Controversy and criticism hits once-proud Down Under

MELBOURNE: Australian tennis once was full of good news stories, and personalities to match. Rod Laver, the only male player to twice win all four Grand Slam tournaments in the same calendar year — in 1962 and 1969 — and leading women's major winner Margaret Court were in that category. Other exemplary role models and multiple major winners include Evonne Goolagong Cawley, Ken Rosewall, John Newcombe and Pat Rafter.

Two-time Grand Slam champion Lleyton Hewitt, a Davis Cup stalwart who had an often difficult time with his on-court demeanor, has emerged recently as a more eloquent elder statesman during his injury-forced move toward retirement.

Even during dry spells in Davis Cup play and in men's majors over the past decade, players have mostly been respectful. So where, seemingly, has it all gone wrong?

At Wimbledon, 20-year-old Nick Kyrgios battled with umpires time and again, was accusing of tanking and swore so loudly and abused his rackets so violently that he was fined nearly $10,000.

That behavior earned him the wrath of an Australian sports great, Olympic champion swimmer Dawn Fraser. The 77-year-old Fraser told a breakfast television show in Australia she was disgusted by Kyrgios' behavior in his fourth-round loss to Richard Gasquet at Wimbledon.

"They should be setting a better example for the younger generation of this great country of ours," Fraser said. "If they don't like it, go back to where their fathers or their parents came from."

Kyrgios, who was born in Canberra, the Australian capital, has a father born in Greece and a Malaysian-born mother. After outrage on social media, Fraser apologized for her comments about Kyrgios' family.

Laver told ESPN television that he thought Kyrgios' behavior was holding him back. "Nick's young and maybe doesn't realize what he is doing sometimes," Laver said. "He's playing with emotion ... that's certainly something that he needs to grow out of and he needs to grow out of that sooner rather than later. There's certainly no excuse for swearing. That's just bad behavior, that's ugly."

Just when that media skirmish was settling, 22-year-old Bernard Tomic renewed his ongoing messy tussle with Rafter, who now is Tennis Australia's performance director.

Tomic, after reading Rafter's earlier comments critical of him, complained at a post-match press conference at Wimbledon about lack of support when he was injured, being made to pay for practice balls and courts and directly criticized other Tennis Australia officials, which drew him a suspension from this weekend's home Davis Cup quarterfinal against Kazakhstan in Darwin.

And on the day that Novak Djokovic defeated Roger Federer for his third Wimbledon title, and with the Australian singles players long gone from southwest London, the feud kept simmering Down Under. Rafter, responding to Tomic's comments, told Sunday's News Limited newspapers that playing tennis for Australia was "about opportunity, not entitlement." "It's a principle I believe in and feel really passionate about," Rafter added.

Kyrgios was quick to respond on Twitter: "Another negative comment out of Rafters mouth. Does this guy ever stop? (hashtag)everyoneisaworkinprogress." Kyrgios later deleted the tweet, but damage was done. On Monday, as if the sport in Australia needed another controversy, Tennis Australia sent out a listing of upcoming matches for Australians overseas, and it noted that Tomic had a first-round match at the "Hall of Shame" tournament in Newport, Rhode Island. That was supposed to be the Hall of Fame tournament, and Tennis Australia quickly sent a correction and an apology.

As many tweets suggested, you couldn't make this up. "This unfortunate error has been widely circulated on social media and there is some discussion as to how such a mistake could occur," Tennis Australia said. "We have a very upset staff member who made a simple clerical error."

Tomic's family said they were considering legal action because of Tennis Australia's "continual shaming and misrepresentation of Bernard." Tomic lost in the first round in Newport on Monday in straight sets. Kyrgios arrived in Darwin for the Davis Cup match against Kazakhstan and said Tomic should have been included, but Australian captain Wally Masur was in a more conciliatory mood.

"We'd like to think that cool heads will prevail," Masur said, "and at some point everyone can sit down in a room and get to the bottom of all the issues."—AP

HARARE: Indian cricket captain Ajinkya Rahane holds the trophy with an official after his team beat Zimbabwe in the One Day International cricket match series. — AP

India defeat Zimbabwe

HARARE: Kedar Jadhav made Zimbabwe pay for a woeful dropped catch as his unbeaten century powered India to an 83-run victory in the third one-day international at Harare Sports Club yesterday and a series whitewash.

Jadhav was on 41 when Elton Chigumbura put down the simplest of chances off the bowling of Graeme Cremer, and the Indian batsman went on to score 105 not out as India posted 276 for five.

The feat gave Indian cricket something to cheer about on the day that two Indian Premier League franchises were suspended for two years and two officials were banned for life for their part in the 2013 fixing scandal. Manish Pandey also provided a good news story as he made 71 on his long-awaited international debut - the fourth-highest score by an Indian debutant in ODIs. As he had in the second ODI, Chamu Chibhabha provided the sole bright spot in Zimbabwe's reply, scoring 82 as the hosts were bowled out for 193 in 42.4 overs.— AFP

SCOREBOARD

HARARE: Final scoreboard in the third one-day international between Zimbabwe and India yesterday:

India			
A. Rahane c Utseya b Madziva	15	R. Chakabva b Patel	27
M. Vijay c Mutumbami b Madziva	13	E. Chigumbura lbw b Vijay	10
R. Uthappa c Chigumbura b Masakadza	31	R. Mutumbami lbw b Binny	22
M. Tiwary c and b Utseya	10	Sikandar Raza b Harbhajan Singh	13
M. Pandey c Sikandar Raza b Chibhabha	71	M. Waller c Rahane b Binny	5
K. Jadhav not out	105	G. Cremer c Rahane b Harbhajan Singh	0
S. Binny not out	18	P. Utseya c Uthappa b Sharma	0
Extras (1b, 1lb, 10w, 1nb)	13	D. Tiripano not out	13
Total (5 wkts, 50 overs)	276	N. Madziva st Uthappa b Patel	3
Fall of wickets: 1-25 (Rahane), 2-33 (Vijay), 3-68 (Tiwary), 4-82 (Uthappa), 5-226 (Pandey).		Extras (10w, 1nb)	11
Did not bat: Harbhajan Singh, Axar Patel, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohit Sharma.		Total (all out, 42.4 overs)	193
Bowling: Tiripano 8-0-46-0, Madziva 9-0-59-2, Chibhabha 8-0-55-1, Masakadza 10-0-31-1, Utseya 10-0-41-1, Cremer 5-0-42-0.		Fall of wickets: 1-16 (Masakadza), 2-86 (Chakabva), 3-97 (Chigumbura), 4-150 (Mutumbami), 5-160 (Chibhabha), 6-172 (Sikandar Raza), 7-172 (Cremer), 8-176 (Waller), 9-176 (Utseya), 10-193 (Madziva).	
		Bowling: Kumar 6-1-12-0, Sharma 7-0-33-2, Binny 10-1-55-3, Harbhajan Singh 10-0-35-2, Patel 6.4-0-39-2, Vijay 3-0-19-1.	
Zimbabwe		**Result:** India won by 83 runs.	
H. Masakadza lbw b Sharma	7	**Series:** India won the three-match series 3-0.	
C. Chibhabha c Jadhav b Binny	82		

Maasai Warriors bowl over premiere audience

LONDON: "The eye that leaves the village sees further" according to a Maasai proverb. In that case, Sonyanga Ole Ngais sees a long way. Resplendent in red traditional robes, the captain of a cricket team made up of Kenyan Maasai warriors cut a distinctive figure in London's West End on Monday as a documentary about his side's exploits received its premiere. "Warriors", whose executive producer is England paceman James Anderson, charts how the players, introduced to the sport in 2007 by South African enthusiast Aliya Bauer, grow to love the game and even take part in a global amateur tournament at cricket's spiritual home Lord's.

The film is full of arresting imagery, be it the scenes of the Maasai's native remote central highlands of Laikipia or the sight of the team, who play in their traditional dress rather than conventional cricket whites, walking through the Long Room at the British ground. There are also moments of humor, as when an officer connected to the British Army Training Unit in Kenya, who helped provide the Warriors with an artificial pitch to train on, says: "It's got a bit of a slope but, then again, so has Lord's." However, much of Warriors is devoted to the team's attempts to get their tribal elders to abandon the traditional practice of female genital mutilation.

The often deadly practice, which ranges from slicing off the clitoris to the mutilation and removal of the entire female genitalia, is banned in Kenya but still regularly carried out. The combination of cricket and social activism might seem jarring to audiences used to legions of high-profile players who confine their public remarks to nothing more controversial than bland reflections on the match they've just played.

But for Warriors skipper Sonyanga one leads naturally to the other. "In our society, the women or the girls are treated as inferior, and it's no good," Sonyanga said at the premiere. "We are not saying we abandon all our good culture, only the harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. "It is very hard to go against the elders, but cricket is giving us that courage, and that confidence. We are very proud of what it means to be Maasai and that is why we play in our traditional robes."

In the audience at Soho's Curzon Cinema on Monday was former England captain Michael Atherton, who congratulated British director Barney Douglas for a "visually stunning" film on Twitter. Dressed in striking colorful bead necklaces, with some in headdresses, the team, who mostly come from Il Polei village near Mount Kenya, also wear standard cricketing kit of gloves and shin pads.

It was a picture of one of the players hitting a ball that is said to have drawn first-time director Douglas, who spent several years working for the website of the England and Wales Cricket Board. "I've known Barney for a few years through his involvement in cricket," said executive producer Anderson, explaining his connection to the documentary.

"I don't know if he asked me as such but we were talking about it and it was something that straight away I really liked." Anderson, set to feature against Australia in the second Ashes Test at Lord's tomorrow, said he saw the film as a way "to do some good" through the game, saying it had been "very kind" to him during his 14 years as a professional player. "Some guys (in the Warriors' team) travel for four hours on a motorbike to practise every week with their cricket bag on their back. "Just seeing that passion for the sport that I love reminded me of why I started playing cricket." — AFP

IPL in turmoil as teams banned in betting scandal

NEW DELHI: Cricket's Indian Premier League was thrown into turmoil yesterday when a Supreme Court-appointed panel suspended two of the eight teams after officials were found guilty of illegally betting on matches. India's board said it would respect the verdict and pledged to clean up cricket after the shock decision to ban the Chennai Super Kings (CSK) and Rajasthan Royals for two years to protect "the integrity of the game."

CSK, led by India's one-day international captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni, and the Royals, skippered by Australian star Steve Smith, had hoped to escape with heavy fines but the panel was in no mood for leniency. It also banned Gurunath Meiyappan-the son-in-law of Narayanaswami Srinivasan, the Chennai franchise owner and the current boss of the International Cricket Council-for life from cricket-related activities.

And a similar punishment was handed down to Raj Kundra, co-owner of the Rajasthan team and husband of Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty.

"Their conduct has affected the image of the game, the players and others associated with the tournament," the panel's chairman Rajendra Mal Lodha told reporters while announcing the verdict in the capital New Delhi.

Asked about the financial losses of players, Lodha said: "We did not consider financial losses to players and teams. That is not significant. "The integrity of the game is what matters," added Lodha who is a former chief justice.

The outcome could have major financial consequences for the glitzy Twenty20 league which draws some of the biggest names in world cricket and raises questions over the future of the two franchises which are both former champions. It was not immediately clear whether the two franchises can be sold, thus allowing the cricketers to continue to be part of the IPL which is overseen by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

Jagmohan Dalmiya, president of the BCCI, said the board would give its full observations after reading the entire report but was "committed to honour and respect judicial decisions".

"The BCCI is committed to ensuring transparency, accountability and cleansing the sport in order to restore the faith and confidence of millions of cricket loving people in the glorious game of cricket in general and IPL in particular," Dalmiya added in a board statement.

'FANS FEEL CHEATED'

Lodha said that "huge injury has been caused to the image of cricket which is a passion for millions of people". "The purity of the game has been affected. Fans feel cheated and doubts abound if the IPL is clean." Lodha was appointed head of the sentencing panel in January after the Supreme Court had found Kundra and Meiyappan guilty of betting on the outcome of matches in 2013.

"Meiyappan was an integral part of the team," said Lodha. "By regularly placing bets he acted in gross violations of the rules of the game. He suffered a loss of 60,000,00 rupees ($94,560) in bets." The hugely popular Chennai Super Kings are the most successful team in the IPL, having won the tournament in 2010 and 2011. They finished runners-up in 2008, 2012, 2013 and 2015.

Rajasthan Royals won the inaugural event in 2008 under the captaincy of Australian spin legend Shane Warne, but have failed to make the final since then.

Royals' co-owner Kundra expressed shock late Tuesday with the decision taken against him. "Many inaccuracies...Have requested for a copy of the judgement - obviously very shocked and disappointed... #Faith," he posted on Twitter.

Cricinfo editor Sambit Bal however hailed it as a "massive decision and positive one" on the micro-blogging website, saying "the judges have done what the BCCI should have done long ago".

NEW DEILHI: Chairman of an Indian Supreme Court appointed panel Rajendra Mal Lodha gestures during a press conference. — AFP

The 2013 IPL season was mired in controversy after police launched legal proceedings against several officials and three Rajasthan Royals players, including former Test fast bowler Shanthakumaran Sreesanth, for illegal betting and spot-fixing. The IPL, which is broadcast around the world, is hugely popular in India with its mix of sport and showbiz, with a number of teams fronted by big Bollywood names.

But it has been continuously dogged by corruption allegations and on Monday Hiken Shah, a first-class player from Mumbai, was suspended over an approach he made to an unnamed team-mate before this year's tournament in April-May. International news organisations including Agence France-Presse have suspended on-field coverage of matches hosted by the BCCI since 2012 after the board imposed restrictions on picture agencies. — AFP

MUMBAI: In this photograph taken on March 5, 2012, Indian Premier League Rajasthan Royals' team owners Raj Kundra (left) and his wife Indian Bollywood actress Shilpa Shetty pose at the unveiling of the IPL 2012 cricket team Rajasthan Royals jersey in Mumbai. —AFP

Tiger excited to be back at special St Andrews

ST ANDREWS: Tiger Woods' love affair with St Andrews goes back 20 years and the former world number one cannot wait for romance to blossom again at the 144th British Open that starts tomorrow. The 39-year-old American made his first appearance in golf's oldest major in the 1995 edition held at the Old Course and went on to win the prized Claret Jug when the championship returned to the iconic links in 2000 and 2005.

Woods is expecting the course to present a different kind of challenge this week but is licking his lips at the prospect nonetheless.

"I'm very excited to be back here at the Home of Golf," he told reporters on Tuesday. "I've always loved this course from the first time I played it... there's just something special about it.

"It's playing a little bit differently to previous Opens I've played in. It's a little bit softer and it's going to get even softer with the (rain) forecast for Friday. Woods, who has had a torrid run of form but showed flashes of his old magic at the Greenbrier Classic in West Virginia two weeks ago, enjoys the creative element that comes into play at the Old Course. "You have to be able to hit all different type of shots," he said. "The first thing I ever heard about St Andrews is that all you do is hit it as hard as you can and aim left.

"That's basically not how you play the golf course. You need to have the right angles. "Over the years of learning how to play the course under different type of wind conditions, it changes greatly and it's based on angles. You have to put the ball on certain sides of the fairways in order to get the ball close," Woods explained.

"That type of thinking and the strategy that goes into that is something I've always loved." Woods has been stuck on 14 major victories since winning the 2008 U.S. Open but said he still had designs on overhauling Jack Nicklaus' record total of 18. "I ended up playing well at the Greenbrier and hit the ball the best I've hit it in probably two years on the Sunday," he added. "I'm still young, I'm not 40 yet. I know some of you guys think I'm buried and done but I'm still right here in front of you. I love playing, I love competing and I love playing these events." — Reuters