

BRIEFLY

Venus pulls out of
Brisbane tournament

Venus Williams pulled out of the season-opening Brisbane International on Wednesday after a "setback" during practice. The American veteran said she still hoped to play at the Adelaide International later this month ahead of the Australian Open, the first Grand Slam of the year. "Unfortunately I will not be starting my season in Brisbane due to an unexpected setback during my training," the 39-year-old seven-time major winner said in a statement. "I look forward to being in Australia in the new year and will see everyone in Adelaide." The tournament, featuring a strong field including world number one Ashleigh Barty and Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka, gets underway on January 6. Organisers will announce a replacement for Williams on Thursday.

AFP

Man City was team of
the decade: Guardiola

Manchester City were the team of the decade in the Premier League because no other club had won more trophies, points or scored more goals over the past 10 years, manager Pep Guardiola said on Tuesday. City played 381 league games in the past 10 years, collecting 818 points -- 71 points more than their closest challenger Manchester United (747 points from 380 games). They scored 845 goals, 130 more than Chelsea and Liverpool. City also won 10 trophies -- including four league titles -- and Guardiola credited the owners, the Abu Dhabi United Group, for investing in the club and transforming them into a competitive team that took on the established elite. "I think in the last decade we were the best team in terms of points, in terms of goals, in terms of everything, titles even. So congratulate Manchester City for that," Guardiola told reporters. "When we analyse every single day here... it gives us perspective in what happened in the last 10 seasons. Especially when the people from Abu Dhabi took over the club and bought good players, (brought in) interesting managers."

REUTERS

24 nations, \$15m bounty and new format

The first week of the decade begins with the innovative ATP Cup, adding to the growing list of tennis team tournaments

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
SYDNEY, JANUARY 1

TENNIS' INNOVATIVE new team championship kicks off the men's 2020 season on Friday, with Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic among those looking for a winning start ahead of the first Grand Slam of the year.

The ATP Cup will see 24 nations split into six groups across three Australian cities, with eight teams emerging from the round-robin to compete in a knockout phase until one country is left standing.

It is the sport's newest tournament and the third men's team event competing for the hearts and minds, and dollars, of fans, along with a revamped Davis Cup and the annual Laver Cup, which pits Europe against the World.

But it has already suffered setbacks, with major drawcard Roger Federer opting to give it a miss and Andy Murray and Kei Nishikori pulling out injured.

Despite this, world number two Djokovic said the move towards more team tennis was good for a sport best known for the individuality of its global superstars.

"More than 90 percent of the time, we're playing as individuals and we don't have too many team events," said the Serbian great, who also heads the ATP player council.

"This is going to bring together a lot of nations and, for me personally, it will be a very nice and proud moment to represent my country. An event like this is truly going to make an impact."

Sydney hosts the finals, along with group games, which are also held in Brisbane and Perth with US\$15 million in prize money and up to 750 singles and 250 doubles ATP rankings points at stake.

Australian star Nick Kyrgios agrees with Djokovic, believing it will be "an awesome event". "I know everyone on the Tour wants to be with their teammates. There's nothing better than playing for your country against the other best players in the world," he said.

Looking to the future

While Federer, Nishikori and Murray are missing, most of the world's top 30 men are playing. The championship, from January 3-12, will feature two ties each day in the



World No1 Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic are among the crowd-pullers who will take part in the tournament. Reuters

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three cities during the round robin, comprising two singles matches then a doubles.

Belgium kick off the Sydney action against Moldova before Britain face Bulgaria. Kyrgios spearheads local hopes for Australia in Brisbane against the Alexander Zverev-led Germany while Greece take on Canada in the same city.

First up in Perth will be the United States against Norway followed by Russia and Italy. Djokovic makes his tournament debut in Brisbane for Serbia on day two, as does Spanish world number one Nadal in Perth.

Under the format, the second-ranked singles players from each country face each other first, then the top-ranked men ahead of a potentially decisive doubles.

A country winning two of three matches

will claim the tie.

The skippers

As well as the players, some big-name former stars are captaining their countries, including Boris Becker (Germany), Marat Safin (Russia), Tim Henman (Britain), Lleyton Hewitt (Australia), and Thomas Muster (Austria).

Previously the men's season kicked off with players spread across various smaller-scale tournaments, and outgoing ATP chairman Chris Kermode said it made far more sense to have everyone under one umbrella.

"The ATP Cup fits perfectly with our strategy to innovate and look towards the future," he said.

"The first week of the season is when the players want to play and that's why the tournament has their strong support."

TEAMS: Group A (Brisbane) - Serbia, France, South Africa, Chile Group B (Perth) - Spain, Japan, Georgia, Uruguay Group C (Sydney) - Bulgaria, Belgium, Great Britain, Moldova Group D (Perth) - Russia, Italy, USA, Norway Group E (Sydney) - Austria, Croatia, Argentina, Poland Group F (Brisbane) - Germany, Greece, Canada, Australia.

EXPLAINED
E.
How does the
format work

The 24 teams are divided into six groups of four for group stage, round-robin play. The six winners of each group and the two best second-placed finishers across the groups emerge to contest the Final Eight. Each tie will comprise two singles and one doubles match. The country winning two matches wins the tie. Every country will be guaranteed to play three ties in the group stages. Singles will be best-of-three tie-break sets. Doubles will feature No-Ad scoring and a Match Tie-break in lieu of a third set.

Mane set for African crown as trouble brews on

Liverpool sharpshooter Sadio Mane is expected to become the first African football headline-maker of 2020 by winning the Player of the Year award in Egypt next week. Here's a looks at some of the issues facing the most popular sport in a continent where good footballers and bad administrators often share the media stage.

AWARDS

Consistent Liverpool scorer and Senegal talisman Mane is favoured to become the second star from his country after El Hadji Diouf to be named Player of the Year. His rivals are Liverpool teammate Mohamed Salah, the Egyptian who won the last two editions, and Algerian Riyad Mahrez of Manchester City. The Player of the Year, and the winners of seven other male and female categories, will be announced at a ceremony in Egyptian Red Sea resort Hurgada.

WORLD CUP

A couple of weeks after the awards banquet, Egypt will host another eagerly anticipated event, the draw in Cairo for the group stage of World Cup qualifying. The latest FIFA rankings are expected to determine the seedings, meaning Senegal, Tunisia, Nigeria, Algeria, Morocco, Ghana, Egypt, Cameroon, Mali and DR Congo will be in pot one. All those nations except Mali have played at the World Cup, and an Ivory Coast team that can call on the dazzling footwork of Wilfried Zaha could be the most dangerous second seeds.

CUP OF NATIONS

Trouble lies ahead after a change from a January/February to June/July tournament this year to avoid tug of wars between clubs and countries over the services of Europe-based stars. The first revamped Club World Cup, featuring 24 teams, is set for June 17 to July 4 2021 in China, effectively ruling out a mid-year Cup of Nations in Cameroon. Senior CAF officials say off the record that a return to January/February dates is likely, and with it the possibility that an increasing number of players will put clubs first.

NATIONS CHAMPIONSHIP

Tunisia have reportedly decided because of fixture congestion to withdraw from the 2020 edition in Cameroon of the tournament for footballers playing in their country of birth. Traditionally a biennial January/February competition, it is slated for April 4 to 25 this year in three southern Cameroon cities, the capital, Yaounde, Douala and Limbe. The 16-nation championship will test the readiness of Cameroon to stage the Cup of Nations next year after construction delays led to them being replaced by Egypt as 2019 hosts.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Tunisian club Esperance have been erratic as they seek an unprecedented third straight title, battling to overcome a Chadian club then defying the odds to defeat Raja in Casablanca. They have lost several 2019 title-winning stars, including Algeria winger Youcef Belaili, and the starting line-up for a group match last weekend included only four Tunisians. Record eight-time champions Al Ahly of Egypt, TP Mazembe of the Democratic



Liverpool star Sadio Mane scored 26 EPL goals in 2019. Reuters

Republic of Congo, Mamelodi Sundowns of South Africa and Casablanca clubs Raja and Wydad are potential threats.

CONFEDERATION CUP

A new name will be engraved on the trophy this year as recent winners Ahly, Etoile Sahel of Tunisia, Mazembe, Raja and Zamalek of Egypt are all competing in the Champions League. Judged by group form up to the halfway mark, Cairo outfit Pyramids could become the third Egyptian winners of a competition modelled on the UEFA Europa League. Emirati Salem al Shamsi has invested millions in a squad dominated by Egyptians but also containing stars from Burkina Faso, Ghana, the Ivory Coast, Tunisia and Uganda.

SUPER CUP

Zamalek are threatening to boycott the February 14 match against Esperance scheduled for Qatar, a country Egypt accuses of destabilising the Middle East region. Controversial club chairman Mortada Mansour says Zamalek will change their stance only if ordered to do so by the government. "I do not understand why CAF want to stage the match in a country which is an enemy of Egypt. We are African clubs so why should we play in Asia?," Mansour asked

during a press conference.

CAF

The six-month secondment of FIFA secretary general Fatma Samoura to crisis-plagued CAF ends on January 31 and there will be huge interest in what progress the Senegalese has made. Her brief was to introduce reforms, notably in governance, competitions and refereeing, to an organisation World Soccer magazine labelled the "biggest basket case in football". Assisting Samoura is CAF president Ahmad Ahmad, who has not commented on various allegations against him, including corruption, financial misappropriation and sexual harassment.

BROADCASTING

There have been no broadcasts in sub-Saharan Africa of CAF national team and club fixtures since November after a 12-year TV deal with a French company was scrapped. Lagardere Sports paid one million dollars (890,000 euros) in 2017 for the TV and marketing rights, but separate judgments ruled the deal illegal because there was no tender process. Desperate football followers have resorted to streaming, but fixture options are limited and the high cost of internet data is an additional obstacle.

AFP

SHOPLIFTERS

A TALE ABOUT HARDSHIPS.
A DISCUSSION THAT SIMPLIFIES IT.

Director: Hirokazu Koreeda | Curator: Shubhra Gupta, Film Critic, The Indian Express
Screening Date: 3rd January, 2020 | Time: 7:00 PM
Venue: Gulmohar, India Habitat Centre

To register, scan the QR Code or SMS - IEFILM <space> "PD" <space> "your name & email id" to 56161.
Confirmation SMS will be your ticket. Limited seats available on first-come-first-served basis.

Here are some comments shared by our readers about the unique format of The Indian Express Club.

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Khushi Padma Singh , Research Scholar

"After a good film, one invariably has a lot of queries, reactions, observations. The best part of The Indian Express Film Club is the post screening discussion, as it provides the perfect platform to air and share these".

Basudha Banerji, Government Official