

# INSIDE

COVER: Oakleigh's Jessica-Jade Bruce and her trusty guitar.  
Picture: Lucy Di Paolo



**Big show:** Glen Iris Valley Recreation Club volunteer Shelly Snow and president Peter Gillieron are elated over successfully hosting the Fed Cup tennis tie at Mt Waverley. Page 9.

Picture: Ted Klaszynski

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# Fed Cup venue wins a volley of praise

BY ROY WARD

HOSTING a Fed Cup tie last weekend has the Glen Iris Valley Recreation Club of Mount Waverley wanting to host more future international tennis events.

The club answered a late call from Tennis Australia in March to host the tie between Australia and Ukraine.

Tennis Australia ran the event and installed two temporary clay courts at the club along with portable grandstands and hospitality and media tents.

Club president Peter Gillieron said he had received good feedback from all parties about the venue.

"We couldn't be happier with how it went," he said.

"At first we were worried about the weather after the rain in Melbourne during the week. But that cleared up.

"I think we would be more than [happy to] host an international event again."

Although Australia lost the tie 3-2 and was

relegated from the prestigious World Group, the club impressed players and officials with its homely atmosphere and closeness to the CBD.

Glen Waverley tennis product Sally Peers was a last-minute inclusion in the squad and was expected to play in the doubles match at the end of the tie.

But with the two nations locked at two rubbers each going into the doubles match, Australian captain David Taylor selected his two singles players, Jarimla Groth and Anastasia Rodionova. The pair lost in three sets.

Tickets from the event were all but sold out for the 'intimate' venue despite Australian stars Sam Stosur and Jelena Dokic making themselves unavailable, focusing instead on their French Open preparations in Europe.

Mr Gillieron said hosting the tie was one of the highest honours the club had received since opening in 1927. He said the timing was perfect as it had caused almost no disruption to regular club competitions.

"We have received some great exposure around the city and the rest of Australia."



Big show: Glen Iris Valley Recreation Club in Mt Waverley hosted a Fed Cup tennis tie between Australia and Ukraine on April 16 and 17. Club volunteer Shelly Snow and Peter Gillieron are pictured.

Picture: Ted Koszynski

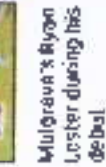
Saints fire, Monash Uni battles disrupted start  
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### In Brief

#### Lester takes to the stage

**AFL FOOTY:** Oakleigh Chargers graduates made a name for themselves in Round 1 of the AFL season.



Mulrooney's Ryan Lester during his debut.

Mulrooney's Ryan Lester during his debut. Fremantle on Saturday night, collecting 16 possessions and kicking a goal in his side's twin 100s to the Dockers. On Sunday, Andrew Galt was set to make his debut for the West Coast Eagles against North Melbourne at Subiaco.

#### What a start

**SAC CUP:** Oakleigh started its TAC Cup season with a crushing win over the Eastern Ranges. In a Round 9 clash, brought forward to Sunday as part of a big AFL Match season-opening day at Carlton's Princes Park, the Chargers went 74.13 (157) to 8.6 (54).

Shayne Galt kicked five goals to be named the Chargers' best.

#### Cavaliers win Shield

**SCL CRICKET:** Cavaliers claimed the SCL Menzies Shield when it successfully chased-down Glen Waverley's Day 1 total at the 2-and-Far last weekend. And, in-fair-50, Cavaliers ended the two-year unbeaten run enjoyed by the reigning premiers. In reply to Glen Waverley's Day 1 total of 6/210, Cavaliers, led by Sean Vanderwert (95) and Heshat Silva (70), reached 8/214 in the 78th over.

#### Camions down to Bergers

**VFL SOCCER:** Oakleigh lost its Victorian Premier League clash, 3-1, to Heidelberg United at Camions Village on Sunday night. Dione Ashwinovic scored Oakleigh's goal in the 57th minute.

## Mount Waverley club to host Australia v Ukraine

# Fed Cup coming to town

Tennis | David Turner

MOUNT Waverley's Glen Iris Valley Recreation Club will host the Federation Cup World Group play-off tie between Australia and Ukraine in April.

The tie, in the international women's tennis event, will be held from April 16 to 17 and is the first such Cup tie to be played at the club.

In announcing the event, Australia's manager, major events Kay Goodkind, said Glen Iris Valley would make the ideal location for the tie.

"The last time a Fed Cup tie was hosted in Melbourne was in 1988 at Melbourne Park, so for Glen Iris Valley to host an event of this calibre is a huge achievement," she said.

"The club is in the perfect location for this April Fed Cup tie as all the players will be playing in various overseas destinations prior to the event and the inter-city location means the venue is very accessible for the team.

"Also with multiple outdoor courts, which can be changed to clay for the tie, it will allow the Australian team to play on clay prior to the French Open, which is in May."

Glen Iris Valley manager and club coach Kane Downes said hosting the tie would help promote the club and the sport in general.

"It should be good for the club and great for the local area," he said.

"We're at the forefront for this type of thing because we host a lot of local tournaments."

"They wanted to play on clay so they were looking at venues in Melbourne where they could play on clay."

"It's about raising the awareness of the club to the area and it will bring awareness not only to the club but the sport of tennis and the local area."

Australia's Fed Cup captain David Taylor said he and the team were looking forward to the play-off tie.

"After having our chances against the current champions, Italy, in February I know the girls are keen to get back on court and ensure Australia returns to the World Group in 2012," he said.

"Australia and Ukraine have had some great ties in the past and the competitive spirit between the two teams will be high with the countries tied 1-1 in their head-to-head matches."



Samantha Stosur will head Australia's Fed Cup effort at Mount Waverley's Glen Iris Valley Tennis Club next month. Picture: MICHAEL BOGGE

# Oaks fall just short of acceptable

VSDCA | Casser Ryan

NEAR enough isn't good enough for the Oakleigh Cricket Club.

After cruising through the rivalry season, as one of the dominant teams in the VSDCA East/West group, the Oaks were bundled out at the semi-final stage by Williamstown last week.

Where many other clubs would take positives from the finals run, Oakleigh captain-coach Jarrod Travaglia said his side had nothing to cheer.

"The feeling in the rooms after the match was one of extreme disappointment," he said.

"We were confident of chasing down their total, it was a beautiful batting wicket, but they were able

The feeling in the rooms after the match was one of extreme disappointment. We were confident of chasing-down their total, it was a beautiful batting wicket, but they were able to bowl a lot tighter and took their chances. Jarrod Travaglia

JARROD TRAVAGLIA

to bowl a lot tighter and took their chances.

"We didn't have anyone leave a long stay at the crease and gave

away too many soft dismissals. We had a lot of starts, but no big score. "We did a lot of work this season to put ourselves in a position to go all the way, then saved our worst performance for the year for the semi-final."

Oakleigh was dismissed for 119 in reply to Williamstown's 198. Williamstown progressed to the grand final to take on the undefeated Melton.

Melton also defeated Oakleigh for the KC Fawcett Club Championship, claiming the title with 241 points to runner-up Oakleigh's 210. The Oaks will have plenty of work to do during the off-season if they want to go one better next season, with two significant players departing to cover.

The club's leading run-scorer, also the competition's third-highest scorer, Dhany Mohan and experienced No.3 Simon Street will be missing from the Oaks line-up next season.

Travaglia said the club would create opportunities for young players at the club.

"Those five guys will be steady missed. We're going to have to make a few changes. We've already started recruiting."

"You do a lot of hard work over the off-season. "We put ourselves in a great position to go all the way this year, but we let it slip. "A lot of guys are in a rut. "We need to improve to go one better."



Diane Ashwinovic

# Horoscope

by Shelley von Strunckel

**Aries** March 20-April 19  
 Thinking as recent obstacles were, they forced you to tame persistent dilemmas from an unaccommodated angle. Their path has since progressed, but with the sun's remaining energetic in Aries until the 23rd, it and the hot fire here to address such issues, and in depth. This especially applies to those from the past. What you learn will influence you to make it new and your ideas about your future.

**Taurus** April 20-May 20  
 Critics have taken over decision's which is a relief. However, they're asking worryingly few questions, so you've cancelled problems will surface later. But with Mercury nearby, the 27th, consultation and minor, even the inevitable answers. Do the minimum, while the year's still appropriate to negotiate, you'll be surprised how many of the arrangements turn out brilliantly.

**Gemini** May 21-June 20  
 Usually, when making plans, you're going them as a work in progress. But critics consider these obligatory tentative arrangements as they're is complicated by your role. Mercury remaining retrograde until the end of next week. Make it clear that any arrangements are still in transition and get others involved, and you'll be amazed how much you can accomplish.

**Cancer** June 21-July 22  
 You feel every full moon intensely. However, because tomorrow's astrological elements of your work and lifestyle, one's simple tasks could seem very worry. It's so unclear as they've seen, do nothing. Once you're clear, your perspective will shift. But as the family, with the 23rd, you'll be solving swiftly, that's about overwhelming problems could soon lead to the future.

**Leo** July 23-August 22  
 Obviously, you're in a "later" you'll have to make decisions about potential changes in who a and how you live and work. Try to organise things now, however, and you'll enjoy run into obstacles. What's more, with Mercury retrograde until the 23rd, things aren't as they seem. Instead of struggling to impose order, explore, intuitively, what's currently less appealingly could, ultimately, turn out best.

**Virgo** August 23-September 22  
 Yet again you've been left in a red at others' lack of planning about whether the things they're planning will work. But you've little responsibility for those plans, so had best be sure you're self-responsible. The wider you explain, the more you'll learn, then about matters that are changing but seem of little importance. Now, perhaps, in a week or so, however, those facts could be pivotal.

**Libra** September 23-October 22  
 After weeks of struggling to keep everybody happy, you're somewhat fed. Consequently, the heightened feelings triggered by tomorrow's 23rd and Mars' entry have been overwhelming. Finally addressing issues, discuss options about which you're sharing a war of commenters. By the week's end, your perspective will have changed considerably.

**Scorpio** October 23-November 21  
 Sometimes, when thinking about tricky dilemmas until you find a solution, you're very busy every day, such intensive analysis would only be exhausting. Instead, get regular updates from those who're also involved but avoid all but essential. That's why you've been slow, but retrospect you'll realise how much simpler you made your life.

**Sagittarius** November 22-December 21  
 Trilling as recent developments show, you feel unsure. This may be because you can't control certain matters or are more modestly available than you're accustomed to. What's most challenging is there's no dark in which means being with a combination of excitement and confusion. Actually, that's as it should be. What you learn will benefit you for years.

**Capricorn** December 22-January 19  
 Circumstances may require a decisive approach but that doesn't mean this is the last time you'll be dealing with these situations. Knowing that, do only what's appropriate now, leaving the rest for later. Ordinarily, you'd worry this will cause problems but actually, it's the reverse. The less you've organised, the better it will be when changes need to be made.

**Aquarius** January 20-February 18  
 Some situations require well to analyse. But what you're doing is both a in transition and requires more than one's own perspective. Instead of "telling" on plans or others' views, involve ourselves whether we're really care about certain arrangements or, perhaps, it's time to say farewell to them. Gradually you'll find an amazing sense of freedom and relief.

**Pisces** February 19-March 19  
 Early this month your ruler Neptune returned to Pisces for the first time in 150 years. Although initially its influence will be subtle, during its 100-year stay your experiences and ideas will blossom. But you can't count on current intense focus on your health, mind, and, and the other charges is a serious. Balance these two and you'll be amazed how quickly you're thriving.

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# SPORT

## Five in-a-row for Ashwood

**Junior cricket** | Megan Hushwaite  
 ASHWOOD Cricketer Club is celebrating a rare feat at Junior cricket.

The club's under-14 team won the Eastern Cricket Association flag last season, courtesy of a comprehensive win over Knox Churches.

But, the premiership had some extra significance for coach Barry Wood, as well as players Lionel Spence, Angus Wood and James Morrey.

All have now won five consecutive seasons together.

They've been so successful because they are willing to listen and learn and they carry out the coach's orders.

**BARRY WOOD (ASHWOOD JUNIOR COACH)**

"We had two years in the under-14s and played finals for under-10s, where the team who finished top of the ladder wins the premiership," Wood said.

"We then moved up to the under-12s where it was the same and we finished top and won both years.

"This season we went up to final.

A solid innings of 76 from Jason Birch helped the side post 151 on a very slow outfield.

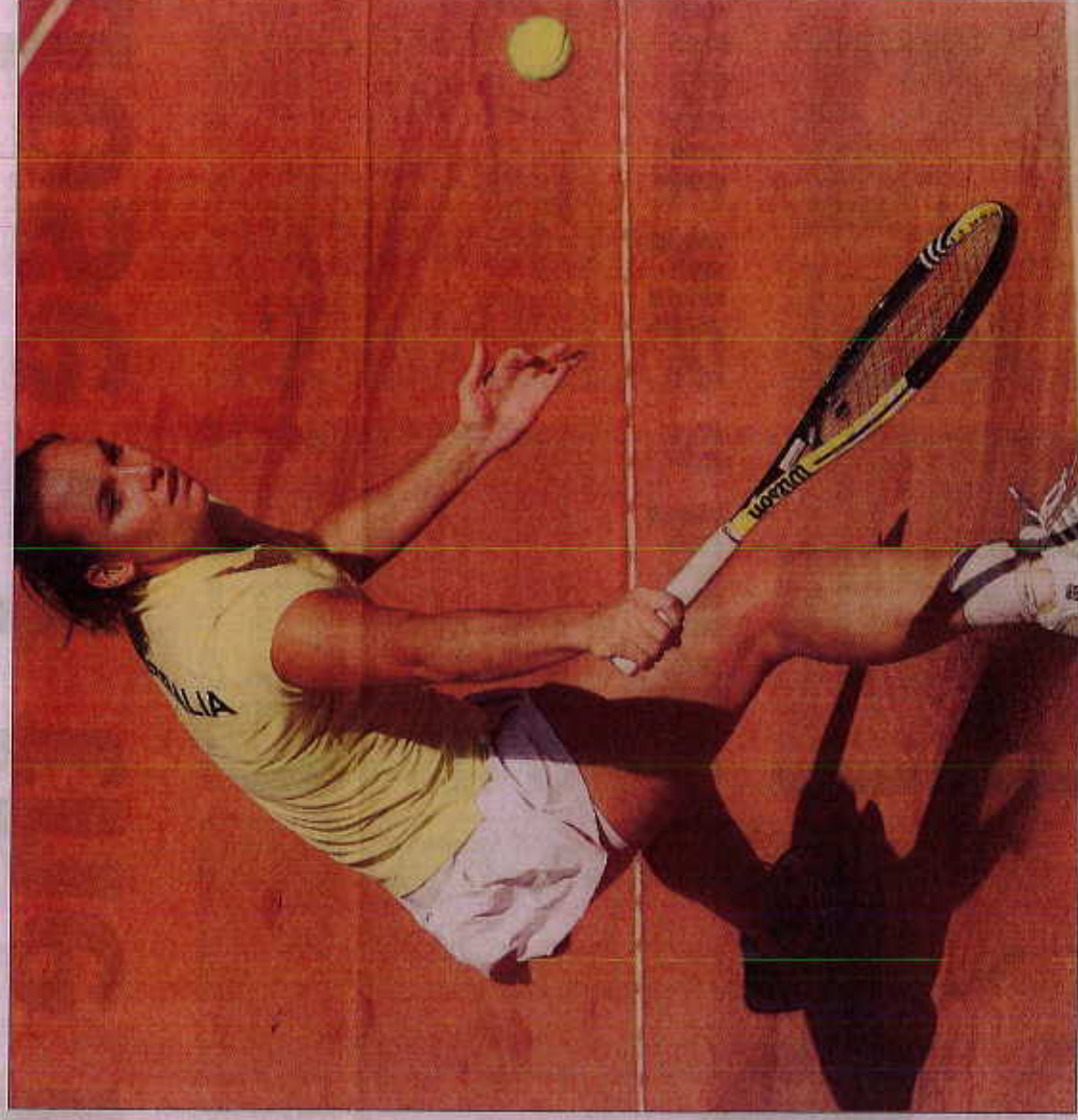
On Day 2, excellent bowling and outstanding fielding meant Knox was never allowed to get into the game and, with Daniel Spence (47) and Sarvik Verma (32) at the stumps in a key partnership, Knox was dismissed for 19.

"They've been so successful because they are willing to listen and learn and they carry out the coach's orders," Wood said.

The team will contest the under-14 competition again in season 2011-12.

## Australia loses to Ukraine in Mt Waverley

# Out of the Cup



**Tennis** | Fed Cup

AUSTRIALIA bowed out of the Fed Cup World Group after suffering a 2-0 loss to Ukraine at the Eden Hills Valley Recreation Club in Mount Waverley.

The loss sends Australia back to World Group II.

After Saturday's opening day, the clash stood at 1-1 with Jelena Groth, Anastasia Rodionova and Tsvetlana Pironkova at the tie, retiring Olga Savchenko, 6-1, 6-1.

Australia's No 2, Anastasia Rodionova, lost to Tsvetlana Pironkova, 6-1, 6-4.

Sunday saw Australia taken 2-1 when Groth partnered for Tsvetlana, 6-1, 6-4 but the Ukraine squared the ledger when Savchenko defeated Rodionova, 7-6, 7-5.

The deciding doubles rubber saw Groth and Rodionova go down to Tsvetlana and Savchenko, 6-3, 7-6(3), in a thrilling two-set battle.

After her Commonwealth Games success, Groth Waverley's Sally Payne was selected for her Fed Cup debut.

She had been set to join Sophie Ferguson in the doubles clash, against Yuliya Leshchikova and Viktoriya Kuznetsov, but, with the game deadlocked at 2-2, both countries opted to switch their pairings for the decider.

Jelena Groth in action at the Eden Hills Valley Recreation Club on Saturday. Picture: SALES SPORT

## Docklands is still the chosen one

**Football** | Sam Landsberger

DOCKLANDS Stadium will, again, host the VFL and TAC Cup grand finals despite drawing fewer than 10,000 fans to last year's deciders.

AFL Victoria has accepted the same formula as last year, with both matches to be played on the Sunday before the AFL Grand Final.

In 2009, the matches were played on the Friday night and still drew a paltry crowd.

But, VFL operations manager John Hook said, he wanted a crowd of at least 15,000 at this year's Big Playoff.

"We're never going to fill out the Stadium, and we know that, but they have been very supportive of VFL, for as well as there again. I think it'd be realistic to say anything between 15,000 and 20,000 is going to be our maximum," he said.

"If we get anything over 15,000, it'll be a good crowd."

Regents have been circulating that this year's season-ticket holder would be invited to Carlton's Princess Park for a bigger community feel.

But, Hook said, the Docklands Stadium was the preferred choice of VFL clubs.

"The stadium's always been very good as far as helping us with the game," he said. "They've been pretty supportive. We're helping us make a push or at least break even."

"I mean, the clubs love playing there, particularly North Ballarat."

The Regents have won the past three premierships at the 31,000-seat stadium.

"Friday night before the AFL Grand Final most people are parking ready for the big game. On Sunday, you're guaranteed there's a million else on, at least at AFL level," Hook said.

► More VFL and TAC Cup at [localfooty.com.au](http://localfooty.com.au)



Docklands Stadium will again host the VFL and TAC Cup grand finals Saturday.

## Attention to detail key to Storm's flying start

# Little things count

### RUSSELL GOULD

THE secret to Melbourne Storm's success is obvious, apparently, but no player will talk openly about it.

In vague terms, it's an adherence to what coach Craig Bellamy calls "the little things".

Bellamy has many elements to his coaching philosophy, but always returns to that one as a basis for getting the job done.

"The big things only come after doing the little things well. I'm not sure if that's right or wrong, but it's what I believe," Bellamy said.

After Storm thrashed Parramatta last Sunday, he needed a renewed belief in doing those little things well, particularly from his new crop of forwards, as a big reason for the 4-1 start to the season.

Bellamy recruited what can be described as "pros" "Nobody else seemed to want" to fit in with his dynamic playmakers and said their progression would determine Storm's success.



Troy Thompson

important. That's one thing that has clicked. They need to do those small things well if we are going to be the team we are capable of being.

"We were probably a little bit slow to start in that area but in the past couple of weeks, they have been really good. Our challenge is for those guys to keep it up."

Second-year Storm prop Bryan Norrie, who earned the ball for a season-high 1440 in the big win over the Eels, agreed and said adhering to those "little things" made players who embraced them better.

But when asked exactly what those "little things" were, Norrie couldn't recall them and said they often remained unspoken.

"We talk a lot about the little things without saying what they are, but they make a massive difference when we are trying to defend our try line or go forward in attack," he said.

"They're not rocket science, but doing them well is a big focus here."

"The club has a lot of superstars but even they pride themselves on doing the little things well. They can do some Greekish things, but they are also the leaders in doing the little things," he said.

In general conversation, Storm players talk about making sure they support their mates, in defence and attack, and running the right lines. They could be among those "little things" and are what the forwards have to do well.

Norrie said the more time spent together, the better the group would be produced. And as long as the Storm boys do the little things well, scoring Penabix's big boys should be a no-brainer.

STORM Queensland locally registered back-to-back NRL wins with a 26-18 victory over CARBERRA in Townsville last night and Brisbane Broncos' superb 2011 defensive form has continued with a 26-4 win over Sydney Roosters at Blue-Tangney Stadium, Gosford.

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### LEO SCHLICK

MELBOURNE athletic Mark Gerrard has described the Rebels' rapid performance against the Highlanders as "embarrassing", as the club prepares for a grueling run against several Super Rugby heavyweights.

With matches coming up against Auckland Blues, NSW Waratahs and Queensland Reds, the Rebels need to rebound quickly from their 40-12 drubbing on Friday night.

Gerrard was chastised by the side's sloppiness in virtually all facets, as his team was destroyed by a top-quality opposition.

The Rebels struggled with all aspects of their kicking game, but the biggest frustration was their inability to finish tackles. Add to that a high turnover rate and bad handling, and you had a shambles.

"That is, in and what the Rebels are about," Gerrard said of the club's poor display. "That's embarrassing. We let ourselves down in all facets. My kicking was poor. Danny (Cipriani)'s kicking, at times, was poor."

"Our ball carrying was poor — we kept dropping the ball — and we didn't play our style."

"We prepped really well for this game, but I think early on we didn't play to our strengths."

Head Maqoke described Melbourne's failure to perform as a coach's nightmare. The Rebels had won their previous two matches, yet rarely looked comfortable against the Highlanders.

"They capitulated on our mistakes and they did it very, very well," Gerrard said. "It's something we've got to address because the Blues play a very smother game and they're a bit more physical and a bit more dynamic in the backline."

Gerrard admitted player attitude could have been a factor, despite the positive match-day preparation.

"Our attitudes were flat and we pride ourselves on being an aggressive, physical team, and we were probably the opposite of that."

"Attitude plays a massive role. They played the right game, it's a little bit embarrassing about that, but we can turn it around. You can't dwell on this."

Gerrard scoffed at claims Melbourne had ordered players to "walk in the team's drinking culture".

"That's from NSW papers? We just signed Kurtley Beale," Gerrard said. "There will always be that rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne."

THE Queensland Reds celebrated life at the top of the Super Rugby standings last night, clocking a sixth straight win, with a 22-10 victory over the defending champions, Bulls, at their Suncorp Stadium fortress. Meanwhile, the Waratahs finished five first-half tries at Eden Park in Auckland, losing 33-17 to the Blues.

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# Dominant Groth lifts Fed hope

### JACKIE EPSTEIN

"I thought it was pretty good, very solid for what I needed," the world No.30 said. "I didn't have to raise my game and stayed to the level which I had to."

"But when I had to play the point I played the point, which was pretty good."

"The tennis court is a happy place for me, especially if I play tournaments and something like Fed Cup brings out the best in me."

Rodionova was expected to defeat Tsurenko, who is ranked almost 50 places lower than her.

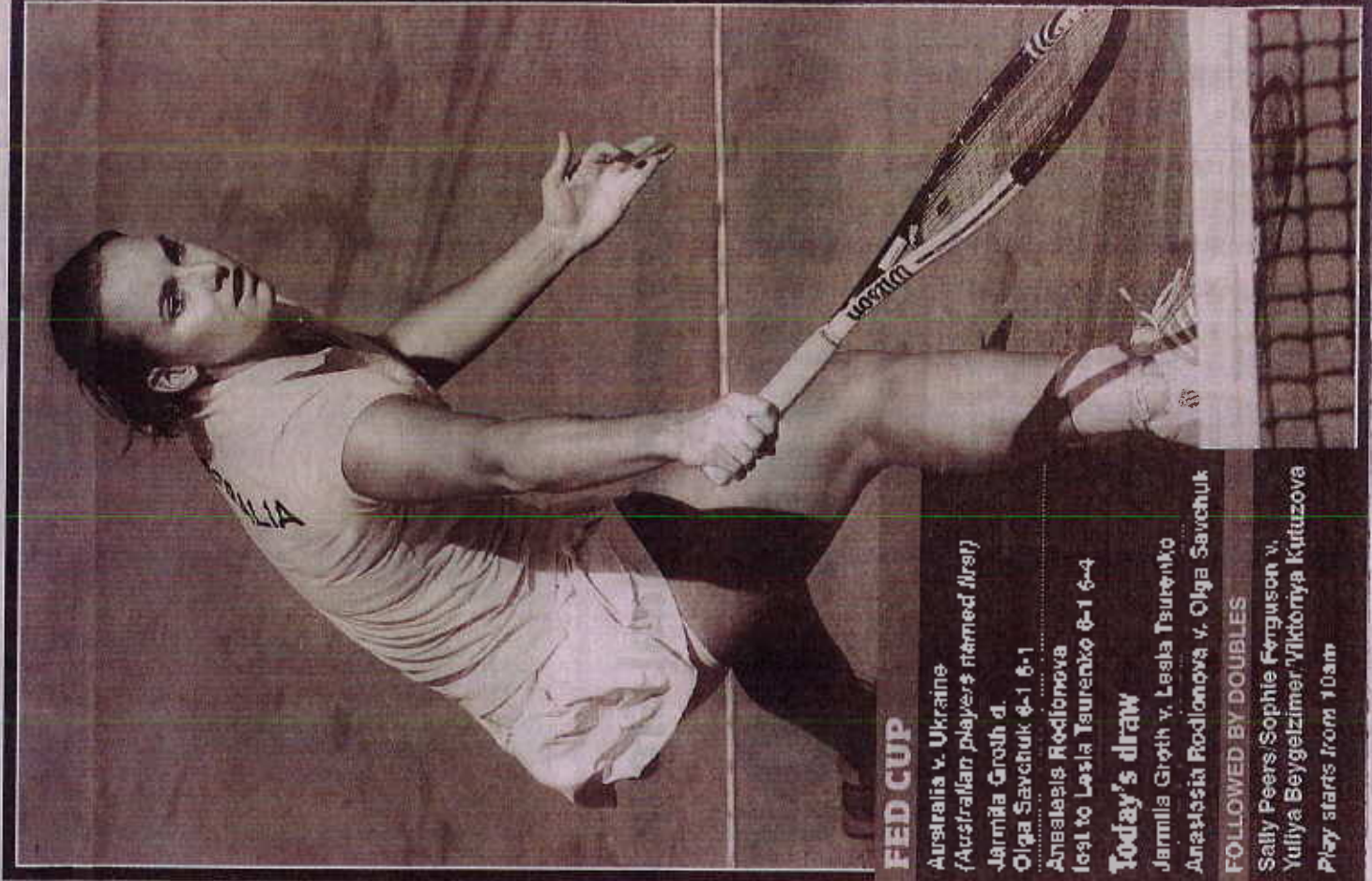
But she was still upbeat, knowing she has a chance to bounce back against Savchuk today.

"She's a good player. She's done really well at the Australian Open and I knew I had to compete really hard and play my best tennis to win today and up for tomorrow. I couldn't do it," Rodionova said.

"I think a lot of things didn't really work. I didn't really feel good on the court. I stopped making unforced errors and felt like I was getting into the match, but she finished really strong."

A win in the world group playoffs is a must for Australia to remain at the elite level after losing to reigning champions Italy.

Taylor said he would likely use Rodionova in the doubles if it was needed.



### FED CUP

Australia v. Ukraine (Australian players returned first)

Jarmila Groth d.

Olga Savchuk 6-1 6-1

Anastasia Rodionova

lost to Lesia Tsurenko 6-1 6-4

### Today's draw

Jarmila Groth v. Lesia Tsurenko

Anastasia Rodionova v. Olga Savchuk

### FOLLOWED BY DOUBLES

Sally Peers/Sophie Ferguson v.

Yuliya Beygelzimer/Yekaterina Kutuzova

Play starts from 10am

Left-handed: Jarmila Groth powers to a 6-2, 6-2 win against Olga Savchuk

## News

## Groth ready for feats of clay

TENNIS  
LYDIA PERKIE

AUSTRALIA has a Fed Cup spearhead with a liking for clay and a seeding at next month's French Open, but her name is not Sam Somers. It reads Groth has gone from tri-ple figures to the top 30 in less than a year and, in Susanna's absence, from debutante to team leader in just 10 weeks.

This time 12 months ago Groth was rebuilding her career after arble surgery, relegated to the second-tier ITF circuit in Africa. In Khartoum, she met her future partner, Asia Rodionova and veterans Rennee Stubbs and Alicia Walker were calling her "Liz" over the return to the Fed Cup's world group with a 5-0 court of Ukraine.

The same prize is on offer this weekend against a lesser African team, although the tank-building city of Kisumu has been swapped for Mount Waverley. And yet, and now, Groth has never spent April in her adopted home town, not had the Slovenian-born base-wards represented her country before her first February visit to Hobart.

"That was her & also, because Iie again, titleholder Italy. Groth (standing world No.4

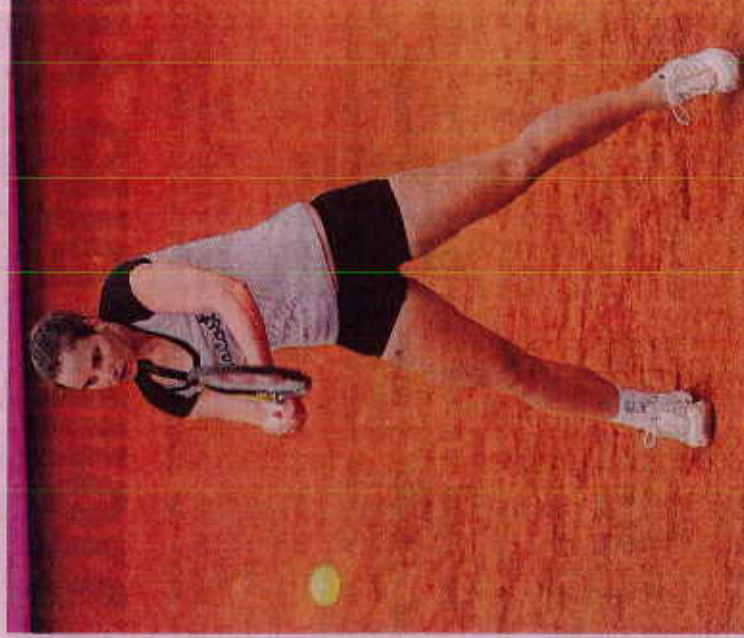
Francesca Schiavone in the opening rubber. Yet it was in an ultimately failed weekend, Groth losing her reverse singles in Havia Pennetta in straight sets, and Susanna unable to win a point at all.

"I'm sure the experience is good for Liz, so hopefully the second is going to be better than the first even," Groth said. "I had a pretty good start but unfortunately I couldn't finish as I started."

Yet Groth has continued to progress, and next month at Roland Garros she will be seeded at a grand slam for the first time. With that comes the guarantee she will not meet a seed until at least the third round, as well as a welcome pressure-eater entitlement reserved for the elite few.

"I get a court by myself, so that's a good thing, and I get it when I want it, which is a good thing as well because last couple of years at Indian Wells and Miami it was impossible for me to actually hit on site because I wasn't a seed," said Groth, who will soon be defending fourth-round appearances at both the French and Wimbledon.

"I don't think it's pressure I'm making forward to it because I enjoy playing, these



Warning: Groth practices yesterday. PHOTO: G. S. BUSHBY/CONTRAST

two grand slams and I have good memories from last year. And being seeded this year I'll have a different position than I had last and hopefully I can use that to my advantage."

Tomorrow's opponent is likely to be the Ukrainian No.2, 14th-ranked Olga Savchenko, followed by world No.31, Lesia Tsurenko in the reverse singles on Sunday. Clay has been laid over the weekend as surface at the Glen Iris Valley Recreation Club, and Groth should be at home in every sense.

"I saw Jacky play, these

Molly, when she was 14 years old in the quarter-finals of Budapest," said Australian captain David Taylor. "So she then went off the radar a bit, but we all thought 'wow, this girl's unbelievable', so she's really just on a day and I think maybe even her favourite surface, so we're lucky to have her here, no doubt."

"She's the leader now. Play what that is under pressure against Italy in Hobart, I think she grew as a player, and I think with that experience now she'll be ready to be a leader."

## Firebirds too hot for Vixens

NETBALL

LIFE without captain Lauren Nourse began with a convincing win for the Queensland Firebirds in Brisbane last night over the Sharnelle McMahon-less Melbourne Vixens.

Undefeated Queensland locked up a home final by extending its rich record unbeaten run to 11 games with a 57-36 victory.

Firebirds sharp shooter, Romelda Aiken dominated with 36 goals at 84 per cent.

It was a stunning result for the Firebirds, who were still cooling from news this week that Nourse had been ruled out for the rest of the season with a knee injury.

The final's lure has been waited, but the Vixens

remains up in the air. One of Lauren's bling for the three remaining finals games, the Vixens' (6-4 record) chances were further complicated by play-off rules. With a 10-0 win against the Queensland Vixens last night in Melbourne, Vixens coach Julie Fingleton welcomed their performance.

"Our center court didn't stand up tonight which was disappointing for us," she said. "If that is our standard then we are way off. That is not a final's performance for us."

The Vixens looked badly out-of-sorts as they began a demanding road trip that will also take in Perth on Sunday. AP

## I doubted myself: Mundine

BOXING

WHEN Mundine's trainer's son after seeing merge on earth Wood Brit was a different story before the 10-hour drive north to Melbourne on Wednesday with an unanimous points decision.

Mundine believed he had alienated critics who had called for his retirement, by bringing Downie's shock loss to Wood and declared himself a "legend".

"People have to understand I am fighting a war when I as a fighter am an Australian 'boxer' said

himself (4 wins, four losses) but I like to see the record, that's the sign of a legend."

But Mundine dropped his eighth long enough to reveal his ego had taken over some major decisions in the past.

"I thought myself a lot of things you have to ask yourself, are you still a champion? Is that the way you should be? It was a bit of a struggle."

Mundine wanted to win a world junior middleweight title in 2004 to be the first to win world titles in three divisions, a daunting task. AP

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# Ukraine spirit defeats host

**TENNIS**  
LINDA PEABOE

AS THE tears dried and the sun set on Australia's failed campaign to remain among the top eight nations in the Fed Cup for next year, captain David Taylor attributed the weekend's shock success of the Ukrainian team to its superior emotional level.

"It's not a real good feeling at the moment, but that's stating the obvious," said Taylor, whose team could not consolidate a 2-1 lead after the second leg of Farouka Grob's singles quinnels, despite holding two match points in the decisive fifth doubles rubber on Mt Waverley clay.

"We were very heavily favoured to win this tie and we didn't. They played a little bit freer and they had a really great attitude from start to finish and they got a reward for that."

Taylor praised Smith, who has gone from non-selection to stand-in team leader in a year, and again defended the absence of Sara Stosur and Jelena Dokic. Unspoken was the fact that Anastasia Rodionova could not repeat her bourned debut performance at Khar'kov last year.

**FED CUP**

At Clon Es, Valley Recreation Club

**AUSTRALIA 2, UKRAINE 3**

**WILSHIRDAY**

SPINKES

Jamilla Grob d Olga Savchenko

6-1, 6-3

Dave Satchuk d Anastasia Rodionova

6-1, 3-0, 7-6 (14-12)

**DOLBLES**

Ukraine (Savchenko/Taylor) d Australia (Satchuk/Rodionova)

7-6, 7-6 (7-3), 6-3

**SATURDAY'S SINGLES**

Grob d Satchuk 6-1, 6-1

Taylor d Rodionova 6-1, 6-4

Rodionova yesterday dropped her second singles match of the tie to world No. 144 Olga Savchenko 7-6 (7-3), 7-6 (14-12) before partnering Grob to a 0-6, 7-6 (7-3), 6-3 doubles loss to Savchenko and Taylor.

"Where did it go wrong? I guess we'd hoped to win it in the singles, we realistically didn't think it would come down to the doubles, but it did, and then we still obviously played well enough to win the tie, having two match points, but it's fine, it's not it," Taylor said.

"You're a point away from competing for the Fed Cup and now we're fighting for our Fed Cup lives again."



Falling flat: Jamilla Grob helps Anastasia Rodionova during their doubles loss.

PICTURE: ANDY HARRINGTON

Despite Australia's two notable absences, Ukraine was also missing its best duo, the injured Boudarenko sisters. The best nation was an overwhelming favourite, even after Rodionova's heavy loss on the opening day, but managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of what had seemed an inevitable victory.

"I don't think I played great today, but I think I did everything I could," Rodionova said. "Of course I'm disappointed and frustrated, but I feel like I gave everything I could."

Having failed to serve out either set, but surviving the dramatic second tie-breaker to save four match points

matches, and was imperious again yesterday. She was serving and returning brilliantly, executing efficiently off the ground and moving well on the clay on which she will play her first tournament of the season next week.

Last year in the European spring, Grob reached the quarter-finals of Estoril as a slain fourth round at the French Open — a feat she watched a month later at Wimbledon. She will return to Turkey mid-week to prepare for Roland Garros lead-up events in Estoril, Rome and Madrid, Australia, meanwhile, prepares for a return to world group II.

## BRIEFS

**GOLF**

**SCOTT BACK IN HUNT**

AUSTRALIAN Brian Scott edged back into contention at the Texas Open in San Antonio. The defeat in 14th and linked the final two holes to card a two-under-par 70 in one third round. Scott trails the leader, American Brandon Steele, by three strokes in a 14-hole final round. Scott (174) dropped off the pace, with the big boys.

**AUSTRALIAN LAG**

THE Australian team of Andrew Hall and Mark Lunn were strong finishers at the first leg of the final round of the European Nations Cup when Lunn fired a final score of 67-67 for a 70 to be 10-under overall and outguy seventh after three rounds, trailing Sweden's Anna Nordqvist and Spain's Olin Lobos.

**ITALIAN TEEN WINS**

ITALIAN teenager Mikko Heineslein edged the par-five 11th hole to rally for a one-shot win over Henrichman Gregorovich at the Makasum Open in Auckland last year yesterday. Two days before his 18th birthday, Mikko shot a four-under 68 to finish with a 185-under total of 272. Maiden Freshman Rory McIlroy was tied, two shots back after a double bogey on the 12th and a bogey on the final hole.

**TENNIS**

**RAFAEL SURVIVES BATTLE**

RAFAEL Nadal needed to produce his best in age on injured Andy Murray 6-4, 2-6, 6-1 and Louis Lajoz in the final of the Movistar Cupo Masters. Nadal will battle a seventh straight tie against compatriot David Ferrer. Fourth seed Ferrer beat Jürgen Melzer 6-3, 6-2, a day after the Austrian had beaten Roger Federer.

**BASKETBALL**

**WILKES, HEAT RALLY**

THE Miami Heat and Chicago Bulls staged rallies to win their NBA season; Milwaukee played off-center as Chicago edged from visiting Fox's 104-99 win over the Pistons. Procter while Miami came back from a 12-point first-quarter deficit to beat the Philadelphia 76ers 97-89. In other play-off games, Atlanta defeated Orlando 100-93, while Dallas beat Portland 89-81.

**MOTOR SPORT**

**POWER ON POLE AGAIN**

AUSTRALIAN Will Power has earned pole position at the Grand Prix of Long Beach, California, his third straight to open the IndyCar season. Power, late weeks' winner at Nashville, made a usual 11.1-turn, 3.2-kilometre circuit in one minute, 3.06 seconds, just ahead of defending Long Beach champion Ryan Hunter-Reay.

**CYCLING**

**CATALUNYA WINS STAGE TRAIL**

CONTRIBUTOR: GREGORY B. LEBLANC  
de France champion Alberto Contador of Saxo Bank won the fourth stage of the Tour of Catalunya, a 112-kilometre individual time trial in the northern town of Zamora. His opponent, senior kondo of the national team back over the leader's jersey.

**ICE HOCKEY**

CONTRIBUTOR: GREGORY B. LEBLANC  
THE Detroit Red Wings and Montreal Canadiens won their NHL quarter-finals to take a 2-0 lead in their best-of-seven play-offs. The Red Wings beat the Pittsburgh Penguins 4-3, while the Canadiens defeated the Florida Panthers 3-1.

# Vixens got the Fever and a finals boost

**NETBALL**

THE Melbourne Vixens boosted their finals campaign with a 54-38 victory yesterday against the West Coast Fever at Perth's Challenge Stadium.

The Vixens moved into the top four with 14 points in NSW, which has played nine fewer games.

And the victory ensures the Vixens will reach the finals at they can win their last two matches, against the Central Pulse on Saturday and the Swifts in the final round.

Vixens attacking path Tegan Caldwell and Kate Beveridge struggled with their shooting in the second half but still scored 37 and 17 goals respectively to help their side bounce back from a 21-goal loss in league leader Queensland last week. Caldwell dominated the first quarter, scoring 11 goals from 12 attempts to guide the visitors to a seven-goal lead at the first break.

The Fever was more positive early in the second and cut the margin to five at one stage but the Vixens dominated the final minutes of the period in a three-goal half-time lead.

Melbourne lost wing attack Chelsea Teague to a rolled ankle late in the third quarter but remained in control throughout the second

**ROUND 18**

Thursday, Brisbane 37c v 49c

30c v 49c, 63c v 49c

Saturday, Queensland 67c

67c v 63c

Wednesday, Vixens 54c v 38c

Wagtails 60c v 49c, 48c v 33c

Friday, Tadeo v Pubs, Swifts v Mystics

half to claim its third win from four games since losing national team star Sharelle McMahon to a season-ending Achilles injury.

Melbourne coach Julie Hourveng said she was pleased with the way her side bounced back from the loss to the Pulse.

"After four days on the road we had some tired and fatigued bodies so it was really nice to get a win. And a 16-goal win against this Fever team is a very nice result," she said.

"We were tight years ahead of the way we played on Thursday. This time we kept putting pressure on the other team, which was great."

Fever coach Jane Seale said she was frustrated that her side had produced another below-par performance at home.

"We certainly got enough of the ball to give ourselves chances but we couldn't convert those opportunities. They were just more controlled in our attack than we were and that was the difference," she said.

Have you had your career defining moment?

MyCareer.com.au

## Giga Bites Andrew Gigacz

**SWIMS' FIBRONACHI RESULTS**  
New Swims coach John Longhine is a strategist and a thinker. Based on Sydney's results, he may also be a mathematician. In the Swims' home games thus far Longhine has not let defeat faze margins of 0, 5 and 1.3. These figures are part of the Fibonachi sequence. The first two Fibonachi numbers are 0 and 1, and each subsequent number is the sum of the previous two. Thus the first 12 numbers of the sequence are: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55 and 89. If Longhine continues with his current Fibonachi strategy, fans can expect to see these numbers many times as final margins in Sydney games during the season.

**TAKING IT TO THE MTH DEGREE**  
A closer look reveals that the Swans' injuries have increased with each game. If this trend continues another margin of Fibonachi numbers. Then Sydney can expect to beat St Kilda in round 22 by 121.34 points — or higher!

**WHO HAS TOP SCORERS?**  
122 has been a popular score in rounds 2 and 3, although each goal score of it has been unique. Last Saturday, the Bulldogs scored 18.14 (121) against Collingwood while Geelong beat Port with a total of 17.20 (122) the next day. A week earlier against Melbourne, Hawthorn attained the same score via 18.26. Despite having been registered three times in three rounds, 122 is not the most common score so far. That "number goes to 84," escaped by Sydney and Melbourne in their round-one draw by 18.00 (84) the week end, and by Essendon in its win over St. Kilda 18.00 week. Like 122, it has been recorded in three different ways — 11.18 by Sydney and Melbourne, 12.12 by St. Kilda and 13.06 by Richmond.

### A-LIST RESULTS IN A LOSS

It seems that being part of the "A-list" isn't all it's cracked up to be. Over the first three AFL rounds, there were 10 games in which one team's top three players refused to start or began with the letter A, then the coach in not one of those games put the side with more A players on. The best result was St. Kilda which, with Armstrong and Archer on board, drew with Port. Richmond, which had three A players,

### POTPODE OF THE WEEK

Anyone following the US Masters last weekend would have caught the distinctly Australo-flavour with Jason Day and Adam Scott tying for second place and Geoff Ogilvy not too far behind. But there was also a more obscure Australian reference, credited by Japanese golfer Taro Ichikawa. A consistent effort by Ichikawa meant that midway his 54-hole round he was 27, 31 and 34 a week of the Australian amateur bracket shows that 7177 is the bogey score at Midway Point.

### THE NAME OF THE GAME

Ever notice how week 9 has more less to do with London, St. Nick coach Ross Lyon appeared to see the need for a player turnover. Lyon had already introduced Daniel Nicholls for his first game in round two, and then added another debutant last week, junior Smith. But it's the mother in Lyon's turnover approach that is all just a bit of an Italian and Anglo-Sarban-Alexar-Smith's name had the answer. It's an anagram of A BUT, MISS TSNL.

Former of Andrew Higgins' world facts and figures from the world of sport and beyond, visit [factyadventure.com.au](http://factyadventure.com.au)

# Pearson in the race for triple crown

## ANALYTICS

MICHAEL GIBSON

SALLY Pearson needed the allure of a triple title to bring her to Melbourne. John Steffensen needed the prospect of a full body lycra suit with a skeleton on the front to get him on track. The first day of the national athletics championships in Melbourne delivered the diverse yet the retraining. For Pearson, the allure of claiming one or even two national titles was not sufficient motivation to brave autumnal Melbourne, but the idea of three and becoming the first woman in 33 years since Pamela Hyatt's triple held a quirky appeal.

Pearson, the Olympic silver medalist and Australia's premier sprinter, approached the street with a new goal and last night achieved the first stage of that temple when she comfortably won through to the 100 metres finals tonight in 11.69 seconds. Earlier this week, Pearson wondrously hit the triple — the 100 and 200 metres and the 100 hurdles — was too much, and contemplated dropping the 200, but the triple title persuaded her.

"It hasn't been done since Pam Ryan [in 1968], so I thought I might as well have a go at it... I have seven races over the next three days, so I need to make sure my body is up to it," she said.

"I was not motivated to come down here to run because of the cold, but you have to get over that because Europe can be like this. So I thought I might as well motivate myself and do something that will excite me a little bit."

In 1968, Pam Ryan won the 80m hurdles, the 100m and the pentathlon, starting her own triple record from five years earlier when she won the long jump, 80m hurdles and pentathlon.

Pearson said the load would be difficult, given she is likely to have the finals of the 200m and the 100m hurdles, 40 minutes apart. She had not interested to compete in the hurdles in Sydney this summer, planning to wait until she arrived in Europe. John Steffensen made another statement of sport as entertainment when he hit the crack in his skeleton suit.

"At the end of the day, this track is boring without John Steffensen. I prove that day in, day out. I'm still doing it for the cause," said the 2006 Commonwealth Games gold medalist who qualified for the final second, behind Sean Wroe and with Steve Solomon and Ben Offinans.

"The average person doesn't know what 44 seconds is, but they know what enthusiasm is and the sooner we start thinking that way the sport will grow."



Australian long jumpers, Fabrice Lapierre and Mitchell Watt both advanced to tomorrow's final. Watt with a jump of 7.78 metres qualified in second place behind Robert Crother who leapt 7.44m and Lapierre, the world indoor champion and reigning national champion, was

third with a distance of 7.41m. Meanwhile, two-time 400m hurdles world champion in form Pirman has announced she has separated from her husband Chris Rawlison for a second time. She pulled out of this weekend's championships with a calf injury.

Bonus: 400m hurdles  
6.09m Ashli Steffensen hits a body of light-hearted interest to the table.

# Rodionova set in the mould of a clay queen

## AUSTRALIA V UKRAINE

What: Fed Cup world group play-off

Where: Glen Iris Valley Recreation Club, Mt Waverley

Surface: Outdoor clay

Record: Australia 1, Ukraine 1

Last time: Australia 4 Ukraine 5-0 in Kharkiv, 2010

What: Today, 11am — Jarmila Groth (singles ranking 30) v Diga Savtchuk (144)

followed by Anastasia Rodionova (72, pictured) v Lesia Tsurenko (131)

Tomorrow, 10am — Groth v Tsurenko, Rodionova v Savtchuk

Sally Peers/Sophie Ferguson v Yuliyia Bergelzhmir/Viktoria Kuznetsov

The winner of the tie will qualify for the Fed Cup's eight-nation world group in 2012.



Last year and I've already played one tournament this year, in Charleston," Rodionova, 26, said. "I feel really good on it, especially after I had one week of practice with Conchita Martínez, the clay-court queen, so I'm really glad clay was chosen for this tie."

Yet it is not just the conditions that suit, but the team environment in general, with the fiery world No. 72 having also won dual Commonwealth Games gold and a silver in Delhi last year. "She's really come to the forefront when representing her country, which is great," said Australian coach Nicole Bradstoke. "Both Rod and Jarka [Groth] have had great Fed Cup debuts, and a good positive start can do wonders for the tie's after that, as well."

Withdrawals aside, the weather has been the main negative this week, disrupting preparations at the Mt Waverley venue.

having not played before, with the reverse singles and doubles scheduled for tomorrow and a place in the 2012 world group at stake. "I'm very excited, and hopefully I can fulfil the position of No. 1 and I can help the team to win at least one point, hopefully two," said Groth, the 16th highest-ranked participant at No. 20. "It's hard to walk in Sam's footsteps but I will try, and hopefully eventually will be happy and we get the win."

Rodionova dropped from favour-able to underdog against the Czech Republic when Kim Clijsters was forced to pull out injured from its Fed Cup semi-final this weekend.

Clijsters, carrying shoulder and wrist complaints, complained her health problems by badly spaining her ankle at a wedding over the weekend. In the absence of the 178 Open champion, Belgium will be led by Yanina Wickmayer, ranked 23rd.

I feel really good on it, especially after I had one week of practice with Conchita Martínez, the clay-court queen.

ANASTASIA RODIONOVA



# Groth and Rodionova drop decider in World Group tie

## Aussies Fed-exed

Jackie Epstein

AUSTRIANIA must fight to return to the Fed Cup World Group after suffering a shock loss to the Ukrainians.

Favoured to win at home, the Australians were out-painted 2-3 after squandering two match points in the deciding doubles rubber at Mt Waverley yesterday.

Captain David Taylor said the 6-6 7-6 6-3 defeat was devastating.

"I guess we'd hoped to win it in the singles," he said. "We didn't realistically think it would come down to the doubles, but it did."

"We still played well enough to win the tie, having two match points, but it's fine lines, isn't it? You're a point away from competing for the Fed Cup and now we're fighting for our Fed Cup lives again."

"One point away from losing comes back into the team and Jacko (Jason Grich) keeps improving wow, you're a chance to win the whole Fed Cup."

"Now we're trying to get back into the World Group. So one point can mean the difference and that's very hard to accept at this stage, but we don't have an option other than to regroup."

Groth won her earlier singles match against Olga Savchuk and yesterday 6-1 6-3 against Lesia Tsurenko.

But Anastasia Rodionova dropped both her singles, with her 7-6 (7-3) 7-6 (11-12) loss to Savchuk sending the tie into a fifth live match.

Taylor said it would be better if the ITF scheduled matches in a more convenient location for top-ranked players such as Stosur and Jelena Dokić.

"It's hard to expect them to be available to play every week of the year," he said.

Rodionova said she was surprised by how well Savchuk and Tsurenko performed in doubles and Grich looked forward to redempting Australia's standing.

"Doesn't matter if I win two singles — it was a team effort and all we can do is look forward to the next tie and keep fighting to get back to where we belong," she said.



**Cup empty:** The Australians went down and, finally, out yesterday in their Fed Cup World Group playoff against Ukraine. Jamila Groth (above) hit this forehand winner on her way to beating Lesia Tsurenko, but (right) Anastasia Rodionova needed a lift when she and Groth teamed for the deciding doubles against Tsurenko and Olga Savchuk. But the helping hand wasn't enough and the Ukrainians took the match and the tie. Pictures: AFP



Improving: Steph Gilmore

## Surf's up for Bells

Ananda Litham

THE best surf for an Easter event at Bells Beach in four years is on the menu for the 50th anniversary of competition at Victoria's surf hotspot this week.

The Rip Curl Pro Pro men and women has been the site of great surf in recent years, but competition director Rod Forster wants a more international flavour. He announced confirmed reports of good swell on the way for this year's event.

"Maybe there is five feet to nine to 10 metres) for the early part and then hopefully new swell for Friday, Saturday, Sunday, maybe four to six foot (almost two metres)," Hardman said.

The sub-competition in the second round of the Association of Surfing Professionals World Tour event will be held as early as Wednesday if the forecast holds true.

American 16-time world champion Kelly Slater is No. 1 seed in the men's 3000 and Hawaiian Carissa Moore is the top woman.

However three-time Bells winner and four-time world champion Stephanie Gilmore and fellow Australians Taj Burrow, Trent Burkhart and Mick Fanning are expected to excel in the annual event.

Slater, who finished second to Gilmore in the year's opening event on the Gold Coast earlier this year, Gilmore is improving from a fractured wrist suffered in an attack outside her home.



**Big haul:** Melbourne Rebels target James O'Connor takes on the Brumbies' defence in Canberra yesterday. Picture: GETTY IMAGES

Darren Wallton  
Canberra

WESTERN Force heaped more Super Rugby pain on the ACT Brumbies with a 27-19 victory yesterday at Canberra Stadium.

Two second-half tries from winger David Smith and a 15-point haul from James O'Connor piloted Force to only the second win from eight starts this season.

The Brumbies' one-time home-ground fortress is now proving more a gateway to four competing points for visiting teams, with the side one from four in Canberra this campaign.

While Force was plucky, the Brumbies should never have lost the tie. They led 10-7 at halftime but their advantage could have been much greater

restored the Brumbies' lead before O'Connor nailed a 41m reply to put the visitors back in front 17-10 at 67 minutes.

Gilmore and O'Connor traded far more penalty goals as the kit and changed hands four times in the final half-hour before Smith sealed victory for Force two minutes from time when he crossed under the posts.

WELLINGTON Hurricanes lock Jeremy Thrush's last-minute try, which was nullified against the Cheetahs in an 11-try thriller in Bloemfontein yesterday.

The two contested rounds in times as two of the competition's strugglers defied cold, wet conditions to put on an exceptional display.

The win lifts the Hurricanes to the bottom of the New Zealand conference.

## FOXSPORTS TOP10

THIS WEEK'S MUST-SEE SPORTS ACTION

FROM APRIL 18-24, 2011

**AFL Round 5**  
Saturday, 10:00pm  
For Sports HD & Fox Sports 1  
North Melbourne v Richmond

**AFL**  
Monday, 8:00pm  
For Sports HD & Fox Sports 1  
Fit Test Derby  
Dimitri James HD

**ALSO ON FOX SPORTS THIS WEEK**  
AFL: AFL WINNERS PRESENTS: Celebrate a career with 2000+ Greatest Grand Guys. AFL Midpoint Show at 6:30pm Friday  
NRL: ROUND 7  
3 LIVE matches  
Premier League  
Main United v Everton  
LIVE, Saturday

**AFL: AFTER THE BOUNCE**  
AFL: Adelaide Strikers, LIVE at 11:30pm Sunday  
**BASEBALL MLB**  
4 matches LIVE

"This is a victory for all of us, including the people trying their best in Tohoku," said Hisashi Iwakuma, the Eagles' starting pitcher.

And so it was on opening day, Japan style. There were staples of custom and optimism -- fried soba noodles on the griddle, cheerleaders in pink sash outfits dancing in the early spring sun, long lines of fans eager to enter the stadium for the first time

energy," said Ryo Shishido, 33, a construction worker who drove eight hours from Fukushima City to see his team play. "Usually, I'm so busy I can't get to opening day, but there was no way I was going to miss it this year."

After the final out, some of the Eagles players ran to the left-field stands to salute their fans, many of whom took off work so they could cheer the team on behalf of

those at home who could not be there themselves.

Opening day, of course, is just one game in a long season for the fans and players. For the owners, much work remains. The Marines are looking to bring in diesel generators to power the lights when night games resume later this spring, said Akio Shigemitsu, the chairman of the Lotte group. In

the meantime, attendance and advertising rates will suffer because of all the day games the team has to play, he said.

His problems pale next to those facing the Eagles. At their stadium in Sendai, walls and walkways were cracked, lounges and suites were flooded, and the ceilings in the team offices fell. Many of the team's fans are

out of work, living in refugee centres or worse. The nuclear crisis in neighbouring Fukushima prefecture has heightened fears.

Given all of the obstacles, if the Eagles are in contention for the pennant in September, they are likely to become an inspiration not just for their fans but to a nation looking for encouragement. **NEW YORK TIMES**

what I'll have to do. Hopefully it's a good omen. I injured the same knee a year out before the Athens Olympics where we won the gold."

Dwyer said his injury came at the best possible time with regard to next year's Olympics.

"We haven't got much on for the next three or four months and most of international stuff is later in the year," he said. **WEST AUSTRALIAN**

## Criticism of Stosur missing tie unjustified: coach

**TENNIS**  
**LINDA PEARCE**

AUSTRALIA'S Fed Cup captain David Taylor has defended Sam Stosur's decision to skip this weekend's world group qualifying tie against Ukraine to focus on the European claycourt season, while acknowledging the teetering world No. 6 is struggling to deal with "the expectation and pressure that comes with being a top player".

Taylor, who has also been Stosur's coach since 2008, said it would be unfair to question the French Open

finalist's decision to sidestep national duty for the first time, and instead segue her unsuccessful title defence in Charleston, South Carolina, last week into an uninterrupted preparation in Stuttgart, Germany, where she reached the final last year.

Jelena Dokic, who cited exhaustion for her late withdrawal from a four-woman squad now comprising Jarmila Groth, Anastasia Rodionova, Sophie Ferguson and Victorian debutante Sally Pears, is the other player to bypass the Mount Waverley claycourt fixture

that will determine whether Australia remains in the eight-nation world group for 2012.

Taylor admitted that Stosur's season "hasn't been what she'd hoped", and while a top-20 position in the WTA's calendar-year points race was far from disastrous still more than a month out from Roland Garros, the Queenslander had become discouraged by her inability to win a succession of close matches.

But in an awkwardly-scheduled week when many of the world's top players

would be absent from Fed Cup duties, with Australia having failed in its bid to switch the tie to a more central neutral venue such as Spain, Taylor said: "I think it'd be really silly for anyone to be critical of Sam not playing. Every other top player misses ties, and now we have other top girls it's a different situation; before it wasn't."

"Sam had never missed a tie in nine years other than when she had Lyme Disease, and she's about to become Australia's most winningest player ever in Fed Cup so there'll be no criticism from

me of her decision... I think we've got a strong enough team without her to still win, so I think it's probably important to focus on the people that are here."

Against a Ukrainian team led by top-150 pair Lesya Tsurenko and Olga Savchuk in the absence of the injured Bondarenko sisters, clearly the best-credentialed player on either team is the 30th-ranked Groth, who reached the fourth round at the French Open and Wimbledon last year and won her second career title in Hobart in January.

"It's an honour to be the No. 1 and I'll try to do my best," said the Slovakian-born Groth, who arrived from her Turkish training base on Monday night.

"I try to make the effort and hopefully I will be ready and I can help the team to hopefully beat Ukraine."

Temporary stands to seat 1500 have been erected at the leafy Glen Iris Valley Recreation Club, and clay laid over the existing en-tout-cas courts to best replicate the conditions players will face in Europe over the next eight weeks.



Anastasia Rodionova returns darling yesterday's loss to Lesia Tsurenko but captain David Taylor is tipping her to win today's rubber against Olga Savchenko. PICTURE: MAT COOPER

# Coach backs Rodionova

## LEIGH PEARCE

FED Cup captain David Taylor has backed Anastasia Rodionova to regroup after yesterday's delectable upset to her celebrated singles rival against the Ukrainians, as Australia enters its world group play-off finale. Headed 1-1 with a result had been expected to rival.

As she did against Italy in February, Tsurenko forth impressively secured the first point for Australia, this time outlasting world No 140 Olga Savchenko 6-1, 6-1 in just 40 minutes. But the surprise came in the second rubber, when Ukrainian No 1 Lesia Tsurenko levelled the tie 6-1, 2-4 against Rodionova, 59 places below in the world rankings.

"No doubt it's disappointing, especially Taylor admitted, before the rubber singles and then a possibly good tactical doubles selection on Monday strategy play. We were pretty heavily favoured to win both rubbers, as we should have been, and fast in the great job, a very clean match. Tsurenko displayed the difference in the levels of the two players.

"Second match, it's not easy to come and play in front of your home

you're sure, you go onto the next tournament. Fed Cup you get another chance to feel good about your tennis... and so much tennis you the first match (Rodionova) can play for a bit, so that's going to be a new experience and I think it'll be a positive one for Anastasia."

Rodionova certainly was keen to behind her, and focus on a rematch with the more familiar Savchenko whom she leads 3-0 overall and outlasted in a marathon three-set tie on a Bahamas hardcourt just last month. "I have a good record against Olga and I'm just looking forward to going back out on the court and show the Australian crowd that I can play special tennis," said Melbourne-based Rodionova.

Ukraine's tennis was exceptional, the standard No 1 in Sara Sorocut's absence losing just one point in her first five service games while also blabbering the Savchenko serve, and making mistakes, errors. Yet she admitted she had not been attended in her first claycourt match of the season and estimated she had performed at "maybe 50 per cent of what I can actually play".

But the great thing is normally when you lose a match, the next day

Tsurenko looks as a tougher proposition the strong, favored favorite having prepared for the tie on the Queensland Pro-Tour circuit and been rewarded for her extended local preparation. "I know what to do, and I think my style is much better against Tsurenko than Olga's style," the 141st-ranked Tsurenko said. "I think at least I have to play the same as today, maybe a little bit stronger and maybe a little bit smarter."

Should she come down to the fifth rubber, Taylor indicated he would air his original inclination of Sophie Ferguson and teenager Sally Peers with 28th-ranked Rodionova clearly the more accomplished doubles player in the quarter.

"I think Anastasia, it's fair to say, is our best doubles player, and I probably struggle if it came down to the doubles, a team would include her, but I'm not sure of who her partner would be," said Taylor, still remnant of the win that would retain Australia's place in the world group. "I think the form favours a displayed today, was really a much higher level and if she can do that tomorrow I think it sets us up for a good chance to win."

# Federer out, win for Nadal

## MONTE CARLO, MONACO

TOP seed Rafael Nadal won his 35th consecutive match at the Monte Carlo Masters by crushing Ivan Ljubicic 6-1, 6-3 on Monday to set up a repeat semi-final with the resurgent Andy Murray.

But second seed Roger Federer, a three-time losing finalist to Nadal here between 2006 and 2008, was upset 6-4, 6-4 by Julien Melzer, having never previously lost a set in three meetings with the Austrian.

Federer was well off his best form after two superlative matches last week in Monaco, but was quick to admit he had been unprepared on the day as he missed too many chances.

"I don't think I played terrible. It's just the first week of clay, so I don't expect myself to play my very best," he said.

"He played well when he had to and I missed too many chances. Every time I had this slight opening, things didn't go my way. Either he shakes them and they stay in play, or he hits the line. But he did well, played aggressive and played the right way he was supposed to."

Melzer played in pain after having the court with just one game completed for treatment on a neck problem. But he came out a changed man, taking control against the 16-time grand slam winner and pleased to have finally defeated Federer. "I beat Rafa last year in Shanghai. I have beaten Novak Djokovic in the French Open quarter-finals. So this was the one missing."

Melzer, a straight-set loser to Federer three times last season, last night played his semi-final against Spanish fourth seed David Ferrer and lost 6-3, 6-2.

It was the first time that Ferrer has reached the final of the Monte Carlo Masters, and the Australian Open semi-finalist will bid for his 12th career title.

Murray has recovered from a four-match losing streak in record three victories in Monaco, knocking out Portugal's Frederico Gil 6-2, 6-1 to reach his second semi in his first three tournaments here. He lost to Nadal at the same stage in 2008.

Nadal improved to a phenomenal 37-1 at the venue with his win over Ljubicic, with Nadal's only loss coming to Challenger Carin on his debut in 2003. Former world No 3 Ljubicic had lost four straight matches prior to this week, but bounced back by beating 12th seed to-williard Twardy and fifth seed Tomas Berdych.



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