



We're a better chance without Hewitt: Rafter

DUAL US Open champion Pat Rafter believes Lleyton Hewitt's absence from this weekend's first-round Davis Cup tie against Switzerland has given the Australian team a greater chance of victory.

Rafter yesterday cast doubt on whether the world's best player, Swiss star Roger Federer, would have withdrawn if Hewitt, who is resting a jarred left ankle, was fit and available.

Federer's withdrawal from the tie, to be played on clay in Geneva, has opened the door for an inexperienced Australian team to strike despite being clear underdogs.

The make-up of the team will be finalised by captain John Fitzgerald today but Victorian pair Chris Guccione and Peter Luczak appear set to feature in the singles.

Veteran Wayne Arthurs and newcomer Paul Hanley are the likely doubles pairing with world No. 49 Stanislas Wawrinka to spearhead the home team.

Rafter described Hewitt's withdrawal as a "catch 22" before throwing support behind Guccione and Luczak to get the job done.

"It gives the guys a chance," Rafter said of Federer's absence. "If Lleyton played, I think Federer would have made himself available in a heartbeat. It's a catch 22. Lleyton's a big loss but so is Federer."

The former US Open champion said there was little doubt Fitzgerald would leave Arthurs, the second-oldest top-100 player

behind Andre Agassi, out of the singles draw.

"I can't see Wayne playing singles," he said. "You've got to give the young guys like Chris Guccione a go. That's my feeling, anyway."

"It'll be interesting to see how Paul goes in the doubles because he hasn't played there before and there's a lot of pressure."

Rafter said he would call Fitzgerald to wish the team luck before the start of the tie.

He also said he was keen to relocate back to Queensland at the end of the year with his wife Lara and children Joshua and India. Rafter, who has lived in Sydney since his retirement in 2003, said he "belongs" north of the border and will return to his house on the picturesque Sunshine Coast.

Rafter was in Brisbane yesterday for the announcement of additional land being granted for the \$60 million State Tennis Centre to be built at Tennyson. Rafter said the announcement had heightened his interest in coaching at a junior level.

"The way I've positioned myself with that is that if a state coach thinks a player is doing really well, then they can come down and have a hit with myself and (Tony) Roche," he said. "But we're not going to waste our time hitting with kids who don't want to be there."

"I definitely need to get back out on the court and hit a few balls because I need to get fit." **AAP**

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