

Pollock sacked

AFP, Johannesburg

Shaun Pollock was sacked as captain of the South African cricket team on Saturday following the country's dismal World Cup campaign, the United Cricket Board of South Africa (UCBSA) announced.

A statement released by the UCBSA said a replacement would be named on Sunday.

"On recommendation from the national selectors and with the input from the national cricket committee, the general council of the United Cricket Board of South Africa has decided to relieve Shaun Pollock of the captaincy of the South African national team with immediate effect," said a UCBSA statement.

The Proteas began the World Cup as co-favourites and widely regarded as the one team capable of challenging defending champions Australia for the title.

However, they never made it out of the preliminary round after

winning three of their matches against Kenya, Canada and Bangladesh but losing to the West Indies and New Zealand and suffering a fatal tied game with Sri Lanka.

Pollock admitted later his team had miscalculated the target needed in the rain-hit tie against Sri Lanka.

"Shaun is a very valuable member of the national squad and is one of the world's best all-rounders," said UCBSA chief executive Gerald Majola.

"He will continue to play a vital role in the team."

Pollock's sacking came just hours after the UCBSA had been forced to quash speculation that the 29-year-old had resigned as the selectors met to pick a squad for tournaments in Bangladesh and Sharjah.

Former South African batting great Barry Richards called Pollock's ousting a "knee-jerk" reaction.

"It all looks like a bit of a knee jerk to me," said Richards, who is doing television commentary at the World Cup.

"You've got to sit down and think about these things. It might be the right thing to do but it all looks too rushed to me."

"You've got to go through things like this rationally."

The 22-year-old Graeme Smith has emerged as a popular choice to succeed Pollock and captain the team on its post-World Cup assignments in Sharjah, Bangladesh and England.

"They're all talking about Graeme Smith. There's no one person who jumps out at you and says pick me," Richards said.

"But if they go for Graeme Smith, well he's never played cricket in England at that level before. England in England are tough."

Earlier Saturday, the

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PHOTO: AFP

IT'S TIME FOR REFLECTIONS: Axed South African captain Shaun Pollock speaking to the press at Durban yesterday.

I'm a victim of Cronje legacy

AFP, Durban

Sacked South Africa captain Shaun Pollock said the legacy of disgraced former skipper Hansie Cronje had inhibited his own leadership of the side.

"Ever since the Hansie issue there's been an effort to make sure the captain wasn't given too much power and shared responsibility was the approach they wanted," Pollock told reporters at Kingsmead here on Sunday.

"Unfortunately that hasn't worked out from my perspective."

"As captain you want full support to be able to do what you want," the 29-year-old Natal all-rounder added.

"When Eric Simons (the South Africa coach) came in there was talk of him being ultimately responsible. As captain, you want to take on that mantle. You want to live and die by your decisions."

Cronje, who was killed in a plane

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PHOTO: STAR FILE

Heath Streak

Streak to carry on

AFP, Johannesburg

Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak insisted on Sunday he will not follow Andy Flower and Henry Olonga into retirement and that he would battle on at the head of his shell-shocked team.

"I will keep going as long as my body allows. I love my country, I love my job, I'll keep going," said Streak a day after teammates Flower and Olonga slipped into international retirement and exile, both fearing for their safety if they returned home.

The Zimbabwe skipper said he was sad about the retirement of the two men who had won wide international praise for their black armband protest against the regime of president Robert

Mugabe.

"They're both quality players and it will be difficult to replace players of such calibre," said Streak.

Meanwhile, a British newspaper reported on Sunday that fast bowler Olonga had been forced to go into hiding to avoid capture by Zimbabwe's secret police.

The Sunday Telegraph claimed that seven plainclothes officers from the feared Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), arrived in East London where Zimbabwe played the Sri Lankans on Saturday.

Olonga "had been told the officers intended to 'escort him home', where a likely charge of treason awaited," the newspaper

said.

The punishment for treason in Zimbabwe is death.

In mid-afternoon Saturday, officers from the World Cup-appointed Close Protection Unit returned to the players' hotel and packed all of Olonga's personal possessions in case he was intercepted after the match, the paper said.

England, where one of his sisters lives, remains Olonga's most likely final destination, as long as political asylum is granted.

The 26-year-old, a long-standing critic of the Mugabe regime, had issued an emotional statement after the game setting out the reasons why was he retiring from international cricket.

Olonga on the run

AFP, Johannesburg

Zimbabwean fast bowler Henry Olonga, who announced his retirement from international cricket on Saturday, has gone into hiding to dodge Zimbabwe's secret police, a British paper said Sunday.

Seven plainclothes officers from Zimbabwe's secret police, believed to be from the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), arrived on Friday in East London, South Africa where Zimbabwe faced the Sri Lankans, The Sunday Telegraph reported.

Olonga "had been told the officers intended to 'escort him home', where a likely charge of treason awaited," the newspaper said. The punishment for treason in Zimbabwe is death.

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"He was pretty shaken but he seemed to be coping as well as anyone can in a situation like that," a teammate told The Sunday Telegraph after the match on

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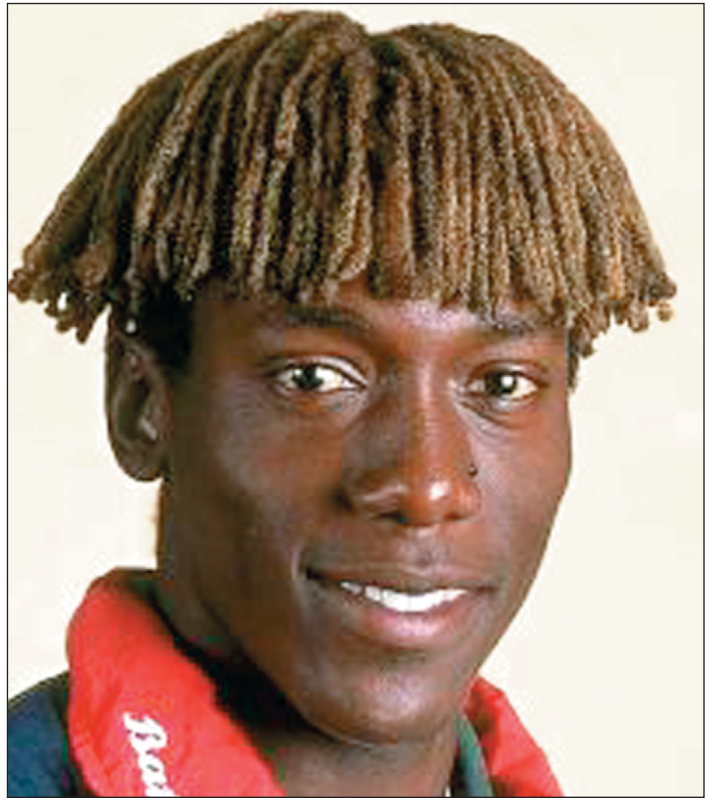


PHOTO: STAR FILE

Henry Olonga

Officials for semis named

INTERNET, Johannesburg

The International Cricket Council on Saturday confirmed the umpiring and match refereeing appointments for the Cricket World Cup semifinals at Port Elizabeth and Durban.

Umpires David Shepherd of England and South African Rudi Koertzen will be in charge of the first semifinal on March 18 between Australia and Sri Lanka at Port Elizabeth, the third umpire being New Zealander Billy Bowden. He will be assisted by Pakistan's Aleem Dar. The match referee is Clive Lloyd.

West Indian Steve Bucknor and Australian Daryl Harper will officiate in the day-night game between

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Indian women falling fast for cricket

AFP, New Delhi

A growing number of women in India even, reportedly, the wife of the US ambassador are falling prey to the charm of cricket during the ongoing World Cup.

India Today magazine said US envoy Robert Blackwill, whose country is not known for its interest in South Asia's favourite sport, recently confided to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee that "his wife, not much of a sports buff, now sits up at night to watch cricket while he sleeps."

While cricket has long been viewed as a gentlemen's game, women in cricket-crazy India are

finding it increasingly hard to resist thanks to blanket television coverage and the national team's dream run in the World Cup.

Saurav Ganguly's Indians have already qualified for the Cup semifinal against Kenya at Durban on March 20, having won seven matches in a row and millions of woman fans in the process.

The number of women fans have grown nearly three-fold since India's remarkable victory over England in the NatWest Trophy final at Lord's last year.

"During the NatWest series in England last year, the female TRPs (Television Rating Points) were 2.8. They rose to 4.9 in the World Cup

and to 9.8 for India matches," India Today reported.

Outlook magazine said female viewership comprised 46 per cent of total viewership, with as many as 22 million having watched the World Cup matches in South Africa on television.

"This rating surprised us all, though we'd strategised to get women to watch as much cricket as possible," the magazine quoted Sony Entertainment Television MAX executive vice president Rajat Jain as saying.

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Quips & Quotes

AFP, Johannesburg

Who's saying what at the World Cup:

"The threatening e-mails I have received make it dangerous for me to return to Zimbabwe. I was never under the illusion that my stand would have no consequences but I believe that one should have the courage of one's convictions and do all one can to uphold them."

Zimbabwe fast bowler Henry Olonga on his decision to quit international cricket and live in exile.

"I will keep going as long as my body allows. I love my country. I love my job, I'll keep going."

Zimbabwe skipper Heath

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PHOTO: AFP

PROVING A POINT: The Kenyans celebrate the fall of Australian batsman Brad Hogg at Durban on March 15.

Kenyans caution Indians

AFP, Durban

Kenya, inspired by middle-aged spinner Asif Karim, gave defending champions Australia a major fright on Saturday and then warned India to expect the same shock treatment when they clash in the World Cup semifinal here on Thursday.

The 39-year-old Karim got rid of skipper Ricky Ponting, Darren Lehmann and Brad Hogg to finish with figures of 3-7 in their Kingsmead day-night Super Six clash.

And although the African minnows went down to a five-wicket defeat, acting skipper Hitesh Modi warned India that they are planning a huge upset when they meet in the semifinal.

"India should watch out. We have nothing to lose and if we believe in ourselves, we can do it," said Modi who deputised for

injured Steve Tikolo.

"We have done it in the past and we can do it again. With Asif Karim bowling the way he did tonight, the experience is there to do it. It was the spell of his life."

Karim came out of retirement to play in the World Cup having quit after the last tournament in 1999.

"It was a wonderful day. There was turn in the wicket for me and by the grace of God I did well," Karim said.

"I have 20 years of experience in the tank. I retired after the 1999 World Cup but the board asked me to come and play again and it was my duty to serve my country."

Chasing 175 to win, Australia reached their target in just 31.2 overs

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Barry not bemused

AFP, Durban

South African great Barry Richards believes Kenya's advance into the World Cup semifinals was a fairytale, but was unsure if it was good for cricket.

"What does it say about a tournament that it's allowed a situation to happen where a team can benefit from a forfeited match?" Richards told this news agency, referring to New Zealand's refusal to play their group match in Kenya for security reasons.

"Kenya getting to the semifinals, it's a fairytale but I'm not sure if it's good for cricket."

"I know that it's easy to be wise after the event, but if South Africa was given the right to host the World Cup, then why weren't all the matches played in South Africa?"

"It's got the grounds. Six months ago people knew what the situation was in Zimbabwe and Kenya."

"But Zimbabwe and India are pretty close. India is a very powerful member, especially financially, on the International Cricket Council (ICC)."

"It's a real issue, how much politics should affect international cricket."

Richards, who played just four Tests before South Africa's sporting isolation due to apartheid, added that Kenya's advance posed real difficulties for the ICC.

"They don't have great depth and

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PHOTO: STAR FILE

Barry Richards