

Asia confident of winning WC bid

Notwithstanding Australia entering the World Cup fray, the Asian countries are confident of winning the bid to stage the sporting extravaganza in 2011.

India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have said they have no problems with Australia's candidature and are ready to face the challenge of such a bid.

The four countries have already sent a Letter of Intent to the International Cricket Council stating their desire to bid for cricket's quarterly showpiece event.

Pakistan Cricket Board's director of operations Saleem Altaf, who sent the letter to ICC on behalf of the four Asian nations, said Asia was confident of winning as the region had the biggest viewership and commercial market for the sport.

"We have no problems if Australia or New Zealand or both combined want to bid for the tournament. We are confident about our bid given the huge commercial market for the sport in this region and the overwhelming interest it evokes among the people," Altaf said.

"We have no problems if Australia and New Zealand want to bid. Because we will be making a strong bid in any case. In the past the two World Cups that we have hosted in 1987 and 1996 have been spectacular successes," he was quoted as saying in local daily 'The News' today.

Altaf said the four Asian nations had already started working out the modalities for staging the event.

Chanderpaul stays skipper

CRICINFO, undated

Shivnarine Chanderpaul has been recommended by the West Indies selectors to be retained as captain and Ramnaresh Sarwan his deputy for the tour of New Zealand from February 16 to March 29, convenor Joey Carew confirmed on Tuesday.

Carew was quick to end speculation initiated by a report on a Trinidad radio station, repeated on Voice of Barbados, that Daren Ganga, the Trinidad and Tobago and West Indies A captain, was likely to replace Chanderpaul.

But Ganga, who played the last of his 31 Tests against South Africa in Georgetown last April, was recalled for the Twenty20 match, five one-day internationals and the three Tests.

TEST SQUAD

Shivnarine Chanderpaul (captain), Ramnaresh Sarwan (vice-captain), Chris Gayle, Devon Smith (Wavell Hinds), Daren Ganga, Brian Lara (excluded for ODIs), Runako Morton, Dwayne Bravo, Dwayne Smith, Denesh Ramdin, Rawl Lewis, Ian Bradshaw, Jerome Taylor, Fidel Edwards, Daren Powell (Deighton Butler). (ODI replacement in brackets)

Kallis has to go home

REUTERS, Melbourne

All-rounder Jacques Kallis has been ruled out of the remainder of South Africa's tour of Australia because of problems with his injured elbow.

South African selector Haroon Lorgat said in a statement on Wednesday that Kallis would return home to undergo immediate treatment.

Kallis has been troubled by the injury for months and missed the first Test against Australia as well as this week's one-day match with Sri Lanka.

His place in the squad will be filled by uncapped all rounder Johan van der Wath.

"In keeping with our player management philosophy, Jacques is going home for treatment so that we can get him fully ready for the return series against Australia in South Africa in February-March," Lorgat said.

"With great interest we have been watching Johan's performances and good form for South Africa A and for the Eagles in the domestic competitions. We believe that he has much to offer both now and in the future."

Kallis is the third South African player to return home due to injury on this tour, joining fast bowlers Makhaya Ntini and Andre Nel.

Bangladesh go

FROM PAGE 12 February 2006.

Table with 2 columns: Rank, Country, Points. 1. Brazil 839 pts, 2. Czech Republic 796, 3. Netherlands 790, 4. Argentina 772, 5. Spain 768, 6. France 768, 7. Mexico 767, 8. United States 767, 9. England 757, 10. Portugal 753



FIFA president Sepp Blatter (C) speaking at the general assembly of the Confederation of African Football in Cairo on Tuesday.

Blatter calls for bigger African share at WC

Football

FIFA president Sepp Blatter called on Wednesday for African countries to be given a bigger presence at future World Cup finals.

Africa will have five countries when the 2006 finals in Germany kick off in June - Ivory Coast, Ghana, Angola, Tunisia and Togo - and will be hosting the 2010 finals for the first time, in South Africa.

Though FIFA have not finalised whether South Africa will cost the continent a place at 2010 or will add a sixth slot, Blatter clearly indicated he favoured the latter.

Highlighting that five African countries would be alongside 14 from Europe in Germany, Blatter told the Confederation of African Football (CAF) Congress: "I don't need to explain the rules of mathematics."

"Those with a bigger representation will automatically, and perhaps even logically, have a better chance."

"What must be done? You have to fight on the pitch and I can assure you that we will continue to fight for a better African representation at the World Cup," he said, as applause broke out among delegates.

"In 1998, when I was on the way to the FIFA presidency I had... a project in mind to bring the World Cup to Africa. That has now been done."

Blatter said sceptics who had predicted that a World Cup in Africa would generate less money than previous tournaments had been proved wrong and said South Africa would be a bigger success than Germany.

"The market has not been mistaken, it's the prophets who have made a mistake," Blatter said.

"The 2010 World Cup, with most of the contracts that we have have

reached with television and sponsors, will bring in more money than that of 2006.

"That means that football is an excellent product... that the FIFA World Cup is even bigger because it has a bigger audience than the Olympic Games, every one wants to be there, and thirdly, and for more the most important thing, it means people have confidence in Africa."

"The whole world will be behind this World Cup."

Blatter said that extra money would be available for football development programmes, including an initiative to enable young talented African players to have a career on their own continent, rather than move to Europe.

"Obviously, you'll still need a few stars elsewhere in the world, but not the hundreds and thousands who play in the second or third divisions in other countries," he said.

No more a Sachin clone

Cricket

AFP, Lahore

India opener Virender Sehwag was Wednesday hailed as a batting genius on a par with Sachin Tendulkar after mauling the Pakistan attack in the first Test here.

Sehwag's brilliant 254, his second double-century in as many Tests against Pakistan, forced critics to finally acknowledge he was more than just a rustic, copy-cat version of teammate Sachin Tendulkar.

"The clone is now an original," wrote veteran Indian journalist Ayaz Memon in the Mumbai-based Daily News and Analysis. "Sehwag is now the benchmark for future generation of cricketers, in India and everywhere else."

When the short, stocky, curly-haired Sehwag burst onto the Test scene in 2001 with a century on debut against South Africa at Bloemfontein, many noticed a striking resemblance with Tendulkar in the way he looked and played.

The straight drive, backfoot punch and the ability to whip the ball off the hips all bore the stamp of the record-breaking Tendulkar, a modern great.

Sehwag laughed off the comparison, telling an English journal-

ist in 2002: "Me and Sachin? No way. He has a much bigger bank balance than me!"

Sehwag, 27, may not be one of the most technically sound batsmen in contemporary cricket, but is second to none when it comes to striking the ball hard and clean.

He cocks a snook at coaching manuals and bats as if his sole purpose is to dominate and demoralise the rival bowler. He is all eye and power and has an uncanny knack of finding gaps.

And Pakistan's bowlers know that better than most.

Against Pakistan, Sehwag has plundered 1,236 runs in just seven Tests with an astonishing average of 112.36. Overall he has 3,574 runs from 40 Tests at 56.73.

Sehwag's love affair with the Pakistani attack began in the opening Test at Multan in 2004 when he became the first Indian to smash a triple-century, reaching the landmark with a six.

Then, when Pakistan toured India last year, Sehwag hammered 173 in the first Test in Mohali, 81 in the second in Kolkata and 201 in the third in Bangalore.

The audacious 254 in the drawn first Test here on Tuesday, a knock studded with 47 boundaries and a six, came during a 410-run opening stand with skipper Rahul Dravid after Pakistan had amassed 679-7 declared.

The partnership fell just four runs short of breaking the 50-year-old world record of fellow-countrymen Vinoo Mankad and Pankaj Roy, who put on 413 for the first wicket against New Zealand in Madras in 1956.

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq conceded it was difficult to stop Sehwag when he was in such flow.

"We had a plan to contain him but he still scored at a brisk pace, said Inzamam. "There has to be a way to get him cheaply."

Pakistan's fast bowling great Waqar Younis said he was relieved he did not have to bowl to Sehwag. "I don't know how I would have been able to stop him," he said.

For his part, Sehwag said Pakistan's pace spearhead Shoaib Akhtar had not lived up to expectations.

"I think they gave us a flat wicket because we had won the last time in Pakistan," the Indian opener said. "Shoaib did not bowl well at all because a lot was expected of him."

"I just love the Pakistani bowling. I was not getting runs before this series, but I was confident I will get them against the Pakistanis and that's what happened."

The second Test will be played in Faisalabad from Saturday and the third in Karachi from January 29.

Lee to bow down to umpires

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

Fast bowler Brett Lee believes Australian cricketers don't make frivolous appeals, but joined colleague Glenn McGrath here Wednesday in conceding they had to be more careful with the way they treated umpires.

Both bowlers have fallen foul of officialdom this summer. Lee for dissent and McGrath for obscene language, during the third Test against South Africa in Sydney earlier this month.

And wicketkeeper-batsman Adam Gilchrist is also in trouble after being reported for dissent when he questioned an umpire's decision during a one-day match against the Proteas last Sunday.

Although Lee maintained the Australians only appealed when they believed an opponent to be out, he agreed that both he and his teammates had to respect umpires' decisions.

"There's a line you can't step over and we've got to make sure that we don't do that," he said. "We've got to get to know the umpires a lot better and realise too that the umpires have only got 0.3

of a second to make up their minds, so it's a very tough job.

"We've got the aids here, cricketers and journalists, and people watching on TV at home that we've got the super slo-mo replays and we can say: 'That's definitely going to hit leg stump' or 'He's definitely

decision and get on with it."

Lee's admission comes a day after McGrath conceded Australians needed to "pull our heads in" on the field, although he maintained umpires also had to be approachable.

During what has been a heated summer of cricket between Australia and South Africa, Proteas coach Mickey Arthur has claimed that the Aussies were the best side in the world at excessive and aggressive appealing.

Lee, who is also making a name for himself as a useful lower-order batsman, made a career-best 57 against the South Africans on Sunday.

He said he enjoyed the extra responsibility afforded him with the bat in the past year, being used as a Test nightwatchman and as a big-hitter on one-day games. He averages about 20 with the bat in both Tests and one-dayers.

"I'd like to be considered as a handy tail-end batsman and whether that develops into a bowling allrounder, then that's great, that's what I'm aiming at," he said ahead of Friday's tri-series clash against the South Africans in Melbourne.

Italy to host Germany for friendly

AFP, Rome

Italy will play a friendly World Cup warm-up match against Germany at the Colline Fiesole stadium in Florence, the Italian football federation said on Wednesday.

At the World Cup, Italy meet Ghana, the Czech Republic and the USA in Group E while Germany play Costa Rica, Poland and Ecuador in Group A of the June 9 to July 9 finals.

Cricket to see more of India and England

BBC ONLINE, undated

English cricket bosses have reached an agreement, in principle, to play India at home and away every four years.

India, considered the second biggest draw after Australia, are likely to tour in 2007 and again in 2011.

But the agreement is subject to the International Cricket Council's tours programme being relaxed next month.

"We told the Board of Control for Cricket in India we are open to a four-year cycle but details are to be worked out," said an England and Wales Cricket Board spokesman.

India played an extra one-day series in England in September 2004, packing grounds for three matches prior to the ICC Champions Trophy.

England begin a tour of India late in February to play three Tests and seven one-day matches.

Representatives of the 10 Test-playing nations are expected to rubber-stamp plans to alter the current future tours programme (FTP) at their next meeting in Dubai.

It currently requires all 10 sides to play each other at home and away every five years - but that is likely to be extended to six.

India have already announced plans to play home one-day series against Australia in 2007 and 2009 and a Test series in 2008, although Cricket Australia has not confirmed this.

World governing body the ICC is worried India's scheduling will break agreements made in the FTP but England's plan is likely to be less controversial.

The Ashes was left on a four-year cycle despite the implementation of the FTP in 2001.1

Zim to name new skipper

BBC ONLINE, undated

Batsman Hamilton Masakadza and all-rounder Andy Blignaut are the leading candidates to take over from Tatenda Taibu as Zimbabwe captain.

The interim committee running Zimbabwe Cricket is expected to make the appointment later Wednesday.

The jobs of manager Mohammed Memon, selector Richie Kaschula and ex-coach Phil Simmons are all up for review.

Taibu resigned in November and has not returned despite the suspension of a player strike until January 31.

Currently playing club cricket in Bangladesh, the wicketkeeper criticised the running of the game and refused to return while Peter Chingokaisi ZC chairman.

The government installed an interim committee earlier this month but kept Chingokaisi as its head.

Blignaut is one of the few remaining players of recognised international calibre, with 19 Test caps to his name.

Masakadza burst onto the international scene in 2001 when he became the youngest batsman ever to score a century on his Test debut, a record since bettered by Mohammad Ashraful of Bangladesh.

However, Masakadza has struggled for consistency since taking a break to attend university in South Africa.

Zimbabwe are due to travel to the West Indies in April for two Tests and five one-day internationals.

Surprising BTTF

FROM PAGE 12 leagues in the last four years qualify to have a councillor. However, the president, without consulting the executive committee or holding an AGM, reduced the period to one year from two years.

It was also surprising to see the name of Quamrunnabar Dana, a renowned badminton player, in the list that did not include two former national TT champions -- the Guinness World Record holder Zobera Rahman Linu and Munira Morshed Khan Helen -- or any representative from Abahani, one of the top clubs of the country.

The BTTF president, however, was not available for comments.

Owen happy at Newcastle

Football

BBC ONLINE, undated

Michael Owen insists he is happy at Newcastle United as he continues his recovery from the fractured metatarsal he suffered in December.

England boss Sven-Goran Eriksson has been quoted as saying the 26-year-old does not enjoy playing for the Magpies.

But Owen, who returned to light training on Tuesday, told Newcastle's website: "I am enjoying my time here."

"There is nothing like being in the Premiership and I have not been disappointed since I have been here."

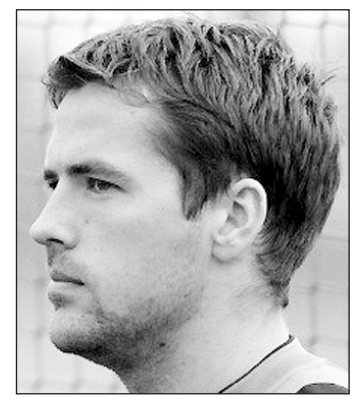
Owen moved to the Magpies in a 16m pound summer move from Real Madrid and was given a hero's welcome by fans on Tyneside.

He added: "It was a fantastic reception I had here and I have loved every minute of it already."

"You always want to repay the fans for the support they have

given you in producing good performances on the pitch. When I am fit I am sure I will do that.

"I have plenty of mates in the



MICHAEL OWEN

dressing room and the people have been great to me up here.

"I enjoyed my time at Real Madrid, but there is nothing like coming into a dressing room where you understand all the jokes and everything else."

Cantona slams MU

Football

BBC ONLINE, undated

Manchester United legend Eric Cantona has rounded on the current team for its lack of attractive football.

Cantona took the unusual step of criticising his beloved former club in the wake of Roy Keane's exit.

"With Glazer and the departure of Roy Keane I am worried," the former Old Trafford forward told the Sun.

"I have the feeling that the club could lose its philosophy. That would be a pity now we've entered the age of making players like sheep."

Cantona believes the club are now in danger of losing the soul of

the club that made them successful in the past and will struggle to recruit crowd-pleasing players.

He said: "The death of George Best could coincide with the death of the soul of a unique club."

"United were capable of recruiting the Bests, the Keanes and the Bobby Charltons - the more balanced sorts - and of respecting each man's difference."

"You could express yourself at United and you were loved for who you were. United were certainly the club that gave me my freedom."

Cantona's disparaging comments come after United's dismal defeat in the Manchester derby, alleged unrest in the Old Trafford camp and before their FA Cup third-round replay with Burton Albion.

An American day

FROM PAGE 12

and fended off three set points for American qualifier Ashley Harkleroad in the second set to advance 6-1, 7-5.

James Blake, seeded 20th, rallied from a set down to oust French qualifier Jean-Christophe Faurel. Robby Ginepre could have made it an even better day for the US contingent but fell to qualifier Denis Gremelmayr after winning the first two sets and leading 3-0 in the third.

Moodie tried to pressure Roddick, rushing the net behind a serve that was nearly as fast as Roddick's. Despite his deft volleying, Moodie won only 57 per cent of his 58 net approaches as Roddick's passing shots left him lunging from side to side.

Roddick broke serve for the first time to take the first set. After Moodie fended off a break point and held for 3-3 in the second set, he didn't have another game point until he already was down 2-0 in the third set.

Roddick, who shockingly lost in the first round of the US Open, meets Julien Benneteau of France in the third round.

Williams, seeking her eighth Grand Slam title, lost her serve twice but broke Pin four times and finished with 30 winners

against only six for the French player.

Williams, backed by a vocal contingent in her first appearance on packed Vodafone Arena, seemed to get frustrated with the 130th-ranked Pin's lack of pace, pounding the ball harder and harder, grunting with the effort.

Pin didn't help herself by double-faulting twice while serving at 1-5 to set up double match point. Williams finished it by pouncing on a slow first serve and whacking a powerful crosscourt forehand winner.

Williams next faces 17th-seeded Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia, who beat Asian wildcard entry Akgul Amanmuradova 6-4, 6-1. Williams won the Australian Open in 2003 and 2005, and missed the 2004 event because of injuries.

Sharapova got a tougher-than-expected challenge from the 107th-ranked Harkleroad and twice received treatment for a left foot blister in the second set.

After Sharapova overcame three break points while serving at 4-5 in the second set, Harkleroad double-faulted on break point to hand the Russian a 6-5 advantage. Sharapova held and finished off the match with a

USA's WC tickets sold out

AP, Chicago

The U.S. Soccer Federation sold out its allocation of tickets for the Americans' first-round games at the World Cup during its presale.

The USSF said Tuesday it received a total of about 10,000 tickets for the three games and that requests for about 40,000 tickets were made during the ussoccerfan.com presale from Dec. 12 to Jan. 4. The USSF received about 8 percent of the tickets for each game.

At the World Cup, the Americans play the Czech Republic on June 12 at Gelsenkirchen (capacity approximately 48,000), Italy on June 17 at Kaiserslautern (41,000) and Ghana on June 22 at Nuremberg (37,000).

The USSF has asked FIFA for additional tickets.

Paraguay booter loses arm

INTERNET, undated

Vicenza's Paraguay international striker Julio Gonzalez has lost his arm after a car crash in Italy.

The accident happened en route to Venice's Marco Polo Airport a month ago but the injuries were so severe that his left arm had to be amputated.

The 24-year-old has been hospitalised since the crash, which occurred three days before Christmas.

Gonzalez was a key part of the Serie B team's squad but his hopes of playing in the World Cup finals have been shattered by the dreadful accident.

His former clubs include Nacional from his birthplace Asuncion and Huracan, and he won a silver medal in the Athens Olympics.

It was reported that three different teams of surgeons had to work on his multiple injuries during an operation that lasted almost 12 hours.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution time of 21 mins and a list of words to be filled in.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers. Includes the text 'CRYPTOQUIP' and 'WB OJI WMLUMX H KJKIYHE'.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHY WOULD ANYONE WANT TO WATCH A DUEL AS IT OCCURS? I GUESS IT'S DRAWING ATTENTION. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: B equals F. The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.