

Akhtar back in Pakistan fold

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan on Thursday named Shoaib Akhtar in their preliminary 21-man squad for next month's tour of England, marking the fiery fast bowler's return from injury.

The 30-year-old, plagued by numerous injuries in his eight-year international career, has resumed bowling after undergoing twin knee surgery in February this year.

He had not played for Pakistan since breaking down during the final Test against India in Karachi four months ago.

"We need our best fast bowlers for the tour of England so Akhtar is back," chief selector Wasim Bari told AFP.

"But he will not be an automatic choice and will have to prove his fitness in the conditioning camp."

Akhtar on Tuesday vowed to give his best on the England tour, claiming he was fully fit. He took 17 wickets in Pakistan's 2-0 win over England when they toured here last year.

Pakistan are scheduled to play four Tests and five one-day games on their tour of England, with the first Test starting at Lord's in London on July 13.

Akhtar's new ball partner Mohammad Sami also staged a comeback after poor form axed him from the team's tour of Sri Lanka in March this year.

Taufiq Umer returned from the sidelines and was named among three openers in the preliminary squad, in what Pakistani officials hope is a solution to an ongoing top order problem.

Bari said he hoped the openers would rise to the task.

The preliminary squad will assemble in Lahore for a conditioning camp from May 25 to June 5.

PRELIMINARY SQUAD

Inzamamul Haq, Salman Butt, Imran Farhat, Taufiq Umer, Shoaib Malik, Younis Khan, Mohammad Yousuf, Faisal Iqbal, Shahid Afridi, Buzid Khan, Asim Kamal, Kamran Akmal, Abdul Razzaq, Shoaib Akhtar, Danish Kaneria, Navedul Hasan, Mohammad Asif, Rao Iftikhar, Mohammad Sami, Umar Gul, Zulqarnain Haider.

RVN keen

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There have been reports linking van Nistelrooy with a move to Atletico Madrid and Spanish international striker Fernando Torres moving in the other direction, though, United would have to stump up some 21 million pounds.

Five-time consecutive French champions Lyon are also reported to be interested in the Dutch striker, but might have to part with influential midfielder Mahamadou Diarra, as United's wishlist to fill the gap left by Keane.

Either way, van Nistelrooy will be putting his club woes behind him and focusing on the Oranje World Cup campaign which sees them drawn in a tough Group C along with Argentina, Ivory Coast, and Serbia and Montenegro.

The force

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One such event was the "Football War" of 1969, in which an ill-tempered qualifying match between El Salvador and Honduras for the 1970 World Cup sparked rioting that led to a brief, bloody border conflict.

Even so, for football to excite passions this way, it has to have something special.

It is consistently rated the world's most popular and exciting game. Experts attribute this to the game's simplicity, the low cost of playing it, the one-on-one confrontation within a short timescale, the swift back-and-forth action and its enduring chance for the underdog. By these yardsticks, other sports don't come even close.

Barca bloom

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foot wide and then Ljungberg, coming in from the opposing flank, forced Valdes to tip the ball over the bar.

Then, with 20 minutes left, Henry squandered a wonderful opportunity to deliver what would have been a fatal blow. Sent clear by Hleb's pass through the inside right channel, the Frenchman steered his low shot too close to Valdes and the goalkeeper, who had got his positioning exactly right, was able to dive to his right and smother the ball.

It would have been Henry's 50th goal in European competition, perhaps the final glorious act of a glorious Arsenal career.

But the fairytale ending was not to be. Six minutes after that chance was spurned, Barcelona equalised, Larsson's flick inside the box allowing Eto'o to get round the back of the back four and squeeze the ball between Almunia and his near post.

Worse was to follow for the Spanish goalkeeper four minutes later when Larsson spotted Belletti's surge into the box. The substitute's momentum carried him past two Arsenal defenders and his shot found the net through the goalkeeper's legs.



An AFP file photo of May 12 shows Justin Gatlin pointing at the time board after setting a new 100m world record at the Qatar Super Grand Prix with a time of 9.76secs.

Error spoils Gatlin feat

The athlete sad at world record share



AFP, undated

A timing mistake has stripped world and Olympic champion Justin Gatlin of a stand-alone world record time in the men's 100m, world athletics ruling body announced on Wednesday.

Gatlin was timed at 9.76secs at an IAAF Grand Prix meeting in Doha on May 12, a mark which was one-hundredths of a second faster than the existing world record set by Jamaica's Asafa Powell in last June in Athens.

But in a statement, the IAAF said that the actual timing for the American was 9.766secs which meant it should have been rounded up to 9.77 and not 9.76.

"The IAAF has just been informed by Tissot Timing of an error in the reading of the result."

"Therefore, Gatlin's time will now be adjusted to 9.77, and pending ratification, will equal the previous 100m world record of Asafa Powell set in 2005," the IAAF statement said.

The news sets the scene for a future mouth-watering showdown between Gatlin and Powell.

After Gatlin's Doha run, Powell, the recently-crowned Commonwealth champion, vowed to reclaim the record.

"He has borrowed the record. I will get it back. I am capable of running 9.60," said Powell who has already run 9.95 this season.

Powell on Sunday reacted strongly to a report indicating that Gatlin might not take him on at the June 11 Grand Prix in Gateshead, England.

"I heard he pulled out, but I don't know why," Powell said.

When Powell set the record last year, he bettered the time of 9.79secs set in 1999 by American

Maurice Greene.

The 9.78sec set by Greene's compatriot Tim Montgomery in Paris in 2002 was wiped off the books after he was suspended in the wake of the BALCO doping scandal.

Meanwhile, Gatlin was unhappy about having his world-record run downgraded but vows to reclaim sole possession of the mark.

"It's very disappointing to me that it has taken five days to determine the official time of a race with this significance," Gatlin said.

"I remain confident that I am the 'World's Fastest Man' and I look forward to proving it once again."

"My parents raised me to be a good sport but I don't want to share the world record."

Sir Alf Ramsey: The General

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Sweden '58 and Chile '62, England failed to go beyond the last eight.

There was little reason to suspect that the Brits would dethrone Pele and Brazil, but England and English football were about to wake up to the world.

A goalless draw against Uruguay kicked off the finals for the hosts, which was followed by an unconvincing 2-0 win against Mexico. However, a confident 2-0 victory over France showed the team were moving in the right direction, and after vanquishing Argentina in a rugged 1-0 match - Ramsey infamously referred to the Argentina players as "animals" after the contest - the nation began to believe in the coach and his "wingless wonders."

With Gordon Banks in goal and captain Bobby Moore majestic in front of him, England had not conceded a goal in the tournament to that point. When their net did bulge for the first time, it came just eight minutes from time in the semi-final against Portugal, and Eusebio's penalty was too late as the sharp-shooting Bobby Charlton had already struck twice. The 2-1 victory put England into the final where they would face West Germany, a side they had never lost to.

And, while the form book continued in England's favour, the drama of the 1966 World Cup final was hard to predict - Germany's last gasp equaliser for 2-2, England's controversial 'third,' Geoff Hurst's hat-trick and finally the jubilation - all with Ramsey sitting resolutely on

the bench.

Hero Hurst related how Ramsey convinced the team to fight on before extra time: "Alf never raised his voice, but he had a powerful manner."

Alf became Sir Alf a year later and under his charge, the 60s continued to swing for English football fans. Many commentators believed the team Ramsey took to Mexico '70 were even better than the champions of four years before, and the paternal England coach seemed to instinctively know what his boys needed to perform at their best. Together with this psychological insight into the machinations of the modern professional player, Ramsey's hand extended as far as travel arrangements, diet and fitness. His planning and control was even more exact for the Mexico finals.

"Alf's preparations for Mexico were incredible," remembered Stiles. "They'd be reckoned obsolete by today's standards but in those days they were revolutionary. No stone was left unturned. He even took HP Sauce to Mexico. I'll always remember that - HP Sauce on the tables."

But the world champions were hit by incidents off the field that would test Ramsey's managerial abilities to the full. First, his captain and great ally, Moore, was falsely arrested for stealing a necklace from a shop in a Colombian hotel. And, before the quarter-final re-match with West Germany, Banks, whose miraculous save from a Pele

header in the 1-0 group defeat to Brazil only added to his reputation of being the best in the business, fell ill.

The resulting quarter-final in Leon was a turning point in the England coach's reign. An error from Banks' replacement Peter Bonetti gave the Germans a lifeline at 2-1 in the second half, and Ramsey's decision to take off Charlton just minutes before Uwe Seeler's goal brought the contest level has been viewed as the moment when the boss' messiah-like reputation was lost for good. Gerd Muller's winner in the second period of extra time left England toppled in the most dramatic of fashions.

"If Bobby Moore had wept, we would have all wept with him," said the deflated coach whose dozen-year reign came to an end after the contest. In all, Sir Alf's England teams registered 69 victories, 27 draws and 17 losses.

"It was the most devastating half-hour of my life," Ramsey later said of his sacking. "I stood in a room almost full of staring committee men. It was just like I was on trial. I thought I was going to be hanged."

The 53-year-old son of a small-holder remained the people's champion though and with every passing year his unique feat of leading England to victory in the game they gave to the world appears more and more remarkable.

The perennial gatecrasher

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best result ever for an Asian team. The South Koreans weren't alone. Senegal rode a tournament-opening win against defending champion France all the way to the quarterfinals in its first World Cup appearance. The United States also posted its best showing since 1930, beating Portugal in its first match and making to the quarterfinals before falling to Germany.

1998: There were few shockers in this tournament, with host France, four-time champion Brazil and two-time finalist the Netherlands making the semifinals. Past champions Argentina, Italy and Germany also made it to the quarters. The one outsider was Croatia, playing in its first World Cup after the break-up of Yugoslavia. Led by Davor Suker's two goals, Croatia beat Germany 3-0 in the quarterfinals before falling

to eventual champion France in the semis.

1994: Brazil was joined by seven European teams in the quarterfinals, but there were still a few surprises. Bulgaria, winless in 16 previous World Cup matches, made it to the semifinals behind the great play of Hristo Stoichkov, who scored the game-tying goal in a 2-1 quarterfinal win against defending champion Germany. Sweden also made it to the semifinals before losing to eventual champion Brazil. Even the host United States and Saudi Arabia provided surprises by making it to the second round.

1990: Cameroon, led by the 38-year-old Milla, provided a breakthrough performance for African countries, beginning with a 1-0 win against defending champion Argentina. Milla became the oldest player to score in the World Cup at the time and had four goals in all. He scored twice in extra time

against Colombia to send Cameroon to the quarterfinals, where it lost 3-2 to England. Ireland also made a surprising run without winning a game. The Irish tied all three first-round matches and advanced on penalty kicks in the second round before falling to Italy in the quarterfinals.

1986: Belgium finished third in its group, beating out only winless Iraq, but made it all the way to the semifinals as the tournament switched to a knockout format in the second round. The Belgians got goals in extra time from Stephane Demol and Nico Claesen to beat the Soviet Union 4-3 in the second round, then surprised Spain and advanced to the semifinals on penalty kicks. Belgium fell to eventual champion Argentina. Morocco also became the first African nation to qualify for the second round.

A blow for Jayasuriya

AFP, London

Sanath Jayasuriya has seen his chances of a Test recall dented after he was omitted from Sri Lanka's four-day game against English county Sussex that started on Thursday.

The 36-year-old former Sri Lanka captain has made himself available for selection just six weeks after he announced he was quitting Test cricket in order to concentrate on one-day internationals in the build-up to next year's World Cup in the Caribbean.

He was talked out of Test retirement by new chairman of selectors Asantha de Mel and arrived in England on Saturday.

Neither captain Mahela Jayawardene or coach Tom Moody was consulted before the decision was made and they have reacted by overlooking the former World Cup winner for the four-day contest at Hove.

Although De Mel is the convenor of overall selection, Moody, Jayawardene, vice-captain Kumar Sangakkara and team manager Michael Tissera oversee the process of picking sides on tour.

While Jayasuriya has not been ruled out of contention for next week's contest against Andrew Flintoff's men at Edgbaston, this is the Sri Lankans' only match action prior to travelling to Birmingham and it is difficult to envisage throwing him straight into a Test.

"We have to continue trying the younger players we have got with us here and we have to give them the opportunity to gain some more exposure and practice before the next Test," said Tissera.

Tendulkar on track

CRICINFO, undated

The possibility that Sachin Tendulkar will join the Indian squad for the Test series against West Indies starting June 2 in Antigua has increased after yet another promising day - his third in a row - of training at the MRF Pace Academy in Chennai.

Tendulkar trained for four hours, batting for two 45 minute-sessions in which Lakshmiipathy Balaji, the right-arm seamer seeking to regain a place in the national team himself, and other Academy bowlers bowled to him from a shortened run-up. Though he didn't bowl, Tendulkar practiced catching - chest-high ones as well as high catches. He threw back the ball using his left hand and at times when he used his right hand, he threw it underarm. He even engaged in a 15 minutes pilates-session during the training.

"I am very happy about the workouts and batting practice," Tendulkar told the Press Trust of India. "Things are looking to be falling in place."

Andrew Leipus, the former Indian team physiotherapist, was present at the Academy and watched him train.

Rooney awaits

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even contemplating the possibility of losing his fitness battle after sustaining the injury against Chelsea on the penultimate weekend of the season at Stamford Bridge.

He said: "I don't think Wayne even believes that not being at the World Cup will be the case for him. He is desperate to play in the World Cup. He has no negative thoughts like that."

"He is one of the best players in the world and wants to compete with Ronaldo and Ronaldo and whoever. He really wants to be on that stage."

Once Eriksson has a clearer picture of Rooney's fitness, he can decide whether he has to adopt a different tactical style this summer particularly in the latter stages of the tournament.

He has already confirmed Peter Crouch will start in the opener against Paraguay alongside Michael Owen should Rooney be unavailable for the start of the tournament.

But Eriksson has other options to ponder including the possibility of operating Liverpool skipper Steve Gerrard as a marauding second striker.

He said: "I have known for many years that Steven Gerrard could play in many positions and one of those is the second striker. I am sure he could play first striker as well and is even excellent as a right-back."

"A lot depends on what is going to happen with Rooney. We haven't decided yet where to use Gerrard but he is useful wherever he plays. It is very good."

"Of course, I hope we will play Michael Owen and Wayne Rooney up front. That is the best formation we can have, as has been seen many times, but Gerrard is an option there."

Gerrard will join up with the squad next Monday on their return to England after being given a week to recharge his batteries following his exertions with Liverpool over the past 10 months.

Tottenham midfielder Jermaine Jenas is expected to resume full training tomorrow after making good progress in recovering from his recent shin problem.

Richards decries Lara captaincy



AFP, New Delhi

West Indian great Vivian Richards believes Brian Lara's return as captain was prompted by "commercial considerations" and may not prove a popular choice with teammates.

"West Indian cricket continues to spring one surprise after the other. The latest one has been the choice of Brian Lara as captain," Richards wrote in a syndicated column for the Indian media on Thursday.

"Clearly it is a decision prompted by commercial considerations, keeping in mind the World Cup. It's also a decision that might last only till that tournament."

"Chances are that Lara's appointment was not a very popular decision among the players."

However, this short-term appointment was necessary because some of the other players in contention were not yet mature or responsible enough for the position

of captain."

Lara, Test cricket's leading run-getter with 11,294 runs from 124 Tests, was appointed West Indian captain for a third time last month following the resignation of Shivnarine Chanderpaul.

The 37-year-old, who led his team to a 5-0 sweep over Zimbabwe in a one-day series this week, begins another series against India later on Thursday.

"In this bleak scenario, the one thing that the West Indian fans can cheer about is the improvement in the team. Players like Chris Gayle, Chanderpaul and Ramnaresh Sarwan have joined forces with Lara to lend muscle to the batting."

"The bowling is also looking good with Fidel Edwards holding out a promise of pace. There are players like Dwayne Bravo and Denesh Ramdin who give the team some options lower down the order."

"All told it is a fighting one-day unit, and Indians might find the opposition quite challenging."

Russian day in Rome



AFP, Rome

Former Roland Garros champion Anastasia Myskina played through a thigh injury to manage a patchy 6-0, 1-6, 6-4 victory over Italian Roberta Vinci to move into the third round of the Rome Masters on Wednesday.

The tenth-seeded Russian was one of three compatriots who advanced on a sunny day at the Foro Italico, joining 16th seed Dinara Safina who beat Italy's Maria Elena Camerin 6-4, 6-4.

Number five Elena Dementieva didn't have to strike a ball in anger as China's Shuai Peng withdrew injured before their second-round match, sending the Russian ahead.

Italo-Swiss Romina Oprandi, whose double lip piercing appears to be the only one on the WTA Tour, provided a victory for the hosts as she whipped Australian Samantha Stosur 6-2, 6-2.

Myskina, who won the French Open in 2004, took treatment on both thighs, confirming later that she first suffered the problem in her opening match.

"It certainly wasn't a great match. I'm happy to go through. But if I play like this, I won't win my next round," said Myskina.

She now faces a showdown with compatriot Svetlana Kuznetsova, who won the US Open two years ago three months after Myskina lifted Paris.

Safina duplicated her best showings in Rome by reaching the third round.

Russian fourth seed Nadia Petrova joined compatriot Maria Sharapova on the sidelines, pulling out before her opening match with a pectoral strain picked up during last weekend's Berlin title.

Defending champion Amelie Mauresmo withdrew at the weekend due to illness.

Bangladesh

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received a pass from substitute Shamim Reza inside the box.

Bangladesh looked mediocre as they rarely threatened the opposition due to poor coordination among the players.

They produced few scoring chances, and those were foiled due to the poor finishing by the forwards.

Bangladesh coach Jamal Haider expressed his satisfaction with the triumph, but he believed the margin should have been better since his team have already qualified for the finals.

Pakistani Tahir Jaman, appointed Bangladesh team's technical advisor by the Asian Hockey Federation, said that the margin doesn't matter to him as Bangladesh are the lone team to remain unbeaten.



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lastling legacy," said Erik Falt, of the U.N. Environment Programme which backs Green Goal.

The scheme would offset 100,000 tonnes of heat-trapping carbon dioxide generated within Germany by transportation, construction and maintenance of the stadiums and the presence of 3.2 million spectators, it said.

Carbon offset projects include planting forests, which soak up carbon as they grow. Most scientists blame carbon dioxide, emitted by burning fossil fuels, as a main cause of rising temperatures that could wreak havoc with the climate.

"The pitch at the Berlin Olympiastadion and other stadia will be watered from a new rainwater harvesting system and water-free urinals in the men's toilets will feature at numerous key locations," Green Goal said in a statement.

Fans buying tickets for matches in the 12 World Cup venues could also use them for free access to local public transportation during 24 hours to encourage spectators to leave their cars at home.

Fishy omen for Japan

AFP, Yokohama

If the forecasts are to be believed, Japan's players in next month's World Cup are small fish in a big pond.

An aquarium in Yokohama is organising a piscine World Cup, in which fish the colors of national teams fight for a ball packed with bait in a tank holding two goalposts.

It's not the best showing for the home team.

Japan -- whose blue jerseys on the football field are represented in the tank by Blue Palette Surgeonfish -- seem to have less fighting spirit than Brazil, played by Yellow Tang.

"The Blue Palette Surgeon tend to stay at a corner of the fish tank while Yellow Tang is more active," said Osamu Masubuchi, a spokesman for the Hakkeijima Sea Paradise in Yokohama, south of Tokyo.

BITS AND BOBS

World Cup including five-time champions Brazil, Croatia and Australia.

The match is held twice a day at feeding time at the aquarium's aqua museum. The aquarium will later feature fish bearing the colors of other teams.

"As it is the time of the season for excursions by schoolchildren, they are cheering for the fish," Masubuchi said.

Security in high gear

REUTERS, Berlin

A special World Cup security unit in Germany's interior ministry swung into round-the-clock action on Thursday, just over three weeks before the start of the 32-nation tournament.

Some 120 officials from German police and security agencies, world police organisation Interpol and the European Union's crime-fighting bodies Europol and Eurojust will pull together intelligence on potential threats.

"It's about the whole World Cup security picture, from hooliganism to terrorism to crime," an interior ministry spokesman said.

The long lead-in time before the June 9 kickoff is to make sure everything is working smoothly "before things get serious" and to prepare for the arrival of teams and fans, he added. Togo this week became the first team to arrive in Germany.

German officials declined to comment on a magazine report this week which said they considered at least 21 matches as facing an increased risk of terrorist attack.

But they have publicly acknowledged that both the Munich tournament opener between Germany and Costa Rica and the July 9 final in Berlin present high-value symbolic targets

Shortened work hours

REUTERS, Sao Paulo

Banks in Brazil can shorten their hours to give employees a chance to watch the national soccer team's

Eng greats laud Sajid

BBC ONLINE, undated

Former England captains Alec Stewart and Mike Gatting are backing Lancashire fast bowler Sajid Mahmood as he tries to establish himself in the Test team.

Mahmood took five wickets in his debut appearance against Sri Lanka at Lord's.

And Stewart and Gatting believe he has the potential to become an important weapon for England in the future.

"He's got good pace, he can swing the ball and with his action he looks as though he'll be able to reverse swing the ball as well," said Stewart.

"He's got to keep working on the consistency of his action, certainly work on keeping his wrist behind the ball just that little bit longer to get more late swing."

"But he's going to be there or thereabouts around the England set-up because I know how much Duncan Fletcher likes pace -- he likes to have his quick bowlers bowling 85, 90 miles an hour plus and Mahmood can definitely do that," he told the BBC.

Gatting believes Mahmood's "repeatable action" is another important attribute.