

Shoaib prepares for Leeds

REUTERS, Islamabad

Fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar has recovered from a stress fracture to his ankle and is likely to be available for the third test against England, a Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) official told Reuters on Friday.

Shoaib, who is currently Pakistan's leading bowler with 165 test wickets, was originally omitted from the touring squad because of fitness concerns that have kept him out of the side since February. "Shoaib had a meeting with the team physiotherapist and trainer in England yesterday and they reported he was physically strong now and looking good for a comeback in a week's time," PCB director Abbas Zaidi told Reuters.

"They feel he needs to play one or two games to get back to full match fitness and then should be available for the third test." The third test is at Headingley from August 4.

Pakistan battled to a draw in the first test at Lord's with a depleted bowling attack and the second test starts at Old Trafford next Thursday. Pakistan have faced a number of fitness problems in the last month and after losing Shoaib and Rana Naved, they also had to send paceman Mohammad Asif and all rounder Shoaib Malik back to Pakistan with elbow injuries.

Zaidi said Shoaib was with his English county side Warwickshire, where he was undergoing a rehabilitation programme and would play a couple of games for them. "Obviously he is an important member of the side and the team management is very keen to have him back as soon as possible," Zaidi added. "His pace gives the team that extra edge."

T-mobile sacks Ullrich

AFP, Berlin

Former Tour de France champion Jan Ullrich, excluded from this year's race because of links to blood-doping, has been sacked by his T-Mobile team, SID news agency reported on Friday.

Germany's Ullrich, the 1997 Tour de France winner who would have been one of the favourites for the 2006 race, had been suspended by his T-Mobile team the day before the July 1 start.

The 2000 Olympic road race champion was suspected of using the services of doctor Eufemiano Fuentes whom Spanish police believe is at the heart of a blood-doping network.

FIFA defends

FROM PAGE 20

euro fine by a disciplinary committee of football's world governing body on Friday.

The punishment provoked widespread outrage in Italy and newspaper La Stampa described it as a "scandalous sentence". Leading sports daily Gazzetta dello Sport's headline read "Zidane-Materazzi 3-2, Italy is angry" and said it was "too low a punishment for Zizou."

FIFA remains adamant the verdict was in line with its current rules and said Article 54 of its disciplinary rulebook states: "Anyone who insults someone in anyway, especially by using offensive gestures or language, will be sanctioned with a match suspension."

"If the perpetrator is a player, he will be suspended from at least two matches; if he is an official, he will be suspended from at least four matches."

Materazzi had admitted abusing Zidane during extra-time in the final in an incident which caused the France captain's dismissal after he reacted by head-butting the Inter Milan star.

Zidane, who was given a three-match ban and fined 4,700 euros by FIFA, later claimed in a television interview that Materazzi had insulted his mother and sister, while lip-readers employed by several newspapers said the Italian had called his rival a "terrorist."

FIFA's head of media Andreas Herren told PA Sport: "We will continue to consider each case on an individual basis."

"If we decide to investigate it, the disciplinary committee will give each party the chance to state their case to give a fair picture of the events, the same as we do now."

French Football Federation president Jean-Pierre Escalettes said he would apply FIFA's ruling to any future incidents that echo the Zidane-Materazzi clash in his domestic leagues.

Escalettes told the French federation's website: "The first remark to make is that the instigator has been punished with a two-match suspension for the national team."

"Materazzi will not appeal against the sanction. In punishing the instigator, FIFA has set an example even if Zinedine Zidane is guilty."

"The second remark is that this verdict is in the same sense as the FFF philosophy and can be used as a basis for work for disciplinary committees whether at national or district level."



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene bats during a practice session at the Nondescript Cricket Club ground in Colombo on Friday.

Focus firmly on cricket

AFP, Colombo

South Africa's first non-white cricket captain Ashwell Prince says his team is not worried about playing in violence-wrecked Sri Lanka on the current tour.

"Prior to the tour, a team of security experts visited Sri Lanka and submitted their observations," Prince told a media conference here late on Thursday. "We have been assured that everything is fine and are pretty pleased with the arrangements."

South Africa are scheduled to play two Tests and a one-day tri-series also featuring India during the six-week tour of the island nation. All matches will be played in the capital Colombo.

Prince was named skipper for the tour after regular captain Graeme Smith withdrew with an ankle injury and vice-captain Jacques Kallis was sidelined with a tennis elbow injury.

Canada refuse to host series

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

India on Friday cancelled a proposed one-day series against the West Indies in Canada in September because neither the rivals or the hosts seemed interested.

Indian cricket board secretary Niranjan Shah said the Canadian Cricket Association had informed him that it was unable to organise the series in Toronto as planned.

"Canada has told us they can host a series only next year, they can't do it now," Shah told AFP.

There were also reports that the West Indies Players' Association had threatened to boycott the series because it had not been taken into confidence by the West Indies Cricket Board about the proposed matches.

Shah said the Indian Board was looking at alternatives, including possible contests against Australia or New Zealand in either the Netherlands or Asian venues like Singapore and Malaysia.

"We have received a lot of proposals and are considering it," he said. "Something will be worked out soon."

India seem determined to organise a one-day series in September to prepare for the International Cricket Council's (ICC) Champions Trophy it hosts in October-November.

The series against the West Indies was planned after India agreed to boost the coffers of the cash-strapped West Indian board by playing matches outside the ICC's official Test and one-day programme.

The series was seen in the media as India's way to thank the West Indies in their support for South Asia's successful bid to host the 2011 World Cup against a combined bid by Australia and New Zealand.

West Indian cricket officials on Friday added to the confusion by revealing they wanted to host India and Sri Lanka for a tri-series in January next year leading to the World Cup in the Caribbean in March-April.

A tri-series between the same teams is already scheduled to be held in India in January, but West Indian team manager Tony Howard hoped it would be held in the Caribbean.

"We are hoping to have it played in the West Indies, but it is not settled yet," Howard was quoted as saying in the Jamaica Observer newspaper.

"We are pitching for late January, about a month or so before the World Cup so that would be perfect preparation in the lead-up."

Arjuna back

FROM PAGE 17

"I am sad that my name has created such a stir. I ask whether I am unsuitable to come into cricket administration simply because I am a deputy minister," Ranatunga said.

"I am not just a politician. I have played the game for 20 years and I have been involved in various cricket activities," said Ranatunga, who became a cult figure in Sri Lanka after leading them to the World Cup title in 1996.

Last year, Ranatunga headed the SLC's high-profile cricket committee but quit in disgust after the interim committee failed to implement his proposals.

"He is their number one bowler and has troubled us over the years," he said. "We will have to raise our game against him and come up with a game plan which will help us counter him."

Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene, meanwhile, said his team could not rest on the laurels gained in England and needed to start afresh.

Rookies get a lift

AFP, London

England bowler Matthew Hoggard insisted on Friday his country's raw attack is improving all the time despite their failure to finish off Pakistan.

England were forced to settle for a frustrating draw at Lord's in the first match of a four-Test series after the bowlers were unable to dismiss the tourists in the second innings.

But Hoggard is adamant the criticism is wrong and said: "I think it's a little bit harsh. "To bowl them out first time for 400 on the flattest wicket you could ever play on was a great effort."

"It didn't degenerate too much, there wasn't any uneven bounce and it didn't turn much, so to say we blew hot and cold is unfair."

"There were periods when we didn't bowl as well as we could do but that happens in cricket. "I would like to see anyone bowl a team out on that pitch without a mystery spinner."

Yorkshire star Hoggard is one of England's most reliable players and is ranked fifth among the world's leading bowlers, yet he rarely earns the headlines given to teammates like Flintoff and Stephen Harmison.

However, that suits the modest 29-year-old and he added: "I have been number five for quite a while, not that I look."

"I don't pay much notice to statistics and records, it is about performing on the day, but for me to be up there with the greats in the top 10 of the world is fantastic company. It is nice to be associated with all those great names."

Asafa Powell unprofessional!

AFP, Kingston

Stephen Francis, coach of sprint star Asafa Powell, Thursday denied that "unprofessional conduct" was to blame for Powell and three other Jamaican runners missing a meeting in Greece.

Powell, the co-holder of the 100m world record, was to travel with his agent Paul Doyle, hurdler Brigitte Foster and sprinters Michael Frater and Sherone Simpson on Wednesday for Friday's 22nd Vardinoyiannia meeting at Rethymnon on Crete.

The meet organizers charged that Powell and his teammates were unprofessional and had been scratched from competition. They vowed to complain to the IAAF (International Association of Athletics Federations) and the EAA (European Athletics Federation).

However, according to Francis, Powell, unlike Simpson, Foster and Frater, was not contracted to compete at the meet.

"Asafa was not down to compete at this meet, so he did not withdraw as stated in these reports," Francis said.

"We had an agreement for Asafa to compete in the 100m, but then the meet representatives told us that the majority of the agreed fee would not be paid until sometime next year ... we then told the meet rep that we would not be competing on those terms, and that Asafa and the other athletes would withdraw."

"The meet promoter asked us (as a favor) to allow the other athletes to run and for us to still carry Asafa to the meet even though he would not be competing ... we agreed," Francis said.

Meanwhile, Doyle said the problem with the flight arose when airline agents didn't want Powell to carry on his hand luggage, saying it was overweight.

Doyle said the party tried to retrieve their checked baggage in order to transfer the contents, but couldn't.

Dimming hopes

FROM PAGE 17

on sprint," said Kitab. National champions Masudul Karim will run 100 and 200 metres while Shamsuddin will also compete in the 100m. Hafizul Islam and Mohon Khan are going to the Games as part of the relay team.

"If one of them does well, we will give him a chance. We are taking young long jumper Al Amin to give him exposure. He does not have much chance this time but as the Games will be held in Dhaka next time, he would be a good prospect for us. The experience will be valuable," he commented.

Although winning a gold medal in Colombo is not in the likelihood, the coach was not all frustrated.

"I know it's too early to say something but like all coaches, I also have faith in one guy. Our best prospect to win a gold would be Mahfuzur Rahman. He is young, talented and is motivated to win. His form is also encouraging," said Kitab of the 110m Bangladesh Air Force hurdler.

"His best timing is 14.10s in manual timing. The last time, the gold medalist clocked 14.34s. If we add 0.25s to Mahfuz's timing and compare it with electronic timing, he still looks good. However, we don't have the information about our future competitors. If they have progressed, he will also have to do better."

Lama at Kenya helm

Football

AFP, Nairobi

Former France goalkeeper Bernard Lama on Friday vowed to inject professionalism into Kenyan football in his new role as the national team's coach.

Lama, 43, will be expected to build a team capable of challenging for a place in the 2008 Africa Nations Cup finals in Ghana and the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

A veteran of 44 French international, the Kenyan coaching post is Lama's first national team job, although he was Japan's

goalkeeping coach before the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea.

Lama, who officially takes charge on August 1, said he was well aware of the difficulties he is faced in plunging into the politically-volatile football arena, especially in Kenya where officials have been at loggerheads over the last two years.

"In each country you have many problems," said Lama at a press conference in Nairobi.

"But my being here is to inject professionalism into the game and help tap the talent. I want to help the players to forget about the problems, help them relax and give

their best on the pitch." "I know that Kenya has great inspirations and the potential to become a strong football nation and through the cooperation of the Kenyan society we will achieve," said Lama.

"I know that the World Cup will be held in South Africa in 2010 and there is a great chance for us as a team to qualify for this event."

Lama will play a role in selecting the four local coaches who will assist him in preparing Harambee Stars for the 2008 African Cup of Nations qualifying matches, which start in September.

Kenya play in Group Six alongside the 2006 World Cup debutants Angola, Eritrea and Swaziland.

Andy given a fright

Tennis

AFP, Indianapolis

Andy Roddick had to work to get past journeyman Jeff Morrison 7-6 (7/4), 7-5 here Thursday, losing the battle of aces but still advancing into the quarterfinals of the ATP Indianapolis Open.

Second seed Roddick, the 2003 and 2004 champion, managed only nine unreturnable serves to a dozen for the No. 183 Morrison.

Apart from the final result, the evening was an exercise in frustration for Roddick, who won the last of his 20 career titles nine months ago and is still searching for a first final in 2006.

"I felt I played well all night, but on every window of opportunity I had, he came up with a huge serve or a great volley," said the 11th-ranked former US Open champion.

"I played some of my best stuff this year, but I barely got the win. I was fortunate."

"I feel great, but I want to start stringing three, four and five matches together, getting deep into tournaments," he said. It was tough going as well for

top seed James Blake.

The American faltered while leading 5-1 in the second set before steadying to defeat South African danger-man Wesley Whitehouse 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4.

Blake, sixth in the world, dropped serve on a double-fault while serving for the win. He managed to eventually come through thanks in part to 19 aces.

"I had to weather the storm," said Blake, winner of two American titles this season. "I had a hiccup. I may have eased off the throttle a bit."

The loss ended the hopes of Whitehouse, the No. 512th-ranked qualifier who claimed the scalp of Marat Safin in the second round.

Thailand's Paradorn Srichaphan came back from brink, saving three match points in a 5-7, 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) win over American Paul Goldstein.

The eighth seed, from Bangkok, is fast forgetting his 12 first-round defeats this season, seven coming on clay and his most recent to claycourter Agustin Calleri at Wimbledon.

Paradorn, 2003 runner-up here to Roddick, saved three match points in a momentum-shifting final set, in which he trailed 4-2.



PHOTO: INTERNET

American Serena Williams returns a shot from Bethanie Mattek during a match in the Western & Southern Financial Group Women's Open in Mason on Thursday.

Clinical Serena thru' to qtrs

Tennis

BBC ONLINE, undated

Serena Williams swept to her second clinical win since returning from injury as she reached the quarterfinals of the Cincinnati Open.

The 24-year-old earned a 6-3 6-1 victory over Bethanie Mattek to follow up her straight sets win over Anastasia Myskina on Tuesday.

Williams, who took just 63 minutes to win, missed six months

will give Williams a wild card for the US Open if necessary.

Williams, who won the event in 1999 and 2002, has entered this year's tournament but her injury-affected world ranking of 139 means she will not receive automatic direct acceptance.

In addition to the players already in the draw, 16 players will gain entry through qualifying, while the remaining eight spots are wild cards awarded at the discretion of the USTA.

"I feel like I'm moving faster but I can still get quicker," said Williams. "I feel fine, I've been doing a lot of off court work. Both players I have played so far have been really competitive and really tough."

"I'm just taking it one match at a time."

"I didn't expect super-spectacular results, but I didn't expect bad results, either. I'm not looking too far ahead."

Meanwhile, the US Tennis Association has confirmed that it