

Darrell did not panic

REUTERS, Melbourne

Darrell Hair said his decision to ask for 500,000 dollars to quit his role as an umpire following the Pakistan ball-tampering furore was not a panic reaction to events at The Oval last week.

Hair has been heavily criticised since the International Cricket Council (ICC) revealed details of an email he sent to officials requesting a one-off payment in return for quitting their elite panel of umpires after the row. "It wasn't a spur of the moment thing. I didn't do it off the cuff," Hair told Australia's Sunday Mail.

Hair and fellow umpire Billy Doctrove imposed a five-run penalty on Pakistan for ball tampering on the final day of the fourth Test against England in London last week.

Pakistan subsequently forfeited the game when they refused to take the field after tea in protest at the decision. It was the first forfeiture in Test cricket's 129-year history.

But Hair, who has been vilified in Pakistan's media over his decision and a perceived bias against Asian teams, said he meant no harm with the shock offer to stand down revealed on Friday.

"This correspondence was composed at a very difficult time and was revoked by myself after a period of serious consideration," he said in a statement.

"There was no malicious intent behind this communication with the ICC. I am anxious the code of conduct hearing takes place as soon as possible so these matters can be resolved and allow me to move on with my umpiring."

Hair insisted his request had fallen on some sympathetic ears before he retracted it following an intervention from ICC Chief Executive Malcolm Speed.

"I had dialogue with them. (ICC Umpires and Referees manager) Doug Cowie even said in his email reply to my offer that the proposal had merit."

Asked whether he would ever umpire again, Hair told the Mail: "Let's address one thing at a time."

ECB may not buy Aussie ump idea

BBC ONLINE, undated

England are unlikely to support a plan to scrap neutral umpires for this winter's Ashes series.

Recent reports claim Cricket Australia are keen for the "best umpires in the world" to stand in the five Tests, regardless of their nationality.

But an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) spokesman said: "The ICC have a well-established principle of appointing neutral umpires for Tests."

"It's a process that the ECB are extremely comfortable with."

There are 10 umpires on the ICC's elite umpiring panel.

Under existing rules, Australians Simon Taufel, Darrell Hair, Daryl Harper and England's Mark Benson would not be considered for on-field duty during the Ashes series.

But Peter Young, Cricket Australia's Head of Communications, said recently: "If we lived in a perfect world it would be great if the forthcoming Ashes series, played between the best two teams in the world, could have the world's best umpires officiating."

"At the moment, the best umpires officiating are Australians."

During the 2005 Ashes series in England, which the home side won 2-1, umpiring duties were rotated between New Zealand's Billy Bowden, South African Rudi Koertzen, Aileen Dar of Pakistan and West Indian Steve Bucknor.

Benson and two other English officials, Jeremy Lloyds and Nigel Long, were chosen, however, to fill the TV umpire role.

Mehrab enters

FROM PAGE 17

for us because he is not only an important batsman in the middle order but also the captain of the team. We will wait till the last moment," he said.

But there were confusion over the fitness of Bashir as he has yet to confirm whether he will need a surgery for his injured left metacarpal.

"I am feeling good after four weeks of my injury but I'm confused about whether there will be need for a surgery. If it is needed, ICC Champions Trophy is over for me. I will meet with a local doctor tomorrow but I need a week to settle the issue. What I desperately want is to play the tournament," informed Bashir, who had been injured while fielding of the second match against Zimbabwe.

PRELIMINARY SQUAD

Habibul Bashar, Shahriar Nafees, Rajin Saleh, Javed Omar, Aftab Ahmed, Mohammad Ashraf, Khaled Mashud, Alok Kapali, Tushar Imran, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammad Rafique, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Syed Rassel, Shahadat Hossain, Forhad Reza, Abdur Razzak, Sakib Al Hasan and Mehrab Hossain.



PHOTO: AFP
Belgian tennis star Justine Henin-Hardenne hits a forehand against Lindsay Davenport during the final of the Pilot Pen Tournament in New Haven, Connecticut on Saturday.

Lindsay hands Justine title

INTERNET, undated

It was tough enough that Lindsay Davenport was facing one of the world's top players. She had to battle her health as well.

The defending champion, Davenport was forced to retire from Saturday's final of the Pilot Pen Tennis tournament with a right shoulder injury, handing the title to Justine Henin-Hardenne of Belgium.

The seventh-seeded Davenport appeared uncomfortable from the start and trailed, 6-0, 1-0, against the world's third-ranked player when she decided to retire from the 1.275 million dollar co-ed tournament.

"I've been struggling with my shoulder throughout the week," Davenport said. "The pain started travelling down my arm, even into my wrist."

Henin-Hardenne, who took more than a month off after losing to France's Amelie Mauresmo in the Wimbledon final, noticed that Davenport was not right from the start.

"At the beginning of the match, I could tell she was not hitting the ball as usual," Henin-Hardenne said. "She made the right decision to stop."

Having missed much of 2006 with back problems and a concussion, Davenport's latest

injury comes at a terrible time as the year's final major -- the US Open -- is scheduled to start Monday.

"If I have to play Monday, then I will do everything I can to make sure I make it," Davenport said. "I will probably just rest a lot and won't hit the ball until the warmup before my next match."

The 1998 US Open champion, Davenport showed little fight and dropped the opening set in 22 minutes before calling for a trainer. During an official injury timeout, she went back into the locker room, where she had a bandage placed on her right shoulder.

Despite the medical attention, the 30-year-old Davenport had a look of disappointment on her face as she lost in the first game of the second set. She decided to retire after hitting a forehand into the net.

With only the top four seeds receiving first-round byes, Davenport had to play four matches to reach the final. She won all of them in straight sets, even beating the top-ranked Mauresmo in the quarterfinals Thursday.

"It's tough to play so many matches and stay healthy," a teary-eyed Davenport said. "You want to play your best, but maybe it was just too much, too soon." With the abbreviated win in the 600,000-dollar Tier II women's event, Henin-Hardenne claimed her fifth title of the season and 28th career.

The French Open champion has

been no stranger to injuries herself, retiring from the final of the Australian Open in January against Mauresmo.

In the final of the 675,000-dollar men's event, second seed Nikolay Davydenko of Russia captured his third title of the year with a 6-4, 6-3 triumph over No. 10 Agustin Calleri of Argentina.

The seventh-ranked player in the world, Davydenko improved to 4-0 in his career against Calleri. He also beat him at Sydney and Bastad this year.

"I just tried to keep on serve," said Davydenko, who didn't drop a set in the tournament. "I won my first three service games easily. And after I broke him, I just wanted to hold my own serve. From the beginning of the second set, I started feeling better and better. It finally got dark, and I played well every point."

Davydenko broke Calleri three times and saved all six break points against his serve in the match that lasted 81 minutes.

"I had three or four break points early, but he served very well," Calleri said. "He didn't give me a chance to break him. He just played very well on the important points. I didn't serve that well, but he didn't give me a lot of opportunities during the match. I didn't play badly, but I could have played a little bit better obviously. Of course, he helped me to play not so well."

Greeks end Sino run

AFP, Saitama

China's dream of a best-ever finish in global competition was shattered at the World Basketball Championship here Sunday by Greece, which eliminated the Asian champions 95-64.

Despite a 12-point Chinese lead early in the second quarter, the unbeaten Greeks rallied by outscoring China 26-6 in the third quarter to capture a quarter-final berth against France, which beat Angola 68-62.

A victory would have launched the Chinese into the final eight and brought a chance to improve their best showing in global competition, the eighth-place finishes from the 1994 World Championship and 2004 Athens Olympics.

"All I can say is we made our lowest goal," Chinese center Yao Ming said. "We didn't win but we went down fighting. We did well in the first half. In the second half they were too much for us."

China took a last-second victory over Slovenia just to reach the 16-team playoff rounds, but were pummeled by the United States and Italy as well as European champions Greece and Yao was blunt when asked about China's weaknesses.

"Everywhere. Our team doesn't have a lot of spirit to play against the best teams in the world," he said. "We just need to play more and get more experience."

The 2.23m star center for the National Basketball Association's Houston Rockets averaged a four-

point-high 28 points a game but managed only 10 points against a determined Greek defense led by Sofoklis "Baby Shaq" Schortsianitis.

The 21-year-old Greek center stands 2.08m but has the wide size and inside speed and power that earned him a nickname harkening to NBA superstar big man Shaquille O'Neal.

"Baby Shaq" earned Yao's respect in their first live meeting. "I hope good luck for him the rest of his career, especially when he comes over to play in the NBA," Yao said.

Theodoros Papaloukas led Greece with 19 points while Vassilis Spanoulis added 15. The Greeks made only three turnovers, none in the second half, while forcing 24 from China and making 13 steals.

"My team came out with a lot of respect for China and we had a few nerves," Greece coach Panagiotis Yannakis said.

"China were up 10 points. We lost our concentration but then we started to play good defense. We pushed more and more to get them to make mistakes because the team that makes the most mistakes loses."

China stormed to an 8-0 lead in the first 4:03, the Greeks missing their first seven shots on the way to missing 16 of their first 21, and stretched the lead to 23-11 on Wang Shipeng's 3-pointer 41 seconds into the second quarter.

But Greece awoke with a vengeance. Papaloukas scored eight points and Spanoulis added seven in a 19-4 Greek run over a five-minute span of the second quarter,

helping the Greece seize a 41-36 half-time edge.

"Greece was very disciplined," Yao said. "There is not a lot of difference between their inside shooters and outside shooters. They can help each other when they play together."

The Greeks broke open the game in the third quarter, six steals and nine Chinese turnovers contributing to a 26-4 run in the last eight minutes of the period for a 67-42 edge entering the fourth quarter.

"In the beginning it looked like we had prepared well but after that we were very bad in offense. We made too many turnovers and we lost confidence," China coach Jonas Kazlauskas said.

"Spanoulis and Papaloukas changed the game for Greece and broke our defence. They were more aggressive."

"China were up 10 points. We lost our concentration but then we started to play good defense. We pushed more and more to get them to make mistakes because the team that makes the most mistakes loses."

China stormed to an 8-0 lead in the first 4:03, the Greeks missing their first seven shots on the way to missing 16 of their first 21, and stretched the lead to 23-11 on Wang Shipeng's 3-pointer 41 seconds into the second quarter.

But Greece awoke with a vengeance. Papaloukas scored eight points and Spanoulis added seven in a 19-4 Greek run over a five-minute span of the second quarter,

helping the Greece seize a 41-36 half-time edge.

"Greece was very disciplined," Yao said. "There is not a lot of difference between their inside shooters and outside shooters. They can help each other when they play together."

The Greeks broke open the game in the third quarter, six steals and nine Chinese turnovers contributing to a 26-4 run in the last eight minutes of the period for a 67-42 edge entering the fourth quarter.

Bird on Inzy's side

AFP, London

Former Test umpire Dickie Bird believes Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq should be acquitted of the charges levelled against him following the controversial fourth Test against England.

Bird's comments come after the International Cricket Council (ICC) revealed umpire Darrell Hair had sent an email requesting a payment of 500,000 US dollars to retire from the game following the furore at last Sunday's Test at The Oval.

Bird believes the ICC now have little option but to acquit Inzamam, facing charges of ball-tampering and bringing the game into disrepute.

"It is looking like the charges are going to be dropped," said Bird. "It is looking in favour of Pakistan now and it is my regret that it ever came to this in the first place."

"Everybody should have used a little bit of common sense, tried to finish the Test match then thrashed it out behind closed doors."

"The public had paid a lot of money to watch a cricket match and they did not get it, so they might think twice about going back to cricket in the future."

Bird officiated in 66 Test matches during his career and believes much hard work needs to be done to rescue the image of the game.

"It is a very, very sad time for cricket and there is no doubt our great game has been badly hurt. But as in the past, I am sure it will eventually get over it," he said.

Former England captain Mike Atherton said it was "extraordinary" the ICC were yet to charge Hair with any impropriety.

Atherton said: "It seems extraordinary when you consider that Inzamamul Haq has been charged on two counts -- one of ball-tampering, for which nobody can find any evidence, and secondly for bringing the game into disrepute on the back of the first charge."

"So poor old Inzy finds himself under two charges, but Darrell Hair, after these extraordinary letters, finds himself under no charge whatsoever," Atherton told Sky Sports News.

Hair snubbed by county

PTI, London

Controversial umpire Darrell Hair now finds himself out of favour in English domestic cricket as well with the Players' Association and some sections of ECB questioning his credibility to stand in county games.

The Australian official has gone from being seen as a respected umpire to a villain in less than a week after his actions led to the first ever forfeiture in Test cricket at The Oval and he later asked for a 500,000-dollar payout to stand down from the Elite Panel.

The events have now prompted some members of the English cricket fraternity to wonder whether Hair, who lives in Lincolnshire, should be allowed to officiate on the county circuit next year, the Sunday Times said.

Hair is on the England and Wales Cricket Board's reserve list, and an umpires' spokesman told the newspaper that he would be considered for promotion to the full 25-man panel after the current season ends on September 24.

But an ECB member questioned whether such a move would be appropriate for English cricket.

"Darrell Hair has no credibility left," he said. "I can't see him being welcomed at county games. I'm not sure other umpires would be happy standing with him. I expect he'll become a celebrity umpire, trundled out to officiate in benefit matches and find the fielding side guilty of ball tampering."

The Professional Cricketers' Association has also come out openly in this case.

"In the short term, we think it would be inappropriate for him to stand given that he is in a stressful situation and the focus should be on the cricket," the association's chief executive Richard Bevan said.

It is understood that the problems are not with the actual development, but that the powers-that-be in Trinidad took a long time to decide on the scope and size of the project. As part of the rush to get ready, GL Events, the French

Walcott was also manager of the West Indies team which won the 1975 and 1979 World Cup. Former West Indies fast bowler Michael Holding paid tribute to his compatriot.

"On my first tour to England in 1976 he was my manager," Holding told Cricinfo.

"He helped me a lot early in my career. I can give you one example of what Clyde was like. On that tour we'd played against Hampshire and I wasn't very happy."

"I didn't have the best equipment for English conditions, my studs were too short, and I was feeling sorry for myself."

"Clyde could see this because I was sat at the back of the coach on my own and he just came up and sat down next to me -- just to have a chat."

"After I'd told him the problem he suggested a talk to some of the county pros and find out about how to get some new equipment. That was Clyde, he wouldn't wait for you to ask him, he would approach you and try to help."

Walcott was also manager of the West Indies team which won the 1975 and 1979 World Cup. Former West Indies fast bowler Michael Holding paid tribute to his compatriot.

"On my first tour to England in 1976 he was my manager," Holding told Cricinfo.

"He helped me a lot early in my career. I can give you one example of what Clyde was like. On that tour we'd played against Hampshire and I wasn't very happy."

"I didn't have the best equipment for English conditions, my studs were too short, and I was feeling sorry for myself."

Hewitt to defy pain US Open begins today

Tennis

REUTERS, New York

Former champion Lleyton Hewitt said he would go through the pain barrier to compete at the US Open which starts on Monday.

Hewitt pulled out of the Toronto Masters Series event earlier this month with a knee injury and has still not fully recovered.

"I had patella tendinitis and then a little issue with my patella tendon as well," the former world number one told reporters on Saturday.

"It's definitely not 100 percent yet. Hopefully if I don't aggravate it any more during the tournament, it will just get better and better."

Hewitt, the 15th seed, is keen to maintain his excellent record at the last major of the season, where he has reached at least the semifinals in five of the past six years.

"I've been able to play with niggling injuries in the past," he said.

"There's no doubt my ankle wasn't 100 percent during the French Open but I was able to get through a few rounds and push (Rafael) Nadal in the fourth round."

"I definitely know how to play with pain, at least. That could be something that's going to get tested again here in the next fortnight," added Hewitt, who is chasing the third grand slam title of his career.

Haq focused on cricket

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan skipper Inzamamul Haq has decided to put behind the Oval Test row and bring his focus back on cricket with the start of the ODI series against England this week.

"What has happened has happened and now we have to look towards the future," Inzamam was quoted as saying in the News on Sunday.

Inzamam faced an eight-ODI or four-Test ban after being charged with ball tampering and bringing the game to disrepute following Pakistan's forfeiture of the fourth Test against England last week.

"The (Pakistan Cricket) Board would be taking care of it, I am sure. My job is to play to the best of my ability in the forthcoming one-dayers and to make it sure that my boys do the same," he said.

Dar slams Pak protest

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

Aleem Dar, one of two Pakistani umpires on the ICC's Elite Panel, has said that Pakistan's decision to protest and stay off the field on the fourth day of the fourth Test at The Oval last week, was wrong and may harm the game in the long-term.

Pakistan refused to take the field after Darrell Hair penalised them for ball-tampering, a decision which ultimately led to the Test being forfeited. But Dar told Cricinfo: "There are other ways of protesting and the avenue they chose I believe was the wrong one. Strictly according to the law, the decision is correct."

Opinion on Pakistan's decision to protest and refusal to come out after tea has been mixed. The protest galvanized much of the nation; it was seen by many as a protection of their honour. But some ex-players, such as Imran Khan, Javed Miandad and Wasim Akram have struck discordant notes; the latter two agree with Dar in that it shouldn't have happened at all.

"The problem is that if one country attempts it, then others will follow and that cannot be good for the game in the long-run," Dar said.

Dar also argued that the spotlight has unfairly focused on Hair, after the Test became the first in the history of the game to be forfeited. "It is not about one umpire. It can't be about just one. Both umpires and even those off the field are involved. Those decisions on ball tampering and the forfeit were not taken by Hair alone."

Much fury in Pakistan has been vented at the lack of evidence with regards to the charge of ball tampering, the incident at the very root of the hullabaloo. That is to miss the point, as Dar points out. "There doesn't seem to be video evidence but we must remember that no evidence is required. It could be that Pakistan is right and they didn't do anything but as an umpire that is your decision."

The lack of video evidence suggests that the state of the ball, already 56 overs old when it was changed, will become crucial when the hearings are eventually held for Inzamamul Haq. There is uncertainty whether evidence of tampering can be proved just by inspecting the ball; Aaqib Javed is adamant

that you can but others are not so sure.

Dar, diplomatically, hedged his bets. "You can tell sometimes that tampering has occurred, depending on the level of it. On a new ball obviously it is easy to say if something has been applied to it. On an older ball it becomes more difficult but not impossible. As I say, it depends on other things. But the umpires can check at any time they want."

Dar was understandably reluctant to talk of Hair's attitude and the subsequent revelation that he had offered to resign in return for a 500,000-dollar pay-off. He did suggest, however, that the whole situation -- from the ball-tampering penalty to the eventual forfeit -- might have been handled differently by other umpires. "It's important to remember the decisions themselves weren't wrong. But it depends on your personality how you handle it. The situation could've been handled better."

Dar is regarded by many to be the second best umpire in the world behind the Australian Simon Taufel. But if the last week has posed any sort of dilemma at all for him -- torn between his profession and his country -- then he's not letting on.

Lara stadium not ready yet

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

With 200 days to go before the start of the 2007 World Cup in the West Indies, all 12 stadiums in the region are looking in good shape - except one.

There are great doubts over the readiness of the Brian Lara Stadium in Tarouba, Trinidad and Tobago, and officials have put authorities there on notice. The facility -- which will host pre-tournament matches -- is behind schedule. A Cricket World Cup (CWC) inspection team will visit the ground on September 7 and a decision is expected by mid-month.

Organisers are looking at several options as backup in case the ground cannot meet the required standard for a global event of the size of the World Cup. As it stands, the ground will now only be used for the four scheduled matches. It will not be used as a back-up venue as part of the contingency plan.

It is understood that the problems are not with the actual development, but that the powers-that-be in Trinidad took a long time to decide on the scope and size of the project. As part of the rush to get ready, GL Events, the French

Walcott was also manager of the West Indies team which won the 1975 and 1979 World Cup. Former West Indies fast bowler Michael Holding paid tribute to his compatriot.

"On my first tour to England in 1976 he was my manager," Holding told Cricinfo.

"He helped me a lot early in my career. I can give you one example of what Clyde was like. On that tour we'd played against Hampshire and I wasn't very happy."

"I didn't have the best equipment for English conditions, my studs were too short, and I was feeling sorry for myself."

"Clyde could see this because I was sat at the back of the coach on my own and he just came up and sat down next to me -- just to have a chat."

"After I'd told him the problem he suggested a talk to some of the county pros and find out about how to get some new equipment. That was Clyde, he wouldn't wait for you to ask him, he would approach you and try to help."

Walcott was also manager of the West Indies team which won the 1975 and 1979 World Cup. Former West Indies fast bowler Michael Holding paid tribute to his compatriot.

"On my first tour to England in 1976 he was my manager," Holding told Cricinfo.

"He helped me a lot early in my career. I can give you one example of what Clyde was like. On that tour we'd played against Hampshire and I wasn't very happy."

"I didn't have the best equipment for English conditions, my studs were too short, and I was feeling sorry for myself."

"Clyde could see this because I was sat at the back of the coach on my own and he just came up and sat down next to me -- just to have a chat."

FORMULA 1 Massa makes it first

REUTERS, Istanbul

Ferrari's Felipe Massa celebrated an emotional first Formula One victory in Turkey on Sunday while Renault's Fernando Alonso won an epic duel with title rival Michael Schumacher.

World champion Alonso's second place, by barely half a car's length, stretched his overall lead to 12 points with four races remaining.

As the young Brazilian roared to the chequered flag from pole position, a winner at last after 66 starts, teammate and seven times champion Schumacher was locked in combat with Alonso.