

India will support move to reduce umpires' power

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

India will support any moves to dilute cricket umpires' powers following the forfeited Test between England and Pakistan, an official said on Thursday.

"For the sake of spectators, television viewers and the game's sponsors, no match should be called off and certainly not by the umpires," said Niranjana Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India.

"Any decision to forfeit a Test should be made by the match referee or the International Cricket Council (ICC)."

The Oval Test in London ended in bizarre fashion on August 20 when Pakistan refused to take the field after tea on the fourth day in protest at being accused of ball tampering by umpires Darrell Hair and Billy Doctrove.

The move led to the umpires

awarding the match to England -- the first forfeit in the 129-year history of Test cricket -- and triggering the biggest crisis in the sport since the match-fixing scandal in 2000.

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq was subsequently charged with ball tampering and bringing the game into disrepute. His case will be heard in the second half of September at a yet unspecified date.

ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed said match referee Mike Procter and the two teams were willing to resume play on the fifth day but the umpires, citing the rule book, stood by their decision to call off the match.

Shah said that in future any umpire or team which refused to play without "sufficient reason" should be penalised heavily.

"An umpire who abandons play without sufficient reason should be sacked," said Shah.

"Similarly, teams walking off and forfeiting matches should be

penalised and made to pay heavy damages.

"Unless there are unforeseen circumstances like bad weather or riots, it is the right of spectators and sponsors to see the match go on."

Sri Lankan match referee Ranjan Madugalle will hear charges against Inzamam, but Pakistan wants the role of the umpires, especially Hair, in the forfeited match to be investigated first.

Hair, 53, added to the chaos when the ICC revealed he had offered to quit the elite panel of umpires in exchange for a payout of 500,000 dollars.

Hair, no stranger to controversy, later withdrew the offer and issued a public apology for demanding the money.

Sri Lankans have not forgiven Hair for no-balling spin wizard Muttiah Muralidaran seven times for a suspect bowling action during a Test match against Australia in Melbourne in 1995.

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Dhaka stun Noakhali

Football

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Dhaka reched the final of the Jubok Phone National Football Championship with a 2-1 win over star-studded Noakhali in the first semifinal at the Sylhet Stadium yesterday.

They will watch the result of today's semifinal between hosts Sylhet and reigning champions Narayanganj at the same venue to know who their opponents will be.

Dhaka scored the winning goal in the 79th minute from a penalty after Lincoln appeared to have fouled Maruf inside the danger area. Polo coolly put the ball in the back of the net from the subse-

quent spot-kick.

The match was sparked into life after a languid first quarter when Ridon of Dhaka struck the Noakhali crossbar in the 19th minute. Then, within minutes, Mintu did exactly the same for Noakhali when he thundered the Dhaka crossbar.

National striker Alfaz Ahmed then latched on to a pass from Zahid Hasan Emily in the 34th minute to put the impressive Noakhali outfit in front. Dhaka goalkeeper Al Amin actually let the ball go through his legs as a corner from Arman came in from the right flank. It was one of the easier goals that veteran forward Alfaz has scored in his long career.

Ironically, it was the Dhaka goalie Al Amin who made some impressive saves later in the game to earn the man-of-the-match

award.

The Dhaka equaliser had a quirky touch to it. The country's first and only throw specialist Belal sprang into action just at the stroke of half-time when his long throw-in was completely missed by Noakhali goalkeeper Aminul Haque. The ball fell at the feet of Ridon who made no mistake this time and slotted the it into the back of the net.

Second-half saw the game being played at the same pace with chances going both ways. Dhaka had the first opportunity in the 52nd minute when Arif crossed towards Maruf but the header from the Dhaka midfielder was just wide of the Noakhali post.

Dhaka looked more organised in the second-half. They had better

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Dhaka goalkeeper Al-Amin is about to catch a ball during their Jubok Phone National Football League clash against Noakhali at the Sylhet Stadium yesterday.

They are not retiring

Cricket

REUTERS, Coolum

Australia's senior cricketers are playing down suggestions they might retire en masse if they win back the Ashes.

Shane Warne, Glenn McGrath, Adam Gilchrist, Justin Langer and Matthew Hayden are all in their mid-30s and rapidly approaching normal retirement age.

They have publicly hinted they wanted to go out in a blaze of glory rather than face the axe, which is wielded swiftly and ruthlessly by Australia's selectors, but have since shelved plans to quit after the home series against England.

Warne said he could play on for another five years. The leg-spinner is the greatest wicket-taker in Test history and is bowling as well as ever despite going through the personal trauma of divorce.

"I turn 37 in a couple of weeks, so I'm going to get asked (about retirement) all the time," he told reporters at a team training camp in Queensland.

"I'll be one of the guys who goes through that transition and people will have to get used to me not being around."

"When that time comes, I think everybody will know but at the moment I love playing cricket."

McGrath has been plagued by injuries in the past few seasons and has not played for Australia since January when his wife was diagnosed with cancer.

The 36-year-old has taken more wickets than any other fast bowler in Test history but has lost none of his boyish enthusiasm and believes he could even play a part in the 2009 Ashes in England.

"I'm probably as, if not more, excited for this season than ever before," he said.

"I've had a good break and I've been training hard and working on a few things that I wanted to touch upon."

Gilchrist declared last year that he might hang up his gloves after next year's World Cup to spend more time with his young family but he is also having second thoughts.

The demands of batting and keeping wickets have clearly taken a toll on the 34-year-old, but he has been allowed to skip several matches and next month's one-day series in Malaysia to keep himself fresh.

"I've thought about it a lot but I'm feeling extremely refreshed now," he said.

"The way I feel at the moment,

I'm really keen to get through this summer and be keen to go on after this summer."

"But I realise things can change. I don't want to make any bold statements about where I'm headed but the intention at the moment would be to keep playing."

Langer, 35, and Hayden, 34, are Australia's most successful opening partnership but age is catching up with them and they are under pressure for their places from the much younger Phil Jaques.

Langer's future seemed to be in doubt when he was felled by a Makhaya Ntini bouncer in South Africa and forced to miss three matches but the left-hander went to England in the off-season to regain his confidence, scoring a career-best 342 for Somerset.

Langer said the trip to England had not only convinced him he had the physical ability to play on but the ribbing he suffered from his team mates about the last Ashes series reassured him he had the mental desire.

"Physically and mentally I feel really sharp. I just got 300, so of course I'm alright," he said.

"And every day I was over there, people were reminding me about the Ashes. The thinking was already on the fire then but now it's like an inferno."



FRUITS OF THEIR LABOUR: Bangladesh players indulge in a helping of fruit during a break in the training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Thursday.

Rain saves England

Cricket

AFP, Cardiff

Rain ended England's run of seven straight limited-overs defeats as the first one-day international against Pakistan ended in a no-result at Sophia Gardens here on Wednesday.

Pakistan, chasing a revised target of 159 in 32 overs after a rain break of an hour-and-a-quarter, were 46 for one off seven overs when a second downpour ended the match.

Although the tourists were ahead of the required run-rate, they had to bat for a minimum of 20 overs for this day/night fixture, the opening contest of a five-game series, to be deemed a match.

Mohammad Hafeez was 18 not

out and Younis Khan 12 not out.

During their current home season England had lost a Twenty20 and five full one-day internationals against Sri Lanka before Monday's five-wicket Twenty20 defeat against Pakistan at Bristol.

This series continues with a day match at Lord's on Saturday.

England had earlier been bowled out for 202, featuring Ian Bell's one-day international best of 88, after Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq won the toss and chose to field.

"It's not the way we wanted to stop the run of defeats," Bell told reporters. "We believe we can compete with Pakistan in this series and we're excited about Lord's."

Mohammad Asif, who ripped through England's top order, fin-

ished with an impressive three for 28 off a maximum 10 overs.

And fellow quick Shoaib Akhtar, who returned to international action after a stress fracture of the left ankle on Monday, three for 45 off 10.

Bell, who hit three hundreds in the recent Test series against Pakistan, said: "It went pretty well today (Wednesday)."

"I tried to carry on my form from the Test matches," added the Warwickshire right-hander, whose innings surpassed his previous one-day best of 80 against minnows and World Cup qualifiers Ireland in June.

"That was the best I've played in one-day cricket for England," insisted Bell, making his 19th appearance at this level.

Pakistan suffered a setback in

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It's only rumours

REUTERS, New York

Andy Roddick was not in party mood after marking his 24th birthday with victory at the U.S. Open, trying to put to rest rumors he is romantically linked with Russian Maria Sharapova.

"We're not dating," he told reporters after his 6-3 7-6 6-3 win over Danish qualifier Kristian Pless.

"I've said it a million times already, but you guys refuse to write it. You know, we're friendly. We're in the same places. I think she's a great girl. You know, we'll talk. That's about it."

Roddick, the 2003 U.S. Open champion and former world number one, said life on the tennis tour made relationships difficult to manage.

"It's a little bit of a stretch when we both travel. She's actually busier than I am. That's a little bit of it."

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School kabaddi from Sept 12

UNB, Dhaka

The 14th NZ Textile Mills school kabaddi competition, organised by Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation (BKF), will begin at the Kabaddi Stadium on September 12.

A total of 40 schools will take part in the meet.

All the participating teams will be provided with jerseys while members of the champions and runners-up teams will get free education -- one year for the champions and six months for the runners-up team, said a BKF official.

Top two off the mark

US OPEN

AFP, New York

Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal both took confident first steps towards an eventual third straight Grand Slam final showdown in the first round of the US Open on Wednesday.

Top seed Federer of Switzerland needed just 1 hour 40 minutes to dispatch Wang Yeu-Tzuo of Taiwan 6-4, 6-1, 6-0.

Second seed Nadal of Spain demolished former finalist Mark Philippoussis of Australia 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 in just over two hours.

Also through to the second round in early play were two former champions looking to get back to their best -- 2000 winner Marat Safin of Russia and the man who succeeded him, Lleyton Hewitt of Australia.

Top American James Blake, the fifth seed, stirred his hometown crowd with a 6-3, 7-5, 7-6 (9/7) win over Juan Monaco of Argentina.

And there was more Stars and Stripes flag-waving in the featured night match when Andy Roddick, watched intently by new coach Jimmy Connors, was the first through to the third round with a 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 win over Kristian Pless of Denmark.

In the women's event, top seed Amelie Mauresmo quickly turned the tables on Kristina Barrios of Germany winning 6-1, 7-5 in a match held over from Tuesday because of rain with the French woman 2-5 down in the second.

Unseeded two-times former champions Serena Williams also made it through by clobbering

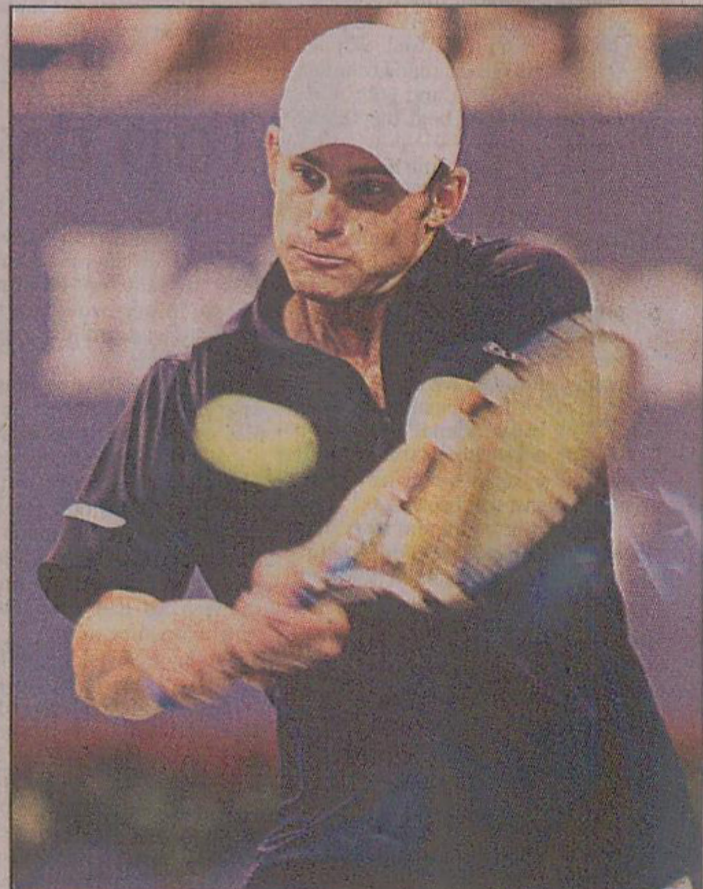
Spain's Lourdes Dominguez Lino 6-1, 6-2 and Russian diva Maria Sharapova made short work of Michaela Krajicek of the Netherlands winning at a canter 6-3, 6-0.

The stormy weather that has

dogged the US Open reined at last to allow 20-year-old Mallorca whirlwind Nadal to take centre-stage with a typically swashbuckling display.

He was chomping at the bit

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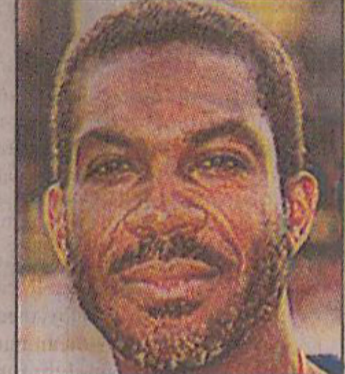


US star Andy Roddick hits a backhand return against Kristian Pless of Denmark during their US Open match at Flushing Meadows on Monday.



Did U Know?

A baseball ball has exactly 108 stitches; a cricket ball has between 65 and 70 stitches.



Michael Holding

(West Indies fast bowling legend) "When England used reverse swing to beat the Australians in the 2005 Ashes, everyone said it was great skill. When Pakistan does it, the opposite happens, no one thinks it is great skill. Everyone associates it with skulduggery. When bombs go off in Karachi and Colombo everyone wants to go home. When bombs go off in London, no one says anything. That is first world hypocrisy and we have to live with it."

While reacting to the ball-tampering issue against Pakistan.



TEN Sports

US Open Day Five Live at 9:00 pm

Uttara thrash Mukta Bihanga

UNB, Dhaka

Bappi struck twice as Uttara Hockey Club thumped Mukta Bihanga Tarun Sangha 6-1 in the Green Delta Insurance First Division Hockey League at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Apart from Bappi's goals, Mizu, Manik, Shuvo and Ronny netted one goal apiece for Uttara. The winners led the first-half 2-0.

Jasim scored the consolation goal for Mukta Bihanga.

In the day's other match, Bachelor SC drew 2-2 with Police AC.

Shiplul and Mahmud scored for Police while Bachelors' goals came from Liton and Rajib.

Dighinala win on penalties

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Dighinala forced their way into the final of the DC Cup football tournament after a penalty shootout against Panchhari at the Khagrachhari Stadium yesterday.

They only played the semifinal after Manikchhari were suspended for fielding players from outside the upazila in the quarterfinals.

Panchhari and Dighinala were locked 1-1 in the regulation time of the semifinal, but converted all of their penalties to win 4-1.

Earlier, the match got off to a flier when Usain Marma struck for Panchhari with a wonderful shot in the 14th minute. But Dighinala immediately equalised when midfielder Sohel struck a low shot.

The match was competitive all the way but none could find the back of the net.

Penalties came and Panchhari could convert only one out of four shots. But Rohen, Bachhu, Sohel and Mazid were precise in their placement.

Dighinala will now take on Khagrachhari in the final of the tournament on September 2.