

India worried for Hair safety: ICC

REUTERS, New Delhi

Crowd trouble concerns raised by hosts India influenced the removal of Australian umpire Darrell Hair from the panel for next month's Champions Trophy, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Saturday.

"One of their concerns was Hair's presence would provoke the crowds," ICC spokesman Brian Murgatroyd said. "That is obviously something we took into consideration in making our decision."

He added: "The letter the BCCI (Indian cricket board) sent us of course referred to the concern about provoking the crowds."

"I guess it is a case of semantics. If the hosts are raising an issue like that, obviously you have to be mindful of that."

The ICC cited "safety and security" reasons on Thursday for excluding Hair, who was slammed by Pakistan when they forfeited the Oval Test against England in protest after the umpires changed the ball and penalised them five runs for alleged ball-tampering.

Indian board secretary Niranjana Shah denied BCCI president Sharad Pawar wrote to ICC due to security concerns.

"We could have provided full security," Shah said. "He is in the midst of a controversy. There could be some incident, maybe shouting from the crowd and the media will also be after him."

Pakistan skipper Inzamamul Haq was cleared of ball-tampering charges following a disciplinary hearing on the Oval Test, but he was banned for four one-dayers for bringing cricket into disrepute.

The Pakistan Cricket Board asked the ICC to keep Hair out of their future games and the Champions Trophy.

The ICC spokesman denied the omission was any punishment for Hair, among the most senior umpires in the ICC elite panel.

"No, Darrell Hair is contracted till March 2007 and that remains the case."

Lazio close

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Ventola's overhead kick.

The visitors were back on level terms three minutes later, Giacomo Tedesco's rising half-volley from the edge of the penalty area flying into the top corner.

Scholes's no

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"I respect those decisions when he retired from international football and I don't expect to be asking him again. But door is always open and I would never close it on Paul Scholes."

Deschamps

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his Serie B tally to five goals and Juventus up to 4 points from their starting place at 17.

"There's a long way to go yet, but we are on the right path," said the Frenchman. "Now we have finally understood what Serie B is like, although there are still a few small details to work on."

The situation could yet improve, as Juve's appeal against the penalty will be heard on Wednesday October 11.

"Whether the handicap is reduced or not doesn't depend on us. We will wait and see, but the most important thing is to keep on winning."

Scolari in West

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friend and we have been talking a lot recently.

"He has already approached me to work for him before and every offer he makes is respectful and deserves my attention."

"Right now I am still coaching Portugal but nothing is impossible and no door is closed."

"I often talk about jobs with Kia, if something was to happen in the future I'm sure we would discuss it."

Indecent exposure

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ened. "I did not see it. But if anything did happen, we will look at it with an open mind and deal with it."

"I am sure the timing of our goal had a lot to do with any over-celebration. Maybe also there was the fact that one or two people have been saying things about our away form."

It is not the first time Barton, who was on Everton's books as a schoolboy, has found himself involved in a controversial incident.

He was sent home from City's pre-season tour of Thailand in 2005 after becoming involved in a bar-room brawl.

And he was also hit with a club record fine for stubbing a cigar out in the eye of Jamie Tandy, a City youth team player, during the club's 2004 Christmas party.



PHOTO: AFP

BACK IN ACTION: Indian legend Kapil Dev (R) bowls during a charity cricket match in Yokohama on Sunday.

Atherton lashes at ICC

Cricket

PTI, London

Former England captain Mike Atherton has accused the International Cricket Council of "fudging" the verdict in the Oval ball-tampering case so as not to upset the Asian bloc.

In his column in "The Sunday Telegraph", Atherton said ICC was to be blamed for allowing the Oval Test fiasco to linger on and that its entire conduct during the controversy left a lot to be desired.

"If the spark was precipitated by bad umpiring, it was allowed to develop into a raging fire by the inability of the ICC to act promptly and rigorously," he said.

"The saga showed the ICC at their worst: prevaricating, in that a judgment which should have been handed out on the fourth evening of the game was allowed to fester for a month; callous, when it revealed confidential e-mails from an employee; and ultimately fudging a verdict so as not to upset the key players in this very political game --

the Asian bloc." The former cricketer turned commentator was also of the view that the Oval mistake should not cost Darrell Hair his job.

"It was the brusqueness and insensitivity of Hair's conduct, without a solid evidence, which was at fault," he said adding "I would like to see Hair umpire again at the top level, but I doubt if it will happen."

Meanwhile, Atherton has questioned the rationale behind holding Champions Trophy tournament which he said had more to do with money than cricket.

The cricketer-turned-commentator was also critical of the scheduling of the tournament, coming as it does six months before the World Cup.

"The Champions Trophy, unashamedly, has always had more to do with money than cricket," he wrote in his column for "The Telegraph".

"The Champions Trophy... Has nothing to do with finding the best one-day team and a lot to do with empire-building," he said citing profits that the International Cricket Council stands to make from the tournament starting in India on Oct

7.

"The Champions Trophy, it could be said, encapsulates the essence of the central debate that currently exercises the minds of those who run the game.

"How far can the boundaries of cricket's integrity be stretched within the framework required to raise funds for the continuing expansion of the game? How much is too much? At what point will the general public take a stand against the gradual erosion of quality for the sake of more profit?" Atherton said the administrators were siding with short-term expansion and profit.

"No organisation that can schedule a mini-World Cup, which is essentially what the Champions Trophy is, six months before the real thing can claim otherwise.

"The public should know better than to fall for such a sucker punch, but the Indian public are the least discerning of the cricketing audiences. One-day international cricket there, in any shape or form, is likely to sell," he wrote.

ECB to seek \$1.5m damages

CRICINFO, undated

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) may ask the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to pay damages up to \$1.5 million for losses the ECB incurred because of the cancellation of the fifth day of The Oval Test. In the next few days the PCB is likely to receive formal notification from the ECB on this matter, The Sunday Times reported.

After Pakistan refused to come out of the dressing room to resume play following the tea interval on day four because of being penalised for unproven ball-tampering charges, the match was awarded to England. The spectators who turned up on day four have been refunded 40% of their ticket price and those who bought tickets for the fifth day have been refunded the entire ticket amount by the ECB.

On their part, the Pakistan board feels that Darrell Hair, the umpire at the centre of the controversy, and not the PCB, is to blame for the abandonment of play at The Oval. "We consider it not our responsibility that this Test was abandoned in the way it was," Shaharyar Khan, the PCB chairman told The Sunday Times.

Given the cordial relations that exist between the two boards it is unlikely that either of them would risk confrontation on this issue. Meanwhile, the PCB plans to ask the ICC that the charge of bringing the game to disrepute be brought upon Hair. This would make the ICC responsible for reimbursing the ECB for the monetary losses suffered.

"The situation won't be left as it is," said Waseem Khokhar, of the Pakistan board's lawyers DLA Piper. "There is the strength and resolve to see that the right course of action is taken. There is an immense amount of hurt and sense of grievance."

Barca too good

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laboured and they did not get a shot on target until a minute before the break when Ustaritz turned Gudjohnsen's cross into his own goal under pressure from Carles Puyol.

Barca's Mexican defender Rafael Marquez thumped a fierce volley against Bilbao's post a minute after the restart, but it was Gudjohnsen who put the visitors in front, nipping through a static defence to stab Xavi's pass into the net.

Saviola came on for the Icelander in the 71st minute and soon after finished off a fine passing move that involved Ronaldinho, Xavi and Andres Iniesta before the Argentine shot low into the corner for his first Barca goal in two years.

Schumacher

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his seventh title, but he has tasted victory in Japan and Brazil before and could easily win both again.

If he needed any omens, it came when Alonso dropped his magnum of champagne over the podium balcony to a Renault mechanic below -- who failed to grasp the bottle and saw it smash into smithereens.

Schumacher's was fielded safely.

In a race full of incident, particularly in the later stages, Schumacher was more than 20 seconds behind Alonso before roaring back into contention.

"The most critical decision was after the first pit stop, which tyres to go to, and it was obviously a gamble," said Schumacher, who swept past Fisichella as the Italian emerged ahead of him from his second pit stop.

McLaren's Kimi Raikkonen, Schumacher's successor at Ferrari next season, retired with a throttle problem seven laps after he had overtaken Fisichella for second place on lap 13.

Valiant Villa

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side his area before clearing upfield. Ivan Campo teed up the resulting free-kick for Speed, in his 750th league game, to lash home on 30 minutes.

However, television replays indicated Reina was inside his area and Liverpool's Spanish manager Rafael Benitez could not hide his frustration and annoyance.

"It's clear that a mistake has been made," Benitez told the club's Web site. "Pepe let go of the ball inside the area and then kicked it outside. The linesman was in a bad position."

"I knew at the time it was a mistake but what can you do? Every week we can talk about incidents but nothing changes. It's annoying." Campo headed Bolton's second goal in the 51st minute.

Micah Richards got Manchester City's equaliser in the fourth minute of stoppage time at Goodison Park after England striker Andy Johnson had notched his sixth of the season for Everton.

Tampering not unusual

Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

Ball-tampering is commonplace in world cricket and there were suspicions about marks on the ball used by Pakistan at The Oval, claims analyst Simon Hughes.

But he also believes England and other countries break the letter of the law.

"Bowlers around the world have effected the art of slightly manipulating the ball by little, tiny, gentle scratches, mimicking the natural wear and tear.

"I don't think it's any different to what England players and others do, countries do," said Hughes.

Hughes, a key witness for Pakistan in captain Inzamamul Haq's disciplinary hearing, said England players, "suck sweets and then rub sugary saliva on the ball, which is not permitted in the laws".

He told BBC Five Live's Sportsweek programme: "We get in a great big lather about this but it's just minor things on the ball that might or might not help it to swing a little bit and make the game more interesting."

"If we're honest about this most bowlers in the world -- of all coun-

tries -- do kind of tamper with the ball in some way or other when they're bowling with it."

Hughes, a former seam bowler who played for Middlesex and Durham, examined the ball after Pakistan were penalised for ball-tampering during the fourth Test.

Inzamam was this week cleared of ball-tampering because of a lack of "cogent evidence", although he received a four-match ban for leading the team's subsequent protest.

"There were a few minor scratches on it, which are fairly typical of a fairly old ball on a fourth-day pitch," said Hughes of the ball.

"One or two of the scratches were concentrated on one area and that slightly aroused my suspicions."

"But it was impossible to say for sure whether they got there naturally or with human intervention."

Former England spinner John Embury, who is now Middlesex coach, told Sportsweek these methods went on in county cricket.

"It does happen. I think our players have done it. I think players from other counties have done it to try to see what reaction there is," he said.

"There will always be bowlers trying various means to try and make the ball do something."

Eleni downs Ai for title

Tennis

AFP, Seoul

Greece's Eleni Daniilidou won the 145,000-dollar Korean Open here Sunday in heroic fashion by beating fourth seed Ai Sugiyama of Japan 6-3, 2-6, 7-6.

The 24-year-old defeated the world number 27 despite finishing the match in obvious pain and collapsed to the ground in agony as Sugiyama's return hit the net after 2 hours 36 minutes of thrilling entertainment at Seoul Olympic Park.

With the game balanced finely at 2-2 in the tie-break in the final set, Daniilidou twisted her knee while hitting a fine winner down the line.

Despite getting back to her feet

after receiving lengthy treatment, the Cretan-born player was in obvious pain.

The world number 58 battled on to win the tie-break 7-3 to bring the crowd to their feet in delight.

That wasn't the only obstacle the athletic Daniilidou overcame. She was down 4-5 and 0-40 in the final set but came back to take the match into the tie break.

It was a dramatic end to an absorbing contest.

There had been little to separate the two with the European serving better but the Japanese star looking fresher after a gruelling week in the South Korean capital.

At the beginning of the final set it was anybody's game. Chances were few and far between.

At 5-4, the experienced

Sugiyama had her opportunity.

"I'm a little disappointed. It was tough to lose in that kind of situation. I was leading 5-4 and had three matchpoints -- that was the key," Sugiyama explained after the game.

"In the tie break, it is not easy to play a normal game when the other player is injured. I was just pushing the ball back in the court as I thought she couldn't move but she was still hitting the ball really well."

Subsequently, the momentum was with Daniilidou whose battered knee couldn't prevent her lifting the trophy and being saluted by a sizeable and admiring crowd.

Martina Hingis was the top seed but the world number eight was eliminated in the second round.

Pioneer football

SPORTS REPORTER

An early strike by Hanif gave Bangladesh Sporting full three points in the Pioneer Football Super League yesterday with a 1-0 win over Maghbazar Krira Chakra at the Bishreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur.

Hanif scored the all important goal in the Group D match in the ninth minute.

In a Group C match, Nawabpur Krira Chakra split points with Mohammadpur Sonali Sangha in a 1-1 draw. Sabbarpur Nawabpur ahead after seven minutes while Ashish equalised for the Mohammadpur outfit five minutes later.

Mahela pledges

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"I now have a regular batting slot which has given me a lot of freedom. It was a bit difficult to be consistent in the initial years (of my career) when I had no fixed batting place."

Jayawardene said Marvan Atapattu's return from an injury and Sanath Jayasuriya's current form auger well for the team.

"Marvan's return is a bonus. He is an experienced batsman and has given us more options. It is also good to see Sanath in good form. He is a great asset."

The Sri Lankan captain, however, declined to pick winners, saying every team was focused.

"Playing any team is a challenge in this tournament. Any team can win. Just remember how the West Indies came from nowhere to lift the trophy (in England) last time," he said.



PHOTO: AFP

Greek youngster Eleni Daniilidou is ecstatic after beating Japan's Ai Sugiyama during the final of the Korea Open tennis tournament in Seoul on Sunday.

Champions Trophy squads

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Abdul Razzqa, Shoab Akhtar, Shahid Afridi, Shoab Malik, Kamran Akmal, Rana Naved, Mohammad Asif, Umar Gul, Mohammad Hafeez, Rao Iftikhar.

AUSTRALIA: Ricky Ponting (captain), Adam Gilchrist, Nathan Bracken, Stuart Clark, Michael Clarke, Brad Hogg, Michael Hussey, Mitchell Johnson, Simon Katich, Brett Lee, Damien Martyn, Glenn McGrath, Shane Watson, Andrew Symonds.

INDIA: Rahul Dravid (captain), Virender Sehwag, Sachin Tendulkar, Yuvraj Singh, Mohammad Kaif, Dinesh Mongia, Suresh Raina, Mahendra Dhoni, Ramesh Powar, Harbhajan Singh, Irfan Pathan, Ajit Agarkar, Rudra Pratap Singh, Munar Patel.

SRI LANKA: Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Kumar Sangakkara, Sanath Jayasuriya, Marvan Atapattu, Upul Tharanga, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Chamara Kapugedara, Farveez Maharoof, Chaminda Vaas, Ruchira Perera, Dilhara Fernando, Lasith Malinga, Malinga Bandara, Muttiah Muralidaran.

SOUTH AFRICA: Graeme Smith

(captain), Loots Bosman, Mark Boucher, AB de Villiers, Boeta Dippenaar, Herschelle Gibbs, Andrew Hall, Jacques Kallis, Justin Kemp, Charl Langeveldt, Andre Nel, Makhaya Ntini, Robin Peterson, Shaun Pollock.

WEST INDIES: Brian Lara (captain), Ramnaresh Sarwan, Chris Gayle, Shivnarine Chanderepaul, Runako Morton, Dwayne Bravo, Dwayne Smith, Carlton Baugh, Corey Collymore, Fidel Edwards, Ian Bradshaw, Jerome Taylor, Marlon Samuels, Wavell Hinds.

ZIMBABWE: Prosper Utseya (captain), Stuart Matsikenyeri, Brendan Taylor, Vusi Sibanda, Elton Chigumbura, Hamilton Masakadza, Terry Duffin, Tawanda Mupariwa, Ed Rainsford, Piet Rinke, Anthony Ireland, Gregory Strydom, Chamu Chibhabha, Tafadzwa Kamungozi.

ENGLAND: Andrew Flintoff (captain), James Anderson, Ian Bell, Rikki Clarke, Paul Collingwood, Jamie Dalrymple, Stephen Harmison, Ed Joyce, Sajid Mahmood, Jon Lewis, Kevin Pietersen, Chris Read, Andrew Strauss, Michael Yardy.

A test for the best

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surgery to test himself against the best before resuming his rivalry with the Australians.

"I cannot wait to go to India," said Flintoff.

"I have missed 12 weeks of the season. I have trained hard and worked hard to get back out on the cricket field, so India is something I am desperately looking forward to."

Also back from a long lay-off is premier Australian paceman Glenn McGrath, who is expected to play a key role in the Ashes. He figured in a couple of matches in the recent one-day series in Kuala Lumpur which was won by the Australians.

There will be no dearth of stars as most teams are at full strength and keen to get into the groove ahead of the World Cup.

South Africans Jacques Kallis and Graeme Smith, India's Sachin Tendulkar, Pakistan's Shoab Akhtar and New Zealanders Scott Styris and Shane Bond all are back after suffering injuries in recent times.