

'Final's venue of WC not yet fixed'

BBC ONLINE, *undated*

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Nasim Ashraf says India is not certain to host the 2011 World Cup final, despite claims to the contrary.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has announced several times that it will host the tournament's final as well as 22 group matches.

"I don't think the allotment of matches or the venue for the final is done as yet," said Ashraf.

"We are holding a joint meeting on December 11 to discuss these issues.

India and Pakistan are hosting the tournament along with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, but Ashraf said the schedule still had to be finalised.

"The meeting has been called to sort out these things," added Ashraf.

"But we are confident everything will be finalised amicably in consultation with the other boards."

Pakistan and India jointly hosted the 1987 World Cup with the final in Kolkata.

And in 1996 they were joined by Sri Lanka in organising the World Cup, with the final held in Lahore.

PCB protests Kaul claims

REUTERS, *Lahore*

Pakistan has asked the International Cricket Council (ICC) to investigate allegations made by an Indian security officer about the behaviour of Pakistani players during the Champions trophy.

The Indian security officer of the Pakistan team in the tournament, Anil Kaul, made allegations to Indian television channels that fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar slapped coach Bob Woolmer on the team bus in Jaipur.

He also alleged other rude behaviour by Shoaib and other players.

"We have sent our protest in writing to the ICC as the Indian board has distanced itself from Kaul's appointment," Saleem Altaf, the PCB's director of cricket operations, told Reuters on Sunday.

"We have asked them to investigate the matter and take some action against this fellow based on their findings," Altaf said.

Hussain slates Harmison

PTI, *Melbourne*

Former England captain Nasser Hussain has flayed Steve Harmison for his recent lacklustre performances saying the fast bowler had only himself to blame and should work harder in his preparation.

"Steve has only got himself to blame. He needs to have a look at the amount of bowling he has put in and needs to realise that when he is not bowling well he needs to put in twice the effort," Hussain said on Sunday.

He said Harmison must lift his tempo with the Ashes opener in Brisbane due in 11 days.

Harmison did not play in England's tour opening debacle against the Prime Minister's XI on Friday but gets his chance to impress in a three-day game against New South Wales which began on Sunday.

Christmas could

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the recurrence of a calf complaint which will keep him out of England's friendly trip to Holland in midweek.

The United manager will clearly hope that the long-serving Neville is soon fit again and ready to take his place in a defence that is bringing back memories of the most effective defensive units of Ferguson's reign.

"If we go back to the '95 season we only conceded 18 goals the whole year," said Ferguson. "And Peter Schmeichel wasn't too happy with his defence that they let in a couple of those."

"Edwin van der Sar is exactly the same, on at his defenders all the time about their concentration and defending properly. We have certainly improved in that department."

Blackburn manager Mark Hughes certainly agreed with that assessment and believed his team could well have lost to the Premiership's next championship team.

"They're more dynamic this year, their play and rotational movement is as good as it has been for years and they have the bit between the teeth," said the former United forward.

"They've got a decent enough squad and will go close. We couldn't have done much more today (Sunday) and asked more questions of United than most teams have this season."



New South Wales batsman Phil Jaques (L) drives the ball back past England bowler Matthew Hoggard who takes evasive action during the first day of their three-day tour match in Sydney on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

Phil a thorn

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bowled Ed Cowan for 26 in his fifth over.

Katich – who had a life on 14 when Marcus Trescothick put down a straight-forward chance at first slip off Andrew Flintoff – was out to a splendid outfield running catch by Kevin Pieterse.

Katich lofted Giles to deep mid-wicket, where Pieterse took a tumbling catch just inside the boundary rope. Katich batted for 194 minutes with six fours.

Anderson, who was knocked about early, bowled better in his second spell with the wicket of Aaron O'Brien for six, caught at first slip by Trescothick.

Clarke, who played in last year's Ashes series, looked composed in his knock of 50 before he edged Panesar to Trescothick at slip ending his 132-minute stay at the crease with six fours.

Flintoff got more encouragement in his comeback from ankle surgery to get through 15 overs without problems for 0-52.

Left-arm spinner Panesar, under-geared in Canberra where he bowled just three overs, had an extended run Sunday, sending down 18 overs. He got a late reward with Clarke's wicket to finish with 1-54.

England and NSW have agreed to play 14 players during the three-day match – which will not have first-class status – but only 11 players a side can bat.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Scoreboard at the close of the opening day of the three-day tour match between New South Wales and England at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday:

NEW SOUTH WALES: First innings 325 for 5 in 90 overs (Jaques 107, Cowan 26, Katich 68, Clarke 50, Smith not out 36; Giles 2-46)

Jaques talks reality

BBC ONLINE, *undated*

Aussie batsman Phil Jaques knows his Test chances are bleak despite his two tons in three days against England.

Opener Jaques hit 11 fours and two sixes in his 107, for New South Wales, just 48 hours after his 112 for the Prime Minister's XI in Canberra.

However, Matthew Hayden and Justin Langer are established at the top of the Test order and Jaques said: "The two guys that are there are fantastic players."

"I'm expecting the selectors will go with those two."

Born in Sydney to English parents, Jaques is a familiar figure in county cricket, where he has played for Northants, Yorkshire and Worcestershire.

As a British passport-holder he qualified as a domestic player with Northants before deciding late in 2003 that did not want to play for England because "my heart says Australia."

He has made the most of limited opportunities so far, hitting 94 – the best by an Australia one-day debutant – against South Africa and 66 in his second Test, against Bangladesh when Langer was injured.

Cronje.

Pakistan cricket chief Nasim Ashraf said recently that the board would consider an appeal by Malik against his ban.

The issue came up after the International Cricket Council's executive board this month lifted a life ban on former Pakistan fast bowler Aataur Rehman.

Malik visited the board offices on Sunday to meet Ashraf. "I had to come to find out if it is possible for me to submit an appeal with the board. I have always pleaded I am innocent," Malik told reporters.

Nasim Ashraf, the chairman of the board said he had yet to meet Malik and would then see what could be done in case he wants to file an appeal.

Another board official said the cases of Malik and Rehman were different.

"Rehman was banned for committing perjury and a court ordered us to consider his appeal. In Malik's case he was banned for other reasons and his appeal is still pending with the Supreme Court," the official said.

The board has invited former captains Imran Khan, Asif Iqbal, Mushaq Muhammad and Wasim Akram to the seminar.

Chairman Ashraf found himself in an uneasy position at a news conference on Sunday when it was pointed out that the name of former Pakistan captain Javed Miandad, a strong critic of the board who played 124 Tests, was missing from the list.

"I think it is a mistake that is all. His name must not have been mentioned inadvertently. I have spoken to him myself and he is coming," Ashraf said.

A formal confirmed letters were being sent to Miandad and another former skipper, Hanif Mohammad whose name had also not been included in the list.

SLC's noble donation

BBC ONLINE, *undated*

Sri Lanka Cricket handed over the keys to 94 houses to victims of the devastating December 2004 tsunami in the southern town of Matara on Saturday.

The Sri Lankan association, together with World Vision, constructed two villages for some of the victims of Sri Lanka's biggest natural disaster.

The keys were presented by Sports Minister Jeevan Kumaratunga along with former cricket captains Sanath Jayasuriya and Marvan Atapattu, both of whom were born in Matara, a fishing town, and have the villages named after them.

Sanath Jayasuriya village comprises 50 houses while Marvan Atapattu village has 44 houses.

"It was great to see relief on the faces of those people. They have gone through a lot of hardship with some still living in refugee camps," Jayasuriya told AFP.

"It gives me great pleasure to have contributed to a worthy cause," he said. "I thank all cricketers and non-cricketers in New Zealand, Australia and England for their generosity."

The Melbourne Cricket Ground hosted a charity game in January 2005 to raise funds, with stars such as Brian Lara, Sachin Tendulkar, Inzamam ul Haq, Shane Warne and Ricky Ponting playing in the match.

Other games were organised in England and New Zealand.

A complete house in either of the two villages consists of a living room, two bedrooms and a kitchen. Both villages also have playgrounds to encourage children to play sports.

Streets have been named after former and present cricketers including Steve Waugh, Shane Warne and Martin Crowe.

PM appeases Panesar

PTI, *Melbourne*

Amid concerns that Monty Panesar could face racial abuse in the upcoming Ashes series, Australian Prime Minister John Howard has assured the England spinner that there was nothing to be afraid of.

"I think it (crowd comments) will be vigorous but in the very best of humour," Howard was quoted as saying by the local media on Sunday.

While England remains hopeful Panesar will not be racially abused by Australian crowds this summer, South African skipper Graeme Smith said he feared Panesar was "going to cop an unbelievable amount of abuse" during the Ashes campaign.

The first Sikh to play cricket for England, Panesar has spent time with team psychologist Steve Bull discussing how to deal with Australian crowds.

England vice-captain Andrew Strauss has said he knew of no problems and expected tough new penalties to deter potential offenders.

"I am sure they will do," he said on Saturday.

But Smith has warned of the taunts which he feels await Panesar.

"I was chatting to some of our team just the other day and we all shivered at the prospect of what he could be in for," Smith said.

"He is going to cop an unbelievable amount of abuse. I sincerely hope for everyone's sake, but especially his, that it isn't of a racist nature, but our own experience obviously leaves us with doubts."

"Hopefully Monty can become a bit of a folk hero. I can see how that might happen. (But) I dread to think of him fielding on the boundary."

"We have to give those two individuals as much bowling as possible, especially Ashley (Giles) who hasn't bowled for a year, just about, and it's crucial that he gets enough overs under his belt as well."

"From the spin bowling point of view it's going to be a difficult decision and we are looking at playing two spinners in most of the Tests..." he said.

"We have to give those two individuals as much bowling as possible, especially Ashley (Giles) who hasn't bowled for a year, just about, and it's crucial that he gets enough overs under his belt as well."

"We respect and speak highly of him (Mahmood) but we are concerned about his consistency," Fletcher said.

"And that's one thing when we go

Yousuf shows sympathy for bowlers

AFP, *Lahore*

Pakistan's prolific batsman Mohammad Yousuf on Sunday had kind words for bowlers, whom he has been punishing all through the year, saying they deserved better wickets.

"I think world over, wickets in general are flat and Test cricket has become a batsmen-dominated game," said Yousuf.

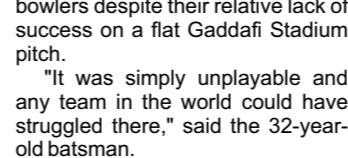
He said he had seen flat wickets since making his debut in South Africa eight years ago.

"I've been seeing flat wickets for the last 10 years or so and there's little help for the bowlers," said Yousuf, whose century on Sunday was his sixth this year.

"It doesn't mean that lot of grass should be left on the wicket where it becomes impossible for batsmen to play strokes, but at least there should be some bounce that could encourage the bowlers," he said.

He praised the West Indian bowlers despite their relative lack of success on a flat Gaddafi Stadium pitch.

"It was simply unplayable and any team in the world could have struggled there," said the 32-year-old batsman.



Winning start for Federer

AFP, *Shanghai*

World number one Roger Federer came from a set down to demolish defending champion David Nalbandian 3-6, 6-1, 6-1, while Andy Roddick won a tight match with Ivan Ljubicic as the Masters Cup opened on Sunday.

The fired-up Roddick, under the watchful eye of mentor Jimmy Connors, squandered two match points in a second-set tie-breaker before coming through 6-4, 6-7 (9-11), 6-1.

Earlier Federer, who missed last week's Paris Masters citing fatigue, committed a string of unforced errors in a rusty first set as the tournament kicked off with a re-run of the classic 2005 final.

But the Swiss machine soon clicked into gear, producing some vintage moments as Nalbandian imploded.

"This is the defending champion, I knew it was going to be tough," Federer said. "He was just a better player in the beginning, thank God I was able to turn it around."

"It's always very important to win the first match in a round robin so this is a very good start for me."

The 2003 and 2004 champion is bidding to become the first player to win three Masters Cup titles and the first man since Pete Sampras to win three year-ending championships.

He was broken in the third game before breaking back for 3-3, as Nalbandian became the first Masters Cup player to challenge a line-call using the new "Hawkeye" video technology and was overruled.

But the Argentine found a forehand return to break and was gifted the first set by Federer's only double-fault of the match.

It was a different story in the second set as Federer broke immediately and thrilled the Qi Zhong Stadium crowd with some brilliant tennis to level it in 28 minutes.

The Swiss took the fourth game with a quick interchange at the net, and charged from behind the baseline to chase down a drop shot as he broke again for 4-1.

After holding to love, Federer converted his first set point when Nalbandian found the net.

The game was up for Nalbandian when the Argentine world number seven was broken twice in the deciding set.

With the error count ticking higher, Nalbandian finally won a game for 5-1 but then handed the Swiss the first of three match points as he dumped a forehand into the net.

Nalbandian also lost last year's opening round-robin match to Federer before coming from behind to beat the hobbling Swiss in the

final of the elite, season-ending tournament.

"I'm still in the fight, nothing is finished today," Nalbandian said.

"I have to win the next two matches and I know if I play well I can beat them. I have to work a little bit more."

In Sunday's second Red Group match Roddick, resurgent under Connors' tutelage, harangued the umpire in the style of John McEnroe as he emerged from two close-fought sets to take the third with ease.

The combustible American drew whistles from the crowd as he lambasted umpire Mohamed Lahyani after a line judge called a Ljubicic serve out before changing his mind.

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Tennis

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at himself after putting a forehand long, broke the fading Ljubicic twice before serving out.

"I avoided the big blow-up today, which I was flirting with. I always feel when I'm playing well I'm able to bring it back when I need to and use it," Roddick said.

"I hear that everybody here was calling this group the 'Group of Death' but the way I see it only two players are dying, so I don't want to be one of them."

It was Roddick's first match since aggravating a foot injury at last month's Madrid Masters, and stretches his record against the Croatian to 6-3.

Ljubicic was also returning to competition after suffering an allergic reaction to prescription drugs.



Swiss world number one Roger Federer is a picture of concentration as he prepares to serve during his match against Argentina's David Nalbandian at the Tennis Masters Cup in Shanghai on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

the point. My argument wasn't with Hawkeye or with the call at all," he said later.

Roddick, who missed last year's tournament with a back injury, then let slip two match points as he lost the second-set tie-break 9-11.

But he got lucky with a net cord after five deuces to save for 2-1.

The world number five, scream-

"I was in bed for 17 days," he said. "I couldn't move, I couldn't run. After 2-1 in the third set I was dead."

World number two Rafael Nadal will play James Blake in Monday's Gold Group opener while Russia's Nikolay Davydenko takes on Tommy Robredo.

"I enjoyed playing tennis this week but it's been a very frustrating year," said Clijsters.

"And there were definitely days and weeks even where I wanted to stop (my career) already.

"Never say never but I'm going to stop after next season. This is something that I've thought about for a long time.

"It's been hard. My wrist will always be the weakest part of my body. I'll be very happy to not have to do all that other stuff anymore."

"I would love to start a family. There's a lot of things I want to do. I enjoy working with kids. We'll see."

In April Clijsters, who was once engaged to Australian tennis star Lleyton Hewitt, announced her engagement to American basketball player Brian Lynch.

Maria delighted with season

Tennis

AFP, *Madrid*

Russian pin-up Maria Sharapova said she was delighted with her season despite seeing it ended in the WTA Championships semi-finals here against Justine Henin-Hardenne.

That defeat also meant the US Open champion missed out on the chance to end the season as the world number one, a position that will be held by her conqueror when the end-of-year rankings are published next week.

But having matched her best season in winning five titles, including a Grand Slam, and having doubled her career prize money, Sharapova is understandably pleased with the way this season progressed, even if her last match was a disappointment, losing 6-2, 7-6 (7/5).

"I had a bad day. I struggled to concentrate for more than two points at a time. I don't know why," said the Russian.

"I was a bit tired but I don't think

that was decisive. It was just one of those days."

Sharapova even shrugged off the disappointment of missing out on the rankings top spot and paid tribute to the Belgian.

"Not being number one is not really a disappointment. I'm disappointed I lost, that's all.