

Imran rates Rahul over Inzamam

PTI, New Delhi

Rahul Dravid's leadership qualities has earned him rich accolades from the legendary Imran Khan, who described him as an "aggressive player with good leadership qualities".

Imran Khan, a former Pakistan cricket captain, preferred Dravid as the captain of a combined India-Pakistan team ahead of Inzamamul Haq.

Dravid took over as the captain of the Indian team from Sourav Ganguly following the Bengal batsman's spat with coach Greg Chappell in September last year.

Asked why he opted for Dravid ahead of Inzamam as the captain of the hypothetical team, Imran told NDTV that the Karnataka batsman had good leadership qualities.

"Dravid is a more aggressive player with good leadership qualities", he said.

Billy wants to forget Oval

REUTERS, Mumbai

West Indian umpire Billy Doctrove is keen to put the Oval Test controversy behind him after admitting it was the most difficult moment of his career.

Doctrove partnered Australian Darrell Hair in the August Test match in London that was forfeited by the touring Pakistan side after they were deducted five runs by Hair for alleged ball tampering.

"The period has been a very testing time for me, probably the most testing in my career so far," 51-year-old Doctrove was quoted as saying on the West Indies Cricket Board's official Web site.

Hair, the fourth most-experienced umpire in the history of the sport, was banned by the International Cricket Council earlier this month from umpiring in international matches.

Doctrove, who has stood in nine Tests and 56 one-day internationals, is scheduled to officiate in the one-day series between hosts South Africa and India starting on Sunday and is looking forward to getting back to work.

"I do not believe that there is any additional pressure placed on me because of what happened at the Oval," Doctrove said.

"What has happened has happened. The controversies are all behind me. I consider them as history and you have to be able to take your bruises, as our local calypso king said.

"You have to take your bruises in life and get up and fight. That is exactly what I am doing. As I said, I am happy to be back out there and I will just go out there and do what I have to do."

Revenge sweet

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lost the first leg to Qatar 2-1 on March 1 but all the three goals then had been scored by Qataris -- Adel Lamy and Ali Nasser in the opposite direction while Bilal Mohamed had managed to score and own goal.

Koshelev, who plays for Russian club Shinnik, fired the Uzbeks into the lead in the 31st minute before Serie B side Genoa star Zeytullayev scored what proved to be final goal of the game in the 53rd minute. Uzbekistan were forced to play without Dynamo Kiev hitman Maksim Shatskikh after he was sent-off on the hour.

Despite the defeat, Jamaluddin Musovic's men still sign off atop the group with 15 points from six games, followed by Uzbekistan on 11 points.

Ahmed Salah snatched a 1-1 draw for Iraq with his second half strike against China to help the West Asians finish on top of Group E in the AFC Asian Cup 2007 qualifying in Changsha.

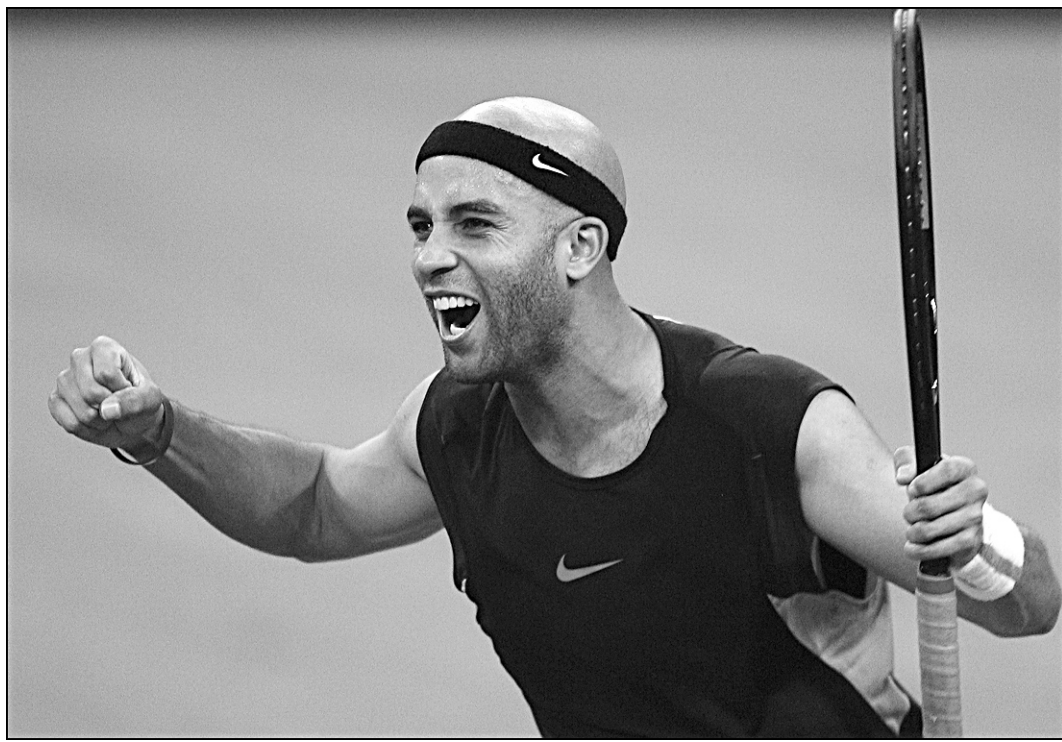
Attacking midfielder Salah equalised the score with his 65th minute strike after Shandong Luneng striker Han Peng had given the hosts the lead four minutes before the break.

The Iraqis' 2-1 triumph in the opening leg combined with yesterday's draw gave them top place in the group on head-to-head after both ended with 11 points from six outings.

Both Iraq and China had made sure of their place in the finals with wins over Singapore and Palestine respectively in the previous round.

Syria blanked Chinese Taipei 3-0 while India drew 1-1 away in Yemen. The match between Singapore and Palestine, to be played in Singapore, was cancelled.

The move was necessitated after the Palestinian team failed to travel out of the country due to the heightened political tensions in Gaza. Repeated attempts to contact the Palestinian FA in this regard failed.



American James Blake celebrates after beating Russia's Nikolay Davydenko in the Masters Cup in Shanghai yesterday.

Blake downs Davydenko

Tennis

AFP, Shanghai

Surprise package James Blake recovered from a miserable start to beat Nikolay Davydenko 2-6, 6-4, 7-5 and move within sight of the Masters Cup semifinals on Wednesday.

Blake, the bottom seed and last player to qualify, needed seven attempts to hold serve before he found his rhythm in the second set and broke late for the third.

It was Blake's second win over a high-ranking opponent here after he shocked number two Rafael Nadal in straight sets in his opening round-robin match.

Blake, who stretched his record against Davydenko to 5-0, will qualify for the last four if Nadal beats compatriot Tommy Robredo in Wednesday's later Gold Group match.

Davydenko said he was ill-prepared for the match after coming down with a virus.

"I wasn't ready. My tennis is good but physically I wasn't ready," he said.

"It's not because I never beat Blake. I felt like I should have beaten him today because I was playing well.

"I think if I played faster I would have had a good chance."

Davydenko was the first to find form in an error-strewn opening set when neither player was able to hold serve for six games.

The Russian finally held for 4-2, whipping a forehand past Blake as he came to the net, and broke again before serving out.

Blake went down another break early in the second before eventually holding, sparking the revival as he broke for the first time for 4-4 and then again to tie the match at a set each.

The players exchanged breaks in the third set before Blake converted his third match point, breaking for 7-5 as Davydenko misfired with a forehand.

Blake had won all four previous matches with Davydenko.

He qualified for the tournament on the back of a breakthrough season in which he snared five titles and entered the top 10 for the first time.

Davydenko is also at a career-high ranking after a globe-trotting year in which he played 31 tournaments before the Masters Cup.

He rose to number three after winning last week's Paris Masters and will face Nadal in his final group match.

The world's top eight players are competing in the 4.45-million-dollar, season-ending tournament, which is in a round-robin format ahead of Saturday's semifinals.

ICC confirms clean CT

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

Random dope tests conducted on 24 cricketers at the recent Champions Trophy in India turned out to be negative, a relieved International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Tuesday.

The lone blip was the Pakistani pace duo of Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif testing positive for the banned steroid nandrolone in tests conducted by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) before the biennial event.

Akhtar and Asif were both sent home without playing in the tournament when the PCB announced the results a day before Pakistan's first match against Sri Lanka in Jaipur on October 17.

The PCB later banned Akhtar for two years and Asif for one year. The Champions Trophy was the

first tournament involving Test-playing nations where doping tests were conducted since the ICC signed the World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) code in July.

Two players from each team were randomly selected for testing from six of the tournament's 21 matches, including one semi-final and the final between eventual champions Australia and the West Indies, the ICC said in a statement.

The tests were submitted to the WADA-accredited laboratory in Malaysia.

"The fact all the tests conducted at the Champions Trophy have been negative is great news for our sport," ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed said in the statement.

"It confirms cricket's reputation for being low risk when it comes to drug use but that does not mean the ICC, or any of our members, can afford to be complacent in this area.

"To this end, five of our full members -- Australia, England, New

Zealand, Pakistan and South Africa -- are already testing outside of ICC events and the West Indies is set to join that list in the near future.

"We would encourage all our remaining members not already doing so to follow suit for the good of the game.

"That way, if cricket does have a drug-related problem -- and I do not believe it has -- it can be identified and dealt with so that we make sure our sport gets stronger as a result.

"We should never forget that cricketers are role models and they need to be sending out the right messages to the public, and that is one of the reasons why we must continue to have a zero tolerance on drug use," said Speed.

Random testing will also take place at the World Cup in the Caribbean next March.

Lara wanted to bat on

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the opener high on his pads and was clearly missing the stumps.

Silva also erred when he did not refer a close stumping decision to the third umpire when Pakistan's Mohammad Yousuf seemed out of his crease. Yousuf went on to score 192 runs.

"They (umpiring decisions) are part of the game and you have to accept them. Some days tough decisions go against you and some days they don't," said Lara.

West Indian captain hoped his side would stage a comeback in the second Test starting in Multan from November 19.

"We still got the rest of the series to look forward to, we have made some inroads in terms of playing in Pakistan. Majority of the players are playing for the first time in Pakistan and there are still 10 days of Test cricket to play," he said.

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq said it was easy once Lara was dismissed.

"Lara was the danger man but once he was dismissed we knew the win was around the corner," said Inzamam, who was playing his first match after being banned for four one-day matches for bringing the game into disrepute at the Oval in England in August.

Inzamam did not agree Pakistan was playing with a second string pace attack without key pacemen Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif, who were banned on doping charges.

"This was our best 15 and I don't think this was the second string. All the players did well and Mohammad Yousuf was at his usual best," said Inzamam.

The third Tests is scheduled for Karachi from November 27.

Pace works for Rajshahi

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burst that did the trick for Rajshahi. He scalped opposition skipper Tushar Imran (14), all-rounder Manjarul Islam (0), wicketkeeper Sahagir Hossain (4) and Jamaluddin (0) to reduce Khulna to 104 for six just after lunch. Later he picked up the final wicket of Dollar Mahmud to complete his five-wicket feat.

Only veteran opener Sajjadul Hasan batted with some conviction when everyone around him fell so easily. He watched from the other end as the Rajshahi bowlers got the better of his fellow batsmen. He hit nine boundaries and a six in his 164-ball knock of 72.

Number eight batsman Abdur Razzak (25) stuck around for nearly an hour to share a 47-run seventh wicket stand with Sajjad before falling

to Shahjada. Later, Shahjada had the Khulna's top-scorer Sajjad caught by Naeem Islam on 168 as the ninth wicket. Apart from Mushfiq's five-for, Shahjada picked up three vital wickets while left-armer Shafaqul Jabir took 2 for 44.

Rajshahi opens Junaid Imrose dominated the Khulna attack as he was not out on 40 along with Forhad Hossain (9 not out) as they are on a 62-run opening stand.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SYLHET: First innings- 281 for 7 in 90 overs (Baisya 98*, Mabud 80; Tareq 3-53, Sunny 2-50).

KHULNA: First innings- 179 all out in 65.5 overs (Sajjadul 72, Razzak 25; Mushfiqur 5-51, Shahjada 3-49).

RAJSHAH: First innings- 62 for no loss in 17 overs (Junaid 40*).

Biman cross a major hurdle

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Biman edged defending champions Leonine in a battle of Grandmasters in the Dutch-Bangla First Division Chess League at the federation-hall-room yesterday.

Biman's 2.5-0.5 victory consolidated their bid to regain the title as they stayed atop of the table with 38 points after 11 games. Leonine remained third with 33.5 points, also from 11 matches. They are 2.5 points behind Chittagong Mohammedan, who have played a match more.

GM Ziaur Rahman inspired the Biman victory when he beat his GM Iulidachev Saidali. The other boards were drawn as Biman's GM Reefat Bin Sattar, IM Abdullah Al Rakib and FM Mehdi Hasan Parag shared points with GM Niaz Murshed, GM Safin Shukhrat and Mohammed Ali respectively.

In yesterday's 12th round matches, Chittagong Mohammedan beat Destiny 2000 2.5-0.5 while Narayanjan City Chess Club defeated Faith Chess Club 3-1.

The other matches -- Muktiyoddah Sangsad v Sonali Bank, Titus Club v Friends Chess Power, Mohakhali Prodip Sangha v Rajshahi Daba Unnayan Sangstha and Dhaka University Chess team v Farashganj Sporting Club -- ended in draws.

Two rookies in SL squad

CRICINFO, undated

Sri Lanka have named their Test and one-day squads for the tour of New Zealand which starts next month.

As the board announced on Tuesday Marvan Atapattu is not included in the Test party but there are recalls for Chamara Silva and Akalanka Ganegama.

Silva is a middle-order batsman and leg-spinner who played the last of his 10 one-day internationals against India at Bristol in 2002 while Ganegama is a 25-year-old seam bowler. Neither player has yet won a Test cap and Silva is likely to compete for a place in the final XI with Chamara Kapugedera.

TEST SQUAD

Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Kumar Sangakkara, Sanath Jayasuriya, Upul Tharanga, Tilakaratne Dilshan, Chamara Kapugedera, Chamara Silva, Prasanna Jayawardene, Farveez Maharoof, Chaminda Vaas, Lasith Malinga, Dilhara Fernando, Akalanka Ganegama, Muttiah Muralidaran.

ONE-DAY SQUAD

Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Kumar Sangakkara, Sanath Jayasuriya, Upul Tharanga, Marvan Atapattu, Tilakaratne Dilshan, Chamara Kapugedera, Chamara Silva, Farveez Maharoof, Chaminda Vaas, Lasith Malinga, Dilhara Fernando, Muttiah Muralidaran, Malinga Bandara, Ruchira Perera.

Sania wiser on b'day

PTI, New Delhi

Sania Mirza is unrattled by the criticism that has followed her recent drop in rankings on WTA charts and says she has learnt to take failures in her stride.

Wiser perhaps on turning 20 -- which she did on Wednesday -- Sania said it was difficult to live up to the expectations of a billion of people.

"The pressure of expectations is part of every sportsperson's life. I have become conditioned to it now and anyway you cannot live up to the expectations of everyone," said the tennis star who finished the year ranked 66th after starting it on an enviable 31st.

The Hyderabad lass said she found it amazing how the cricketers handled the pressure that comes from playing the country's favourite sport.

"In terms of popularity tennis has only caught up lately. Indians have been crazy about cricket since ages. I really admire the cricketers for their ability to handle with ease all the pressure," she said at a promotional event here last night.

The pressure and the mindgames involved in sports has drawn her into psychology and she wants to pursue the subject seriously once she gives up tennis.

"If I had not been a tennis player, I would have been a psychologist. In fact I am pursuing psychology right now and once I give up tennis, I will think of a career in psychology", she said.

Seamers under

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pacers would only intensify and only at the end of it would one know who has been left standing.

India would take no chances with its batsmen and all the top ones are most likely to be paraded in the middle.

Everyone, from Sachin Tendulkar to Virender Sehwag to Rahul Dravid, would be keen to hit the ground. A certain Mahendra Singh Dhoni's elevation in the batting order would also be watched with interest.

Joyce in for Trescothick

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

England said Wednesday it had called up Middlesex batsman Ed Joyce as the replacement for opening batsman Marcus Trescothick on the Ashes cricket tour of Australia.

Somerset opener Trescothick returned home Wednesday after a recurrence of his stress-related illness forced him to quit the Australian tour.

Joyce, 28, was promoted from England's Academy squad, who arrives in Perth later Wednesday for a five-week training camp, and has yet to play in a Test match.

The left-hander made his international debut in June in a limited overs match against

Ireland -- his country of birth -- and played a further two times in the shortened form of the game during the English summer.

Chairman of selectors David Graveney said on the English and Wales Cricket Board's web-site: "As we already have other players in the squad who have experience of opening the innings, we have decided to choose a replacement who will be able to cover a number of different positions within the order.

"Ed is a highly promising player who has performed well for Middlesex this season and I am sure he will be delighted to be part of an Ashes squad."

Joyce will join the Ashes squad in Adelaide Friday, where England is playing a three-day game against South Australia ahead of the November 23 opening Ashes

Test in Brisbane.

Trescothick failed to find form in his two innings on the Australian tour, scoring two against the Prime Minister's XI and eight against New South Wales in the three-day match that finished in a draw here Tuesday.

The Somerset left-hander failed to return to the field during the NSW second innings with his England teammates Tuesday.

Trescothick suffered a stress disorder that forced him to take a complete break to recover during England's India tour last February and the subsequent English summer.

Trescothick, who will be 31 next month, has played 76 Tests for England, scoring 5,825 runs at 43.79 with 14 centuries.

Marcus broke down

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Marcus Trescothick suffered a breakdown during Day Two of the match against New South Wales and had to be cared for by the team doctor for two hours before asking for a release from the Ashes tour.

Duncan Fletcher, the England coach, had already considered sending Trescothick home when the incident occurred on Monday.

"We decided well maybe the best way to deal with it was bring his wife (Hayley) out," Fletcher told AAP. "And then I was a little bit uncomfortable about that, because was that going to help the problem?"

Fletcher was planning to talk to Trescothick, who scored 8 before being bowled by Brett Lee, after the game about whether he should end the tour before the first Test. "I was pretty uncomfortable about it (sending him home)," Fletcher said. "It was taken out of my hands when Marcus came off the field in the afternoon (on Monday) and there was a recurrence of the problem he had in India."

Trescothick flew back to England in the lead-up to the first Test against India in February and he also missed the Champions Trophy in the same country last month before declaring his fitness for the Ashes. "He was feeling pretty upset," Fletcher said of the SCG episode. "He wanted to go back." Trescothick

boarded a plane for England on Tuesday and a replacement will come from the team of "shadow" players that is due in Perth this week.

"It was unpleasant in the change room with him," Fletcher said. "The doctor just had to sit and console him for about two hours or so. After a while the doctor spoke to him and said to him it's best if he does go home. I only told the chaps last night after the game."

Fletcher hoped the illness would not force the end of Trescothick's 76-Test career. "I can't say at this stage," he said. "It would be foolish of me to turn around and say anyone's Test career is over."

Kaneria to work on Lara

Cricket

REUTERS, Lahore

Pakistan leg-spinner Danish Kaneria will go back to the drawing board to restrict master batsman Brian Lara after the West Indies skipper reeled off his third successive hundred against Pakistan in the first Test.

"He is the most difficult batsman I have ever bowled to and the finest player of spin," Kaneria said of Lara who made 61 and 122 in a match Pakistan won by nine wickets on Tuesday.

Lara, Test cricket's leading scorer with 11,688 runs in 129 matches, blasted his 33rd century to follow scores of 130 and 153 against Pakistan last year in the Caribbean.

Kaneria helped Pakistan win the second Test in Jamaica after bowling Lara around his legs for a duck in the second innings.

"I have bowled against all the top batsmen in the world but Lara is exceptional, no doubt about that," Kaneria, who has enjoyed success against India, Australia and England, told Reuters.

"Bowling to him is a big challenge because he prompts you to raise your game and level of skills. He is one batsman who even punishes a good ball," Kaneria said.

The 25-year old, only the second Hindu to play for Pakistan, took just three wickets in the first Test but has taken his overall tally to an impres-

sive 172 in 41 matches.

He has struggled in his last 10 Tests by his own standards, taking 29 wickets despite being described as a key bowler by his captain Inzamamul Haq.

"I tried giving little width to Lara and bowling a bit quicker to him to give him less time to play his shots. But he adjusted very well to the pitch which was slow and had low bounce," Kaneria said.

"He raises his game according to the challenge. His adjustment is phenomenal," he added.

Kaneria said Lara had lifted his spirits after the game by saying to him: "Well bowled little master."

"It is such praise which qualifies you to become a better bowler," Kaneria said.

Inzamam thinks Lara remains a threat to his team's chances of winning the series.

"He has got a lot of runs against us and we keep on discussing plans to restrict him. But it is never easy against his class," Inzamam said, adding that Kaneria could have had greater rewards in the first Test.

"He bowled very well and I think he was desperately unlucky. He picked up important wickets in the first innings and in the second he was good, just not very lucky."

"He remains our key bowler but we can't expect him to take wickets every time," he added.

The second Test starts in Multan on November 19.

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