

FIFA backs Cambodia boss

AFP, Phnom Penh

Football's world governing body has endorsed the election of a military police chief to head the Cambodia Football Federation, despite concerns of political interference, according to a letter received Friday.

FIFA's chief Sepp Blatter extended his "deepest congratulations" to newly elected Sao Sokha in a letter dated December 18.

Blatter urged Sao Sokha to work to help Cambodian football to "reach new heights and to gain the international recognition it deserves."

"In this task, you can rely on my support and on FIFA assistance," Blatter wrote.

Sao Sokha, a military police chief and a close ally of Prime Minister Hun Sen, was re-elected as the chief of the federation earlier this month after FIFA complained that his first election in April was politically influenced.

Pawar gets

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last year after a bitter election against the Jagmohan Dalimiya faction.

Dalimiya, a former ICC president, was thrown out of the Indian board this month after being accused of fudging accounts related to the 1996 World Cup that India hosted jointly with Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The four sub-continent nations also won the right to stage the 2011 World Cup after defeating a combined bid by Australia and New Zealand.

Spanish play

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contacted us, the FIFA Media Office still received quite a few phone calls.

"The honour of the first such call fell to a Norwegian journalist which proves how much the internet has also done for the promotion of cross-border coverage of international football. Following closely were several Italian journalists and an assortment of international media."

Make or break

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bench at the start of the season will benefit me now," said the former West Ham striker.

"I've always looked after my body, and even if I had started most of the games this season I'd still make sure I felt right for the next game."

"My preparation is always right, that is important to me and I just want to win games now."

"I'll keep working hard, and if I get a chance for England in the New Year then I will definitely be ready."

Terry undergoes

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season, and also two years ago, we were very strong when we scored one goal and they other teams could not think about coming back into the game."

Meanwhile, Manchester City boss Stuart Pearce has denied reports Chelsea are lining up an 18 million pounds (35 million dollars) bid for their England defender Micah Richards.

Chelsea are at home to Fulham in the west London derby on Saturday.

Collina's

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and I'm sure it'll be a great success."

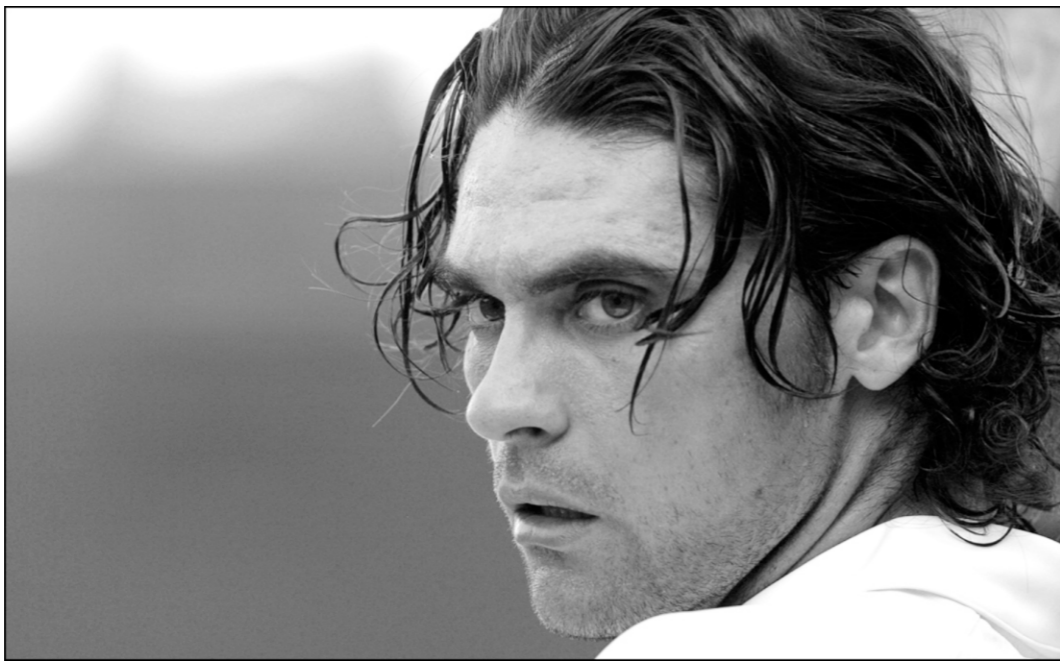
Meanwhile, the chief of the Association of Italian Referees Cesare Gussone will take charge of the appointment of referees for Serie A and B matches while a permanent replacement for Stefano Tedeschi is sought.

Tedeschi unexpectedly quit after less than six months in the job and there had been speculation that Collina would take his position.



Shane Warne

(Australian master leg-spinner)
"I've got no disappointments from the game whatsoever. I've been very lucky to play in a wonderful era of Australian cricket."
After playing in his last Test at his home ground.



MARK PHILIPPOUSSIS

Scud to follow Agassi path



AFP, Perth

Forgotten Australian Mark Philippoussis hopes to revive his career at the Hopman Cup mixed teams tournament -- with a little help from retired American star Andre Agassi.

Agassi, who called it quits after the US Open, slumped to 141st in the world rankings in 1997, before claiming the top spot in 1999.

Philippoussis, twice a Grand Slam finalist but now ranked 114th, says he is inspired by the Agassi story, and has received some pointers on and off the court from the American in Las Vegas, where the Australian is training.

"He's helping me when he can... I've had dinner with him a couple of times," said Philippoussis, known as the "Scud" at the height of his career for his powerful serve.

"He's also jumped on the court with us and that's the guy I look up to." "Being ranked 141st and being about 29, he was in a very similar scenario to me."

"The way he rebounded so strongly and still had the hunger, not to prove anyone wrong, but to do it for himself -- it's pretty much

the mental route I am taking."

In his attempt to emulate Agassi, Philippoussis has even turned to the American's coach, Australian Darren Cahill, and his fitness advisor, Gil Reyes.

Philippoussis, ranked as high as eighth during his career, is still waiting for confirmation he will be given a wildcard into the Australian Open, having elected to skip the qualifying play-off for the first Grand Slam of 2007.

He hopes to use the three singles matches guaranteed by the round-robin format of the Hopman Cup to prove he deserves a spot in the tournament.

He will sharpen his volleying skills by playing doubles with Alicia Molik, herself a former top 10 player who is on the comeback trail.

Philippoussis, who helped Australia win the Hopman Cup in 1999, said he was confident of improved singles results in 2007.

"I've been working extremely hard in Vegas with Gil and Darren," he said.

"If I keep working as hard as this, no doubt it (results) will come."

Philippoussis and Molik will open the tournament on Saturday, with a Group A clash against the Russian duo of Dmitry Tursunov and Nadia Petrova.

Boycott doubts loyalty



AFP, London

Former England opener Geoff Boycott questioned the spirit of the current side after they slumped to an innings and 99-run defeat inside three days in the fourth Ashes Test on Thursday.

The legendary opening batsman, renowned for his resilience, said the current side looked as if they had "given up" after a defeat that left them 4-0 down and in danger of becoming the first England team since 1921 to be whitewashed in an Ashes series when the fifth and final Test starts in Sydney next week.

"Apart from (Alastair) Cook, I don't think anyone has the stomach to play a rearguard innings," Yorkshire great Boycott told BBC Radio Five Live.

"It was just poor all round. That's what's so disappointing for the fans. It's like they've given up," he added after England were bowled out for a meagre 161 -- the second time they've been dismissed for

under 200 in the match after their first innings 159.

"You can't see England winning in Sydney. They are too inconsistent to win."

"They are patchy, they have one good session out of three and that's not enough to win Test matches."

Mike Gatting, the last captain to lead a winning England side in Australia on the 1986-1987 tour, said Andrew Flintoff's men had lacked basic discipline at the MCG.

"We saw some horrible bowling, and the fielding has been poor," said Gatting.

"Then we saw the other side of the coin, with people like (Australia seamers) Stuart Clark and Glenn McGrath pitching the ball up and putting it in the right places."

"All we seemed to do was try to bounce out No 10 and 11. It was ridiculous. It started off reasonably but it's getting worse."

"We haven't kept our discipline, and against a side like Australia you have got to keep your discipline."

Nasser Hussain, England's captain when they lost the 2002-03 Ashes series in Australia 4-1, said the present side badly needed to

show the grit at the crease associated with Boycott and a more recent ex-England skipper and opening batsman, Michael Atherton.

"You have got to show the opposition an 'over my dead body' approach, the stubbornness of a Boycott or an Atherton," said Hussain.

"Was that stubbornness there? I don't think that was evident from anyone."

England hero Ian Botham said it was time for the current team to admit their preparation had been sub-standard.

"You take your hat off to Australia. When they lost the Ashes they sat down and worked things out," said the legendary all-rounder. "They admitted that their preparation had not been right."

"You now hope that England will start to admit that they got their preparation wrong. There is no getting away from that, just look at the score in the series."

"It's praise to Australia and to England it's 'stop hiding, admit when you've got it wrong.'"

Arthur irate at delay



AFP, Durban

South Africa coach Mickey Arthur said he was "hugely frustrated" after a power failure and bad light halted his team's surge on the third day of the second Test against India at Kingsmead Thursday.

South Africa were 64 for no wicket in their second innings, an overall lead of 152, when bad light ended play for the day.

"We obviously wanted to push the game forward tonight," said Arthur.

"We were frustrated too by the amount of stoppages throughout the day, with ball changes and doctors running on the field. There needs to be some proper control of that or it could spill over into something very frustrating for us."

Arthur claimed one of three ball changes during the day took 20 minutes.

Another lengthy stoppage was when umpire Mark Benson had to leave the field after suffering heart palpitations.

Only 58.4 overs were bowled in the day.

South African umpire Ian Howell, who replaced Benson, defended the decision taken by Pakistan's Asad Rauf and himself to stop play, even

chances of forcing a victory.

Arthur said South Africa were on target to achieve the goals they had set for the day before the stoppages.

"We wanted to be 200 ahead by the close," he said.

Arthur added his bowlers had been clinical when they bowled out India for 240 on a heavily overcast day.

"We executed our plans properly," said Arthur.

"We had the same plans for (the first Test at) the Wanderers but we failed to execute."

South Africa gained a first innings lead of 88 despite a patient unbeaten half-century by VVS Laxman, who finished with 50 not out after batting for 282 minutes. He faced 156 balls and hit three fours.

Despite the deficit, India seamer Zaheer Khan believes India can still turn the match around.

"We have to try and get them out as early as possible," he said.

"The overcast conditions were pretty helpful for swing bowling, and hopefully, it will stay this way on Friday."

"It's too early to say how this Test is headed, there is a lot of cricket left and we need to stay positive and play good hard cricket. Picking up early wickets is the key."

Glamorgan want coach back

CRICINFO, undated

Glamorgan are reportedly trying to lure Duncan Fletcher back to Cardiff when his existing contract with the ECB expires after the World Cup.

Fletcher is generally thought to be unlikely to extend his time as England coach, especially given the criticism leveled at him during the Ashes tour, and Glamorgan are rumoured to want him to return to the county where he enjoyed such success before leaving in 1999.

A club spokesman was quoted in the Sunday Mirror saying: "Bringing Duncan back at some stage has always been top of our agenda. He turned around the county's fortunes in the mid-1990s and we see him as the perfect man to get the county out of the doldrums once again."

The one obstacle could be the county's finances which are believed to be under severe pressure due to the cost of redeveloping the Sophia Gardens ground in preparation for it staging Test cricket in 2009.

Twenty20

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further erosion of Indian batsmen's technique and temperament (in Test cricket)," he further said while expressing dismay at the Indian team's display in the ongoing second Test against South Africa at Durban.

Extolling the feats of former middle order Test batsman Sandeep Patil, who has co-authored the book of funny cricket anecdotes "Caught and Told" with senior sports scribe Clayton Muzello, Dugarpur said there were very few cricketers who would support the inclusion of another player at the danger of losing his own place as Patil did during his career.

"I was the manager of the team in England in 1986 when Patil pleaded with me repeatedly to somehow include 'Jimmy' (Mohinder) Amarnath even though that would have meant his own exclusion (from the eleven). But both played ultimately," he recalled.

The Hopman Cup invariably throws up a player that pushes deep into the Australian Open a couple of weeks later and the Czech Republic's Bedyrch could be the man to follow.

The 21-year-old is ranked 13th in the world after some solid results in 2006, reaching two finals.

Bad light rules

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be caught off the next ball when he played forward defensively.

David edged Andre Nel just short of Andrew Hall at third slip before he had scored.

But his luck ran out in the fourth over after the interval when he was given out.

Jaffer, showing his best form of the tour, batted soundly to reach 22 not out. Ntini took two for 14.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at close on the fourth day of the second Test between South Africa and India at Kingsmead on Friday:

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 328
INDIA: First innings 240
SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings (overnight 64-0)

De Villiers c Laxman b V Singh	47
Smith b Sreesanth	58
Amla lbw b Sreesanth	0
Gibbs c sub (Karthik) b Kumble	9
Prince c Ganguly b Sreesanth	0
Boucher lbw b Zaheer	8
Pollock not out	63
Hall lbw b Sreesanth	21
Morkel c V Singh b Sehwa	27
Extras: (b-5, lb-8, nb-12, w-7)	32
Total: (For 8 wickets dec in 67.4 overs)	265

Fall of wickets:	1-99, 2-108, 3-121, 4-121, 5-140, 6-143, 7-213, 8-265.
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Bowler	O	M	R	W
Zaheer	20	5	65	1
Sreesanth	19	4	79	4
V Singh	10	2	64	1
Kumble	16	4	37	1
Sehwa	2.4	1	7	1

Did not bat: A Nel, M Ntini.

INDIA: Second innings
Jaffer not out 22
Sehwa c Smith b Ntini 8
Dravid c Boucher b Ntini 5
Tendulkar not out 0
Extras: (b-2, lb-1) 3
Total: (For 2 wickets in 13 overs) 38

Fall of wickets:	1-14, 2-34			
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Nel	5	1	17	0
Ntini	6	2	14	2
Pollock	2	1	4	0

United urge

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he is a manager of so much guile and experience."

Liverpool, who dropped to sixth after a 1-0 defeat away to Blackburn on Tuesday, are at home to a Tottenham side that beat Aston Villa 2-1 last time out -- a result that left them just three points behind the Anfield club.

Relegation candidates Charlton, denied a win in new manager Alan Pardew's first game in charge after Franck Queudrue's late equaliser for Fulham, are at home to an Aston Villa side who have gone eight games without a win and haven't won in London for more than three years while basement club Watford face Wigan.

West Ham, also in the drop zone, and Manchester City will both be without a first-team regular each after Paul Konchesky and Joey Barton saw appeals against red cards rejected on Thursday.

In other matches, Blackburn are at home to Middlesbrough and Everton welcome Newcastle to Goodison Park.

Asif in, Akhtar out



AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's doping-tainted bowling pair had contrasting fortunes on Friday as Shoib Akhtar was left out but fellow pacesman Mohammad Asif was included in the Test team for next month's tour of South Africa.

Akhtar, 31, and Asif, 24, tested positive for steroid nandrolone in October and were banned by a Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) anti-doping commission last month.

However, both had their bans overturned by an appeal committee earlier this month.

After the overturn, the PCB said both Akhtar and Asif were free to play and any reservations from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) or from the International Cricket Council would not affect the two players.

However, the WADA challenged the lifting of the ban in the Court of Arbitration for Sport, based in Switzerland, and can stop the two from featuring in international events.

Pakistan selector Iqbal Qasim said the PCB had given no instruc-

tions to selectors not to select Akhtar and Asif.

"Both Akhtar and Asif were among the probables announced earlier and there were no restrictions on them. Asif proved his fitness and bowled well in the domestic event while Akhtar lacked fitness for a five-day Test," Qasim told AFP.

Asif played the last of his six Tests against England at The Oval in August this year and did not play in Pakistan's home series against the West Indies due to the doping case.

Another pacesman, Shabbir Ahmed, cleared after completing a one-year ban over an illegal bowling action, also failed to find a place in the team but struggling fast bowler Mohammad Sami was recalled.

Also recalled was middle-order batsman Asim Kamal.

Allrounder Abdul Razzaq was left out of the Tests due to a calf muscle injury.

Qasim said Pakistan had a balanced squad and could compete well in South Africa.

"Asif's return has strengthened the bowling attack and our recent 2-0 win against the West Indies proved that the team is shaping

well. I hope they do well in South Africa," said Qasim.

The team for one Twenty20 international and five one-day internationals that follow the Test series will be named later, said Qasim, a former Pakistan spinner.

Pakistan began the six-week tour with a three-day practice match against South Africa A at Kimberley from January 6.

The three Tests will be played in Centurion (January 11-15), Port Elizabeth (Jan 19-23) and Cape Town (January 26-30).

The five one-dayers will be played in Centurion (February 4), Durban (Feb 7), Port Elizabeth (Feb 9), Cape Town (Feb 11) and Johannesburg (Feb 14).

The Twenty20 international will be held in Johannesburg on February 2.

SQUAD

Inzamamul Haq (capt), Younis Khan (vice-captain), Mohammad Hafeez, Imran Farhat, Yasir Hameed, Shoib Malik, Mohammad Yousuf, Faisal Iqbal, Asim Kamal, Kamran Akmal, Zulqarnain Haider, Navedul Hasan, Mohammad Asif, Danish Kaneria, Shahid Nazir, Umar Gul and Mohammad Sami.

Fletcher admits folly



AFP, Melbourne

Under-fire coach Duncan Fletcher admitted Friday he had made selection blunders in choosing the England team for the disastrous Ashes series against Australia.

England face a humiliating Ashes clean sweep in next week's final Test in Sydney after crashing to an innings and 99-run defeat inside three days at Melbourne Test.

That result followed heavy losses in the Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth Tests after England arrived in Australia to defend the urn won last year.

Fletcher confessed he and captain Andrew Flintoff, who also act as tour selectors, had erred when picking sides to face the rampant Australians.

"We've made some mistakes and we will reflect on it when we get back after the tour, like we do any other series," he told reporters here

Friday.

"We will reflect on it and make sure we try not to make those mistakes again."

Although Fletcher would not admit to any specific mistakes, the major selection clangers were overlooking spinner Monty Panesar for the first two Tests and wicketkeeper Chris Read for the first three.

The folly of favouring Ashley Giles over Panesar was shown in Perth, where Panesar took eight wickets.

Read took six catches in Australia's first innings in Melbourne and made an unbeaten 26 in the second innings when he replaced Geraint Jones, who failed with the bat in the first three Tests.

Fletcher insisted the England team spirit remained strong despite the massive innings defeat after winning the toss and he said his players were giving it their all.

He admitted England had let its travelling fans down by performing poorly in all the Tests, but said it

was unfair to accuse the players of not giving their best.

"You go into the change room and see how despondent they were (on Thursday)," he said.

"If they weren't trying then I'd say they've let us down, but they're trying their damndest."

Fletcher said he had experienced worse defeats than Australia's three-day hammering in Melbourne.

He nominated the loss to South Africa by an innings and 92 runs at Lord's in 2003, in what was Michael Vaughan's first Test as captain, as the worst defeat of his coaching career.

But Fletcher believes England can pick themselves up for the fifth Test, which starts Tuesday, as the tourists did so four years ago when they won at the Sydney Cricket Ground to prevent a series whitewash.

"I've got to believe we can do it because we did it last time we were here," Fletcher said.

Press for whitewash



AFP, Melbourne

The Australian media is predicting a rare 5-0 Ashes clean sweep in next week's final Test after Australia's emphatic fourth Test win over demoralised England here.