

Foster denies match-rigging allegations

LONDON, Nov 15: Former England paceman Neil Foster on Monday denied newspaper allegations that Essex conspired with Lancashire to fix the results of two matches three years ago, reports Reuter.

And Lancashire announced they had cleared their players of allegations of rigging the matches after speaking to former captain Neil Fairbrother and other players.

Foster's former Essex teammates Don Topley and Guy Lovell were quoted in a Sunday newspaper as saying a County Championship match and Sunday league clash between the two teams at Old Trafford in August 1991 were fixed.

But Foster, captain of Essex in those matches, issued a statement denying any conspiracy.

"I strongly deny any such action," Foster said. "During my career I was always aware of the traditions of cricket and any such thoughts would have been completely contrary to my feelings for the game."

Lancashire chief executive John Bower said the club had carried out an investigation. "We have learned nothing to cause us any concern regarding the honest conduct of the games," he said.

Topley alleged that Essex agreed to lose the Sunday game, boosting Lancashire's hopes of winning the league, in return for being allowed to win the championship match, which they went on to do by eight wickets.

That Old Trafford triumph, and the 21 points they earned, helped Essex go on to win the title ahead of Warwickshire, although Lancashire were pipped for the Sunday prize by Nottinghamshire.

Foster recalled that during the match he took a career-best eight for 99 and added: "A declaration leaving us to score 270 runs in 58 overs was not overly generous."

He said the pitch was showing signs of wear which could be of use to the spin bowlers.

Dutch attack weakened

ROTTERDAM, Nov 15: The Netherlands will miss a key element of their attack on Wednesday when they face the Czech Republic in European Championship Group Five qualifier without Dennis Bergkamp and Marc Overmars, reports Reuter.

Both players have groin problems. Internazionale's Bergkamp has been replaced by Ajax Amsterdam youngster Patrick Kluivert, who is in line to win his first cap.

Kluivert, 18, has made a remarkable start in his first league season and is Dutch top scorer with 10 goals in 10 matches.

Winger Overmars is expected to be replaced by Denoord's Gaston Tadimé. Although the Rotterdam winger is not fully fit yet, midfielders Ronald de Boer and Rob Witschge have also not completely recovered from minor injuries, but all three are expected to be ready for Wednesday.

Coach Dick Advocaat lost Feyenoord defender John de Wolf in training with a foot injury and he was replaced by teammate Arnold Scholten, who joined the squad for the first time.

Kaiser, new Bayern chief

MUNICH, Nov 15: A new era began at Bayern Munich on Monday when "Kaiser" Franz Beckenbauer was elected chairman of the club he joined as a fresh-faced teenager in the 1960s and later led to a string of triumphs, reports Reuter.

All but 10 of Bayern's 2,928 members who took part in the election in Munich's Olympic Stadium cast their vote for Beckenbauer, who both captained and coached West Germany to World Cup victories.

Beckenbauer, 49, succeeds Fritz Scherer, who will now become one of Bayern's three vice-presidents after being at the helm of Germany's reigning soccer champions for nine years.

To make way for someone like Franz Beckenbauer is no demotion but a challenge to work with him to make Bayern even stronger than it is now," Scherer said.

Beckenbauer, nominated as chairman in October, was seen as the ideal compromise candidate, saving Germany's wealthiest and most successful club from a potentially damaging internal battle for office.

Board members had feared a fight for the top job between Scherer, who wanted to stay in office, and vice-chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, like Beckenbauer a former captain of West Germany. Rummenigge will remain vice-chairman.



Argentine tennis star Gabriela Sabatini admires a replica of herself. It was unveiled by the Great American Doll Company to coincide with the publication of her children's book 'My Story' in New York yesterday.

Sport

Long live tradition, long live BOA

Sports Reporter

In a fishy and bizarre quirk of events the executive committee of the Bangladesh Olympic Association is going to hold its adjourned meeting next Thursday with six of the more important and relevant of the original eight agenda sent to the cold storage for reasons best known to the bosses of an already infamous body.

The committee is reportedly focused on the two issues — reception of the silver winning Kabaddi team in the Hiroshima Asian and the forthcoming visit of Ms Faezeh Rafsanjani, president of the Women's Sports Solidarity Council of the Islamic Countries — side stepping some subjects sports lovers would love to have post mortem on.

Although much ink has been split over Bangladesh's abject failure in the 15th Commonwealth Games, followed immediately by yet another allround pathetic display in the twelfth Asian besides the unscrupulous sharp practice by some of the officials linked with country's sports, the BOA has failed to hold any enquiry into the irregularities so far and it looks like the chances are waning with every day, thanks to the lack of will from within.

The BOA has set a standard in procrastination. Its sixteen sub-committees set up for the smooth running of the sixth SA Games last December are yet to submit their respective reports regarding financial matters.

Long live tradition, long live BOA.

Jackson honoured

LONDON, Nov 15: British hurdler Colin Jackson was named as his country's sports personality of the year here on Monday, reports AFP.

The Welsh athlete received his award from the Princess Royal at a star-studded ceremony at London's Cafe Royal.

Cardiff-born Jackson was unbeaten over the 110 metres hurdles this year as he retained his Commonwealth and European titles.

He was awarded 20 one-kilogram gold bars earlier this season for winning each of the 'Golden Four' Grand Prix meetings at Oslo, Zurich, Brussels and Berlin.

Jackson beat other nominees including women's world number one golfer Laura Davies and racing driver Damon Hill in 1997, reports AFP.

Samaranch to meet Mandela

LAUSANNE, Nov 15: International Olympic Committee president Juan-Antonio Samaranch is to meet South African President Nelson Mandela as part of an African trip which starts on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Samaranch heads a delegation of top Olympic officials, although no dates were given in the IOC's brief announcement here on Monday.

The group includes Mario Vazquez-Rana, head of the Association of National Olympic Committees, Keba Mbaye of the IOC's executive committee, Jean-Claude Ganga, head of the Association of African National Olympic Committees and Feckou Kidane, the IOC's director of international cooperation.

Players also would like to see the calendar revamped to give them some more time to recover from big events.

Now, Sampras and Andre Agassi all but slammed the door on the Davis Cup for next year, with the world's No. 1 calling the scheduling "impossible," because he would have to be playing in the United States five days after the Australian Open final.

The January to December schedule of ATP and exhibition events has players tired and injury prone already in summer.

"I have felt drained for five months now," said Australian Patrick Rafter, who shot up the rankings from 57th last year to 20th last week. Fatigue is a recurring complaint so late in the season.

"And the Australian Open is just around the corner," warned Sampras, indicating there is almost no time to recover from stress and injuries.

Fans and players also have been complaining about too much ace tennis. With fast surfaces galore, play has too often been reduced to a booming serve and, if lucky, a hit-or-miss return.

Sunday's ECC final was too much of that, even a prime power server like Magnus Larsson, who lost to Sampras, admitted.

"It's too fast," he said of the Antwerp carpet. "But it's the same all over. Every week it's the same."

So the ATP is working to prolong rallies, advocating slower surfaces, or softer balls to create longer, more exciting play, instead of seeking radical solutions.

"I don't expect to go to one serve. I don't see us moving service line back and things like that," said Mayotte.

But whatever is being tried to liven up the game — from rock music on court to live post match interviews with fans in the stands to more entertainment around stadiums — nothing can match a great rivalry like Bjorn Borg vs John McEnroe, or a personality like Jimmy Connors.

With Agassi challenging Sampras for No. 1, 1995 could turn out to be a hot act. The prospect of a growing rivalry is great for the sport, said Mayotte.

Foreman ready for rematch

NEW YORK, Nov 15: Twenty years after losing his heavyweight title to Muhammad Ali, George Foreman has it again, and he says he's finally ready for the rematch, reports AP.

"It's time for Muhammad Ali," Foreman said Monday, a little more than a week after regaining the crown he lost to Ali in Zaire on Oct 30, 1974. "I want him now. I didn't want him in the '70s, but I want him now."

Foreman was being his silly self, again dispensing advice for the aged and waxing eloquent on the virtues of cheeseburgers at a New York City news conference at which he had absolutely nothing to announce, not even his current weight.

"None of your business," he told a woman inquisitor, politely.

And, yes, Foreman said, he did hear from his 52-year-old former nemesis after he knocked out Michael Moorer in the 10th round for the IBF and WBA versions of the heavyweight championship on Nov 5 in Las Vegas.

Foreman said Ali sent him a poster which read: "Congratulations champ, you had the courage and guts to go out and do it."

"He signed it with a big heart on the bottom," Foreman said. "When he says you've got guts, that's something special."

As for his future, Foreman talked like he would be a busy

champion.

— He spoke of a possible rematch for Moorer "because he gave me this opportunity."

— He said a fight with fellow 45-year-old Larry Holmes would be a natural, but could prove a problem for ringers. "The smell of laminit would be overwhelming, and people would be fighting to get into the bleachers," Foreman said.

Some of you who are 40 and 50 years old, grab onto my coat and I will take you into the 21st Century," Foreman said. "Just cut the gray hair off, get a tattoo and an earring, and let's go!"

Foreman weighed in before the Moorer bout at 250 pounds, his lightest in six years. He bemoaned "all that precious weight that I lost" at his news conference, where, perhaps not coincidentally, the refreshments featured hamburgers, cheeseburgers and French fries.

His motivation for fighting?

"I've got nine kids," Foreman explained. "Those kids literally beat you out of house and home."

Foreman also said he would keep his job as a boxing commentator for home box office, given the good meals before the fights, the ringside seats."

"No way I'm quitting that job," he said.

For new, he said, he likes travelling around and having people call him champ.

"Champion of the world is great," he said, admitting on an uncharacteristically solemn note, "but I know it's brief and it's a fleeting thing."

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Three times Wimbledon champion Becker said, however, that he did not believe the game was in a crisis.

"There is no crisis," he said.

He said there should be an off season for the game more so than the players," Agassi said on the eve of the World Championship in Frankfurt. "When you don't have tennis for three months the public can look forward to it. Now if you turn on the TV there is tennis every week."

The expansion of satellite television worldwide in recent years means it is possible to watch tennis on television virtually every day of the year.

Tennis officials are worried the game is losing its appeal and there have been suggestions to bring in more show to keep the public's attention, including music at change of ends.

One of the game's main problems however, is the lack of a natural break in a year packed with tennis from January to December. Even after this week's so called "year-ending" ATP championship most of the top players go to Munich next month to earn big money in the Grand Slam Cup.

Agassi believes, however, that changes need to be made to the rules rather than to the ambience on the court. He said he wanted lots on serve to be abolished and a more simple method of scoring with no advantage points.

The American said he would favour tennis doing away with its 15,30 and 40 points scoring system in favour of a simple one, two, three, four, the first player to get four points would win a game.

The game is not struggling as people make it out to be ... (but) adding music has nothing to do with the game," he said.

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