

WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND



World champion Michael Doohan of Australia celebrates during the victory ceremony for the 500 cc Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix in Shah Alam on April 2. Doohan won the race. — AFP/UNB photo

5th Asia Cup world's richest tournament

SHARJAH, Apr 6: The fifth Asia Cup is the richest tournament in the world with nearly half a million dollars being spent in the form of participation fees and prize-money, a senior tournament official said here today, reports BSS.

This does not include the one lakh US dollars guarantee paid to the tournament owners — Asian Cricket Council (ACC), he added.

Asif Iqbal of the Cricketers Benefit Series Fund — the organisers of the fifth tournament said "Nowhere in the world is such a huge volume of money involved for one tournament."

"Each of the participants from the Test-playing countries get 1,20,000 US dollars while Bangladesh as a non-Test-playing nation receives 60,000 US dollars as participation money," he said.

Iqbal, the former Pakistan Test skipper, now involved with the CBSF, said the 75,000 US dollars prize money includes 30,000 dollars for the champions, 20,000 for the runners-up, 5,000 dollars for man-of-the-series, 1,000 dollars for man-of-the-match in the league matches and 2,000 dollars for man-of-the-match in the final.

The team winning league matches will earn 1,500 dollars while 500 dollars is allotted for the losers.

Sri Lanka is likely to host the sixth Asia Cup to be held after the World Cup next year.

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Ma's army urged to reunite

BEIJING, Apr 6: The director of China's national athletics team has urged Ma Junren and his estranged record breaking women runners to reconcile for this year's World Championships, a report said Monday, reports AFP.

Describing Ma as "irreplacable," Han Yongjian said the coach and his runners — led by 3,000-meter and 10,000-metre world-record holder Wang Junxia — should reunite for the good of the country.

This is not only in the interest of Chinese athletics, but also in the interest of the state and the entire Chinese nation," Han was quoted as saying by the Liberation Daily.

Meanwhile, another report said that Wang and Ma had a brief meeting late last month, during which they had discussed their differences.

While China was still capable of reaping gold medals at the championships in Gothenburg, Sweden, in August, Han said the performance of Wang and her teammates better known as "Ma's army" — had suffered since the rift within the team.

The runners walked out on their coach last year amid allegations — denied by Ma — that he had pocketed his runners' winnings.

Han pointed to the team's disappointing showing at an international marathon relay in Beijing, when they finished fifth in an event they had twice won with ease under Ma's guidance.

While it would be difficult to bring the team back to peak performance level in time for Gothenburg, Han said Ma's "original" training methods were capable of working wonders.

Doohan's second in a row

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 6: Defending champions Michael Doohan beat Daryl Beattie in the Malaysian World Grand Prix motorcycle race Sunday, the second consecutive 1-2 finish for the two Australians, reports AP.

American Kevin Schwantz, a former world champion, challenged early, but Doohan gradually pulled away from the field, finishing nearly seven seconds ahead of Beattie while Schwantz faded to fourth, Spain's Alex Criville finished third, more than three seconds behind Beattie.

Doohan and Beattie also were the top two in the season opener for 500cc motorcycles last week at Eastern Creek in Sydney, Australia.

"I tried to make a break a couple of times early on, but I had a few slides and decided I should better calm down. But I kept pushing on and gradually I got away," said the 30-year-old Doohan, who also won here in 1991 and 1994.

The second- and third-fastest qualifiers, Italians Luca Cadalora and Loris Capirossi, went out early. Schwantz

charged to the front at the first corner, but Doohan, riding a Honda, soon was in command again. He finished in 47 minutes, 54.380 seconds to 48:01.179 for Beattie, on a Suzuki.

Capirossi hurt a tendon in the little finger of his left hand when he crashed out halfway through the first lap on the 3.505-kilometer (2.178-mile) Shah Alam circuit near Kuala Lumpur.

Cadalora, who had been running fifth in the early stages, stopped his Yamaha in the pits on the 12th lap.

In the race for 250cc motorcycles, defending champion Massimiliano Biaggi of Italy was hardly challenged. Riding an Aprilia, he finished more than five seconds ahead of Japanese Tetsuya Harada, on a Yamaha.

"I pushed hard for the first 10 laps to get an advantage on the others... I'm leading on points now, but this is only the second race. Anything can happen and there are plenty of other guys who can win," said Biaggi.

The world Grand Prix now moves to Suzuka, Japan, on April 23.

Okada was third and Eastern Creek winner Ralf Waldmann of Germany was fourth, leaving him third in the world championship standings, three points behind leader Biaggi. Harada stands second, just one point behind the leader.

Because of rain, the 125cc race had to be stopped after 12 laps and Australian Garry McCoy, riding a Honda, was declared the winner with a time of 21:18.350. Stefano Perugini of Italy, riding an IPA Aprilia, was second in 21:18.777 and Akira Saito of Japan third in 21:24.684.

Eastern Creek winner Haruchika Aoki of Japan managed only 18th, while world champion Kazuto Sakata, also of Japan, finished 10th.

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Random drugs test on Chinese natants

BEIJING, Apr 6: Organisers tested seven swimmers for performance-enhancing drugs on the first day of China's national championships, zeroing in on established champions and hot new talents, official media said today, reports Reuters.

The seven tested on Wednesday were not named, but the official Guangming daily said they included past champions and unsung new competitors with exceptional qualifying times at the meet in Baoding in northern Hebei province.

World champions Le Jingyi and Liu Lin are among many national team members competing in the tournament, but it was not known if they were among those tested.

The meet's conspicuous drug-testing focus reflected new Chinese Swimming Association measures of fight doping, which association officials acknowledged on Wednesday had "infected" the sport in China in recent years.

The meet features 32 Olympic events and the newly revised CSA regulations are in force," association chief Guo Qinglong was quoted by Xinhua news agency as saying in Baoding.

Absent from the national meet were seven top swimmers who were banned for two years after testing positive for drugs at the 1994 Hiroshima Asian Games.

The offences fanned rumours abroad that China's dramatic emergence as a global swimming power, resulted advocate from systematic doping. Some swimming organisations banning all Chinese swimmers from international meets.

China's government and the Swimming Association have rejected allegations of institutionalised doping calling the offences isolated acts of ignorant or misguided individuals.

In 1994, 31 Chinese athletes — including world stars — tested positive for banned drugs, up from 24 in 1993.

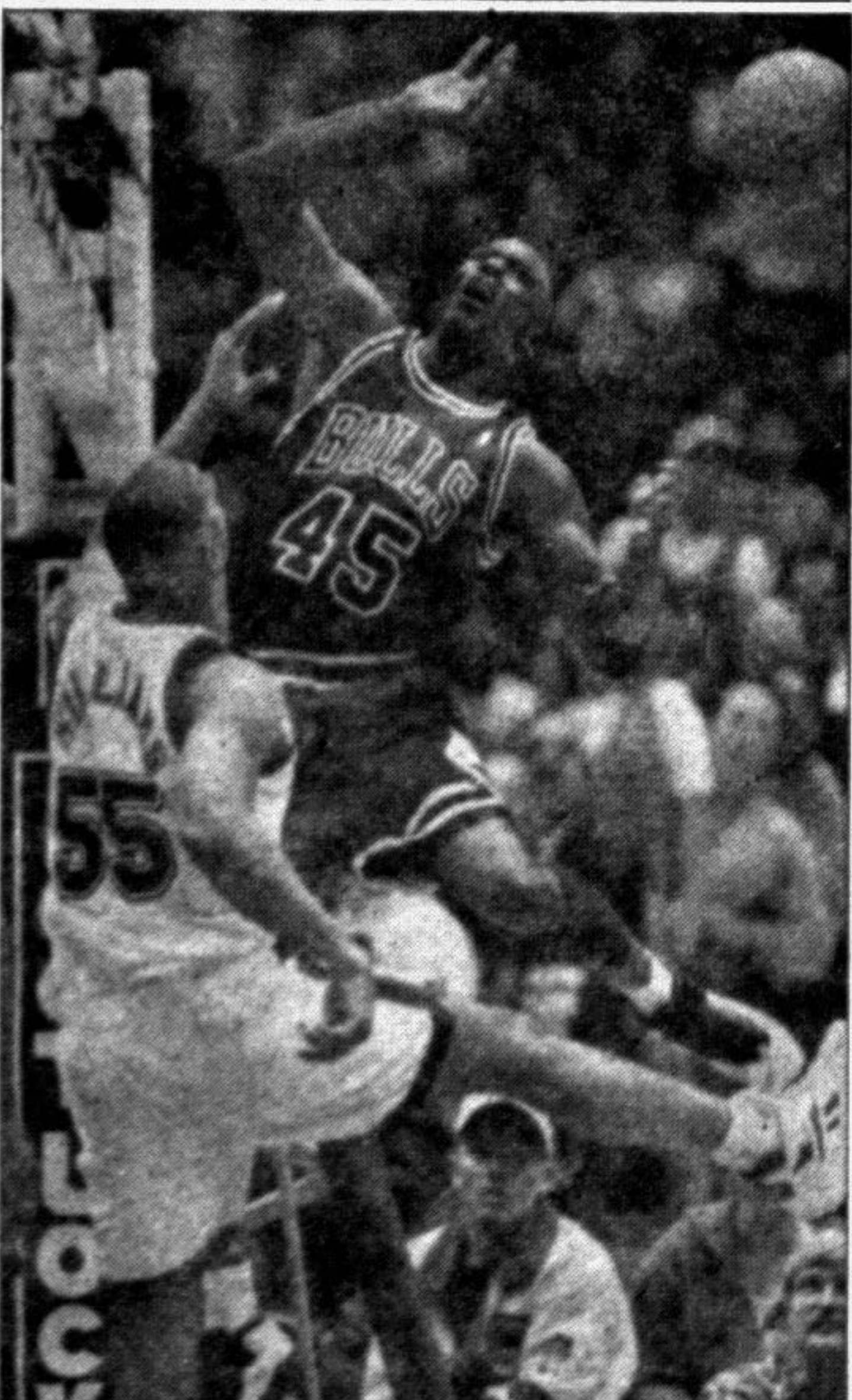
Swimming Association chief Guo said he expected only lacklustre times from the national squad, explaining that they were at a low point in their training cycle and faced no elite competition at the meet. Xinhua reported.

"With no world-class competitions such as Olympics and World Championships on schedule this year, China's top-class swimmers are taking time to adjust their form for next summer's Atlanta Olympics," Guo was quoted as saying.

someone to take over as chief executive officer. When others questioned the need for a chief executive before a company was even in place, Ackerman threatened a walkout.

"I don't want to come into something when I am not wanted," he said. "I have given of my time, my life and my money for the past four years to see this dream realized... I am extremely disappointed that some one can't just come up and say thank you."

Sports minister Steve Tshwete persuaded Ackerman to participate in the steering committee's first meeting, which immediately followed the summit. After three hours of heated argument, Ackerman was elected chief executive of the interim committee, which will be responsible for recruiting a new head for the bid company.



Chicago Bulls Michael Jordan watches the ball fly away after having his shot blocked by New Jersey Nets Jayson Williams during their NBA game at East Rutherford, New Jersey on April 5. The Bulls won 108-101 with Jordan scoring 37 points. — AFP/UNB photo

Cantona not yet ready

MANCHESTER, Apr 6: Eric Cantona is not likely to start his 120 hours of community service teaching football skills to youngsters for at least a week, according to the greater Manchester Probation Service on Wednesday, reports AFP.

"We are drawing up a schedule and sorting out the details of Eric Cantona's programme but we now understand that Wednesday April 19 is the deadline for him to start," said Susan Wildman, head of public relations for the Probation Service.

Wildman, who met Cantona on Monday, added that a statement about the details of his programme involving work with hundreds of inner-city children in the Salford area of Manchester will be issued within the next 48 hours.

Cantona was sentenced to community service last Friday after winning his appeal against a two-week jail sentence for assaulting a spectator.

In normal circumstances, the offender would start his community service order within 10 working days of the sentence.

But with the Easter holiday period starting a week on Friday, Cantona has an extra few days before the mandatory starting date.

Arrests of more than 100 players in Malaysia and England following allegations of match-rigging have dragged the good name of football into the mud. But there are signs that in Kuala Lumpur at least, reports Gemini News Service, the rot has been stopped.

THE score so far in the great soccer scandal is: Malaysia 126, England 5.

Although more arrests are expected, however, there are signs that corruption is on the wane on the playing fields of Malaysia. Police estimate that the results and other details of at least 80 per cent of Malaysian matches were fixed, mainly by bookies but in some cases by punters, with the help of players.

The very success of the crackdown here is believed to have turned the attention of crooked Asian gamblers and bookies to England, where three top players and a Malaysian businessman were arrested following allegations that a Malaysian syndicate had rigged English matches.

The number of arrests in Malaysia represents a staggering one-third of the registered professionals in the country. They include internationals and national heroes, and their departure has completely decimated a couple of leading

popular, sophisticated, wide-ranging and involves large sums of money.

The figure alleged to have been won in Singapore and Malaysia on one English League match between Newcastle and Liverpool last season is £3 million and, says Peter Velappan, Asian Football Confederation general-secretary, "that could be the tip of the iceberg."

Bets are made, he explains, not just on the result of a match but on all manner of incidents from the time of the first goal to the number of yellow cards shown. For many the real fun lies in bets on the number of corner-kicks and penalty saves.

To those who say you need more than one player to influence a game, the Malaysian report is that with millions of Ringgit riding on all these minutiae, one man can indeed play a pivotal role.

— Gemini News
About the Author: Bob Holmes is a British sports journalist currently living in Malaysia.

'Ops Bola' achieves its goal

by Bob Holmes

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manikam by Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) last year. A cloud of suspicion had long lingered over the Malaysian League, but few expected such a large catch.

With 50 players behind bars before the Malaysian Cup final in December and an even longer "wanted list," the police may have soft-pedalled in order to ensure there were enough players to bring the competition to its conclusion. Most arrests were made two days after the final.

(In another example of fair play, a recent swoop was delayed to allow Muslim players to celebrate the end of Ramadan with their families.)

Almost incidental now is that Vana jumped bail and escaped to Prague but when Singapore, accused of dragging its feet after sparking the whole thing off, recently withdrew from the Malaysian Premier League, the ramifications were far-reaching.

Besides ending a 70-year

association with Malaysian football, Singapore's decision could have the most cleansing affect of all — for it was matches involving the only Singaporean team in the Malaysian League, Lions, that attracted most attention from the bookies.

So when the Malaysian season kicked off in the week that saw the arrest in London of Southampton's Bruce Grobbelaar, Aston Villa's John Fashanu and Wimbledon's Hans Segers, together with a Malaysian businessman and Fashanu's girlfriend, the number of new faces was exceeded only by doubts about how a long-suffering public would react.

Well, so far so good. The unanimous verdict among soccer fans is that a new spirit is afoot.

"The good days are back," claimed a headline in the New Straits Times in Kuala Lumpur, which went on to say that the six-month investigation had put "fear into the hearts of the players."

Youngsters have been blooded before their time — and played as if their lives were at stake. Veterans, too, seemed to have regained a waning will to win.

Selangor, a team renowned for its links with bookmakers and for squandering leads in the last few minutes of play, has already displayed a commitment that would satisfy the hardest taskmaster.

That Malaysia is a hot-bed of such shady shenanigans may have been a surprise to many, since the country has made no previous impact on the world game. But in parts of Southeast Asia, gambling on soccer is



Weir retains WBO crown

IRVINE, Scotland, Apr 6: Scottish fighter Paul Weir held on to his World Boxing Organisation light-flyweight title in his home town Wednesday with a unanimous decision over Ric Magrango of the Philippines, reports AP.

It was Weir's fifth world title fight in only his 10th pro contest.

A former WBO straw-weight titlist, Weir lost the light-flyweight title to Puerto Rico's Josue Camacho in February last year but regained it by out-pointing hard-hitting South African Paul Oulden in November. He now is 10-1-0.

Perkins blasts FINA's inaction

PERTH, Apr 6: Olympic gold medalist Kieren Perkins of Australia has attacked the swimming's world governing body (FINA) for not taking a tougher stand against Chinese drug-taking in the sport, reports Reuters.

Perkins, who holds three world freestyle records and was last week named as FINA's 1994 swimmer-of-the-year, said he backed Australia's call for the banning of China over the use of drugs.

Last Thursday FINA said it had found no proof of systematic sport-enhancing drug-taking among Chinese swimmers.

But Australian Swimming Incorporated (ASI) rejected FINA's finding and called on Sunday for China to be banned from international swimming for the next four years.

The "ASI" board recommended that China not be readmitted to international competition until it had proven conclusively that it had put in place effective out-of-competition drug testing and its swimmers were drug-free.

Perkins said although he was delighted to have won international swimming's most coveted annual award he found FINA's stand contradictory.

Perkins, the current 400 metres, 800 metres and 1500 metres freestyle world record-holder, called on other major swimming nations to back Australia's call.

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