

WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND



Players of the national hockey squad, who will take part in the forthcoming 7th SAF Games in Madras, practicing at the BUET ground. — Star photo



Protap Shankar Hazra, national hockey coach, briefing the players in a training session at the Hockey Stadium. — Star photo

The Asiaweek magazine lists Imran Khan among 20 great Asians for the future

Sports star with a grassroots cause

FROM playboy sporting hero to devout Muslim and campaigner for the sick and poor, Imran Khan seems always to have had a mission in life. Once famed for his flowing locks, beautiful companions and fighting spirit as one of cricket's great all-rounders, Khan, 42, is now seen by many as a potential savior of Pakistan. He insists he has no plans to plunge into "the quicksand" of politics, but observers point out that he has studiously avoided counting it out altogether.

How does this fit with his recent Paris wedding to Jemima Goldsmith, a rich, nightclub-going Jewish convert to Islam? In fact, most



fundamentalists hailed it as a victory for the Muslim cause, though liberals were quick to portray Khan as a hypocrite — or "hypocricret," as one cartoonist had it. On balance, many observers believe his chances of one day becoming prime minister are broadly unaffected — assuming he wants to but for the job.

Courtesy: Asiaweek

Can We Shine In SAF Hockey?

by Rabeed Imam

HOCKEY is going to mark its maiden appearance in the regional extravaganza when the seventh edition of the South Asian Federation (SAF) Games will begin in the Indian port city of Madras in December.

The inclusion of hockey in the biennial sporting carnival involving seven SAARC member countries — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan — will certainly provide a world class flare at least in one event.

While Bangladesh, who

are expecting a little threat from Sri Lanka, will have the opportunity to rub their shoulders along with two world standard teams.

Although a bronze is almost confirmed for Bangladesh! the local players are preparing themselves to offer a tough resistance against their two awe-inspiring neighbours.

The five-month long training camp involving 32 players began on May 18 at the Hockey Stadium under the guidance of former national player Protap Shankar Hazra.

The residential camp involving 33 players will begin at the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan (BKSP) from June 18.

Elaborating on the technical aspect for the SAF Games preparation, Protap Shankar Hazra told this re-

porter that the players will be trained in two phases.

"In phase one, I'm concentrating on improving their physical conditions and essential basic skills. After this gruelling but very essential workout the players will be settled into a groove for the second phase where they will be able to galvanize their skills.

"And in the pre-competition period my boys will play different exhibition matches before we select the final squad."

Hazra, however, opined that after playing the league and other major tournaments on natural grass, the players would find it difficult adjusting to the artificial turf in Madras. He explained that usually it takes seven to eight days to get acclimatised with the arti-

ficial turf. Furthermore, it would be unwise to expect the same level of performances from the players, who are accustomed to artificial turf and those who are not.

Meanwhile, the players in the camp are a blend of experience and youth. Fourteen of them have represented the nation in the past and the rest are full of potential. The key individuals among the local players are central defenders Mahfuzul Alam Nixon, Mamunur Rashid; midfielders Mahbub Harun, Haider Alam and forwards Mohammed Sadek and Rafiqul Islam Kamal.

Other notable performers includes Alamgir Alam, Zahid Hossain, Khurshid Alam, Robiuddin Ahmed, Shameem Ahmed, Musa Miah and Zahurul Islam Mi-

tul. Apart from those players Siam, Tusher, Sadek Khan, Ehtesham, Romiz, Biaka Lusal, Tutul are showing a lot of promise.

The players seemed eager and committed to put up a good fight against India and Pakistan. They got a lot of confidence after playing against superstars like Shahbaz Ahmed and Tahir Zaman in the domestic league.

Prior to the SAF Games, the Bangladesh team will take part in the Surjit Singh memorial hockey tournament in Jullandhar, India.

Over the years the Bangladesh national hockey team has rekindled a glimmer of hope at the international level. Bangladesh finished seventh in the 12th Asian games in Hiroshima. But there is still

vast space for improvement.

The general secretary of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) Shamsul Bari expressed his optimism that Bangladesh will be able to earn respect from the hockey superpowers — Pakistan and India.

He informed this reporter that the BHF is trying its best to bring a coach from abroad preferably from South Korea on a long-term basis. Replying to a query, Bari said that the long-awaited laying of the artificial turf at the hockey stadium is likely to start in the next few days.

No one expects Bangladesh to beat the likes of Pakistan and India but everyone is hopeful of better performance from the local boys.

Palestine enters into a new era

RAMALLAH, West Bank, June 8 (AFP): Football governing body FIFA's move to grant Palestine provisional membership opens a new era for the sport on the West Bank and Gaza Strip after more than 40 decades in the wilderness.

The decision was the fruit of a long struggle to be recognised by international bodies," said Raseem Yunes, director general of the Palestinian Youth and Sports Ministry.

"It will allow us to test ourselves against neighbouring countries to make some progress at last."

Palestinian officials have spent the year, since the launch of autonomy on the Gaza Strip and West Bank town of Jericho in May 1994, trying to breathe new life into the game after seven years of revolt or *intifada*.

Out of 2,169 registered players when the revolt or *intifada* erupted in December

1987, 1,500 served time in Israeli jails. Forty-Three were killed by Israeli bullets.

"The absence of top-level competition, financial problems and lack of adequate facilities mean Palestinian football is much weaker than in neighbouring countries, not to mention Europe," Yunes admitted.

Palestine was last a full member of FIFA in 1949 with a team made up mostly of Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe. That membership became obsolete with the recognition of the new state of Israel in 1950. FIFA voted on May 31 to grant Palestine provisional membership.

Yunes and his colleagues have worked hard to launch a new league in the territories on July 1. The last league match took place on December 9, 1987, as huge protests swept the Gaza Strip.

Aborigine abuse: Aussie apartheid

SYDNEY, June 8 (Reuters): The treatment of aboriginal sportsmen and women in Australia is no laughing matter for champion athlete Cathy Freeman.

An idol to her aboriginal people, the dual Commonwealth Games gold medalist has focused world attention on Australia's indigenous population through her track achievements.

Such triumphs have not, however, prevented Freeman from becoming the butt of a disparaging joke that has come to encapsulate the contentious issue of racism in Australian sport.

The joke, which implied all aborigines are thieves, was described as racist and offensive by the 22-year-old Freeman.

But it was the identity of the joke feller, more than its contents, that caused the most concern.

Arthur Tunstall, the bar-room humourist involved, is Australia's senior Commonwealth Games official.

When details of his private conversation were leaked to the media last month, politicians and community leaders echoed Freeman's demand for Tunstall to resign.

"He should not be in a position of leadership. He's an embarrassment," Freeman said of the 73-year-old administrator, whose belated apology has failed to appease his critics.

Calls for Tunstall's resignation have so far gone unheeded.

"We have tried to encourage young aborigines to take up sport and this type of attitude discourages them," said Freeman, who celebrated her heritage before a world television audience last year when she draped herself in the black, red and yellow aboriginal flag during her victory laps for the 200 and 400 metres at the Commonwealth Games in Canada.

In a country in which discrimination against aborigines was once legalised, creating a system of virtual apartheid, sport has long offered black people a profile denied them in other walks of life.

But it is the codes of rugby league and Australian rules football, rather than athletics, that have provided the stage for aborigines to make an impact on Australian sport.

sportsmen has significantly increased over the past decade, but Sydney's Macquarie university political professor Clin Tatz says expediency rather than enlightenment is the reason for aboriginal selection.

"The clubs have not suddenly developed a love for aborigines," Tatz, author of "Obstacles in Race: Aborigines in Sport," told Reuters.

"Instead, the clubs have simply begun to make use of a previously largely untapped source of talent in the hope of winning more games," Tatz said.

Whatever the reason, Tatz believes the greater presence of aborigines at the elite level of sport offers grounds for optimism, creating a sense of unity among the players, and a subsequent willingness to

speak out against prejudice.

Earlier this month, three leading aboriginal Australian rules players went public with their complaints of racism, demanding sterner penalties for opponents who resort to racial abuse.

Taking their lead, black rugby league and soccer players followed, prompting a swift official response.

"The players have certainly indicated to us their belief that enough is enough as far as abuse is concerned," a spokesman for the Australian football league said.

"We are currently drafting a new code of conduct which will include the offence of racial vilification."

But, according to Tatz, while most Australians tolerate aboriginal sportsmen because

of their skills, there is, at best, indifference about their presence.

With some notable exceptions, such as in 1968 when huge crowds greeted the return of world bantamweight boxing champion Lionel Rose and former Wimbledon champion Evonne Goolagong Crawley, Tatz believes Australia has largely ignored the past sporting achievements of aborigines.

As an example, he cites the experience of cricketer Eddie Gilbert, a fearsome fast bowler who bowled the great Donald Bradman for a duck in 1931 after a spell which Bradman described as the "fastest bowling I can remember."

Yet, according to Tatz, Gilbert was barred from travelling to games with white players, played only two dozen matches for his state, Queensland, and was never considered to play for his country.

Although Tatz believes there is grounds for optimism in the public's overwhelmingly sympathetic support for both Freeman and the all players, he argues there is still much to be achieved in eradicating racism from Australian sport.

"A few aborigines have gained respect through sport, the odds have been monumental. Australia still has some way to go in terms of racial equality."

Aussie hockey trio to play in SA

SYDNEY, June 8: Three members of the Australian team that defeated England 5-0 in this month's field hockey series were Tuesday included in a development team to play in South Africa and Zimbabwe in June-July, reports AFP.

Matthew Smith, Daniel Sproule and Max Diamond will join former national team member Greg Corbitt in the touring team.

Corbitt, who has played 103 internationals, was omitted from the Australian team for the England series and has subsequently shifted his playing role from left wing to inside forward.

The Australian development team will play four matches against South Africa from June 28-July 2 and then play in a four-nation tournament in Zimbabwe featuring Russia, Pakistan and the hosts from July 4-9.

VENUSTE Niyangabo is a public relations dream: engaging, erudite, fluent in several Burundi dialects and three European languages.

"German is taking a bit of time to master. I'll have to run there more often," he jokes.

He can also run very fast. In 1992 he shot to recognition as one of his country's two representatives at the World Junior Championships in Seoul by taking the 1,500m silver medal.

It was Burundi's first-ever honour at any sport on the global stage.

Last year the 21-year-old runner proved he could more than hold his own amongst the big boys, giving Algerian Nouredine Morceli a run for his money as the world No. 1 over the metric mile.

He won every 1,500m or mile race he contested except on the two occasions he stood beside Morceli on the start line.

But suddenly the peerless Algerian's position at the top of the middle-distance running ranks does not look quite so secure.

Last year the 1,500m rankings were Morceli first, Niyangabo second — the rest of the world nowhere.

Morceli, not known for his concessions to other runners and undefeated in the last two seasons, acknowledged that the young Burundian was the one runner he feared.

Niyangabo has also showed his proficiency over longer distances in recent months.

Indoors, he claimed the scalp of Moses Kiptanui over 3,000m, the distance at which the Kenyan is the world record holder, although Niyangabo has no immediate plans to move up distance. But his ambitions to claim a world indoor title were scuppered. He flew to Barcelona in March from his base in Italy with the intention of contesting the World Indoor Championships, but was refused entry to Spain.

The International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) admitted their mistake in not providing him with the right papers but despite a personal plea from IAAF President Primo Nebiolo, Niyangabo was unwilling to return and risk a similar indignity.

Visas permitting, the forthcoming outdoor season appears set for a series of fascinating head-to-head duels with Morceli, culminating in the World Championships in Gothenburg in August. Such a series of duels have not been seen in middle-distance running for a decade when Morocco's Said Aouita was battling with Britain's Steve

Running to remove the memory of the massacres

By Phil Minshull from London

Burundi is hard to find in the annals of world sporting achievement, with some minor successes on the African soccer scene and a couple of top-class athletes. Now there is Venuste Niyangabo. Gemini News Service profiles a runner on the verge of bringing global recognition to one of the world's poorest countries.

Nevertheless, Niyangabo is not making any rash predictions about what he might do in the next few months: "This season all I'm just hoping to run somewhere near as well as I did last year."

"Each year I'm getting stronger. All I'm aiming to do is run faster. If that's good enough to beat Nouredine, so be it."

After his 1992 achievement, Niyangabo was recruited by the Italian agent Enrico Dionisi. He now shares a flat in Padua with Zambia's Sammy Matete, the 1991 world 400m hurdles gold medalist.

He was born in Vuglio, a small village in the south of Burundi, eldest of seven children. His father is a vet and his mother a primary school teacher and so the young Niyangabo was protected from some of the deprivations that exist elsewhere in the country.

But as a Tutsi, the region's ethnic minority, there is no way he can ignore the turmoil enveloping his country and the massacres in neighbouring Rwanda.

"I phone home at least once a month because although I like my Italian base I do get homesick from time to time and I am very concerned about the situation in Burundi," says Niyangabo.

"I get depressed when I meet up with some of the other athletes from the area. Some, such as Mathias Ntawulikura (Rwanda's Italian-based long distance runner who was a finalist at the last two world championships), have been deeply affected by the violence. I am saddened about the violence in both countries and am appalled that it continues."

"At home it was normal for everyone to live together. There is nothing to distinguish a Hutu from a Tutsi. In my village our origins were simply part of the community."

"But politics brings these divisions to life. In a country such as ours it is not difficult to understand how the killings start.

"Many people are hungry and it just needs someone to suggest that they can get more land by killing someone from another tribe. They are thinking that someone from another race should not matter and ignorance soon becomes the assassin."

Niyangabo finds it difficult to forget these things even when he is racing. It gives him

the efforts of Dieudonne Kwizera. Before Niyangabo rose to prominence, Kwizera was the nation's sporting idol.

Fifth in the 1987 world indoor 800m and African Games medalist, Kwizera found he was unable to run in the 1988 Olympics because Burundi did not have a National Olympic Committee.

Undaunted, Kwizera set up a Committee, lobbied the International Committee for membership and opened the Olympic doors for Niyangabo and Alois Nizigama, Burundi's other top-class athlete.

Kwizera will be there in Atlanta but probably only as a spectator. Injuries have curtailed his running over the last two years and his ambition of competing at the Olympics looks as though it will be unrealized.

— Gemini News
About the Author: Phil Minshull is a London-based freelance journalist who writes and broadcasts extensively on African sport.



Burundi runner Venuste Niyangabo. Stronger each year.

the perspective that there are some things in life that are more important than success on the track.

He is just accepting what ever comes his way this year, but in 1996 there is the Olympics to consider. Burundi will be represented for the first time and Niyangabo will be going for gold, possibly over 5,000m.

Burundi did not join the international Olympic Committee until 1993, as a result of



Cathy Freeman, who won the 200 and 400 metres in the Commonwealth Games in Victoria, paraded with the aboriginal flag. — Star file photo