

World Series begins today

WI dynasty to dwindle?



ADELAIDE, Dec 14: The West Indies go into Friday's opening match of a one-day tournament against Sri Lanka and Australia diverted by the turmoil surrounding star batsman Brian Lara and beset by poor form, reports Reuter.

Already missing Lara, who dropped out of the Australian tour after being fined for misconduct during this year's England Test series, the West Indies face the Sri Lankans after Tuesday's humiliating one-day defeat by Australia's cricket academy. As a sign of the pressure, team manager Wes Hall banned the media from attending a three-hour nets session today as the besieged tourists completed preparations for the World Series Cup.

Richardson had earlier condemned a report in the Trinidad Guardian newspaper that quoted Hall as saying Lara had blamed the captain for a lack of discipline in England.

"I have not got a problem with Brian Lara," Richardson said on his arrival in Adelaide on Wednesday for the start of the tournament.

"We are confident we have a good team and we are confident we can beat both teams," Richardson said after today's practice session.

Hall's leaked report to the West Indies Cricket Board of Control (WICBC) had said Lara had left the team after an explosive meeting in late July, saying he had retired, the Guardian said.

"Lara's a great miss but what can we do?" Richardson told the Sydney Morning Herald on his absence from

the West Indies squad. "Starting any competition with a win will do your confidence a lot of good but even if we lose the first game, we will be able to make it up," he told reporters.

"The Lara situation is behind us in the West Indies and I don't really want to answer any questions about that," he added.

Hall, who is in Adelaide with the tourists, said on Tuesday he was "surprised and disgusted" that his confidential report on the 26-year-old Trinidadian was leaked to the Guardian.

"This is a matter between the board and Mr Lara and I have no intention of getting involved in any rhetorical discussion," Hall was quoted as saying by Thursday's Sydney Morning Herald.

"I am a Christian, I am interested in healing. This is making a mountain out of a molehill. It is not in the interests of the West Indies," he added.

West Indies will be striving for a vastly improved performance at the Adelaide Oval against Sri Lanka, their conquerors in the Champions Trophy limited overs final in Sharjah two months ago.

Sri Lankan coach Dav Whatmore insisted the turmoil in the West Indies camp would have no impact on the way his team approached the game.

"We can only control what we can do and that's the way we will be approaching all our matches," he said. "I guess in a way it's nice to know your opposition is not in the best of form but we can't read too much into that."

Two days ago Richardson condemned his side's batting

performance as pathetic after they crashed to a humiliating eight-wicket defeat against the academy, who represent the country's next generation of first-class cricketers.

The West Indies were routed for 92 but Richardson believes there will be a vastly improved showing against Sri Lanka.

"We have to put that loss against the academy aside because we know we can do better. Once we go out there in the one-day internationals we will be more motivated," he said.

Australian vice-captain and wicketkeeper Ian Healy said the West Indies' troubles were a cause for concern rather than celebration.

"It worries more than it comforts me," said Healy when asked about the margin of West Indies defeat against the academy youngsters.

"I think you'll find they will be a vastly different side from the one we've seen so far when the international stuff comes around," Healy said.

Australia, who begin their defence of the World Series title against West Indies in Adelaide on Sunday, have dropped 34-year-old batsman David Boon for their first three fixtures.

The gritty right-hander, a veteran of 181 limited overs internationals is likely to be replaced in the batting order by Michael Bevan.

Both Sri Lanka and the West Indies have delayed naming their teams for Friday's game, with Sri Lanka likely to recall left-handed opening batsman Sanath Jayasuriya, who was dropped for the first Test against Australia.

Germon a bit aspiring

DUNEDIN, New Zealand, Dec 14: New Zealand's confidence has not been shattered by their crushing 161-run loss to Pakistan in their one-off cricket Test, Kiwi skipper Lee Germon said Thursday, reports AP.

New Zealand open a four-match limited-overs series against Pakistan at Carisbrook on Friday and Germon said morale remains high.

He pointed out that New Zealand lost by a narrow 3-2 margin in their recent limited-overs series away to India.

"We've got a very good one-day side and on our day we are capable of beating anyone, as we showed in India," Germon said.

"As long as we back our ability and play positively, then we've got a good chance against Pakistan."

The Pakistan tour is unusual in that the four one-day matches take on at least as much importance as the solitary Test.

Players tend to view limited-overs games as a supplement to Test cricket, but with the World Cup starting in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in mid-February teams are in their final build-up for the tournament.

New Zealand still has three one-dayers to play against Zimbabwe in January, but for the Pakistanis the current series is their final preparation for a tournament in which they will be defending champions.

"Before the World Cup we need a bit of practice and this series will help," said Pakistan vice-captain Aamir Sohail.

Germon believes his players' positive attitude will hold the key to New Zealand's chances against Pakistan.

"A lot of one-day cricket is about self-belief," he said. "We've had a lot of one-day cricket and the change needs to be mental. It's an important part of one-day cricket, getting positive energy back in the squad."

SQUADS

NEW ZEALAND (probable): Lee Germon (captain), Nathan Astle, Craig Spearman, Adam Parore, Stephen Fleming, Roger Tose, Chris Cairns, Gavin Larsen, Dipak Patel, Dion Nash, Danny Morrison.

PAKISTAN (from): Wasim Akram (captain), Aamir Sohail, Rameez Raja, Ijaz Ahmed, Inzamam-ul-Haq, Salim Malik, Basit Ali, Rashid Latif, Mushtaq Ahmed, Waqar Younis, Ata-Ur-Rehman, Aaqub Javed, Mohammad Akram, Saqlain Mushtaq.

Tobacco in trouble!

NEW DELHI, Dec 14: An Indian anti-smoking lobby has asked President Shankar Dayal Sharma not to inaugurate the cricket World Cup next year because of its sponsorship by a cigarette firm.

The National Organisation for Tobacco Eradication (NOTE) has written to the President urging him not to attend the opening ceremony in Calcutta on February 11.

NOTE chairman Sharad Vaidya said today he had asked the head of the state not to be a "party to promoting sale of cigarettes, which were known to cause cancer and chronic bronchitis."

"We therefore urge your excellency not to associate with an industry encouraging such products," the head of the Bangalore-based organisation wrote.

He cited the example of next year's Atlanta Olympics, which had been declared "smoke-free," and would not accept sponsorship from cigarette companies.

The World Cup, to be co-hosted by India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka from February 11 to March 18, is being sponsored by ITC Ltd, the country's leading cigarette manufacturer.

Organisers refused to comment on Vaidya's letter, saying only that the President had already accepted the invitation to be the chief guest at the opening ceremony at the 100,000-capacity Eden Gardens.

Only one of the five World Cups held so far has been sponsored by cigarette firms.

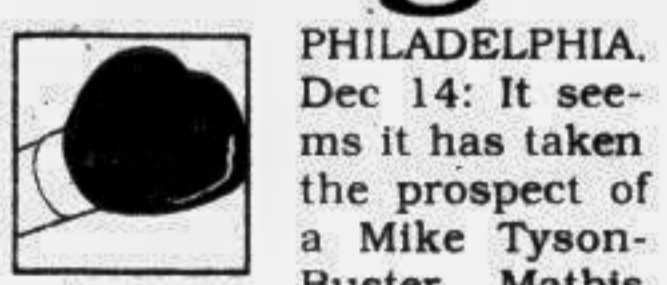
Benson and Hedges were allowed to sponsor the 1992 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, following a special decree from the New Zealand government, which otherwise prohibits such sponsorship.

The first three World Cups in England in 1975, 1979 and 1983 were sponsored by Prudential Insurance, the fourth, held in India and Pakistan in 1987, was sponsored by Indian textile giant Reliance.



Prior to Dec 16 fight, promoter Don King (C) brings former world heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson (R) and Buster Mathis face to face at a press conference in Philadelphia on Dec 13.

King knows his stuffs



PHILADELPHIA, Dec 14: It seems it has taken the prospect of a Mike Tyson-Buster Mathis fight to make this town reaffirm itself as the city of brotherly love, reports Reuter.

Even the usual throng of fight-camp followers, who would swim the Delaware river for a free cup of coffee, did not all sit in the seats in the Orndorff Hotel ballroom for Wednesday's news conference to promote the Saturday bout.

And sparse ticket sales makes it seem as if there is a week-long, hug-in-in-of-born-again pacifists here and no one told the fight crowd.

But perhaps the biggest indication that this fight promises to be as inspiring as watching water evaporate, was the low-watt performance by promoter Dong King, who on bad day could hype the peeling of a banana as the event of the century.

King, the master of hustle and king of confidence, was the most unenthusiastic, even confused, that he has ever been when the chance to sell tickets was at hand.

King's public relations man had to constantly remind the usually masterful master of ceremonies of the names of the people at his own news conference, who they were, and where they were sitting.

It seemed that King, Tyson's long-time promoter who is facing possible retrial after his trial on fraud charges ended in a hung jury earlier this month, was as unenthusiastic about the fight as local fans, who have bought only about 6,000 tickets—priced from 25-500 dollars—for the scheduled 12-round bout at the 18,000-seat Spectrum Arena.

In another strange twist, the wealthy King seemed like he needed to sell T-shirts to make the rent. The wire-hired promoter went so far as to hold up fight T-shirts at the podium like a street hawk, touting them as "a chance to buy a collectors item."

For the record, a very terse, obviously bored Tyson, who put his head down on the table at one point during the lengthy proceedings, promised to give a very exciting performance against Mathis, who is at least a 25-1 underdog.

After praising God, his staff, his sparing partners and the hotel where he is staying Tyson, 29 said: "I'm in great shape. I'm ready to fight and I'll give you good entertainment."

Then he turned to Mathis, 25, and said with just a tinge of malice: "I'll see you Saturday."

For this desultory news conference, that seemingly benign comment registered as a huge insult, and King and some of the crowd whooped and shouted as if Tyson had become the king of one-liners.

Mathis (20-0) was described by King as the "man who has the opportunity to catch lightning in a jug" and beat Tyson.

By most accounts, the light-hitting Mathis instead, should forget the lightning and bring an axe to have a chance against the 42-1 Tyson.

But the sincere and likeable Mathis, who would have to find a sledgehammer to break an egg, is always respectful and soft-spoken.

"I'm just prepared to take on Mike and show the world what Buster Mathis is made of."

Feb 29 Foreman finale



NEW YORK, Dec 14: Former heavyweight champion Goerge Foreman will end his career where it all began — at Madison Square Garden — with a fight against Michael Morrer on February 29, boxing promoter Bob Arum said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

"This is Foreman's final fight, no ifs, ands or buts," said Arum at a news conference to promote a Friday Oscar de la Hoya fight which quickly turned into a forum on Foreman.

"It's an end of an era. That's what we are calling it," said Arum of the bout, which will conclude the career of the popular and charismatic 46-year-old Foreman.

The two-time heavyweight champion made his professional debut at Madison Square Garden on June 23, 1969 with a three-round victory over Donald Waldheim on the undercard of a Joe Frazier-Jerry Quarry bout.

Arum said a formal announcement of the Foreman-Moorer fight will be made next week, but Madison Square Garden vice president Mnohn Cirillo said a few details still need to be worked out before he would confirm the bout.

"We don't have a signed contract," Cirillo said. "We had a great meeting yesterday and we are hopeful that it can happen."

"If in Bob's mind it's done, that's a positive sign," he said. "We have February 29 on hold."

The fight will be a rematch of the November 1994 bout in which Foreman stunned the boxing world by knocking out Morrer to become the oldest heavyweight champion some 20 years after losing the title to Muhammad Ali in Zaire.

Recent published reports had suggested the deal to stage a rematch of last year's stunner had collapsed over problems with the purse.

"I never thought it was dead, because I always knew that if you got everybody together and got people to do

the sensible thing it would happen," Arum said.

"All the problems have been ironed out."

Arum said Foreman, who last fought April 22 when he won a controversial split decision over German Axel Schultz, will receive 10 million dollars for his grand finale. Moorer will earn 2.7 million dollars.

The Foreman-Moorer fight will be the feature attraction in a 25th anniversary celebration of Muhammad Ali's first of three battles with Joe Frazier on March 8, 1971 at Madison Square Garden, Arum said.

On Friday, the unbeaten De la Hoya (19-0) will fight fellow American Jesse James Lelja (30-1-2) for the lightweight title of the lightly-regarded world boxing organisation.

Also on the Madison Square Garden card, International Boxing Federation junior lightweight champion Tracy Harris Patterson (54-3-1) defends his title against fellow American Arturo Gatti (23-1).

Stefan more sincere

STOCKHOLM, Dec 14: Former top-ranked Stefan Edberg will not play in the Olympic tennis tournament in Atlanta next summer, reports AP.

"Stefan told me he wants to give the younger Swedish players a chance to qualify for Atlanta," Davis Cup captain Carl-Axel Hageskog said Wednesday.

Edberg, who turns 30 next month, won the singles title in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics when tennis was an unofficial sport.

In the 1988 Seoul Olympics, Edberg lost in the semifinals to eventual champion Mijoslave Mecir of Czechoslovakia. Four years later in Barcelona, Edberg lost on clay in the first round to Andrei Chesnokov of Russia.

Edberg, who also has been top-ranked in doubles, will finish the year outside the top 10 for the first time since 1984. He is currently ranked 23rd.

Hageskog said Edberg plans to play a full schedule next year, including all Grand Slam events. The French Open is the only singles title Edberg has not won, but he reached the 1989 final against Michael Chang. He won the other Slams — Australian Open, Wimbledon and the US Open — twice each.

Sweden will enter its three highest-ranked singles players and one doubles team in the Atlanta Olympics. Currently, Thomas Enqvist (7) is the highest-ranked Swede followed by Magnus Larsson (17), Jonas Bjorkman (30) and Mats Wilander (46). The players will be selected after the April 29 ranking list is released.

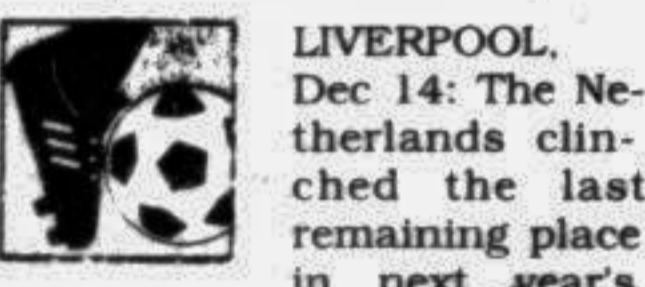
Except for Wilander, the top Swedish players gathered in Hageskog's hometown of Vaxjo, southern Sweden, this week for a training camp.

Motiur memorial soccer

Sonali Bank Sports and Recreation Club-II lifted the Martyr Motiur memorial soccer championship trophy crushing Sonali Youth-II 5-0 in the final played at the Sonali Bank Staff Quarters ground in Dhaka on Wednesday.

Deputy managing director of Sonali Bank Mosharrat Hossain distributed prizes.

Dutch's delayed delight



LIVERPOOL, Dec 14: The Netherlands clinched the last remaining place in next year's European Soccer Championship finals with a comfortable 2-0 victory over Ireland on Wednesday in a play-off match at neutral Anfield, reports Reuter.

Nineteen year old Patrick

draw for the championships with a controlled, composed display.

The match was played in an emotional atmosphere with so much at stake. Defeat almost certainly brings to a close Jack Charlton's nine year reign as Ireland's coach after 93 matches.

The only blemish on an otherwise memorable night for the Dutch was a booking

unlucky after 39 minutes when his 15-metre shot flew just wide of Edwin Van Der Sar's right-hand post.

Ireland's skipper Andy Townsend did himself no favours when he fouled Clarence Seedorf just before halftime, injuring his knee.

He only lasted for two minutes after the break before being substituted by Jason McAteer, a move which



Tony Cascarino (R) of Ireland tries to stymie Dutch Winston Bogarde during their crucial European Championships qualifying play-off in Liverpool on Dec 13. The Hollanders won 2-0 to ensure the last berth in the Championships. — AFP/UNB photo

Kluivert, one of eight Ajax players in the Dutch team, scored both goals, the first after 29 minutes, the second two minutes from time.

The Dutch were so superior they could have easily won by a much bigger margin. Ireland's ageing team, with five men over 30, rarely troubled the defence and apart from a near miss by Paul McGrath in the first half, the Dutch goal was hardly under threat.

The quicker, younger Netherlands players ensured their place in next Sunday's

for captain Danny Blind, which will rule him out of the first match the Netherlands play in the finals.

Charlton was giving nothing away about his future immediately after the match. "My aim now? It's to have a merry Christmas," he told a television reporter.

Wednesday's game was the 231st and last qualifier for Euro '96. The Dutch and Irish were the two teams who had finished with the worst records amongst the eight runners-up.

But there was nothing inferior about the Dutch on the night and bookmakers in London swiftly slashed their odds against lifting next year's title from 12-1 to fourth favourites at 6-1.

While the Dutch weaved intricate patterns, the Irish played long hopeful balls, or tried to utilise the speed of overlapping full-backs Terry Phelan and Gary Kelly, but to muted effect.

The Dutch took the initiative almost from the kick-off and Dennis Bergkamp came close to giving them the lead after eight minutes when he rattled the bottom of Alan Kelly's left-hand post with a powerfully hit right-footer.

The Arsenal striker threatened a second time with a 16th minute free-kick from 20 metres which just went over the bar.

Ireland went close only twice in the opening half. John Sheridan shot wide after 28 minutes and McGrath, Ireland's record cap-holder making his 80th international appearance, was

led to Ireland's best spell of the match.

But when Tony Cascarino missed a header after an hour with only Van Der Sar to beat from five metres the Dutch regained the ascendancy with Seedorf, Kluivert and Ronald De Boer in control.

Kluivert had opened the scoring when he swept home a left-wing cross from Edgar Davids, and he almost made it two when he headed against the bar after 63 minutes.

Seedorf saw Kelly make an instinctive save five minutes later and Davids, another Ajax star, almost scored with a Mazzyrun close to the end before Kluivert did add a second, sweeping through the centre of the Irish defence to shoot home.

Hansie's hair at stake!

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 14: South African cricket captain Hansie Cronje has staked his hair on the result of the five-Test series against England, the Star newspaper reported today, reports Reuter.

It quoted Cronje as saying teammate Gary Kirsten would be allowed to do whatever he liked with his hair if South Africa won.

"He can cut it, bleach it. Do whatever he wants with it," Cronje told the paper.

Cricket commentator Jack Bannister has pledged to eat a page of the newspaper in which his weekly cricket column is published if England lose the Test series.