

Charlton delays inevitable

LONDON, Dec 15: Jack Charlton put off a decision Thursday on whether to end his 10-year reign as Ireland manager, while Wimbledon manager Mick McCarthy emerged as the favourite to replace him, reports AP.

Charlton was coy about his future after Ireland lost 2-0 to the Netherlands in Wednesday night's playoff in Liverpool for the 16th and final spot in next summer's European Championships.

Charlton had strongly indicated beforehand that he would step down if Ireland failed to qualify. But, after the match, he said only that his immediate plans were to "have a merry Christmas."

"I am going to hang around until New Year," he said. "I'm going to talk to a few people, then make my decision."

In a BBC radio interview Thursday, Charlton said his decision could depend on the views of the Irish public.

"I will see what the reaction is in Ireland to what happened last night," he said. Charlton said he would hold talks with the Football Association of Ireland before making his decision.

"I am not going to walk out of the job today," he said. FAI chief executive Sean Connolly said there would be no pressure on the 60-year-old Charlton either to stay or go.

"We are not pushing him to decide one way or the other," he said. "It is entirely a decision for Jack to make and no one else can make it for him."

McCarthy, a former Ireland international who was Charlton's captain during the 1990 World Cup campaign, confirmed he would like to take charge of the national side.

"To play for your country and then to have the chance to manage it, I would have to be interested," he said. "Yes, I would be delighted."

Another possible contender could be Wimbledon manager Joe Kinnear, who was born in Dublin and has strong Irish ties.

Pakistan scrape to post



DUNEDIN, New Zealand, Dec 15: Pakistan won the opening one-day cricket international on their New Zealand tour by 20 runs in a low-scoring match at Dunedin today, reports Reuter.

Batting first after winning the toss, Pakistan struggled to 189 for nine wickets on a slow-paced pitch.

New Zealand's chase got off to a bad start. Openers Craig Spearman and Nathan Astle departed inside the first five overs. Spearman was superbly caught by a diving Ijaz Ahmed at backward point and Astle gave Akram a sharp return catch.

Waqar Younis out through the middle order, taking three wickets in nine balls, an effort which earned him the man-of-the-match award.

Roger Tiose and Chris Cairns added 42 for the sixth wicket in 40 minutes before Cairns and captain Lee Germon "fell to consecutive Mushtaq Ahmed deliveries."

New Zealand seemed down and out at 114 for eight before Tiose and Gavin Larsen put on a spirited 50 runs for the ninth wicket.

Tiose, dropped by wicket-keeper Rashid Latif before scoring, worked the ball around the ground in his 93-ball innings.

However Larsen was caught in the gully for 23 and Tiose's innings ended when he dragged a ball from Akram onto his stumps to finish the match.

New Zealand were all out for 169 in the 48th over. It was a poor response to Pakistan's less than challenging 189.

Only two Pakistani players got to 30. Opener Rameez Raja top scored with a painstaking 35, and Inzamam-ul-Haq hit 32 off 49 balls.

Wickets fell regularly but there was an important hand towards the end from Latif. His 26 off 33 balls gave the Pakistan bowlers something to work with.

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WAQAR YOUNIS... m-o-m series is at Christchurch on Sunday.

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PAKISTAN	
Raja c Cairns	35
Sohail c Spearman b Patel	17
Ahmed Ijaz b Larsen	9
Inzamamul Haq c Patel b Astle	32
Malik c Tiose b Astle	13
B Ali run out	19
W Akram run out	16
R Latif not out	26
M Ahmed c Tiose b Cairns	5
W Younis b Morrison	0
A Javed not out	8
Extras: (lb-6, w-3)	9
Total: for nine wickets, 50 overs	189

NEW ZEALAND	
Astle c and b Akram	5
Spearman c Ijaz b Javed	5
Young b Waqar	17
Fleming Ijaz b Waqar	15
Parore b Waqar	2
Tiose b Akram	59
Cairns c Latif b Mushtaq	18
Germon c Akram b Mushtaq	1
Patel c Ali b Malik	9
Larsen c Ijaz b Akram	23
Morrison not out	0
Extras: (lb-9, w-5, nb-1)	15
Total: (47.4 overs)	169

Bowling				
	O	M	R	W
Patel	7	0	21	1
Morrison	9	0	39	1
Larsen	10	0	29	1
Cairns	9	1	42	2
Astle	10	0	34	2
Tiose	5	0	18	0

Bowling				
	O	M	R	W
Akram	9.4	1	18	3
Javed	9	0	38	1
Younis	9	0	38	3
Mushtaq	10	1	31	2
Sohail	9	0	30	0
Malik	1	0	5	1

Result: Pakistan won by 20 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Waqar Younis.

Pakistan lead four-match series 1-0.

South Africa 225 all out



DURBAN, South Africa, Dec 15: South Africa were all out for 225 on the second day of the third cricket Test against England today, reports Reuter.

Earlier on Thursday, Peter Martin had a burst of three for 31 and Richard Illingworth snapped up two wickets to give England the initiative on a curtailed first day of the Test.

Paceman Martin and left-arm spinner Illingworth reduced South Africa from an encouraging 54 without loss to 89 for five after they won the toss.

Jonty Rhodes (36 not out) and Brian McMillan (26 not out) were leading a recovery which had lifted the score to 139 for five when bad light stopped play for the day just two overs after tea.

Illingworth, recalled to the side after being left out for the drawn second Test in Johannesburg, came on in the 16th over of the innings and bowled most of the way through the afternoon, finishing with 22-8-33-2.

Martin, in his first appearance of the series, conceded 17 runs from his first three overs but came back to take his three wickets in his next 10 overs for a haul of three for 31.

It was Martin, a surprise choice with left-arm pace bowler Mark Iltott ahead of Devon Malcolm and Angus Fraser, who made the initial breakthrough in the morning.

spinner but misread the flight as he tried to hit over the top and holed out to Martin at mid-on.

After lunch Martin struck again with two wickets in quick succession.

First, Daryll Cullinan (10) drove lazily off stump and gave Robin Smith an easy catch in the covers.

Then Martin removed debutant Jacques Kallis for one with a superb delivery which just left him slightly and caught the edge to give Jack Russell a comfortable take behind the stumps.

Rhodes, who batted 140 minutes, and McMillan had to battle determinedly to stem the English tide.

Martin could not hide his delight at recording his best Test figures but said the call to play had come later than expected.

"I bowled well in Paarl (in the previous tour match) and had a vibe that I might be in the team but I didn't find out until 8:45 this morning."

On Cronje's dismissal, Illingworth said he was not surprised to see the South African captain advance down the pitch: "I bowled to him in Bloemfontein and so half expected it. I saw his feet twitching to just banged it in a bit shorter."

Illy on the losing side!

LONDON, Dec 15: England cricket supreme Ray Illingworth lost his bid to gain more power over the national team on Thursday, reports Reuter.

Chairman of selectors Illingworth had hoped that the Test and County Cricket Board (TCCB) would allow him to withdraw international players from county matches if he considered it to be in the best interests of England.

But a Lord's meeting of the TCCB did not even vote on the issue.

The TCCB are trying to close the loophole which allows players with dual nationality to appear in county cricket without commenting themselves to England.

The problem was illustrated earlier this year when Gloucestershire's Anglo-Australian batsman Andrew Symonds declined an offer to go on the current England A team tour to Pakistan.

From the start of next season, players holding dual nationality will be required to sign an annual declaration not to play cricket for any country outside the European Union — although whether such a move will be legally binding remains unclear.

A decision to bar overseas players completely from county cricket in 1999 was deferred.



England paceman Mark Iltott, 2nd from R, is being congratulated by teammates after dismissing South Africa's wicket keeper Dave Richardson during the second day of the third Test match in Durban on Dec 15. — AFP/UNB photo

Valderrama joins MLS

LOS ANGELES, Dec 15: Colombian midfielder Carlos Valderrama on Thursday became the latest big-name foreigner to sign with Major League Soccer, the US First Division league scheduled to begin in April, reports AP.

The 34-year-old Valderrama, known for his bushy blonde hair, played in the 1990 and 1994 World Cups and has seven goals in 90 international appearances. He will be assigned either to the New York-New Jersey, Dallas or Tampa franchises.

MLS also signed two defenders from Cameroon's national team: Victor-Akem N'Dip, 28, and Samuel Ekeme, 27. N'Dip three goals in 86 internationals while Ekeme has none in 32 games with Cameroon.

Reports earlier this week had quoted Valderrama as saying he preferred to play in Tampa.

"I'm thrilled to be a part of Major League Soccer," Valderrama was quoted in a statement from the league announcing his signing. "I have great memories of the fans in the United States from my experience during the 1994 World Cup and I want to do everything possible to make Major League Soccer a success."

He played for Montpellier in the French League from 1988 to 1991, spent a season with Real Valladolid in Spain, then returned to Colombia. He has been with Atletico Junior since 1993.

N'Dip played with Cameroon in the 1986, '88 and '92 African Nations Cup. Both he and Ekeme played last summer with the Hawaii Tsunami of the United States Systems of Independent Soccer Leagues, a US Third Division.

The league also signed American midfielder Dominic Kinnear. The 28-year-old, who played with Mexico's Necaxa in the 1994-95 season, has nine goals in 56 games with the US national team.

Thursday's signings bring to 105 the number of players MLS has under contract. The league had previously signed Mexican goalkeeper Jorge Campos, Bolivian midfielder Marco Etchevery, Mexican forward Hugo Sanchez, and Nigerian Michael Emenalo and Uche Okafor.

A travelling circus

PARIS, Dec 15: It may be a logistical nightmare for travel arrangers, but organisers of the 1998 World Cup have made sure that fans and the 32 teams will see a lot of France during the championship, reports AP.

Continuing its policy of making sure some teams don't get the advantage of playing in the same venue for all the qualifying games, FIFA is moving them around like they did in the United States last year.

Meeting before Tuesday's World Cup qualifying draw at the Louvre, FIFA decided that defending champions Brazil, for example, shall play a first game in Paris, then travel 240 miles (384 kilometres) to Nantes and then 607 miles (972 kms) to Marseille.

Another team, possibly host nation France, would start in Bordeaux, then travel 304 miles (486 kms) to Montpellier and then 475 miles (760 kms) to Paris.

With a record 32 teams taking part this time, an increase of eight from the last World Cup in the United States, it will mean hundreds of thousands of fans criss-crossing the country to follow their teams.



The Thai 4x400 metres relay team poses after clinching the gold at the 18th SEA Games in Chiang Mai on Dec 15. — AFP/UNB photo

Thailand's ton of gold

CHIANG MAI, Thailand, Dec 15: Thailand topped the magic 100 mark in gold medals at the Southeast Asian Games today, winning nearly half of all the gold medals awarded in the first seven days of the nine-day competition, reports Reuter.

By late today hosts Thailand had bagged a total of 106 gold out of 242 awarded so far. The Thais also led in the overall medal count by a wide margin with 252.

Indonesia were a distant second with 163 medals including 55 golds, while the Philippines were third with 117. 29 of which were golds.

More than 3,000 athletes from 10 countries are competing for a total of 324 gold medals, 324 silvers and 421 bronze medals in 28 sports.

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A total of 14 Games records were set in 14 events in the six days of athletics competition. Eight of the records were by Thais, who won 44 of the 135 medals at stake on the track.

Indonesia swept the golds in the four traditional rowing events, while Burma took the silver in all about the women's 400 metres event. Thailand came second in that event and took the bronze in the others.

Fans were gearing up for Sunday's soccer final, which will pit the host team against surprise finalists Vietnam. Today about 1,000 Thai soccer fans, upset that they could not buy tickets for Sunday's game, burned tents and blocked the road in front

of the sports complex. On the shooting range today, Thailand won the top two positions in the men's 50-metre free rifle, and bagged the gold in the team event.

Vietnamese shooter Thi Minh Tam Dao won gold in the women's 25-metre sport pistol, followed by Burma's Khin Soe Thaik and Thandar Su Myint.

Vietnam also won the team 25-metre sport pistol followed by Thailand and Burma.

Thailand's Trinya Srinok and Aranboule won the women's 76 kg and men's 19 kg weight lifting events, respectively.

In the swimming pool, Singapore's Jocelyn Yeo won her seventh gold medal of the SEA Games by finishing a few hundredths of a second ahead of Thailand's Ravee Intaporn-Udom in the women's 400-metre freestyle.

Yeo is due to compete in nine events, and hopes to win gold in all of them.

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Maradona being Maradona



BUENOS AIRES, Dec 15: Troubled soccer star Diego Maradona said Thursday he would quit Boca Juniors, barely two months after making a comeback, reports AP.

"I'm leaving with great sadness," the 35-year-old former Argentine captain told reporters. "I don't want to put rocks in Boca's path, so I'm off."

He said the Boca Juniors' final game of the season on Saturday would be his last with the club.

Maradona had warned that if Boca hired former Argentine national coach Carlos Bilardo, he would leave the club at which he sprang to fame as a teenager in the early 1980s.

Boca President Mauricio Macri confirmed he had offered Bilardo the post, but said he would do everything to keep Maradona.

"Boca is striving to be among the world's top five clubs and so we must keep Maradona," he said, adding that Bilardo did not object to coaching Maradona.

Maradona first played under Bilardo when he inspired Argentina to the 1986 World Cup title.

been offered a contract to play in Japan. "I don't know who will want to sign me," he said, denying that he planned to retire.

Maradona has shown glimpses of his old genius since returning for Boca in late September. However the team squandered a five-point lead this month and even lost 6-4 at home to title chasers Racing Club.

In February 1994, he fired an air rifle at reporters outside his home, injuring four. The incident occurred the day after he was released by First Division side Newell's Old Boys for repeatedly missing training sessions.

He was then kicked out of last year's World Cup finals after testing positive for performance-enhancing drugs after a much-publicized comeback.

Maradona's career has been plagued by controversy since he left Boca in 1981 to play in Europe with Spain's Barcelona, Napoli in Italy and Sevilla.

In 1991 he was banned for 15 months for cocaine abuse while playing for Napoli. The following year he was arrested in Buenos Aires for drug possession.

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