

Pak selectors still sitting on the fence

KARACHI, Jan 8: Pakistani selectors who met here Sunday to pick the cricket squad for the forthcoming World Cup have delayed the decision until Friday, officials said, reports AFP.

Zafar Altaf who chaired the meeting gave no reason beyond saying that the selectors wanted to observe certain players who were currently participating in the Wills Cup domestic tournament.

Cricketing sources here, however, said the delay was due to differences over the possible inclusion of former captain Javed Miandad in the national side. Miandad is a serious contender, Altaf told reporters.

"We have no doubt about his cricketing ability," Altaf said, adding: "But we want to take another look at his fitness."

Miandad left for London late Sunday on a private visit, but is expected to return in two or three days, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) sources said.

The World Cup — jointly hosted by Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka — is to start on February 15.

Miandad — who has not played for Pakistan since December 1993 after suffering a leg injury — has said he would be available for the World Cup.

The ace Pakistani batsman had scored nearly 8,000 runs in one-day internationals and over 8,000 in Test cricket.

Newspapers said Basit Ali, who tried to step into Miandad's shoes, may not find a place in the final squad, and suggested the squad was likely to include Miandad.

Altaf said the PCB had also decided to organise a national cricket camp from January 24 in which four matches will be played between two Pakistan sides.

Besides 18 Test players attending the camp some more players would also be invited to play in these matches.

"Fitness and training of the players was the prime goal of the camp," Altaf said, adding that he wanted to see the boys get into peak physical shape just before the event.

Foreman's farewell bout called off

NEW YORK, Jan 8: George Foreman's planned farewell fight against Michael Moorer, scheduled for here on February 29, is off for a second time, according to a newspaper report Sunday, reports AFP.

New York Newsday said the bout, set for Madison Square Garden, might not come off because of comments made by Foreman and promoter Bob Arum about trying to arrange a fight later this year with Mike Tyson.

The comments undermined the promotion of Foreman-Moorer as the final fight in the career of the 46-year-old former champion, who has been stripped of the titles he won by beating Moorer in 1994.

TKO, the pay-per-view backer of the Foreman-Moorer fight, wants protection against possible financial losses because of those statements, which were hastily retracted once the sponsor's anger was known.

Foreman was set to receive 9.6 million dollars for the fight while Moorer would have gotten three million dollars.

Tyson is set to fight British boxer Frank Bruno for the World Boxing Council title in Las Vegas on March 16, with an eye on other crowns held by Bruce Seldon and South African Franz Botha.

A big money fight deal has also been discussed for Tyson this year, but mainly against Riddick Bowe late in 1996. Talks of a Tyson-Foreman bout have come almost totally from Foreman's Promoters.

The Foreman-Moorer fight was planned to be the centerpiece of the Garden's 25th anniversary celebration of the first Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier bout, which took place there on March 8, 1971.

Ali and Frazier are expected to take part in promotional events, but Arum said he has not finalised anything with Ali. Arena officials said the fight could lose some of its luster and purse without Ali and Frazier as part of the package.

German spikers book Atlanta berth

BREMEN, Germany, Jan 8: Germany's women volleyball team booked their passage for the Atlanta Olympics on Sunday with a surprise victory over their Russian counterparts in Bremen, reports AFP.

The Germans won a close-fought encounter by 3 sets to 2 — 4-15, 15-9, 15-5, 8-15 and 16-14 — to defeat the Russians for the first time since 1987.

Apart from Germany, Brazil, China, Cuba and the United States have also qualified for the Olympics.

Russia have a second chance to claim a berth when they play a tournament in Japan at the end of May.

Brian now on way back?



LONDON, Jan 8: West Indies' record-breaking batsman Brian Lara is likely to play in next month's World Cup after winning selection in a provisional 20-man squad, his agent said on Monday, reports AFP.

Lara's future has been in doubt after he refused to tour Australia in protest against a fine imposed by the West Indies Cricket Board of Control following this year's tour of England.

He was fined 10 per cent of his tour fee, about \$10,000 dollars, for going "absent without leave."

Lara returned to domestic cricket at the weekend, scoring a century in trials for the Trinidad and Tobago side, and on Monday his agent Jonathan Barnett said he had spoken to the 26-year-old Trinidadian about the World Cup.

"I feel confident he will be

Andre all keyed up

MELBOURNE, Jan 8: Andre Agassi is finally over a nagging chest muscle injury and ready to defend his Australian Open tennis title, reports AP.

The flamboyant American flew into Melbourne on Monday to complete his preparation for the first Grand Slam tournament of the year and said he was upbeat about his prospects.

"It's nice to be healthy again, feeling ready — and to start off here is a good secure feeling for me," he said.

"I had never played here before until last year and it's nice to know that when I've been away from the game a little bit I can come back to a place where I'm treated so well."

Agassi, who was red-eyed and shaven-haired at Monday's press conference, will play in the eight-man Colonial Classic event — which runs from Wednesday to Saturday at nearby Kooyong — to round off his build-up to the Open.

"Needless to say, my energy level is high," he said. "I've been away for a little bit, so you are always enthused to get back," he said.

The chest injury ruled Agassi out of the Davis Cup final against Russia in Moscow and the American said a lack of match fitness was his major concern.

"I'm as confident as I ever am, but it's not ideal for me to come into the tournament without playing a tournament for a few months," he said.

During his time away from the court, Agassi has been spending time in the gym keeping up his fitness and working on cardiovascular programmes.

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Barnett also said Lara would not be playing county cricket this year after pulling out of his three-year contract with county champions Warwickshire.

Lara was quoted in Monday's Daily Telegraph as saying he would be "delighted" to consider a good offer from an English county.

Warwickshire chief executive Dennis Amis said later on Monday the county were set to sign South African pace bowler Shaun Pollock after agreeing with Lara when they terminated his contract that the West Indian would not play for any other county this year.

Meanwhile, in Brisbane, West Indies cricket captain Richie Richardson said Sunday that the controversy over missing star batsman Brian Lara isn't foremost on his mind.

"I know that he is included in the 20 names which is not even a squad really, they just needed 20 names and his name was submitted."

Richardson said a player of Lara's quality would always be welcomed back into the team. But he also said any player should abide by the board's rulings and pay the penance if disciplined for any reason.

"It's a pity that such a great talent had to miss the game," Richardson said. "The quicker the problem is sorted out and we get Brian Lara back the better."

"You can't afford to have that talent not playing the game but if he does something wrong he must pay the consequences."

"I'm not even thinking

Sport

Haynes hounds England

SHARJAH, Jan 8: West Indies beat England by five wickets in the NEPC World masters cricket series at the Sharjah Stadium here today, reports BSS.

Score: England — 231 for four wickets (Mike Gatting 101 not out, Paul Terry 65; Sylvester Clarke two for 49).

West Indies — 233 for five wickets (Desmond Haynes 125 not out, Vivian Richards 60; John Emburey three for 31).

Korda tames the tyro

DOHA, Jan 8: Petr Korda outlasted Younnes el Aynaoui 7-6 (7-5), 2-6, 7-6, (7-5), prevailing in a two-hour and 21-minute battle Sunday to win the \$65,000 dollar Qatar Open tennis his first title since December 1993, reports AP.

It's Korda's seventh career title and came against a 24-year old Moroccan who only entered the tournament as a wild card after Frenchman Henri Leconte pulled out because of an injury.

The 27-year old Czech's title comes just three months after a hernia operation to cure him of a nagging groin injury that hampered him for 18 months.

Backed by huge Arab support in the 3,500 strong crowd, the 24-year old el Aynaoui broke first to lead 2-1 in the first set but Korda broke back immediately.

It was Korda's turn to go up a break at 4-2 but the 110th ranked Moroccan earned his second break in the ninth game to send the set to a tiebreaker.

El Aynaoui, who had been broken only once this week going into Sunday's final, steadied himself in the second set, holding his service throughout and breaking Korda twice.

But it didn't last long. Korda opened the third set with a break and then gave it back three games later.

After sending the match to a second tiebreaker, el Aynaoui saved one match point but was powerless one the second. Korda hugged his wife Regina and 3-year old daughter Jessica at court side.

El Aynaoui, who defeated top seeded Thomas Muster in the semifinals, had only appealed in one final before — in Casablanca in 1993. He took home almost \$100,000 to take his earnings over the \$100,000 mark.

Korda announced that he would not play in the Sydney tournament next week because of a sprained ankle and because he could feel his herna throbbing inside.

The tournament is a warm up event for the Australian Open, which is the first Grand Slam of the season.

Wiesner breezes into Round Two

HOBART, Australia, Jan 8: Top-seeded Judith Wiesner, also vice-president of the European governing body UEFA, said it was necessary to find a solution which applied to the entire continent, not just the 18 federations in the EU.

He promised that Bayern would stick to the agreement out of solidarity with the other clubs but added: "It would certainly have been more sensible to abolish the limit right away and bow to the EU decision, as will eventually happen anyway."

In a lawsuit brought by Belgian player Jean-Marc Bosman, the European court ruled last month that limits on the number of foreign European Union nationals a club could field and the sport's transfer system contravened EU law.

Stephen Engels, coach of once-mighty Cologne, last week announced his intention to field all the club's five foreigners together in a bid to stave off relegation from the Bundesliga.

But Cologne president Klaus Hartmann pledged his club would also stick to the accord.

DFB president Egidius

What happens when a club is struggling for survival, a thousand supporters are clamouring outside the gates and the club has a perfectly logical possibility of playing more foreigners," he said.

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