

Akram to join squad in SA?

Star Sports Monitor



The much-maligned Wasim Akram is possibly just hours away from finally getting justice.

According to news reports in India and Pakistan, Akram is likely to head for South Africa "within a couple of days".

Akram will, then, add welcome muscle and class to a Pakistan line-up which has already been hit by injuries. The three-Test series begins Friday.

After that will be a short trip to Zimbabwe and, then, the triseries back in South Africa. Clearly, Pakistan cannot do without Akram's proven ability (334 wickets in 77 Tests; 841 wickets from 238 one-dayers).

The selectors, it may be recalled, had dropped Akram — on a verbal directive from Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief executive Majid Khan — last month. Only, much has happened since.

The most significant development in this regard was Akram's hour-long meeting with the Pakistan Sports Minister, Sheikh Rashid, and the National Assembly speaker, Elahi Bukhsh Sumro in Islamabad on Saturday.

Apparently former PCB chief executive Arif Abbasi, too, was present at the quietly arranged session at the speaker's house. That in itself is significant.

The Karachi-based Abbasi, however, was not available for comment.

While the speaker's involvement would normally raise eyebrows, it is understood that Sumro is a cricket

(indicating any involvement with bookies) to threaten his own career and, secondly that the PCB has denied him the right to defend himself against the many allegations.

It is gathered that both the minister and speaker, responded very positively. And Abbasi, on his part, is reported to have emphasised that the PCB — which is not an autonomous body — cannot act as judge, jury and executioner.

That, too, without adequate proof of Akram's alleged wrongdoings. Also significant is that the PCB has a new chairman, former Pakistan manager Khalid Mahmood, who holds Akram in high regard. In fact, on the day Mahmood replaced Syed Zulfikar Ali Shah Bukhari, late last month, he saluted Akram as being "priceless".

Everything therefore, points to Akram having the last laugh. Indeed, the appointment he has sought with Sharif may also come through any day.

Meanwhile, according to a report of The Dawn standing committee of the Senate on Sports, Culture and Tourism will meet on Feb 12 at Qaddafi Stadium, Lahore, to discuss performance of Pakistani Cricket team with special reference to match fixing allegations.

The Committee has also asked Wasim Akram to attend the meeting and give his point of view on the allegations being levelled against the Pakistani cricketers, including the fast bowler.

Moreover, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.

Telegraph also claimed that Akram made two points at the meeting. Firstly, that he is a pro and would do nothing

buff, much like Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reported The Telegraph of India.

Movingly, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.

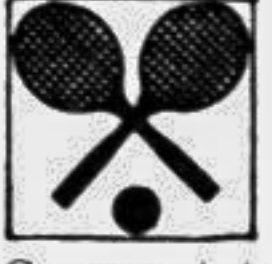
Telegraph also claimed that Akram made two points at the meeting. Firstly, that he is a pro and would do nothing

buff, much like Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reported The Telegraph of India.

Movingly, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.

Telegraph also claimed that Akram made two points at the meeting. Firstly, that he is a pro and would do nothing

King pondering over her team



NEW YORK, Feb 11: Lindsay Davenport and the Williams sisters — Venus and Serena — head US Fed Cup captain Billie Jean King's wish list to take the team into the first-round against the Netherlands, reports Reuters.

In a teleconference call Tuesday, King said she was put together 11 players from which she will pick four to play the Dutch April 18-19 at Kiawah Island, South Carolina.

"She has not said that she would or wouldn't play," King said of Davenport, who beat world No 1 Martina Hingis in the Tokyo final Sunday. "I'm trying to get to talk to her."

Lindsay is very loyal to America and very much into team play. I would hope that she is available. I can't imagine her not being available," said King, who is returning as captain after voluntarily stepping down for a year.

King said she counting on Davenport's loyalty and the memories of last year's 3-2 opening-round upset loss to the Netherlands in the last four months.

King knows, however, that it might take some talking to get them to play beginning with their father.

"I have put a call in to Williams but haven't heard back," King said. "I know school is a very important part of their lives and the match is during school."

"I need to sit down and talk with them," King said. "There is no reason if they were named that they can't bring a tutor down to fit the books. There are a lot of things that I would make sure of. I want to sit down with the Williams."

Others on her list of possible players include Seles, Mary Joe Fernandez, Lisa Raymond, Chanda Rubin, Amy Frazier, Katrina Adams, Kimberly Po and Nicole Arendt. King said that she will wait until early April to make her final selections.

"The thought of getting the teenage Williams sisters, Venus, 17, and Serena, 16, to make their Fed Cup debuts is a thrilling, King said.

"The Williams sisters have created a sense of comfort in the future of American women's tennis," King said. "They are very strongly considered (for the team). Believe me, I'm thrilled."

Venus is No 14 in the world, having reached the US Open final last year and the Australian Open quarterfinals last month. Serena is ranked No 41 and has recorded wins over top 10 players Monica Seles, Mary Pierce

and Davenport in the last four months.

King knows, however, that it might take some talking to get them to play beginning with their father.

"I have put a call in to Williams but haven't heard back," King said. "I know school is a very important part of their lives and the match is during school."

"I need to sit down and talk with them," King said. "There is no reason if they were named that they can't bring a tutor down to fit the books. There are a lot of things that I would make sure of. I want to sit down with the Williams."

Others on her list of possible players include Seles, Mary Joe Fernandez, Lisa Raymond, Chanda Rubin, Amy Frazier, Katrina Adams, Kimberly Po and Nicole Arendt. King said that she will wait until early April to make her final selections.

"The thought of getting the teenage Williams sisters, Venus, 17, and Serena, 16, to make their Fed Cup debuts is a thrilling, King said.

"The Williams sisters have created a sense of comfort in the future of American women's tennis," King said. "They are very strongly considered (for the team). Believe me, I'm thrilled."

Venus is No 14 in the world, having reached the US Open final last year and the Australian Open quarterfinals last month. Serena is ranked No 41 and has recorded wins over top 10 players Monica Seles, Mary Pierce

and Davenport in the last four months.

King knows, however, that it might take some talking to get them to play beginning with their father.

"I have put a call in to Williams but haven't heard back," King said. "I know school is a very important part of their lives and the match is during school."

"I need to sit down and talk with them," King said. "There is no reason if they were named that they can't bring a tutor down to fit the books. There are a lot of things that I would make sure of. I want to sit down with the Williams."

Others on her list of possible players include Seles, Mary Joe Fernandez, Lisa Raymond, Chanda Rubin, Amy Frazier, Katrina Adams, Kimberly Po and Nicole Arendt. King said that she will wait until early April to make her final selections.

"The thought of getting the teenage Williams sisters, Venus, 17, and Serena, 16, to make their Fed Cup debuts is a thrilling, King said.

"The Williams sisters have created a sense of comfort in the future of American women's tennis," King said. "They are very strongly considered (for the team). Believe me, I'm thrilled."

Venus is No 14 in the world, having reached the US Open final last year and the Australian Open quarterfinals last month. Serena is ranked No 41 and has recorded wins over top 10 players Monica Seles, Mary Pierce

and Davenport in the last four months.

King knows, however, that it might take some talking to get them to play beginning with their father.

"I have put a call in to Williams but haven't heard back," King said. "I know school is a very important part of their lives and the match is during school."

"I need to sit down and talk with them," King said. "There is no reason if they were named that they can't bring a tutor down to fit the books. There are a lot of things that I would make sure of. I want to sit down with the Williams."

Others on her list of possible players include Seles, Mary Joe Fernandez, Lisa Raymond, Chanda Rubin, Amy Frazier, Katrina Adams, Kimberly Po and Nicole Arendt. King said that she will wait until early April to make her final selections.

"The thought of getting the teenage Williams sisters, Venus, 17, and Serena, 16, to make their Fed Cup debuts is a thrilling, King said.

"The Williams sisters have created a sense of comfort in the future of American women's tennis," King said. "They are very strongly considered (for the team). Believe me, I'm thrilled."

Venus is No 14 in the world, having reached the US Open final last year and the Australian Open quarterfinals last month. Serena is ranked No 41 and has recorded wins over top 10 players Monica Seles, Mary Pierce

and Davenport in the last four months.

King knows, however, that it might take some talking to get them to play beginning with their father.

"I have put a call in to Williams but haven't heard back," King said. "I know school is a very important part of their lives and the match is during school."

"I need to sit down and talk with them," King said. "There is no reason if they were named that they can't bring a tutor down to fit the books. There are a lot of things that I would make sure of. I want to sit down with the Williams."

Others on her list of possible players include Seles, Mary Joe Fernandez, Lisa Raymond, Chanda Rubin, Amy Frazier, Katrina Adams, Kimberly Po and Nicole Arendt. King said that she will wait until early April to make her final selections.

"The thought of getting the teenage Williams sisters, Venus, 17, and Serena, 16, to make their Fed Cup debuts is a thrilling, King said.

"The Williams sisters have created a sense of comfort in the future of American women's tennis," King said. "They are very strongly considered (for the team). Believe me, I'm thrilled."

Venus is No 14 in the world, having reached the US Open final last year and the Australian Open quarterfinals last month. Serena is ranked No 41 and has recorded wins over top 10 players Monica Seles, Mary Pierce

and Davenport in the last four months.

King knows, however, that it might take some talking to get them to play beginning with their father.

"I have put a call in to Williams but haven't heard back," King said. "I know school is a very important part of their lives and the match is during school."

"I need to sit down and talk with them," King said. "There is no reason if they were named that they can't bring a tutor down to fit the books. There are a lot of things that I would make sure of. I want to sit down with the Williams."

Martin gets on

SAN JOSE, California, Feb 11: Todd Martin, continuing to show he's fully recovered and ready to be a force, upset fifth-seeded Todd Woodbridge 7-5, 6-4 in the first round of the Sybase Open, reports AP.

Earlier Tuesday, Sweden's Thomas Nydahl pulled off the first surprise of the tournament, defeating sixth-seeded Richard Fromberg of Australia 6-7 (5-7), 6-2, 6-4.

In other matches, Switzerland's George Bastl beat Fernando Meligeni of Brazil 6-1, 2-6, 6-3. Jaime Oncins of Brazil defeated Spain's Emilio Alavez 7-6, 7-5; and No. 8 Mark Woodforde of Australia beat Zimbabwe's Wayne Black 6-7, 6-2, 6-4.

Martin, of the United States, was ranked as high as fifth in 1994 before undergoing arthroscopic surgery on his right elbow last February and missing most of the year. He's currently ranked 70th.

"I'm not quite 100 per cent yet, but I felt pretty good today," said Martin. "I'm serving close to as hard as I used to, but my endurance is not quite there yet."

Martin recorded nine aces and won 88 per cent (30-of-34) of his first service points against the British Woodbridge.

"I made a lot of good volleys," said Martin. "I feel like I'm making strides in my game, but there is tons to do to get better."

Martin, of the United States, was ranked as high as fifth in 1994 before undergoing arthroscopic surgery on his right elbow last February and missing most of the year. He's currently ranked 70th.

"I'm not quite 100 per cent yet, but I felt pretty good today," said Martin. "I'm serving close to as hard as I used to, but my endurance is not quite there yet."

Martin recorded nine aces and won 88 per cent (30-of-34) of his first service points against the British Woodbridge.

"I made a lot of good volleys," said Martin. "I feel like I'm making strides in my game, but there is tons to do to get better."

Martin, of the United States, was ranked as high as fifth in 1994 before undergoing arthroscopic surgery on his right elbow last February and missing most of the year. He's currently ranked 70th.

"I'm not quite 100 per cent yet, but I felt pretty good today," said Martin. "I'm serving close to as hard as I used to, but my endurance is not quite there yet."

Martin recorded nine aces and won 88 per cent (30-of-34) of his first service points against the British Woodbridge.

"I made a lot of good volleys," said Martin. "I feel like I'm making strides in my game, but there is tons to do to get better."

Martin, of the United States, was ranked as high as fifth in 1994 before undergoing arthroscopic surgery on his right elbow last February and missing most of the year. He's currently ranked 70th.

Latif likely to miss first Test

Star Sports Monitor

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 11: Pakistan captain Rashid Latif will probably miss the first Test against South Africa because of a neck injury, reports Reuters.

Team coach Haroon Rashid is still optimistic that Latif's neck will heal in time but team doctor Dan Kiesel today all but ruled out the wicketkeeper from the game starting on Friday.

Latif, who replaced Wasim Akram after he resigned last month, injured his neck during warm-up exercises in the tourists' four-day match against Border last week.

"Rashid injured a disc between the third and the fourth vertebrae in his neck. Although he is following treatment he has almost no chance of playing on Friday," Kiesel said.

He's still not practising and the slightest movement in the wrong direction could aggravate the injury," he said. "I think it is better that he recovers fully."

The coach is still optimistic. "Rashid is not ruled out yet. We will only decide tomorrow," he said.

If Latif is unable to play, he will join regular South African captain Hansie Cronje on the sidelines. Cronje is recovering from a knee operation and is replaced by Gary Kirsten.

Meanwhile, according to a report of The Dawn standing committee of the Senate on Sports, Culture and Tourism will meet on Feb 12 at Qaddafi Stadium, Lahore, to discuss performance of Pakistani Cricket team with special reference to match fixing allegations.

The Committee has also asked Wasim Akram to attend the meeting and give his point of view on the allegations being levelled against the Pakistani cricketers, including the fast bowler.

Movingly, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.

Telegraph also claimed that Akram made two points at the meeting. Firstly, that he is a pro and would do nothing

buff, much like Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reported The Telegraph of India.

Movingly, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.

Telegraph also claimed that Akram made two points at the meeting. Firstly, that he is a pro and would do nothing

buff, much like Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reported The Telegraph of India.

Movingly, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.

Telegraph also claimed that Akram made two points at the meeting. Firstly, that he is a pro and would do nothing

buff, much like Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reported The Telegraph of India.

Movingly, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.

Telegraph also claimed that Akram made two points at the meeting. Firstly, that he is a pro and would do nothing

buff, much like Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reported The Telegraph of India.

Movingly, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.

Telegraph also claimed that Akram made two points at the meeting. Firstly, that he is a pro and would do nothing

buff, much like Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reported The Telegraph of India.

Movingly, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.

Telegraph also claimed that Akram made two points at the meeting. Firstly, that he is a pro and would do nothing

buff, much like Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reported The Telegraph of India.

Movingly, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.

Telegraph also claimed that Akram made two points at the meeting. Firstly, that he is a pro and would do nothing

buff, much like Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, reported The Telegraph of India.

Movingly, Akram's exclusion could, sooner rather than later, become a nagging political issue. The Sharif government — and Sumro himself is the Prime Minister's man — has seen that clearly.



Egyptian forward Imam Hazem dodges past two Mozambique defenders during their African Nations' Cup first round clash in Babo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso on Tuesday. Egypt won 2-0.

Americans astound Brazil

LOS ANGELES, California, Feb 11: The United States used a goal by Preki Radosavljevic and a team of saves by Kasey Keller to shock world champions Brazil 1-0 here Tuesday in the semifinals of the CONCACAF Gold Cup, reports AFP.

Preki, a naturalized US citizen from the former Yugoslavia grabbed the first US goal against Brazil since 1930 when he curled the ball into Tafarel's goal in the 64th minute.

But it was Keller, who arrived from club duty in England on Sunday night to take over from Brad Friedel in goal, who made the first victory over Brazil possible.

Keller made half a dozen saves in the first half alone as the Brazilians, while clearly not up to their best, dominated

the action.

In the 11th minute, Romario collected the ball inside the area. His shot struck defender Alexi Lalas and his second chance was stopped by Keller.

Fifteen minutes later a fierce shot from Ze Maria stretched Keller to his limit and as the half ended a Romario header had Keller diving for a save.

Throughout the match Edmundo was inspirational for Brazil, but his skills weren't enough to open the scoring for the South Americans, who were playing by special invitation in the tournament sanctioned by the governing body for Central and North America and the Caribbean.

After the interval, the United States seemed to have shed their excessive respect for the world champions and began creating more opportunities for themselves.

That paved the way for the first victory over Brazil in nine meetings.

In those matches, Brazil had outscored the United States 23-3, and they hadn't allowed a goal to the US since a 4-3 victory in a friendly in 1930.

Preki, who came on in the 59th minute, changed all that, intercepting a pass from Eric Wynalda on the left and firing a left-footed shot that curved inside the post.

Preki had also come on in the second half and scored the winning goal in the 2-1 victory over Costa Rica that put the United States into the semifinals.

In the final they will meet the winner of Thursday's second semi, between two more teams bound for the 1998 World Cup finals Mexico and Jamaica.

\$1m lawsuit against Manoj



NEW DELHI, Feb 11: India's cricket chiefs on Tuesday filed a one-million dollar defamation suit against former Test all-rounder Manoj Prabhakar for accusing teammates of match-fixing, reports AFP.

Also taken to court was the "Outlook" weekly, in which Prabhakar alleged that an unnamed teammate offered him \$2,000 to lose a one-day match against arch-rivals Pakistan in Colombo in 1994, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported.

Prabhakar refused to name the teammate before a one-man inquiry commission appointed by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), saying he feared for his life.

Bachelor, managing director of the United Cricket Board of South Africa, told the news agency: "Yes, an apology was sent but by the player concerned not from the UCB."

"The matter was discussed at the executive meeting at the weekend but it was decided that no action would be taken against the player," Bacher explained.

Bacher refused to reveal the identity of the player or elaborate on whether the UCB had instructed him to send the apology.

"The tour is over, I can not tell you who the player was," Bacher said.

Former Indian chief Justice YV Chandrachud, who conducted the inquiry, absolved Indian cricketers of any wrongdoing after questioning players, officials and journalists.

The suit, filed in the Bombay high court, names Prabhakar and "Outlook" publisher Deepak Shourie, editor Vinod Mehta and reporters Aniruddha Bahal and Krishna Prasad as defendants, PTI reported.

There was no immediate comment from either Prabhakar or the magazine.

In his report, Chandrachud admitted there was "large-scale betting in Indian cricket," but he did not believe that cricketers were involved in match-fixing.

"Betting, like drinking, is a common human weakness... one cannot, therefore, rule out the possibility that some Indian players may be laying the flatter of a bet," the report said.

"But it is insufficient to conclude they lay bets for losing a match. Such a charge lacks substance and is unjustified," Chandrachud also slammed

Prabhakar for refusing to disclose the identity of the teammate concerned.

"This is indeed an easy exercise. Make any unfounded allegations you like against teammates, officials and others and then try to get away with it by saying the names of the culprits cannot be disclosed because there is danger to life or the fear of litigation," Chandrachud said.

In his deposition before the inquiry commission, Prabhakar had said: "I have no evidence to prove my statements. It will be my word against theirs."

Among the cricketers Chandrachud spoke to were present captain Mohammad Azharuddin, Sachin Tendulkar, Nayyan Mongia, Sanjay Manjrekar and former stars Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev.

Sorry shrouded in secrecy

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 11: Ali Bacher, the head of South African cricket, confirmed today that an apology had been sent to the Australian Cricket Board (ACB) after a stunt was spearheaded through the door of the umpires' room after the recent controversial third Test in Adelaide, reports Reuters.

Bacher, managing director of the United Cricket Board of South Africa, told the news agency: "Yes, an apology was sent but by the player concerned not from the UCB."

"The matter was discussed at the executive meeting at the weekend but it was decided that no action would be taken against the player," Bacher explained.

Bacher refused to reveal the identity of the player or elaborate on whether the UCB had instructed him to send the apology.

"The tour is over, I can not tell you who the player was," Bacher said.

Drug detected at Nagano

NAGANO, Feb 11: Snowboarding, the newest sport of the Winter Olympics, produced the first drug scandal of the Nagano Games on Wednesday when Canadian giant slalom winner Ross Rebagliati tested positive for marijuana and was stripped of gold, reports AP.

The Finns lived up to tradition when Jani Soininen won the first ski jumping event on the 90-metre hill. Japanese favourite Masahiko Harada lived up to his reputation and disappointed with gold beckoning.

But Japan earned its second Winter gold anyhow when unheralded freestyle skier Tae Satoya won the women's moguls, making up for the disappointment that produced only a silver in ski jumping.

Rebagliati, 26, from Whistler, British Columbia, had been celebrated as a national hero after his triumph Sunday.

African Nations' Cup

Egypt earn full points

BOBO-DIOULASSO, Burkina Faso, Feb 11: Two goals from Egypt's Hossam Hassan shot them to the top of the African Nations' Cup's toughest Group D here on Tuesday following a 2-0 win over Mozambique.

Many have said a team from West Africa would surely win this event because they would be the most used to the dry, desert conditions and 35-plus degree heat.

And Egypt coach Mohamed El Gohary agreed they found the 35-plus degree heat a trial.

"The heat was a problem and I don't think it allowed us to play to our full potential. But I think on this showing we will make it through to the quarter-finals."

Egypt started brightly and midfielder Ahmed Hassan had a great chance to put them ahead but Tomas Inguane hit the ball off the line in the 12th minute.

Just two minutes later, Egypt, who have won this trophy three times, went ahead.

Hossam Hassan hit home a rebound from six yards to put the 'pharaohs' 1-0 up and on course to lead this toughest World Cup finalists Morocco and Zambia.

History beckons Owen

LONDON, Feb 11: Liverpool's young striker Michael Owen said he was looking forward to making history on Wednesday when he is expected to become the youngest player to appear for England this century, reports Reuters.

Owen, who will be 18 years and 59 days old, has been told by England coach Glenn Hoddle he will make an appearance at some stage during the World Cup warm-up with Chile at Wembley