

Bevan makes NSW proud

It was a cruel blow for Michael Bevan personally but an inadvertent act of generosity to New South Wales when the Australian cricket tour selectors opted for Ricky Ponting for the Headingley Test against England in Leeds last July, according to a report of Sydney Morning Herald.

Twelve Tests later, a period in which he appeared in only the Sydney Test against South Africa for modest returns of 12 and 2-74 while acclaimed as Australia's greatest limited-over international batsman, Bevan has provided New South Wales with urgently needed starch in the batting order.

Now, for the second time in his 18-Test career, Bevan has received the Fosters Lightice trophy for NSW cricketer-of-the-year. He received the award Saturday night at a special dinner at the Sebel of Sydney. The gifted left-hander was also named NSW batsman-of-the-year after scoring three centuries — against Queensland, Western Australia and New Zealand — and three half-centuries for a first-class aggregate of 700 runs at 87.50 from seven games.

Bevan enjoyed his golden summer in 1993-94, hitting five centuries and eight half-centuries for NSW from 12 first-class games. His 1,312 runs at 77.17 launched him into the international arena for Australia and earned him his first cricketer-of-the-year award for NSW.

Cruzeiro crash

RIO DE JANEIRO, May 3: Defending champions Cruzeiro were knocked out of the South American Libertadores Cup on Saturday after being held to a goalless draw at home by fellow Brazilians Vasco da Gama in a dire match full of petulance, fouls and time-wasting, reports Reuters.

The result in Saturday's second round, second leg means that Vasco went through 2-1 on aggregate and will face Gremio, the third Brazilian team in the tournament, in the quarterfinals.

Vasco, who qualified by winning last year's Brazilian championship, packed their entire team into the last third of the field for the whole match and made no effort whatsoever to do any attacking.

Cruzeiro, who had qualified automatically for the second round as holders, dominated the game, winning ten corners to Vasco's none, but lacked the guile and creativity to break down their opponents' massed defence.

There were 57 fouls, eight yellow cards and numerous instances of players taking injuries, pretending to have been fouled and arguing with the referee.

Vasco joined Gremio, Colon of Argentina, Bolivar (Colombia), Cerro Porteno (Paraguay), Barcelona (Ecuador) and Penarol (Uruguay) in the quarterfinals.

The last place will be taken by either River Plate of Argentina or America of Mexico.

Justin Fashanu dead

LONDON, May 3: Soccer player Justin Fashanu, wanted in the United States for a sexual assault on a 17-year-old youth, has been found dead, a police spokesman said today, reports Reuters.

Police sources said Fashanu's body was found hanging around noon on Saturday in a lock-up garage under a railway arch in east London, and his death was being treated as suicide.

Police in the US state of Maryland said on Wednesday they were hunting the 37-year-old former striker, brother of the better-known John Fashanu, on a charge of sexual assault.

SIX NO TRUMPS

A K Sayeedul Huq

A REGRETTABLE DOUBLE (Hand # 29)

North	South	East
♦ S: XXXX	♦ S: Q 10 9 X	1H
♦ H: X	♦ H: A	Pass
♦ D: XXXX	♦ D: A Q J 10	5H
♦ C: XXX	♦ C: A K Q J	Pass

West	South	East
♦ S: X	♦ S: Q 10 9 X	1H
♦ H: XXXX	♦ H: A	Pass
♦ D: X	♦ D: A Q J 10	5H
♦ C: 10 XXXXX	♦ C: A K Q J	Pass

BIDDING (North side was vulnerable)

South	West	North	East
Double	4H	Pass	Pass
4S	Pass	Pass	5H
Double	Pass	Pass	Pass

THE PLAY

A friend of mine who played several international tournaments in his life narrated a sad experience he had a long time ago while commenting on my bridge column in the Daily Star. He described how many doubles are aborted due to unique distribution of cards in the above-mentioned contract he held 23 HCP over East who opened 1 Heart. South doubled for take out but West made an excellent bid of 4 Hearts which blocked North-South communications. When East passed South tried 4 Spades but East persisted on to 5 Hearts on the assumption that there would be no Spade loser. An exasperated South doubled for a handsome punishment, but, alas, the declarer redoubled and made an over-trick! South opened his King of Clubs which was ruffed by the declarer, and then threw the singleton Diamond on the King of Spades. He surrendered only a trick to South for the Ace of Hearts. My friend who sat South regretted his double all his life, and more so he could have avoided giving the overtrick by opening the Ace of Hearts and then cashing the Ace of Diamonds.

Ageing heroes gasping for last hurrah

SOFIA, May 3: (Reuters) Like their Balkan neighbours Romania, Bulgaria travel to France with an ageing team.

Coach Hristo Bonev's squad have even more to live up to than the Romanians. They shocked the world by reaching the semifinals at USA '94, beating Germany en route in one of the biggest upsets of modern times.

CSKA Sofia's Milen Petkov, 24, and Marian Hristov, another 24-year-old who plays for German club Kaiserslautern have also been given their head but Bonev knows that this year's World Cup will probably come too soon for most of them.

"I am looking at young players but time is short and results cannot be achieved in a day," he admitted.

Bonev believes the poor standard of the national league is to blame for the paucity of talent coming through the ranks.

"The Bulgarian championship has for years been of an unenviable standard and when we play at international level you can see that we've fallen behind the rest of the world," he said.

If it seems likely, Bonev sticks with his old stars, then motivation may be a problem for a generation of players who could hardly improve on their showing in 1994.

One of Bonev's biggest problems has been the fact that nearly his top players are based abroad in the richer leagues of Europe.

Not only does it make it difficult to assemble them for any length of time, but many — most notably Stoichkov at Barcelona this season — have struggled to hold down regular places, meaning they are lacking match sharpness for internationals.

The coach will therefore have been delighted by the decision of several key players to return to Sofia prior to the final in order to prepare better for the tournament.

Stoichkov, defender Ivanov and striker Kostadinov have all returned to CSKA Sofia in order to ready themselves.

Stoichkov is now 32 and may be past his peak but he has always been a big-match player and his presence alone inspires the rest of the team.

He knows France is probably his final bow on the biggest stage of all and is determined to ready himself.

"I must work hard to achieve good form for the World Cup finals and I think I have enough time for that," Stoichkov said.

Lechkov is still the jewel in their crown, and the likes of Trifon Ivanov, Emil Kostadinov, Yordan Lechkov and Krasimir Balakov provide plenty of guile and class.

Bonev has tried to rejuvenate the side, but so far results have been disappointing.

Two away friendlies in March — a 2-0 defeat by Argentina in Buenos Aires and a 1-0 loss against Macedonia in Skopje — confirmed that

concern; however.

The 29-year-old walked out on Turkish side Besiktas in February without giving any reason, prompting Bonev to ask: "if he is not playing anywhere, what's the point including him in the team?"

Ivanov, whose headed goal against Russia clinched qualification, is adamant the old guard can prove a real force four years after their finest hour.

"We have played together or six years and I think that the

most serious problem

we have had so far was in the under-17s World Cup competition in Qatar in 1995," he added.

"We were contacted by coaches in the hotels who said some of their players had spent time in rooms with people coming to them offering gifts. They weren't asking for anything in exchange."

The newspaper said gangs behind the potential bribes were based in Asia, where millions will be bet on every game. The quarterfinal game are believed to be particularly susceptible, the newspaper said.

Peter Velappan, head of the Asian Football Confederation, said match-fixing syndicates had targeted the quarterfinals of the 1994 World Cup in the United States.

The newspaper said referees would be placed under guard in their hotels. It said referees traveling to matches outside Paris would be accompanied by FIFA officials.

STOICHKOV

team from USA '94 can give the fans something to shout about again," he said.

Bonev has urged his players to work on their form and not rely on a 18-day camp before the finals.

The former striker who still holds the national team record of 46 goals has tried to make the side more solid by flooding the midfield and playing only one or two strikers.

It is not a style that has pleased Stoichkov, who says a 4-4-2 formation would get the best out of the team.

Whichever Bonev settles on, Bulgaria cannot afford to start slowly in France, where they will face Spain, Olympic champions Nigeria and Paraguay in a tough Group D.

But even contemplating reaching the knockout stages would have come as a surprise prior to 1994. Until they thrashed Greece 4-0 in the US, Bulgaria had played 17 matches in the World Cup finals without managing a single victory.

Two away friendlies in March — a 2-0 defeat by Argentina in Buenos Aires and a 1-0 loss against Macedonia in Skopje — confirmed that

they become the third country to host the World Cup for the second time.

Jacquet has already restored some morale after the catastrophic failure to reach the 1990 and 1994 finals.

He took charge in late 1993 and his side went unbeaten in 30 matches — apart from Euro '96 semifinal elimination by the Czech Republic on penalties — until December 1996 when they lost 1-0 to Denmark in Copenhagen.

They have since lost two more games but those results are less important than France's failure to fulfil their potential at the 1996 European Championship in England, when they played their last competitive matches.

Blessed with a brilliant midfield, France were let down

in their next 10 games up to March 1996 the French had a 28-5 goals record although that included a 10-0 win over Azerbaijan.

A third 12-match phase spanning Euro '96, and the Copenhagen defeat, from May 1996 to January 1997, saw France maintain a similar scoring rate with 18 goals but the defence tightened to the point of only conceding three one goal every four matches.

But the statistics in the 14 months from February 1997 to March 1998, when Jacquet has sought to play a more attacking game point to a definite change in attitude.

The results have been mixed and the goal ratio has not increased but France have created more chances and opening up at the back conceded 11 goals in 10 games.

This has come at the time of intense experimentation by Jacquet partly of his own design but also determined by club commitments and injuries in the run-in to the season's club competitions.

Inter Milan forward Youri Djorkaeff put France's recent performances into perspective when he said, "After Euro '96, we were criticised for an excessively defensive attitude."

"Today we have certainly changed, we have a sound basis and a real (team) personality said the player whose linking with Zidane will probably be the key to French success.

The new players have added their freshness of spirit," Djorkaeff added.

Allied to home advantage it could be enough to take them all the way.

Dosedel, Meligeni to fight it out

PRAGUE, May 3: Czech Slava Dosedel, ranked 47th in the world, seized the opportunity of the absence of all eight seeds to win through to a final against Brazil's Fernando Meligeni in the 340,000 dollars Czech Open tennis tournament on Saturday, reports Reuters.

All of the seeded players crashed out early in the tournament.

Dosedel wore down Ecuador's Nicolas Lapentti in an evenly-matched semifinal to win 3-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Meligeni who knocked out Russia's Andrei Chesnokov in the quarterfinals, beat Romania's Dinu Pescaru 7-6, 7-6 in the other semifinal.

Novotna books her place

HAMBURG, May 3: Jana Novotna reached the Hamburg women's tournament final against Martina Hingis on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Novotna recovered from the verge of defeat against rising 19-year-old Swiss Patty Schnyder to win their semifinal 2-6, 7-5, 6-3.

Jacquet's men are therefore obliged to win the World Cup in

Sport

World Cup bribery scare

LONDON, May 3: The 32 countries in the summer's World Cup in France will be given detailed warning about bribes from officials of FIFA, the world governing body of soccer, reports AP.

FIFA's acting general secretary Michael Zen-Ruffinen, quoted in London's The Sunday Times, said security teams would be placed in the hotels of players and referees.

But he admitted detection would be difficult.

"If you bribe a defender and he provokes an unnecessary penalty, nobody will know," the newspaper quoted Zen-Ruffinen as saying.

"The most serious problem we have had so far was in the under-17s World Cup competition in Qatar in 1995," he added.

"We were contacted by coaches in the hotels who said some of their players had spent time in rooms with people coming to them offering gifts. They weren't asking for anything in exchange."

The newspaper said gangs behind the potential bribes were based in Asia, where millions will be bet on every game.

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