

Dunedin Untested

DUNEDIN, New Zealand, Dec 20 (AFP/AP): The first cricket Test between India and New Zealand was abandoned today on its third day without a ball being bowled, but with hints of controversy between the two sides.

Carisbrook Park, the world's southern most Test venue, lived up to its local house of pain's reputation with solid rain from Friday morning when play was to have started.

Although the pitch covers were doing their work by today, with rain still falling it was apparent the rest of the field was getting a good soaking.

Australian match referee Barry Jarman offered an extension to the match with a day Wednesday, but India declined, saying it did not give them enough time until the second Test on December 26 in Wellington. The third and final Test is on January 2 in Hamilton.

Both teams agreed to play a day/night limited-overs exhibition match on Monday, but the rainy weather forecast placed that match in doubt.

New Zealand Cricket (NZC) chief executive officer Chris Doig described the washout as a 'terrible shame' but said the financial implications were minor.

"Both teams are keen to get something out of the remaining two days. The Indians have warmly embraced the idea of playing a one-dayer," Doig said.

Jarman said the one-day game will be used as an experiment for the use of red ball under lights in white clothing.

Traditionally day/night internationals are played in coloured clothing and with a white ball.

At the start of the series India had turned down an offer to utilise the International Cricket Council's (ICC) experimental laws regarding lost time.

Under the ICC rule lost time can be made up by using floodlights or by altering the start or finish times later in the match.

"I think this game will help us identify a few problems. The cricket world is still split and is not comfortable with the way," Jarman said.

Recently England refused to use lights in the current Ashes series against Australia because ground lights are a relatively new addition to the English scene and the team has not played often under those conditions.

This is the second Test to be abandoned without a ball bowled in Dunedin. Nine years ago a Test between the hosts and Pakistan was also abandoned without a ball being bowled.

This is only the eighth Test to be abandoned in the history of cricket.

The last was in 1994 when the second Test between Sri Lanka and Pakistan in Colombo was canceled due to post-election curfew.

Not the way PT wanted to end!

BANGKOK, Dec 20: A bitter and tearful Indian track legend P T Usha ended her international athletics career on the sidelines Saturday after India ruthlessly ditched her before the Asian Games 4x400m relay, reports AFP.

The Indian mother, whose haul of 33 medals in Asian Games and Asian Championships including 18 golds is unparalleled, had been hoping for one final honour after bravely struggling with injury all week.

But the Indian team put its medal ambitions ahead of sentiment.

As the Indian quartet crossed the line in second behind China and ahead of bronze medalists Kazakhstan, Usha, who ran at the Asiad despite a hamstring problem, broke out in tears.

"I'm bitterly disappointed," she said. "I was deliberately left out. They did not even have the decency to tell me. I was not even informed until I asked last night."

She said she felt she had been let down by the team management, who she said had not supported her as she battled for fitness.

But Lalith Bhanot, secretary of the Amateur Athletic Federation of India (AAFI), defended the decision.

"It's more important to win the gold medal than to think of one athlete," he said, adding Usha's 400m times were no longer up to scratch.

The 34-year-old Usha, whose career reached its pinnacle when she won four gold and a silver medals at the 1986 Asian Games in Seoul, came here with a left hamstring problem that stopped her driving off the leg with full power.

She failed to qualify for the 200m, came within the 400m final and, as anchor, missed a bronze medal in the 4x100m by a tenth of a second.

Some reports earlier this week suggested frantic attempts were being made within the team to convince her to save her strength for the relays and to bypass the individual events, moves she rejected.

It was a sad end to a career spanning two decades.

This time, however, the decision looks final, "I want to go out of these Games with a bang," she said before the race.

She had prepared perfectly before her injury by winning four medals at the Asian Championships this year, bronzes in the 200 and 400, a gold and silver in the relays.

But her injury led to her being replaced by Jincy Phillips, quicker than Usha in recent months. India's high class quartet also included Jyoti-moy Sikdar, who took gold in both the 800 and 1,500 here, and Rosa Kutty, who finished fourth in the 400m individual final.

Atherton's maiden double



HOBART, Dec 20 (Reuters/ AFP/ Internet): Mike Atherton scored his first double century in first-class cricket on the rain-hit second day of the four-day match against an Australian XI on Sunday.

Atherton, skipping the side in the absence of Alec Stewart, made 210 not out as England built an unbeatable 469 for six declared in their first innings.

The Australian XI were 30

for no wicket at the close.

After rain had ruled out play until mid afternoon, Atherton and Graeme Hick took advantage of an attack shorn of the injured Paul Reiffel, Michael Kasprowicz and Gavin Robertson.

They carried their overnight fourth-wicket stand of 33 to 195 before Hick was dismissed for 125.

Atherton, averaging just 19 on 94, Hick went on to hit 22, including successive sixes, off the first five balls of an over by Michael Kasprowicz and Gavin Robertson.

He was caught off the final ball by 17-year-old Nathan Webb, one of three substitute fielders.

Ben Hollioake was dismissed without scoring and then Webb took a smart catch at cover to dismiss wicketkeeper Warren Hegg for four, at which point Atherton called a halt to the onslaught.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard after the second day of the four-day cricket tour match between an Australian XI and England at Bellarine Oval on Sunday:

ENGLAND: First innings (298 for 3 overnight)

Butcher c Richards b Law 25
Atherton not out 210
Crawley c Gilchrist b Blewett 27
Rampakash b Bevan 65
Hick c Sub (Webb) b Bevan 125
B Hollioake c Gilchrist 0
Julian 0
Hegg c Sub (Webb) b Bevan 4
Extras: (lb-5, w-2, nb-6) 13
Total: (For 6 wkt dec in 126.1 overs) 469

Fall of wkt: 1-57; 2-126; 3-265; 4-460; 5-460; 6-469.

Bowler: O M R W
Kasprowicz 183 2 67 0
Reiffel 1.3 0 4 0
Julian 32 6 98 1
Blewett 24 2 73 1
Law 21 4 84 1
Bevan 23.1 3 94 3
Elliott 5 0 34 0
Lehmann 1 0 10 0

AUSTRALIA XI: First innings

Elliott not out 14
Blewett not out 11
Extras: (lb-2, nb-3) 5
Total: (For no loss in 11 overs) 30

Bowler: O M R W
Tudor 6 3 12 0
Fraser 5 2 16 0

Sporting success: The Chinese method

BANGKOK, Dec 20 (AP): Chinese Olympian Huang Liping was just 7 when a coach determined his destiny.

Scouting for future gymnasts, the coach lined up Huang and his schoolmates and picked those with promising physiques. Huang and another boy were the only two chosen.

The national women's weightlifting team, for instance, numbers some 40 athletes. That allowed China to field one top-class team of lifters at last month's World Championships, where its women took 13 golds, and another fresh team of record-breakers at the Asian Games.

From there, years of state-sponsored training brought Huang Olympic and World Championship medals. He retired after the Atlanta Games in 1996. But at the Asian Games that ended Sunday, China continued their medal-winning ways, highlighting their sports machine's ability to pick and train athletes young, hard and in volume.

China won 129 golds, far ahead of second-place South Korea with 65. The Chinese swept all 11 Asian Games rowing golds. They won six of seven table tennis golds. They also took the most track and field golds.

In weightlifting, diving and gymnastics, all sports where China prepares athletes from young ages, the Chinese looked untouchable. In diving, China took all four golds and all four silvers, and unveiled a new 14-year-old star, Li Na. In gymnastics, China took gold in 12 of 14 events. In weightlifting, China's women swept all the gold for the third games in a row and broke world records on seven consecutive days, thanks to lifters like Liu Xiuhan.

The petite 24-year-old, whose new 83.5-kilogram snatch record was close to twice her body weight, was picked at age 13 by a coach who "thought I was physically suited to weightlifting," she said.

Now, weightlifting "counts as my job," said Liu, who trains three to four hours a day, five or six days a week.

Back in China, many top athletes are paid and housed by the state, or cared for in state-run sports schools. Once picked for top teams, promising young talents are trained without charge for them or their par-

ents. It's a system that enables China to churn out athletes in big numbers, and shift smoothly from one generation of athletes to another.

The national women's weightlifting team, for instance, numbers some 40 athletes. That allowed China to field one top-class team of lifters at last month's World Championships, where its women took 13 golds, and another fresh team of record-breakers at the Asian Games.

When China lost Lu Yufu, a vault specialist, to injury before the Asian Games gymnastics competition started, coaches quickly found a replacement. Underscoring its depth, two of China's gold medalists in men's individual gymnastics disciplines, Yang Wei and Xing Awei, were newcomers.

The 16-year-old Xing, who won pommel horse gold, looked to have the makings of a future star. His graceful, relaxed movements "make people feel as if they are being taken to the stars," said head Chinese coach Qian Kui.

But China's Asian Games were not without setbacks. In the pool, China took second place to Japan in golds. China's total of 15 track and field golds was seven less than at the last games in Hiroshima, Japan, in 1994. China was shut out in long and middle distance events. Noticeably absent were runners trained by flamboyant coach Ma Junren, whose team was not included because it did not take part in qualifying events.

China's Asian Games delegation head, Yuan Weimin, said Sunday that overall he was "basically satisfied, but not totally satisfied" with China's showing.

We did random tests for prohibited drugs on athletes as specified by each sport's federation," added the chairman of the organising committee's medical control sub-committee.

He said that up to Saturday more than 700 tests had been conducted on the 6,700 athletes. Two weightlifters, one from Jordan and one from Kuwait, were the only drug failures announced.

Jaber Rashid Al-Ajmi of Kuwait, who finished 10th and last in the men's over 105-kg class on Monday, tested positive for the steroid mandrolone.

Opener Matthew Hayden was the only Queensland batsman to offer any real resistance, scoring 51. Queensland lost five wickets for 16 at one stage in the final session, Colin Miller and Gerard Denton grabbing two wickets each.

Chinese coaches, however, angrily denied that China's weaker showing in some events at Bangkok showed that their successes in previous games must have been due to doping.

"If a Chinese swims fast it's drugs, if a Chinese swims slowly, no drugs," said Zhang Xiong, the swim coach. "It's not fair."

China's swimmer, Koji Ito, who collected three golds and set three Asian records. Besides he is also the fastest man in the region.

Sohail says it's not over

FAISALABAD, Pakistan, Dec 20: Pakistan captain Aamir Sohail, who has given vital testimony to a judicial commission investigating match-fixing allegations in cricket, today dismissed speculation that his career was over, reports AFP.

Sohail walked out of the team in the second Test at Lahore last week after a row with selector Salahuddin Ahmed, coach Javed Miandad as well as disagreement with Pakistan board chairman Khalid Mahmood.

He was named in the 16-man squad for the third Test in Faisalabad but did not turn up there due to indisposition.

On Saturday he reappeared before the judicial commission inquiring into match-fixing and betting allegations against some Pakistan cricketers and recorded his in-camera statement.

"I cannot disclose much and you guess it yourself," Sohail said.

Pakistan Cricket Board legal adviser Ali Sibtain Fazli said Sohail had given solid evidence against some players.

This time around he spoke freely as captain's hat was no more on his head," Fazli said.

Sohail has given an important document to the commission, another source said.

Local media reports suggested Sohail threatened to reveal startling facts on the role of fellow players in betting.

"I have not burnt my boats and am gearing up to go to India, my cricket is not finished," Sohail said.

However he said, "It is up to the selectors to select me or not," for the team's 10-week trip to India next month.

PCB chief has no excuses

FAISALABAD, Dec 20: Pakistan Cricket Board chief Khalid Mahmood today denied a rift in the national team saying all was not lost after the successive defeats in series against Australia and Zimbabwe, reports AFP.

"We have lost two series in a row but it is cricket and this is very unfortunate that people do not accept defeat as a defeat, they start spreading things like rift in the team and between officials," Mahmood said.

Pakistan lost to Australia in October, Zimbabwe, 1-0 up in the ongoing series, were heading towards their first series win as a Test-playing team in 1992.

Commentators say an apparent row between Mahmood and PCB's chief executive, Majid Khan, has affected the PCB working and a rift between team members had led to dismal performances in the home series.

We were very close to square the series against Zimbabwe in Lahore but weather intervened, so this should be taken as bad luck," Mahmood said.

Cricket officials were subjected to harsh criticism for scheduling the matches in unsuitable conditions and venues.

The next thing on our cards is the Indian tour for which we are planning," Mahmood said.

However, the 10-week tour for two Tests, three one-dayers and a Test of the Asian Test Championship faces threats of disruption by militants of an anti-Pakistan coalition partner of the Indian government.

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Tasmania appeared set for victory over Queensland at the Gabba after reducing their opponents to 127 for seven in their second innings, an overall lead of just 62.

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The player hinted that he might soon be demanding a transfer, although his contract does not come to an end until June 2000, if Sacchi does not give him more frequent opportunities to show his prowess.



MARATHON MAN: Lee Bong-Ju of South Korea waves the national flag and his running shoes after winning the final event of the Asian Games. — AFP photo

Lee claims the last gold

BANGKOK, Dec 20 (AP): South Korea's Lee Bong-ju pulled away from Japan's Akira Manai in the marathon Sunday, pounding a final stamp of victory on the Asian Games' final battle — between their two nations for second in the gold standings.