

## Boycott threat looms?

DUBAI, July 11: One of the Asian delegates who walked out of Friday's FIFA congress in Los Angeles said today that a boycott of the 2002 World Cup was still on the cards, reports AFP.

Mohammed ben Hammam of Qatar, speaking on his return to Doha from the runway congress as FIFA president, stressed that the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) would carry out its threatened non-show in the next World Cup if an extra fifth berth was not forthcoming.

Ben Hammam, who on Friday resigned from FIFA's technical committee, said: "The AFC will not go back on its decision until the fifth place which has been given to South America is restored to us."

His comments came 24 hours after the Saudi Football Federation (FSF) had proposed staging an extraordinary meeting of the AFC general assembly to iron out the row.

## Titles go to Sino shuttlers

BANGKOK, July 11: China's badminton players, battling for places in next year's Sydney Olympics, achieved a clean sweep of the titles in the Thailand Open today, reports Reuters.

The Chinese won the men's and women's singles and doubles at Bangkok's Nimibutr stadium, as well as the mixed doubles played on Saturday.

In the men's singles, unseeded Ji Xinpeng's dream run in the championship ended when he lost the final in straight sets to compatriot Chen Gang.

World number nine Chen's well-rounded game proved too much for Ji, who had been the surprise of the tournament. He was beaten 15-12, 15-6.

World number two and top seed Dai Yun of China captured the women's singles title when she defeated second-seeded compatriot Gong Ruina 11-6, 11-5.

In the women's doubles, Qin Yiyang and Gao Ling saw off vita Marisa and Emma Ermawati of Indonesia 15-8, 15-7 while in the men's Yu Jinhao and Chen Qiqiu beat Michael Sogaard and Jim Laugesen of Denmark 15-11, 15-13.

The first set of the men's singles final saw a hard fight with Ji twice clawing back into contention to 5-7 and 10-11. But Chen's experience and powerful smash ultimately got the better of Ji.

"I have to gain ranking points and be selected for the Olympics," Chen said. "It was a fast and attacking game today. My experience helped me."

Dai took a 4-0 lead in the first set of the women's final before Gong fought back to 5-4. But Dai regained the initiative with fierce smashes that troubled her opponent throughout the match.

## Sydney tickets selling better

SYDNEY, July 11: Local demand for Sydney Olympic tickets had surged as the initial offer entered the final week, a SOCOG official said Sunday, reports AP.

After a slow start SOCOG said interest had picked up as the July 16 deadline got closer. Five million of 9.6 million tickets to next year's Summer Games are available to Australian fans through mail order or Internet.

Those applying for tickets in the first round will go into a lottery for available seats. Tickets for events which are not sold out will then go on sale again with those holding tickets getting the first refusal.

The overseas allocation may also be increased with SOCOG reporting better than expected foreign interest.

"The demand from right across Australia is very strong. I think this shows Australians from all over are embracing their Games," said SOCOG ticketing spokesman John O'Neill.

"We're very comfortable with where we are and we think we're in for a hell of a ride this week. We think we will have a very good result."

"Our call centre received a huge spike in numbers late last week, we have been taking about 500 calls a day — on Friday, we took 1,800 calls."

SOCOG has not revealed how many ticket applications it has received, although it says a free offer for an Olympic pin for the 50,000 received has now finished.

O'Neill said people were ordering a mix of sports across a number of days and said the demand for tickets from overseas was greater than their allocation.

No 1 on the request list is track and field, which will be held in the 11,000-seat main stadium. The opening ceremony, swimming, soccer and field hockey round out the top five.

## Yokohama selected

TOKYO, July 11: Japan's organising committee for the 2002 World Cup soccer finals has chosen the nation's largest stadium in Yokohama, south of Tokyo, for the venue for the final match, reports said today, according to AFP.

The decision is expected to be formally approved at a July 26 extraordinary executive board meeting of the Japan Organisation Committee for the 2002 FIFA World Cup (JAWOC), the Yomiuri Shimbun and Japan Broadcasting Corporation said.

The 2002 football World Cup, to be co-hosted by South Korea and Japan, will be first finals to be staged in Asia.

The 70,336-seat Yokohama International Stadium is about 25 kilometres (15 miles) away from central Tokyo.



US President Bill Clinton visits the locker room of the national team to congratulate the players after their World Cup triumph on July 10. —AFP photo

## Driven by 'girl power'



PASADENA, California, July 11 (Reuters): In the baking heat of Pasadena's Rose Bowl, 22 women on Saturday made soccer the coolest sport of the summer.

The US-China final of the women's World Cup, played out in front of a sellout crowd of more than 90,000 proved a celebration of 'girl power' from the pony-tailed athletes on the field to the glitzy pop stars strutting their stuff on stage in the intervals.

On the pitch, in temperatures nearing 100 degrees (38 C), the women of Team USA and China played their hearts out for the honour of winning the third — and most successful — Women's World Cup.

In the stands, soccer moms, young girls and grandmothers outnumbered the men to cheer on the women in shorts and socks who in three short weeks have captured the imagination of a nation that has never showed any sustained interest in the world's most popular sport.

"America's Best Chicks" proclaimed one home-made banner

hoisted aloft the largest crowd ever to attend a women's sporting event. "Score one for the girls," urged another.

"We can do what we want to," sang British teenage pop star Billie, pumping out the tournament's official song during prematch entertainment that captured the party atmosphere.

Beneath the roar of the crowd, a two-year-old boy fidgeting on his mother's lap briefly forgot his woes to scream "Mia" when the media darling of the American squad, Mia Hamm, came close to scoring.

His six year old soccer playing sister sucked her thumb, engrossed in a game that until this tournament had been an also-ran on the American sports scene.

With its lack of goals, it could almost have been a men's World Cup final — except that the pace was fast and furious, unhindered by the prima donna antics that top men's players frequently employ to win a penalty, a free kick, or simply a breather.

And the police in riot helmets, the angry scuffles in the stands between rival supporters and the rainstorm of bottles and rocks that have so often marred world class men's soccer were absent as a cloud in

the blazing Pasadena summer sky.

At the Rose Bowl, fans drank water and diet Coke in place of lager while Chinese flags mingled affably with the red, white and blue faces, star-spangled banners and dainty straw hats of Americans who had travelled across the nation to witness a defining moment in women's sports history.

And as the minutes ticked away without goals and into extra time, what the women of China and the United States may have lacked in finishing power and sophisticated passing, they more than made up for in sheer perseverance.

"Oh my gosh," squealed a young American woman, urging her heroines to keep running during the punishing 30 minutes of extra time. "Oh please, oh please let them make it."

In the end, they did — on a penalty shootout that had the stadium teetering on its collective feet.

A beaming Brandi Chastain, who scored the Cup-clinching goal to end the shootout 5-4 in favour of the host nation, was asked about the legacy of the tournament.

"All these people in the stands, 90,000-plus ... and the smiling faces of these young kids that are sitting right here,"

## England on standby



LONDON, July 11: England is again on standby to stage the 2002 World Cup after a threatened Asian boycott created the prospect of co-hosts Japan and South Korea forfeiting the right to host the next tournament, reports AP.

British media reports Saturday said FIFA, soccer's world governing body, would be forced into moving the 2002 event out of Asia if the dispute over Asia's allocation of berths in the finals continues to escalate.

English World Cup 2006 bidders offered to fill in as 2002 hosts when financial and scheduling concerns last year cast doubt over the staging of the World Cup in Asia for the first time.

Those concerns were erased but the fallout by Asian officials at the FIFA congress in Los Angeles on Friday raised new speculation that FIFA president Sepp Blatter will be forced

to take drastic decisions.

Saturday's Daily Mail newspaper reported that England is on standby to take over the 2002 World Cup following a "rebellion of the Asia nations."

Their threat of a boycott of the qualifying competition compels FIFA to make contingency plans in case a solution cannot be found and it becomes unrealistic to take the greatest event in world sport to the Far East," the Daily Mail reported.

"The longer the protests continue and the more frequent the walkouts, the greater likelihood that FIFA will run out of patience and seek an alternative venue."

England had their first and only World Cup triumph in 1966, the last time the tournament was held in the British Isles. The last major soccer tournament hosted in England was the Euro '96 finals.

The Asian allocation issue, which first arose in December, appeared solved when UEFA offered half of one of its 15 European places to Asia earlier this week. That meant Asian nations had the prospect of getting five teams, including the two host nations, into the finals.

But the Asian Football Confederation and its members are upset that their demand for a fifth guaranteed place in the finals has not been met and say they will boycott the tournament.

Blatter was outraged by Friday's mass walkout and hinted sanctions might be taken against the national associations that left the Congress.

"FIFA as an institution can't give in to this kind of pressure," he said. "If we do, we will die as

an institution. This cannot be accepted."

"This is a disgrace," Blatter said. "This shows no respect to the institution called FIFA, no respect to the other delegates, guests, honorary members, the Executive Committee. This has nothing to do with fair play."

Blatter said he will return to his offices following Saturday's Women's World Cup final in Pasadena, California, to work on the problem.

"Ask me next week in Zurich," he said. "I think, very clearly, and this is my personal feeling, they will come back. But let's wait a little, let some time pass."

England, who face competition from Germany, Africa and South America to host the 2006 World Cup, would also face competition if FIFA needed a new venue for 2002.

The United States, host of the 1994 World Cup, could be among the challengers.

## 2012 Olympics Joint-bidders get boost

WASHINGTON, July 11: A bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympics has received a major boost, with donations of more than 1 million dollars in new corporate contributions. The pledges push efforts to raise 10 million dollars by 2002 past the halfway mark, reports AP.

The Washington-Baltimore Regional 2012 Coalition, which is working to pursue the Olympics, has gained 750,000 dollars in pledges in the past month from Giant Food Inc., T Rowe Price, The Rouse Co. and Marriott Corp., as well as nearly 500,000 dollar in services such as office space and legal services.

The group, now with about 5.25 million dollars in total contributions and pledges, will submit its formal bid to the US Olympic Committee in December 2000. A single American winner will be selected in 2002 to participate in a worldwide competition to host the 2012 Olympics.

Seven other American cities, including Dallas, are seeking the 2012 Games.

In an unprecedented move, the coalition also said it would push to hold opening and closing ceremonies jointly on the Mall in Washington and at Baltimore's Inner Harbour rather than in a single amphitheater. The group also plans to make such ceremonies open to the public.

He said the coalition has not yet formally approached the US Park Service, which administers the Mall, about the ceremonies. He said the group intends to do so soon.

"The Summer Olympics opening ceremonies, going back to ancient Greece, have always been in an enclosed stadium," said John Lucas, an Olympic historian and retired Penn State Professor. "This Washington idea is very provocative. With the IOC in such a state of flux, the time is right for some brave new thinking. But they should come up with a backup plan in case the USOC doesn't want to go through with it."

## Presidential praise!

LOS ANGELES, July 11: President Bill Clinton was among the 90,185 fans at the Rose Bowl here on Saturday to watch the US team win the women's World Cup Saturday, reports AFP.

"The whole country is caught up," said Clinton after the American team defeated China 5-4 on penalties.

"It's going to have a bigger impact than people ever realised, and it will have a far reaching impact not only in the United States but also in other countries," he said.

After the game Clinton visited the Chinese dressing room first before going to the US dressing room to congratulate the winners.

"We were honored to have you in the United States," he said, adding that they played a "magnificent game."

"The first thing he said was congratulations to our team," said disappointed star striker Sun Wen. "Also we had a picture taken with President Clinton."

He then went over to the US team, telling the players, "It was a most exciting game." He thanked them for the "gift you have given the United States. We've learned a lot about soccer and a lot about women athletes."

Clinton also visited Michelle Akers, who left the game early with an injured shoulder.

## Brown in trouble

LONDON, July 11: Scotland's national soccer coach Craig Brown was accused Sunday of religious bigotry when a British newspaper reported that he sang sectarian songs to a mistress, reports AP.

The tabloid News of the World reported that 59-year-old Brown, who has been Scotland coach since 1993, was recorded singing "hate-filled anti-Catholic" songs on an answer phone message.

The paper alleged that Brown left his message for a lover following an Old Firm match between Glasgow rivals Rangers and Celtic.

But Brown, a former Rangers player, denied the allegations and said the matter was in the hands of his lawyers.

"I have already taken legal advice ... with a view to issuing legal proceedings against the News of the World for defamation," he said in a statement released by his brother Jock Brown, a former Celtic official.

"The main thrust of litigation is in respect of the allegation of bigotry, which I completely deny."

"I am not and never have been a bigot, as friends and colleagues of all persuasions will be able to confirm."

The Old Firm rivalry between Rangers and Celtic has polarised soccer supporters in Glasgow along religious lines.

Catholics traditionally support the green and white hoops of Celtic while Protestants follow Rangers, which wears a blue strip.

The allegations against Brown arise as the Scotland Football Association is attempting to stamp out sectarianism following the resignation in May of a Rangers official also accused of singing anti-Catholic songs.

Rangers vice-Chairman Donald Findlay, one of Scotland's leading lawyers, quit Rangers after a newspaper published photographs of him apparently standing on a stage and singing what the paper described as "anti-Catholic anthems" following Rangers' Scottish Cup win over Celtic.

## Kiprop retains Gold Coast Marathon

GOLD COAST, Australia, July 11: Fred Kiprop of Kenya won his second consecutive Gold Coast Marathon on Sunday but did not threaten Robert De Castella's 17-year-old Australian record, reports AP.

Kiprop said last week that with favourable conditions, De Castella's time of 2 hours, 9 minutes, 18 seconds could be beaten on the fast Gold Coast circuit.

Despite generally good weather the chance of a record time was hampered by a lack of pacemakers and at the 5-kilometre mark the lead pack was 10 minutes off De Castella's record.

Kiprop, 26, gradually cranked up the pace to break away at the 34-kilometre mark and win the marathon with a time of 2:14:02, well off the 2:11 he ran in 1998.

"Last year my condition was good, like this year but in this race there was no pacemaker," Kiprop said. "I wanted to beat the race record but I was also trying to win the race. Maybe next time."

South Africa's Johannes Maremane was second with a time of 2:15 and Thabiso Moele of Lesotho was 44 seconds back in third.

In the women's race, Hiromi Igarishi of Japan won with a time of 2:35:19 ahead of Russia's Alina Ivanova, 41 seconds behind. Australian Olympian Carolyn Schuwalow, running her first marathon, was third in 2:41:37.

In the men's half-marathon, Ethiopian-born Sisay Bizabech, who migrated to Australia in 1996, planned to represent his new country in Sydney, won with a time of 1:03:23 ahead of the Japanese pair of Kazutaka Higuchi and Toshiya Katayama.

In the women's half-marathon, Nuta Olaru of Japan won with a time of 1:11:46 ahead of countrywoman Mami Kusunoki and Australian Elizabeth Miller.

## Dejected not disgraced



BEIJING, July 11 (AP): In the end, it was the game. Despite its billing as a grudge match between two countries with lots of animosity, China's 0-1 loss to the United States in a grueling women's World Cup showdown brought admiration from hardcore Chinese soccer fans.

"Both teams played their best. Finally it came down to luck," said Meng Xianyu, one of 60 soccer nuts packed into the smoky Soccer Buff's Cafe, the American team just outlasted the Chinese team."

Soccer fans throughout Beijing spent a sleepless night Saturday waiting to watch their team take on the Americans in the World Cup final, shown live

Emotions in the capital ran high before the game. Chinese sports fans disappointed by the failure of their men's team in international competition were looking for vindication, both in sports and for NATO's bombing of Beijing's embassy in Belgrade two months ago.

The Beijing Youth Daily reported that more than nine out of 10 people in the 116 households it surveyed said they would watch the game live, despite the hour.

"Better Watch Our Sisters!" the China Sports Daily said in its lead article Saturday.

"The Chinese team is determined not to let the nation down. It will show its standards, its style, matching the US side in skill, strategy, ability, mentality, fight, teamwork, fortitude, murderousness, and grit," said a front-page article in Saturday's Beijing Morning

To the great disappointment of many Chinese, the men's team has never qualified for a World Cup, let alone been in position to win one. Yet soccer in China has by-and-large been viewed as a man's sport. The success of the women's team is helping win them some long overdue recognition.

"In our dorm, we only have posters of male soccer players. There aren't any posters or photos of women soccer stars," Ren Liping, a 21-year-old member of the Beijing women's soccer team, said Saturday.

"This might change that. Now, maybe someone will take pictures of us," teammate Luo Ting chimed in.

Six members of the Chinese national squad started with the Beijing team. Coach Cheng Wenkuan said he hopes to see at least several more move up.



Chinese fans urging their team on at the Rose Bowl on July 10. —AFP photo

on nationwide television.

The outcome — a loss on penalty kicks after two overtime periods — drew huge cries of disappointment. And some complained about whether a header by Fan Yunjie had actually crossed the goal line before being headed out by Kristine Lilly.

"Every one knows that match was not fair. That ball went in," said Xu Li, an office worker and one of the few female fans inside the Soccer Buff's Cafe. She cried when the Chinese lost.

"This was just too tragic, too tragic," said Ma Zhengmei, his shirt rolled up to expose his belly, as he, like the others, made a quick exit from the restaurant after the game.

Post.

President Jiang Zemin telephoned the Chinese squad to offer encouragement.

"You have demonstrated fully the aspiration to win honours for the motherland," the official Xinhua News Agency reported Jiang as telling the team.

With such heightened expectations, there was never any question that the Soccer Buff's Cafe would stay open.

"Who could sleep anyway?" said Li Yan, manager of the tiny Sichuan restaurant in south Beijing. Its whitewashed walls were strung with slogans saying "Win" and balloons — red for the Chinese women's team, green for Beijing's men soccer club, Guo'an.

Team captain Han Jianrong fretted that as the visiting team, China might not get a fair match.

"It will be a great match, but only if it's a fair one," Han said. "It's always different for the visitor and the host."

China's state-run media has fanned suspicions that referees were biased in favour of the Americans in earlier clashes between the two teams. The atmosphere of mistrust following the Belgrade bombing has accentuated them.

Despite her doubts, Han said she expected China to win.

"Both sides have their strong points. The Americans are physically strong. But our team is better in skill, strategy and spirit," she said.

## A sports revolution



LOS ANGELES, July 11 (Reuters): Twenty determined young women conquered America's traditional antipathy towards soccer this summer.

As the United States celebrates not only winning the Women's World Cup (WWC) for a second time, but also hosting the world's best attended women's sporting event ever, the euphoria of the past three weeks is giving way to hopes and fears for the future.

"The future of football (soccer) is feminine," said Sepp Blatter, president of soccer's world governing body FIFA even before the staggering success of the 1999 WWC.

"Even in this macho-minded sport, there is progress," Blatter added.

Ticket sales for the WWC totalled 650,000 — dwarfing the 112,000 sold for the last WWC in Sweden in 1995 and reflecting an enthusiasm for the world's most popular sport in a nation many people had regarded as a soccer desert. The global television audience for the 32 World Cup matches contested by 12 nations was an estimated one billion.

Poised and personable, the athletes of Team USA became media darlings after years of obscurity and were the new heroines of scores of teenage girls more accustomed to cheering cute ice skaters or gymnasts than grass-stained soccer players.

"This is history in the making. There are bigger things happening here than just us winning a game," said striker Mia Hamm.

The numbers alone appear to support the confidence of Hamm and the men in suits who run FIFA which says that about 30 to 40 million women around the world play organised soccer, including 7.5 million in the United States.

But much depends on the ability of the women's game to continue to attract corporate sponsorship and to move onto the world professional stage.

There are currently no professional soccer leagues for women anywhere in the world and in many of the bastions of male soccer prowess, the women's game is a very poor relation.

China, runners-up to the USA on Saturday after an impressive run in the WWC, has a division one women's soccer league and a high-level tournament. But only 10,000 women in a nation of 1.2 billion people play soccer.

"Most fathers cannot accept girls playing soccer. It's the culture. Girls are supposed to be shy and studious and not so active," said Chinese striker Sun Wen.

In Norway, a professional league is "many years back" said Karen Espelund, general secretary of the women's Norwegian Football Association, adding that Norway's success in reaching the semifinals in the United States should boost the women's game there.

The US Soccer Federation is conducting a feasibility study

for the formation of a professional women's league with a possible launch date in 2001.

Alan Rotherberg, president of the US soccer Federation, says a pro-league is not just an option. "We have to have a women's professional league in this country if we're going to stay at the top of women's soccer," he said.

But corporate America seems ambivalent and some industry experts feel that the finest hour of the women's game has already come and gone.

"It has been a wonderful event. Nobody's losing money on it," said Nova Lanktree of Sports Celebrity Network. "And a month from now it will be a nice memory, just like the Olympics in 1996."

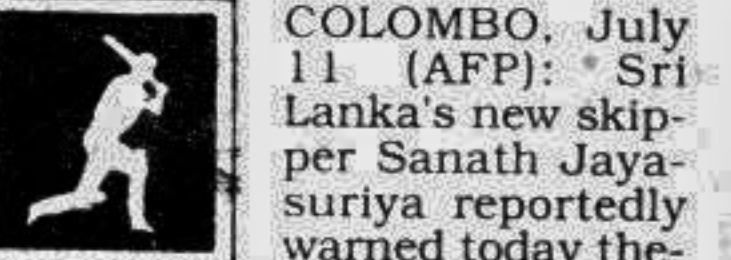
Tommy Kain, soccer brand manager at Nike which was one of 11 corporate sponsors of the 1999 WWC, acknowledges that the sport is healthy as far as participation is concerned. "But they still have a light ahead of them regarding television ratings, corporate sponsorships, licensed sales, global respect and editorial space," he said.

Marla Messing, president of the WWC, has already witnessed a minor miracle over the past three weeks. Perhaps it's not too ambitious to hope for another.

"This is an evolutionary process and not a revolutionary process," she said.

"If you take a country like the UK or Brazil, one thing they love is to see great football, no matter who is playing. When they see that women can play great football, I believe they will come round."

## Sanath's reality-check

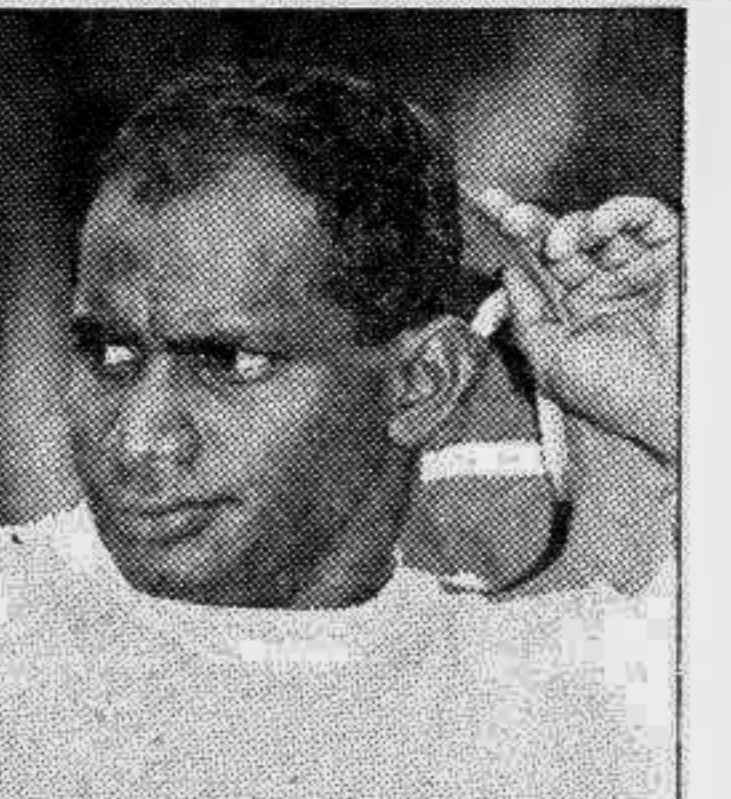


COLOMBO, July 11 (AFP): Sri Lanka's new skipper Sanath Jayasuriya reportedly warned today that there will be no immediate turnaround in the team's flagging fortunes but said the re-entry of coach Day Whatmore could make a difference.

Jayasuriya, who was named captain last week to replace veteran Arjuna Ranatunga, said the team would face formidable challenges against India and Australia, the current world champions, at next month's triangular tournament here.

"Don't expect miracles overnight," Jayasuriya said in an interview with the Sunday Times. "I will strive to do my best and also get the best from my team-mates to put Sri Lanka cricket back on the correct track."

Jayasuriya, 30, said, he had a "long conversation" with Ranatunga and his sacked



deputy Aravinda de Silva and both of them had assured him their "fullest cooperation."

With the appointment of Jayasuriya to lead the country's team after its abortive defence of the 1996 World Cup, the cricket authorities here announced a deal with Day Whatmore to coach the team again from August.

Whatmore will groom the Sri Lankan squad to face the next World Cup. He is widely credited for Sri Lanka's shock victory at the 1996 World Cup where they beat Australia in the finals.

Jayasuriya said Whatmore knew the individual needs and capabilities of players and would be best suited to take care of the national squad.

Cricketers said Jayasuriya had also been complaining that they had too many coaches in the run-up to the last World Cup.

Jayasuriya said he wanted changes made in training schedules, with brief but more focused sessions instead of lengthy practices.

He said Sri Lanka's batting failed miserably during the World Cup and he himself was also unable to perform well.

Head of selectors Sidath Wettimuni said Sri Lanka needed intense help with bowling and fielding too.