

An Aussie star in the making



KARACHI, July 17 (Reuters/ AFP/ Internet): The ousted head of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) expects the country's leading players to be the next target in a campaign to find a scapegoat for the World Cup final thrashing last month.

Ex-PCB chairman Khalid Mahmood also said on Saturday he was surprised at the sudden suspension of the board by Pakistan's president Rafiq Tarar on Friday night.

"The feeling in Islamabad is that the final was a no-game. Logically, if the top hierarchy believes that the match was deliberately thrown, then the players should be the next target," Mahmood told the news agency from Lahore.

"My perception is that the board has been suspended because of match-fixing allegations which are not only untrue but false and baseless.

"Now think it will be the main issue in days to come and some of the frontline players might be made scapegoats to justify the sacking of the board," Mahmood said.

Tarar's suspension of the PCB -- he has appointed an ad hoc committee headed by Mujibur Rahman in its place -- comes a month after Pakistan lost the World Cup final to Australia at Lord's by eight wickets.

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It led to accusations of match-fixing by Pakistan fans and local media.

Mahmood said: "The chief of the Ehtesab Bureau (Accounting Bureau) has been levelling accusations against the players. Now his brother is the chairman of the ad hoc committee."

Mujibur Rahman is the younger brother of Saifur Rahman, chief of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Account-

ability Bureau which is already looking into allegations that Pakistan deliberately lost the final.

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Terminating the allegations as "ridiculous", he added, "The team has performed very well except one bad game. You can't sack the whole board for it."

"I always defended the players and I am ready to defend them even now. They are wonderful players and a very talented side. None of the matches in the World Cup was fixed. It was said there was not enough evidence to prove the claims."

That background has led to eyebrows being raised every time Pakistan lose unexpectedly, particularly among the team's own volatile fans.

That occurred during the recent World Cup when Akram's team lost to lowly Bangladesh in one of the greatest shocks in the tournament history. Aspersions were also cast when Pakistan lost to India after being in a winning position.

Akram's players however denied the final was fixed. But Pakistan's defeat triggered protests by their own fans who burned effigies of skipper Akram and accused the team of being "traitors and gamblers."

Former and current Test players declined to comment.

"My apprehension that certain elements were deliberately maligning the team and engineering a campaign against the board is proven by the suspension decision," Mahmood added.

Former and current Test players declined to comment.

"I am just concentrating on having a pre-season with Western Australia and having another good (domestic) Shield season but this is certainly a great opportunity."

Katich's promotion could be the death knell for the Test career of South Australian Darren Lehmann, who retained his one-day position but was overlooked for the Test segment of the tour to Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.

Katich, a graduate of the Australian Cricket Academy in 1996, scored all of his five first-class centuries last season.

Also a handy left-arm wrist spinner, Katich has scored 1,632 first-class runs at an average of 52.65 with a highest score of 154 not out.

An admirer of the way West Indian great Viv Richards batted, Katich said he wanted to be known as a player who could be relied on when the going was tough.

"Last season I managed to get to three-figures five times so hopefully that's something I can continue to do," he said.

"Just like Viv did so perfectly when it's tight, we had a few tight situations late in the season - I certainly enjoy that."

Marquez vows to stop Vargas

SOUTH LAKE TAHOE, Nevada, July 17 (AP): Fernando Vargas has a world title and a perfect record. Raul Marquez, who used to hold that IBF junior middleweight title, says he'll prove Saturday night that Vargas is just an overhyped fighter.

Vargas, at 1996 US Olympian, has won by knockout in each of his 16 pro fights. The Californian will be making his second defence of the 154-pound (69-kilogram) title he captured last December.

Marquez, a 1992 Olympian from Texas is 30-1 with 20 knockouts. He held the title for eight months in 1997.

"I'm eager to find out what Fernando is all about. I think he has talent and hype -- he has a little talent and a lot of hype," Marquez said. "I think the pressure is on the champ. Fernando is a big star. I read all about him in the magazines."

Marquez, 27, lost the title when he was stopped on cuts by Yory Boy Campanas in the eighth

round in late 1997. It came less than three months after the left-handed Marquez needed 70 stitches to close cuts in his eyebrows in a successful title defence.

That tendency to cut easily is one reason why Marquez is a big underdog to defeat Vargas in the fight at Caesars Tahoe and regain the crown. Another reason is the talent and superior speed of Vargas, who has gotten all his knockouts by the seventh round.

SEA Games

Myanmar targets boat races

YANGON, July 17: Myanmar will be hoping to bag gold medals in traditional boat racing next month in the 20th Southeast Asia Games in Brunei, a top sports official said Saturday, reports AP.

But other sports that Myanmar won gold in at the last SEA Games -- women's weightlifting, wu shu, body building and women's sepak takraw have been dropped from the current edition.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, will send a 245-strong contingent, including 144 athletes to compete in 12 sports, said Maung Win, the Sports Ministry's director of sports and physical education.

"Myanmar lays high hopes on the traditional boat racing events," he said. "Myanmar's team bagged two golds and several silvers in both women's and men's events in the 19th SEA Games in Jakarta."

The 97 men and 47 women will compete in track and field, billiards and snooker, bowling, boxing, soccer, golf, karate, traditional boat races, sepak takraw, swimming taekwondo and pencak silat.

Speaking at a meeting with athletes and their team managers Thursday, Lt Gen Khin Nyunt, a top leader in the military government and head of the national Olympic Committee, urged the athletes to win.

Khin Nyunt said that even though some sports Myanmar excels in have been dropped, the country's best athletes have been selected for the Brunei lineup.

Khin Nyunt said that the government and local and foreign businesses had contributed cash and kind to the Myanmar team.

Mahmood worried about players

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Mates' movement for Chavez, Lara

ASUNCION, Paraguay, July 17: The Mexican soccer team on Friday threatened to boycott the Confederations Cup next week unless two players accused of doping are absolved, reports AP.

The 22 Mexican players signed a letter of support for Raul Rodriguez Lara and Paulo Cesar Chavez, who were suspended from the Copa America after traces of anabolic steroids were found in their urine.

"We are entirely sure there was an error in the testing," the letter said. "All of Mexico knows the clean and transparent trajectory, as soccer players and people, of our companions."

It said the scandal "has stained the name and reputation of Mexican soccer players around the world" and demanded a quick solution.

"If the players are not absolved before the Confederations Cup, the members of this team will not participate in the referred-to event as a sign of protest, and show of unconditional support."

The tournament is to start July 24 in Mexico.

The players' position leaves the Mexican delegation in a delicate spot. On Friday, Mexican officials said they accepted the positive result.

Lara and Chavez underwent routine testing after their first-round game with Brazil, which Mexico lost 2-1. Both samples came back positive.

Lara was tested again after the next game, a 3-1 win over Venezuela, and again the result was positive.

The Mexican federation ordered the two to undergo new tests in California after the scandal erupted, and the results were negative. But the South American Soccer Confederation, which organised the Copa America, said the tests were irrelevant.

If the Mexican federation refuses to recognize the positive results it could face sanctions by FIFA, soccer's governing body, and could no longer be invited to take part in the Copa America.

The confederation's executive committee meets Saturday to analyze the case. One solution reportedly under study is to let CONCACAF, the confederation Mexico belongs to, decide on the definitive punishment of the two players.

Mexico plays Chile on Saturday for third place in the Copa America final on Sunday.

Fleming, though, was unlucky when Roger Twose (59 not out) escaped twice in an over on 52. Fleming first failing to hold a difficult return catch and Mark Ealham put down a chance at slip.

And Horne, 57 overnight, at last went lbw to Matthew Fleming, playing a tired shot at a ball nipped back by the Kent captain.

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The only batsman to miss out was captain Stephen Fleming, taken behind off a loose shot for 24 to give strongly debutant James Golding his maiden first class wicket.

Fleming set a target of 500, and there is enough playing time left reach that objective and bowl Kent out to record their first victory over the county.

"Our batting's been too patchy and we were looking for a score of 500. We've got a lot of all round quality, which offers more depth to the side," said Fleming.

"We were disappointed with our last two sessions in the Edgbaston Test, but our county form has been good by comparison."

It was an opportunity not to be missed and Horne, in particular, made sure the big chance did not go to waste. He started his innings in Thursday and occupied the crease for 501 minutes of solid diligence.

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