

Sport

Change in Indian captaincy certain?

MUMBAI, July 25 (Internet report): News reports here suggest it is almost certain that a new captain will be named next Wednesday in Nagpur after Mohammad Azharuddin told the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Saturday that he will be able to "establish his full fitness" on August 5, which is 11 days from now and a week after the national selection committee appoints the captain for the tri-series in Sri Lanka.

Quoting unnamed sources The Hindu reports, the selectors may be asked to name the captain in the quadrangular tournament in Nairobi. The Indian team is scheduled to play from the last week of August, limited over tournaments in Sri Lanka, Singapore, Kenya and also should the Government and Board agree the five match series in Toronto.

Azharuddin met the BCCI president, Raj Singh Dungarpur at the Cricket Club of India (CCI) on Saturday evening and explained to him that he underwent "arthroplasty of the acromio-clavicular joint of the right shoulder". He was operated in London by Dr. Ian Bayley, on June 19, a day before the World Cup final.

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Owen returns next week

BELFAST, July 25: England international Michael Owen is near the end of a "long dark tunnel" and will be back in training within 10 days. Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier said on Saturday, reports AFP.

Owen's fitness problems and the length of time it is taking him to recover from a hamstring injury, has dominated Houllier's mind while he has had his new-look squad in Northern Ireland for a pre-season tournament.

After the impressive 2-0 win over Dutch side Feyenoord which secured Liverpool the trophy, Houllier had a double reason to be pleased.

"We have had some good news about Michael while we have been out here," he said. "The doctor has kept me fully informed."

"For Michael, when he starts training again it will be the end of a long, dark tunnel for him. I can see that being within a week to 10 days."

Owen's treatment has been the source of much speculation this week. Houllier has admitted a difference of opinion with club physio Mark Leather over the treatment and Leather has not accompanied the squad to Ulster for this four-team tournament.

Owen has been sent to German specialist Dr Hans Müller-Wohlfahrt who also looks after Bayern Munich and the German national side.

He is now back in England having intensive treatment, and Houllier believes the 19-year-old will be playing again within a week of the season starting on August 7.

Keegan for foreigners

LONDON, July 25: England coach Kevin Keegan believes the foreign invasion of British football can help raise the standard of home-grown players, reports AFP.

Keegan, who admits he is likely to continue picking players from the reserves of some Premiership clubs while stars from other countries take first-team places, has hit out at critics who claim the influx of foreigners hurts the development of domestic players.

"Stop moaning, work harder and if you still don't make it, then accept it is because you are not good enough and not because of the foreigners over here," he said.

Keegan, who signed the likes of Frenchman David Ginola, Colombian Faustino Asprilla and Belgium's Philippe Albert when he was in charge of Newcastle, added: "My view is that English youngsters are going to have to be a bit better to force their way through and I think that is a good thing."

The gauntlet is down for the kids of this country. Are they going to hide behind the excuse 'there are too many foreigners, we won't get our chance', or get off their backsides, work even harder, become even more dedicated?

"If they give it their best shot and don't make it that will be because they are not good enough, not because Arsene Wenger (Arsenal manager) or Gerard Houllier (Liverpool manager) has fetched foreigners in."

No one near Matthaeus

BONN, July 25: Bayern Munich's veteran star Lothar Matthaeus has been voted German footballer-of-the-year by a massive margin, reports AFP.

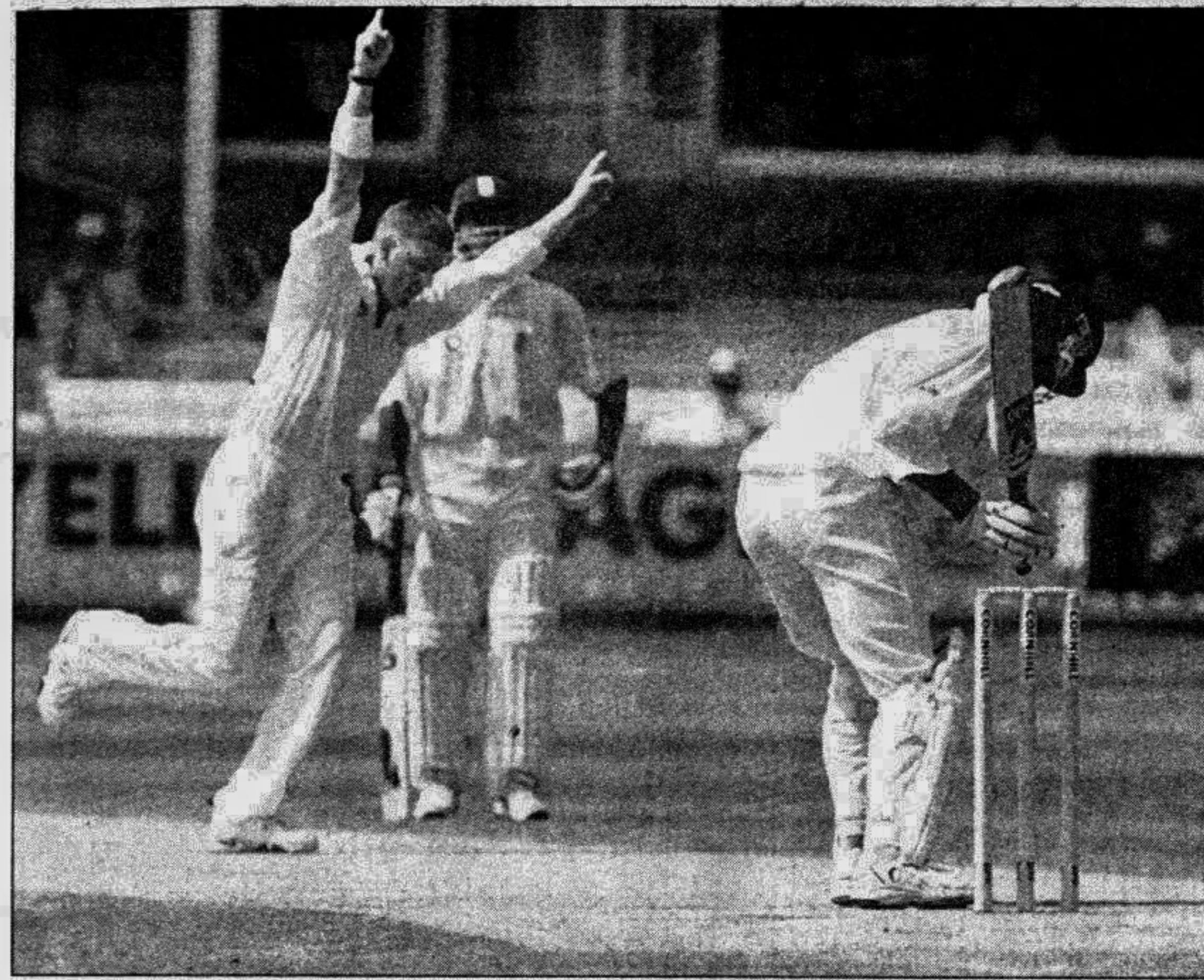
The 38-year-old won the award following of poll of just under 1,000 sports journalists.

He won 556 votes, ahead of Hertha Berlin striker Michael Precht (161) and Bayer Leverkusen striker Oliver Neuville (48). Oliver Bierhoff, the AC Milan striker and Germany's captain, was fourth (35).

Matthaeus won his 137th cap for Germany in Saturday's 4-0 defeat by Brazil at the Confederations' Cup in Mexico.

The sweeper, who also won the award in 1990, helped Bayern win their 15th German title last season and reach the European Cup final, only to go down to Manchester United.

He is due to play his last game for Bayern on December 15 before joining the New York New Jersey MetroStars on a one-year contract.



Geoff Allott (L) is ecstatic after getting the edge from England's Dean Headley yesterday. —AFP photo

Ban slapped

From page 13

Akram, Malik and Ijaz Ahmed were named as prime suspects last September in an interim report which recommended that the three players should not be selected until the investigations were completed.

But no action was taken by the PCB executive council which eight days ago was suspended by president Rafiq Tarrar amid fresh controversy surrounding allegations that the side "threw" the World Cup final against Australia in June.

Rehman was then appointed as the chairman of the ad hoc committee. Incidentally his brother, Sohail, who is known to be a close friend of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif head Ehtisham Cell.

"Although the ad hoc committee has not been officially informed of the accusations by the Accountability Cell, the charges framed are serious enough to suspend the three cricketers," Mujeeb-ur-Rehman said.

The interim report of the PCB probe committee had also recommended the same last year. So I don't think we are doing anything new. I believe that this should have been done last year."

Rehman said five other players questioned in the probe would be available for selection "as they have not been reported to be active in corruption."

"They are said to be just beneficiaries. But their role will also be investigated."

Pakistan, in the coming season, are scheduled to participate in a triangular series in Sharjah in October before flying to Australia for three Tests and a tri-nation series involving India and Australia.

APP said that the EB investigations showed that players tried to influence the PCB not to take any action against them.

"The EB investigators say that from the information

available from the PCB, the players influenced the executive council and (asked) that before the terminal action was taken, the board should await the final report of the probe committee, thus intentionally delaying matters for the benefit of the players," APP said.

APP said the allegations against Akram were made on the basis of the interim report of the probe committee which relied on the evidence provided by former captains Aamir Sohail and Rashid Latif and discarded Test fast bowler Ata-ur-Rehman.

The IB officers, who travelled with the team throughout the tournament in different garbs, confirmed that the final against Australia was not fixed, as feared by the masses and projected by some lobbies in the government.

However, the IB in their report sent to the EB have reported that they were aware of the presence of the brothers of Wasim Akram and Inzamamul Haq in London during the World Cup, who were allegedly busy in placing bets on some of the matches. The IB had gathered information that before the game against Bangladesh, the two allegedly placed large sums of money belonging to some cricketers with the bookmakers William Hill and Ladbrokes.

Asif and Shakawat scored one goal each for the winners while Imran pulled one back for the Shishu Kishore Sangha.

But the interesting thing is that the IB officers were unable to provide solid evidence regarding the involvement of any cricketer in match-fixing or betting.

However, the IB have reported several instances of the players staying out late, visiting casinos, night-clubs, bars, etc. The names of Ijaz Ahmed and some other players have been prominently mentioned in the report with reference to disciplined behaviour. Ijaz has been accused of visiting a casino on the night before the final -- a charge he has denied vehemently accepting that he did go to a casino with a friend, but at least two nights before the final at Lord's.

Wasim Akram left the field when Rahul Dravid and (Mohammad) Azharuddin were scoring freely. Vice-captain Aamir Sohail took over and captured two wickets by readjusting field placing.

"On returning to the field, Akram angrily demanded why Aamir Sohail had made changes in the field placing," APP said.

Akram is considered the best fast bowler of the modern era. He is the only bowler to capture 300 or more wickets in both forms of the game. In 88 tests, he has captured 378 wickets, while 275 one-day internationals have produced 387 wickets.

Final wasn't fixed

From page 13

showpiece event. The officers at times stayed at the same hotel as the team. The move came on the orders of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who had been requested to give approval for this purpose by the EB, who are headed by Senator Saif-ur-Rehman.

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Pak trader offers to sponsor Sahara Cup

TORONTO, July 25 (Internet reports): A Toronto-based Pakistani Canadian businessman has offered to sponsor the annual Indo-Pakistan five-match series of one-day Internationals boosting organisers' hopes of going ahead with the 1999 event which is known as Sahara Cup.

If the offer is accepted, the tournament will be known as "Bulk 'N Bitz Cricket Cup," said an official of DBS Group of companies which agreed to sponsor the popular Toronto event, reports The Dawn newspaper of Pakistan.

The official told the on Saturday that Bilal Chapti, the president of the DBS Group has formally submitted the offer and the deal being negotiated with the relevant authorities.

He declined to give more details. Asked to comment on reports that the Sahara officials are no more interested in sponsoring the event, the official said: "We understand that perhaps they are not sponsoring the cup but only the International Cricket Conference (ICC) or the London-based Trans World International can confirm or deny the report."

Bilal Chapti, he said, made the sponsorship offer for the promotion of the game. To another question, he said the Bulk 'N Bits Company is part of Canada's DBS Group Holding Inc.

The Sahara Cup, which has the approval of the ICC, is played here in September every year at the Toronto Cricket, Curling and Skating Club. The two-team event was launched in 1996 with Pakistan winning the inaugural contest by three games to two (3-2).

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MAKING HIS MARK: Brazil's superstar in the making Ronaldinho (No. 7) scoring off a rebound against Germany in their Confederations' Cup clash. —AFP photo

Brazil batter Germany

"I'm happy to have gotten a goal," Ronaldinho said after the game. "I feel like I grew during this game, and I think Brazil will grow even more during this competition."

In the 40th minute, Warley centered to Alex, who headed the ball into the net to Lehmann's right. Only three minutes later, Alex dribbled the ball up the middle all alone, easily faking out Lehmann and tapping in his goal.

Luxemburgo remained cautious after the match when asked whether Alex and Ronaldinho marked the future of Brazilian soccer.

"Both are great players," he said. "But the team has other players who have great ability and who can stake a claim for a place in the team for the qualification phase of the 2000 Olympics."

Germany had few scoring opportunities, and most were shot wide.

Their best opportunity came in minute 39 of the first half, when a long shot bounced off the hands of Dida and Michael Preetz tried to tap the ball in. Brazilian defender Evanson cleared it.

Oliver Neuville also made a nice center to Michael Preetz in the 13th minute of the second half, and Preetz headed it straight into Dida's hands.

After the first goal, our defense sank because we're still in the physical preparation phase, and the Brazilians showed their technical superiority," said German coach Erich Ribbeck.

The game began rough, with three yellow cards in the first half for Emerson and Vampeta of Brazil, and for Mehmet Scholl of Germany.

The matchup was seen as a test of the youth of each of the soccer powerhouses. Both countries fielded young teams, devoid of many of their major stars.

Brazil comes off the Copa America triumph less than a week ago, and many players on both teams are starting pre-season with their European clubs.

The first goal came after a lackluster first half, and a young Brazilian squad came together with brilliant soccer in the second half.

The Brazilians seemed like two different teams. In the first, they were indecisive, and while they dominated the ball they couldn't seem to get off a clean shot. Forwards Ronaldinho and Christian repeatedly got tripped up as they advanced into the penalty box.

The second half was another story. The Brazilians played gracefully, as the young players following in the tradition of their idols with a brilliant passing and ball-handling.

"That was the strategy," said Alex, 21-year-old who scored two of the four goals. "Come in with a team heavy on marking and in the second half to bring out a more offensive team."

In the second half, we started out more rested and we took advantage of the Germans' weariness," added coach Luxemburgo.

Nonetheless, Guadalajara's love affair with Brazil continued. The 58,000-seat Jalisco Stadium was a sea of yellow and green.

During World Cup competition in 1970, Brazil are based here. That year, Pele carried the team to their third World Cup victory. Brazil came back in 1986 but are eliminated by France in the quarterfinals.

"In 1970 and 1986 I was too young but now I can enjoy it," said Hector Sandoval, a con-

struction worker in a Brazil jersey and joker's hat. "We're celebrating, drinking a few beers — and dancing samba, of course."

Four teams are based in Guadalajara — Brazil, Germany, New Zealand and the United States. Four others are in Mexico City — Mexico, Bolivia, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. After a round-robin in each city, the top two teams of each group will advance to the semifinals.

Brazil and Germany have played 16 friendlies but the soccer heavyweights have managed to avoid a confrontation in official tournaments. Brazil has won nine of those friendlies and Germany just three.