

## Tug of war over MCG

SYDNEY, July 27 (AFP/Internet): An impasse is continuing over the fate of international cricket at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) for this southern summer.

The Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) - ground managers of the MCG - and the Victorian Cricket Association (VCA) held negotiations on Tuesday in a bid to resolve a long-running feud.

Discussions between the two bodies have broken down several times in the past three years over terms and conditions for cricket to continue its 122 year association with the MCG.

Officials from the MCC and VCA were unavailable for comment as meetings continued with a fresh urgency.

Tickets for this summer's international cricket matches go on sale next Monday with Melbourne venues on the season schedules denoted 'to be advised'.

It is believed Sydney Cricket Ground would be awarded fixtures, including the traditional Boxing Day Test, currently pencilled in for the MCG this summer if the negotiations aren't resolved.

These also include four one-day internationals including the first final of the tri-series against India and Pakistan, scheduled for February 2.

The VCA has the Australian Cricket Board (ACB) in its corner in the fight over a 15-year agreement to settle cricket's short-term future at the MCG.

The VCA has rejected MCC demands for control of television signals beamed from the ground, a position it maintains is supported by legal opinion and the ACB.

In turn the MCC has rejected a series of VCA proposals to solve the dispute which initially flared at a meeting in January 1996.

VCA chief executive Ken Jacobs has said the association was investigating its options to play international cricket at other venues in Melbourne but the most viable option, the 52,000-capacity stadium at the Docklands on the city fringe, won't be completed until January next year.

**Old Robinson ready to retire**

LONDON, July 27 (Internet report): Nottinghamshire opener Tim Robinson, the oldest player in county cricket, is to retire at the end of this season.

Robinson, 40, made 29 Test appearances for England and has accumulated 24,335 first class runs in his 21-year career at Trent Bridge.

"Cricket has been extremely good to me but I have found it a struggle this season and have felt the mental pressure in particular," he said.

"I'm currently struggling with a hamstring injury and this has confirmed to me that the time is right to retire."

**Leonardo not leaving Milan**

MILAN, July 27 (Internet report): Italian Serie A club AC Milan has denied that Leonardo is set for a move to Middlesbrough.

The Brazilian forward was linked with a move to the Riverside last week but Rossoneri Vice-President Adriano Galliani told Italian newspapers on Monday: "Leonardo is staying with us. That's official."

He added: "He was a bit perplexed about the fact that there were seven forward players in the squad, but I convinced him that everyone would be happy and that there would be space for everyone."

Last week Middlesbrough boss Bryan Robson confirmed an interest in the Brazilian forward, and chief executive Keith Lamb said: "We have had preliminary discussions about both Ziegler and Leonardo coming to Middlesbrough."

"So far, AC have not dismissed our interest. We have yet to speak to either player but Christian knows of our interest."

"We anticipate further discussions but it's a little bit premature to say the deal will be wrapped up in the next two days," he added.

**Premiership refs all wired up**

LONDON, July 27: English Premiership referees and linesmen will be wired for sound this season.

They will be given radios and ear pieces to help them keep in close contact, reports AFP.

Premier League Referees' Officer Philip Don said: "We'll be reviewing and evaluating it during the season and we'll take it from there."

The idea was piloted in a Premiership clash between Liverpool and Tottenham in May.

Don said the system had since been improved, adding: "Generally speaking, it's gone all right and it's helped referees improve their control of the game."

"It's something we've talked to FIFA about and they're happy with us to experiment with it."

Don added referees this season would also clamp down on gamesmanship.

He said: "We've talked about the FIFA directive regarding simulating to deceive, which is diving. We're saying that players who dive will be cautioned."

"What we're also saying is the image of the game is suffering due to the amount of foul, abusive and insulting language there is at the moment. Where that language is wilfully directed at the match officials, the referee will be taking action."

## Rehman speaks his mind



ISLAMABAD, July 27 (Reuters/Internet reports): Pakistan's new cricket chief Mujeeb Ur Rehman urged 12 members of the national squad on Monday to follow a strict code of conduct.

Rehman was appointed a week ago as chairman of the ad hoc committee of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

In a statement on Monday, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said, "The meeting was part of Mujeeb's efforts to streamline the game on the right footing and to build players' confidence," the statement said.

"The players have been told to follow a strict code of conduct and disciplinary line if they want to serve the nation."

Pakistan President Rafiq Tarar suspended the PCB in the wake of Pakistan's humiliating World Cup final defeat to Australia and appointed Rehman as head of the ad hoc committee of the board. Tarar is the patron of the PCB.

On Sunday captain Wasim Akram, Ijaz Ahmad and Salim Malik were barred from selection pending a report by Pakistan's anti-corruption board. The board also said it had gathered evidence of what it called

immoral conduct by the players during the World Cup last month.

A government-appointed judicial commission has been investigating corruption in the Pakistan game since September.

No date has been set for the release of its report.

Rehman described his meeting with the players on Monday as "fruitful" and encouraging. "I am very happy and feel confident about the future of Pakistan cricket. They are all good boys and understand my language," he said. He had made it clear to the players that what was done in the past was done, but now no sort of discipline would be tolerated, We have set examples."

The chairman stated the players realised that they now had to work hard to regain the confidence of the people and restore their faith in the team. "What pleases me is that they understand what I am trying to do and the line of action I am following. Their morals are high and I conveyed to them that reaching the World Cup final was a big achievement."

The News reported quoting informed sources that Rehman delivered a clear message to Moin Khan, Inzamamul Haq, Waqar Younis and Mushtaq Ahmed that they would not be

spared if in future it was found they had taken part or cooperated even as silent spectators in any "fixed" international match.

Saqain Mustaq along with the four were named by the committee as having been "beneficiaries" of the match-fixing racket but having no direct or active involvement.

Moin, Inzamam, Waqar, Mushtaq, Salim Malik, Younis Youhana, Abdul Razak, Azhar Mahmood, Shahid Afridi, Shoib Akhtar and Wajahatullah Wasti appeared before the chairman on Monday, while Saeed Anwar had already met him separately a day earlier as he had some urgent matters to attend on Monday.

Saqain could not attend the meeting as he is playing for Surrey in the English county championship. But he has informed the committee he would appear before them on July 29.

It was reported that the players, whenever called for the meeting were nervous and shifty, but Rehman assured them there was no vilification campaign against them.

Rehman stated some of the players had spoken to him about the promise made by the Board to give bonuses to them for reaching the final and he assured them the ad hoc committee would adhere to such commitments.

## Atherton awaits recall



LONDON, July 27 (Internet report): Michael Atherton could be poised for an earlier than expected recall for the third Test against New Zealand at Old Trafford as a solution to England's batting and captaincy problems.

Chairman of selectors David Graveney had previously said that Atherton would only be included by England again if he proved his consistency of performance over a length of time to end any doubts about his back problems.

But Graveney's patience with England's inconsistent top order, which both he and injured captain Nasser Hussain blamed for Sunday's nine-wicket defeat at Lord's, finally snapped in the aftermath of another disappointment at the home of cricket.

Almost certainly England

will also have to name a new captain, despite Hussain claiming he is now "50-50" for Old Trafford after he suffered a fractured right middle finger, while Graeme is determined not to tolerate any more of the below-par batting displays which have plagued his term as chairman.

In both cases Atherton will fit the bill as someone who can concentrate for long periods without giving his wicket away cheaply and also a player who has extensive experience both of Old Trafford and captaincy at Test level.

As selectors, the batting is

something we obviously have to look at very closely - the word 'haemorrhaging' comes to mind," snapped Graveney.

We have scored just one hundred since the first Test against Australia in Brisbane, which is totally unacceptable.

The way we play our domestic cricket, if you look at the times of hundreds, they will probably take three hours and Test match hundreds have got to take five hours.

It's just not that easy against quality bowling. Whoever you play against will not give you the frequency of scoring opportunities that you might find in county cricket."

Although Atherton, ruled out of both the final Test of last winter's Ashes tour in Sydney and the World Cup with his long-standing back problems, may be an ideal candidate to strengthen England's batting resources, his selection would nevertheless represent a major

challenge for the selectors.

Graveney stressed: "The weather at Lord's was not quite what we were led to believe and the swinging ball was not an impossible one to counter."

Even protecting your wickets, knowing the weather conditions would have been better the following day, would have been a better course of action but to collapse from 100 for two is very disappointing to put it mildly.

"I'm not talking about blocking and just survival. It is the construction of a Test match innings which is an area in which we are sadly lacking."

Since Graveney began his term of office two years ago with a first Test success against Australia at Edgbaston, England have won just six of the intervening 23 matches and

concentrated on getting the batsmen out.

One area in which England

do excel is the department of bizarre explanations. Ted Dexter, one of Graveney's predecessors, variously blamed smog, facial hair and the alignment of the planets for England's failures.

The former coach David

Adams was a New Zealander.

Andrew Caddick, who learned his cricket in Christchurch, scored 45 runs in a 78-run partnership with Chris Read.

He then bowled with real venom as New Zealand set out after their modest victory target of 58.

The New Zealanders clearly do not like Caddick and Chris Cairns and Dion Nash reserved some choice invective for the number eight.

He returned the compliment when New Zealand batted, giving Matthew Horne and Matthew Bell a torrid time before Bell hit the winning runs.

Caddick's efforts with the bat in the first Test, which England won, and again at Lord's, shine an unfaltering light on the England top order.

He has shared in two of England's top partnerships and twice bettered his own best Test score.

Chairman of selectors David Graveney is very unhappy at England's lack of batting quality.

"It was an extremely poor batting performance, and that's putting it politely," Graveney said on Monday. "In essence we have to score more runs from

our main batsmen."

They have already lost through injury Darren Gough, their best bowler, and fellow paceman Alex Tudor, who scored 99 as a nightwatchman in the seven-wicket victory in the first Test.

New Zealand, in Steve Rixon's last series as coach, have fewer problems. Simon Doull, their master of swing, may be fit for the third Test starting at Old Trafford next week which will bring them back to full strength.

New Zealand have all too often followed one match-winning performance in a Test by barely competing in the next.

This time their impressive young captain Stephen Fleming does not lack motivation. The Kiwis did not take kindly to a remark from Wisden editor Matthew Engel that they are "the world's least charismatic team".

Had England, not for the first time, underestimated the New Zealanders?

"It's probably hard not to, to be honest," Fleming replied.

"We all read the papers throughout the tour. We've got no personalities and we also lack 'flair'."

"If I was England reading about that, I would be confident as well."

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