

Ijaz's call to teammates, supporters

KARACHI, July 29: Barred Pakistani cricket star Ijaz Ahmed Wednesday called on teammates and fans to support the players accused of match-fixing and bribery, reports AFP.

"We need the support of teammates and fans all around the world because we have done nothing wrong," Ijaz told the news agency.

The star batsman met the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board's ad hoc committee, Mujibur Rehman, on Wednesday at the board's headquarters in Lahore.

"I have told my viewpoint in anything that could bring a bad name to the country and will appear before the Accountability Bureau on Thursday," Ijaz said.

Ijaz along with captain Wasim Akram and batsman Salim Malik has been suspended from the national team by the Pakistani anti-corruption bureau over match-fixing charges.

He had put the list of my assistants before the judicial commission and was cleared. This new scenario is hard to understand," Ijaz said, referring to an inquiry being conducted by Lahore High Court judge Malik Mohammad Quyum since last year.

The trio was implicated in match-fixing and betting in an interim report of a committee of the cricket board in September.

Sources said Ijaz's meeting with the chairman of the ad hoc committee lasted just 10 minutes.

"The chairman of ad hoc committee sounded very supportive and told me that he liked my batting but said charges would have to be cleared before the bureau," Ijaz said.

Twelve players including vice-captain Moin Khan and Malik met Rehman on Monday. Captain Wasim Akram dashed from England and met Rehman and Accountability Bureau chief, Senator Saif-ur Rehman, on Tuesday.

Pakistan's anti-corruption bureau Wednesday said its investigators would begin interrogating the three players.

"I have a clear conscience and will put before the bureau all my assets. I have always paid taxes," Ijaz said.

Ijaz said he was suffering from high blood pressure after the news of suspension.

"I was in Dubai where I got the news which was shocking. What wrong have I done? It is very discouraging," Ijaz said.

Keegan hints at Gascoigne return

LONDON, July 29: England manager Kevin Keegan is considering recalling Paul Gascoigne to his squad if the troubled Middlesbrough midfielder proves his fitness early in the new season, reports Reuters.

Gascoigne has battled alcoholism and depression since he was sent home before last year's World Cup in France by Keegan's predecessor Glenn Hoddle.

"Gascoigne is in my thoughts," Keegan told a news conference on Tuesday.

"He is one of a number of players who can do things that change a game. But I think it is important for him that he will last 90 minutes so I want to see him first hand myself."

"I would like to wait a week or two in the season and have a look at him."

Keegan will name his squad next month for crucial European championship qualifying matches against Luxembourg and Poland.

Rapid coach's initiative

BUCHAREST, July 29: Rapid Bucharest's coach said today he was willing to pay personality for drug tests on teammates of Stefan Vrabioru of Astra Ploiesti who died in suspicious circumstances on the pitch last week, reports Reuters.

"I'm ready to pay 500 dollars from my own pocket for each Astra player to undergo a drugs check," Mircea Lucescu, former coach of Internazionale Milan, told Reuters.

"This is not an attempt to prove my club's innocence but rather to avoid the recurrence of such a tragic event."

Astra Ploiesti officials issued a statement agreeing to Lucescu's proposal, but said they were prepared to pay for similar tests for Rapid players.

Vrabioru, 23, collapsed minutes after making his first division debut away to champions Rapid and died on his way to hospital.

An initial autopsy was inconclusive but forensic experts said they would be conducting further tests for drugs or a viral infection.

Mircea Sandu, soccer federation president, has ordered the country's League of Professional Clubs to set up a commission to investigate alongside a police criminal enquiry.

But he made clear there was no money in his budget to pay for systematic drug tests.

"The Romanian Soccer Federation is saddened by the death of a young player and we stand alongside Astra and his family," Sandu said in a statement.

"UEFA has not asked us to draw up any contract with a specialised laboratory for testing drugs. Moreover, drug tests are very expensive and we have no money to pay for them."

Meanwhile, medical officials have been asking why Rapid's board provided only a badly equipped ambulance at the ground, when supplying a proper vehicle would have cost the equivalent of only \$25.

Kiwis whack Derbyshire

DERBY, England, July 29: New Zealand, buoyed by their nine-wicket win over England in the second Test, cruised to a 130-run victory over a weakened Derbyshire side here on Wednesday in a 50-over match, reports AFP.

The New Zealand batsmen, spearheaded by Craig McMillan with 86 off 89 balls, took full advantage of a Derbyshire attack missing their leading bowlers Dominic Cork and former England paceman Phil DeFreitas.

The promising opening partnership of second Test centurion Matthew Horne and Matthew Bell, who hit the winning runs against England, helped themselves to half-centuries.

A total of 369 for six was never going to be within Derbyshire's range, particularly as Australian opening batsman Michael Slater was also left out but a century from acting captain Adrian Rollins rescued the hosts from complete humiliation.

New Zealand, who included seven of the Test team only leaving out their attack that humiliated England, cruised along at around seven an over before raising the tempo even further towards the end of their innings.

Horne and Bell added 132 in 21 overs before Horne was stumped charging the slow left-arm spinner Ian Blackwell for 73.

Bell was also stumped off the Irish seamer Ryan Eagleson for 73.

McMillan b Blackwell 86

C Harris c Spenlove

70. But the runs continued to flow, and only off-spinner Simon Lacey emerged from the onslaught with respectable figures.

Captain Stephen Fleming and Chris Harris failed to cash in, but McMillan and Nathan Astle ruthlessly demolished some very moderate bowling.

They hammered seven sixes between them, and Roger Twose briefly joined in the slaughter as 91 runs came from the last five overs.

McMillan hit four sixes and five fours, while Astle struck three sixes in his unbeaten 34 which came from only 13 deliveries.

Derbyshire's supporters voiced their displeasure during the interval at the one-sided nature of the game, and their mood was not improved when Matthew Cassar was bowled for a duck in the second over.

But Rollins, who pulled the third ball of the innings for six, provided some respectability by batting through the 50 overs to finish with 111 from 159 balls.

Pick of the New Zealand attack were McMillan and Twose, who both picked up two wickets.

Stephen Titchard shared the only substantial stand of the innings with Rollins (75 for the fifth wicket).

DERBYSHIRE

A Rollins not out 111

M Cassar b McMillan 0

R Weston c Croy b McMillan 30

I Blackwell b Astle 10

B Spenlove b Walker 24

S Titchard c McMillan 27

B Twose 27

M Newell lbw b Twose 0

S Lacey c Walker b O'Connor 12

S Griffiths c McMillan 9

B O'Connor 16

Extras: (b-4, lb-3, w-7, nb-2) 19

Total: (For 8 wickets in 50 overs) 239

Did not bat: Eagleson, Deane.

Fall of wks: 1-12; 2-54; 3-78; 4-123; 5-201; 6-202; 7-222; 8-239

Bowler O M R W

O'Connor 9 0 56 2

McMillan 7 2 24 2

Harris 9 2 34 0

Astle 5 1 26 1

Walker 10 0 63 1

Twose 10 0 29 2

Result: New Zealand won by 130 runs.

Toss: Derbyshire.

Blewett blows Lancs out

LONDON, July 29 (AFP/Reuters): Yorkshire saw off Lancashire on Wednesday to book a NatWest Trophy semifinal showdown with Gloucestershire while County Championship leaders Surrey will face Somerset in the other last four match.

Yorkshire looked on their way out at Old Trafford despite making 263-7 in their 50 overs, which was founded on a fourth-wicket partnership of 111 between captain David Byas (72) and Anthony McGrath (60).

England outcasts Mike Atherton and Neil Fairbrother looked to be steering Lancashire towards the target but with the score on 164-2 Yorkshire's Australian star Greg Blewett turned the tie around. After Chris Silverwood had bowled Fairbrother for 54 to put an end to the partnership, Blewett knocked over the former England captain's off-stump with the next delivery. Atherton made 61.

The Australian all-rounder, who lost out on the man-of-the-match award to Yorkshire's former England all-rounder Craig White, weighed in with figures of 4-18 as well as running out Warren Hegg.

Gloucestershire's progress was imperious. Tim Hancock, with 90, and former England Test batsman Kim Barnett with 68 laid the foundations as they accumulated 274-6 before dismissing Glamorgan for 138 - a victory margin of 136 runs.

Piran Holloway was the hero of Somerset's quarterfinal victory over Kent at Taunton.

Holloway's unbeaten 75 from 92 balls saw the Cidemen overhaul Kent's 264-6 to secure a six-wicket victory and stay on course for a first Lord's final in 16 years.

He was supported well by Australian skipper Jamie Cox, who pipped him to the man-of-the-match award.

Surrey stayed on course for the County Championship and Trophy double with a comfortable win against Northamptonshire at Northampton with Pakistan spinner Saqlain Mushtaq proving the key figure.

Set only 153, they reached their target for the loss of just three wickets.

Ian Ward and Alec Stewart put on 62 for the second wicket before England A all-rounder Graeme Swann gave Northants some hope with two wickets in two overs. But Graham Thorpe (42 not out) and Ally Brown (39 not out) then saw the visitors safely home.

Earlier, Saqlain's figures of 4-28 helped skittle out Northants for 152.

LAST FOUR DRAW

Somerset v Surrey

On August 14 at Taunton

2ND SEMIFINAL

Gloucestershire v Yorkshire

On August 15 at Bristol



GREG BLEWETT

The White Rose side eventually romped home by 55 runs gaining sweet revenge over the side that twice deprived them of an appearance in a Lord's Final in 1996.

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Lazio calls off Anelka bid

ROME, July 29 (Mail/Internet): Lazio have closed the door on Nicolas Anelka's move to Rome, blaming the unreasonable demands of Arsenal, the player and his agents.

The Italian club's main negotiator declared that "crazy" money being asked by Arsenal had provided the biggest stumbling block.

Vincenzo Morabito, the FIFA agent who has been working for Lazio in the bid to sign the 20-year-old, said: "The negotiations are definitively closed."

Morabito said they stalled once and for all at a meeting last Thursday with Arsenal vice-chairman David Dein and one of Anelka's brothers, Didier.

Listing the reasons, Morabito blamed the impossibility of lowering the fees for the agents, of renewing the player's contract, and above all "the crazy and totally unrealistic" demand of 22 million pounds from Arsenal.

When a player who is 20 years old with one year's experience in the Premier League is

rated at 70 billion lira, it is madness," he said.

"We did everything we could. We wanted to bring Anelka to Rome at all costs but we didn't succeed because Arsenal's demands were crazy and unreasonable."

In Paris, Anelka's brothers, Claude and Didier, were still claiming last night that a move to Lazio remained a possibility but they appeared to be in disagreement about the rebel striker's final destination.

Sources in Italy suggested that Lazio had given Claude until tomorrow to sort out a fresh settlement with Arsenal and resurrect the move.

Claude insisted: "Sergio Cragnotti, the Lazio owner, has told us to be patient."

But I'm not sure what he means. Nicolas fought hard to join them and did everything he could to make the move but if things don't work out, there are plenty of other clubs who want him."

However, Didier said last night: "Given the way we have been treated by Lazio, at this point we are much closer to Arsenal than we are to Lazio."

The player himself has claimed he would never go back to Arsenal, even though the club expect him for pre-season training. He said: "It's comical. I think they'll be waiting for me for a very long time."

He has sent Arsenal a doctor's certificate indicating that he is in no fit mental state to continue his career in north London but he said last night: "I'm fine. I'm calm."

This break from the game will be good for me. I've recharged my batteries for this season, which looks like being a long one."

Although Anelka's brothers are believed to be ready to send more sick-notes, Arsenal are prepared to send their own medical team to France to assess his state of health.

Lazio had agreed to raise their initial bid of £18million by around 4million dollars if Anelka agreed to reduce his personal demands. He was reportedly offered a four-year deal worth 56,000 pounds a week.

Should Anelka eventually return to Arsenal, he would face hostility from teammates and fans and pose huge problems for manager Arsene Wenger.

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Italian giants' mixed bag

MILAN, July 29: Italy's soccer giants were in very different moods on Thursday, after Juventus triumphed in Europe but AC Milan earned an ear-bashing from their coach after an embarrassing defeat, reports AFP.

Juventus all but secured their place in the Interoto finals after beating Rostselmash Rostov 4-0, but Alberto Zaccaroni was spitting fire after his champions lost their first official friendly to a third division side.

Juventus coach Carlo Ancelotti had nothing but good news from his team's performance on Wednesday. Newcomers Darko Kovacevic and Gianluca Zambrotta both made and scored goals, while Filippo Inzaghi proved he is already on form with two goals, one of them a penalty.

Kovacevic, a Yugoslav striker drafted in as a reserve to either Inzaghi or Alessandro Del Piero, is showing promise, while young midfielder Zambrotta justified his recent breakthrough into the national team.

Ancelotti, whose men were leading 1-0 at the break, said: "I'm very pleased with the result because although we still have the second leg at Cesena, our place in the next round is already in the bag."

"Our opponents were tiring in the second half and we were able to turn on the quality. We kept possession of the ball well and took full advantage of the extra space up front."

"I'm pleased too to have Inzaghi back, not just because he scored twice but because he and Kovacevic showed they can already play well together."

"Their understanding was excellent in the second half and the results were there for all to see."

Meanwhile, Milan's lack of understanding was equally clear as they slumped to a 1-0 defeat to Varese. The team lacked bite and their passing was poor.

Zaccaroni said: "It really annoys me to lose a match that way, even if it was only a friendly. The commitment was there, but in the second half, there wasn't the fighting spirit needed for a match like this one."

And he sent his men a clear

warning about any more soft-peddling in future.

"There are players who arrived last year and had an extraordinary season. But they mustn't start relaxing and think it's easy to stay at AC Milan."

"We've won the championship, but now we have to prove that we're even better than last season."

"I know that the effects of all the training made themselves felt. But they didn't have to keep passing the ball to the other side... especially when our own players were unmarked."

"We often lacked speed and accuracy and we made an infinite number of bad passes. In percentage terms, I think at least eight out of 10 went astray."

There was a low-profile debut too for Milan's new Ukrainian signing Andriy Shevchenko.

"Andriy was coming back from an ankle injury and he certainly wasn't helped by the form of the rest of the team, who were too slow and too predictable," Zaccaroni said. "He does best when he can break away."

Champions' League qualifying results

PARIS, July 29 (AFP): Colated results of Champions' League second qualifying round first leg matches on Wednesday:

At Tbilisi: Dynamo Tbilisi (Geo) 2 Zimbru Chisinau (Mol) 1

At Bucharest: Rapid Bucharest (Rom) 3 Skonto Riga (Lat) 3

At Borisov, Belarus: Dnepr-Transmash Mogilev (Bel) 0 Aik Solna (Swe) 1

At Moscow: CSKA Moscow (Rus) 2 Molde FK (Nor) 0

At Kiev: Dynamo Kiev (Ukr) 2 (Shatskikh 39, 78) FK Zalgiris (Lit) 0

At Valkeakoski, Finland: FC Haka (Fin) 1 Rangers (Sco) 4

At Nicosia: Anorthosis de Famagusta (Cyp) 2 Slovan Bratislava (Svk) 1

At Istanbul: Besiktas (Tur) 1 Hapoel Haifa (Isr) 1

At Belgrade: Partizan Belgrade (Yug) 3 NK Rijeka (Cro) 1

At Skopje: Sloga Jugomagnat (Mkd) 0 Brondby (Den) 1

At Vienna: Rapid Vienna (Aut) 3 Valetta (Mlt) 0

At Maribor, Slovenia: Maribor (Slo) 5 Genk (Bel) 1

At Reykjavik: IBV Vestmanna (Icl) 0 MTK Budapest (Hun) 2

At Lovchev, Bulgaria: Litex (Bul) 4 Widzew Lodz (Pol) 1

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