

Sport

NatWest Trophy

Somerset out to end drought



LONDON, Aug 14 (Internet report): Somerset have waited 16 years since last lifting the NatWest Trophy, a span often longer than the shelf-life of a professional cricketer.

That, of course, was in the days when Ian Botham, Viv Richards and Joel Garner were in their pomp parading as big-match winners.

But their far-distant victory over Kent in 1983 was surprisingly, in this competition at least, the most recent Lord's triumph of any of the semi-finalists who do battle in the west country this weekend for the right to appear in the end-of-season showpiece on August 29.

Surrey, their powerful opponents at Taunton, last took the Trophy in 1982, Gloucestershire had their only win in the old Gillette Cup way back in 1973 while Yorkshire, who face them at Bristol on Sunday, enjoyed the second of their two wins in this competition no less than 30 years ago.

So it will hardly be a familiar path for the winning captain to tread to the upper tier of the Lord's pavilion to receive the silverware and cheque for £52,000 at the climax to a long one-day season that began with the World Cup.

It is certainly all new for Somerset's skipper Jamie Cox, who has proved to be one of the most inspirational overseas signings of the summer.

The Tasmanian wanted to keep minds fresh for the visit of Surrey by banning all talk of the match until this week's three National League games were out of the way.

Under Cox's leadership, Somerset have become one of the form one-day sides in the

L'kosen manage to draw

BONN, Aug 14: Bayer Leverkusen, down to 10 men for most of the game, hung on for a point in a goalless draw at MSV Duisburg in their opening match of the German First Division season on Friday, reports Reuters.

SA hold India

JOHANNESBURG, Aug 14: An injury-depleted South Africa held Asian Games champions India to a 0-0 draw Friday, the first of their five field hockey Test tour, reports AP.

Top four progress

MASON, Ohio, Aug 14: Pete Sampras, Yevgeny Kafelnikov, Andre Agassi and Patrick Rafter all won quarter-final matches Friday to make the ATP Championship, the first tournament since Wimbledon in 1993 to have the top four players in the world in the semifinals, reports Reuters.

REGRETS

Due to space constraint our regular item CROSSWORD could not be accommodated. — Sports Editor

country and three wins in those League matches the space of five days has lifted them to 10 victories out of 11 — that on top of impressive NatWest deeds against Sussex and Kent in the last two rounds.

Indeed, Cox is faced with an embarrassment of selectorial riches. It is more a case of which form player to leave out, not which one to include.

It looks to be a straight choice between the experienced Graham Rose and Steffan Jones as first bowling change, while off-spinner Adrian Pierson and England Under-19 seamer Matt Bulbeck could miss out.

Cox, who received the man-of-the-match award for his 73 from 85 balls in the quarter-final against Kent, insisted: "We have absolutely nothing to fear. I am delighted we've had a busy week which has kept the players' minds off the semi-final. We banned all talk of it until the three National League games were over."

In recent years Somerset have been talked of as a team who fold in big games and that have set out to put right.

The Surrey match is another big test for us, but I believe we are now well prepared to come through it."

Alex Tudor's knee problem will keep him out of the Surrey side which has twice lost to Somerset in the National League.

Hot championship pacemakers, but cool one-day performers is not a criticism much liked by Surrey coach Keith Medlycott.

"I hear this a lot — that we're poor at one-day cricket. But we have 15 wins in our last 17 matches in 50-over cricket," Medlycott points out.

"Any side in the world would be happy with a record like that."

Surrey's 'poor' one-day tag is based on their indifferent form in the 45-over National League, where they are second from bottom in division two.

Medlycott added: "If we play to our potential, Somerset will have to be worrying about what we are doing rather than us worry about them."

Pakistan's outstanding off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq was instrumental in the seven-wicket beating of Northamptonshire in the quarter-final, and could again prove to be one of the most significant figures in this match.

Gloucestershire returned to Lord's after 22 years to lift the Super Cup a fortnight ago, but since that heady occasion have lost the winning habit, being beaten in their last three one-day games.

That is not the ideal basis to face Yorkshire in a re-match, after beating them so soundly in the Super Cup final.

Coach John Bracewell said: "It was the first time in 22 years

the county had won anything and since then our focus hasn't been good."

Winning is a habit but Gloucestershire are inexperienced at being patted on the back. There isn't much time but we have to rediscover team spirit, the feeling of being a unit, which saw us through the Super Cup final."

Gloucestershire are likely to replace Michael Cawdon with off-spinner Martyn Ball, who has not played since breaking the top joint of his little finger at Lord's.

Yorkshire will be at pains to atone for their defeat in the Super Cup on their first Lord's final for 12 years, when they bowed poorly and were brushed aside with 10 overs to spare.

That is doubtless the main reason why Yorkshire returned 1,500 of their 2,500 ticket allocation for the Bristol match which, unlike Taunton, is still not a sell out.

At least they have another chance to reach Lord's after burying their Lancashire bogey in the quarter-finals — plus they have chance of revenge over Mark Alleyne's side.

They have not ruled out England all rounder prospect Gavin Hamilton, who missed Thursday's National League match against Lancashire with a hamstring injury. A Sunday match gives Yorkshire another 24 hours to work on his fitness.

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Claudio Lopez was also on target in that game.

Barca sans stars for Super Cup return

BARCELONA, Aug 14 (Reuters/Internet): Barcelona will be without their star striker Rivaldo and club captain Pep Guardiola when they look to turn around a 1-0 deficit in the second leg of the Spanish Super Cup against Valencia on Sunday.

The league champions looked a long way short of their best as they went down to a Claudio Lopez header five minutes from the end of the first leg at Valencia's Mestalla stadium.

Guardiola, whose return from long term injury midway through last season inspired Barca's title-clinching run, limped out of that game at half-time with an ankle injury.

And Barcelona have decided not to risk him in what is sure to be another tough clash with Valencia, meaning a rare start for Ronald de Boer in the centre of midfield.

"Ronald has played in that position before," said coach Louis van Gaal of the former Ajax man, who is more accustomed to a right-sided position.

"He can fill in there, while we also have the option of Roger Garcia."

More difficult to replace will be Rivaldo, the club's highest scorer last season and the joint-leading marksman in the recent Copa America.

He arrived back in Barcelona this week after an extended summer break but club officials have already said he will not make his debut until the opening league game against Real Zaragoza on August 22.

Valencia, meanwhile, will be buoyed by their 2-0 win over Hapoel Haifa in the away leg of their Champions League qualifier on Wednesday.

Claudio Lopez was also on target in that game.



Andrzej Juskowiak (C) of VFL Wolfsburg being held by 1860 Munich captain Marco Kurz in their Bundesliga clash on August 13. — AFP photo

Yorke heads United to top



MANCHESTER, England, Aug 14: Two deft headers by Dwight Yorke gave Manchester United a 2-0 win

over Leeds at Old Trafford on Saturday, a result which lifted them to the top of the English Premiership — for a few hours at least, reports AFP.

Yorke's second and third goals of the season, after 76 and 80 minutes, put paid to a plucky Leeds side which had more than held its own in the noon clash brought forward for security

reasons.

The result means United have seven points from three games, one point more than both Aston Villa and Arsenal. Arsenal were playing at Sunderland later on Saturday, with Villa hosting West Ham United on Monday.

Roy Keane gave a subdued first-half performance as the hours ticked down to his decision on Manchester United's Real Zaragoza on August 22.

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Keane shelves MU's offer

MANCHESTER, England, Aug 14: Roy Keane snubbed a new contract offer from his club Manchester United on Saturday, preferring instead to keep his options open and decide on his future at the end of the season when his contract runs out, reports AFP.

The news, confirmed minutes after Keane had helped United beat Leeds 2-0 at Elland Road in an Antwerp clinic on Thursday on an injury suffered a year ago. Doctors said the operation was a success and they did not know why his heart stopped in the early hours of Friday.

As an out-of-contract player Keane would be able to negotiate lucrative terms from a club of his choosing.

The United captain said he was undecided about accepting the offer of a new contract from the club and needed more time to weigh up his options.

SOCcer SNiPPETS

BRUSSELS, Aug 14 (Reuters): Brima Kanu, a 21-year-old player with Belgian First Division club Lokeren, died on Friday when his heart stopped following a knee operation, a club spokesman said.

Kanu originally from Sierra Leone, underwent knee surgery in an Antwerp clinic on Thursday on an injury suffered a year ago. Doctors said the operation was a success and they did not know why his heart stopped in the early hours of Friday.

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Stoichkov in hospital

SOFIA, Aug 14: Hristo Stoichkov, the greatest player in Bulgarian football history, has been hospitalised here after receiving a electric shock in his home, Bulgarian television reported here on Friday, reports AFP.

Stoichkov, deputy mayor of his home town of Plovdiv, was undergoing medical tests in Sofia's military hospital.

The 33-year-old earlier this year retired as a player, quitting Japanese J-League club Kashima Reysol to bring an end to his long and storied career.

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