

Imran for neutral umpires

KARACHI, Dec 1: Former world class all-rounder Imran Khan called on the International Cricket Council to introduce neutral umpires at both ends in international cricket, reports AFP.

"I think the time has come to introduce two neutral umpires in international cricket and it will put most of the controversies in the sport to end," Imran, now a politician, told the news agency.

The move comes after Pakistan's resounding defeat in Australia, although Imran insisted his call had nothing to do with the matches there.

Nevertheless in the second Test of the just-ended series, Australian umpire Peter Parker turned down a confident caught behind appeal against Aussie batsman Justin Langer which ruled Pakistan captain Wasim Akram.

"I am not saying this because of any specific incident but in my opinion there remains an element of doubt with the home umpires standing in a match," said Imran, who boasts an aggregate of 3,807 runs and 362 wickets in 88 Tests.

Pakistan captain Wasim Akram, who was left seething at Parker's decision, has also argued in favour of two neutral umpires in Test matches.

The Pakistan team, due back home later today, were clean swept 3-0 in the series by Steve Waugh's Australia.

"When we have two neutral umpires in other sports why can't we have this in cricket? The factor of home bias has to be eliminated," Imran said.

Pakistan Cricket Board's ad-hoc committee chief Zafar Akhtar is reportedly to raise the issue at the ICC annual meeting.

"Besides having neutral umpires at both ends I think it's about time we took more assistance from TV replays in crucial decisions like caught behind, there is no harm in it," Khan said.

Imran was full of praise for Australia.

"Congratulations Steve Waugh on this fabulous win and he led his team by example," he said.

"Australia rallied back at crucial stages and that helped them rout a balanced Pakistan team."

Imran said Pakistan showed a lack of resilience and their bowling failed to live up to expectations.

Sachin sits out India-NSW 4-day tie starts today

SYDNEY, Dec 1: India cricket captain Sachin Tendulkar will sit out the four-day match against New South Wales starting at the SCG Thursday, reports AFP.

Coach Kapil Dev said today it was the only break Tendulkar would get before the three-Test series starting in Adelaide on December 10.

"He can't play all the matches other people have to play," Kapil said of Tendulkar. "We're giving him a break. The big matches are coming."

Tendulkar has had sporadic back trouble for the last year.

India also surprisingly left out young off-spinner Harbhajan Singh, while NSW rested their four Test players.

But Kapil said Singh's absence allowed the tourists to give more practice to their fast bowlers.

"We just want to give the fast bowlers time to get their rhythm," he said.

Rahul Dravid will keep wicket, allowing MSK Prasad to also rest.

India crashed to a 10-wicket defeat to Queensland in their opening tour match in Brisbane.

Face spearhead Jagavallu Srinath, who was rested from that match, returns while star leg-spinner Anil Kumble will be hoping to improve on his 0-131 from 29 overs in Brisbane.

SQUADS
INDIA: Sadagopan Ramesh, Devang Gandhi, Saurav Ganguly (capt), Rahul Dravid, VVS Laxman, Vijay Bhardwaj, Ajit Agarkar, Hrishikesh Kanitkar, Anil Kumble, Jagavallu Srinath, Debashish Mohanty, Venkatesh Prasad (12th man to be named).

NSW: Greg Hayne, Corey Richards, Michael Ewan (capt), Shane Lee, Michael Clarke, Greg Mail, Brad Haddin, Gavin Robertson, Stuart MacGill, Brett Lee, Don Nash, Jamie Heath (12th man to be named).

'Walsh should be the one'

SYDNEY, Dec 1: India's world record holder for Test wickets, Kapil Dev, believes West Indies fast bowler Courtney Walsh deserves to break the mark, reports AP.

Dev, now India's coach, took 434 Test wickets and Walsh has 423 ahead of two Tests in New Zealand.

"I think he will be a fool if he doesn't take it," Dev said with a laugh Wednesday. "There's no reason he won't get it because he has the time and he has the motivation."

"It's very difficult to set the target. When somebody has the motivation to reach it it's not difficult."

Dev, who retired from Test cricket in 1993, said Walsh was a class bowler.

"He will deserve it, playing for 15 years and being a fast bowler is good enough reason to be there," said Dev, an all-rounder who bowled fast-medium.

"No doubt all the world's batsmen will say he is worthy."

Walsh has said he will play another home Test series in March making him odds-on to become the first West Indian to hold the record since off-spinner Lance Gibbs in 1975.

Lele sues website

NEW DELHI, Dec 1: Indian cricket board secretary Jaywant Lele has filed a million-dollar defamation notice against an internet website that published an interview in which he allegedly trashed the national side, reports AFP.

"We have received the notice through Lele's lawyers, asking for a full retraction, a published apology and 50-million rupees (1.2 million dollars) compensation," said Prem Panicker, executive editor of online news service, Rediff-on-the-net.

"We are standing by the story because we believe in the story," Panicker told the news agency.

"Our lawyers are now dealing with it and filing a response. There will be no apology, retraction or payment."

The notice served on Rediff editor Nikhil Lakshman, said the website had intentionally sought to malign Lele.

The interview, published Tuesday and picked up by all the national Indian dailies, carried alleged comments by Lele disparaging the Indian cricket team and its prospects on the ongoing tour of Australia.

"They are trying to tarnish my image by putting out imaginative statements attributed to me," Lele, who is the second most powerful cricket official in India, said after the interview was published.



DELIGHTFUL DOUBLE: Shobhon M Shahabuddin, who won both the Seacom Cup and the Annual Snooker Championship, poses with his better half at the prize-giving ceremony of Chittagong Club on Monday.

Cameraman says sorry

SYDNEY, Dec 1: Channel Nine cameraman Joe Previtera today confessed to uttering the "can't bowl, can't throw" jibe about Australian Test pacerman Scott Muller, reports AFP.

Previtera apologised during a current affairs programme to Muller for any hurt caused by the incident.

There had been speculation that it was Australian vice-captain Shane Warne who made the comment during the second Test against Pakistan in Hobart last month, which was audible during the match broadcast.

Warne told the programme that the most disappointing aspect of the situation was that he had repeatedly denied making the comment, but the controversy had continued.

A Channel Nine spokeswoman refused to provide any more details about Previtera, including how long he had worked for the network.

Breaking his silence on the issue, Warne said he had spoken to Muller a couple of times recently, but he still did not know why the Queensland fast bowler thought he had made the comment.

"He's just got it in his head that it sounded like my voice," said Warne.

"It has disappointed me a little bit, the innuendo and everything of suggesting but not really coming out and saying I said it," said the Test leg-spinner.

Prize-giving ceremony of Ctg Club

The annual prize-distribution ceremony of Chittagong Club billiards and snooker competitions was held at the pleasant swimming pool vicinity of the club on Monday, says a press release.

Shobhon M Shahabuddin was the star of the occasion who clinched a brilliant double. He won both Seacom Cup and the traditional Chittagong Club Billiards and Snooker Tournament '99.

A Berger salesman, Shahabuddin was also awarded the prestigious Snooker performance through the season.

Besides, Intiaz Ikram emerged runner-up in both tournaments.

Club chairman Tariqul Islam Khan gave away the prizes as chief guest while Amirul Haque was the special guest.

Allott out of WI Tests

CHRISTCHURCH, Dec 1: New Zealand's World Cup hero Geoff Allott has been ruled out of the two-Test cricket series against the West Indies because of injury, reports AP.

The medium-fast bowler, who took a record-equalling 20 wickets at the World Cup this year, has not recovered as quickly as he had hoped from a lower back stress fracture.

Another scan is likely to check if the original injury sustained four months ago on the tour of England has healed.

"I've been quite stiff and sore and not progressing quite as quickly as hoped, so we are looking at having another scan," Allott said.

He will now target a return to the international scene in the New Year, during the five-match limited-overs series against the West Indies.

Allott said it was disappointing to be sidelined from pressing for a Test place, but time was running out for him to do enough bowling to prepare properly for Test match play.

Allott has been only able to cope with 10-over spells in club cricket.

"I would have thought I should have been able to cope with more bowling if things had been going okay," Allott said. "I can't commit to bowling longer spells."

Allott will target several one-day warm-up games for Canterbury to build himself up for the international series.

German Cup Div Two Mainz embarrass Hertha

BERLIN, Dec 1: Second Division PSV Mainz scored a shock 2-1 extra-time win over Champions League campaigners Hertha Berlin in the German Cup third round on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

Mainz, conquerors of First Division Hamburger SV in the previous round, went 1-0 down when Michael Pretz struck in the 67th minute.

But they levelled through Michael Thürk in the 82nd minute and forced extra time despite the loss of defender Juergen Klopp for a second bookable offence two minutes later.

Brazilian Marcio Rodrigues hit the winner nine minutes into the extra period and was promptly sent off for removing his shirt to celebrate his goal.

The memorable victory enabled Mainz to reach the quarter-finals for the first time in 34 years.

Other First Division clubs cruised into the last eight with straightforward victories over opponents from lower divisions.

VfB Stuttgart arc: Hansa Rostock recorded 4-0 wins over second division Leverage Cologne and amateurs Eintracht Trier respectively. SC Freiburg beat second division Energie Cottbus 2-0.

Space age mascot sees light

TOKYO, Dec 1 (Reuters/Internet): A family of futuristic, computer-animated characters called Atmos were unveiled on Wednesday as the official mascots of the 2002 World Cup finals.

The fantasy figures were introduced in an animated cartoon as The Great Atmo Leader, a golden,

translucent figure, who was accompanied by two soccer-crazy Young Atmos, one purple and one

ultramarine.

They look like illuminated gobblins and are not immediately lovable, but the creators

maintain the world will grow to love them. The world will have to. It will certainly be seeing enough of them between now and the first finals in Asia in 2002.

FIFA, soccer's governing body, said the mascots reflected the hi-tech reputation of co-hosts Japan and South Korea.

Mascots in the past have been two-dimensional and quite crude," said Glen Kirton, a senior executive with ISL, FIFA's marketing partner. "We wanted to use the latest technology to reflect the modernity of the host countries."

The Atmos are unlike mascots used to market any major sporting event before and are light years away from World Cup Willie, the first World Cup mascot used in England in 1966.

An animated film shown in Tokyo certainly took the audience by surprise, as did some of the graphics which FIFA admit may frighten younger children.

According to a statement accompanying their introduction, the Atmos live high in the sky in a place called Atmozone where they play their own version of soccer called Atmoball.

There, they create a great atmosphere around the game -- the kind of atmosphere created back here on earth when humans go to a match. The Great Atmo Leader is challenged by his father, King of All Atmozone, to go and create a special atmosphere for the 2002 World Cup.

The Japan Organising Committee for the 2002 FIFA World Cup Korea/Japan unveils three "Atmos" characters, who are the official mascots of the 2002 World Cup, at a Tokyo hotel on December 1.

— AFP photo

Story-lines will be developed over the next 2-1/2 years plotting the adventures of a family of Atmos as they try to find their way to the 2002 World Cup finals.

"Mascots for our events have evolved over the years but this is a giant leap into the future of staging our biggest event," said FIFA general secretary Michel Zen-Ruffin.

"We hope that the end result will contribute to full stadiums with a fabulous atmosphere at all 64 matches."

FIFA says they are delighted with the creations which have cost around 1 million Swiss francs (631,300 dollars) to develop over the past 18 months.

"We have long felt more could be done than just have a furry little animal - cute and cuddly as mascots like World Cup Willie. Footie and all the

others have been in their day," Kirton said.

"The whole concept of the Atmos is different and will add significant muscle to the marketing programme. They have neither Korean or Japanese characteristics, but are very much in keeping with the oriental cartoon feel and animation from this part of the world."

"A number of ideas were suggested like having the Atmos live under the ocean between Korea and Japan, but I think the space-age feel is perfect for the start of the new millennium."

"A number of people within FIFA have said that some of the imagery is a little frightening -- but I think kids like to be frightened a little bit. And they are quite loveable and mischievous once you get to know them."



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Kanu Africa's booter of the year

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 1 (Reuters/Internet): Nigerian striker Nwankwo Kanu has won the African Footballer of the Year award, the Confederation of African Football (CAF) announced on Wednesday.

It is the second time the 23-year-old Arsenal forward has won the award, following his triumph in 1996 when he captained Nigeria's under-23 team to the Olympic title in Atlanta.

Kanu, who has made a remarkable recovery from a life-threatening heart ailment, has been a revelation in the English league since he joined Arsenal from Inter Milan in January. He has previously played for Ajax Amsterdam.

He finished with 46 points, just 10 points more than Ghanaian defender Samuel Osei Kuffour of Bayern Munich in the poll of members of CAF's technical and press committees.

Ivory Coast striker Ibrahim Bakayoko of French club Olympique Marseille was third with 42 points, two points ahead of former World Footballer of the Year George Weah of Liberia.

Muhammed Hadji of Morocco, last year's African poll winner, finished joint eighth, one place below 1997 winner Victor Ikpeba of Nigeria.

Kanu's selection means Nigeria have won four African Footballer of the Year awards in the last six years since CAF took over the running of the award from the magazine France Football.

Tenager striker Aruna Dindane of Ivorian club ASEC Abidjan was the highest-placed player with an African club. He finished sixth.

One controversial selection

1978: Karim Abdoul Razak (Asante Kotoko and Ghana)

1979: Thomas Nkono (Canon Yaounde and Cameroon)

1980: Jean Manga Onguene (Canon Yaounde and Cameroon)

1981: Lakhdar Belloumi (GCR Mascara and Algeria)

1982: Thomas Nkono (Espagnol and Cameroon)

1983: Mahmoud Al Khatib (Al Ahli and Egypt)

1984: Theophile Abega (Toulouse and Cameroon)

1985: Mohamed Timoumi (Royal Armed Forces and Morocco)

1986: Badou Ezaki (Real Mallorca and Morocco)

1987: Rabah Madjer (FC Porto and Algeria)

1988: Kalusha Bwalya (Cercle Bruges and Zambia)

1989: George Weah (Monaco and Liberia)

1990: Roger Milla (St Denis and Cameroon)

1991: Abedi Pele Ayew (Marseille and Ghana)

1992: Abedi Pele Ayew (Marseille and Ghana)

1993: Abedi Pele Ayew (Lyon and Ghana)

1994: George Weah (Paris St Germain and Liberia)

1995: George Weah (AC Milan and Liberia)

1996: Nwankwo Kanu (Inter Milan and Nigeria)

1997: Victor Ikpeba (Monaco and Nigeria)

1998: Mustapha Hadji (Deportivo Coruna and Morocco)

1999: Nwankwo Kanu (Arsenal and Nigeria)

"The France Football award was discontinued after 1994, when CAF instituted a new award."

Rich List survey of clubs

World champs richest of all

LONDON, Dec 1: Manchester United remain the world's richest soccer club but Spanish and Italian rivals could overtake them soon, according to a survey published today, reports Reuters.

The Rich List survey by accountants Deloitte and Touche and soccer magazine FourFour Two revealed that all the 20 wealthiest clubs were in Europe and 14 of them were either English or Italian.

Flamengo of Brazil were 11th in the last Rich List, with clubs ranked according to turnover, but this time they were pushed out by the Europeans with their flow of cash from satellite television.

Spain's Atletico Madrid and Dutch club Ajax Amsterdam also slipped out of the super-rich group.

United, who on Tuesday beat Palmeiras of Brazil 1-0 in Tokyo to become the first British side to win the World Club Cup, generated income of 87.9 million pounds (140.1 million dollars) from all sources in the 1997/98 season.

That figure was unchanged from the 1996-97 season but is expected to increase dramatically next year.

"At 87.9 million pounds, their turnover in 1997/98 was around 20 per cent more than that of Real Madrid who, with a turnover of 72.2 million pounds, have knocked Barcelona from the number two spot this year," the survey said.

Real's turnover increased by almost 17 million pounds (27.09 million dollars), much of it derived from pay television and the club's Champions League triumph in 1998.

"The fact that Manchester United's turnover did not change highlights its impressive capacity for generating income," the survey said.

"These figures come from the season when they won nothing yet they were still able to easily outstrip all the world's other clubs," added the survey.

"Next year's figures will show an increase of more than 25 per cent to more than 111 million pounds."

"Yet incredibly this may not be enough to keep United top of the financial pops for long because of the size of deals that Spain and Italy's top clubs are doing with TV companies."

Gerry Boon, partner in charge of Deloitte and Touche's Football Industry team, said television income was also leading to increased polarisation of wealth.

"Polarisation is occurring not only within leagues but also between them," he said. "Last year there were eight different countries represented in the Rich List while this year there are only six -- Brazil and Holland having dropped out."

"Unless the structure of the premier league TV deal changes in 2001, English clubs just won't be able to compete with that soon," said FourFour Two editor Michael Hann.

United, who won the English league and FA Cup last season as well as the European Cup, were easily the wealthiest club in the premier league.

Newcastle United, the "magpies" who have a huge support but last won the league in 1927, were the second wealthiest English club in fifth place with 49.2 million pounds (78.39 million dollars).

Chelsea, playing in the Champions League this season, were the highest new entrants

in the list in ninth place with 47.5 million pounds (75.68 million dollars) in income.

They would be in second place with 80.5 million if their travel agency was included in the turnover figures.

Liverpool, Arsenal, Aston Villa, Tottenham Hotspur and Leeds United also made the top 20.

Juventus, fourth overall, was Italy's richest club with generated income of 55.3 million pounds (88.11 million dollars) and the survey predicted big gains to come in future years.

Bayern Munich were Germany's wealthiest side.

Palmeiras fans unable to take it

SAO PAULO, Brazil, Dec 1: Small groups of angry Palmeiras fans threw rocks at passing buses and cars while others smashed shop windows Tuesday, venting their frustration at the club's 1-0 loss to Manchester United in the Toyota Cup final, reports AP.

Most fans took the loss in stride, Brazil's third straight failure in the annual match in Tokyo for the unofficial title of world club champion, dancing on the streets of Sao Paulo.

At least 3,000 Palmeiras fans gathered at the headquarters of "Mancha Verde" (Green Stain), the team's huge fan club, to watch the game. When it was over, many of them broke up into small groups and started hurling rocks.

Others, armed with iron bars, smashed some shop windows and the installations of a subway station.

In one part of the city, a group of Palmeiras fans clashed with taunting supporters of their team's archrival, Corinthians.

With the club's fans having a reputation for violence, police were standing by and quickly moved in to quell the disturbances. It was not immediately clear if anyone hurt or arrested.

Meanwhile, hundreds of "Palmeirenses" showed there were no hard feelings by singing, dancing and waving large green and white Palmeiras flags on Avenida Paulista, one of the city's principal thoroughfares.

"Of course we're sad and frustrated," Palmeiras fan Francisco Pecolara said. "We're dancing, singing and cheering because we know we'll win next year."

"We may have lost, but we showed everyone that Palmeiras is the best team in the world," he added.

TWENTY WEALTHIEST CLUBS

The following is a list of the world's richest soccer clubs in 1997/98, according to a survey by accountants Deloitte and Touche published on Wednesday.

The survey ranks clubs according to their turnover. Figures to nearest 100,000 pounds, 1996/97 position and (figure in brackets):

Clubs	Million Pounds
1. (1) Manchester United (England)	87.9 (87.9)
2. (3) Real Madrid (Spain)	72.2 (55.7)
3. (5) Bayern Munich (Germany)	65.2 (51.6)
4. (4) Juventus (Italy)	55.3 (51.8)
5. (2) Newcastle United (England)	49.2 (41.1)
6. (8) Barcelona (Spain)	48.6 (58.9)
7. (6) AC Milan (Italy)	48.6 (46.1)
8. (10) Inter Milan (Italy)	48.2 (38.2)
9. (-) Chelsea (England)	47.5 (23.7)
10. (9) Liverpool (England)	45.5 (39.2)
11. (7) Borussia Dortmund (Germany)	41.5 (42.2)
12. (19) Lazio (Italy)	41.1 (27.3)
13. (20) Arsenal (England)	40.4 (27.2)
14. (18) Parma (Italy)	33.4 (27.8)
15. (13) Paris St Germain (France)	32.9 (31.7)
16. (14) Rangers (Scotland)	32.5 (31.7)
17. (-) Aston Villa (England)	31.8 (22.1)
18. (16) Tottenham Hotspur (England)	31.2 (27.9)
19. (15) Roma (Italy)	30.7 (28.2)
20. (-) Leeds United (England)	28.3 (21.8)