

Sport

Abandoned tie takes England into final

CENTURION, South Africa, Feb 10: England qualified for Saturday's final of the Standard Bank triangular series against South Africa in Johannesburg, when their final league match against Zimbabwe at Centurion Park was abandoned because of rain Wednesday reports AFP.

England went through to the final because of a superior run rate. Both England and Zimbabwe had four points from five matches and they both won one match in the two encounters between the sides in the current series.

With 73mm of rain, having fallen since Sunday, the ground was almost saturated although the pitch was kept dry, covered by a marquee with industrial hot-air dryers operating inside. Umpires delayed a decision until almost 7:00 p.m. (1700 GMT) before finally abandoning play.

It was the second time in a month that cricket at Centurion was affected by heavy rainfall. Three days of the fifth and final Test between South Africa and England in January were washed out.

Final standings: (Played, won, lost, no result, points, net run-rate)

S Africa 6 4 2 0 8 0.10
England 6 2 3 1 4 0.03
Zimbabwe 6 2 3 1 4 -0.12

Remaining match:

Feb 12: Final (D/N), South Africa v England, Johannesburg

Langer puts WA in control

HOBART, Australia, Feb 10: Western Australian captain Justin Langer hit a masterly 129 against Tasmania here Thursday, but Friday will face a more difficult task -- deciding when to declare, reports AFP.

At the close of the third day of their Sheffield Shield game, WA were 221 for two in their second innings, a lead of 327, after Tasmanian captain Jamie Cox declared 106 runs behind at 351 for four after lunch.

So far 1,023 runs have been scored for the loss of 15 wickets -- and there's no sign of the track deteriorating.

In Adelaide, former Test paceman Michael Kasprowicz captured six wickets to keep South Australia 92 runs behind Queensland after the second day of their match at Adelaide Oval.

In reply to Queensland's 345, SA were bowled out for 146 in their first innings and were forced to follow on.

At the close, the home side was 107 for one in its second innings with Greg Blewett on 45 and Darren Lehmann 29.

Kasprowicz took 5-42 off 11 overs in SA's first innings to help competition leaders Queensland take first innings points.

In Sydney, Victoria's top order batsmen hit a rich vein of form to grab the advantage over New South Wales on the opening day of their match at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Chasing a spot in the final, the second-placed Victorians amassed 281 for four.

Opening batsmen Matthew Elliott, 48, and Jason Arndt, 46, set the pattern and Matthew Mott, 71 not out, and Brad Hodge, 61, ensured the openers' work wasn't wasted with a productive third wicket partnership of 125 in 151 minutes.

NSW and Australian leg spinner Stuart MacGill (3-93 off 29 overs) was primarily responsible for ensuring the Victorian top order didn't capitalise on its promising start.

Wallace's ban revoked

ST JOHN'S, Antigua, Feb 10: The West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) has rescinded a one-match ban on Barbados captain Philo Wallace and he can now play in the Busta Cup semi-finals, reports Reuters.

The ban was cancelled by the WICB because of "its concern that the match referee, in arriving at his decision, did not follow the procedures required by the WICB Code of Conduct."

Wallace was given a one-match ban by match referee Anthony Lalacksingh for showing "dissent" in last weekend's vital Busta Cup match against Trinidad and Tobago in Port of Spain, which Barbados won by one run.

Wallace is now eligible to play in the semifinal against the Leeward Islands at Kensington Oval starting on Friday.

Seeds sail in Dubai

DUBAI, Feb 10: The top seed glided through the opening round of the million-dollar Dubai Duty Free Open on Wednesday, with Ecuadorean Nicolas Lapentti beating German Oliver Gross 6-3, 6-2, and Felix Mantilla of Spain beating Byron Black of Zimbabwe 7-6, 6-2, reports AP.

Defending champion and eighth-seeded Jerome Golome Golmard of France won against Spanish Francisco Clavet 6-4, 4-6, 6-1.

Seventh seed Hicham Arazi of Morocco took just one hour and eleven minutes to beat Rainer Schuttler of Germany, while fourth seed Albert Costa of Spain saw off his compatriot Alberto Berasategui 6-4, 7-5, to move into the second round of the tournament.

Lapentti showed off his form, punishing Gross for his errors to make the Germans' efforts negligible.

"I am glad I wasn't pushed too far in the opening game," said Lapentti who comes to Dubai straight from the Davis Cup games in Ecuador over the weekend.

Italian Cup semi-final

Vieri stars in Inter win

CAGLIARI. Sardinia, Feb 10: Christian Vieri all but booked Inter Milan into the Italian Cup final on Wednesday, when soccer's most expensive player in history scored twice in a 3-1 win over Cagliari, reports AFP.

Inter's Romanian signing Adrian Mutu broke the deadlock in the 48th minute, Corsican Francois Modesto levelled for Cagliari in the 57th but Vieri scored twice to put the semi-final, first leg beyond doubt.

The away goals rule puts Inter totally in control of next week's second leg at San Siro, as Vieri continues to repay the near 50-million-dollar fee Inter paid Lazio for him last summer.

Cagliari, second from bottom in the Serie A, need to win by a substantial margin at San Siro - 3-0, 4-1 or 3-1 plus a penalty shoot-out - in order to reach the final.

Inter coach Marcello Lippi was measured in his verdict, saying: "It was a good game, the team were concentrated and paid attention. And at times they also played good football."

Inter took 20 minutes to come out of their shell, and when they did the determination was clearly there but the accuracy wasn't.

Cagliari fired the first shot in anger when Frenchman

Jonathan Zebina met Luis Oliveira's free-kick on the right in the sixth minute, forcing Inter goalkeeper Fabrizio Ferron to get down quickly.

Inter had to wait for the 21st minute for their first attempt - a barreling drive from Greek defender Grigoris Geo gatos, who picked up a loose ball outside the area after a free-kick.

Vieri let the ball run for Mutu and the Romanian's 20-metre shot into the top right-hand corner left Cagliari no chance.

It was Mutu's second goal in the Cup after scoring in a 3-2 victory over AC Milan in the previous round.

Cagliari nearly equalised

immediately when Oliveira collected a defence-splitting pass by the right-hand post but the Brazilian-born Belgian's shot trickled just wide of the far post.

But it was all square soon afterwards when Fabio Maccellari swept over a high ball from the left and the inrushing Modesto met it with a fine first-time volley.

Inter were back in front three minutes later when Georgatos broke down the left flank and sent over an inswinging cross which Vieri met with an unstoppable header inside the six-metre box.

Cagliari nearly levelled in the 73rd minute when Maccellari fired in a 22-metre free-kick which Ferron just turned round for a corner at full stretch.

But Vieri killed off this and almost certainly the second leg just before injury-time - collecting a long ball forward, dodging between two defenders and hitting a low shot past Scarpi before a third defender could get in a tackle.

The breakthrough came four minutes after the re-start when

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