

Magura cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Bangabandhu Jubo Kishore Sangsad and Young Eleven Star won their respective matches of the Begum Wazeda Ahmed Memorial Gold Cup cricket tournament at the local stadium on Wednesday.

Bangabandhu defeated Hercules Cricket Club by 94 runs in the first match.

Batting first, the winners scored 184 for nine in the stipulated 25 overs.

In reply, Hercules were all out for 90 in 22.5 overs.

In the second match, Young Eleven Star recorded a six-wicket victory over Dilip Smriti Sangsad.

Dilip Smriti batted first and collected 127 runs for four wickets in 20 overs.

In reply, Young Eleven made 129 for four in 18.4 overs.

B'baria cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Surjo Tarun Cricket Club defeated Three Star Cricket Club by 40 runs in the second round of the Shaheed Freedom Fighter Ranga Mia Cup at the Shahajpur Junior High School playground yesterday.

Winning the toss, Surjo Tarun batted first and collected 160 losing all wickets.

In reply, Three Star were all out for 120 in stipulated 35 overs.

In the other match of the day, Agradut Cricket Club beat Malayesh Cricket Club by six-wicket at the same venue.

Winning the toss, Agradut scored 130 runs for four in stipulated 30 overs.

In reply, Malayesh collected 128 losing all the wickets.

Sino paddlers advance

AFP, Osaka

The Chinese table tennis steamroller began gathering momentum on the second day of the World Championships Tuesday, with both the men's and women's teams cruising through the preliminary round.

China took a clean sweep of table tennis gold medals at last year's Sydney Olympics and not many here would bet against a repeat in the team events as well as in the singles and doubles, beginning next week.

The all-conquering women's side hardly broke into a sweat during their 3-0 pummeling of Lithuania.

China rested world number two, Li Ju, for the tie, substituting her with sixth seeded Yang Ying.

Yang, alongside double Sydney Olympic gold medalist Wang Nan and world number three Zhang Yining, thumped the Lithuanians in just over an hour, at which point ties on neighbouring tables had barely finished their first match.

With five of the top-six ranked players in the world, China are considered a near-certainty for the title.

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Hagi's goodbye to Romania

Football

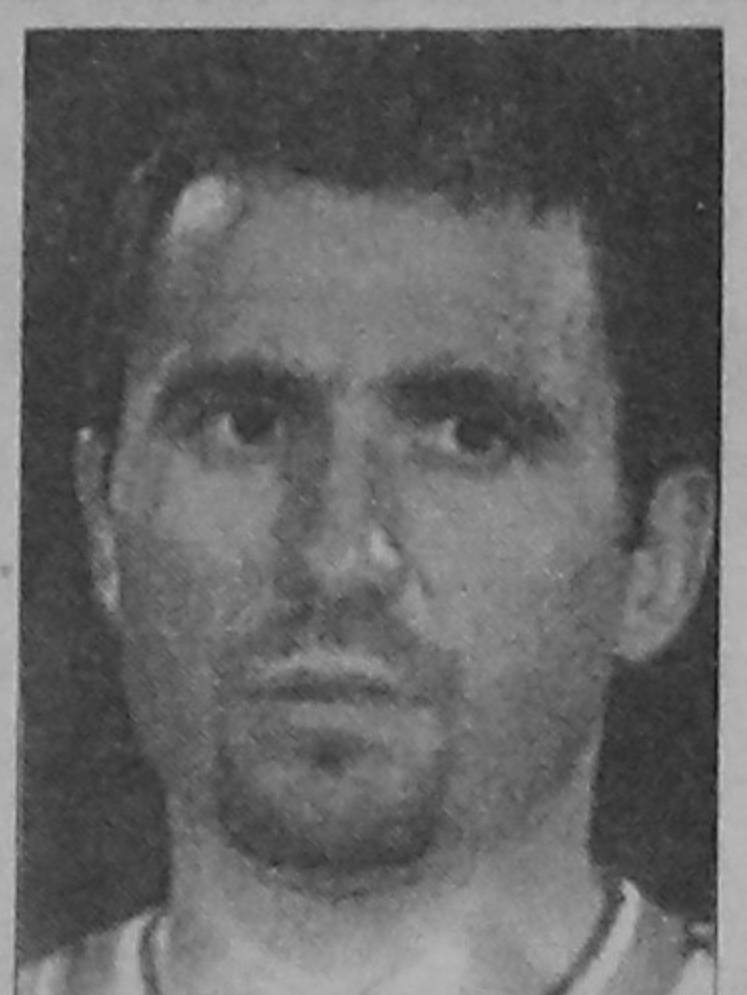
REUTERS, Bucharest

Ten months to the day after his international career ended with a red card, Romania's greatest ever footballer Gheorghe Hagi donned a yellow national team shirt again on Tuesday for a farewell tribute game.

Although now a shadow of the player who led Romania to the brink of the 1994 World Cup semi-finals, Hagi showed flashes of brilliance throughout and set up both the goals his Romanian select side scored in a 2-2 draw against a World XI.

To most of the 60,000 fans cheering his name as he took a lap of honour -- and to millions of ordinary Romanians seeking a source of national pride after the collapse of communist rule in 1989 -- Hagi was a living legend. But he knows many others will

remember the controversies which dogged the latter stages of his 18-year career as his talent waned and his frustration with referees grew.



GHEORGHE HAGI

Hagi factfile

REUTERS

1965: Born February 5, in the eastern village of Sacele.

1974: Joins nearby Black Sea club Farul Constanta.

1978: Plays for Romania's national youth team.

1981: Moves to Bucharest for intensive training at Luceafarul soccer school before returning to Farul Constanta.

1982: Makes First Division debut against FCM Bacau.

1983: Given full international debut for Romania by coach Mircea Lucescu in a 0-0 friendly against Norway.

1984: 1987: Scores 141 goals in 223 matches for Sportul Studentesc Bucharest.

1984: Plays at the European championship finals in France.

1985: Captains Romania, coached by Mircea Lucescu, for the first time in a World Cup qualifier against Northern Ireland.

1985: Named Romanian player of the year -- an accolade he wins again in 1987, 1993, 1994 and 1996.

1987: 1990: Wins three national titles and two Romanian cups with Steaua Bucharest after scoring from a free-kick on his debut to clinch the 1987 European Super Cup with a 1-0 win over Dinamo Kiev. Scores 76 times for Steaua in 97 games.

1989: Steaua beaten 4-0 by AC Milan in European Cup final.

1990: Plays in the World Cup finals in Italy, where Romania reach the knock-out phase.

1990: Moves to Real Madrid for dollars 4.3 million, a Romanian transfer record lasting seven years. Scores 15 times in 64 games for Real and wins the Spanish Super Cup in his first season.

1991: Scores what ranks as the best of his many spectacular goals -- a 45-metre strike for Real against Osasuna in a Spanish league game. Wins Spain's Super Cup for the second year running.

1992: Moves to Italy as captain of Brescia. Plays 61 matches in a two-year spell at the club, scoring 14 goals.

1994: Delivers arguably the best performance of the 1994 World Cup finals, helping an inspired Romania to the brink of the semifinals before defeat against Sweden on penalties.

1995: Returns to Spain to join Barcelona but does not settle.

1996: Plays in the European championship finals in England, notching up his 100th Romanian cap against Spain.

1996: Moves to Galatasaray as captain, winning four Turkish titles in a row from 1997 to 2000 and three domestic cups.

1997: Breaks a 58-year-old Romanian international scoring record with his 31st goal for the national team against Iceland.

1998: Announces in April he will retire from international soccer after the World Cup finals in France.

1999: Reconsiders his retirement and returns to help Romania to their first win against neighbouring Hungary in 64 years.

1999: Named Romania's best footballer of the century.

2000: Wins the UEFA Cup with Galatasaray -- the first major European trophy won by a Turkish club. Under a different coach, Galatasaray also beat Real Madrid to win the European Super Cup.

2000: Plays his last match for Romania against Italy in the European championship finals, ending a career in which he played 125 times for his country and scored 35 international goals.

2001: Hagi assembles a Romanian select side and a World XI for a testimonial charity match in Bucharest. He will retire as a player at the end of the season and hopes to become a coach.

"I know I won't just be in people's memories for the goals I scored but also for how many times I spat and hit opponents and how often I was sent off," Hagi told Reuters in an interview.

"I grew up in a peasant household with the animals," he said. "I'm not ashamed of my past but I always tried to put my origins behind me. For this reason I considered all unfair means to stop me much more than a simple mistake."

However much disciplinary problems marred his reputation, few can dispute the sublime skills that made Hagi many fans' choice as the star of the 1994 World Cup and took him to both Spanish giants Real Madrid and Barcelona during his career.

And three giant screens in Bucharest's Lia Manoliu stadium reminded fans of his dazzling side, replaying highlights of his performances at three consecutive World Cup finals from 1990 and three European championships with a laser lightshow backdrop.

Hagi's Romanian squad featured 10 team mates from the 1994 finals, where both Romania and Bulgaria proved eastern European teams could take on the world's best.

Veteran sweeper Gheorghe Popescu almost spoiled the show with an own goal but a fine save by Bogdan Stelea tipped his misdirected header over the bar to spare his blushes.

Hagi's 35 goals in 125 international matches make him Romania's all-time top-scorer but he failed to round off his swansong appearance by hitting the back of the net -- despite giving himself a free role than even he would usually expect.

However, Bulent Korkmaz, a team mate at the Turkish club Galatasaray with whom Hagi won the UEFA Cup last year, said the man nicknamed the "Maradona of the Carpathians" was always more valued for his inspirational presence.

"Galatasaray had nothing to fear with Hagi on the pitch," said Korkmaz, a defender in Tuesday night's World XI. "He is forceful, he gave us confidence, he was born a leader."

Hagi, who is giving profits from his testimonial to orphans in his home town of Constanta, now plans to become a coach.

But as Romania struggle to qualify for the next World Cup, they are a long way from building a post-Hagi future, as Tuesday night's guest of honour Michel Platini acknowledged.

"All beautiful celebrations are beautiful but this day is a sad one for Romanian soccer," the former France captain said.

In a letter apologising for his absence from "Gala Hagi", Sepp Blatter, the president of world soccer governing body FIFA, wrote what many would see as a fitting epitaph to Hagi's career.

"Hagi is a touching player. He is a very temperamental player, maybe too much sometimes. But this is an ingredient that makes the difference between a good player and a great one."

Questioning of Kapil, Ajit ends

AGENCIES, New Delhi

An investigation into former Indian coaches Kapil Dev and Ajit Wadekar in connection with a match-fixing scandal has been completed and will be submitted soon, the Indian cricket board said Tuesday.

AC Muthiah, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), told reporters that its investigator, K Madhavan, was preparing his report.

Madhavan wanted to interview a few players who were playing against Australia earlier this month and so the report was delayed," Muthiah said.

Madhavan interviewed Dev and Wadekar after they were questioned by federal investigators in connection with the scandal which rocked world cricket last year.

However, Madhavan also said he would have to question current players.

"I need to conduct some more interviews with current cricketers who are relevant to my inquiry," he told the Associated Press.

"They have got no role in match-fixing but are just relevant to my inquiry," he said. "I am looking at finishing my inquiry and submitting my report to the cricket board in a short while."

The Central Bureau of Investigation's probe report implicated five Indian Test players -- Mohammad Azharuddin, Manoj Prabhakar, Ajay Jadhava, Ajay Sharma and Nayan Mongia.

Mohammad Azharuddin and Ajay Sharma were subsequently banned from the game for life by the BCCI. Ajay Jadhava and Manoj Prabhakar were suspended for five years while Nayan Mongia was exonerated.

BCCI in need of wealthy sponsors

REUTERS, New Delhi

The four bids so far submitted for the sponsorship of the Indian cricket team are not satisfactory, the treasurer of the country's cricket board (BCCI) said on Wednesday.

The BCCI are looking for a new sponsor after Indian cigarette maker ITC pulled out of their deal following a government move to ban tobacco sponsorship.

The Indian board opened four bids -- from 21st Century, Hero Honda, Gayatri Arts and Sporting Frontiers -- at a marketing committee meeting on Tuesday.

Kishore Rungta said automobile maker Hero Honda was the only company among the four, with the others being agents for various companies. He did not identify the companies.

"The highest bids at the moment match what ITC was giving us. Since that contract was done last year, we were looking for much higher bids this time," Rungta told this news agency.

ITC paid 3.7 million rupees (79,000 dollars) for every Test match played by India and 3.45 million rupees (73,600 dollars) for every one-day international.

Last year, India played 34 one-day internationals and six Tests. Rungta said the board was now trying to negotiate with the bidders.

"Bidding is a new thing. Normally these deals are finalised through successful negotiations. We're hopeful we'll manage to get a much higher bid after we talk to the interested parties," he said.

Ticket issue heats up

AP, New Delhi

The Indian cricket board has been dragged into a ticket scandal in the western state of Goa, where police have arrested local cricket officials for their role in circulating fake match tickets.

Goa Cricket Association officials have blamed the Board of Control for Cricket in India for the mess, saying the sport's national governing body demanded extra tickets be printed for its use during an India vs Australia limited-overs clash April 6 in Goa.

Dr AC Muthiah, president of the BCCI, on Wednesday said the national board had been wrongly dragged into the episode.

"Certain allegations have been made by the (Goa) officials about the board's role in the circulation of excess tickets," Muthiah said. "But the BCCI has no role to play in printing and circulation of tickets."

"The BCCI on its own is probing the issue and shall behave as a responsible regulator," he added. "We are seeking an explanation from Goa's cricket authorities."

Several top GCA officials were arrested after the fake ticket scam erupted in the wake of a police baton charge on fans seeking entry into the stadium in Margao, Goa, for the series deciding clash match.

The sale of several thousand fake and extra tickets--beyond the capacity of the stadium--led to a clash between fans and police outside the venue as authorities moved to prevent overcrowding inside the stadium.

'See you down under'

Cricket

AFP, Kingston

There is one remaining challenge for Shaun Pollock's South African cricket team -- to beat world champions Australia in a Test series.

The opportunity will come in December this year when South Africa play three Tests in Australia, with the Australians making a reciprocal tour of South Africa, also with three Tests, in February and March 2002.

By then there will be an official world championship at stake -- the first time such a crown has been up for grabs in cricket history.

A 2-1 victory in a five-Test series in the West Indies which ended Monday strengthened South Africa's position as the only realistic challengers to Australia.

The International Cricket Council agreed at a meeting in Melbourne, Australia, in February to sanction an official world championship, based on a format devised by the English magazine, Wisden Cricket Monthly.

The details have still to be worked out by the ICC but Wisden's latest unofficial poll has Australia on top with 25 points from 15 series, based on two points for a win and one for a shared series.

South Africa have 24 points from 16 series. The numbers of series varies because Australia have yet to play against Zimbabwe in Australia. Neither side has had a series against Bangladesh.

Some of the points may be deducted when the official championship is launched, because the ICC may insist that only series of two or matches will count. South Africa's home and away wins against Zimbabwe were both in one-off Tests, while Australia's away victory against the same opponents was also in a single game.

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It will mean that victory for South Africa will earn them the championship.

Pollock is wary about looking too far ahead, or comparing his team against other sides. "We take one series at a time and concentrate on our own performances," he said.

Before going to Australia, South Africa have two Tests in Zimbabwe in September followed by a three-Test home series against India.

But all-rounder Jacques Kallis spoke for several of his teammates when he said in an interview in the South African Sunday Times last weekend that his ambition was to be in a winning side against Australia.

Kallis said he felt South Africa were ready for the challenge. "We have a young side, which is fantastic when you look at a few teams around the world, especially the Australians, who have got quite a few old guys."

The age issue has already provoked a reaction from Australian Steve Waugh, who with twin brother Mark turned 36 this year. When it was pointed out that the Australians who will play in England this year are one of the oldest Australian teams to tour England, he said: "If you're good enough, it doesn't matter how old you are."

Meanwhile both teams had something to celebrate after the West Indies won the final Test against South Africa by 130 runs at Sabina Park Monday.

Pollock admitted that his team might have allowed some complacency to slip in after clinching the series in the fourth Test. He said this could have contributed to what proved a critical first innings collapse to 141 all out.

But Pollock was delighted with the way his team had adapted to West Indian conditions. "We played in conditions which didn't suit us and I was very happy with the way we fought our way through, with all the players making a contribution at different times."

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