

Last Aussie frontier Ponting's men leave for Lanka



AFP, Melbourne

Australia skipper Ricky Ponting said his team was capable of conquering the challenges of playing in the Indian sub-continent as the world champions left for a tour of Sri Lanka.

Ponting said the Australians were coming to terms with the physical and psychological barriers presented by the conditions presented by matches in the region, which has proved an unhappy hunting ground in recent years.

"I think it's a huge challenge for us - anywhere in the sub-continent has always been a huge challenge for Australia," Ponting said before the team's departure for Sri Lanka, where they lost a Test series 1-0 in 1999.

"There are conditions over there that looking back through the records, probably Australian teams haven't performed that well in.

"But saying that, a lot of the guys in the side now have played a lot of cricket in those conditions."

Australia have matched India in limited overs cricket for several years, including victories in the 2003 World Cup final and recent tri-series in both countries.

But the big challenge is the three-Test tour of India later this year.

"Looking back to the last Indian tour, we played really well on that tour but didn't win it -- but we've got a better understanding of how we can play well in those conditions," said Ponting of the epic 2001 series which Australia lost 2-1.

"One thing I want the team to be able to do is to win away from home."

"What I want us to do is to play the same brand of cricket overseas as we do here in Australia."

"We've got a lot of cricket in the sub-continent coming up over the next six or eight months and the challenge is there for us."

"I know we've got the right personnel and the right approach, it's just a matter of putting that into practice when it matters."

Ponting said the side needed to avoid psyching itself out of a winning frame of mind because of the pitfalls of the sub-continent.

"As long as you've got your own game plan sorted out when you get there the rest of it will look after itself -- you'll actually go out and play well," he said.

"But if you go there expecting slow turning wickets and them to play lots of spinners you actually worry about that too much."

Shane Warne is expected to be named in the Test team next week for the three Tests against Sri

Lanka, but Ponting warned his inclusion was not automatic.

"It's just going to depend on what happens in the coming days, I think," he said.

"He's got a game against Tasmania coming up in the next couple of days."

"It's in Shane's hands now and I'm sure the selectors would be keeping a pretty close eye on him."

"You can't take anything like that for granted and I'm sure Shane won't be doing that."

"He'll be getting himself up for this game and trying to put a good performance on the board."

Ponting said Warne had shown enough in his comeback match for the Victorian Second XI to prove he was in good form after the enforced one-year layoff.

"As far as match practice goes, I know he's probably fitter than he's ever been," he said.

"I know he's been doing quite a bit of bowling as well. Shane has always been a guy who's never had to do too much bowling anyway."

"Even when he was in the team and bowling his absolute best he wouldn't be doing a lot of bowling in training."

Italian Cup Juve prevail over Inter

AFP, Milan

Juventus booked their place in the final of the Italian Cup by defeating Inter Milan 5-4 in a nail-biting penalty shoot-out after their pulsating semi-final, second leg ended all square here on Thursday.

With the spot-kick count level at 4-4, Inter striker Christian Vieri saw his weak effort comfortably saved by veteran goalkeeper Antonio Chimenti and Fabrizio Miccoli netted the winning kick for Juventus.

A pulsating contest at the San Siro finished 2-2 after 90 minutes and 4-4 on aggregate. Another 30 minutes of extra time failed to separate the two teams even with Inter reduced to 10 men following the sending-off of Ivan Cordoba in the 66th minute.

Juventus will now meet Lazio in the two-legged final.

Adriano gave Inter an early lead before the visitors struck back with goals from Igor Tudor and second half substitute Alessandro Del Piero.

But Inter grabbed a dramatic equaliser in the dying seconds of normal time through central defender Daniele Adani

Fehér died from congenital heart deformity?

AFP, Lisbon

Doctors in charge of the autopsy of Benfica's Hungarian striker Miklos Fehér, who died on the pitch last month, have discovered the player suffered from a congenital heart deformity, daily newspaper Jornal de Noticias reported Thursday.

The unnamed doctors told the paper preliminary results of tissue samples taken from the 24-year-old indicate he suffered from the problem, which had not been detected during medicals carried out by the various clubs he played for.

The doctors said they were still awaiting results of drugs tests and the final results of the autopsy would only be available at the end of March.

Fehér collapsed and died on January 25 while playing for Benfica in a televised Portuguese league match in the northern city of Guimaraes.

He was stretched over the field and taken to hospital where he was treated for a heart attack but died shortly afterwards.

As an autopsy performed a day after his death was inconclusive, doctors removed tissue samples from the player so they could carry out a second more exhaustive autopsy.

Benfica's medical team has said the player underwent exhaustive medical tests, including an electrocardiogram on his heart and drugs testing, just one month before his death and nothing unusual was found.

Fehér moved to Portugal in 1998 from Hungary's Győr ETO to play for FC Porto when he was just 18.

He was signed by Benfica in 2002 after loan spells at Salgueiros and Braga and had scored seven goals for Hungary in 25 international matches.

Fehér's death has raised concerns that first division footballers are being overloaded with multiple competitions.

Come on India

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any doubts over the tour and ruled out the relocation of the series elsewhere.

"They are all media reports and nothing official," Khan said.

Pakistan had to play its home series against the West Indies and Australia in Sri Lanka and Sharjah in 2002 after both teams refused to tour Pakistan over security fears in the wake of the US-led war in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Jagmohan Dalmiya, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), said a final decision on the Test tour would be taken after a three-member delegation returns from Pakistan next Monday.

The BCCI delegation, which includes a security expert from the home ministry, is visiting venues in Pakistan to study the security and players' arrangements for the tour.

Pakistan's corporate sector, which had been anxiously looking forward to the series, is prepared to be disappointed.

"We have planned a lot of activities but we are now skeptical, in fact the whole corporate sector has gone skeptical over the series," said advertiser Shams Kamal.

And cricket fans are upset. "I have never seen India play here," said Mohammad Amin.

"Come on India, and play Pakistan -- I don't think India will lose, they stand a good chance of winning," he said.

Final preview Who'll rule Africa?



AFP, Tunis

Roger Lemerre hopes to complete a remarkable personal journey on Saturday by erasing his World Cup misery with France in 2002 thanks to a resounding triumph with Tunisia at the 2004 African Nations Cup.

Lemerre, who was in charge of France's ill-fated defence of their world title and paid for the failure with his job, is just 90 minutes away from adding the African title to the 2000 European title he won with France before the whole adventure went sour.

"The African Nations Cup has been as much a challenge for me as it has the Tunisian national team," admitted the Frenchman.

However, standing in his way are two mighty obstacles - opponents Morocco and a fickle Tunisian public who booed Lemerre and his team when they played out a drab 0-0 draw against their Maghreb neighbours at the end of last year.

Fans here are desperate for success having never been able to celebrate an African Nations Cup

title unlike Morocco who won in 1976.

Like Lemerre, Morocco coach Badou Zaki has also had to battle critics who denounced his reliance on foreign-based players and ignoring local talent.

However, he has been vindicated with his stylish team beating Nigeria in their opening match and then demolishing Mali 4-0 in the semi-final to book their place in the title showdown, the first ever between two north African sides.

"I have a young team who play as a unit rather than individuals," said Zaki, who has brought out the best in the likes of Youssef Hadji and Marouane Chamakh.

However, both sides have endured nervous moments.

Morocco needed a goal in the fourth minute of injury-time to pull themselves level with Algeria in the quarter-finals before racing to victory in extra-time while Tunisia were just eight minutes from elimination in their semi-final against Nigeria. They were saved by skipper Khaled Badra's penalty which cancelled out Jay Jay Okocha's spot-kick. Tunisia didn't need a second invitation and booked their place in Saturday's final via the

penalty shoot-out.

Lemerre says he has never doubted his team's powers of recovery and wouldn't be surprised if there is a similar scenario at a packed 60,000-capacity Rades stadium on Saturday.

"Against Nigeria, we still had twenty minutes to equalise," said the Frenchman.

"The statistics show that 85-percent of our goals are scored in the closing 15 minutes."

Meetings between these two sides rarely serve up goal feasts and so Saturday's match could well be decided by a flash of inspiration from either Tunisia's Brazilian import Silva dos Santos or Hadji, both of whom have three goals in the tournament.

"Lemerre is one of the best coaches I know. His style and way of training have brought a lot to the team," said Santos.

Hadji believes team spirit will carry Morocco, who are also bidding to host the 2010 World Cup, through to the title.

"It's a great achievement," said the Bastia player. "We have done it with style."



YOUSSEF HADJI

The other Hadji

AFP, Monastir

Youssef Hadji has for years lived in the shadow of his older brother Mustapha, the Aston Villa player whose exploits for Morocco in the 1998 World Cup made him a household name back home.

But now it's Youssef who is grabbing all the attention at the African Nations Cup where he has scored three goals ahead of Saturday's final against hosts Tunisia.

"To come after Mustapha has been difficult," the Bastia midfielder conceded.

"When I'm in Morocco everyone's talking about him - he really left his mark after the '98 World Cup."

But now it's the younger Hadji who is the talk of the country, especially after he came on as a substitute to strike a late goal in Morocco's key 1-0 group stage win over Nigeria.

"I guess you could say that the Hadji family has given good service to Morocco," he smiled.

Hadji says he has built up a good striking partnership with his fellow forwards Marouane Chamakh and Jawad Zairi.

"It's true we get on really well, but the important thing is the team as a whole. Each time someone comes on he adds something. Just look at Nabil Baha, who came on against Mali and scored."

Hadji believes the reason for the spirit of unity in this Moroccan team is down to the fact that the players developed their skills in France.

"They all establish themselves there - and you can sense the common bond of having developed in France," he says from his hotel here where he can watch Moroccan television and see how his team's path to the final has been celebrated back home.

"Watching people celebrate gives you a huge amount of pleasure. If we can bring the cup back to Morocco - that really would be incredible."

But to do that they first have to overcome a Roger Lemerre-inspired Tunisia.

"Tunisia are a decent side, they take after us a little. They also have the advantage of playing at home."

But the player who after this tournament will never be confused to his older sibling again concluded: "It's been almost 30 years since Morocco has won something - we'll be doing everything possible to try and bring the Cup home to Morocco."

Spanish King's Cup Zaragoza in final

AFP, Madrid

Spain's Cup final on March 17 will be a royal affair after Real Zaragoza edged out second division Alaves on Thursday to book a date with Real Madrid.

Zaragoza crept into the trophy match after a goalless second leg at home to advance on the away goals rule after drawing the away leg 1-1 against an Alaves side who bear little resemblance to the one which lost 5-4 in the UEFA Cup final to Liverpool almost four seasons ago.

The Real prefix means royal and although Zaragoza cannot call on Madrid's riches they do have the pedigree of five previous Spanish Cup wins, the last coming in 2001.

Moneybags Real Madrid survived a torrid second leg Wednesday in Seville, where they lost 1-0 but advanced having won their home encounter 2-0.

Seville scored after just 40 seconds through Antonio Lopez from Dario Silva's cross and Real's world player of the year Zinedine Zidane was dismissed for thrusting his hand into Seville defender Pablo Alfaro's face just before half-time.

But Seville lost their numerical advantage when Javi Navarro was sent off in the 54th minute and their illustrious visitors survived.

Clijsters back on track



AFP, Paris

Top seed Kim Clijsters got back to winning ways after the fourth Grand Slam final loss of her career at the Australian Open by racing into the quarter-finals of the \$55,000-dollar Paris Indoor Open Thursday.

The Belgian world number two showed little sign of a left ankle injury that has bothered her so far this season needing just 39 minutes to dispose of 45th-ranked Spaniard Maria Sanchez-Lorenzo 6-0, 6-1 to set up a meeting with Italian seventh seed Silvia Farina Elia for a place in the final four.

"Today I played really well. I was really looking forward to going out there," said the 20-year-old Clijsters,

who returned to Europe last week after three months spent in Australia.

Making her first appearance in the Paris tournament Clijsters is gunning to win the 20th title of her career, in the absence of defending champion Serena Williams and home favourite Amelie Mauresmo through injury.

But the day was not a good one for the seeds as Russian qualifier Dinara Safina came from behind to shock Swiss third seed Patty Schnyder 4-6, 6-2, 6-1, while another Russian Elena Bovina dispatched Serbian fourth seed Jelena Dokic 4-6, 7-6, 6-0 at the Courberlin Stadium.

Bovina next meets 1998 Paris Indoors champion Mary Pierce of France who brushed aside eighth-seeded Spaniard Magui Serna 6-2, 6-4 but needed her fourth match point to seal the tie.

Safina, 17, had been trailing after the first set but won nine games in a

row to take the tie in 1hr 38min against Australian Open semi-finalist Schnyder, the world number 15.

Fawad star

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runs. The southern Africans dismissed the Boga youngsters for exactly 100 while defending an impressive 237 in 50 overs.

KHULNAZONE WARM-UPS
Pakistani sub-keeper Fawad Alam cracked a sparkling 169 against Khulna Division Under-19 as the South Asian powerhouse recorded a crushing 190-run win at the Khulna Divisional Stadium.

The left-hander from Sialkot slammed 15 fours and eight mighty sixes off 108 balls as the Pakistani colts amassed 362 for nine in 50 overs.

The total was definitely beyond Khulna Under-19 who managed 172.

At the Jessore District Stadium, Jessore Under-19 caused a minor upset by trouncing Papua New Guinea by nine wickets.

Jessore U-19 reached the required 124 runs in 22 overs after the visitors struggled to make 123 in 39.5 overs.

Away at the Khulna Stadium, Khulna DSA surprised Ireland by six wickets when they scored 145 for four in 22.4 overs in reply to Ireland's 142 in 40.4 overs.

Big win

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Adnan Sr 2-20)
Result: Maple Leaf won by 157 runs.

AK HIGH SCHOOL: 265/5 in 35 overs (Hasan 80, Rony 55, Shaon 39, Jewel 20)

PARADISE INTERNATIONAL: 160/9 in 35 overs (Hasan 24, Salam 14, Mustafa 3-37, Jewel 3-28)
Result: AK High School won by 104 runs.

SHER-E-BANGLA HIGH SCHOOL: 149/10 in 28.5 overs (Anwar 50, Nikhil 20, Mehrab 3-3, Rony 2-30, Turjo 2-23)
WILLS LITTLE FLOWER: 150/3 in 19.4 overs (Monirul 55, Mustafiz 21, Momin 3-52)
Result: Wills Little Flower won by seven wickets.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	33 Sundance	54 "Monty Python"	11 Post-diet
1 Tilt	enjoy, often	Intro	20 Dismissed
5 Young fellows	34 McCloud	55 Exemplar of	22 Splicer's materials
9 The whole state	36 Prepares to pray	56 Screaming	24 Augusta's state
12 Stichladd	37 Compass direction		25 McBeal's field
13 Rival of Jimmy and Bjorn	38 "Waking"		26 Lemoieux milieu
14 Links location	39 Tolerate		27 SFO info
15 Blood-hound's clue	42 Miss Piggy, self-referring		29 Chemical suffix
16 Soft, wet terrain	44 Shot	6 Grad	30 Up to
17 Cote comment	48 Billboards	7 It needs	31 "Works for me"
18 Teller's partner	49 Bell sound	8 Bit (Abbr.)	35 Clicker
19 Diamond judge	50 Sport	9 Actress	36 Joust
20 Mountain lake	51 Back talk	10 Jessica	37 "South Pacific"
	52 Yen	10 Second	38 setting
	53 Met melody	man?	40 Tens
			41 Venomous
			42 vipers
			43 Way back when
			45 Unembellished
			46 AOL message
			47 Exam format
			49 Tucker's partner?

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CRYPTOQUIP

C K J L B E K N P U C W D J L E D N

G P Z E L D D I X G P W K J L S P D D E J L

" G H P D D X P S C N M P W . S J W

E M C B P D E L Z P U . "

Yesterday's DELICATESSEN WORKER PURPORT TO BE AN EXPERT IN "LOX, STOCK AND BAGEL"?

Today's Cryptquip Clue: D equals S

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.