

No sign of rebels

Cricket

AFP, Harare

A continued boycott by 15 white Zimbabwe professional cricketers has forced the national selectors here to choose a team once more from the country's second string to meet Sri Lanka in the third of five internationals at Harare Sports Club here Sunday.

They are sticking to the side which has already suffered two big defeats at the hands of the bemused tourists.

In refusing to show up for practice on Saturday as part of a new deal proposed by the Zimbabwe Cricket Union (ZCU), the dissident players underlined their rejection of a plan which would mean mediation by an independent body and of new procedures to resolve union and player differences.

Details of this plan are being withheld by the ZCU, but they are known to entail the involvement of an independent arbitrator and a one-on-one method of resolving future issues between the union and professional players.

It took former captain Heath Streak and senior batsman Grant

Flower just a few minutes on Friday to turn down the idea of a mediation mechanism which the ZCU hoped would move negotiations forward quickly. Flower said later that the other 13 had also expressed disapproval.

As the stalemate continued into a fourth week since their insistence on reinstatement as captain of Streak -- which ZCU chairman Peter Chingoka has said is "no longer for discussion" -- there seems to be no further sign of a breakthrough.

Many of the players are still scattered around the country on holiday -- at Nyanga mountain resort, Victoria Falls and Lake Kariba.

A players' meeting is being planned for Tuesday or Wednesday next week, after the return from neighbouring South Africa of their lawyer Chris Venturas.

Flower said: "Nothing is going to happen until at least then."

In these circumstances the 15 could not turn up for practice, which would be an indication that they are available for selection, until the crisis is resolved, because that would concede a negotiating position.

It seems inevitable that Sri Lanka will proceed Sunday on their way to

a series whitewash by the final match on Thursday.

Left-arm Sri Lanka seamer will be looking for three more wickets to take him to a career 400, while Mahela Jayawardena wants just 10 runs to reach 4 000 in this form of cricket.

The Zimbabwe team and Sri Lanka squad from which a final eleven will be chosen just before the match.

TEAMS

ZIMBABWE: Tatenda Taibu (captain), Vusi Sibanda, Brendan Taylor, Dion Ebrahim, Elton Chigumbura, Stuart Matsikenyere, Alester Magwedere, Mluleki Nkala, Prosper Utseya, Douglas Hondo, Tinashe Panyangara. 12th man Tawanda Mpariwa.

SRI LANKA (from): Marvan Atapattu (captain), Mahela Jayawardena, Sanath Jayasuriya, Kumar Sangakkara, Tillekeratne Dilshan, Russel Arnold, Saman Jayantha, Thilina Kandamby, Chaminda Vaas, Nuwan Zoysa, Dilhara Fernando, Nuwan Kalasekera, Farveez Maharoof, Muttiah Muralitharan, Upul Chandana, Rangana Herath.

Ponting's points

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Ricky Ponting says it would have been easy for Sri Lankan spinner Muttiah Muralitharan to bowl with a straighter arm than normal while being tested for throwing.

The Australian captain believes the International Cricket Council (ICC) needs to view footage of Muralitharan bowling in match conditions before making a proper assessment of his action when he delivers his controversial 'doosra'.

Muralitharan has been found to bend his arm twice the ICC-approved limit for his wrong'un, the doosra, but there have been calls for the governing body to double the limit to accommodate him.

The Sri Lankan, on the verge of becoming the greatest Test wicket-taker of all time, has continued bowling his contentious delivery in one-day games against Zimbabwe this week.

Ponting said Saturday there was no guarantee Muralitharan bowled the same way during recent testing by biomechanics at the University of Western Australia as he did during a match.

"That's the thing with it -- if you look at the way they are doing that testing, there probably could be ways around it all the time," Ponting said in a radio interview here.

"I think they have to look at the actual video footage from when he's



RICKY PONTING

bowling in Test matches to get a real idea and understanding of what's going on.

"It's a little bit strange that they're talking about bending some of the rules again. I don't really understand how that works."

Ponting said Muralitharan, who he called "an absolutely sensa-

tional bowler," should tone down the doosra anyway.

"I actually mentioned to him after the recent series in Sri Lanka that I thought he bowled that delivery too much and it was actually becoming pretty easy for a lot of the batsmen to pick because we were seeing it so often," he said.

"He made comment to us that he thought the Australian team on that tour played him better than any other team has ever played him, including India and even his own players."

Muralitharan was advised by Sri Lankan officials prior to the current Zimbabwe tour to stop using the doosra until they had sought the advice of the ICC Technical Committee.

But Muralitharan ignored that advice in the opening one-day international, bowling the delivery on a number of occasions.

He cannot be reported again until the completion of the six-week stage-one ICC process for dealing with suspect actions, which ends after the five-match one-day series and mid-way through the first of two Tests.

Coria sends Safin packing

Tennis

AFP, Monaco

Argentina's Guillermo Coria continued his impressive winning streak on clay with a 6-4, 1-6, 6-3 victory over Russia's Marat Safin to reach his second successive final of the Monte Carlo Masters here on Saturday.

The 22-year-old third seed's win gave him his 25th win in a row on the surface stretching back to his semi-final defeat at last year's French Open as well as a place in Sunday's final here against either Spain's Carlos Moya or Rainer Schuettler of Germany.

Coria will be chasing his second title of the year and eighth of his career.

Australian Open runner-up Safin, who was also a finalist in Estoril last week, got off to a lack-

lustre start losing his serve to fall 2-1 down before Coria went onto take the first set when his opponent netted a backhand from the baseline.

The colourful Russian sent down 17 unforced errors compared to the Argentinian's five to hammer home his frustration.

But Safin was soon back in charge breaking in the second and sixth games with a flourishing, attacking game which had Coria constantly pinned far back behind the baseline.

Safin, with just five errors in the set, levelled the match after 68 minutes on court with a blistering ace.

He saved two break points in the fourth game of the decider but the errors were creeping back in and he was powerless to prevent Coria from breaking in the eighth game to lead 5-3 when Safin hit a lazy, long forehand.

Coria, who was a finalist at the last Masters event in Miami in April where he had to retire injured against Andy Roddick, wrapped up the match after 1hr 51min when Safin fired another forehand long.

The Argentinian finished with 12 winners and 20 errors while Safin, ever the more flamboyant, went down in flames with 39 unforced errors against 31 winners.

Windies 57-2

FROM PAGE 13

Ricardo Powell, Dwayne Smith, Ridley Jacobs, Dwayne Bravo, Mervyn Dillon, Ravi Rampaul, Corey Collymore.

ENGLAND: Michael Vaughan (captain), Marcus Trescothick, Andrew Strauss, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff, Rikki Clarke, Ian Blackwell, Chris Read, Darren Gough, James Anderson, Stephen Harmison.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a key and clues for words.

CRYPTOQUIP T A Q H G F D K I Q Q N Q B Z T D X F J L K D F L N Q A I Q Q H F J B C I Q H F D E T C Q A Q C K I K H G J Z E L T D X Q A . Saturday's Cryptoquip: COULD A BLIZZARD BE CONSIDERED A WEATHER PHENOMENON THAT INTERRUPTS TRAFFIC? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals B

Bashar steals

FROM PAGE 13 victory 178-4 in 36.5 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Acme vs BEXIMCO BEXIMCO: 247 for 8 in 45 overs (Parvez 13, Moniruzzaman 35, Sajjad 20, Ashraf 81, Azam Iqbal 25, Neeayamur Rashid 23, Asadullah Khan 13, Masudur Rahman 10 not out, Nadif Chowdhury 14 not out; Debrabata 1-58, James 1-48, Hasan 4-43, Imran Parvez 1-37, Ali Arman 1-59).

Acme: 250 for 6 in 44 overs (Hannan 13, Sakib 49, Nahidul 36, Bashar 73 not out, Hasan 46, Imran Parvez 19 not out; Murshed Ali Khan 1-49, Masudur Rahman 1-47, Azam Iqbal 2-38, Nadif 1-45)

Result: Acme won by four wickets.

CityCell vs Partex CityCell: 228 for 9 in 50 overs (Imran 66, Imtiaz 11, Moniruzzaman 62, Rajin Saleh 45, Rezaul 13 not out, Tapas 15; Pratik Shaha 3-37, Rezanul 1-40, Mehrab Hossain 2-49)

Partex: 151 all out in 49 overs (Pappa Sharma 18, Tariq 18, Rezanul 30, Mizanur 40, Pratik 15 not out; Tapas 2-50, Alamgir 1-45, Rezaul 2-15, Nabil Samad 2-22)

Result: CityCell won by 77 runs.

Biman vs Gazi Tank Gazi Tank: 174 all out in 41 overs (Nizamuddin Ripon 71, Ali Nishan 24, Waseluddin 15; Syed Russell 1-18, Anisur Rahman 3-22, Sharifullah 1-23, Humayun 1-27, Sanwar 3-32)

Biman: 178 for 4 in 36.5 overs (Rashedul Haq 85, Jahangir Alam 14, Sanwar 33 not out, Hasanuzzaman 17 not out; Sanjoy 1-23, Shafulah 1-31, Murad Khan 1-30, Garry 1-28).

Result: Biman won by six wickets.

Happy birthday

FROM PAGE 13

"I don't know if his batting has changed in the conventional sense, but today he knows his game very well. He is more solid now," Indian leg-spinner Anil Kumble told the Press Trust of India news agency.

"I am not sure the emergence of young players has made him relax, but I'd certainly say he is more comfortable now."

And that will be uncomfortable news for bowlers, who have been finding themselves at the receiving end of his array of shots for more than a decade.

Tendulkar is now the most senior member of the team, but still plays the game with the enthusiasm of a youngster making Test debut. The desire to dominate and win has still not diminished.

Former Pakistani skipper Waqar Younis said Tendulkar had now become more compact and started playing like a very mature batsman.

"With the passage of time he has understood what Test cricket is about and that he has to stay at the crease. Now you do not see him play any flashy shots," he said.

"If you do not change your game, the bowlers are going to catch you. He has changed his game and has become even more difficult for bowlers."

Tendulkar may have curbed a few strokes of late, but remains one of the most entertaining batsmen in the world.

"He was more flamboyant in his early years, but is an extremely difficult batsman to bowl to these days. If he gets into double-figures, he more or less closes the options for bowlers," said teammate Harbhajan Singh.

"He might have scored 20,000 runs and 70 centuries in international cricket, but still wants to perform to his optimum level."

Former Indian skipper Ajit Wadekar said Tendulkar's presence in the middle was a boon for young players.

"He is a matured batsman now. He has realised he needs to stay in the middle to guide youngsters so that they could be moulded into reliable batsmen for the future," he said.

"It is the youngsters' good fortune that they are being guided by a player of his status. It is a learning experience for them."

Tendulkar concedes a lot has changed since his debut Test series.

"I think as you grow old, things change. Similarly with cricket. It's a gradual change for the better. I am also trying to be as compact as possible."

New Zealand

FROM PAGE 13

last season, said: "Traditionally at this time of year in England the wickets are fresh, grass covered and conducive to seam and swing bowling.

Diego off

FROM PAGE 13

that he can recover and be with us again," said a statement issued by Dalma and Gianina Maradona.

"That's why we ask the real supporters and fanatics to cooperate, not just by not shouting his name but helping to quieten anybody who does," they said.

"We ask that if they hold any kind of demonstration, that they do it away from the clinic. It will be worth as much and it will be better for everyone."

Argentine media reported that fans of Boca Juniors, Maradona's favourite team, planned to bring the band to play in front of the clinic on Saturday afternoon.

The fans distributed pamphlets asking supporters to come dressed either in Boca Juniors or Argentina team shirts.

Ranieri's time up?

Football

THE SUN/AFP, London

Chelsea are ready to bring the curtain down on manager Claudio Ranieri's reign next week.

Owner Roman Abramovich could sack the Italian as early as Monday if the team flops at Newcastle on Sunday.

Friday night Ranieri defiantly insisted he would still do things his way. He said: "I can't change now. I'm like Frank Sinatra -- I always do it my way."

"I told the players everything I did in the Monaco game was wrong."

"I changed things to win the match -- but we lost and I was thinking 'Oh \*\*\*\* Claudio, why, why? Bad Tinker!'"

If Red Rom believes Ranieri has lost his players' confidence he will boot him out in the hope that after the 3-1 defeat in Monaco a change can rescue their Champions League ambitions.

The game at St James' Park will be judged not only on the result, but the team selected, attitude of the players, tactical options and Ranieri's media interviews.

The growing feeling among senior Stamford Bridge personnel is that he should go now.

They fear he no longer commands the respect of key players after his tactical errors against Monaco on Tuesday night. And Ranieri confirmed reports that Argentine midfielder Juan Sebastian Veron had told him he was not fit.

Ranieri admitted: "He needs 10 more days' training to improve his stamina. It was a mistake to play him."

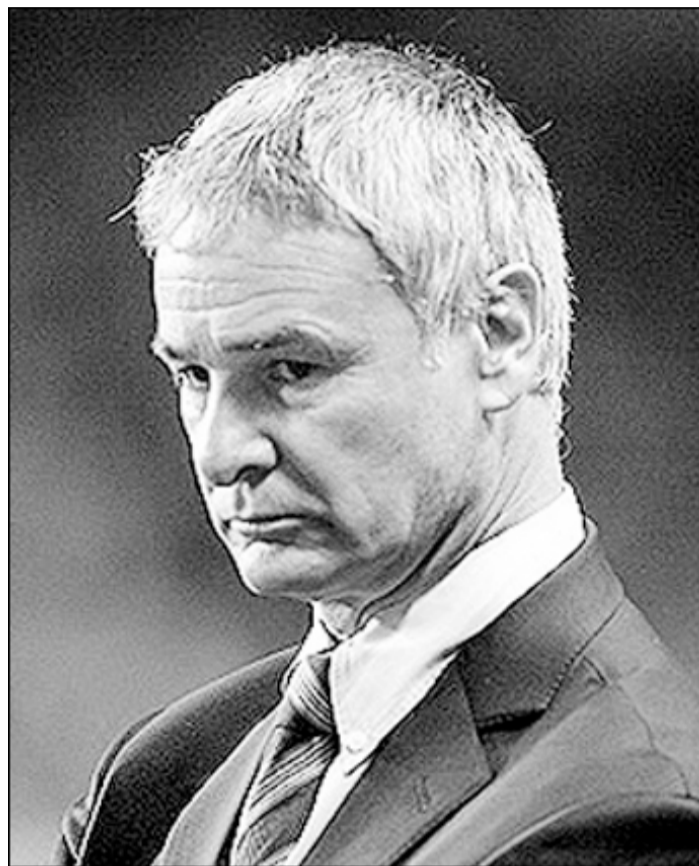
"Every change was made for the right reasons. But when you lose a game no one is interested in that."

Ranieri refuted the theory he

deliberately sabotaged Chelsea's Champions League semifinal dream to get his revenge on Abramovich.

He said: "Whoever says these things doesn't know me."

"We still have a chance to win the Champions League. Madrid, Milan



CLAUDIO RANIERI

Mourinho interested

Football

AFP, Lisbon

FC Porto manager Jose Mourinho admitted it is one of his dreams to coach an English Premier League team and confirmed that two clubs had approached him.

Mourinho has emerged as the man every aspiring club would love to have as manager having guided Porto to UEFA Cup triumph last year and a possible place in the final of this year's Champions League.

Following press speculation in England this week linking him to Chelsea, the no-nonsense Portuguese coach admitted that taking charge of a top Premiership side has always been one of his dreams.

"There are two English clubs who are interested in me," Mourinho confirmed during a press conference here, although he did not specify which clubs were concerned.

"I'm happy at Porto but I've never hidden the fact that I would one day

love to coach in England." Mourinho denied that he would be spending time in England this summer "either for work or for holidays".



JOSE MOURINHO

Press speculation this week suggested that Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich had approached Mourinho as a possible replacement for Italian Claudio Ranieri, who has guided Chelsea to the semi-finals of the Champions

and Arsenal would love to be in our place."

Meanwhile, Ranieri admitted he had been totally unaware that Lampard was in contract negotiations, underlining once more how tenuous his position at Stamford Bridge has become.

"I don't know anything about Frank Lampard. But, if I'm a dead man walking, how would I know?" the Italian said in a reference to widespread speculation that he will be sacked in the summer with FC Porto's Jose Mourinho now the favourite to succeed him.

"Frank's been one of my best players this season," Ranieri added. "He played very, very well and is very important to my team and Chelsea's future."

Chelsea have reportedly refused Lampard's demands to be paid the same as his overseas teammates amid interest from Italian giants Inter Milan.

The England midfielder, who has been outstanding this season, has two years left on his current deal.

But negotiations over a new, improved contract have stalled according to the player's agent, Steve Kutner.

"Talks have stopped because the club said that they could not agree to the terms, which we were looking for," Kutner was quoted as saying by British media on Friday.

"Inter love him," Kutner revealed. "They think he's great. They're not the only major club in Italy who think he's fantastic."

Owen linked to Barca?

AFP, London

Speculation was growing Saturday that Liverpool striker Michael Owen could be on his way to Spanish giants Barcelona at the end of the season.

The Catalanian side have made it clear they are in the market for a top-rated striker in their bid to regain the top spot in Spanish football from arch-rivals Real Madrid.

Dutch coach Frank Rijkaard has propelled the side up the league after a poor start to the season and Brazilian midfielder Ronaldinho has been an undoubted success.

The 24-year-old Owen could be next in line and Rijkaard was not ruling it out.

"We need a fast striker who is also technical and knows how to create numerous goalscoring opportunities. Am I referring to Owen? What do you think?" he told the Daily Mail.

Owen's future could be sealed in the next couple of weeks if Liverpool fail to qualify for next season's Champions League which would cast further doubt on coach Gerard Houllier's job.

Meanwhile, Dutch striker Patrick Kluiterveld would welcome a move to England he revealed to the BBC on Saturday further fuelling rumours that Liverpool's Michael Owen could be on his way to the Catalan giants.

The 27-year-old said while he had a year left on his existing contract he was open to holding talks with any interested parties.

"I still have one year left in my contract," said the 73-times capped forward.

"But I am open to holding conversations with anyone in the Premiership," he added.

Hitzfeld's excuse

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich manager Ottmar Hitzfeld believes his team's inability to reach the Bundesliga summit this season has put too much pressure on his players who are not used to hunting the opposition.

Amazingly Bayern have yet to occupy top spot in the Bundesliga this season chasing early pacemakers VfB Stuttgart and then leaders Werder Bremen who have been top since December.

"At the start of the season we fell off the pace when we had a lot of injuries," Hitzfeld explained in an interview with newspaper Frankfurter Allgemeine.

"We are not used to playing the role of hunter. We are used to others hunting us."

Indeed last season Bayern stormed into an early lead and surged away from Stuttgart and Borussia Dortmund to win the German crown by a staggering 16 points.

"It seems we need to be in top spot to help motivation," declared Hitzfeld. "That way the players do not put themselves under pressure."

The former maths teacher believes the media attention paid to his collection of stars has also had a mental effect on his charges.

"When Bremen lose no-one makes a fuss," added Hitzfeld. "When we lose all hell breaks loose for a week. That leaves its mark on the players."

Portuguese soccer chief charged

AFP, Lisbon

Portuguese Professional Football League president Valentim Loureiro was charged with 22 counts late Friday in connection with corruption and influence-peddling among referees, judicial sources said.

Loureiro, who was suspended from his football league job, was freed on bail of 250,000 euros but placed under house arrest after spending three nights behind bars.

Police detained 16 people, including nine referees, in dawn raids on Tuesday on "strong indications of the crimes of document falsification, sports corruption and influence peddling."

Among those detained were Loureiro, 66, and Antonio Pinto de Sousa, the president of the Portuguese Football Federation's Council of Referees.

The detentions came as Portugal was gearing up to host the 16-nation European Championship from June 12 to July 4.

Chelsea suffer Desailly ban

AFP, Lyon

Chelsea defender Marcel Desailly was banned for three European matches by UEFA for elbowing Monaco striker Fernando Morientes during the first leg of the Champions League semifinal this week.

The French international will now miss the second leg of the semifinal at Stamford Bridge on May 5 and would also be ruled out of the final if Chelsea qualify.

The referee failed to spot Desailly swinging his elbow and catching Morientes in the face and Desailly was allowed to stay on the field but he was punished Friday after the UEFA Control and Disciplinary Body reviewed video evidence.

Desailly has until midnight on Monday to appeal against the decision for violent conduct.

Becks not Real image

Football

INTERNET REPORT, Madrid

Potential Real Madrid presidential candidate Enrique Sobrino has launched a second, altogether more vicious attack on David Beckham.

The Madrid lawyer last week claimed the England skipper and former Manchester United midfielder may be sold if he is successful in his bid to win control of the Spanish giants.

Now Sobrino has gone as far as to accuse Beckham of damaging "the image of the club" following alleged revelations about his private life.

Sobrino is quoted in British tabloid The Sun as saying: "Beckham is a great player but all this stuff about him as a celebrity is overshadowing him as a footballer."

"The dressing room has suffered as a result of all the scandal about Beckham."

"There is too much written about players' wives and their lovers and this is very damaging to the image of the club."

"In my plan if I became president, as I have said a number of times, I would listen to offers for David

Beckham. "Too many of the stars of Real Madrid are appearing in the news for all the wrong reasons."

"All this stuff about Beckham and parties is something people here don't like."

"It has caused a bad atmosphere around the dressing room, as demonstrated by recent defeats."

"We want our players to be stars for footballing reasons, and only for footballing reasons."

"There isn't the level of discipline amongst the stars that the fans want."

Sobrino, 35, even issues an open invitation to Chelsea supremo Roman Abramovich to express an interest in signing Beckham.

"I know that Abramovich is interested and it wouldn't be inconvenient for us to listen to his offer," added Sobrino.

"I don't know him and I haven't met him. But I would like to get in touch with him further down the line. I would love to speak to him."

Sobrino added that coach Carlos Queiroz would be another likely departure if he takes over, and he all but ruled out a move for Ruud van Nistelrooy, Thierry Henry or Ronaldinho.



DAVID BECKHAM