

Ganguly's new identity

AFP, Calcutta

Indian cricket captain Saurav Ganguly has been signed as a brand ambassador by the information technology industry in his home state of West Bengal, a top official announced here.

"Ganguly has agreed to the proposal of becoming our brand ambassador," said G.D. Gautam, principal secretary of the IT industry in the Marxist-ruled eastern state.

"He was very much impressed with our recent achievements. We are planning to involve him in some key promotional events," he told AFP on Friday.

"We believe that his dynamic outlook and robust image as a successful captain of the national cricket team will help West Bengal's IT industry surge ahead," he added.

Ganguly confirmed he had agreed to the proposal from the West Bengal government.

"Yes, you can say I am the brand ambassador of West Bengal's IT industry. I would be happy if I could help the industry."

Marsh saddened

AFP, Sydney

Zimbabwe coach Geoff Marsh said here Friday he was disappointed at the country's agreement to postpone their remaining four cricket Tests this year.

"It's disappointing to get to a situation like that," Marsh said from his home state of Western Australia, where he is on holiday for the next month.

Zimbabwe Cricket Union (ZCU) officials agreed during talks with the International Cricket Council in Dubai this week to postpone two Test in Pakistan in October and two at home to England in November.

The agreement was made so that Zimbabwe could focus on getting their game back into shape after damage caused by a players' dispute which saw 15 senior players go on strike after the sacking of captain Heath Streak.

Streak had objected to the selection policies of the ZCU which he claimed were compromising the success of the national team.

Marsh, whose contract expires at the end of September, said: "I understand the reasons why the ZCU has agreed to it and it's probably in the best interests of everyone involved, but the best way to improve the standard is to keep playing at that level."

The ZCU decided to scrap the two home Tests against Australia last month because of fears its national team would be thrashed by the world champions so badly that Test cricket's integrity would be at stake.

By taking a similar approach to the series against Pakistan and England, Zimbabwe will only play one-day matches for the remainder of this year.

Marsh's last engagement with the ZCU is to take his young side to the Champions Trophy tournament in England in September for which he has few goals other than to have his side be competitive.

WHIZZKID-212 correctanswers

- 1. Who won the GP Corporate Cricket League Plate title? Ans: Gazi Tank
- 2. Who lifted the United Insurance IM Chess crown? Ans: Zia
- 3. What was result of the Bangladesh-West Indies ODI series? Ans: 3-0
- 4. Who will host the 2010 FIFA World Cup? Ans: South Africa
- 5. Who clinched the UEFA Cup title? Ans: Valencia



PHOTO: AFP

A combo photo shows Russian midfielder Alexander Mostovoi (L) and Spanish forward Raul in training before today's match in the Euro 2004 in Faro.

PREVIEW: SPAIN v RUSSIA

Battle of unpredictables



REUTERS, Faro

Spain need victory from their Euro 2004 debut against Russia in Group A on Saturday to avoid unwanted complications and make a convincing case for a first major title for 40 years.

Spain's only moment of glory came when they beat the Soviet Union to win the European Championship in 1964.

Since the group stage was introduced at the finals in 1980, they have only once managed to win their opening game, against Denmark in 1988, and the players are anxious to shrug off their reputation as slow starters.

"The first game is always the most difficult," fullback Carles Puyol said from the team's base in northern Portugal, close to the Spanish border. "We need to do well this time."

Spain certainly cannot afford a repeat of Euro 2000, when they lost their opening game against Norway and were lucky to sneak through with wins over Slovenia and Yugoslavia.

After taking on Russia, Spain face tricky games against Greece,

who beat them during qualifying for the tournament, and Portugal.

The last thing the players want is to go into the Portuguese game in Lisbon with a place in the quarterfinals still in doubt.

"That would be very difficult," striker Fernando Morientes warned. "It's not just because of their quality but also because as the host nation they have every incentive to win."

"It would be better to resolve matters in the first two matches."

The return to form of Morientes since his loan move to Monaco should lift a Spanish side otherwise

Live on ESPN at 12.40 am (Sunday).

PROBABLE TEAMS

SPAIN: 23-Iker Casillas; 5-Carles Puyol, 3-Carlos Marchena, 6-Ivan Helguera, 15-Raul Bravo; 17-Joseba Etxeberria, 4-David Albelda, 8-Ruben Baraja, 14-Vicente; 10-Fernando Morientes, 7-Raul.

RUSSIA: 1-Sergei Ovchinnikov; 16-Vadim Yevseyev, 4-Alexei Smertin, 13-Roman Sharonov, 17-Dmitry Sennikov; 22-Yevgeny Aldonin, 15-Dmitry Alenichev, 10-Alexander Mostovoi, 7-Marat Izmailov or 5-Andrei Karyaka; 3-Dmitry Sychev, 9-Dmitry Buluykin.

England recover

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from their interval score of 374 for seven.

First he took a juggling catch at third man off Stephen Harmison to get rid of McCullum, who made 21.

Hoggard then had his 100th Test wicket when the luckless Mills was caught behind for a four-ball duck.

He finished the innings when Martin (two) was caught by Vaughan at short backward square leg, another juggling take.

New Zealand started the day on 295 for four but ended up well short of the 500 target set by their captain Stephen Fleming, who made 117 on Thursday.

Styris, 68 not out overnight, saw a four off Andrew Flintoff take him to a chanceless hundred, his first Test century against England and the fourth of his career, in 161 balls with 15 fours.

But a misjudgement against left-arm spinner Ashley Giles saw him give substitute fielder Bilal Shafayat an easy catch at cover.

England had already won the three-match series following a

seven-wicket victory at Lord's and Monday's nine-wicket win at Headingley.

New Zealand needed to win this Test in order to avoid the fate of their 1978 predecessors who lost 3-0 in England - the last time England whitewashed a side in a major Test series.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the second day of the third Test between England and New Zealand at Trent Bridge on Friday:

NEW ZEALAND: First innings (overnight 295-4)

Richardson c Vaughan b Giles 73

Fleming c Thorpe b Flintoff 117

Styris c sub b Giles 108

Astle b Harmison 15

McMillan lbw b Harmison 0

Oram c Strauss b Saghers 14

Cairns c Thorpe b Saghers 12

McCullum c Hoggard b Harmison 21

Franklin not out 4

Mills c Jones b Hoggard 0  
Martin c Vaughan b Hoggard 2  
Extras: (b-2, lb-14, nb-2) 18  
Total: (All out in 121 overs) 384  
Fall of wickets: 1-163, 2-225, 3-272, 4-272, 5-308, 6-331, 7-366, 8-377, 9-382, 10-384

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Hoggard	25	6	85	2
Harmison	32	9	80	3
Flintoff	14	2	48	1
Saghers	22	5	80	2
Giles	27	6	70	2
Vaughan	1	0	5	0

ENGLAND: First innings

Trescothick not out 45

Strauss c McCullum b Cairns 0

Butcher c Styris b Franklin 5

Vaughan not out 44

Extras: (lb-1, nb-4) 5

Total: (For 2 wickets in 23 overs) 99

Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-18

To bat: Thorpe, Flintoff, Jones, Giles, Hoggard, Harmison, Saghers.

NATO meanwhile has agreed to supply Portugal with AWACS surveillance planes which can detect low-flying aircraft at a distance of over 400 kilometres (250 miles).

The aim is to protect the Euro 2004 finals against unruly fans as well as possible terror attacks, a risk which became more real following the train bombings in neighbouring Spain which killed 191 people in March.

But despite the security measures, many shopkeepers in cities which are hosting matches continue to fear fan violence will mar the tournament and are taking precautions.

Shops in Cascais, a beach resort some 30 kilometres west of Lisbon are boarding up their windows while a number of bars in the Portuguese capital have said they will close early on match days.

"We are going to watch and pray that our private security will be able to handle any problem that might arise," Lisbon shop owner Sofia Ventura told daily newspaper the Publico.

Rating chess

SPORTS REPORTER

International Master Abdullah Al Rakib took solo lead with five points in the Open FIDE Rating Chess tournament after the end of the fifth round games at the federation hall room yesterday.

He won the board against Saif Uddin Lavlu.

FIDE Master Abu Sufian Shakil, Shawkat Hossain Pallab, Syed Mahfuzur Rahman Emon and Abdul followed the leader with 4.5 points each.

In other matches, Maleq beat sub-junior champion Imran Ali, Pallab beat Kazi Taherul Islam, Emon beat Mohammad Ali, FM Sheikh Nasir Ahmed beat Sohel Chowdhury, FM Khondokar Aminul Islam beat Obaidul Islam, Debaraj Chatterjee beat Aminul Islam and Mohammed Javed beat Nasiruddin.

Haynes worries for WI

CRICINFO, undated

Desmond Haynes, one half of one of the greatest opening combinations Test cricket has ever seen, has expressed concerns about the West Indian team's readiness for English conditions, and said that unfamiliarity with the moving ball could hamper the players.

The Barbados Daily Nation reported Haynes' doubts about the possibility of West Indian success in England -- a far cry from the confidence his team exuded while touring in the past.

"We are going to England in a couple of weeks' time and there is no preparation in place where the guys can go into an indoor facility somewhere in the Caribbean to start playing against the moving ball."

"I am not too sure of our preparation for that tour and that is why I have a little problem with how well we will do in England," he said. "Because we just came off two tracks that were very, very flat. There was no sideways movement, playing against Bangladesh. That preparation, to me, is not adequate at this level."

Haynes, who played 116 Tests, most of them in concert with his fellow Barbadian opening partner Gordon Greenidge, pointed out that few players had experienced English conditions, unlike in the past, when many West Indian team members (including Haynes himself, in a prolific career with Middlesex) were fixtures on the county circuit. Of the one-day squad picked for the tour, only four players -- Brian Lara, Ramnaresh Sarwan, Shivnarine Chanderpaul and Ridley Jacobs have significant experience in England.

"It is harder on these players now than it was with us because there were about nine guys in the West Indies team that would have played in England or were playing in England for a county or something like that," said Haynes. "We were strong back in the 1980s because we had the opportunity to play county cricket."

TERRY ALL BUT OUT

AFP, Lisbon

John Terry's chances of playing for England in the Euro 2004 opener against France on Sunday appeared to have disappeared on Friday after the Chelsea centre-back missed a deadline to return to full training.

Terry, 23, only took part in the first 20 minutes of England's hour-long workout before leaving his teammates to continue rehabilitation work on his injured hamstring.

England coach Sven Goran Eriksson said he would be highly unlikely to pick Terry unless he was back in full training on Friday 48 hours ahead of the match in the Stadium of Light.

A total of 20,000 police officers, supported by the military, will patrol the streets during the tournament, with roughly 1,000 officers dispatched to the interior of stadiums during matches.

Navy warships will guard the coast while F-16 fighter jets will help patrol the no-fly zone which will be imposed on match days over the 10 grounds which will host Euro 2004 games.

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Coaches for France



AFP, Lisbon

If a straw poll of Euro 2004 coaches is anything to go by France are set to retain their continental crown.

Of the 16, fully 14 make France their favourites, given the possibility to pick more than one championship candidate, eight said hosts Portugal have a good chance.

Seven said the same of Italy, while Holland and Germany received six mentions each.

France coach Jacques Santini was flattered but cautious.

"Many teams can have a decent shot at the title with Italy, England and the Netherlands coming into this category."

"But I am thinking especially about Portugal. Playing at home is a big advantage, and for players such as Luis Figo, Rui Costa and Fernando Couto it's their last chance. We have also come here to win," Santini told reporters.

England's Sven-Goran Eriksson said he had two favourites.

"France have a fantastic team but for me there is another favourite: Germany. Germany always fight like crazy for the title."

Rudi Voeller, for the Germans, did not return the compliment in England's direction.

"My top favourites are the French, then Italy and Holland."

Then there are six or seven other sides who have a high level. We are one of them," said Voeller.

Italy's Giovanni Trapattoni says he sees the outcome as very open.

"France, England, Holland, Spain, the Czech Republic and Germany have strong teams."

"The Germans have a few problems but I know their players. In championships they never give up. And with 23 first choice players we are right up there. It's a tough choice to know who to select," said 'Trap'.

Luiz Felipe Scolari, Portugal's coach who won the 2002 World Cup with Brazil, said he saw any one team from ten coming through.

"There are ten teams who can win the event. Maybe France, Spain, Italy or Germany. We respect our rivals but don't fear them."

Dick Advocaat of Holland sat on the fence, saying only "it's hard to say who will win it. I hope we play well and win the trophy."

Aleksandrs Starkovs of Latvia, playing in their first ever finals, saw a wide palette of possibilities.

"Our first-round opponents Holland, the Czechs and Germany are all possible winners. That also goes for France, Italy and Spain."

Spain's Inaki Saez saw several sides as having an equal chance.

"Some sides theoretically have a better chance than others - Portugal as the hosts, for example, France as holders. Then you have

the usual suspects such as Germany, England and Italy."

Otto Rehhagel, Greece's German coach, said: "Aside from Portugal, France, the Czechs and the Dutch, Germany are also among my favourites."

Plamen Markov of Bulgaria was in little doubt.

"The French are my favourites - I don't think they will be as weak as they were at the 2002 World Cup."

Morten Olsen of Denmark agreed.

"I think France have the best team. They play football as I like to see it and it would be good for the game if they win."

Otto Baric of Croatia went along with that, saying that "France are the favourites. But I think the Spaniards will go a long way."

Georgij Jarzev of Russia noted that "European Championships are closer run affairs than World Cups and anything can happen."

Switzerland's Koebi Kuhn said that "France are normally a step up on most of the rest but Portugal are also a title candidate. It's more open than ever."

Karel Bruckner of the Czech Republic was wary of sticking his neck out.

"I wouldn't plump for a favourite but France, Italy and Portugal have a good chance."

Sweden's joint coaches of Lars Lagerback and Tommy Soderberg were both in solid agreement, however, in chorusing simply: "France."

EURO 2004 BRIEFS



REUTERS, Santo Tirso

France defender Lilian Thuram may play the role he has always wanted as he looks forward to winning his 100th cap on Sunday against England.

"We don't know anything yet. But my idea is that I'm going to play in central defence," Thuram said. "It's good."

The Juventus player, who was first asked to play right back by France coach Aime Jacquet and kept there by Roger Lemerre, has recently played in the sweeper position he has long coveted.

"I've been asking for it for about ten years," said the 32-year-old. "And I was heard eventually. The central defence has always been my favourite position on the field."

"But I never complained about anything. I consider myself lucky to still be here, to have been able to play at the international level for so long."

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REUTERS, Estoril

When Freddie Ljungberg is with Arsenal, he travels first class and stays in the best hotels.

When the 27-year-old joins up with Sweden, he receives a minimal match fee and travels among the back-packers in economy.

This dip in status does not bother Ljungberg. One reason may be his patriotism, another could be that when Sweden are on tour he can enjoy the easy-going lifestyle for which his nation is world famous.

At Sweden's Euro 2004 training camp in the resort town of Estoril the atmosphere is as laid-back as at a barbecue back home with fans and players mingling.

Wives and girlfriends of the 23-man squad are being allowed to stay with their men for a week during the first round games.

At dinner on Wednesday evening, the team had something to celebrate when defender Erik Wahlstedt rang from Sweden to announce the birth of his daughter. He had been allowed to stay at home to enjoy the thrill of fatherhood first hand. "We let them do what they want because they are experienced professional sportsmen and we trust them, of course," said the squad's media officer Jonas Nystedt. "It's the Swedish way."

Twice this year, at squad gatherings for warm-up games, the players held open discussions with the Publico.

VANDERSAR DOUBTFUL

AFP, Albufeira

Dutch goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar is a doubt for the Netherlands' opening Euro 2004 match against Germany on Tuesday after injuring his finger in training.

Fulham custodian Van der Sar, 33, was forced to pull out of training here Friday after damaging a finger in his right hand.

Better news for the 1988 champions came in the form of AC Milan midfielder Clarence Seedorf who participated in training for the first time since sustaining a thigh injury.

ABLOW FOR GROENKJAER AND DENMARK

AFP, Copenhagen

Denmark's Euro 2004 preparations have been badly hit with the news that the mother of Chelsea star Jesper Groenkjaer has died of cancer.

The 26-year-old winger had stayed behind in Denmark to be at her side as she fought the illness, but she died on Thursday according to the Danish press.

Team manager Morten Olsen had been fully supportive of Gronkjaer's decision not to travel with the rest of the Danish squad to Portugal ahead of their opening game against Italy on Monday in Guimaraes.

The player's immediate plans for the rest of the tournament were not known, but he was not expected to be named in the side to take on the Italians.

"There are things more important in life than football, especially the family," Olsen said.

Life in the Swedish lane



REUTERS, Estoril

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management to decide how they would prepare for this tournament.

"Yes, it is a kind of democracy in action," Nystedt said. "They wanted to discuss the schedule, the organisation, the planning and everything. It is very open."

Unusually Sweden has two coaches -- Lars Lagerback and Tommy Soderberg who have been together since 1998. Lagerback will take sole charge when his partner retires after the tournament.

"But it is not really a democracy here - we don't hold elections and there is no voting. And the final decisions on team selections are always taken by the coaching staff," Lagerback said.

In the centenary year of the Swedish Football Association, the coaching duo hope to reach the final and mark their 90th international match in charge in style.

Third place at the 1994 World Cup, and a semifinal appearance at the Euro 1992 finals, remain the landmarks to beat. However, even if they achieve their goal, they will not be paid anything extra.

"We are on set salaries so we don't get any bonus payments," said Lagerback. "But, of course, we want to be successful and to win. That is why we have planned ahead and made our bookings all the way through to July." The final is on July 4.

Sweden's players will receive bonus payments but they don't know how big they were. "They are keeping that among themselves," he said.

The budget for Sweden's campaign at Euro 2004, bonuses included, is calculated at 36,000

euros per day. This pays for all travel, hotels and training.

Swedish football, from youth teams through the clubs to the national team, is effectively bankrolled by the country's biggest sports sponsor, the national lottery Svenska Spel which contributes about eight million euros annually.

Nystedt said 75 per cent of this goes to the clubs and only 15 per cent to the national team.

"It is more expensive here than it was in Japan," he said. The Swedes' base is a five-star golf resort hotel.

Sweden's success in qualifying for Euro 2004 resulted in the payment of a bonus of 100,000 Swedish crowns (about 9,000 Euros) for the entire squad.