

ICC defends minnows' inclusion

CRICINFO, undated

Reacting to heavy criticism by Ricky Ponting, among other players and officials, the International Cricket Council (ICC) has defended the inclusion of weaker teams on the international circuit.

Before and after the buffing Australia gave USA, Ponting said that neither team gained much from such one-sided encounters.

But Brendan McClements, a spokesperson for the ICC, disagreed with the view, saying that the exposure was vital for weaker teams and that, in any case, they were scheduled to play more matches until the 2007 World Cup.

"I think it's important those countries are able to aspire to and test themselves against that level," AAP quoted McClements as saying. "We have restructured the tournaments for our associate members over the last two years and over the next two years we'll see them take place as we get towards the World Cup in 2007."

"They will get a lot of cricket among themselves that will improve their cricket and there will also be some targeted funding toward the higher performing associate members. So I think as this structure takes root over the next two years we'll see the benefits of that by the time we get to the 2007 World Cup."

Barlow bemoans

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Barlow, who had prepared a fantastic development programme during his short 1999-2000 period as director of coaching, stressed that Bangladesh should improve their domestic structure to make a mark in international cricket.

"There is no alternative to having a good domestic structure."

A U S - N ZEALAND

FROM PAGE 13

Lehmann 5 0 16 1 AUSTRALIA: Hayden, Gilchrist, Ponting, Lehmann, Symonds, Martyn, Clarke, Watson, Kasprowicz, Gillespie, McGrath

Toss: Australia.

Umpires: Steve Bucknor (West Indies) and Rudi Koertzen (South Africa).

Pakistan ready

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one-day internationals in 18 months.

"With the scenario we have in Kenya, with a lack of games, we can't feel optimistic anymore," said Tikolo who helped his team to the World Cup semifinals last year.

"It's been a disappointing series but this we'll keep on happening if we don't play more. Our next fixture against the major teams is the 2006 ICC Trophy. There is no silver lining."

"After the World Cup we thought we'd get more games but obviously nothing happened but we did miss an opportunity today to show we can play well."

Kenya, however, do have an Inter-Continental Cup (the four-day competition for internationals teams outside the Test elite) in October against Namibia with the winners going forward to the semifinals in Sharjah.

Meanwhile, Tikolo said Kenya had missed Maurice Odumbe after the all-rounder was given a five-year ban last month after being found guilty of taking bribes.

"We are missing Maurice as a player. He was an integral part of the team as both a batsman and a bowler. To fill the gap he left will not be easy. But as a team we were focused on this tournament."

'Aussie series at stake'

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

India's cricket chiefs went into an emergency huddle Thursday amid fears next month's home series against world champions Australia will be cancelled if a television rights imbroglio is not resolved.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), meeting in Calcutta, was debating a court order which prevents it from seeking fresh bids for rights to the Australian series until the legal dispute between rival networks, Zee and ESPN-STAR Sports, is settled.

ESPN-Star, jointly owned by Disney and Rupert Murdoch, has challenged BCCI's decision to award TV rights for all international cricket played in the country for the next four years to Zee for 308 million dollars.

ESPN-Star contended in the Bombay High Court that Zee, India's largest listed media company, did not fulfil a requirement to have two years' experience of telecasting international cricket matches.

The court, which has put off hearings till September 21, wants the BCCI to maintain the status quo till it reaches a verdict.

With the high-profile series

against Australia less than three weeks away -- the first of four Tests begins in Bangalore on October 6 -- the BCCI maintains the court's decision is untenable.

BCCI lawyer Virendra Tulzapurkar told a hearing Wednesday that if the matches were not telecast, "there is every likelihood that not only will the entire series be cancelled with the possibility of penal measures, but also that the same is likely to cause serious international repercussions."

The court ordered status quo following media reports that the BCCI was negotiating with public broadcaster Doordarshan.

"Time is running out and we are desperate," a senior BCCI functionary told AFP.

"There is no guarantee that even if the court gives an early ruling, it will not be challenged by the losing party in a higher court. The case could go on for months."

The official, who did not want to be identified, said there were serious concerns about the Australian series.

"It is mandatory that third-umpire coverage is made available for the Tests," he said.

"If this is not done, anything can happen. Official status for the series may be withdrawn, the International

Cricket Council may not post third umpires or referees and more punitive action may be taken.

"The game is first and then the money. Broadcasters and telecasters cannot dictate all the time."

Zee had initially bid 260 million dollars for the deal. But when ESPN-Star upped its offer from 230 million dollars to 308 million dollars, Zee matched that amount and was granted the rights on the basis that it had initially been the highest bidder.

Zee's offer represented a six-fold increase on the 54 million dollars paid by Doordarshan for the past four years, and dwarfed even the Indian government's annual sports budget of 44 million dollars.

The standoff has left fans both bemused and angry.

"People usually went to court to recover lost dues, but here they are fighting to pay up 308 million dollars. It is insane," said charter accountant Pankaj Agrawal.

Another critic wondered why the BCCI had delayed calling for fresh bids till August when it knew four years ago that Doordarshan's tenure would end before the start of the 2004-2005 season.

"We may be deprived of watching good cricket because the BCCI is so unprofessional," said Shantanu Chatterjee.

Murali to take time

Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan could be out of action until March next year as he recovers from shoulder surgery.

Muralitharan underwent surgery in Australia last month and is happy to be taking his time.

He told BBC Sport: "It could be five months, seven months or eight months before I return to match action."

"A better shoulder will put in better performances so I am in no rush to hurry back. I don't want to come back too early and then have more surgery."

The 32-year-old off-spinner has spent the last 14 years playing cricket and said the enforced break had been a positive experience.

"In some ways it is good to be having a break," he said.

"Now I know I am out for at least six months, I can take a back seat and enjoy my life and now I know what it will be like when I retire from the game."

But the Test wicket world record holder said he was racing to get back playing for Sri Lanka.

He will miss the Pakistan series

and is now a doubt for the New Zealand tour as well.

Muralitharan was pleased the team had been playing well in his absence.

He added: "People always thought that without me, Sri Lanka can't win. But by beating South

Africa so convincingly in the Test and one-day series they have proved they can.

"I'm not worried about winning my place back. I might have the world record but I do not think I should be given it by right. I am prepared to fight for it."

Russian men no match

REUTERS, Beijing

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