

Bend it like Murali

Cricket

AGENCIES

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Wednesday rubbished Australian media reports that it had drawn up a list of bowlers with suspect actions even as officials moved to put a lid on the controversy.

Media reports down under said the sport's governing body planned to target bowlers like Shoaib Akhtar of Pakistan, Harbhajan Singh of India and Muttiah Muralitharan and Chaminda Vaas of Sri Lanka for their bowling actions.

But ICC general manager David Richardson, a former South African wicket-keeper, said in a statement the reports were "completely untrue."

"To say that the ICC has a specific list of bowlers under scrutiny is completely untrue," said Richardson, who earlier this month chaired an expert sub-committee in Dubai on the issue of illegal deliveries.

"The sub-committee was convened to look at the overall picture of the current regulations for dealing with potentially flawed bowling actions."

"It dealt with principles and processes, not personalities. It had no mandate or responsibilities to report on specific players or their bowling actions and at no stage did it do so."

"It is disappointing that this report has appeared without any attempt to discuss this issue with the ICC. One phone call prior to publication could have dealt with this."

The committee, which includes former Test stars like Sunil Gavaskar,

Aravinda de Silva, Angus Fraser and Michael Holding, recommended a new rule allowing bowlers to straighten their arms by up to 15 degrees.

If the proposed new ruling is accepted by the ICC chief executives' committee of the 10 Test-playing countries at Melbourne in February, Muralitharan will be allowed to bowl his controversial 'doosra' delivery which turns the other way from his normal off-break.

Tests showed that his elbow straightened by 14 degrees, nine degrees more than the current limit for spinners, when bowling this delivery.

Muralitharan, meanwhile, was barred by his home authorities from making statements on the bowling actions of other players following a row over his reported comments on Australia's pace trio of Glenn McGrath, Jason Gillespie and Brett Lee.

The off-spinner was quoted in Australian media reports as questioning the legality of the trio's action in the wake of the ICC's assertion that research revealed that almost every bowler straightened his arm on the verge of delivery.

Muralitharan said during an interview with Melbourne's Radio Sport 927 that Gillespie, McGrath and Lee flexed their arms by 12, 13 and 14-15 degrees respectively.

At present, spinners are permitted five degrees of bend, medium pacers 7.5 and fast bowlers 10, although last week an ICC committee recommended all bowlers be allowed to straighten their arms by up to 15 degrees.

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) spokesman Ray Illangakoon said in Colombo that Muralitharan will not be allowed to comment on the issue in future.

"Murali is a contracted player of the SLC and we have told him not to make statements without our approval," Illangakoon said.

Muralitharan, who has been sent a letter by the board, has said his comments were misrepresented. "I never called anyone a chucker," Muralitharan told the Sydney Morning Herald.

"All I said is that if you are accusing me of going over the level of tolerance, you have to look at your own bowlers too," he said.

Muralitharan's remarks, however, were like waving a red flag before a bull.

Australian opening batsman Matthew Hayden sprang to the defence of his team-mates, claiming the controversial off-spinner's remarks bordered on defamatory.

"Sticks and stones kind of stuff from Murali in the papers is not going to get him any favours in world cricket," Hayden said.

"I think they're (Aussie bowlers) probably a little bit disappointed with the reactions," he added.

Australian players association boss Tim May also went into bat for the Australian quicks.

May, who has seen ultra slow-motion footage and data of the vast majority of international bowlers' actions, indicated Muralitharan's claims were off the mark.

"I don't know where those figures came from...," the Australian Cricket Association chief executive said here. "Our blokes will be disappointed

and rightly so.

"On one of those blokes, I won't mention his name, I'm unaware of any footage (of his bowling action) at all."

"I'm not going to come out one way or the other and say this guy got this amount of degrees straightening, or whatever but what I can say is I'm surprised at the report this morning."

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming said he was delighted that chucking, the "ugly sister" of cricket, was now out in the public arena for discussion and resolution.

Fleming said the chucking issue was a massive one for international cricket.

"And one thing we are happy about it is some movement. For too long it was the ugly sister that wasn't being talked about but now it's out in the open and there's some positive steps being put in place," New Zealand's most capped player and all-time leading run-scorer told.

"There's a lot of emotion out there about it and I've watched with interest the various characters who've popped their heads up but I would like some more information to understand what exactly they (ICC) have in store and what exactly what they are looking for."

Fleming said elite players or Test captains should be able to view the evidence that has led to the sub-committee making its recommendation.

"It shouldn't be secretive," he said. "What we have to be careful of is the knee-jerk reactions when a statement comes out and we get this emotive type reporting that starts throwing players names up without basis."

Teeing off

INTERNET SOURCE, Madrid

Shy English forward Michael Owen seems to be finding his place on and off the pitch in Spain. The former Liverpool striker was recently spotted chasing a considerably smaller white ball around in the company of fellow Real Madrid star Ronaldo.

The pair took time out from their busy schedules to get in a friendly round of golf at La Moraleja country club outside Madrid. The golfing duo, looking country club sharp in khakis and sweaters, seemed to take their second sport equally seriously as they exchanged swing tips prior to teeing off.

The 24-year-old footballer is an avid golfer and has become something of a regular at the club. Since his transfer to the Spanish capital, he has bought a house up the road from the course and is frequently seen about the neighbourhood.

Premiership Rooney shoots Magpies down

REUTERS, London

Wayne Rooney scored twice and Ruud van Nistelrooy converted a penalty as Manchester United beat Newcastle United 3-1 away on Sunday to record their first win in three Premier League matches.

Former Manchester United captain Bryan Robson, meanwhile, had an unhappy start as West Bromwich Albion manager as his struggling side went down 2-1 at home to Middlesbrough on the ground he once graced as a budding England midfielder.

United remain 11 points behind leaders Chelsea, who won 4-1 at Fulham on Saturday when champions Arsenal beat Tottenham Hotspur 5-4 at White Hart Lane in a remarkable north London derby to stay two points behind in second place.

Newcastle are now 16 points off the pace after a third successive home defeat in domestic competition.

Rooney put United ahead after seven minutes when he volleyed his second goal in six league matches and fifth altogether since Ferguson won the race against Newcastle for the England striker's transfer from Everton in August.

Newcastle captain Alan Shearer equalised in the 71st minute after robbing substitute defender Wes Brown of the ball but complained bitterly about the penalty awarded to United three minutes later.

Keeper Shay Given palmed down a Rooney effort but then brought down Paul Scholes as they went for the loose ball and Van Nistelrooy converted from the spot for his third league goal and 12th overall this season.

Rooney took his league tally to three with his second goal in stoppage time when he blasted home the loose ball after centre back Titus Bramble had cleared a Van Nistelrooy effort off the line.

Middlesbrough, under former Manchester United coach Steve McClaren, climbed to fourth on 22 points with goal difference putting them above Bolton Wanderers, who lost 2-1 at home to Aston Villa on Saturday.

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Sunday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):	
Chelsea	13 10 2 1 21 4 32
Arsenal	13 9 3 1 37 17 30
Everton	13 8 2 3 15 11 26
Boro	13 6 4 3 22 16 22
Bolton	13 6 4 3 20 16 22
Villa	13 5 6 2 19 14 21

Serie A

Juve thank Del Piero

AFP, Rome

Alessandro Del Piero scored the winning goal as Juventus scraped a 1-0 win away to Lecce on Sunday to maintain their sixth place lead at the top of Serie A.

The Italy international struck in the 14th minute, slamming home his fifth league goal of the season after good work from Swedish striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

The game became farcical in the closing stages as the heavy rain made conditions very difficult, but Juve survived a late Lecce onslaught on a waterlogged pitch for their 10th victory of the campaign.

At the San Siro, Andriy Shevchenko took his Serie A goal tally to 100 as second-placed AC Milan beat Siena 2-1.

The Ukraine international was on target twice for the defending champions, his second strike bringing up the magic three figures and taking his league tally to nine.

Kaka set up Shevchenko for his first goal in the 26th minute, driving into the box with a purposeful run before picking out his unmarked teammate with a diagonal pass.

Shevchenko caught the ball perfectly, his first-time right-footed shot giving Siena keeper Marco Fortin no chance.

Siena levelled the score six minutes later when Stefano Argilli met Enrico Chiesa's crossed free-kick with an unstoppable header which flashed past Milan keeper Nelson Dida.

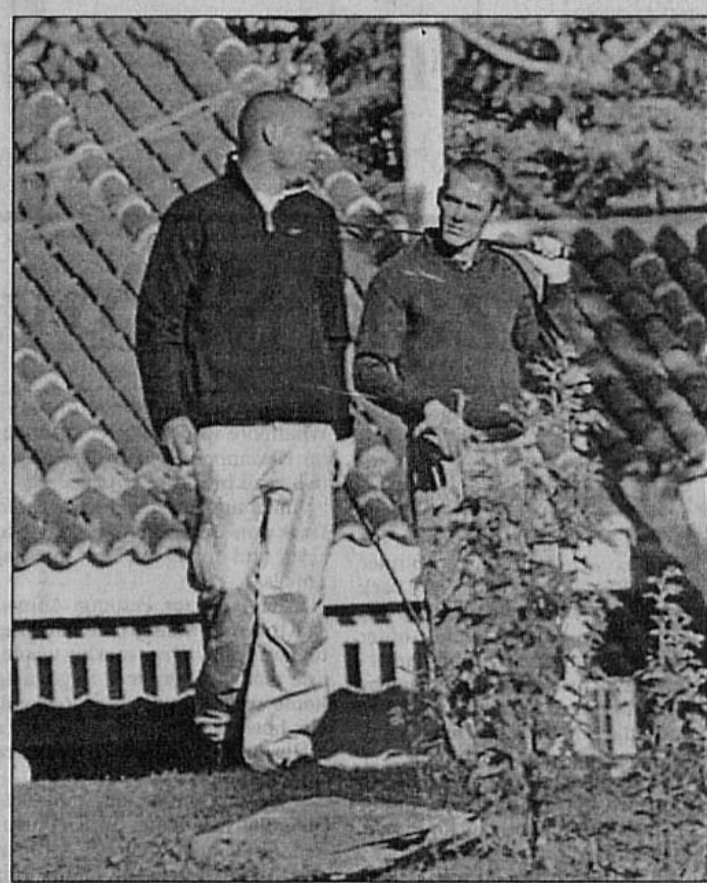


PHOTO: INTERNET SOURCE

WE SHOULD BECOME PARTNERS IN GOLF TOO! Real Madrid superstar Ronaldo talks to teammate Michael Owen during a round of golf near Owen's home outside Madrid.

Primera Liga

Ronaldo orchestrates Real

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Ronaldo put in an astonishing display of pace, power and skill to inspire Real Madrid to a 6-1 victory over Albacete at the Bernabeu.

The superstar opened the scoring in just the second minute when he headed in Raul's flick on at the back post.

Albacete were soon back on level terms thanks to an awful mistake from Walter Samuel. Javier Francisco made the most of the Argentinian's ugly mis-kick and eventually beat Iker Casillas at the second attempt.

From then on it was all Madrid and they regained their lead when Zinedine Zidane struck from the edge of the area.

The hosts stretched further ahead when Zidane's delicate cross was precisely headed home by Raul.

David Beckham, back from injury, played his part in the next goal when his curling cross was headed in at the far post by the unmarked Samuel.

From then on it was all Ronaldo. Everytime he took the ball he either forced saves from the Albacete defender or provided scintillating passes for his teammates.

Michael Owen continued his remarkable recent form when he raced onto Ronaldo's through ball before finishing calmly for the fifth before the Brazilian phenomenon completed the rout in the final minute by going past several defenders and smashing an unstoppable shot.

League leaders Barcelona warmed up for next weekend's mouth-watering clash with Real Madrid in the worst possible way by slipping to their first defeat of the season at Real Betis 2-1.

The Catalan giants totally dominated the opening 45 minutes at the

Estadio Manuel Ruiz de Lopera but were undone by second-half goals from Luis Edu and Ricardo Oliveira.

Gerard Lopez gave Frank Rijkaard's side hope with a 71st-minute header but it was not enough to save their 10-game unbeaten start to the campaign.

A late goal from Gonzalo Colosa denied Real Mallorca a much-needed win and prevented Hector Cuper from a first victory in his second spell in charge of the Balearic club.

Cuper returned to Mallorca to replace the sacked Benito Floro and started his tenure with a promising 1-1 draw at Sevilla last weekend.

And the momentum seemed to carry over into Sunday's game at San Moix when Juan Arango gave the hosts the lead after 26 minutes.

But Colosa's late strike denied rock-bottom Mallorca a first home win of the season.

Claudio Ranieri's miserable run as Valencia coach continued on Saturday as his side failed to win for the 10th time in succession.

Valencia were held to a goalless draw at the Mestalla by Real Zaragoza in a game neither team deserved to win and where the assistant referee's flag frequently interrupted play.

Valencia failed time and time again to beat the Zaragoza offside trap and Zaragoza's well disciplined and organised central defensive pair of Gabriel Milito and Luiz Alvaro caught the home side offside on 16 occasions.

Deportivo La Coruna were forced to battle all the way to a narrow victory at the expense of surprise packages Levante.

The minnows from Valencia had their chances at the Riazor stadium against a team with a far greater history but which is below them in the table.

However, a Diego Tristan penalty in the second half was in the end

As good as Pele!

INTERNET SOURCE

The junior coach of Santos attacker Robinho says the youngster can genuinely be compared with Pele.

With Robinho on the verge of an agreement with Real Madrid, his former coach, Izildo Pereira, said: "Robinho has as much ability with the ball as Pelé had."

"But I do not believe that he can obtain the numbers of Pelé because today football is different from 50 and 60 years ago."

"Robinho is a more spectacular player than Pelé. It is the moment for him to go to Europe."

"I even believe that he should go now. He will play a great role in Madrid."

Becks' target 100

AFP, London

England captain David Beckham said he hopes to earn 100 appearances for his country and expects to continue his international career beyond the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany.

"As a youngster everyone dreams of playing for England and captaining England and I've been lucky enough to do both. I want to carry on as long as I can. I set a target for myself to get over 100 caps, even 106 or 108 caps. That's the target I've set and I want to complete that."

Razzak

FROM PAGE 13 bin-Mortuza and Talha Jubair, who have not played for Bangladesh in over a year, were eligible for selection.

"Both are now fully fit and I am hopeful that they will feature in the series," said Faruque.

The main concern for the selectors was captain Habibul Bashar's fitness. Bashar returned from a thumb injury after a two-month lay off but fractured his big toe on the right foot in the second ODI against New Zealand and missed the third match.

"He will get nearly a month to recover and we are hoping for his return against India," said Faruque.

"I will get a proper picture of the injury after the plaster on the big toe is taken off on November 21. But I am still excited with our prospect as we will have a full team against India with Mashrafe, Talha and Razzak all returning," said Bashar on phone from his hometown of Kushtia.

THE PROBABLES

Habibul Bashar, Rajin Saleh, Khaled Mashud, Khaled Mahmud, Javed Omar, Mushfiqur Rahman, Hannan Sarkar, Sanwar Hossain, Alok Kapali, Mohammad Ashraful, Mohammed Rafique, Manjural Islam Rana, Tapash Baisya, Abdur Razzak Raji, Mashrafe Bin Mortuza, Enamul Haque Junior, Nazmul Hossain, Tareq Aziz, Nafees Iqbal, Aftab Ahmed and Talha Jubair.

Year of Sharapova

FROM PAGE 13 to beat top players..."

Sharapova became just the second woman to win the Championships in her first appearance. Serena Williams did it in 2001, when Lindsay Davenport withdrew from the final with a knee injury.

"I played five days in a row, and with my body, at 17 years old, it's not easy."

Sharapova said her round-robin match against Amelie Mauresmo was a low point, but she was pleased to find she had enough resources to recover.

"When I was playing against Amelie, I was absolutely dead," she said. "I felt that I couldn't go on. But I found an inner strength in myself."

ICC insulting greats!

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

The International Cricket Council's assertion that greats such as Sir Richard Hadlee, Dennis Lillee and Imran Khan threw the ball is "grossly insulting and degrading to the history of cricket", former New Zealand wicketkeeper Ian Smith charged Tuesday.

"The trio would have been utterly shocked with such allegations. To be heaped with praise over the years and having been named in the best teams in the world then be called a chucker is an absolute insult," he said.

An ICC committee of former Test players, supported by scientific equipment found that almost every

international bowler straightened his arm at some stage in their delivery and recommended a new rule allowing bowlers to straighten their arms by up to 15 degrees.

The ICC committee found that even Steve Harmison, Glenn McGrath and Shaun Pollock are chuckers under existing rules, while Lillee, Khan, Hadlee, Fred Trueman and Ian Botham also threw the ball.

Smith, now a television commentator, said the ICC had let the issue of chucking get out of hand over the years.

"The use of scientists has transgressed the rules to the letter of the law by degrading not only fast bowling but also Hadlee, Lillee and company who have been purists and models for bowlers," he said.

Smith who played 63 Tests and 98 one-day internationals for New

Zealand from 1980-92, added that it was a "ludicrous system now that is pointing fingers at great bowlers with flippant comments."

He did not agree that the proposal to allow up to a 15-degree of bending of the bowling arm could mean injecting some excitement and entertainment into a code notorious for its rigid rules.

Vaughan

FROM PAGE 13

"We have good players but players like Michael Vaughan and Darren Gough can promote the game here better than our players can."

SQUAD

Michael Vaughan (captain), James Anderson, Gareth Batty, Ian Bell, Paul Collingwood, Ashley Giles, Darren Gough, Geraint Jones, Simon Jones, Kevin Pietersen, Matthew Prior, Vikram Solanki, Andrew Strauss, Alex Wharf.

Sourav

FROM PAGE 13

good to fall for long."

India have suffered four consecutive one-day losses to Pakistan since August and also conceded their first Test series defeat on home soil to Australia in 35 years earlier this month.

Ganguly, India's most successful Test captain with 15 wins who was feted after the victorious tour of Pakistan in March-April where he won both the Test and one-day series, has suddenly turned a villain in the eyes of the country's fanatical cricket supporters.

He was rubbished in the media for opting out of the last two Tests against Australia with a groin injury described by the respected 'India Today' magazine as a case of "green wicketitis."

The magazine's comment followed Ganguly's outburst at the rare green-top prepared for the third Test at Nagpur which India went on to lose by 342 runs, their heaviest defeat in terms of runs.

Ponting taking

FROM PAGE 13

Fleming, who scored the second double-century of his career against Bangladesh, missed that game with a mystery illness but has been cleared for the opening Test along with Nathan Astle and Daniel Vettori, who were also ill.

As the captain and leading batsman in the side, Fleming has been singled out by the Australian bowlers in the build-up to the opening Test but says he is unfazed by their taunts.

"It's been pretty typical really," he said. "It seems to be a technique that they use, to target one or two players publicly."

"But that's fine. We always assume to be targeted when we hit the middle so nothing really changes."

"It's just their way of trying to place pressure on individuals and break up team unity."

Meanwhile, New Zealand recalled Craig McMillan for the first Test ahead of specialist batsman Hamish Marshall who was relegated to 12th man. The 28-year-old all-rounder was overlooked for their recent tour of Bangladesh and was only called up for the series against Australia as a standby.

The Kiwis suffered a late blow on Wednesday when left-arm seamer James Franklin was ruled out with a groin strain and replaced by Kyle Mills.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP
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RP W W Z B K O RY U D Y Z W
UM Y L B Q L B R U B Z K O L R
Y G U Y V U D M G V U W B Z R R
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN A TORTOISE IS SLEEPING, WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU WITNESSED A NAPPING TURTLE?
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: U equals A
The Cryptoquip 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.