

100th Test 'just another match'

AFP, Kolkata

Steve Bucknor will become the first umpire to stand in 100 Test matches when he officiates in the second Test between India and Pakistan starting at the 90,000-capacity Eden



STEVE BUCKNOR

Gardens here on Wednesday. But the 58-year-old Jamaican has dismissed the landmark Test as "just another match," saying he will be as nervous as he was in his first international game 16 years ago.

"The preparations will be the same, probably more because the Eden Gardens, like most places in the Indian sub-continent, is the toughest place for an umpire," Bucknor told reporters Monday.

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Dhaka in the saddle



6th National Cricket League

SPORTS REPORTER

At Khulna, Mashrafee-bin-Mortuza's batting heroics kept the home side's hopes alive to avoid a follow-on against Sylhet.

CHITTAGONG-DHAKA

Without key batsmen Nafees Iqbal, Nazimuddin and captain Azam Iqbal who suffered injuries during the match, Chittagong's chances to enforce a draw looked unlikely. But they fought valiantly to close on 295 in their second innings.

Dhaka paceman Anwar Hossain Munir struck early as the home side, resuming on 29-1, lost makeshift opener Ilias Sunny on his overnight score of one.

But Ehsanul Haque, the top scorer for Chittagong in the competition, led their fightback with a fine 66 off 108 balls.

Ehsanul, who hit nine boundaries, put on 41 runs with Faisal Hossain (33) for the third wicket and a further 127 runs with Aftab for the fourth wicket to weather the early storm.

Aftab stole the show with an explosive 83-ball knock that featured a dozen fours and four sixes. But the national cap was dismissed just four

runs short of what would have been his first century of the season.

Yasin Arifat delayed the inevitable when the young spinner made 51 off 70 balls with help of nine fours before Dhaka's reserve wicket-keeper Anwar Hossain scalped him.

The first three wickets went to Munir but it was national star Mohammad Ashraful who destroyed the Chittagong middle order with his part-time leg-breaks, taking 3-89. Ashraful, who removed Ehsanul, Aftab and Habib Mobbashir, was adjudged man-of-the-match for his sparkling all-round display including a superb 126 in the Dhaka innings total of 443.

After five matches, Dhaka now moved to 24 points with their second successive outright win while Chittagong, who fell to their first defeat in the run, stuck to 18.

RAJSHAI-BARISAL

Rajshahi recovered from an early disaster to take command at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium when seasoned left-arm spinner Saifullah's 5-65 during a 23.5-over

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PHOTO: STAR

THEY PLAY FOOTBALL HERE? Visibly unhappy Al Faisaly team members look at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium pitch in Kamalapur yesterday after arriving there to train.

'We lack killer instinct'

Harbhajan likely to return for Kolkata

AFP, Kolkata



India needs to show hunger for success and must learn to land the killer punch if they want to improve their standing in international cricket, coach John Wright said on Monday.

"We could not get the killer blow in," Wright said after his team failed to convert an unassailable position into victory in the first Test at Mohali last week.

"Mohali has to make us more hungry," he said ahead of the second Test against Pakistan starting at the Eden Gardens here on Wednesday.

"If you want to be a top side, you have to get the job done. This is an area where we are still learning. If we want to climb the list we'll have to have the killer instinct. This is what I look for and want from the team."

Pakistan were struggling at Mohali when they began the fifth and final day's play just 53 runs ahead with four wickets in hand, but salvaged a draw due to a gutsy century by wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal and resolute batting by all-rounder Abdul Razzaq.

"It was disappointing to get into a situation where we had an opportunity to win and could not achieve that," said Wright.

"In India-Pakistan contests, players always seem to find that little bit extra, but it came on the last day from the Pakistani batsmen."

India planned to make one change from the side that played the first Test, with off-spinner Harbhajan Singh set to return after being dropped at Mohali to make way for a third seamer.

"Conditions suit us here and he (Harbhajan) has a good chance of making the side," said Wright.

"He has done well at the Eden Gardens and likes bowling here," Wright said of Harbhajan, who has

29 wickets at an average of 18.8 in four Tests here.

Harbhajan's bowling action had been under scrutiny but was recently cleared under new regulations introduced by the International Cricket Council.

Wright revealed leg-spinner Anil Kumble would be retained, with a paceman -- possibly Zaheer Khan -- to step aside for Harbhajan.

"I don't think we'll go with five bowlers," Wright added.

"Traditionally we have always played two seamers and two spinners here and it has worked for us."

India had played the Mohali Test with three fast bowlers and one spinner.

"It is never easy to leave out a bowler of Harbhajan's class, but I am sure he will be back in business soon," said Indian captain Sourav Ganguly.

"Pakistan emerged with great credit at Mohali, but I am confident we can win here."

Kamalapur disgusts Al Faisaly

SPORTS REPORTER

Jordanian club Al Faisaly arrived in Dhaka yesterday to play their away fixture in the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Cup against local giants Muktiyoddha Sangsad Krira Chakra.

The match kicks off at 4 pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium tomorrow.

The 19-member squad, which features six national players and two professionals from Syria and Iraq, is looking to earn full points after being held 1-1 by Nebitchi FC of Turkmenistan in their Group A home encounter.

"We have no idea about our opponents (Muktiyoddha) but we are full of confidence. Although we performed well against Nebitchi, it was not enough in the end," said coach Mohammad Yaman.

"This is the first time we're taking part in the AFC competition. Earlier, we only played twice in the Arab Cup. Still, we boast an impressive domestic track record by clinching the league title 30 times," he added.

The visitors, who flew into the capital in the morning, said they felt at home because of the pleasant weather conditions.

"It is almost like being at home because the weather here is so similar to ours. And that is an important factor in a football match," said the Al Faisaly coach.

The visitors were scheduled to practice at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur in the afternoon but no sooner had the team stepped off the bus, they decided against training

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Musharraf may watch 1st ODI

AFP, New Delhi

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf may travel to Cochin in southern India to attend the one-day international between the two nations on April 2, a cricket board source told AFP here on Monday.

"There are indications that he may come to Cochin," the source said. "We should have a confirmation in the next few days."

Cochin, a popular tourist town in the Indian Ocean state of Kerala, will hold the first of six one-dayers between India and Pakistan at the conclusion of the ongoing three-Test series.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last week invited Musharraf to watch one match during Pakistan's first tour of India since 1998 after he publicly expressed an interest, but did not name a venue.

Pakistan's foreign office said Friday that Musharraf had accepted Singh's invitation but was still to confirm which match the president will attend.

Musharraf last visited India during an India-Pakistan summit in Agra in 2001 when Singh's predecessor Atal Bihari Vajpayee was prime minister.

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"Pakistan emerged with great credit at Mohali, but I am confident we can win here."

—Sports Editor

Goodbye Batigol



REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina's record goalscorer Gabriel Batistuta has decided to quit soccer at the age of 36.

"I am announcing my definitive retirement from football and I thank everyone who has helped make my career so successful," said the former Fiorentina and AS Roma striker in a statement to Argentine media from Qatar on Sunday.

The decision came two days after Batistuta ended his contract with Qatari club Al Arabi following an injury-plagued year in which he played only three matches and failed to score.

Batistuta, who hit 56 goals in 78 internationals, said he was planning to coach in the future.

"I will certainly continue in football in a different role," he added. "I will continue with my contractual, publicity and managerial commitments and finish my studies for coaching."

Batistuta played in the 1994, 1998 and 2002 World Cup finals, his last international goal coming in the 1-0 win over Nigeria in the 2002 World Cup finals.

His Argentina career also produced frustration when he was overlooked for long periods by former coach Marcelo Bielsa, who often preferred Hernan Crespo in attack and would not field the pair together because he said their styles were incompatible.

Batistuta made his professional debut with Newell's Old Boys in 1989. He also spent six months with River Plate before moving to Boca Juniors, becoming one of the few players to play for the two bitter Buenos Aires rivals.

He joined Italy's Fiorentina in 1991 and spent nine seasons there, including one in the second division after he preferred to help the club back to the top flight rather than move elsewhere.

Batistuta joined AS Roma in 2000 and had a brief spell with Inter Milan in 2003 before leaving for AlArabi.

GABRIEL BATISTUTA

FACTFILE

Factbox on Argentina striker Gabriel Batistuta, who announced his retirement on Sunday:

1969: Born on February 1 in Reconquista, Argentina

1988-89: Makes debut for Argentine side Newell's Old Boys. Scores four goals in title-winning season before moving to River Plate.

1989: Leaves River and crosses Buenos Aires to city rivals Boca Juniors.

1991: Signs for Fiorentina for \$2.3 million.

1992-93: Despite his 16 goals in 32 games, Fiorentina are relegated. Batistuta turns down offers to move to other Serie A sides.

1993-94: Scores 16 goals in 26 matches to take Fiorentina back into the top flight at first attempt.

June 1994: Hits hat-trick in his World Cup debut against Greece.

1994-95: On target in each of his side's opening 11 matches of the season to set a new Italian goal record. Ends campaign as Serie A's top scorer with 26 goals from 32 games.

April 1996: Grabs his 34th goal for Argentina in a 3-1 victory over Bolivia, equalling Diego Maradona's record.

May 1996: Scores in both legs of Italian Cup final as Fiorentina beat Atalanta Bergamo 3-0 on aggregate to claim their first major trophy in 21 years. It was the only title Batistuta won in his nine years in Florence.

April 1997: Hits superb equaliser in UEFA Cup semi-final in Barcelona. Photos of "Batigol" holding his finger to his lips to silence a 100,000-strong Nou Camp crowd become part of Italian football folklore.

November 1997: Recalled by Argentina after being dropped for 10 months.

June 1998: Grabs hat-trick at World Cup in 5-0 drubbing of Jamaica. Becomes father for third time the day before Argentina's quarter-final win

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Pakistan on a high

AFP, Kolkata



Pakistan plan to give India yet another shock treatment by raising the level of their performance in the second cricket Test starting at the Eden Gardens here on Wednesday.

The tourists defied the odds by salvaging a creditable draw from a losing position in the opening match of the three-Test series at Mohali on Saturday, frustrating India with their resilient lower-order batting.

Pakistan skipper Inzamamul Haq said his team would not rest on the Mohali laurels, but raise their performance further to win the Test series.

"I think we can win this series, but we need to improve our catching and our top-order batsmen should also deliver," said Inzamam, whose team dropped five catches in the first Test.

Pakistan's main worry was their top-order batting after Salman Butt, Taufiq Umar and vice-captain Younis Khan all failed in the previous match, putting pressure on their teammates.

Inzamam led from the front with two successive half-centuries before finding a saviour in wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal, who denied India victory on the final day with a maiden Test century.

Pakistan were just 53 in front with their last four wickets in hand when Akmal put on a record 184 for the seventh wicket with all-rounder Abdul Razzaq (71) to steer his team to safety.

"The fightback will help us in the series. It was a great morale-booster," said Inzamam.

Pakistan not only silenced their critics who had called the team "weak", but also infused new life into the series which was initially considered a contest between two unequal teams.

The inexperienced Pakistani side gained a big psychological edge with their resolute show after being on the ropes on the first four

days before coming back strongly on the final day.

But Pakistan will have to solve their pace bowling problems before nurturing hopes of gaining the lead in the series.

Leg-spinner Danish Kaneria alone put in a disciplined performance against a strong Indian batting line-up in the last match, finishing with six wickets.

He, however, lacked support from the other end as pacemen Mohammad Sami, Razzaq and Nadeem Hasan failed to keep pressure on the Indian batsmen.

Coach Bob Woolmer, meanwhile, said he did not think there would be many changes in the team despite unimpressive performances from top order batsmen and fast bowlers in the previous match.

"I don't see the need of making drastic changes," he said. "Maybe a couple of tactical changes. That's my personal opinion because I am just one of the selectors."



PHOTOS: AFP