

King puts on a brave face

REUTERS, London

West Indies head coach Bennett King was trying to remain optimistic for next week's first Test against South Africa, despite the contract dispute that has robbed him of seven players, including skipper Brian Lara.

Lara was left out of the squad by the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) after failing to reach agreement over personal endorsement contracts.

Lara, like vice-captain Ramaresh Sarwan, Chris Gayle, Dwayne Bravo, Dwayne Smith, Fidel Edwards and Ravi Rampaul, has a personal sponsorship deal with Cable and Wireless, meaning a potential clash with the West Indies' main sponsor Digicel.

Shivnarine Chanderpaul will lead the team in Lara's absence for the first Test starting in Georgetown next Thursday.

"I think it's disappointing that the seven (the Cable and Wireless players) are not there, whatever the reasons, but it opens opportunities for other players to show what they're worth," Australian King told the Trinidad Express.

The depleted squad of 14 has arrived in Barbados for a pre-series training camp, with negotiations regarding their participation still ongoing.

"We'll be working hard over the next five days of the camp to get everyone as properly prepared as possible for what is going to be a tough series," King added.

"In the circumstances, we'll pay attention to the personnel as well as the technical side of things."

Digicel's five-year sponsorship deal, which is worth about 20 million dollars and is the biggest in West Indies history.

SLC dissolved?

CRICINFO, undated

The board of Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) is all set to be dissolved.

Parliamentary sources revealed to Cricinfo that that there was every likelihood this would happen on Thursday afternoon, with an announcement to this effect following.

"This comes on the heels of the decision by Tilakaratna Sunathipala, the modern day godfather of Sri Lankan cricket, to return to the limelight by announcing his desire to contest an unprecedented fifth term as board president, and has triggered determined behind-the-scenes politicking by his enemies."

Speculation is now rife that the government is poised to takeover of the administration of the board for the third time since 1999.

Fitness the key for Germans

AFP, Frankfurt

German national coach Jurgen Klinsmann believes his team must be one of the fittest in world football if they are to achieve their aim of World Cup glory in 2006.

Klinsmann has brought in his own fitness trainers from the United States to get the German players into shape with weight-lifting and endless shuttle runs testing their physical condition to the maximum.

Even goalkeeper Oliver Kahn is being asked to practice his sprinting and on Thursday magazine Kicker showed a picture of team-mates Michael Ballack and Kevin Kuranyi chukking at the sight of the custodian in full flight.

"We want to play at a high tempo and put the opposition under pressure to force a mistake," explained Klinsmann.

It is vital that the players recognise that we are helping them for now and the rest of their career. Over the next few months we will work on tempo, speed and stamina."

Germany's 2-2 draw against Argentina in February underlined how far Klinsmann's team were in terms of fitness with a frantic tempo set for 70 minutes only for some tired legs to chase shadows as Argentina gave a lesson in the art of keeping possession.

"If it comes to extra-time in the World Cup fitness levels will be vital," explained Klinsmann's assistant, Joachim Low.

"At the World Cup we may need to be able to play at a high tempo for 120 minutes every three days. It is like a Formula One driver. He can be knackered after 100,000 miles or carry on for another 100,000 miles."

Klinsmann, 40, clearly believes the training ground routines will pay dividends when the World Cup kicks off in June 2006.

"World Cup is within our grasp," declared Klinsmann. "There is no point in settling for second best."

Germany's next match is a friendly against Slovenia in Celje on Saturday.

Beckham not amused

Football

AFP, Manchester

David Beckham has dropped the strongest hint yet that he could be forced to quit Real Madrid because of paparazzi harassment of his children in the Spanish capital.

The England captain told reporters here on Wednesday that incidents involving his sons Brooklyn, 6, and Romeo, 2, in the last fortnight had left him "at a point where I don't

line."

Despite the pressure, Beckham said he had never contemplated giving up football and withdrawing from the public spotlight.

"I love my children, I love my wife but I'm a professional person and I love my football. If I give in to some of the things that have happened over my career, it is giving in to these people."

While Beckham is resigned to having to put up with constant media interest wherever he lives, he appears to believe that the situation



BROOKLYN

know what to do."

Beckham revealed that his eldest son Brooklyn had been left upset after being chased into a football school he attends by a group of photographers.

"He was going to a football school and I was working and Victoria was looking after (their third recently-born boy) Cruz and paparazzi show up and harass him and chase him into his football school."

"This is a six year old little boy."

Beckham added: "Of course that affected him and it was the same with Romeo. He was going to his nursery and there were press taking pictures of him while he was playing with the other kids, and for me it is crossing the line with my children."

"I'm at the point where I don't know what to do because it is my children's line," he said.

"I love Spain as a country, I love the fans and they have been incredible to me since I moved there. But what I do get over there, I've not had anywhere else before, except perhaps America one time."

Beckham has been with Madrid since joining in a 25-million-pound transfer from Manchester United in 2003 and recently said that he would be happy to end his career there. But his comments on Wednesday have raised major doubts about whether that will happen.

We'll not let up: Smith

Cricket

Reuters, Durban

South Africa captain Graeme Smith says his team will make the best of a difficult situation when they play a weakened West Indies in the Test series starting later this month.

West Indies will be without captain Brian Lara and six other leading players for the first test in Guyana on March 31 because of a contract dispute.

"It is obviously a very difficult situation for all concerned," Smith said in a United Cricket Board media release on Wednesday before the squad left for the Caribbean.

The all rounder has been ruled out of the first Test, and will join the tour once he has recovered.



GRAEME SMITH

SQUAD

Graeme Smith (captain) Nicky Boje, Mark Boucher, AB de Villiers, Boeta Dippenaar, Herschelle Gibbs, Andrew Hall, Jacques Kallis, Charl Langeveldt, Andre Nel, Makhaya Ntini, Shaun Pollock, Ashwell Prince, Jacques Rudolph, Monde Zondeki.

ITINERARY

Itinerary of South Africa's upcoming tour against West Indies: Mar 31-Apr 4: First Test, Guyana Apr 8-12: Second Test, Trinidad Apr 16-17: Tour match, Trinidad Apr 21-25: Third Test, Barbados Apr 29-May 3: Fourth Test, Antigua May 5-1: Day match, Jamaica May 7: First ODI, Jamaica May 8: Second ODI, Jamaica May 11: Third ODI, Barbados May 14: Fourth ODI, Trinidad May 15: Fifth ODI, Trinidad

"They now have a chance to prove themselves under very different conditions in the Caribbean."

Ronaldo at ease

Reuters, Rio de Janeiro

Ronaldo says he will put his Real Madrid troubles behind him when he turns out for Brazil in Sunday's FIFA World Cup qualifier against Peru.

"Here, it is completely different to there," the striker told reporters after training with the world champions on Wednesday.

"When I'm with Brazil, I just think about Brazil. When I'm with Real Madrid, I just think about Real Madrid."

"Here, I've scored lots of goals, I'm the leading scorer in the World Cup qualifiers and I'm going to try and keep it that way," said Ronaldo, who has hit nine goals in the South American group to help Brazil into second place behind Argentina.

"I'm going through a bad patch at the club because the goals aren't coming, I've created chances and played some good games but the supporters and the public want to see goals."

"I hope that for Brazil I continue scoring and getting wins."

Ronaldo has suffered a goal drought for Real in the last two months, has been substituted a number of times and was sent off in the 2-0 defeat by Juventus which put his side out of the UEFA Champions League.

He apologised on Monday for throwing a plastic water bottle into the crowd after being verbally abused by fans during Real's 1-0 home win over Malaga the day before.

The incident occurred when Ronaldo was substituted five minutes from time and he had to endure a barrage of whistles as he walked off the field.

"It's difficult not to lose your temper when they offend your mother," he said.

"But what really hurt was to have had three or four chances and not convert any of them. That hurt more than what happened afterwards."

"I am what I am. I don't try to be anything else, to take anyone aside. I just try to be the best at what I do, the best father, the best son, the best forward..."

BCB embarks

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one or two games. But under the new system, each team will have a guaranteed number of matches.

The BCB termed it a pilot project of their game development programme.

"We are very much aware that this is a very ambitious plan. That's why we have decided to start with schools in Dhaka metropolitan. If we are successful here, we will then spread the programme into seven different zones across the country," said Khondoker Jamil Uddin, vice-president of the BCB's game development committee.

Frisk subsequently received death threats and announced his immediate retirement from refereeing, leading to condemnation of Chelsea by UEFA, which accused the London club of making false declarations and creating a "negative ambience."

UEFA's head of refereeing Volker Roth also responded by describing Mourinho as "an enemy of football".

Chelsea fully adheres to, and respects, the processes of UEFA and is under no illusion about the seriousness of these charges. We will defend these in the correct and proper manner and within the guidelines laid down by UEFA," Kenyon added.

The launching of the new format means that there will be no school cricket championship in other parts of the country this year. The number of entries from Dhaka has also been reduced from previous years.

"Schools outside Dhaka would be deprived initially as we will need a couple of years to introduce it all over the country. But through this programme, the BCB eventually aims to unearth real talents from all corners of Bangladesh," added Jamil Uddin.

A total of 69 schools of Dhaka will compete in the first round, which will be played on a league basis. A selection panel will then pick the best players from all schools who will make up four zonal teams that will compete in the second round.

The second round matches will also be held in a league format with the top two finishers playing the final. The most promising school players to emerge from the competition will be sent abroad for better training.

"Our ultimate goal is to find the best players for the national age group teams," said Shaun Williams, BCB's national manager of game development.

Jamil Uddin informed that the board has decided to give Tk 18,000 to each age group team for preparation. Sponsors Standard Chartered Bank has provided Tk 35 lakh Taka out of the total budget of nearly Tk 65 lakh. Tk 301 matches will take place during the meet at 16 venues on matting wickets.

Swiss world number one Federer arrived at the 6.5 million-dollar tournament in Key Biscayne in search of one of the dwindling number of titles he hasn't yet won.

Federer successfully defended his title at Indian Wells to add that title to the ones he has already claimed this year in Doha, Rotterdam and Dubai.

His only defeat of the year has come at the hands of Marat Safin, who downed Federer in the semi-finals of the Australian Open en route to the championship.

Mauresmo, on the other hand, suffered a disappointing third-round defeat at Indian Wells, where she crashed out to 44th-ranked Evgeniya Linetksaya.

"I'm looking forward to taking that disappointment away here in Key Biscayne," Mauresmo said as the tournament got underway.

But 32 seeds on both the men's and women's sides were only spectators on a blustery, sometimes rainy opening day.

While they sat tight enjoying their first round byes, others jockeyed to join them in the second round.

Georgia's Irakli Labadze earned a second-round clash with the merciful third seed, Safin.

"It's a good opportunity," Labadze said after defeating Morocco's Younes El Aymo 6-4, 1-6, 6-1.

Umpires: Billy Bowden (New Zealand) and Simon Taufel (Australia).

Referee: Tony Roche (Australia).

PREVIEW: ASIAN QUALIFIERS

Welcome to the jungle

Reuters, Tokyo

of styles and Kuwait host Uzbekistan.

Japan's visit to Tehran should provide the fireworks with Iran chasing their first win after drawing 0-0 in Bahrain in their opening final round qualifier.

Japan won last year's Asian Cup amid a hostile atmosphere in China but the cauldron-like Azadi Stadium packed with 100,000 fans will be new to many players.

For those in the squad who played for J-League side Jubilo Iwata in the 1999 Asian club champion, it will bring back uncomfortable memories.

"It was weird," midfielder Toshiya Fujita said. "They were throwing stones and tomatoes... all sorts of things. At one point a dead pigeon just missed us."

Japan coach Zico came under fire after his team's somewhat fortunate victory over North Korea in their

Group B opener but he insists his players will not be intimidated.

"Playing at home or away is just the same," said the Brazilian. "As a player, I loved playing in that kind of intense atmosphere in front of 100,000 people. I expect the players to rise to it."

Playmaker Hidetoshi Nakata will return to Japan's side for the first time in a year, along with fellow Europe-based midfielders Shinji Ono and Junichi Inamoto.

Iran's Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic is confident a full-strength Japan squad will hold no fears for his side.

"We don't care about the opposition... if they are Germany, North Korea or Japan," he shrugged. "The crowd will give us an advantage. They will be like a 12th man for us."

South Korea coach Jo Bonfere also welcomes back his Europe-based contingent for Friday's visit to

Dammam following a 1-0 warm-up victory over Burkina Faso.

"It's a must-win game but we have the ability to win it," said PSV Eindhoven's Park Ji-sung. "If we play like we did in the first match we should be alright."

South Korea top Group A after beating Kuwait 2-0 in their opening game and victory over Saudi Arabia, thrashed 4-1 by Finland at the weekend, would put them firmly in control.

The pressure is on the Saudis following a 1-1 draw with Uzbekistan in Tashkent last month.

All eight teams in action again next Wednesday. The top two from each group qualify automatically for next year's World Cup in Germany.

Asia could earn a fifth spot as the two third-placed teams meet for the right to contest a two-legged playoff against a CONCACAF side.

'Betradar' is here!

AFP, Berlin

The German Football Federation (DFB) and German Football League (DFL) signed a rolling contract with security company 'Betradar' on Thursday to monitor betting in German football.

"The DFL and DFB have reached an agreement with Betradar and will work alongside bookmakers in the future," Wilfried Straub, business leader of the DFL, told newspaper Die Welt.