

## 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 Ramnareesh 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 personal 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 set to be dissolved.

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

"This comes on the heels of the decision by Tilakaratne Sumathipala, the modern day godfather of Sri Lankan cricket, to return to the cricketing 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 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 chucking 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 on June 9, 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

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



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 lives and my wife's life."

"Me and Victoria have always accepted that we are in the limelight and there are always going to be people who want to take pictures of us, but when it comes down to little children, being out on their own, in their school, for me it is crossing the line."

## We'll not let up: Smith

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.

"I just hope that they can reach a settlement soon. But rest assured that whoever we face on the tour we will be giving 100 per cent at all times, because the West Indies can never be underestimated on their home soil."

The dispute centres around a potential clash between the West Indies' main sponsor Digicel and the players' personal contracts with Cable and Wireless.

Along with Lara, the other players missing are vice-captain Ramnareesh Sarwan, Chris Gayle, Dwayne Bravo, Dwayne Smith, Ravi Rampaul and Fidel Edwards.

South Africa lost their first home Test series to England in 40 years in January before bouncing back to win the one-dayers.

They then achieved an emphatic but expected win in a home series against Zimbabwe earlier this month.

"It's important that we take the momentum gained from the end of the England tour and the Zimbabwe series and use it to build a really cohesive, powerful unit," Smith said.

"We have had a tough summer at home, but have moved forward in many areas."

"It has been good to see new players like AB (de Villiers) and Charl (Langeveldt) make names for themselves as well as those who have returned to the national set up like Monde Zondeki and Ashwell Prince.

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

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

"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 better than anyone, to take anyone's place and, most of all, to push anyone aside. I just try to be the best at what I do, the best father, the best son, the best forward..."

## BCB embarks

FROM PAGE 16 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.

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 35 lakh Taka out of the total budget of nearly 65 lakh Taka. 301 matches will take place during the meet at 16 venues on matting wickets.

## Pakistan all

FROM PAGE 16 responsible knocks.

**SCOREBOARD** Scoreboard at stumps on the opening day of the third and final Test between India and Pakistan at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore on Thursday.

**PAKISTAN:** First innings Hameed c Karthik b Pathan 6 Afridi c Dravid b Balaji 0 Younis not out 127 Inzamam not out 184 Extras (lb-2, nb-2, w-2) 6 Total (For 2 wks in 90 overs) 323

**Fall of wickets:** 1-4, 2-7 To bat: Youhana, Kamal, Razzaq, Akmal, Sami, Kaneria, Arshad.

**Bowler** O M R W Pathan 21 2 67 1 Balaji 20 3 74 1 Kumble 24 3 93 0 Harbhajan 22 2 73 0 Tendulkar 3 0 14 0

**INDIA:** Ganguly, Sehwa, Gambhir, Dravid, Tendulkar, Laxman, Karthik, Pathan, Kumble, Harbhajan, Balaji. Toss: Pakistan.

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

## 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.

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some good games but the supporters and the public want to see goals."

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## Chelsea hit back

FROM PAGE 16 Chelsea have been charged with bringing the game into disrepute after their manager Jose Mourinho's accusation that Swedish referee Anders Frisk met Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard at halftime during the first leg of the clubs' Champions League first knockout round match on February 23.

"Chelsea is both surprised and disappointed that at least one individual within UEFA appears to have launched an unprecedented attack on the club, regardless of the fact that Chelsea has co-operated fully with the inquiries related to the charges against us," the club's chief executive Peter Kenyon said in a statement.

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.

"However the statements against Chelsea, Jose Mourinho, Steve Clarke, and Les Miles by at least one official UEFA means we are no longer able to keep our own counsel, which we have consistently done since submitting our report to UEFA following the Barcelona v

## PREVIEW: ASIAN QUALIFIERS

## Welcome to the jungle

REUTERS, Tokyo



Japan can expect a torrid reception when they face Iran in the boiling-hot atmosphere of Tehran's Azadi Stadium in an Asian World Cup qualifier on Friday.

Iran have been punished for crowd trouble before and Japan players, who were pelted with anything from rotten fruit to dead pigeons, called the experience "terrifying."

In Friday's other Group B match, North Korea host Bahrain in Pyongyang hoping to boost their qualifying campaign following a 2-1 defeat in Japan last month.

In Group A, 2002 World Cup semi-finalists South Korea travel to Saudi Arabia in an intriguing clash

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 Iran 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 championship 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 me."

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 Bonfre 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 are 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.

Betradar has over a 100 betting offices under its wing and uses extensive contacts to report on strange betting patterns and German football authorities hope using their expertise will prevent a repeat of the Robert Hoyzer scandal.

German referee Hoyzer, 25, worked in collaboration with the Croatian mafia to help fix matches for financial gain and his revelations have cast a dark cloud over German football ahead of the 2006 World Cup on home soil.

## Sharapova, Federer honoured

AP, Miami

Wimbledon champions Roger Federer and Maria Sharapova were three-time winners at the inaugural Pro Tennis Choice Awards on Tuesday night.

Coming off a year in which he won three Grand Slam events and 11 singles titles, Federer was the easy choice for the ATP's Player of the Year. He was also voted the Fans' Favorite Award by ATPennis.com users and was named the Stefan Edberg Sportsman-of-the-Year.

Sharapova won WTA Tour Player-of-the-Year after winning her first Grand Slam event at Wimbledon and claiming four titles. The 17-year-old Russian also received the Most Improved Player award and the Fans' Favorite award.

Also in the joint ATP and WTA Tour ceremony, Andy Roddick received the Arthur Ashe Humanitarian of the Year Award; Serena Williams and Tommy Haas were the Comeback Players-of-the-Year. The ATP's Most Improved award went to Joachim Johansson, and Tatiana Golovin and Florian Mayer were named Newcomers-of-the-Year.

## Football

REUTERS, London

Premier League leaders Chelsea have responded to what they describe as an "unprecedented attack" by Europe's governing body UEFA, saying they will fight any charges all the way to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

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## Amelie hopes to bounce back

AFP, Miami

France's Amelie Mauresmo is hoping a change of coasts brings a change of fortune at the WTA and ATP Masters Series tournament that started here Wednesday, while more of the same would no doubt suit men's top seed Roger Federer just fine.

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 dined 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 Evgenia Linetskaya.

"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.

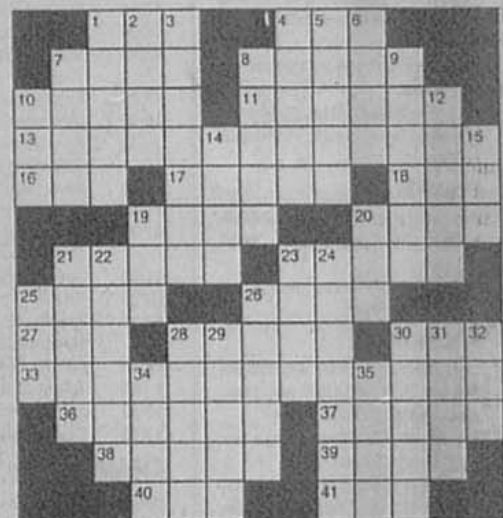
While they sat tight enjoying their first round byes, others jockeyed to join them in the second round.

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

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

## CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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