

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 Ramnaresh 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 all 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.

This comes on the heels of the decision by Thilanga 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 take over 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 chuckling 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



AFF, 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



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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 now."

"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."

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

is not as bad as it could be.

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

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

"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.

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"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.

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 Ramnaresh 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 under very different conditions in the Caribbean."

The tour of the West Indies will

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."

"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 us wins."

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