

Bulgarian Football Union sorry for Stoichkov outburst

AFP, Sofia

The Bulgarian Football Union (BFU) has apologised to UEFA following "scandalous" remarks by national team coach Hristo Stoichkov against the body's president Lennart Johansson.

Following Bulgaria's 3-0 loss to Sweden in a FIFA World Cup qualifier in Solna (Sweden) on September 3, Stoichkov accused Johansson — who is a Swede — of "being aware in advance of how the game would end".

Stoichkov, the leading scorer in the 1994 World Cup who went on to score 35 goals in 83 internationals for Bulgaria, was also furious over Belgian referee Frank De Bleckere's decision to send off midfielder Blagoy Georgiev, collecting himself a red card for his complaints.

As a penalty for the latter incident football's world governing body, FIFA, has ordered Stoichkov to watch his team's home game against Iceland on Wednesday night from the spectators' lounge and not from the bench. Both teams have lost all hopes of qualifying for next year's World Cup.

"BFU's executive board sent a letter to UEFA President Lennart Johansson to express its apologies in connection with the scandalous remarks of Stoichkov," BFU press officer Zahari Nikolov told AFP.

Bulgarian newspaper Dnevnik said that Stoichkov has twice before accused Johansson of "using his position to arrange the national team of his country with favourable referees for its games against Bulgaria."

UEFA has filed a disciplinary complaint with FIFA following Stoichkov's remarks and will press for further sanctions to be imposed.

Rolling Stones bowled over

AFP, London

Rolling Stones singer Mick Jagger may have a concert to play in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on Thursday night but he can't get no satisfaction for thinking about cricket.

The supergroup's frontman revealed he is brimming with excitement over the thrilling climax to England's five-Test series against the world's best, Australia.

"I will wake up as early as I can and watch it," cricket nut Jagger told BBC radio from Milwaukee.

"Every English person I have met around the US has been either following it or asking people how it has been going."

The Rolling Stones, still rocking and still rolling after four decades on stage, released "A Bigger Bang" on Monday, their first studio album in eight years.

The Stones are set to play Chicago's Soldier Field Stadium on Friday.

Brothers, MSC

FROM PAGE 16
England's two victories in the series to date, in the second and fourth Tests, at Edgbaston and Trent Bridge respectively, had come when they set the tone with imposing totals batting first against an attack minus Glenn McGrath.

However, the veteran quick was passed fit following a right elbow injury and returned in place of Michael Kasprovicz.

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Strauss, Warne

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SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the first day of the fifth Test between England and Australia at The Oval in London on Thursday:

ENGLAND: First innings
Trescothick c Hayden b Warne 43
Strauss not out 92
Vaughan c Clarke b Warne 11
Bell lbw b Warne 0
Petersen b Warne 14
Flintoff not out 39
Extras: (b-4, lb-5, nb-5) 14
Total: (For 4 wickets in 55 overs) 213
Fall of wickets: 1-82, 2-102, 3-104, 4-131

To bat: Collingwood, Jones, Giles, Hoggard, Harmison

Bowler	O	M	R	W
McGrath	15	2	44	0
Lee	10	4	44	0
Tait	9	0	47	0
Warne	18	3	55	4
Katich	3	0	14	0

AUSTRALIA: Langer, Hayden, Ponting, Martyn, Clarke, Katich, Gilchrist, Warne, Lee, McGrath, Tait
Toss: England
Umpires: Billy Bowden (New Zealand) and Rudi Koertzen (South Africa)

Northern Ireland do the unthinkable to England



Michael Owen's body language tells the story after England were shocked by Northern Ireland at Windsor Park in Belfast on September 7.

PHOTO: AFP

AP, Belfast

England's World Cup qualifying bid was stalled by a stunning 1-0 loss to Northern Ireland on Wednesday night, while Thierry Henry revived France's chances of making it to next year's tournament in Germany.

Italy, the Netherlands and Israel all won their qualifiers, but Portugal wasted a chance to become the second European nation to clinch a berth in next year's tournament when it played a 0-0 tie Russia.

England lost to Northern Ireland for the first time since 1972 and at Belfast for the first time in 78 years, with David Healy beating an offside trap to chip the ball off the hand of goalkeeper Paul Robinson and into the goal in the 74th minute.

Sven-Goran Eriksson, a Swede who is England's first foreign coach, already had been severely criticized following a 4-1 exhibition loss to Denmark last month and a 1-0 win at Wales on Saturday.

"I'm not going to resign," Eriksson said. "I am going to try and make it right in October, win two

games and we've qualified."

But that won't be easy if England continues to play so poorly.

"Tonight it has been a bit of an embarrassment for the lads," captain David Beckham said. "Tonight hurts more than any night probably, but we stick together, that's all we can do. If we win the next two games, we go top of the group, that's all we have to do."

England will have to do it against Austria on Oct. 8 without striker Wayne Rooney, who picked up a yellow card.

Beckham tried to calm Rooney down, but the 19-year-old Manchester United striker pushed him away, cursed the linesman and ignored a plea from assistant coach Steve McClaren to compose himself.

Poland (8-1), which won 1-0 at Wales, leads Group Six with 24 points, five ahead of England (6-1-1), which hosts the Poles four days after the Austria match.

The eight European group winners and top two second-place teams qualify, and the other six second-place teams go to playoffs.

Luca Toni scored three goals and Mauro Camoranesi one as Italy overcame an early deficit to win 4-1

at Belarus. It was the first three-goal game for an Italian player in an away game, not including neutral sites, since Silvio Piola in a 1939 exhibition game at Finland.

Italy (5-1-2) is atop Group Five with 17 points, five ahead of Slovenia and Norway (both 3-2-3). Slovenia won 2-1 at Moldova and Norway lost 2-1 at Scotland.

The Netherlands moved to the brink of qualifying with a 4-0 win over visiting Andorra. Ruud Winstelrooy scored twice but missed a penalty kick for the Dutch (9-0-1), which lead Group One with 28 points. The Czech Republic, second at 8-2, is four points back following a 4-1 win over visiting Armenia.

At Dublin, Henry beat goalkeeper Shay Given with a curling shot in the 68th minute, leading France over Ireland 1-0. France and Switzerland, which won 3-1 at Cyprus, have 16 points apiece and 4-0-4 records.

"It's a very big result. We played really well defensively and nicked a goal," Henry said.

Israel, which won 2-0 at the Faeroe Islands on second-half goals by Avi Nimni and Yaniv, is one point back at 3-0-6, and Ireland is three behind at 3-1-4.

Despite failing to win with a man advantage for the entire second half, Portugal (7-0-3) heads Group Three with 24 points, five in front of Slovakia, which tied 1-1 at Latvia, and Russia (both 5-1-4).

Spain went ahead on Raul Gonzalez's goal in the 19th minute but gave up a goal to Mateja Kezman in the 69th and tied visiting Serbia-Montenegro 1-1. Serbia (4-0-4) maintained a two-point lead in Group Seven over Spain (3-0-5) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (3-1-5), which won 1-0 at Lithuania.

Greece got a big victory at Kazakhstan when Nikos Liberopoulos scored four minutes into injury time. Ukraine (7-1-3) has clinched first place in Group Two, and Greece (5-2-3) is two points behind Turkey (5-1-5), which won 1-0 at Ukraine, for second place.

Argentina and Brazil also have qualified to join host Germany at the World Cup along with Mexico Iran, Japan, Saudi Arabia and South Korea.

Germany, which received an automatic berth, beat visiting South Africa 4-2 in an exhibition game as Lukas Podolski scored three goals and set up another.

Mexico Germany bound

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Mexico duly qualified for the World Cup on Wednesday by demolishing Panama 5-0 while Costa Rica appear set to follow them after beating Trinidad & Tobago 2-0.

Guatemala's chances slipped after they could manage only a goalless draw at home to the US, who fielded a weakened side having made sure last Saturday of their place in next year's finals in Germany.

After eight rounds of matches, the US and Mexico lead the final stage of the CONCACAF qualifiers with 19 points, followed by Costa Rica (13), Guatemala (8), Trinidad (7) and Panama (2).

Costa Rica need two points from their final two outings, at home to the US and away to Guatemala in October, to take the final direct qualification spot.

Guatemala and Trinidad, meanwhile, have been left to fight for fourth spot, which earns a two-leg playoff against the fifth Asian side — either Uzbekistan or Bahrain — in November.

BA's Ashes

AFP, Sydney

British Airways heightened tensions ahead of the climactic fifth Ashes Test Thursday by offering hundreds of flights between England and Australia at a price set by the combatants' first innings scores.

Under the deal, Australian customers will be able to buy return tickets to London for the equivalent in pounds of England's score in its first innings, while Britons can travel the other way by paying whatever the Aussies score in their first dig.

"We're looking forward to a great match," BA's Southwest Pacific marketing manager Suzie Hayes said.

"With London as our home hub, we'll be thrilled if England win, but if they're bowled for a low score then our Australian customers will be getting an absolute bargain."

BA's standard return fare from Sydney to London is 735 pounds (£1,350 US).

6 selected

FROM PAGE 16

Medical tests will be carried out at the BFF Bhaban on the first day while the fitness and written tests will be held the next day at the Bangladesh Army Stadium.

'Go Sven'

THE SUN, London



Gutted England fans demanded to know where was Sven Goran Eriksson's passion after Wednesday night's disastrous World Cup result.

They chanted "Sack the Swede" as Sven showed no emotion as his side were humiliated in Belfast.

And proud supporters were fed up with the man who enjoyed red-hot times with old flame Faria Alam — but who can only manage to be lukewarm for England.

They were thrashed 4-1 by Denmark last month — and scraped a 1-0 win over minnows Wales at the weekend.

England now needs to win both of their remaining Group Six matches if they are to guarantee reaching the 2006 tournament in Germany.

Shell-shocked fan Glen Myrie, 42, from West Bromwich, said: "I'd rather have a Scottish bloke running the team than Sven. He's a man without passion and his team were rubbish tonight. The sooner we boot him out the better."

His comments were echoed by England fan Peter Bettell, 43, who said: "Any English manager faced with defeat at the hands of Northern Ireland would have been storming up and down the touchline.

England have had a series of slip-ups under Sven. In 2002 they limped to a 2-2 draw against Macedonia.

In 2003 they lost 3-1 to Australia and Sven said: "It does not concern me that much." Despite a load of hype, they crashed out of Euro 2004 to hosts Portugal. And last month they were thrashed 4-1 by Denmark.

Shocked England fans chanted "What a load of rubbish" as their team slumped to defeat — the first time Northern Ireland has beaten us at Windsor Park stadium since 1927.

And as their fans danced in the streets, England supporters, pundits and even players hung their heads in shame.

Former England captain Gary Lineker added: "It was an abysmal performance."

Calls for Sven's head mounted after England fell behind to a 73rd-minute goal from Leeds striker David Healy.

It was Northern Ireland's first victory against England since 1972. And it was the first time Lawrie Sanchez's team had scored against England in 25 years.

But when asked whether the FA would be justified in sacking him, Sven insisted it was not for him to decide. He said: "I'm not going to resign. I'm going to try to make it right. In October we'll win two games and qualify."

However, last night bookies William Hill offered odds of 2/9 that Sven will be gone before the World Cup finals. And Ladbrokes lengthened the odds of England even qualifying from 7/1 to 8/1.

India's poor shows to be looked into

Cricket

PTI, New Delhi

Stung by the Indian cricket team's recent string of reverses, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has said it would initiate a "thorough and complete review" of the performance of the players and take immediate remedial steps.

The BCCI also said that it expected the selectors to take appropriate decisions in the wake of defeats in Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe which had disappointed the country.

Board president Ranbir Singh Mahendra said former Test cricketers Sunil Gavaskar, Ravi Shastri and Srinivas Venkatraghavan besides coach Greg Chappell will conduct the five-day review starting September

25. "A thorough and complete review of individual performances, performance of the captain and physical fitness of the players would be carried out," Mahendra told an India TV programme to be telecast on Saturday.

Mahendra said he expected the selectors to take remedial steps soon after the Zimbabwe tour.

"They (selectors) are independent but I do expect the selectors to do something after this series," he said.

"I expect the players to do much better. I have myself talked to many of them, I have reminded them of the hopes and aspirations of the cricketing public."

"Indeed, they too realise that the country is disappointed... All the players I have talked to said they are worried."

A tough second day

FROM PAGE 16

Habibul Bashar, who had only returned to the Lankan capital from a compassionate leave early morning yesterday, had to field.

Rafique later bowled in the nets to show signs of improving fast from a knee injury.

Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore admitted that his charges had a tough second day.

"The wicket was a bit difficult for bowling after the first session yesterday. Still we got ten wickets. They had some good young batsmen who played well and stuck to their job."

Whatmore also found positives from spending a long time on the field.

"We want to bowl the opposition out in any game, particularly in Test matches. And we may need more than one day to do it. In that way, it was some practice."

When asked about his bowlers who delivered 25 no balls, Whatmore said that it was one area they had to improve a lot in the Tests. "We can't afford to bowl extra deliveries."

Whatmore was impressed with the pace of his tearaway Shahadat and the effort put in by Enamul.

"Shahadat's ability to bowl quick would definitely put the batsmen under pressure. Still he needs to think about being consistent. I think Enamul was unlucky. He bowled better than those two wickets suggest."

The Tigers coach thought that there would be no pressure on the batsmen on the final day.

"Our objective is to use the best of our last chance to bat before the Test matches. We might get bowled out (tomorrow) but we want to use the opportunity."

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the second day of the three-day practice match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka Development Squad at the Colts Cricket Club ground in Colombo on Thursday:

BANGLADESH: First innings 195 (Javed 81, Baisya 58; Rupasinghe 3-31, Wijekoon 3-35)

SL DEV SQUAD: First innings (overnight 109-2)

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Vithana c Nafees b Rasel	16			
Kalavittigoda c Mashud b Rasel	59			
Gajjanayaka b Aftab	12			
Samaraweera lbw b Enamul	48			
Kandamb c Enamul b Manjarul	17			
Mendis lbw b Rasel	95			

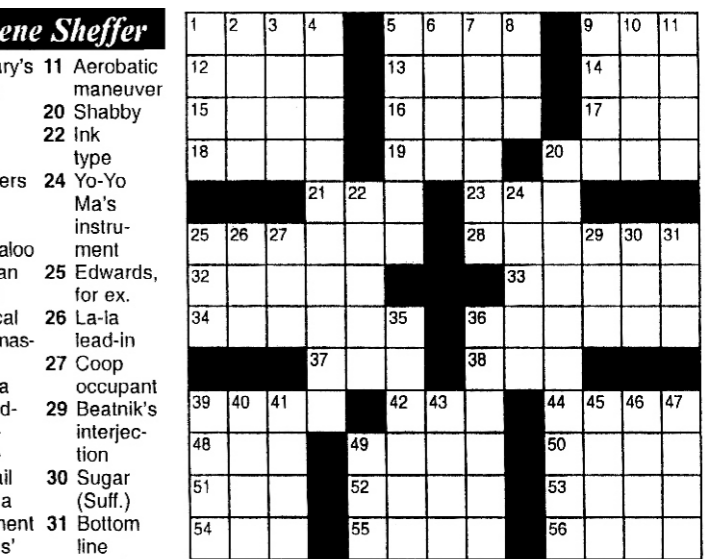
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Rasel	23	3	85	4
Shahadat	22.5	1	85	1
Baisya	11	2	44	0
Enamul	25	7	74	2
Aftab	11	2	38	1
Manjarul	13	0	49	1
Tushar	6	1	14	0

BANGLADESH: Second innings
Javed not out 12
Iqbal lbw b Wijekoon 5
Manjarul not out 2
Extras: (lb-1, nb-4, w-7) 12
Total: (For 1 wkt in 8 overs) 31
Fall of wicket: 1-27

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Lakshitha	2	0	10	0
Waruna	4	0	18	0
Wijekoon	2	1	2	1

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Dance
5 Put together
9 Guy's companion
12 Urban transport
13 2004 hurricane
14 Commotion
15 "... do, — do better"
16 Jell-O creation
17 Confucian principle
18 Apple variety
19 Symbol of 25-Across
20 Office part-timer
21 Serbian city
23 Essen expulsive
25 Wisdom goddess
26 Boring lecture
32 Unlettered
33 Renter's paper
34 Plunderer
36 Lois Lane's employer
37 Matlock's field
38 Scepter
39 Figurine material
42 Mound stat
44 John Goodman role
48 Buy now, pay later
49 Strike
50 Cupid's specialty
51 Internet address
52 Shake-spear's river
53 Gambling mecca
54 Reuben holder
55 Lapidary's supply
56 "First Wives Club" members
24 Yo-Yo Ma's instrument
25 Edwards, for ex.
26 La-la lead-in
27 Coop occupant
29 Beatrix's interjection
30 Sugar (Suff.)
31 Bottom line
35 Midnight shrimps
39 Soup du—
40 Confronted
41 Take out of context?
43 Leeway
45 NYSE counter-part
46 Hammer, anvil or stirrup
47 Piccadilly statue
49 Sack



CRYPTOQUIP

BU IJE OUESHVUO SF

QUPFWU J PJSSAU GJVPBUG.

BHE FIV WFSBUG BJO

VJWUO BHW QGJVQFV HGFVE.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I WOULD REALLY LOVE TO BE AN ASTRONAUT WHEN I GET OLDER. THOSE GUYS HAVE A BLAST.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals W

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.

Agassi epic rolls on



PHOTO: AFP

Andre Agassi of the United States celebrates his marathon five set quarterfinal victory over compatriot James Blake in Flushing Meadows on Thursday.



REUTERS, New York

In the end James Blake, like the rest of Flushing Meadows, had no choice but to embrace the legend.

Andre Agassi's astounding recovery from two sets and a break down to win their all-American US Open quarterfinal started on Wednesday, finished on Thursday and will be remembered for years.

The 35-year-old with the bad back completed a 3-6, 3-6, 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 victory with a forehand service return that plopped perfectly on to the junction of baseline and trampoline nine minutes after one o'clock in the morning.

"I don't know if I've ever felt this good here before," said the eight-time Grand Slam champion, who will play another American, Robby Ginepri, in the last four.

On a day when American world number one Lindsay Davenport was beaten by a Russian with one of the worst serves in women's tennis, Agassi and his wild card opponent combined to send the host nation's spirits soaring.

Blake, who had saved one match point with a forehand punch down the line, bore his scarcely deserved defeat with the grace of a man grateful to

have played his part in a great sporting moment.

"It couldn't have been more fun to lose," said the 25-year-old as he congratulated a player he admits is his idol at the net.

"I want to see you do it again." So too, do the 20,000 privileged souls who bellowed long beyond bedtime on Arthur Ashe Court and were rewarded with a come-from-behind classic.

Blake has endured enough pain outside tennis to keep his defeat in perspective. Last year he suffered two broken back vertebrae, lost his father to cancer and contracted a form of shingles that paralysed half his face.

Agassi is the oldest US Open semifinalist since a 39-year-old Jimmy Connors reached the last four in 1991 and his victory over Blake, his second successive five-set win, showed talk of his retirement is premature.

Davenport stumbled out of the tournament after a 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 defeat by sixth seed Elena Dementieva, who fully deserved her win despite serving 12 double-faults to take her five-match tally to 62.

The Russian, runner-up last year, will face Mary Pierce in the semifinals after the rejuvenated Frenchwoman thrashed third seed Amelie Mauresmo 6-4, 6-1.

will not have a representative in the women's semifinals for the first time since 1994. It was only the second time in the last nine US Opens that she has failed to reach at least the semis.

Dementieva lost to compatriot Svetlana Kuznetsova in last year's final and this time she could face another Russian, with top seed Maria Sharapova contesting the other semifinal against Belgian Kim Clijsters.

Pierce, the 30-year-old 12th seed who knocked out Belgian Justine Henin-Hardenne in round four, mesmerised Mauresmo 6-4, 6-1 to reach the last four at Flushing Meadows for the first time.

Pierce won the last of her two grand slam titles in 2000 but a new approach to her mental and physical conditioning has helped her to rediscover