

Not picking Shah criminal: coach

AFP, London

Middlesex coach John Emburey has described England's failure to pick Owais Shah for the tour of Pakistan as "criminal".

Karachi-born Shah has been the leading batsman in English county cricket this summer and Emburey said he deserved to have been rewarded with a recall to the one-day squad that will tour Pakistan from next month.

"The fact that he's not there to me is criminal," Emburey told the BBC.

"He's going to have to bat like Don Bradman to play any better than he has done this year."

Shah, 27, has just enjoyed his finest season for Middlesex, scoring a total of 1,656 runs at an average of 69.

But that record was not enough to convince the selectors, who appear unwilling to forget Shah's 15 previous England appearances, which brought him only 283 runs at a disappointing average of 21.76 before he was dropped two-and-a-half years ago.

Emburey suspects that a nagging knee problem may have counted against the batsman.

Kacharipara

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slammed a hattrick as Naba Nabin Samabesh enjoyed a goal feast in a 7-1 victory over Abdul Latif Smriti Sangsad of Gopalganj.

Jahangir, Arafat, Ripon and Rihan Khan added one each to the winners' tally while Saiful netted the lone goal for the losers.

The winners will meet Kushtia Crescent Club, who registered a solitary goal victory over Jhenidha Mohammedan SC, in the semifinals. Khaled netted the match-winner.

Moonlight Club reached the group semifinal beating Sonali Dhara Club of Kurigram 3-1 at the Natore Stadium.

Faruque struck twice and Azizur scored once for the winners while Hasanur netted one for the losers.

Two other scheduled matches at Feni and Khulna could not take place due to dawn-to-dusk hartal.

Reflections

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Whatmore also informed that the batting order was changed to give Shahriar Nafees some more freedom.

"We felt that Afrizal would be a bit, we had him as another opener and there was nothing to lose by making the change. I am happy that it worked for once. Iqbal got 35 and Shahriar made 50," said Whatmore with a rare smile on his face.

Confidence sorely

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front of first slip. It was Fernando's 50th Test wicket.

Mohammad Ashraful and Aftab Ahmed, the best future prospects of the country, tried to settle down but even the best Bangladesh stand was not worth 50 runs.

Ashraful, the only player who showed some confidence, played with his usual flair and authority to top score (41 off 42 balls). It was great to watch as long as it lasted. After taking a bouncer on his arm, Ashraful counter-attacked Fernando with a glanced four and hooked a six off successive balls. He lofted Muralitharan's last ball before lunch to the midwicket fence and came back to rattle 19 runs off pace-man Fernando in the third over of the second session with a six over midwicket and two boundaries through covers.

He should have calmed down when the Marvan Atapattu set a trap, bowling short with fielders at deep-fine leg, long-leg and deep square-leg. He tried to break the shackles by improvising and just like the first Test when he lofted the ball to the cover fielder, Ashraful skied the ball in an attempt to clear the mid-on fielder for an easy catch.

Fernando scalped Aftab soon to complete his third 5-wicket haul in Test cricket. The rest was easy picking for Muralitharan.

Sania crashes out of Sunfeast Open

PTI, Kolkata

The fizz went out of the WTA Sunfeast Open on Wednesday as crowd favourite Sania Mirza crashed out of the tournament losing to the much lower ranked Hungarian Melinda Czink in a closely fought three-setter in the second round.

Czink relied on her powerful forehand to stage a remarkable comeback after being completely outplayed in the first set to finish off with a 6-6, 6-4, 6-4 win and book a berth in the quarterfinal.

The partisan crowd at the Netaji Indoor Stadium had a whale of a time in the first set cheering every aggressive shot by the 34th ranked Mirza, who looked unstoppable.

But the complexion of the match changed soon as Sania's serve completely deserted her and she lapsed into frequent unforced errors, losing her confidence in the process.

In contrast, the 122-ranked Hungarian grew in confidence as the match progressed and sent down delightful winners to close the match in a little less than two hours.

'I was shot at in India'

Cricket

AFP/REUTERS, New Delhi

England all-rounder Andrew Flintoff's claim that he was shot at while fielding during a one-day international in New Delhi in 2002 was scoffed at by Indian cricket officials here on Wednesday.

Flintoff, who inspired England to an Ashes triumph over Australia earlier this month, made the startling revelation in his forthcoming book 'Being Freddie' whose extracts were carried by the Times newspaper in London.

"I felt something hit me and, looking down, saw pellets on the ground," Flintoff wrote, referring to the one-dayer at the Ferozeshah Kotla ground in the Indian capital in January, 2002.

"You expect to have plastic bottles thrown at you when you are playing on the sub-continent, but you don't expect to be shot."

Flintoff said the English team management playing down the incident, but New Delhi cricket officials said they were not taking the all-rounder's claim seriously.

"This is the first time I am hearing of it," said Chand Khanna, a senior official of the Delhi and District

Cricket Association (DDCA) and a vice-president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

"If such a thing actually happened, why did the England team keep quiet about it?"

"No one told us a thing then or after the tour. He can't be serious."



ANDREW FLINTOFF

Delhi police, however, also expressed surprise at the claims.

"If there was any such thing at that time it would have been brought to our attention and action taken. To bring this up after such a long time... Delhi police has nothing on this matter," spokesman Ravi

Pawar told Reuters on Wednesday.

Flintoff claims he was himself rattled by the team management's decision to play down the incident.

"Nasser Hussain (the captain) got very heated about it in the middle and Phil Neale, the tour manager, came to find out what was going on, but the whole thing seemed to get swept under the carpet," Flintoff wrote.

"There was a big story back home to do with crowd disturbances, but Andrew Walpole, the England and Wales Cricket Board's media relations manager, told me to play the incident down when I was interviewed the following day."

"Looking back now, I think I should have made more of a stand because I wasn't there to be shot at. We explained it away as the crowd just being overexcited at the time, but I wasn't sure about that at all."

England had initially raised safety concerns over travelling to the sub-continent, the tour coming soon after the September 11 attacks in the US, before being cleared to tour by security officials.

Indian cricket stadia are heavily guarded during international games due to the huge crowds that turn up. Spectators are barred from even carrying water bottles and mobile phones inside the venue.

Streak slows

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before he edged the fifth ball he faced to wicketkeeper Tatenda Taibu as he drove expansively at a Mahyire delivery angled across the left-hand.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at the tea on the second day of the second cricket Test between Zimbabwe and India at Harare Sports Club on Wednesday: ZIMBABWE: First innings 161 (Coventry 37, Mazakadza 27; Pathan 7-59)

INDIA: First innings (overnight 195-1) Gambhir c Taibu b Mahyire 97
Swag c Taibu b Streak 44
Dravid b Mahyire 98
Laxman lbw b Streak 8
Ganguly c Taibu b Mwayanenga 16
Yuvraj b Streak 25
Karthik b Streak 1
Pathan not out 8
Kumble not out 0
Extras: (b-4, lb-11, nb-8) 21
Total: (For 7 wickets in 95 overs) 318
Fall of wickets: 1-75, 2-198, 3-219, 4-245, 5-306, 6-306, 7-318

To bat: Harbhajan, Zaheer
Bowler O M R W
Streak 26 9 52 4
Mahyire 25 5 82 2
Blignaut 14 1 57 0
Mwayanenga 21 6 79 1
Dabengwa 9 1 35 0

BD-SL SCOREBOARD				
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Ashraf not out	21			
Shahadat not out	0			
Extras: (b-4, lb-1, nb-5)	10			
Total: (For 4 wickets in 34 overs)	131			
Fall of wickets: 1-22, 2-44, 3-56, 4-131				
Bowler O M R W				
Vaas	7	0	24	1
Malinga	7	0	31	0
Fernando	5	0	25	2
Herath	7	3	19	0
Muralitharan	7	2	22	1
Dilshan	1	0	5	0

Sachin not fit

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practice at the nets in his home city of Mumbai.

Tendulkar has scored 10,134 Test runs from 123 matches and needs just one more century to break into compatriot Sunil Gavaskar's world record of 34 Test hundreds.

Tendulkar is already the most successful one-day batsman in history with 13,642 runs from 348 matches with 38 centuries.

India are hoping Tendulkar will be fit for the rest of the season which includes Test series against Sri Lanka, Pakistan, England and the West Indies and a minimum of 33 one-dayers from late October to July.

"In almost every country teams have been hiring Brazilians and I don't think it is just a passing fashion," Ronaldinho told Reuters in an interview. "I think Brazilians do a good job and have brought good results with them so that makes them very interesting for teams like Barcelona and Real Madrid."

There was a time when having a Brazilian in your squad was a rarity, something of an exotic indulgence. Brazilians' famous "saudade", or yearning for home, made them, uncertain investments and many clubs preferred not to take the risk.

The success of Romario, Ronaldo and Rivaldo, however, all of whom played for Barcelona in the 1990s, helped to pave the way for an ever increasing number of their compatriots to make the move to Europe.

Not only were Brazilian players often available at a far lower price than European counterparts but their presence on the pitch was usually a guarantee of the sort of entertainment that would bring fans flocking to stadiums.

Juninho's influence at Middlesbrough was a prime example. The diminutive Brazilian became a hero on Teesside for his skill, commitment and dedication to the cause, even if the trophies did not materialise.

Ronaldinho has performed a

BUNDESLIGA Another 1-0 special

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich raced five points clear at the Bundesliga summit on Tuesday with a 1-0 win over Eintracht Frankfurt maintaining their 100 percent start to the season.

Peruvian substitute Paolo Guerrero scored the only goal of the game on 72 minutes as the champions extended their record run to 15 successive wins with six of them coming in the current campaign.

"Why do we always win 1-0? It is because the other teams build up barricades for us," answered Bayern goalkeeper Oliver Kahn. "Our run will come to an end at some stage but it could be in four or five games."

Werder Bremen had kept up with Bayern's ferocious early pace but the 2004 champions suffered a 2-1 loss at Borussia Monchengladbach to slip five points behind the leaders.

German international Frank Baumann scored a dreadful own goal on the hour mark to condemn Bremen to their first defeat of the season at the Nordpark Stadium.

Bayern were ravaged by injuries prior to the trip to Frankfurt with Michael Ballack, Claudio Pizarro and Owen Hargreaves all watching from the sidelines.

But while other teams cannot absorb the loss of such influential players, Bayern just called in another string of top stars with Iranian international Ali Karimi shining in Ballack's playmaker role.

Karimi went close to scoring himself in the first half and played a helping hand in the goal heading back Mehmet Scholl's cross for Guerrero to nod the ball home.

It was Bayern's third successive 1-0 victory in a row, following identical wins over Rapid Vienna and Hannover, and a maximum 18 points from six points is ominous for their title rivals.

Bremen looked to be on the road to victory when Belgian defender Jelle van Damme, on a season loan from English side Southampton, opened the scoring on 21 minutes.

But Gladbach rallied in the second period and Thomas Broich rifled in the equaliser on 53 minutes off the inside of the post.

Last season's runners-up Schalke 04 are now nine points behind Bayern and must win their game in hand against FC Nuremberg on Wednesday before Felix Magath's side disappear off the radar.

Brazil! Brazil!

Football

REUTERS, Barcelona

Clashes between Primera Liga giants Barcelona and Real Madrid will have a distinctly Brazilian flavour this season.

Barcelona, or "Brasilona" as some commentators have christened them, have six Brazilian-born players on their books including world player of the year Ronaldinho, defender Juliano Belletti and midfielder Deco, who hails from Sao Bernardo do Campo but now plays international football for Portugal.

Real have four in their squad - Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos, Julio Baptista and the spectacular youngster Robinho - and former national team boss Vanderlei Luxemburgo is in charge of the team. The nine-times European champions have also secured an option on Brazilian international defender Cicinho, who is expected to join the club from Sao Paulo during the January transfer window.

It is not just in Spain that Brazilians have made their mark; the Italian, German, English, French and Russian leagues have all looked to the South American country for new players.

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Ronaldinho has performed a

British Asians can play

Football

AFP, London

Young British Asians with hopes of playing professional football are being "discriminated out of the game" as a result of stereotyping, according to a report published on Wednesday.

The report, entitled "Asians Can Play Football", calls on the Football Association to instigate reforms aimed at provoking a "seismic shift" in the way in which youngsters of Asian origin are viewed.

There are only a handful of Britons of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage playing professional football in England and Fulham defender Zesh Rehman is the only British Asian to have established himself as a regular in the Premiership.

The under-representation of the Asian community in British football has been attributed to cultural influences, including a lack of interest in the sport and parental pressure on teenagers to concentrate on academic success.

But the report's authors argue

that these kind of factors have been overstated and that the inertia of the Football Association and leading clubs is also to blame.

"Within the Asian footballing community there is a feeling the FA as a governing body has failed successive generations of young talented footballers of Asian background," said Jas Bains, chairman of the Asians in Football Forum.

"The pitifully low numbers of Asian professionals, set against the huge interest and passion for the sport within the community, is symbolic of the way in which football has discriminated us out of the game through stereotyping and a lack of action to address this issue."

Simon Johnson, The FA's Director of Corporate Affairs, insisted the governing body had begun to address the issues raised in the report.

"All clubs want to find the best youngsters regardless of ethnicity," he said. "Many Asian youngsters now want to play top flight football so we are working hard together towards the same aim."

"If the top clubs are going to be able to develop more players from the Asian communities at the top level of the game, then we need to

widen the pool of talent from the Asian communities and ensure that they have access to more top quality coaching."

Premier League Clubs have been meeting with people who run Asian teams and Leagues, working on developing better links between community departments, academies and amateur teams, and working hard to gain the trust of local Asian communities.

A 2004 survey by the Commission for Racial Equality found that British Asians made up only 0.8 percent of players at top club's academies, the training centres used to produce professionals.

If the academies were representative of the British population as a whole, the figure would be closer to four percent.

Asians are also significantly under-represented as fans of both clubs and the England team and have struggled to break into management and other senior positions in the game -- a problem they share with members of other ethnic minorities.

And at the grass roots level, the report notes, "it is sad to report that a few all-Asian local football leagues still exist," because of racism.

'Iran the dark horse'

AFP, Tehran



Brazil, Argentina or Holland and not Germany are the teams best placed to scoop the World Cup in Germany next year, Iran's Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic told AFP.

But he also sees the Iranian team, among the first to qualify for a slot in Germany, as a major "spoiling" force who could give the big sides a run for their money.

"I think the favourites will be Brazil, Argentina, and Holland," Ivankovic told AFP in Tehran. "I do not believe in Germany. Although they have a good team, it is not a team to win the cup - they have a young team."

"If you want to win the cup you need stars, and the Germans do not have any stars except Ballack and Kahn," he said referring to Bayern Munich goalkeeper Oliver Kahn and playmaker Michael Ballack.

"We were better than them," Ivankovic insisted of Iran's friendly game against Germany in October 2004, even though the Germans won 2-0.

Since then, key Iranian players have been gaining crucial experience in the Bundesliga - Ali Karimi in Bayern Munich, Mehdi Mahdavia in Hamburg, and Vahid Hashemian in Hannover.

Iran erupted into mass festivities in July after earning a place in Germany. Iran has only ever played in the World Cup finals in 1978 and 1998.

"Believe we have a very good team which can upset the plans of the others, and it will progress even more as we get near to the World Cup," said 51-year-old Ivankovic, Iran's coach since 2002.

He acknowledged the football-crazy Islamic republic's side still needed more organisation - something he hopes to address with a hectic string of fixtures in the run-up to Germany 2006.

"I have opened up the team to the young. About fifteen players are between 21 and 25, and only two players are more than 30 years-old," he said, adding that veteran 36-year-old captain Ali Daei was still considered "the best for his job".

"Iranian players are not only quality players, but they are also full of enthusiasm," he says of his side.

"We will face South Korea and Thailand in October and we will try to play Brazil and Portugal, we are in discussions with Serbia and Croatia," he said of plans for friendlies before Iran takes up residence in Friedrichshafen.

"We would like very much to play against France, and if it happens in Tehran, it would be spectacular," he said.

For Ivankovic, the ideal result will be a World Cup final clash between Iran and his native Croatia - "with a victory of Croatia, unmerited, but a victory nevertheless".

After nearly five years working in Iran and often facing a hostile press, Ivankovic acknowledged that his "bags are always packed and ready" at his north Tehran apartment.

But he adds: "I never had any problems. When I'm in Europe, I try to explain the things here, I tell people that everything is normal here."

Iranian football, he says, will be "at a true international level in five to ten years time, if the country invests in the infrastructure."

"You know how many clubs there are in the whole of Iran? Just 150. That's fewer than in Paris."

similar role at Barcelona. Joining the Catalans in July 2003 from Paris St German when the club was in a crisis, he became the catalyst for their revival.

He scored 14 league goals in his first campaign and inspired the club to a 17-game unbeaten run which lifted them to second place in the title race. The following season he helped to guide them to their first league title in six years.

"I think Brazilians have a different style that attracts football fans and the public in general," says Ronaldinho.

"But what I think attracts teams most about Brazilians is that they can help bring trophies to the club. Brazilians are experiencing success and that is why doors are opening here in Europe."

Brazil and Barcelona team mate Belletti agreed. "It was different in the past, Brazilians came to Europe and couldn't adapt," he said.

"It was more difficult then, but now that Brazilians are helping their teams win trophies, that motivates them to sign more

Brazilians."

The success of the national team is another incentive for European clubs to look to Brazil. The five-times world champions have already booked their place in next year's World Cup and, unlike four years ago, they have qualified with ease.

Their spectacular attacking style and array of talent have already drawn comparisons with the great team that won the 1970 World Cup.

The latest high-profile Brazilian to make the switch to Europe is Robinho, the 21-year-old prodigy who helped to steer Santos to two Brazilian championships in 2002 and 2004.

With his dizzying "pedaladas" (step-overs) and limitless repertoire of ball skills, Real Madrid are hoping their new recruit will help them to win a first trophy in three seasons as well as allowing them to match Barcelona in the entertainment stakes.

"He's a huge player," said Ronaldinho. "He's a great friend and I wish him all the luck in the

world and hope he can go far."

Belletti sounded a note of caution, saying that a move to Europe was not always a guarantee of success.

"Robinho has the ingredients to be one of the best players in the world," he said. "He has personality, he is in the Brazil national team and now is at Real Madrid, but when Denilson came here he was in almost the same situation as many thought he could become the best player in the world."

Denilson, touted as one of the country's most talented players when he joined Real Betis for a world-record \$35 million in 1998, sank without trace in Spain and has recently been loaned out to French side Bordeaux in an attempt to resurrect his career.

"Robinho's advantage is that he has a Brazilian coach in Luxemburgo," said Belletti. "He knows him and he coached him before and the fact that he will play alongside people he knows like Ronaldo will also help him a lot."

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