

England's tour opener may be moved

CRICINFO, undated

The opening match of England's forthcoming tour to Pakistan could be switched from Rawalpindi to Lahore, following the devastating earthquake that struck in the north of the country on Saturday.

In the aftermath of the disaster, which has so far claimed upwards of 30,000 lives, the neighbouring city of Islamabad has been made a centre for the relief efforts, and there is the possibility that hotel rooms allocated to the cricket teams and entourage may be needed to house the homeless or provide a base for aid workers.

Richard Bevan, the chief executive of the Professional Cricketers' Association, was confident that the tour would go ahead as planned, but would wait for an update from security officials. "The situation... is very much monitored and managed by the security firm appointed by the ECB and the PCA," Bevan told Sportinglife.

"So in terms of what happened at the weekend, our security people have already written to us advising us that they are monitoring and liaising with the relevant authorities in Pakistan.

"I would imagine [the earthquake] is probably not going to have an effect on the tour," he added. "It may have some impact on the logistics, but again we won't know what our advice is on that for a few days. It may be something that can assist in the feelgood factor and helping Pakistan get back to normality."

Bevan added that he had spoken to the players, all of whom were happy about the procedures being put in place, while according to the Pakistan Cricket Board, the Rawalpindi stadium had suffered no structural damage during the tremors.

No play in Colombo

SPORTS REPORTER

The first day's play of the second four-day match between Bangladesh Development Squad (High Performance) and their Sri Lankan rivals was washed out without a ball being bowled at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo on Wednesday.

The visitors had lost their first four-day to Sri Lanka Development Squad by 202 runs.

Lara blames lack of match practice

CRICINFO, undated

Brian Lara, the West Indies batsman, has blamed his dreadful performance in the one-day matches of the Super Series on the lack of match practice.

Lara made 0, 5 and 0 in his three innings as Australia completely dominated the World XI to win the one-day series 3-0.

"I was short of competitive work," Lara was quoted as saying by the Sydney Morning Herald. "I hadn't played cricket since June against Pakistan, so it was always going to be tough coming up against the best team in the world and to get runs right away, especially in the one-day arena. With that behind me, and a couple more practice sessions and a version of the game I'm more comfortable with, Test cricket, I can get my act together. More of your natural ability comes out in Test cricket and I'm looking forward to it."

He felt the same applied to the World XI squad as well. "The guys here individually are very good players, they're great players," said Lara. "It's just the team concept -- it's always going to take us time. Hopefully we can do it in a Test match. The guys are going to be a little more composed. Your true character comes out in a Test."

"I've had many ups and downs in my career. I've worked really hard on my game throughout," added Lara. "Every time I go out into the middle I say I have to give 100 per cent, and I do."

Tigers rewarded

FROM PAGE 12 A total of 24 players have been working in the Beximco Group.

Ashrafui, who is an employee of Beximco, said, "In the last three years Beximco couldn't play well. But this year, we are playing for the championship (in the Corporate League)."

"We remain at the bottom of the ranking in cricket world. So we have to pull up Bangladesh from there and we are working on that. But in the last series in Sri Lanka, we showed disappointing performance," national coach Dav Whatmore said. The national cricketers, the team management and Beximco officials were present.

It'll be you, no you

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Shane Warne and Muttiah Muralitharan Wednesday each predicted the other would take 1,000 career Test wickets as they prepared to face off at the spin-friendly Sydney Cricket Ground.

Warne said he was relishing the prospect of the world's top four slow bowlers playing at the SCG and backed the World XI to reverse its dismal form against Australia in the six-day Test beginning Friday.

The Australian, who has taken a world record 623 wickets, predicted Sri Lanka's Muralitharan would be the first Test bowler to pass the 1,000-wicket mark.

"Look at him, he's young, he's fresh and he gets wickets all the time," Warne told reporters.

"I don't think there's any rivalry there. I'm just happy to hang onto it while I've got a little lead on him and I'm sure he'll catch that up pretty quick."

The Sri Lankan, on 563 Test wickets, said he doubted Warne would give up his crown easily.

"Shane is being modest, he can take 1,000 wickets because he's going to play for another five or six years," he said.

Warne said cricket fans were in for a spectacle when he, Australia teammate Stuart MacGill and the World XI's Muralitharan and Daniel Vettori were set loose on the SCG.

"I've always said the more spinners the better," Warne told reporters.

"I'm a little bit biased -- I think one of the great things in the game is seeing a batsman prepared to use his feet against a spin bowler... that and watching a fast bowler trying to knock someone's head off are the two most exciting things in cricket."

Warne joins an Australian team determined to continue its winning form that led to a 3-0 whitewash of the World XI in the one-day series in

Melbourne.

Warne defended the Super Series concept which has pitted a team of the world's best cricketers against Australia in one-day matches and the six-day Test starting on Friday.

He said he expected the World XI to bounce back from defeat.

"I expect a very, very good showing from these guys," he said. "I think it's going to be a good spectacle, playing the World XI versus the best side in the world."



SHANE WARNE (L) AND MUTTIHA MURALITHARAN

world is a great concept."

Warne was particularly wary of a Brian Lara backlash after the West Indian batsman scored only five runs and was skittled for two ducks in the one-day series.

"You don't keep players like Brian Lara down for long -- you don't make 0-5-0 when you're one of the great players," he said.

"It's a bit ominous for us, I suppose, going into the Test match. He can be pretty destructive on his day so we're probably not looking forward to that."

The Australian leg-spinner, who no longer plays one-day internationals, said the Test arena rewarded consistency in a way not always evident in the short form of the game.

"Obviously we're disappointed at the 3-0 result, we came here to win both series so it's make or break in the Test match," he said.

"Hopefully we can carry on that form we have in the one days and our batsmen can turn it around a little bit as well," he said.

The New Zealand spinner said it was impossible to say whether Warne or Murali was the game's best bowler.

"I'd hate to put anything between the two of them," he said. "You've got a spectacle here and we get to appreciate the two greatest spinners to ever play the game and Stuart and myself as well."

Adu's no to Ghana

AFP, Washington

Freddy Adu, the Ghana-born teen prodigy who became a US citizen in 2003, has no interest in playing for his African homeland in the 2006 World Cup, the Washington Post reported Tuesday.

Adu was overjoyed to learn Saturday that Ghana had qualified for its first World Cup, but the 16-year-old reserve forward for reigning Major League Soccer champion DC United told the Post he intends to play only for US national teams.

"If they asked me, I would have to say no," Adu said. "I made up my mind to play for the United States some day and I'm sticking to it. I'm very happy. It makes me feel great that Ghana made it. But this is where I play now."

Adu has dual citizenship and would have the option, if approved by FIFA, of playing for Ghana in Germany next year because he is under 21 and has never played for the US senior national squad.

Once Adu played for Ghana, however, he could never play for the US team.

"It's definitely tempting because I want to be at this World Cup so bad," Adu told the Post. "But I am going to stay with the United States."

Adu has a longshot hope of making next year's US World Cup squad, a veteran-laden team looking to improve upon a 2002 quarter-final run, but he would be a strong contender for a 2010 World Cup debut in South Africa.

Adu was born in 1989 and moved to suburban Washington eight years later, playing on the US under-17 team at the 2003 World Championships in Finland.

Zoro still finds 'em recists

AFP, Rome

Despite promises by the Italian football authorities to clamp down on racism, Serie A defender Marc Zoro says he constantly suffers "deplorable" insults because of the colour of his skin.

"I have been playing in Italy for three years and I see this happening almost daily, particularly when I'm in the north or the centre of the country, playing against clubs like Lazio, Roma, Verona and Treviso," the 21-year-old, who plays for Sicilian side Messina, told AFP on Wednesday.

"It happens less in the south of Italy, but I have problems all the time. All this makes me really sad. It's not easy for me and it hurts. I don't deserve this."

On the first day of this season, Messina played Lazio at Rome's Olympic stadium; Zoro, an Ivory Coast international, was subjected to monkey chants throughout the match.

His anger almost boiled over at the final whistle and he had to be restrained by his team-mates. Afterwards Lazio president Claudio Lotito went into the Messina dressing room to apologise on behalf of his club.

There was a similar outpouring of vitriol several weeks later when Messina visited Siena in Tuscany, where Zoro was roundly booed and jeered every time he touched the ball.

Asked whether initiatives like the European Week Against Racism in Sport - which runs from October 13 to 25 - could help eradicate the bigotry, Zoro said he thinks the issue runs too deep.

"It's a good thing, but the root of the problem is mentality; it's down to ignorance and a lack of sophistication. To shout racist insults and to throw things at the players is just savage behaviour. And sometimes it's even worse."

"(Ivory Coast born Lazio midfielder) Christian Manfredini is whistled by fans of his own club. If a fan loves his club, he can't have this kind of attitude."

Zoro was at a loss to explain why Italy has failed to deal with racism on the terraces, an offence which carries a possible jail sentence in England where the bigots have been driven away.

Rahul replacing

FROM PAGE 12 enough to play for a few years more and it does not matter if I am captain or not."

Ganguly's laboured six-hour 101 against Zimbabwe in Bulawayo was his first Test century since November 2003. He has scored 5,066 runs in 84 Tests with 12 hundreds.

He also has 10,123 one-day runs, only the fourth batsman after compatriot Sachin Tendulkar, Sri Lankan Sanath Jayasuriya and Pakistan's Inzamamul Haq to reach the five-figure mark in limited-overs cricket.

Blatter calls

FROM PAGE 12 and the majority of fans -- could not hope to earn a decade?" Blatter asked. A new FIFA taskforce was being formed to deal with "the kinds of excesses I have outlined", Blatter wrote, adding: "And I am confident that this initiative will bear fruit quickly and decisively."

Ailing Puskas going to sell everything

Football

REUTERS, London

Ferenc Puskas is to sell more than 100 personal mementos of his illustrious soccer career at a British auction next month.

Hungary's most famous sportsman, who scored 83 goals in 84 appearances for his country and helped them dominate world football in the 1950s, is suffering from a form of Alzheimer's disease and requires full-time medical attention.

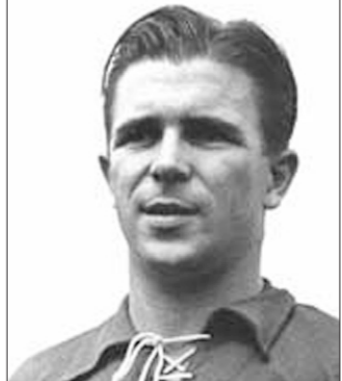
A recent charity match in Budapest between a Puskas XI and one of his former clubs, Real Madrid, to raise funds for his medical care reportedly resulted in a mere 7,000 pound (\$12,210) donation to his family.

Items going under the hammer at Bonhams in Chester on November 2 include the Golden Boot awarded to him for his world record goals tally, his 1954 World Cup runners-up medal and a shirt signed by Pele.

"We are expecting a great deal of interest," said Bonhams spokesman Rebecca Ruff. "It's sad that he is not in the best of health but this sale offers a unique opportunity for followers of

football."

Among the other items being sold by 78-year-old Puskas are his boots from the 1952 Olympic Games final in Helsinki and a montage of memorabilia from Hungary's historic 6-3 defeat of England at Wembley in 1953.



FERENC PUSKAS

The plight of Puskas came to light recently following the charity match in Budapest, in which Real Madrid were reportedly paid an appearance fee of 892,000 pounds (\$1.56 million).

The game had been intended to provide a trust fund for Puskas's wife Elizabeth to provide for his long-term care.

Newspaper reports said she has been left distressed while their daughter Aniko accused the organisers of "hijacking the name of Puskas" to get Real Madrid to Budapest.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter, a great admirer of Puskas, said the sport's world governing body would step in to help the ailing player.

Speaking in Wednesday's Daily Telegraph Blatter said: "We have already taken the decision to make a donation to Ferenc and Elizabeth Puskas. The only matter that is yet to be finalised is the amount."

"FIFA do not want to discuss the matter any further, and we are seeing it as a straightforward humanitarian situation that needs to be dealt with because of exceptional circumstances."

Puskas joined Real Madrid in 1958 as a 31-year-old and became part of the club's folklore when he scored four goals in the 7-3 demolition of Eintracht Frankfurt in the 1960 European Cup final.

Wome called Eto'o a liar

REUTERS, Milan



Pierre Wome, whose missed penalty cost Cameroon a place in the World Cup finals, says he could have been killed by fans after Saturday's match and that his family is now living under police protection.

Wome, who plays for Inter Milan, struck an injury-time penalty against the post in the qualifier against Egypt, leaving the game to finish 1-1 which allowed Ivory Coast to qualify for the finals ahead of Cameroon.

"It could have ended very badly indeed," Wome told the Italian news agency ANSA after returning to Inter's training camp on Tuesday. "They wanted to and could have killed me."

"Even though I am a tough lad and I have never been afraid of death, my concern was about the safety of my relatives," added Wome, who joined Inter from Bologna this season after playing in England for Fulham and in

Spain for Espanyol earlier in his career.

Wome said that some fans had mistakenly attacked vehicles they thought belonged to him and that his family in Cameroon were now being protected by police.

The defender disputed Cameroon captain Samuel Eto'o's version of Saturday's events in which the Barcelona forward said he had not taken the penalty because Wome wanted to convert it.

"I'm very angry with Eto'o because what he said isn't true," he said. "We did not talk on the pitch but I took into account that he and the captain didn't feel up to it so I went to take it myself given that I was on the list of penalty takers."

"No one wanted to take that penalty. No-one. Neither Eto'o nor our captain, because they knew what could have happened if they missed. I have always had the courage and I went to the spot."

Wome said that Cameroon had a list of three players who were design-

nated penalty takers -- himself, Eto'o and Chelsea midfielder Geremi who was suspended for Saturday's match.

"I knew it would be tough if I had missed. Apart from my own personal regret, I think about what happened in the whole of Cameroon. I also think of my relatives who live there."

"I thought about them a lot and before going back to the dressing room at the end of the match I asked the police how they were. They told me they would take care of my family's security."

"The fans have caused some damage to property but the most important thing is that my family is okay."

The left back said that he would consider continuing his career with the national team.

"I'll think about it. For now I'm just going to concentrate on where I am now. All the rest isn't important because I have seen many other similar, if not, worse situations. Always in Cameroon," he said.

Uruguay hold the edge

AFP, Montevideo



The tensions are mounting in some corners of the South American continent ahead of the final opportunity to secure the fifth and final World Cup ticket for Germany.

With four teams already qualified for the 2006 finals Uruguay, Colombia and Chile are vying to claim fifth spot in the group after the final round of matches which would land them a play-off place against Australia.

Only a point separates the three countries who are hoping to join Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Ecuador.

Australia won the Oceania group and with no direct qualification must play-off against the South America zone fifth placed team.

Whoever that turns out to be may be causing some concern Down Under, especially if it turns out to be Uruguay. Uruguay, who currently occupy

fifth place in the 10-team group on 22 points, would initially appear to have the hardest task but on second glance their home advantage against group winners Argentina could prove decisive.

Very few teams go to the Uruguayan capital and come away with the points.

Early on in the campaign Uruguay, coached by Jorge Fossati, succumbed to two shock home defeats, by Venezuela (0-3) and Peru (1-3) a few months later.

But since then, the team which has notched up five wins and seven draws from their 17 games so far have given little to their visitors at the Centenario stadium.

World champions Brazil were held to a 1-1 draw in Montevideo back in March and their last match at home ended in a 3-2 defeat for Colombia.

Fossati is adamant they are going out to grab their chance.

"We have the capacity to go out, square up to and beat Argentina," he declared, although he will be hoping

his players are sufficiently fired up after their scoreless draw away to Ecuador at the weekend.

Colombia are sixth in the table on 21 points and hoping their already qualified hosts Paraguay step off the gas in Asuncion.

Colombia coach Reinaldo Rueda was raging after his team let slip a 1-0 lead against Chile last weekend to finally end up sharing the spoils with their fellow hopefuls.

"We had the match in our hands and we let it slip," he lamented.

"We have to go and do in Paraguay what we failed to do here. Just as everyone predicted, it has all come down to the final game."

Chile coach Nelson Acosta, a Uruguayan, was somewhat more philosophical over his team's chances ahead of their hosting of Ecuador.

"We're going out to win obviously, but our fate depends on a few other results."

ACC plans special 'ODI' Cricket stands by quake victims

AGENCIES, undated

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is launching a global appeal to help raise money for victims of the Pakistan earthquake.

The ICC, which organised charity matches to raise funds of last year's Asian tsunami, said it was kick-starting the appeal with a donation of 500,000 US dollars.

President Ehsan Mani, who hails from Rawalpindi, one of the areas affected by the earthquake, also announced a global appeal would be held on Saturday, coinciding with the second day of the Super Test between Australia and the Rest of the World.

"In matters such as this, where our member countries have been so directly and critically affected, it is vital that the ICC and cricket uses its influence to be a force for good," he said.

ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed said the council had considered a proposal from Pakistan fast bowler Shoab Akhtar to stage a special relief match but decided instead to base the fundraising around this week's super Test, featuring the world's best play-

ers. "We believe that's the best way that cricket can show its remorse, can show the people of the countries that have been affected that we're thinking of them," Speed told a news conference.

"We're concerned to do whatever we can to ease the suffering at this terrible time and he's (Akhtar) happy and appreciative of the approach we've taken."

Speed said giving the money to the Australian Red Cross and asking fans to contribute to an aid appeal on the second day of the Test were the best way to raise funds.

Previous specially-organised matches to raise funds for victims of the December 26 tsunami disaster raised 11 million US dollars in Australia and 710,000 US dollars in New Zealand.

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq thanked the ICC for the donation and urged cricket lovers to support aid efforts in his homeland.

"There is no food, nothing, it's a very bad condition and millions of people are affected," he said.

Australian spinner Shane Warne,

who toured Sri Lanka after the tsunami, said international cricketers were eager to help following the latest disaster, which relief agencies believe may have claimed as many as 40,000 lives.

"When you see that devastation it really does touch you and I'm just happy to play my part," he said.

Meanwhile, the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) has decided to hold a one-day international match in aid of the India and Pakistan earthquake victims.

ACC president Jagmohan Dalmiya announced that the details of the match -- venue and date -- would be revealed in the next week.

"The date of the match would be decided shortly after looking into the tour arrangements of the Test playing countries," he said.

Dalmiya added that the entire proceeds from the match would be donated to the quake victims.

"We will also be approaching the ICC to accord official status to the match once the details are finalised," he said.

Players loving Argentine

FROM PAGE 12

Now we are working on corrections. Still it's too early to say anything. They need more time.

"The Myanmar tournament is part of our preparation. I'll take it as a scope to experiment and test things. It's not that we don't want to win because it is a prestige issue but I will use this tournament to build a team for the SAFF Championship in December and the Asian Cup qualifiers against Pakistan in November. Those are my prime targets. I believe if the boys work like this, we have a good future."

Talking about his strength, Cruciani said he has a good problem of having players of the same level.

"We have six strikers who have all impressed me. As a senior member, Alfaz has done a very good job in three weeks, especially in fitness. He is a very intelligent player and has performed with the enthusiasm of a young player."

"Actually, I want a balanced team with a very strong defence, a creative midfield and efficient strikers, not just strong in one area. I am also working on changing the players' old habits like positioning, movement, concept. They need to use expand the field and switch ends and have to cover the gap when one goes to attack.

"I have seen players not willing to shoot long range in league matches. But they are now doing that. There are many who are able to do that. They just have to get habituated to shoot for goal."

"I have told the boys not to go for crosses. They should pass back from flanks and others have to come for those balls. We don't have any tall strikers or

any one with good headwork. If you play against Pakistan, their tall defenders will win in the air."

Cruciani defended his decision to go with a flat-four backline.

"Two central defenders are enough. I will keep only three in the final list. It's not my idea to play with three centre-backs. I think it's necessary to play with a wide field. When you play with three, you leave big spaces and that can be very dangerous. One fullback will be attacking at a time, like Brazil and France."

Cruciani also took the opportunity to criticise former Argentine coach Marcelo Bielsa's strategy of using three centre-backs in the last World Cup. "Brazil's Scolari used three centre-backs with Cafu and Carlos on the sides but the difference was they had players like Ronaldo, Ronaldinho and Rivaldo up front."

The coach will announce a 24-member squad for the Myanmar meet within a week and he will reduce it to 20 for the Asian Cup home and away qualifiers against Pakistan.

Assistant coach Jobair Nipu said that having a trainer for the first time has been a great help.

"We had done these things in a haphazard manner in the past. Now we know what a trainer can do to enhance fitness level. He has introduced weight training, which is a totally new thing to most of our players. I should start for a player when he is 16 but most of our boys have not done it even in their 20s. He (Cruciani) likes ground passing and playing with minimum touch, not hanging around with the ball. It's new to

the players. They have to adapt to it and move altogether while going up and defending. To do that, they need more stamina and more running. I can see that everyone is trying extra hard to win his position in the side."

Nesta operated upon

AFP, Rome

AC Milan's Alessandro Nesta underwent surgery on his injured left hand on Wednesday.

The Italy international first complained of the injury after AC Milan's Champions League game away to Schalke 04 on September 28.

He wore heavy strapping on his wrist during Italy's 1-0 win over Slovenia last Saturday - a victory which sealed World Cup qualification - and on his return from Palermo AC Milan's medical staff revealed he had ruptured tendons in his left hand.

The Italian press had earlier suggested Nesta's injury came as a result of playing too many video games, much to the amusement of the 29-year-old central defender.

"I must admit I was surprised by the theory that my passion for video games caused the injury," he told AC Milan's official website. "Frankly, I don't believe that the two are related, especially as it's only a hobby."

Nesta is expected to be ruled out for up to four weeks.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Web site language
5 Jack
9 Neutral color
12 Mideast gulf
13 Shankar genre
14 Actress
21 Wisner
24 Court bench
25 Imperfection
26 Source of a fat lip?
30 Airport schedule abbr.
31 Singer
32 "Norma"
33 Humiliated
35 Houston acronym
36 Basmal, e.g.
37 Less
38 Punish, in a way
40 Chutzpah
42 Twitch
43 Swarm
48 Mimic
49 Responsibility
50 Unyield