

Taibu forced into hiding

CRICINFO

The seriousness of the struggle for power inside Zimbabwe became all too clear with the news that Tatenda Taibu, the country's captain, was forced into hiding last night after receiving threats from an individual known to have close links to both Zimbabwe Cricket and Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF party.

Yesterday, Taibu had been involved in a press conference where almost all Zimbabwe's players had lambasted the performance of the board and warned that unless there were changes, there could be another strike.

In the evening it is understood that Taibu took a call at home from a known hardliner which left him shaken. The Sports and Recreation Commission moved Taibu, his wife, Loveness, and their four-week old baby to a hotel for their safety and he is now staying with friends.

That the players called the media conference to support claims made against Zimbabwe Cricket by leading administrators left Peter Chingoka, the ZC chairman, and his board isolated.

The players flagged contentious matters such as player contracts, the funding of the players' representative and players' safety after the pitch invasion by Mashonaland officials at a league game at Harare Sports Club. Despite the incident being reported to ZC, no action has been taken against those responsible.



THE SMILE TELLS IT ALL Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Parreira (L) smiles at reporters while captain Cafu looks on during a press conference in Abu Dhabi on Friday. Brazil play UAE in a friendly today.

A five-star friendly menu

Football

AP, London

Some of the biggest teams in soccer will start their preparation for next year's World Cup finals on Saturday.

World Cup host and three-time champions Germany play at France in a friendly, while the Netherlands host Italy and five-time winners Brazil visit the United Arab Emirates.

The matches will be played the same day that 10 other teams fight for the final five World Cup berths in the first match of their two-leg playoffs. Spain, the Czech Republic, Turkey and two-time champions Uruguay are among the teams still trying to reach the finals.

France, who beat Costa Rica 3-2 in Fort-de-France, Martinique, will barely have had time to recover before playing Germany at Stade de France.

The 1998 champions trailed 2-0 before coming back for the win Wednesday. France coach Raymond Domenech called it "a catastrophic first half."

Nicolas Anelka, however, marked his return from three years away from the national team with France's first goal.

Germany will play Saturday's match without central defender Christoph Metzelder, who has a back injury. But captain Michael Ballack has recovered from a thigh bruise.

Netherlands coach Marco van Basten has a long injury list ahead of his team's match against Italy.

Mark van Bommel, who hadn't initially been called up, tore ligaments in his ankle after a collision with George Boeteng in training.

"I've repeated many times that I don't have any problem with Mark," Van Basten said. "George slipped, this is unfortunate for him as well. But you know these kind of things can happen, soccer is a contact sport."

Forward Ruud van Nistelrooy will also miss the match because of a rib injury, while defenders Nigel de Jong and Khalid Boulahrouz have minor injuries but are expected to play.

Italy coach Marcello Lippi picked Massimo Oddo in defense and Livorno goalkeeper Marco Amelia got his first call up.

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira plans to test out players on his Middle East trip. Brazil play the United Arab Emirates on Saturday and a Kuwaiti select team on Tuesday.

Lyon striker Fred -- called up to replace the injured Ronaldo and Ricardo Oliveira -- and FC Barcelona defender Edmílson will get a chance to play.

"Edmílson will play at least 45 minutes in one game and 45 minutes in the other," Parreira told the Folha de S. Paulo newspaper. "Fred also will play at least a half. I want to observe them."

Edmílson, who helped Brazil win a record fifth World Cup in Japan, will return to the national team for the first time in more than a year. The defender was sidelined from Barcelona for eight months after rupturing ligaments in his left knee.

Other Brazilian stars in the squad include Adriano, Robinho, Kaka, and FIFA World Player of the Year Ronaldinho.

In another match, the United States visits Scotland for the first time since 1952, when the Scots won 6-0.

The United States has reached its fifth straight World Cup while the Scots again failed to qualify.

United States coach Bruce Arena has been forced to leave out some big names as the team plays its 20th game of the year. Starters Eddie Pope, Bobby Convey, Eddie Lewis and Chris Albright will all miss the match.

That means Benny Feilhaber, Heath Pearce and Chris Rolfe could earn their first senior appearance.

"Despite the fact we've had a rash of injuries and some conflicts with clubs, we feel this game is an excellent test for our veteran players in Europe as well as some new players in the team," said Arena, whose squad has a blend of European and domestic-based players.

"We have a solid group and are looking forward to the challenge."

Also Saturday, it's: Finland vs Estonia; Portugal vs Croatia; Bulgaria vs Georgia; Liechtenstein vs Macedonia; Ivory Coast vs Romania; and South Korea vs Sweden.

England won their last tour to Pakistan in 2000 thanks to a six-wicket victory in near-darkness in Karachi, which some Pakistan players described as a farce.

Inzamam said he did not foresee any problems with England's use of substitutions, which caused a row with Australia during the recent Ashes series and was discussed at the captains' meeting in Sydney last month.

"There was lot of discussion held on the substitution of players and players coming off the field for breaks. I think the ICC (International Cricket Council) is very clear about this issue and the umpires are there to govern the game properly," he said.

They have not won a Test series at home since a victory over South Africa in 2003 and they have lost two and drawn three out of their last five series.

England will be relieved that they are not walking into any spin trap in Multan as the Test surface is dry and hard and curator Agha Zahid assured it would be a good Test wicket.

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ENGLAND (from): Marcus Trescothick (Capt), Andrew Strauss, Ian Bell, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff, Kevin Pietersen, Geraint Jones, Matthew Prior, Ashley Giles, Shaun Udal, Steve Harmison, Matthew Hoggard, James Anderson, Liam Plunkett and Alex Loudon.

PAKISTAN (from): Inzamamul Haq (Capt), Salman Butt, Shoaib Malik, Younis Khan, Mohammar Yousuf, Asim Kamal, Hasan Raza, Kamran Akmal, Shahid Afridi, Shoaib Akhtar, Mohammad Sami, Rana Naved, Shabbir Ahmed, Mushtaq Ahmed, Danish Kaneria and Arshad Khan.

Umpires: Simon Taufel (Aust) and Billy Bowden (New Zealand)

No controversy, please

Cricket

REUTERS, Multan

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq is looking forward to a controversy-free tour by England after previous series have been marked by acrimonious incidents.

"We are not interested in getting involved in any controversies," Inzamam said on the eve of the first Test on Friday. "Our complete focus is on cricket. Whatever acrimony has happened in the past is history for us."

"Players of both sides are mature people and know what is expected of them. I think the people want to see a good hard fought cricket series and no controversies," he added.

Test series between the two countries have historically been prone to controversy, starting in 1974 when Pakistan alleged the pitch condition had been changed during a match at Lords in which England left-arm spinner Derek Underwood took 8-51.

In 1987, there was the infamous finger-wagging confrontation between England captain Mike Gatting and Pakistani umpire Shakoor Rana at Faisalabad.

A day's play was lost when the umpires refused to continue the match until Gatting apologise.

When Pakistan toured England in 1992, former pace bowlers Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis were accused of tampering with the ball to gain

accept the change and FIFA ruled on Wednesday that the match would be played at 1800.

The Uruguayans are themselves unhappy that Australia are preparing for the match in neighbouring Argentina.

Australia claim they were spat at by Uruguayan fans when they arrived in Montevideo in 2001 and have been assured they will not have to transfer through the public areas of the airport this time.

"If there was some hostility then and it makes them so afraid, then the truth is they are not ready for this type of game," said Uruguay coach Jorge Fossati.

In the Caribbean, Trinidad & Tobago face Bahrain with both countries dreaming of their first appearance in the finals.

Trinidad goalkeeper Shaka Hislop summed up what the playoffs mean for his small nation when he told Reuters if they qualified it would be one of the biggest events in the country's history.

"I'm sure there will be street parties. It would be a special time in our history. It would be amazing."

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PREVIEW: ARGENTINA V ENGLAND

A no holds barred contest

Football

REUTERS, Geneva

How to contain two of the strongest attacks at the 2006 World Cup will be the main concern of the coaches when Argentina face bitter rivals England in a friendly in Geneva on Saturday.

Argentina coach Jose Pekerman may try a raw debutant in the defensive midfield position while Sven-Goran Eriksson is poised to further test Ledley King in the same role for England.

Martin Demichelis could win his first cap at the relatively mature age of 24 after shining as a holding midfielder for Bayern Munich this season.

If Demichelis plays he is likely to be supported by an experienced Argentine back line containing Javier Zanetti, Roberto Ayala, Walter Samuel

and captain Juan Pablo Sorin. Zanetti should win his 102nd cap after last playing in the Confederations Cup final against Brazil in Germany in June.

Juan Roman Riquelme should dictate the attacking moves from central midfield with Maxi Rodriguez to his right and Esteban Cambiasso on the left. All three will be looking to cement a place at their first World Cup.

There are doubts up front over the fitness of Hernan Crespo so Julio Cruz will hope for another chance after missing out in 2002.

With teenage prodigy Lionel Messi suspended, Javier Saviola and Carlos Tevez are competing for the role of support striker.

Tottenham Hotspur's King, who looks to have shrugged off a knee problem, impressed Eriksson in England's last qualifier against Poland last month in a role that frees Frank

Lampard to press forward. A central defender by trade, King would play in front of a strong back line where Eriksson has to choose between three top centre halves, Rio Ferdinand, Sol Campbell and John Terry.

For his form over the past two years, Terry is an obvious pick while Campbell looks to be back to his authoritative best after a prolonged spell of injuries. Significantly, the pair were Eriksson's first choice for last month's decisive qualifier against Austria.

Ferdinand, who came on as a substitute in that game after an injury to Campbell, has probably not done quite enough to convince the coach he has rediscovered top form.

However, as Terry's place at the World Cup is all but assured, Eriksson may want to see if Campbell and Ferdinand can repeat their excellent displays at the 2002 tournament.

With first-choice left back Ashley Cole out through injury, Eriksson must choose between Wayne Bridge of Chelsea, who has played only an hour's football since breaking an ankle in February, and West Ham United's Paul Konchesky, who has only played once for England.

If Eriksson decides to do without a holding midfielder, Joe Cole will probably keep his place on the left. David Beckham returns from a one-match ban to captain England for the 50th time.

Michael Owen, the scourge of Argentina in their last two meetings, winning the penalty that Beckham converted for a 1-0 victory in the 2002 World Cup and scoring a wonder goal in 1998 that did not ultimately see England through, will almost certainly line up in attack with Wayne Rooney, a new threat for the South Americans.

Thanks but no thanks, says Maradona

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

World Cup winner Diego Maradona said on Thursday he had turned down an offer to work with the Argentine national team.

"I don't think it's the best moment to join the team," Maradona said in a radio interview.

"I want to make it clear that I don't want to get in anyone's way."

His decision came after speculation over what his role would be and whether he would be stepping on the toes of Argentina coach Jose Pekerman.

Maradona met Argentina Football Association (AFA) president Julio Grondona last week to discuss a possible position.

Grondona said in a radio interview last Friday that Maradona had been incorporated into the national team staff and he saw him as a future Argentina coach.

Maradona, a member of Argentina's 1986 World Cup winning side, made a dramatic recovery after undergoing drugs rehabilitation last year and a gastric bypass operation in Colombia in March.

He works as a director of Boca Juniors and also hosted a weekly television show, which ended last week.

Vaughan-less

FROM PAGE 12

matches for us," he said. Kaneria made his Test debut against England in 2000 without much success but has since taken 132 wickets in 28 Tests.

Pakistan are looking at the series to redeem their reputation at Test level as, unlike their one-day form and ranking, their performances in the five-day code have been unsatisfactory for two years.

They have not won a Test series at home since a victory over South Africa in 2003 and they have lost two and drawn three out of their last five series.

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India, Lanka

FROM PAGE 12

We have a dilemma over whom to leave out rather than whom to bring in," he said.

The Proteas are set to arrive in Mumbai in the early hours of Saturday to engage the hosts in a best-of-five limited-overs international series starting at Hyderabad on November 16.

Chappell was not too concerned about the lack of a big innings from team vice captain Virender Sehwag who has not scored a half century in the series despite getting solid starts in almost every match.

Owen exudes confidence

REUTERS, London



Striker Michael Owen says England would have nothing to fear from Brazil if they had to face the holders at next year's World Cup.

Brazil, who beat England 2-1 in the 2002 quarter-finals, are even bigger favourites for 2006 since the emergence of forwards Adriano and Robinho in a side that already has the likes of Ronaldo and Ronaldinho up front.

"I certainly don't see them as unbeatable," Owen, who scored England's goal against Brazil in 2002, told reporters during preparations for Saturday's friendly against Argentina.

"I've no fear of playing any top teams. They've got some cracking players and if you asked the world who were going to win it, they'd come out."

"But if we played against them we wouldn't fear them at all. We'd respect them and they've got some of the best attacking players in the world. But we've got some of the best centre halves in defence in the world."

"And if we can nullify their attacking players, I'd always fancy us scoring a goal against them."

England's strength in central defence, where John Terry, Rio Ferdinand, Sol Campbell and Jonathan Woodgate are competing for places, is balanced by an attacking threat led by Wayne Rooney and Owen.

Fuelling hopes of World Cup glory in Germany, 40 years after their only previous triumph, Owen rates England's 2006 side as better than those of 2002 and 1998.

"They're such good players," he said. "The standard in training is unbelievable."

Owen would have none of the hand-wringing and questioning of mental strength that has accompanied England's recent tournament exits -- at the 1998 World Cup and

Euro 2004 on penalties. "I look at things from other people's point of view. How do Spain, Italy and other teams in our bracket feel?"

"It's not right for us to think we've got a deficiency because we lost a penalty shoot out."

"We think we're the only ones that exist, the only ones that can have this big disappointment and that no-one else can feel as low as we feel. But there's only one winner."

Owen also claims that Sven-Goran Eriksson's squad is stronger than the expensively-assembled Galacticos of Real Madrid.

Owen, who returned to the Premiership with Newcastle United three months ago following a one-year spell with the Spanish giants, believes that the players currently at Eriksson's disposal are good enough to make England serious challengers for the World Cup in Germany next

summer. And the former Liverpool striker insists that an England squad including the likes of Rooney, David Beckham and Frank Lampard would be more than a match for the star-studded array of talent at Madrid.

Owen said: "There are some fantastic players in the Real Madrid squad and you can't deny that the four or five so-called 'Galacticos' are real world-beaters."

"But the rest of the Madrid squad isn't a patch on what we have within the England squad at the moment and there is certainly more depth in this group of players."

"Madrid may have ten or eleven world-class players, but I think that when you go beyond that lot, the standard of player underneath that group doesn't match what we have in this England squad."



MICHAEL OWEN

Davenport stays top

Sharapova in last four

Tennis

AP, Los Angeles

Lindsay Davenport lost to Maria Sharapova at the WTA Championships, yet still won.

Davenport got help from Amelie Mauresmo, who beat Elena Dementieva, to clinch the year-end No. 1 ranking for the fourth time in her career.

"It is a really, really bizarre feeling to put your fate in other people's hands," she said. "It is hard to really cheer for someone else to lock something up for me."

By the time Mauresmo won 6-2, 6-3 just before midnight PST Thursday, Davenport was already gone from Staples Center with her husband. But she left knowing that her top ranking was probably safe.

"It is great," she said. "A year ago, I wouldn't have thought it was possible." Davenport brought a 155-point lead over No. 2 Kim Clijsters into this week, but the Belgian needed to make the semifinals to overtake Davenport.

Clijsters had lost twice going into Friday's final round-robin match, and Mauresmo's victory ensured her elimination.

Davenport, Sharapova, Mauresmo and Mary Pierce advanced to Saturday's semifinals of the season-ending tournament, being played for the last time in the United States before moving to Spain next year.

With the four berths locked up, Friday's matches are virtually meaningless except for deciding the semifinal pairings. Sharapova beat Davenport 6-3, 5-7, 6-4, the 18-year-old Russian's first

victory over a highly ranked player since July, when she defeated Nadia Petrova in the quarterfinals at Wimbledon.

"I played smart tennis," she said. "I took out her strengths. It was exciting to beat someone who's been playing such amazing tennis. I'm very, very happy about it."

Sharapova has been bothered by a "She is a little bit dramatic when she wins and it takes her a while to get to the net," Davenport said.

Sharapova served for the match at 5-4 in the second set. But she netted a forehand to get broken, then Davenport won the final two games to force a third set in front of an announced crowd of 6,111.

Sharapova earned the only break of the third in the fifth game with a forehand winner. Davenport saved three break points to hold trailing 4-3. She saved a match point to hold at 5-4, and had a break point when Sharapova double-faulted in the next game.

But Davenport committed two straight errors before Sharapova's 13th ace won the match.

"It just came down to one break," Davenport said. "I had my chance. I was getting a little bit tired and I didn't feel my serve was accurate."

Sharapova won only five more points and had three more winners than Davenport, with both women committing 31 unforced errors.

Davenport finished 2-1 in round-robin play, and will get Friday off. Sharapova is 2-0, with one match remaining.

"It was a bizarre feeling walking out because I knew before the match I was in," Davenport said. "There was really nothing for me to play for. When I got close to losing, finally the pride hit me and I got going."

Patty Schnyder of Switzerland defeated Petrova of Russia 6-0, 5-7, 6-4, but both women were eliminated by Sharapova's victory.

Schnyder finished 1-2, and Petrova fell to 0-2 playing the championships for the first time, with one match left.

Typical Tyson!

REUTERS, Sao Paulo (Brazil)

It doesn't pay to tangle with Mike Tyson, a Brazilian reporter has learned.

The former heavyweight boxing champion lost his patience when a reporter-cameraman tried to film him at a nightclub early on Thursday, Sao Paulo police said.

"He asked him to stop and he didn't stop. He got up, took the camera, destroyed the tape and damaged the equipment," district police chief Roberto Calassa said.

Police detained Tyson for questioning and later released him.

Reporter Carlos Mello said the ex-champ hit him in the head but police said he needed a medical test to prove it.

"We doubt he was hit because everyone knows Mike Tyson's punch and the reporter didn't seem to have a wound," Calassa said.

Tyson, 39, was making news in Brazil on his way home from Argentina, where he was a guest on former soccer star Diego Maradona's talkshow.

Cruciani for less

FROM PAGE 12
the Pakistani port city Karachi to defend their SAFF title.

Cruciani tried to make sure the footballers understood the necessity of avoiding carbohydrate to improve their fitness level.

"I realised after the Myanmar trip that the players have only reached halfway through to my expected fitness level. They need a diet where there will be no carbohydrate. It would mean they have to stop eating their favourite items, like rice, bread and spicy dishes," Cruciani told reporters.

"As I have said earlier, they need to change habits and especially food. They can eat as many noodles as they want. This is time to change because they will go through a hectic and hard schedule to get as near as possible of the expected fitness level," he said.

"Apart from fitness, the players need to shift their full focus to the SAFF Championship. They must prepare for the challenge and know what their responsibilities are."

Cruciani's boys will return to Dhaka on weekends to play practice matches, against Mohammedan Sporting Club on November 17 and Muktiyoddha Sangsad on November 24. Both the matches are expected to be played at the Army Stadium.

They will play their last warm-up game at the end of the camp but the opponents are yet to be finalised as Abahani might not be available in early December due to National League commitments. Either the Under-20 national team or a team comprising Dhaka-based foreign booters will be playing the Pakistan bound team, it was learned.

BWLSA workshop

FROM PAGE 12
Tariquzaman Nannu presented a paper on '