

PCB appeals against ban on Shabbir

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan are confident they can get paceman Shabbir Ahmed's one-year suspension overturned after filing an appeal with the International Cricket Council (ICC).

"The appeal has been filed behalf of Shabbir," the Pakistan Cricket Board's director of operations, Saleem Altaf told Reuters on Saturday.

"The ICC will now inform us about the date for hearing his appeal and I will be accompanying (Shabbir) as a representative of the board as per rules allowed by the ICC," Altaf said.

The Pakistani paceman became the first bowler to be banned for one year because of an illegal bowling action after he was reported twice in the last seven months by ICC match officials.

Shabbir was suspended on Monday after an independent assessment of his action carried out by the University of Western Australia confirmed he had an illegal action.

Altaf said Shabbir, who has taken 51 wickets in 10 Tests and 33 in 32 one-dayers, stood no chance of being available for next month's home series against India.

"We feel we have a strong case to appeal the ban but even if the ICC upholds our appeal I think Shabbir will still have to undergo a rehabilitation process," he said.

Hanzala-Hasan pair lifts title

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Hanzala and Zahed Hasan won the title in the Fazle Sobhan Bangladesh Bridge Federation National Pairs Championship which concluded yesterday at the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute.

The winners collected 298.63 points while Mobinul Islam and RM Siddique finished as first runners-up with 292.80 points.

Bani Amin and Jamilur Rahman were third runners-up.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan distributed prizes as chief guest at the concluding ceremony of the two-day meet. Bangladesh Bridge Federation president Al Amin Chowdhury and Bangladesh Enterprise Institute president Farooq Sobhan were also present.

Yorkshire gets

FROM PAGE 12 contemplate moving to a new, purpose-built, ground at Wakefield, near Leeds, only to have the plan collapse when the Headingley owners pointed out they would be in breach of their lease.

Headingley, where one of the main stands backs on to the Leeds rugby league ground of the same name, is one of English cricket's most historic venues.

But there have been complaints that its facilities are not up to the standards expected by modern spectators.

Despite not owning the ground Yorkshire have redeveloped Headingley in recent years amidst fears that international fixtures could be lost to Durham's Riverside and Hampshire's Rose Bowl grounds.

Those fears were brought into focus earlier this year when Headingley, for all its history, did not stage a Test match during England's Ashes series against Australia.

Yorkshire have plans to further increase the capacity from its current 17,000 to 20,000 with work on the Grandstand and at the Kirkstall Lane end.

Samabesh

FROM PAGE 12 59th minute, thanks to Mostafa's schoolboy-like goalkeeping. The Rangamati custodian lost a harmless cross by Tanvir from his grip and a lurking Amin Rana just headed the ball in from close.

Rangamati, run ragged by their mighty opposition, almost equalised three minutes later but Mamun's powerful header from five yards was parried by goalkeeper Titu.

A Red storm swelled the Rangamati goal in the next ten minutes but Saiful and Jeremiah missed clear-cut chances before Odaka doubled the lead in the 73rd minute. The Nigerian, who took the ball from Saiful, sent a low drive into the far post from 15 yards and four minutes later, scored his second with another clinical finish after Jeremiah's hard work down the middle.

Odaka's treble came in the last minute of the four-minute stoppage time with a brilliant solo effort that needed a touch of luck. The tall medio raced past two defenders down the left flank but found himself at an acute angle. However, he was fortunate to see his powerful left-footer, intended to find a fellow Muktiyoddha player behind him, take a deflection of Rangamati Mohammedan defender Jet and roll over the line.

Abahani forward Bulbul slotted the first hatrick of the tournament in their 5-1 win over Feni Soccer Club.

New African colours in WC



AFP, Johannesburg

The African football guard changed dramatically in 2005 with minnows Angola and Togo reaching the World Cup while giants Cameroon and Nigeria missed out.

Ivory Coast and Ghana also clinched places at the international showpiece for the first time while Senegal and South Africa were other favoured nations left to heal wounds.

Only in one of the five qualifying groups did the form book prove a reliable guide as Tunisia pipped Morocco after an intriguing 10-round struggle between the North African powerhouses.

But it was Angola, a former Portuguese colony in the south-west of the continent best known for a three-decade civil war, who stole the show by eliminating star-studded Nigeria.

Like several other nations, the Nigerian Super Eagles seemingly believed they had a divine right to be present at the World Cup having appeared at the previous three editions.

An early loss in Angola could have been overcome had the Eagles won the return match, but the visitors came from behind to draw in Abuja and establish a critical

head-to-head advantage.

Fears that the Black Antelopes of Angola would lose their nerve proved unfounded with a convincing home triumph over Gabon followed by a late victory at bottom-of-the-table Rwanda.

Nigeria finished in style under caretaker coach Austin Eguavoen, drilling five goals each past Algeria and Zimbabwe, but the west Africans were left to rue two dropped points in Rwanda.

There will be a Nigerian presence at the World Cup in Germany as Stephen Keshi, fired as an assistant coach of the Super Eagles after a third-place finish to the 2002 African Nations Cup, coaches Togo.

Dismissed as outsiders in a pool containing 2002 World Cup giantkillers Senegal plus 2004 Nations Cup semifinalists Mali, Togo lost their opener in Zambia then went nine matches unbeaten.

Much of the credit must go to former Nigeria defensive stalwart Keshi, who moulded a group of virtual unknowns into a combative unit inspired by consistent scorer Emmanuel Adebayor.

The Hawks came from behind twice in Senegal to snatch a price-less point, hammered Liberia at home, and sealed top spot with a win in Congo after once again trailing twice.

Ivory Coast have produced many fine footballers down the years, but only had a shock 1992 Nations Cup success in Senegal to boast about until this year.

Didier Drogba and Aruna Dindane formed a dynamic strike force, but a couple of losses to serial World Cup qualifiers Cameroon threatened to leave the Ivorians at home.

However, Cameroon were held at home by Egypt in the final round after failing to convert a stoppage-time penalty and Ivory Coast won handsomely in Sudan to sneak through.

Ghana have lifted the Nations Cup a record-equaling four times, but former greats like Abedi 'Pele' Ayew and Tony Yeboah never came close to reaching the World Cup.

Ghana beat South Africa at home and away and finished in style, firing four goals past Cape Verde Islands without reply.

Roger Lemerre, coach of defending champions France at the 2002 World Cup, will be there again next year after masterminding the success of Tunisia.

The Frenchman has added mental steel to the Carthage Eagles, who trailed twice at home in the decider against Morocco before forcing a 2-2 draw that maintained a one-point advantage.

Failure was a bitter blow to unbeaten Morocco and controversial coach Badou Zaki quit soon after to be replaced by outspoken Frenchman Philippe Troussier.

Liverpool door open for Owen

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez says former Anfield great Michael Owen could return to the club one day.

The England striker, now at Newcastle, will make his first



MICHAEL OWEN

appearance at Anfield since leaving to join Real Madrid in 2004 on Monday.

He returned to the Premiership at the start of this season but joined Newcastle, not Liverpool, as his former club were priced out by United's 17 million pound offer.

Owen's exit from Liverpool came soon after Benitez's arrival. But the former Valencia coach insisted he had been keen to sign him this year and would still welcome him back in the future.

"Sure, why not?" he said on Saturday. "He is a good player and good players are always interesting to other clubs."

Liverpool sold Owen, now 26, for a cut-price eight million plus Madrid reserve player Antonio Nunez and the Reds maintained they could not justify paying more than double that to re-capture their former golden boy.

"What is clear is that we tried to sign him and he knows we tried to sign him," said Benitez.

"It is impossible if another club makes a bid of such big money. It is difficult to say we must spend that money on a player that one year before we sold for much less.

"There were several reasons why it didn't happen in the summer: the price, the time, the decision of Michael and the fact that we already had good strikers at the club. All of these things together made it impossible to change the situation in such a short space of time."

Eto'o to play in African Nations Cup

REUTERS, Yaounde

Barcelona striker Samuel Eto'o will stand down from club commitments in order to play for Cameroon at next month's African Nations Cup, state radio quoted him as saying on Friday.

The 24-year-old has been in prolific form for his club, scoring 17 goals in as many games to help the champions top the Primera Liga table, and is shortlisted for what would be a record-breaking third African Footballer of the Year award.

"It has never been a question for me not to go to Egypt (for the African Nations Cup)," Cameroonian state radio reported Eto'o as telling journalists in Garoua during a Christmas trip to his home country.

"We players of the national team, we are carrying the hearts of Cameroonians in our blood. It is our duty to make them happy ... I am proud to defend the colours of my country whenever I am called upon and in all playing grounds around the world."

On Thursday, Spanish daily El Periodico quoted Eto'o as saying that he had not decided whether to continue with Barcelona's championship campaign or join his national team at the African Nations Cup.

Eto'o came third in FIFA's World Player of the Year awards in Germany on Monday behind winner Ronaldinho (Barcelona) and Frank Lampard (Chelsea).

Shearer confirms retirement plan

AFP, London

Newcastle striker and former England captain Alan Shearer says he will stick by his decision to retire at the end of the season.

Newcastle boss Graeme Souness has let it be known that he would love to see Shearer delay retirement for another year after successfully persuading him to prolong his career for this season.

But Shearer told Saturday's Sun newspaper: "As far as I am concerned, nothing has changed. I will retire at the end of the season."

Shearer has made a sizeable impact this campaign, making 20 appearances for Newcastle and scoring eight goals to take him to just one behind Jackie Milburn's club record of 200.

'We won't go quietly'



INTERNET, undated

"But at my back I always hear Time's winged chariot drawing near, And yonder all before us lie Deserts of vast eternity."

-- Andrew Marvell, To His Coy Mistress

When you get old in sports, one of two things usually tends to happen: You either can't handle the fact that your skills are waning, and muddle through against younger, stronger men; or you retire gracefully while still at the peak of your powers.

Or, you figure that it's best to go out with a bang. You put your rear end on the line once again, you find a way to deal with your reduced skill and make up for it in other ways. Because, simply put, you love the game.

Consider three case studies: Romario, Roy Keane and Paolo Di Canio.

Romario turns 40 next month and he found a way to be top scorer in the Brazilian league this season, netting 23 goals in 31 starts.

People joke that he couldn't lose his pace as he got older because he never had any. Maybe so, but he did have quick feet. Now that they're not as quick as they were, Romario more than makes up for it with a quick brain. Few can read the game the way he does, with his uncanny knack for being in the right place at the right

time.

He built an entire career on his goal-scoring instinct, re-interpreting the striker position in an entirely new way. His critics said he was lazy and difficult to get along with. But in his late 30s, Romario has softened around the edges. And now that his athleticism is gone, watching him play is a treat, a throwback to an era when the game was about technique and brains rather than strength, speed and size.

At 34, Keane left Manchester United slamming the door behind him. Few expected it to end that way, but his criticism of teammates eventually led to a public breakdown with Sir Alex Ferguson. It has been several years since "real" Roy Keane was seen; injuries and his breakneck playing style inevitably slowed him down.

Instead of choosing an early, easy retirement, Keane went to Celtic, the club he supported as a boy. It remains to be seen how much he can contribute and whether it was worth it financially.

Keane's critics say he can be a loose cannon, an ego run amok who won't give teammates respect unless he thinks they deserve it. Yet the fact that his peers deem him to be one of the best professionals in Europe speaks volumes about him.

Di Canio is a far more difficult figure to explain, particularly these days, after making a Roman salute at Lazio's game against Livorno and earning a one-match ban and a fine.

There are plenty of reasons to chastise him. But what is not fair is to call him a coward or a publicity-seeker or a Nazi, as some have done. Di Canio has made many bad decisions in his career (such as leaving Napoli in 1994 and pushing referee Paul Alcock). He has paid for every single one of them and he has always faced the consequences of his actions. A coward wouldn't do that.

If Di Canio were a publicity-seeker and nothing more, he would have chosen a slightly higher profile game than Livorno vs. Lazio. Some say he is preparing for a political career. He once said "I have neither patience nor the ability to compromise. I would not make a good politician."

What he does do is identify with Fascist symbols. And he has a fascination with Mussolini. Is that reason enough to ban him? Maybe it is.

Anyway, the point was not to digress on Di Canio. It was to highlight how he, like Keane, like Romario, refuses to go quietly. In their old age, they are determined to make every minute count.

Deep down, they know that they have been immensely fortunate. They had the gifts and the determination to build a career out of the game they love.

They just want to eke as much out of it as they can.

Another window

FROM PAGE 12

"They took this decision because Chingoka and his managing director Osias Bvute are still running ZC and they want them removed.

"And we ourselves also want to oust Chingoka as well as Bvute so that an independent audit can be carried out into the dubious financial affairs of ZC. These two men are crippling the game here."

The players were still awaiting a response from Chingoka after notifying him of their refusal to play in Bangladesh and South Africa.

Their representative Clive Field told AFP: "Neither our professional players' chairman Blessing Mahwire nor I have yet heard from Chingoka. We are awaiting his reply.

"After all, this matter is extremely important and has had considerable repercussions."

There is also still no word from the government minister responsible for sport, Aenos Chigwedere.

He has been considering a proposal by the great majority of Zimbabwe Cricket stakeholders -- including directors, provinces, clubs and players -- that four nominated independent administrators with wide cricket experience should be appointed temporarily to run the sport here while the government's own Sports and Recreation Commission attempts to resolve the impasse.

Mizan, Monwar

FROM PAGE 12

Cricket League match at the City Club ground.

Mizan made 62 and Monwar smashed an unbeaten 58 as Boys, chasing Uttara's moderate 170 all out, reached 171-7 in 37 overs.

Uttara, being put into bat first, were bundled out in 41 overs with Sohail top scoring 31 not out. Mamun and Jitu chipped in with two wickets each for Bangladesh Boys.

Booters in Karachi

FROM PAGE 12

People's Sports Complex Stadium tomorrow at 6pm (7pm Bangladesh time).

The two sides met in the SAFF Championship semifinal at the same venue on December 14 with Bangladesh winning 1-0.

Pakistan, who now have a slight edge after drawing goalless with Bangladesh in the first leg in Dhaka, also left with the Bangladesh team by the same flight Saturday afternoon.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

E W S Y U D H E K W S  
I H X X H B V D A U G G S Q E U K W  
D K H B V S Q I S Q D, U D W F M K S Q  
" K W H K ' D H G F K F A I M Y V ! "  
Yesterday's Cryptquip: IF AN OLD ELFIN TROLL BEGAN GOING OUT ON THE TOWN A LOT, WOULD HE BE A METRO-GNOME?  
Today's Cryptquip Clue: K equals T

The Cryptquip 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.