

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 Zaheed 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

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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

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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 media 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 Mukti Joddha player behind him, take a deflection of Rangamati Mohammedan defender Jet and roll over the line.

Abahani forward Bulbul slotted the 5-1 win over Feni Soccer Club.

In reply, Kalabagan came tanta-

New African colours in WC



AFP, Johannesburg

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 priceless 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 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 Ivoirians 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 handily in Sudan to sneak through.

Ghana have lifted the Nations Cup a record-equalling four times, but former greats like Abedi 'Pele' Aye 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 metal steel to the Carthage Eagles, who trudged 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 Cameroonian 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.

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.

Result: Abahani won by eight runs.

INDIA ROAD: 166 all out in 50 overs (Mabud 34, Jafar 41, extras 8; Kamrul 2-26, Saju 2-7, Tushar 3-35).

INDIA: 217-8 in 43 overs (Jahirul 97, Shadab 28, Faisal 63 not out, extras 10; Nazmul 6-25).

KALABAGAN: 209 all out in 42.3 overs (Uttam 21, Karim 51, Kamrul 39, extras 12; Alamgir 3-46, Hasan 2-43, Faisal 3-22).

Result: Old DOHS won by six

wickets.

BROTHERS: 271-8 in 50 overs (Salahuddin 38, Rashed 107, Ehsanul 47, Marshal 39, extras 28; Rizwan 3-60).

AGRANI BANK: 135 all out in 43.1 overs (Imtiaz 40, Rizwan 45, extras 10; Enamul 2-12, Sunny 2-26, Rashed 2-11, Shuvu 2-25).

Result: Brothers won by 136 runs.

ORIENT: 127 all out in 49.2 overs (Masum 29, Tamim 11, Firoz 27, extras 21; Nadif 4-11, Sabir 3-32).

MOHAMMEDAN: 129-3 in 31.2 overs (Sandeeb 66 not out, Hannan 36 not out, extras 7; Rashed 2-34).

Result: Mohammedan won by seven wickets.

ABAHANI: 217-8 in 43 overs (Jahirul 97, Shadab 28, Faisal 63 not out, extras 10; Nazmul 6-25).

OLD DOHS: 199 for 4 in 39.5 overs (Tikolo 67 not out, Akram 60 not out, extras 24; Rezaul 2-40).

Result: Old DOHS won by eight runs.

ABAHANI-KALABAGAN

Nazmul Haque returned with a six-wicket haul including the scalp of Jahirul but Abahani put on board a respectable total of 217-8 in allotted 43 overs. The match was curtailed due to a delayed start.

Jahirul made 97 off 114 balls and shared 90 runs for the third wicket with in-form Faisal Hossain, who contributed 63 not out.

In reply, Kalabagan came tanta-

' We won't go quietly '



Football

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 arewaning, 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

Keane's critics say he can be a lone 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.

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

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"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."

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