

CHAMPIONS TROPHY PCB weighing Inzy selection

Cricket

REUTERS, Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is to seek advice from the International Cricket Council (ICC) over whether to select captain Inzamam-ul-Haq for the Champions Trophy, a senior official told Reuters on Tuesday.

The ICC has directed all member countries to announce their final 14-man squads for the tournament by September 7.

Inzamam is due to appear before an ICC disciplinary hearing after the tour of England ends on September 10 to face charges of ball tampering and bringing the game into disrepute. The charges followed the Oval Test fiasco and Inzamam's clash with Australian umpire Darrell Hair.

The 36-year-old Inzamam, who has played 113 Tests and 362 one-day internationals, faces a ban of up to eight one-dayers and four Tests if found guilty of both charges, effectively ruling him out of the Champions Trophy which starts in India on October 7.

"This is a very pertinent issue for us. We want to know from ICC what happens if we pick him in our final Champions Trophy squad," director of cricket operations Saleem Altaf said.

"Our selectors want to know if they are allowed to replace him if he is banned after being named in the squad," Altaf said.

"Don't forget besides being captain he also a key player for us. He rates high in the planning for the tournament."

The ICC postponed the Inzamam hearing due to be held on August 25 in London, and on Monday it also cancelled a planned emergency meeting of the executive board which was expected to give a clear ruling on the Oval Test fiasco.

"It is a problem for us. At this stage we don't even know when the ICC will schedule the hearing," Altaf said.

Hair, who sparked a major incident when he penalised the Pakistan team five runs for alleged ball-tampering on the fourth day of the final Test against England is certain to stand in the Champions Trophy unless the ICC decides otherwise.

The PCB on Tuesday asked the ICC to hold an inquiry into Hair's conduct before Inzamam's hearing, also reiterating that Hair would not be accepted as an official in future matches involving Pakistan.

English fans taunt Inzy!

PTI, London

After facing umpire Darrell Hair's allegations over ball tampering, Pakistan cricket captain Inzamam-ul-Haq is now the subject of taunts from English fans.

"Stop Scratching Your..." was the advice written on a banner held by some home fans who resorted to leg-pulling of the Pakistan team during Monday's Twenty20 match at Bristol, the Mirror reported.

However, the visiting captain had the last laugh as Pakistan scored a convincing five-wicket win before the one-day series starting tomorrow.

But Inzamam was visibly unimpressed when jeered as a "cheat" while walking into bat.

Nafees talk

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deputy with a lot of interest, most of which has been generated because of doubts about Nafees's ability to lead the team in the tournament in case of Bashir's injury.

"I think it is a good choice because he has the cricketing brain to become a leader in future. Yes, he is too young but the reality is the young guys between 20 to 25 are dominating the national team, that's why there was no way other than to choose a youngster for the job," said Bashir, who took part in all the drills on the day.

"But my only desire is that we should give him time before taking any negative decision. You can't make someone a good captain overnight, especially it is very hard to lead the team in Test cricket. No doubt we should find out a youngster who becomes a good leader in future," he added.

Experienced wicketkeeper Khaled Masud, who was surprisingly ignored for the job despite his successful handling in the Africa tour in Bashir's absence, also echoed the sentiment.

"I was not upset because I believe that the time has come to groom someone for the future, otherwise it would be a big problem for our team. But we should keep faith with someone for a while before taking any decision," he suggested.

"I think people are showing huge interest over the appointment because of my uncertainty. But I am very hopeful as I am recovering well, though the injured place is still swollen," informed the 33-year-old skipper, Bashir who has a small fracture on his left fifth metacarpal.

Physio Paul Close was also optimistic. "We are optimistic that he would regain full fitness before the Champions Trophy. Injuries like his require about four weeks to heal properly and he should be holding a bat two weeks from now," said Close.

The players return to training again on Thursday after an unscheduled day off on Wednesday due to a strike in the capital.

Drogba to Milan?

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million pounds (45.6 million dollars) in July 2004 from French club Marseille and scored 16 goals in 40 games in his debut season to help the club win their first league title for 50 years.

Drogba ended up as the top provider of goals in the Premier League last season with 11 assists as Chelsea retained their title.

However, his season was blighted by accusations of diving and he hinted that he might leave the Premiership due to what he considered as unfair treatment by the English media.

Drogba helped Ivory Coast qualify for their first World Cup this year with nine goals in eight qualifying games.



Former Brazilian star Zico leaves his footprints on the Champions Promenade during the 2006 Golden Foot Footprints and Prize giving ceremony in Monte Carlo on Monday.

Warne wants Aussie coach

Cricket

AFP, Coolool

Shane Warne wants Australia's next cricket coach to have international playing experience to bring on the country's next generation of players.

Australia will be looking for a new national coach after April's World Cup in the West Indies, following confirmation Monday that incumbent John Buchanan will be looking to stand down after seven years at the helm.

Buchanan has gained outstanding success in that time, with Australia winning 24 Test series, drawing one and losing two - in India in 2000-01 and last year's Ashes series in England.

He has had a 75 percent success rate in Test cricket from 85 Tests, and 74 percent from 182 one-day internationals.

But Warne, Test cricket's leading wicket-taker who has had a strained relationship with Buchanan, sees an opportunity for Australia to employ a coach with a Test-playing background.

"I don't have a preference but I would like to see someone in the job who has international playing experience and understands actually what the guys are going through," Warne told reporters Tuesday.

Warne, who turns 37 in a few weeks, said there was a need for a team manager, rather than coach, to have the access to call in cricket experts to help the players.

"We've gone through a stage where someone like John Buchanan thinks outside the box. Now we need a coach who has a cricket background," he said.

"Australian cricket is about to go through a transition stage where a lot of us will be leaving the team for one reason or another in the next couple of years.

"There will be lots of younger players coming through, so it will be nice to have someone who has played at international level to help teach the younger guys what the game is about because we are going to lose a few of the senior players."

Harmison out of Pak ODIs

BBC ONLINE, undated

England fast bowler Steve Harmison will miss the one-day series with Pakistan because of a nagging back problem.

Harmison had a scan after the Test series earlier this month having experienced pain while bowling.

He was left out of the Twenty20 match at Bristol and will not be risked for five 50-over games starting this week.

An England and Wales Cricket Board statement said: "He's been ruled out as a precautionary measure after not responding to treatment following soreness in his lower back."

The England hierarchy added that no decision had yet been made on a replacement for Harmison.

"There is something in my side-back area which is causing a bit of concern, not the same thing as before, it's something new," the 27-year-old paceman said after the final Test at The Oval.

Harmison missed the Test series against Sri Lanka and was below par in the one-day matches that followed.

He returned a man-of-the-match performance in the second Test against Pakistan, taking 6-19, but then began to suffer problems in his side.

Showkat sinks Dighinala

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Manikchhari reached the semifinals after they trounced Dighinala 4-0 in the DC Cup football tournament at the Khagrachhari Stadium yesterday.

Striker Showkat Khan struck a hat-trick by opening his account as early as ten minutes into the match. Dighinala remained competitive but lost their composure after Monir was sent off in the 70th match. The floodgates opened soon after as Showkat struck two more in the 80th and 85th minute with long-range shots.

Curiously, Dighinala lodged an appeal against Manikchhari for bringing players from outside of the upazila.

Shadhinota KS drown Paihadi

SPORTS REPORTER

A string of hat-tricks powered Shadhinota Kirra Shangha past Paihadi Agragati Jubo Shangha 11-0 in the Pioneer Football League at the Bashabo Tarun Shangha ground yesterday.

Four goals from Chomril and a hat-trick each from Jamal and Hanif simply outclassed a hapless Paihadi.

The other goal was scored by Gafur.

Hair says sorry

AFP, Bristol

Darrell Hair has apologised for the e-mail he sent offering to resign as an umpire in exchange for 500,000 dollars after the ball-tampering row which cut short the fourth Test between England and Pakistan at The Oval.

The apology came as, in a separate move, the Australian was withdrawn from standing in an English 2nd XI Championship fixture by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

"I wish to apologise to all of my family, friends and supporters because I somehow feel that I may have let them down simply by sending an ill-advised but entirely confidential e-mail," Hair, who later rescinded his offer, was quoted in Tuesday's edition of Britain's The Times newspaper as saying.

"This has given other people the opportunity to question my motives," he added.

Hair, who now lives in England, was due to umpire a 2nd XI Championship match between Derbyshire and Gloucestershire at Chesterfield starting Wednesday.

However, the ECB's umpires and operations manager, Chris Kelly, told AFP in Bristol via telephone Tuesday that Hair would no longer be officiating in that match.

"It's an inappropriate time for him to do the match with what's going on. There are lots and lots of issues," Kelly said.

Andre fights

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Lopez, who beat Ljubicic for the first time in a Grand Slam after losing twice in 2006 to him.

"It just wasn't my day," Ljubicic said. Roddick, who won his first tournament of the season last week in Cincinnati, unleashed a 238kph (148mph) serve and fired 10 aces as he routed Serra.

Roddick, the 2003 US Open champ, advanced to the second round where he will face the winner of Spain's Alberto Martin and Kristian Pless of Denmark.

"I feel like I've been hitting the ball pretty well," said Roddick, who suffered a shocking first round exit last year to Gilles Muller. "It is a lot better than last year."

Five-time Grand Slam winner Henin-Hardenne's march towards reclaiming her US Open title began in earnest as she cruised past Camerin.

The reigning French Open champion made quick work of her opponent, taking just 74 minutes to dispatch the Italian at the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Henin-Hardenne, the 2003 US Open champion, is an impressive 44-6 heading into the final Grand Slam of the season.

"I feel good. This is the first year since 2003 that I'm playing the four Grand Slams in the season," Henin-Hardenne said.

American Lindsay Davenport, who won the 1998 US Open, rolled to an easy 6-1, 6-4 first round victory over Klara Zakopalova.

Davenport was relieved she didn't have to stay on the court longer, winning in just 52 minutes.

"The most important thing was to get off to a good start," Davenport said.

United table

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a target for French champions Lyon and Real Madrid.

Trezeguet has scored 125 goals in his six seasons with Juventus: 95 in 151 Serie A matches, 27 in 43 Champions League matches, two in the Italian Cup and one in the Italian SuperCup.

Akhtar glad to be back

Cricket

AFP, Bristol

Shoaib Akhtar said he was looking forward to playing his part in a "lethal" Pakistan one-day team during their forthcoming series against England.

The 'Rawalpindi Express' marked his return to international cricket after a six-month absence with one for 31 as Pakistan, in their maiden Twenty20 international, beat England by five wickets at the Nevil Ground here on Monday.

Akhtar, who'd been sidelined with a stress fracture of his left ankle, last played international cricket in February when Pakistan beat India by 341-runs for a series-clinching third Test victory at Karachi.

Together with fellow quick Navedul Hasan (groin), as well as opening batsman Shoaib Malik (elbow), he missed the whole of Pakistan's 3-0 Test match series defeat against England which concluded with the tourists' dramatic fourth Test forfeit at The Oval after they'd been penalised for ball-tampering.

"It was all right. After a six-month lay-off, to come back in a Twenty20 is never easy," Akhtar told reporters when asked about his Bristol performance.

However, the 31-year-old paceman, for all his time out of the spotlight, was soon bowling in excess of 80mph.

"Just finding my rhythm is more important and I need to do that as quickly as possible," added Akhtar ahead of Pakistan's five-match one-day series against England starting

with Wednesday's day-night clash at Cardiff.

And he insisted the furore caused by events at The Oval on August 20, with ball-tampering and disrepute charges against Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq still outstanding, had not deflected the tourists from their on-field targets.

"We're a happy bunch of lads. We love playing cricket, we love playing for our country and we enjoy the game. We're here to win," said Akhtar, a veteran of 42 Tests and 129 one-dayers.

Fast bowler Mohammad Asif, who only returned from an elbow injury at The Oval, took two wickets in three balls at Bristol to get rid of Kevin Pietersen and England captain Andrew Strauss for nought apiece.

"We've got a full, fresh side now. We've got our bowlers back, myself, Asif and Naved," Akhtar said.

"Our batsmen are getting runs and we've got people who can hit the ball really hard at the end."

"We are a very lethal one-day team right now and we would just like to continue winning."

England's defeat -- their seventh in as many shorter matches against Test match opponents this season after a Twenty20 and 5-0 one-day series reverse against Sri Lanka -- was made worse by the announcement that spearhead fast bowler Stephen Harmison would miss the one-day series with a back problem.

But there was consolation to be had in the England senior debuts of fast bowler Stuart Broad, denied a hat-trick by man-of-the-match Shahid Afridi, and all-rounder Michael Yardy, who scored 24 net out and took a wicket with his left-arm spin.

Experienced opener Marcus Trescothick, who top-scored for his England with 53, said his side's lack of runs was compounded by Afridi's whirlwind 28 off 10 balls which swung the match back Pakistan's way after Broad's double strike had reduced the visitors to 23 for two inside four overs.

"We were probably 20 or 30 runs light," Trescothick explained.

"That innings from Afridi was quite crucial at the time," the left-hander added. "Afridi is a little bit hit and miss at times, with all due respect to him. But when he is good like that he is destructive and can take the game away from you very quickly."

Trescothick, speaking before Harmison's withdrawal was announced, praised the performance of 20-year-old Broad who, in the Durham quick's absence, is likely to take the new-ball alongside veteran paceman Darren Gough during the one-day series.

"I think he's a good prospect -- and the way he approached it and the fashion he bowled in was encouraging."

"We talk about picking characters, and I think he definitely has something," said Trescothick of the son of former England opening batsman Chris.

Gough, playing his first England match in over a year, conceded 33 runs from 3.5 wicketless overs. But Trescothick said the figures were not a reflection of the fast bowler's form.

"In his first two overs he went for 17, I think, and didn't even bowl a bad ball. They just got after him with the wind, and it just didn't go his way."

Georgia pins hopes on Toppmoller

Football

AFP, Tbilisi

Football-mad Georgia is hoping the combination of Teutonic discipline under new coach Klaus Toppmoller, technical skill and the creativity of its home-grown players will open the door for the country's national squad to the Euro 2008 finals.

The Euro 2008 finals have become top priority for 55-year-old coach Toppmoller after he took over Georgia's national team in February.

But the mission will be tough, with Georgia teamed up in the Group B with this year's World Cup runners-up France along with Italy and Ukraine, both of which also played in the knockout stage of football's biggest extravaganza.

"Our qualifying group is very strong," Toppmoller said. "And to progress to the finals is an extremely tough challenge."

Georgia have never qualified for either the European Cham-

pionships or the World Cup finals.

Former France midfielder maestro Alain Giresse, Toppmoller's predecessor, stepped down in July 2005 after 16 months at the helm culminating in his side's failure to qualify for the 2006 World Cup.

However, the former Bayer Leverkusen handler, who guided his club into the Champions League final putting away giant sides like Arsenal, Liverpool and Manchester United said he was ready to work and is sure he knows what to start with.

"Georgia was always famous for its technically-skilled and creative-minded players, but they lacked discipline on the pitch," he said. "My first and main task is to correct the weaknesses and boost the strengths of Georgian team."

Football lovers in Georgia are anticipating success for their favourites in Saturday's match against France after their side took the winning start in the Euro 2008 qualifying campaign under a new coach.

They thrashed the Faroe Islands 6-0 in the Euro 2008 qual-

ifying Group B encounter, establishing a new record in official international matches and boosting morale ahead of the clash with the 1998 World Cup winners France.

However, Georgia will be without their natural skipper, AC Milan defender Kakha Kaladze, who was sidelined with injury, both in the home match with France and an away clash at Ukraine the following Wednesday.

But nevertheless Toppmoller remains confident.

"We have chances for success," he said. "If the players will follow my tactical directions and stay at top concentration throughout the match, we can achieve a positive result."

"I also hope the home crowd's support will boost our performance."

The management of the recently-renovated Boris Paichadze 60,000-seater stadium said they were expecting a sellout.

They also said they were expecting the country's president, Mikhail Saakashvili, to attend the match.

ICC cancels

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to further explain what has happened over the past week and ensure they understand the process from here onwards.

"There has been much speculation over the past few days about whether the executive board has the power to overturn a properly laid charge by the umpires."

"That speculation would only be bound to intensify ahead of the weekend and so by cancelling the meeting it will allow everyone to get off that particular topic and focus on the cricket to be played this week instead."

"The original intention was to seek legal advice concerning the executive board's powers but I do not believe it is necessary to obtain that advice," the South African added.

"We have processes in place to deal with code of conduct matters and we should not seek to interfere with it."

Pakistan Cricket Board Chairman Shaharyar Khan said: "We understand the need for the hearing to go ahead for the reasons explained by the ICC President Sonn."

"In the meantime, we are delighted at the chance to get back to playing cricket, starting with this (Monday) afternoon's NatWest Twenty20 international against England and with five one-day internationals to follow."

The date for Inzamam's hearing will be confirmed in due course but it is likely to be in the second half of September, the ICC statement added.

Inzamam's original hearing, scheduled to take place in London on Friday, was postponed because ICC chief match referee Ranjan Madugalle was unable to hear the case because of family illness.