

Vengsarkar calls for stability

PTI, Indore

Consistent performance and merit would be key factors for the selection of Indian squad for the forthcoming tour of South Africa and the World Cup, Chairman of BCCI's national selection committee Dilip Vengsarkar said on Friday.

"Not just performance in this tournament, but consistent performance and merit will be the only criterion for the selection of the Indian team for the forthcoming South Africa tour during which the team will play five one-day internationals", Vengsarkar, popularly known as 'colonel' told PTI on the sidelines of ongoing four-day Duleep Trophy match at Usharaje ground here.

After the South African tour, the team will also play five one-day matches each with Sri Lanka and West Indies.

"The team will be announced on October 30 after the selectors watch the current matches being played in the Duleep trophy and also India-Australia match at Mohali," Vengsarkar said.

"Everybody has to create his position in the team. It depends how one fits the bill", he said.

"It depends on the composition of the team. We keep trying people all the time. Nobody is indispensable", he said, emphasising the importance of consistent performance for a place in the team.

Massa pledges fairplay

AFF, Sao Paulo

Felipe Massa said on Thursday that he will not stoop to using any under-hand tactics in a bid to help Ferrari team-mate Michael Schumacher win Sunday's Brazilian Grand and clinch an unprecedented eighth drivers' world title.

The 25-year-old Brazilian, who is desperate to win on home soil, conceded that there could be a temptation to collide with championship leader and defending champion Spaniard Fernando Alonso in the showdown contest.

But he said he and Ferrari were committed to fighting clean in the last race of the year as the Italian team bids to land the constructors title -- Schumacher having admitted after the Japanese Grand Prix that his own title hopes were over.

Schumacher trails Alonso by ten points and that means he must win the race and Alonso fail to score a point if he is to defy the odds and lift another drivers' crown.

Massa said: "I am going to be honest. It is important to fight and compete, and I want to win the best possible position. But I am not going to be dirty. I don't want to do that at all.

"There will be no dirty tricks. We will do things only in an honest way. I am going to help Michael, of course, because the championship situation is very complicated, but I will only help him in an honest way."

Massa admitted he would love to win his home race, but his chances will depend on what Alonso is doing in the race and how competitive the two Ferrari drivers prove to be.

"There is a chance to fight for victory and if Alonso is in the top eight," said Massa.

"Then even if Michael wins then it doesn't change anything in the championship so that would give me a chance -- but we have to work together for the championships.

Playing on

FROM PAGE 17
over the full length of the pitch.

The ICC said it the procedure will also be used for the Champions Trophy final, to be staged at the same venue on November 5.

"I am just here to help the ground staff," added Atkinson, who had previous undertaken a series of visits to all the Champions Trophy venues in the six months leading up to the start of the tournament.

"They do a very good job and the ground is looking in marvellous condition.

"There was a fantastic match here between Australia and the West Indies and we are looking forward to more great cricket for the rest of the tournament."

Doping tribunal

FROM PAGE 17
Both Akhtar and Asif have pleaded their innocence, saying they have not deliberately taken any banned substance. The PCB has forbidden them from speaking further to the media.

The Sports Medicine Association of Pakistan meanwhile criticised the PCB for prematurely disclosing Akhtar and Asif's names in connection with the doping scandal.

Clause 16.2 of the ICC's Anti-Doping Code says the ICC and its members should not publicly identify cricket players whose samples have resulted in adverse findings, the association's president Danish Zaheer said in a statement.



PHOTO: AFP

Australia speedster Brett Lee leaps to bowl during a training session at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur on Friday.

Amelie out injured

Tennis

AFF, Zurich

Top seed and world number one Amelie Mauresmo pulled out of the Zurich Open with a shoulder injury on Thursday, and now faces a race against time to be ready to defend her title when the WTA Championships begin in Madrid on November 7.

"It's inflammation in two areas of the shoulder, but not big damage that could really put me out for a long time," said Mauresmo. "I hope I will be in Madrid. For me of course it's an important goal.

"I definitely hope I will be ready. I can't say for sure today (Thursday) that I'm going to be ready but I'll do my best and hopefully it will work.

"It's very frustrating. I've pushed myself to play last week and to be able to come here this week. Maybe it was not the right solution. I tried and it seemed to be not working so well, and it's a tough decision to make."

On the courts, second seed Maria Sharapova of Russia overcame strong resistance from Israel's Shahar Peer to win 6-4, 7-6 (7/4), and third seeded Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova saved three first set points and won the final four games of the second to overcome Serbia's Jelena Jankovic 7-6 (8/6), 7-5.

Katarina Srebotnik produced the

upset of the day, defeating fourth-seeded Elena Dementieva 6-1, 6-4 to reach the quarterfinals and claiming her first win against the Russian in seven attempts.

The victory followed the Slovenian's upset of then-world number four Mauresmo at the same event one year ago, and came just two weeks since Dementieva beat her in a three-hour match in Stuttgart.

Srebotnik began badly, dropping her opening service game after leading 40-0, but she immediately levelled at 1-1 when Dementieva hit consecutive double-faults.

A forehand error from Dementieva gave Srebotnik a second break for 3-1, and a fourth double-fault gave her a further break for 5-1.

Dementieva threatened Srebotnik in the second set, but was unable to win any of seven break points she held for 2-0. And, even though she did break for 3-1, Dementieva gave up her serve in the next game, and she then netted a double-handed backhand to leave Srebotnik serving for the match.

"I think I didn't have enough patience today. I didn't want to play long rallies and was going for winners," said Dementieva. "I wasn't playing my best today, and she was serving pretty hard and consistent.

"It's not easy to play your best tennis in your first match, and I've had a lot of tough matches against

her. She's had one match on centre court already and I think she was feeling more comfortable out there."

Sharapova struggled to find her best form against an opponent who fought for every ball. Peer held a point to lead 5-3 in the first set before Sharapova responded with an ace, broke for 5-4, and then held off a further break point as she served for the set.

Peer continued to battle in the second set, recovering an early break and then holding a set point at 5-4 which Sharapova saved with a powerful service winner. Sharapova broke to lead 6-5 and was unable to serve out the set, but was always ahead in the tiebreak.

Eighth seeded Francesca Schiavone of Italy became the third player to withdraw with injury following Mauresmo and Tatiana Golovin.

She won just one game in the first set against Swiss qualifier Timea Bacsinszky before retiring with a right calf strain that first occurred during her first round win over Meilen Tu.

PCB didn't provide drug list

PTI, Islamabad

The Pakistan Cricket Board had not made available the list of banned drugs to the players before conducting the dope tests, a media report said on Friday.

"The PCB did not provide any list to players. The dope test matter was messed up by the former management of the Board," a source close to pacer Shoaib Akhtar was quoted as saying in 'The Nation'.

Shoaib and swing bowler Mohammad Asif were called back from the ICC Champions Trophy in India last week after PCB announced that they had failed an in-house dope test conducted in September.

"It was astonishing when the tests were taken as the management asked players for the samples without any prior information about the banned drugs," the source said.

The source claimed that the players were warned about the use of illegal drugs but there was no specific information about the list of banned steroids and other substances.

"No player wants to spoil his career by using banned drugs deliberately," he said, adding if the players had been aware of the banned drugs and also about the dope tests, they would never have used "such things".

"It clearly shows that there was mismanagement on the part of PCB officials or doctors who have spoiled the future of two great cricketers," the source said adding the doping could not have been done without involvement of the doctors.

Meanwhile, the meeting of the three-member drug tribunal constituted by the PCB to probe the dope fiasco, is likely to be delayed as its third member has not yet been appointed.

A PCB official said Chairman Nasim Ashraf might also meet the two players later on Friday.

PCB unsure about visas

PTI, Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board is yet to hear from the Indian Government on the issue of cricket visas for fans wanting to watch their team's two Champions Trophy matches in Mohali, Punjab, next week.

The Indian Home Ministry had on Thursday announced that it had given clearance for grant of 1,000 visas for Pakistani fans.

"We don't know about any such development. In fact, we have been facing problems getting visas for some of our own internal guests," Asad Mustafa, a senior PCB official, told PTI.

Pakistan will play New Zealand on October 25 before taking on South Africa on October 27 at Mohali, Punjab.

He said the Board had submitted around 65 passports for visas for the tournament but they were yet to be returned.

"We have got no information about Indian Government issuing special visas for Pakistani fans," he said.

"In fact we were informed earlier that this time the Indian Government was not going to issue any special visas as was done when Pakistan team went to India twice last year for matches," he said.

Pakistani fans generally prefer to go to India to watch matches in Mohali as they can drive through the Wagah border or take a train and it is a low cost adventure for them.

Hundreds of fans had travelled to Mohali last year when Pakistan played India in a Test match in Mohali.

Mustafa said the Board was facing a lot of pressure because of demands for tickets and visas for Pakistan's games in Mohali but it was not in a position to do anything.

Urn open for show

BBC ONLINE, undated

The Ashes urn, one of the world's most coveted sporting trophies, has gone on display in Sydney at the start of a 14-week tour of Australia.

It is the first time the urn has been taken on travelling display, and its tour coincides with the Ashes series between Australia and England.

The urn was unveiled at a museum in Sydney amid tight security.

With great caution, an official from Marylebone Cricket Club placed it in a specially designed display case.

The urn was transported to Australia in its own first class airline seat, and the official, Adam Chadwick, was mindful of the dangers of taking it on tour.

"If you're travelling with a very important... historically important object, then you're always going to try and provide the best level of security for it," said Mr Chadwick.

Azhar ban almost gone

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Mohammad Azharuddin's life ban could be on the verge of being overturned despite widespread concern at the message this would send out.

Azharuddin was banned from the game for life by the Indian board (BCCI) in 2000 after a federal inquiry found him guilty of match-fixing. He denied the charges and is awaiting judgement on a suit filed by him in a court in his home city of Hyderabad challenging the ban.

It is believed that the new BCCI leadership is convinced Azharuddin has served enough punishment and deserves to be pardoned. An indication of his possible return to favour came when it was revealed he had been invited to a function in Mumbai on November 4 to honour him and other Indian captains for their services to the game.

The ICC, which has adopted a strict zero-tolerance policy towards anyone found guilty of match-fixing, is far from happy with the news and is thought be considering boycotting the event if Azharuddin attends.

In a statement unlikely to make him many friends in Dubai, Ratnakar Shetty, the board's chief administrative officer, said that Azharuddin "had undergone enough punishment and he should be allowed to lead his life like cricketers who had faced similar charge in other countries but are going about as if they had done no wrong."

He then said that there was a feeling among the current board that while the punishment handed out might have been correct, it "was a knee-jerk reaction". He continued: "In retrospect, they feel the board had been too harsh on its players considering the way the other boards went about protecting the guilty."

The Indian board are understood to be riled that other players who

were implicated in the scandal continue to play, but Malcolm Speed, the ICC chief executive, warned that "we need to be careful when we compare cases with cases ... it was alleged and proved that Azharuddin was actively involved in match-fixing."

But that cut no ice with Shetty. "Azhar should not be compared with those who got away with murder, people who continued to play after serving a token punishment. One is being persecuted and condemned for life while others strut about as paragons of virtues."

The ICC are taking this seriously. On Thursday, it issued a statement detailing the process for a banned player to be reinstated. But at 43, Azharuddin is not likely to make a comeback and so his rehabilitation into the cricket world does not actually need any official approval.

Azzu case buoys Malik

Cricket

AFF, Lahore

Former Pakistan cricket captain Salim Malik said India's decision to pardon disgraced star Mohammad Azharuddin has raised his hopes of overturning his own life ban for match-fixing.

Indian cricket authorities said Thursday they planned to resurrect Azharuddin from a life of shame despite objections from sport's governing body, the International Cricket Council.

"I can't tell you how happy I was on learning that Azhar's ban will be lifted soon. It's a ray of hope for me that I should get a similar reprieve from Pakistan," Malik told AFP on Friday.

"My pleas have fallen on deaf ears, nobody wants to listen to my requests. It has been just like six years of imprisonment for me."

The stylish 43-year-old batsman currently lives a secluded life in the eastern city of Lahore and is still waiting for the outcome of a Supreme Court appeal against his ban.

Pakistan banned Malik for life in 2000 following a judicial inquiry into

match-fixing allegations that resulted from allegations by Australian players Shane Warne, Tim May and Mark Waugh.

Warne and May alleged Malik offered them money to underperform in a Test in Karachi in 1994, while Waugh said Malik asked him to bat poorly in a one-day match during the same tour.

Malik was also accused of wrongdoing by team-mates and his name was mentioned in India's inquiry into Azharuddin.

The ban ended Malik's impressive 19-year career during which he scored 5,768 runs in 103 Tests and 7,170 in 263 one-day internationals. He also led Pakistan in 12 Tests and 34 one-day matches.

Malik said he would put his case before the newly appointed Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Nasim Ashraf and operations director Salim Altaf.

"I know the new chairman is an educated person and like the Indian board officials would listen to my request and take the same stance as India," said Malik.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), who allowed Azharuddin to tour Pakistan with a veterans team this year, said the master batsman deserved to be

pardoned.

"The general opinion is that Azharuddin had undergone enough punishment and he should be allowed to lead a life like cricketers who had faced similar charges in other countries but are going about as if they had done no wrong," BCCI chief administrative officer Ratnakar Shetty said on Thursday.

The BCCI has also invited Azharuddin to a function in Mumbai on November 4 to honour him and other Indian captains for their services to the game, a move that has irked the ICC.

Azharuddin was investigated and found guilty in 2000 by the BCCI of match fixing which led to his original ban from the game.

Malik said his main goal is to clear his name and then he wants to form an academy for youngsters in this cricket-loving South Asian nation.

"If I am cleared I will never be interested in holding any post in Pakistan cricket," he said.

"My only interest is to start an academy for kids and for that I have acquired land as well. But nobody has allowed me to start it."



PHOTO: AFP

Spanish star Rafael Nadal makes a forehand return against Tommy Haas of Germany during their Madrid Masters match at the Rockodromo Arena in Madrid on Thursday.

Federer, Nadal surge ahead

Tennis

AFF, Madrid

Roger Federer's belief in his own accuracy paid dividends on a pair of late instant replay challenges as the sharp-eyed world number one swept into the Madrid Masters quarterfinals on Thursday.

The top seed's 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (10/8) third-round victory over Sweden's Robin Soderling turned on a pair of perfect challenges upheld by the Hawk-eye linescalling system.

The Swiss was joined in the last eight by title holder Rafael Nadal, who faced and saved only one break point to dispatch German Tommy Haas 6-4, 6-3.

"I'm very happy with my serve, it went well today (Thursday)," said the Spaniard.

"I'm confident with it. I'm pleased with all the aspects of my game."

Federer called decisions into question in a tight second-set tie-breaker, and emerged spot-on with the dramatic final over-rule bringing a smile to the Federer face as it validated his match point.

The win lifted Federer the 79-5 this season as he aims for a first title here and tenth of the season.

Despite the rule in his favour, Federer remains a tennis traditionalist.

said the Swiss.

"I would have won the first set probably easier. It turned out to be a crazy end. I thought it was really funny, especially waiting like this for the match point."

Federer now faces America's Robby Ginepri in the quarterfinals.

Meanwhile, Andy Roddick's bid for a place in the season-ending Masters Cup stalled when Czech Tomas Berdych handed the American a 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 defeat.

The sixth-seeded Roddick aggravated an old ankle injury as he joined fellow Masters Cup contender Tommy Robredo in failing to make progress, the Spaniard losing to 6-3, 7-6 (7/3).

Roddick re-aggravated the right ankle injury Thursday which hampered his clay season.

"It's the same ankle as earlier," said Roddick.

"I tweaked it again. It's a problem which I think happened early in the second set."

Roddick later Thursday pulled out of the Lyon tournament next week leaving a question mark over his participation in the Paris Masters, the following week.

The race to China and the eight-man season-ending tournament in Shanghai is growing tighter.

The only two men who have qualified so far are Federer and Nadal.

Croatian Ivan Ljubicic threw away his chance to gain points this week week in a second-round loss to British teenager Andy Murray on Wednesday.

Ljubicic also pulled out from next

week's Lyon tournament, leaving his Masters Cup fate to his performance at the Paris Masters.

Shanghai hopeful Fernando Gonzalez got a free ride as Swede Joachim Johansson pulled out before their match with a sore throat.

He plays Novak Djokovic of Serbia, who turned around a losing situation down a set and a break at 4-3 to overwhelm Murray 1-6, 7-5, 6-3 as the Scot's confidence oozed away.

The loss was the second on the day for Britain after Tim Henman went out to fourth seed David Nalbandian 6-2, 2-6, 7-5.

Flemo equals

FROM PAGE 17
become New Zealand's highest scorer in Tests having overtaken Martin Crowe's previous record 5444 runs in October 2004 against Bangladesh at Chittagong.

Fleming, who opens the innings in the shortened form of the game, has represented New Zealand in 102 Tests, and accumulated 6545 runs including nine hundreds.

Allan Border (Australia, 178) and India's Mohd Azharuddin (173) are behind Fleming and Ranatunga in the number of times they have led their respective countries in ODIs.