

## Akhtar fined over logo breach

AFP, Karachi

Fiery Pakistan paceman Shoaib Akhtar was fined for refusing to wear the logo of a sponsor of the national cricket board during a domestic tournament, an official said Wednesday.

The 31-year-old, who returned to the sport earlier this month after successfully appealing against a two-year ban for doping, was leading Islamabad Leopards in a national Twenty20 contest on Tuesday night.

"Akhtar refused to wear a logo of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) sponsor and, as a breach, match referee Anwar Khan fined him 10,000 rupees (166 dollars)," PCB spokesman Dr Ahsan Malik said. Akhtar, who has played 42 Tests and 133 one-day internationals for Pakistan, is currently featuring in Pakistan's tune-up camp for next month's tour of South Africa.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport in Switzerland is next week expected to hear an appeal by the World Anti-Doping Agency against Pakistan's decision to overturn bans on Akhtar and fellow pacesman Mohammad Asif.

A tribunal in November banned Akhtar for two years and Asif for one year after they tested positive for the banned steroid nandrolone. They had to fly home from the Champions Trophy in India.

An appeals committee on December 5 upheld the fast bowlers' appeals against the punishment, saying they had not knowingly taken the substance and that they had not been properly educated about doping matters.

## Hughes hails

FROM PAGE 20

England international to clubs such as Newcastle, who are reported to be keen on him.

"I won't talk about other clubs," said Benitez after a defeat that ended a seven-match unbeaten run. "I am happy with Peter and he gives us a lot of things. He is playing well, but didn't finish.

"When you miss three clear chances in front of goal it's not lack of confidence. Maybe it's bad luck or maybe the keeper was in the right position.

"We had a lot of attempts, but their keeper was fantastic. We just couldn't score -- and then we made a mistake to concede the goal.

"Now I have to analyse why we couldn't score or create more chances in the second-half."

## Figo set for Saudi

FROM PAGE 20

adventure far from Europe.

"All television programs are opening with this news. Everyone has gone crazy here, if the deal will be finalised, as it seems, our championship will have a player that has no rivals," explained the tactician.

Figo, who has played 15 matches so far in the season with an average 65 minutes per game, offered a good performance against Atalanta last Saturday, but this does not seem enough to convince Mancini, who has often preferred to field Dejan Stankovic or Santiago Solari instead of the former Real Madrid star, who is allegedly ready to move to a new home in the Middle East.

## Ronaldo extends

FROM PAGE 20

The quality of finishing was in stark contrast to the first half when United enjoyed a glut of possession without finding the net.

Rooney came closest to opening the scoring, after only six minutes, when he met a Wes Brown cross with a close-range shot that brought a fantastic reaction save out of Kirkland.

Rooney missed at least three more chances, including a shot which he screwed just wide of the left-hand post in the 31st minute having controlled Fletcher's excellent through ball with an incredible piece of skill.

The ever-impressive Kirkland also made good saves late in the first half from Scholes's long-range shot and from a close-range Solskjaer header.

Rooney appeared doomed not to get on the scoresheet, a feeling underlined in the 76th minute when good approach play by Ronaldo and Park saw the ball deposited at the feet of the England centre-forward who did well to get in an off-balance shot which thundered against the Wigan bar.

For the visitors, faced with an impossible task having gone three goals behind, there was a marginal improvement as the second half wore on.

But Matt Jackson planted a header directly at Edwin van der Sar from a Kevin Kilbane cross and Kilbane, himself, had a 20-yard shot charged down by Wes Brown before David Cotterill's nice turn ended with a shot that passed inches wide of the home goal.

Finally, in injury-time, Mikael Silvestre's clumsy challenge on David Wright resulted in the second penalty of the game, this one put away clinically by Wigan skipper Leighton Baines.

# Rookie given call-up



CRICINFO, undated

Ishant Sharma, the 18-year-old Delhi medium pacer, is likely to be sent to South Africa ahead of the final Test at Cape Town.

Sharma, currently playing in only his fifth first-class match, is likely to join the squad before the final Test.

With Irfan Pathan being sent back to India to play domestic cricket, and Munaf Patel yet to regain full fitness from an ankle injury, Sharma may be asked to step in and fill the breach in the squad, should the need arise, through another injury.

When contacted, Niranjan Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, would neither confirm nor deny the story. "If the need arises for a replacement, and the team management feels the shortcoming, then the selectors will discuss the matter over the telephone and decide on a replacement," Shah told Cricinfo.

Dilip Vengsarkar also echoed his views, telling reporters in Durban that Sharma won't be

joining the team.

Rahul Dravid, speaking at the toss ahead of the second Test, said that Munaf was not yet fully fit, but did stress that he was only "two or three days" from where the team wanted him to be, suggesting that he would be fit in time for the next Test.

However, it is learnt that the preparations to get Sharma across to South Africa are already underway. "We want him (Sharma) to see what happens at the highest level," said a senior Indian board official and an unimpeachable source, who did not want to be named for obvious reasons. "We believe it will be good for his development."

Although this goes against the grain of what the board secretary told Cricinfo on the record, it corroborates all the other indications received from the team management and sources in South Africa.

Should he go, it is unlikely that Sharma will figure in the playing eleven, but it is believed that he is being sent to South Africa to get a feel of international cricket and the Indian dressing-room and to obtain firsthand guidance from Greg Chappell, the Indian coach, and Ian Fraser, a member of the

support staff.

Sharma plays for the Rohtak Road Gymkhana Club in Delhi and, though in his debut first-class season, has a couple of Under-19 tours under his belt.

He's currently playing for Delhi against Saurashtra in Rajkot, where he has 3 for 117 from 36 overs; prior to this match he'd picked up 19 wickets from four games, with one five-wicket haul against Baroda.

His USP is the ability to extract unnerving bounce, thanks mainly to his build -- Sharma is 6'4" tall and lanky, and is nicknamed Lambu for obvious reasons.

Sharma's cause has probably been helped by the fact that Dilip Vengsarkar, the chairman of selectors, was in Delhi a couple of weeks ago watching him bowl in a Ranji trophy match against Tamil Nadu.

On a shirtfront of a Kotla wicket, where the ball barely carried through to the keeper, Sharma put in a good effort.

Lalchand Rajput, the coach of the Indian U-19 team, was impressed with Sharma's bowling, and apart from praising the bowler in the media had also conveyed his thoughts to the BCCI.

# Brit press adores Warne



AFP, London

The British press heaped praise on Shane Warne after the Australia leg-spinner became the first bowler in Test history to capture 700 wickets during the first day's play of the fourth Ashes Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) -- his home venue.

Warne, who is set to retire from Test cricket and so end a fantastic 15-year international career at next week's fifth Sydney Test, bowled England opener Andrew Strauss with a leg-break to reach the milestone.

The 37-year-old Warne, contracted to play the next two English seasons with southern county Hampshire, then added four more wickets Tuesday to finish the England innings with five for 39 off 17.2 overs in a meagre total of 159 and swell his career tally to 704 wickets in his 144th Test match.

Wednesday's Daily Mirror tabloid led the plaudits, its match report stating: "Shane Warne put his own spin on a Christmas tale to

reinforce his position as cricket's greatest ever bowler with a cracker of a Boxing Day performance."

"The man who is leaving international cricket following the Ashes produced a display to make fairy tales look dull and boring as he became the first man to take 700 Test wickets and then put Australia in control of the Fourth Test."

According to the Guardian, Warne's 700th wicket was "so predictable, so pre-ordained, probably foreseen by Nostradamus, and as he made his way from the arena and up the players' tunnel he radiated the sheer pleasure at the lark of it all."

"This, as he reminds us often enough, is not just a supreme sportsman but a great entertainer who knows his moment."

It came as no surprise, then, that The Times named Warne's dismissal of Strauss as both its "Ball of the day" and its "Magic moment".

The Times also noted: "It is hard to think that he has ever had a much easier five-wicket haul ... or that England, against whom he has prospered from start to finish of his extraordinary journey in Test cricket, have ever been quite such

willing accomplices to his peerless act."

It was not alone in highlighting England's acquiescence in the face of Warne's bowling, the Daily Mail observing: "This was always going to be Shane Warne's party, but he could never have reckoned with England being such perfect, obliging guests

"Perfect and obliging, that is, in a slightly pathetic, desperate-to-please way, as they gifted him not just a 700th Test wicket on his home ground farewell, but four more on a seamer's paradise at the MCG."

The Sun tabloid, Britain's best-read daily, spoke in high tones of Warne's accomplishments: "Shane Warne's script was written in glitter several days before this match began -- but he added a couple of extra pages for fun."

"With the uncrowned King of Melbourne in residence and 89,000 of his subjects there to hail him -- even the Poms were offering standing ovations -- Warne was always guaranteed to milk the occasion."

"It was pure theatre. Pure magic. Pure history."

## Aussies a la Wi: Lara

PTI, Melbourne

West Indies batting legend Brian Lara has said that Australia will inevitably come back to the field when Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath are gone after the current Ashes series.

Lara compared the imminent departure of the two champion Australians with the retirements of West Indies fast bowling stalwarts Joel Garner, Malcolm Marshall and Michael Holding and suggested the world's number one team would feel mortal without them.

"One of things that's going to happen is there will be -- a loss of respect mightn't be the right word -- but people will get a lot of confidence and back themselves when the likes of McGrath and Shane Warne are gone," he told "The Age". "You can mirror it to the West Indies team. (Curtly) Ambrose and (Courtney) Walsh and Ian Bishop are very good fast bowlers, but the fact that Joel Garner and Malcolm Marshall and Michael Holding left ... A lot of other teams felt they could compete," the master batsman said.

After Warne bowled England opener Andrew Strauss to capture his 700th Test wicket yesterday (Tuesday), Lara said, "I'm glad it wasn't me, but it's amazing.

"It's testimony to the fact he has mastered the art of bowling and he's someone everyone around the world has great respect for. As a batsman and fellow cricketer I think he has done a tremendous job," he further stated.

## Head-butt

FROM PAGE 20

by a French football commentator.

"The idea came to me on a wave of emotion after Italy won the World Cup," Ferrari was quoted as saying by Italian news agency Fidest.

"After Zidane's head-butt on Materazzi I thought of turning that unsavoury act into a positive social message aimed at the youngsters, and at the same time offering a trendy product of high quality.

"The name of the branding was born out of the 'Pourquoi, Zidane?' commentary and the questioning of any act of violence."

## Sachin lives

FROM PAGE 20

Laxman not out 10  
Extras: (lb-6, nb-3, w-1) 10  
Total: (For 3 wkts in 38.4 overs)103  
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-35, 3-61.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Nel	12	2	26	2
Ntini	8	4	12	1
Morkel	6	0	33	0
Pollock	8.4	6	6	0
Hall	4	0	20	0
<b>To bat:</b> S Ganguly, M Dhoni, A Kumble, Zaheer Khan, S Sreesanth, V Singh.				

**Umpires:** M Benson (ENG), Asad Rauf (PAK).

**TV umpire:** I Howell (RSA).

**Match referee:** R Mahanama (SRI).

## Platini offers

FROM PAGE 20

monthly magazine Number Ten.

"Artists like us can only tease each other without being mean," added Le Roi.

"Just as years ago there was a certain Omar Sivori who made jokes about me, I am sure that in twenty years you will make jokes about Roma's future number 10. And knowing you, I'm sure it will be very funny," continued the ex-Blancenero.

"I joke at times but with irony and affection for a player who impersonates the beauty of football. The things I supposedly said were not reported to you correctly.

"I hope you win as much as possible with the Roma shirt. In 2009 the Champions League Final will be played at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome, perhaps I will see you there..." concluded Platini.

The Frenchman had made a similar U-turn last week, admitting that Fabio Cannavaro was the best player of 2006 after having initially criticised the decision to hand the Golden Ball to the stopper. Platini changed his mind after the former Juve man also won the FIFA World Player award.

## Dalmiya quits

FROM PAGE 17

I have full confidence." He also promised to stage a comeback saying, "I am confident that I will fully regain the opportunity to continue to serve the game of cricket with full honour." Dalmiya, who has been controlling the affairs of CAB for almost 25 years, also proposed that former BCCI president Biswanath Dutt would be the right person to head CAB in these difficult circumstances.

He said he appealed to Dutta to accept the charge of CAB.

Dalmiya's resignation came ahead of this evening's crucial Working Committee meeting of the CAB, in which the issue of Dalmiya's expulsion for life by BCCI was to be taken up as per which he could no longer continue as an office-bearer of any affiliate.

# Mates stay alive again



AFP, Melbourne

In 2000, good mates Matthew Hayden and Andrew Symonds found themselves in the water struggling for survival, after their boat capsized while fishing near Queensland's North Stradbroke Island.

On that occasion the determined pair swam more than a kilometre to shore and safety.

At the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Wednesday, they again found themselves thrown together under duress, but this time it was Australia's first innings in the fourth Ashes Test that needed rescuing.

And once again the pair toughed it out and overcame the odds, first defying a buoyant England attack and then eventually tearing it apart as they put on a match-turning 279 for the sixth wicket.

Symonds' life was not at stake this time, but his Test career certainly was, and the all-rounder responded with his second timely batting performance in as many Boxing Day Tests.

He came to the crease at 84 for five and with his own place in the side under intense scrutiny after two more failures with the bat in the third Test in Perth, but finished the day an Ashes hero after posting a memorable maiden Test century in front of 75,770 fans.

"It's been an amazing Test match

for me. I didn't think I would be anywhere near playing in the series, to playing with Shane Warne out here getting 700 wickets, scoring 100 with one of my best mates of all time in the Boxing Day Test ... it's been a fair old week," Symonds said.

Despite his belligerent 72 from 54 balls in the corresponding game against South Africa 12 months ago, Symonds averaged a modest 18 with the bat and 40 with the ball in his previous 11 Tests.

With the England bowlers pressing, the powerful right-hander looked uncomfortable early as he tried to survive a testing period directly before lunch, and took 21 balls to get off the mark.

"I was very nervous when I first got out there, but I was seeing the ball well out of the (bowler's) hand and after a dozen balls I was thinking where am I going to get a run here?" Symonds said.

Arguably playing only because of Shane Watson's injury woes, as Australia looks for its answer to Andrew Flintoff, Symonds was also quite fortunate to survive an lbw appeal by Monty Panesar, with umpire Rudi Koertzen again failing to raise the finger despite the evidence in front of him.

However, Symonds blossomed as the innings developed and started to play some of the imperious strokes that have made him a one-day matchwinner.

Symonds brought up his first Test century in remarkable fashion,

smashing part-time seamer Paul Collingwood way over long on for his first six.

"I was thinking whether I should do this (century) in ones or give it some 'Larry Dooley', and I decided if he slipped one up I would give it some Larry Dooley, but I didn't know it went for six," he said.

It sparked wild celebrations from Symonds, who leapt high into the air and into the arms of Hayden, before punching the air in jubilation.

For the first time in his Test career, he had mixed aggression and caution with success, facing 215 balls in 316 minutes at the crease, hitting 15 fours and the six.

At stumps, Symonds had gone on to be 154 not out and the innings had been chanceless, although he survived another confident lbw appeal, this time turned down by Aleem Dar, from the bowling of Flintoff when on 142.

Hayden and Symonds had come together with their side trailing by 75 runs and facing a possible first innings deficit.

By the time Hayden fell to Sajid Mahmood for 153, the pair had batted for most of the day and helped give Australia a lead of 213 by stumps.

This time it was a shattered England that was all at sea and the possibility of a 5-0 series whitewash was becoming very real.

# 'Warne moment forever'



AFP, Melbourne

Shane Warne has changed cricket," it said.

"It was one of life's sweet coincidences that in taking his 700th wicket Warne gave us all a lesson on what's different about him to those who preceded him and the poor souls who will follow.

"Yesterday (Tuesday) was not a day for legspin. The ball was wet, the air was cold and Warne looked stiff as a post in his first over. But, as is most often the case, he came through it."

The Australian newspaper said Warne's milestone before a record Ashes crowd of 89,155 will be long remembered by cricket fans.

"The series is officially dead, with Australia leading 3-0, and England is dying again after being bowled out for 159 on the opening day of the fourth Test, but everyone at the ground yesterday will carry Warne's moment forever," the newspaper said.

"It was not just the moment that Warne captured. He humiliated England, again, to finish with 5-39, the 11th time he had taken five wickets in an innings against the Old Enemy and 37th of his peerless career."

When Warne came on to bowl in the 41st over of the innings the bars around the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) emptied as drinkers bolted towards the action.

"It will go down as a minor miracle that nobody was trampled to death, but the herd's love of Warne comes as no surprise when you think of it. They are, after all, his people," The Australian said.

"It was to be a day you could tell the grandchildren about."

Former Australian captain Steve Waugh, writing in his column in the Daily Telegraph said England's batsmen half-expected the worst to happen on the first

day's play.

"They just didn't look purposeful enough, as if half expecting the worst to happen," Waugh observed.

"The transformation of Paul Collingwood from a guy who scored a double-century in Adelaide to a vulnerable, nervous-looking player to me sums up the thought process of the team right now.

"Their confidence couldn't have been helped by their best batsman, Pietersen, commenting before the last day's play in Perth that 'It's becoming increasingly clear our best is not good enough against this great Aussie side.'

"Batsman with more than one thought on his mind will often wander down the wrong path."

## Athletes' camp

FROM PAGE 17

as a responsible Global Corporate Citizen.

"The facilities and training in this academy are excellent. If we can continue training here, I firmly believe that we can excel not only at the South Asian level but even at the Asian level," said Masudul Karim, the current 100m champion of Bangladesh and a part of the contingent.

"It is our pride and privilege that the BOA found our sports facilities and infrastructure suitable for training their athletes and we are glad to facilitate the development of sports in Bangladesh in some way. We, in Tata Steel, will be the happiest, if we see this contingent winning medals in SAF 2008," told Indronil Sengupta, Chief Bangladesh Project, Tata Steel.

6x3