

Akhtar fined over logo breach

AFP, Karachi

Fiery Pakistani 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 paceman 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

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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 or create more chances in the second-half."

Figo set for Saudi

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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 Atlanta 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

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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

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 runs 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.

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

Brit press adores Warne



AFP, London

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."

Astle given all-clear

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up," said Vettori, who captains New Zealand for the ninth time in one-dayers.

New Zealand claimed the corresponding series 4-1 last summer, and Vettori said a similarly emphatic margin was needed as World Cup preparations gathered momentum.

"We've talked about if we want to consider ourselves as one of the favourites for the World Cup, we've got to start winning consistently -- and if we're not winning in our own backyard we can't be put up as favourites."

Sri Lankan coach Tom Moody, who presided over a 5-0 drubbing of England in their last series away from home, agreed the series was an important stepping stone to the World Cup, as his side only has four more games in India before heading to the West Indies.

"This is part of the process, another hurdle. It's an important lead-up to our campaign and we

want to look at a couple of combinations," said Moody, whose side has the confidence of knowing they beat New Zealand in their last encounter at the Champions Trophy tournament.

TEAMS

New Zealand (from): Daniel Vettori (captain), Andre Adams, Nathan Astle, James Franklin, Peter Fulton, Mark Gillespie, Hamish Marshall, James Marshall, Michael Mason, Brendon McCullum, Iain O'Brien, Jeetan Patel, Ross Taylor.

Sri Lanka (from): Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Marvan Atapattu, Malinga Bandara, Tilakaratne Dilshan, Dilhara Fernando, Sanath Jayasuriya, Chamara Kapugedera, Farveez Maharoof, Lasith Malinga, Muttiah Muralidaran, Ruchira Perera, Kumar Sangakkara, Chamara Silva, Upul Tharanga, Chaminda Vaas.

Symonds, Hayden sparkle

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once by Flintoff.

Steve Harmison, who has failed to recapture the form of last year's Ashes series in England, produced a gem of a delivery to remove Clarke in the next over.

Harmison found extra bounce with his second ball to get an edge off Clarke's prodding bat for wicketkeeper Read to take the catch and leave the Aussies at 84 for five and trailing England at that stage by 75 runs.

The travelling Barmy Army supporters were in full voice, urging England to finish off the Australians, but Hayden and Symonds' defiance stand in almost five hours left them reflecting on more lost opportunities.

All three went into the Melbourne Test boasting century-plus averages in the series -- Ponting (104.80), Hussey (138.33) and Clarke (124.33).

Skipper Andrew Flintoff removed Ponting cheaply when the Aussie skipper attempted to pull from well outside the off-stump only to sky a catch to Alastair Cook at mid-wicket.

Hussey was bowled between bat and pad by Matthew Hoggard with one that straightened on him.

It was the third time in the series that Hussey has been bowled in the series, twice by Hoggard and

(Strauss 50, Collingwood 28; Warne 5-39)

AUSTRALIA: First innings (48 for 2 overnight)

Langer c Read b Flintoff 27

Hayden c Read b Mahmood 153

Lee c Read b Flintoff 0

Ponting c Cook b Flintoff 7

Horsey b Hoggard 6

Clarke c Read b Harmison 5

Symonds not out 154

Gilchrist c Collingwood 0

Mahmood 1

Warne not out 4

Extras: (lb-6, nb-9) 15

Total: (For 7 wkt in 96 overs) 372

Fall of wickets: 1-44, 2-44, 3-62, 4-

79, 5-84, 6-363, 7-365.

Bowler O M R W

Hoggard 21 6 82 1

Flintoff 22 1 77 3

Harmison 22 5 55 1

Mahmood 15 1 67 2

Ponson 12 1 52 0

Collingwood 3 0 20 0

Pietersen 1 0 13 0

Toss: England

Umpires: Aleem Dar (PAK) Rudi Koertzen (RSA)

Match referee: Ranjan Madugalle (SRI).

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. (Curly) 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 feel 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

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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 Fides.

"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 treasured 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

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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