

Shoaib happy at return

PTI, Karachi

Controversial fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar, a late inclusion in the Pakistani squad for the tour of South Africa, believes the dope saga is behind him despite the matter lying before the Court of Arbitration for Sports.

"I have been cleared by a competent committee and do not believe I'm under any kind of threat. I don't even think about it anymore," he said referring to the dope scandal that had put his career jeopardy before he was exonerated of the charge.

The overturning of his ban has been challenged by the World Anti Doping Agency in Court of Arbitration for Sports in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Drafted in as a late replacement for an injured Umar Gul, Shoaib would miss out on the first Test, but the 'Rawalpindi Express' was confident of coming good in the rest of the matches.

"It is great to be back and even though I was looking forward to the opening Test, I'm not really disappointed at missing it because there would be two more matches to go in the series against South Africa. I'm fit and raring to go," he was quoted as saying in 'The News' on Wednesday.

Shoaib also said captain Inzamamul Haq, who is believed to be instrumental in the bowler being ignored from the initial 17-member squad, should be more supportive of his teammates.

"I believe as captain Inzamam should be more supportive of his teammates, especially if they are going through a rough time. As a captain, it is Inzamam's responsibility to keep players united."

Hunt for pacers

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"We have to produce some good fast bowlers to compete at the highest level and I think physique is not a barrier to become a good paceman. Good training, which has already seen success in India and especially in Sri Lanka, is more important," explained the bearded organiser.

"The BCB's pace academy will be working full-fledged so it's a continues process to train the bowlers who had been picked up from the talent hunt programme. We will definitely focus on speed and believe that somebody's action could be rectified if he had real speed, over 140kph," he explained adding that they were also concerned about friendly pitches for grooming fast bowlers.

BCB development committee chairman Khondokar Jamiluddin informed that they have a plan to bring great fast bowlers like Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis during the camp, which will be conducted with selected players after the nationwide search.

"We had a very resounding success last time and we are looking forward for another milestone achievement. One thing I must say is that the GrameenPhone Pacer Hunt is exceptional because it is a national platform that gives every young aspirant to prove his mettle," said Erik Aas, managing director of GrameenPhone.

The Tk 15-lakh programme will be held at two different venues – Phase 1: Chittagong (February 7-9), Barisal (Feb 13-14), Madaripur (Feb 15-16), Khulna (Feb 17-18), Satkhira (Feb 19-20), Rangpur (Feb 25-26), Dinajpur (Feb 27-28), Rajshahi (March 1-2), Mymensingh (Mar 3-4), Moulavibazar (Mar 7-8), Narayanganj (Mar 10-11) and Dhaka (Mar 20). Phase 2: April 20-29 and Phase 3: June 16-25.

1.2 million

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for hefty compensation.

Their chairman Sten-Inge Fredin said: "The exact sum a deal like this will cost United depends on a lot of circumstances. For example, we would have to decide if we need to replace him in our own team."

"It is, first and foremost, up to Henrik if he will stay in Manchester. If he wants that, then we are certainly up for discussions with United."

Diarra staying

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"I am in daily contact with the

Real Madrid management and the option of selling Diarra has never been mentioned," he continued.

The agent was also eager to dismiss rumours that there are any problems with Coach Fabio Capello, who has allegedly included the player's name in the list of men that he would want to be sold at the end of the season.

"He is not playing now, but this doesn't mean anything. Mahamadou has no problem at all with the tactician," ended Guerrá.

Inter chief Massimo Moratti, questioned on the possible arrival of Diarra, cooled talk of such a move on Tuesday.

"I don't know anything about him, you'll have to ask boss Roberto Mancini," stated the Nerazzurri owner.



PHOTO: INTERNET
Indian tennis star Sania Mirza celebrates after beating Australia's Alicia Molik in the Hobart International tournament on Wednesday.

Sania sails, Serena fails



AFP, Hobart

Seven-time Grand Slam champion Serena Williams was eliminated from the quarterfinals of the Hobart International in three sets here Wednesday.

The American, ranked 94 after an injury-blighted last season, went down to Austrian Sybille Bammer, 3-6, 7-5, 6-3, leaving her short of match conditioning ahead of next week's Australian Open in Melbourne.

"I've never seen her play like this before in my life. I guess she was just up to play me," Williams said of the world number 56.

"I don't think I played that well, I made a lot of unforced errors, but I just think I'm a little rusty so I've just got to try and shake it off for Melbourne (the Australian Open)."

"I just got a little bit sore (in the third set), but I wasn't really tired. My body was just feeling sore."

Bammer, who ousted second seed Anabel Medina Garrigues in the second round, will now play Russia's 70th-ranked Vasilisa Bardina in Thursday's semi-finals.

India's Sania Mirza will take on the tournament top seed Anna Chakvetadze in the other semi-final.

Chakvetadze defeated seventh-seed Jie Zheng of China, 4-6, 6-1, 6-1.

Compatriot Vasilisa Bardina triumphed 3-6, 6-2, 7-5 in a grueling three-hour match against Catalina Castano of Colombia.

Blake on course



AFP, Sydney

World number four James Blake's chances of back-to-back Sydney International tennis titles improved with a second round victory and more withdrawals here Wednesday.

"I'm feeling better and better," Blake said.

"I hope to continue that, but I know there's going to be times where there's valleys to go with these peaks."

Blake said he felt he was a definitely a better player than when he won here 12 months ago.

"That's exciting to me. That's one of the main reasons I play the game is to keep getting better."

The top half of the draw is opening up for the American third seed after his straight sets win over Australian Nathan Healey left him with a quarterfinal Thursday against Russian lucky loser Evgeny Korolev.

Top seed Rafael Nadal withdrew from the tournament on Tuesday with a right-thigh injury, giving defending champion Blake a great chance of progressing further.

The bottom half of the men's draw also lost second seed Nikolay Davydenko, who retired after losing the first set to Frenchman Paul-Henri Mathieu, citing a possible stress fracture in his right foot.

Blake enjoyed his career-best season last year with five ATP titles to finish fourth in the year-end rankings.

"Luckily, in the last year it has been a pretty fun ride. I've been rolling along and I seem to keep going further and further," Blake said.

"I'm feeling better and better. It was not easy. It was hot, the first time I'm playing in this heat since a long time," Baghdatis said.

"It's good to have a tough match out there in the heat. I think it's going to make me get ready for the Australian Open and for the next few matches out here."

Moys, twice a losing finalist here, fought off a match point before he prevailed over fellow Spaniard and eighth seed Fernando Verdasco, 4-6, 7-6, 6-3.

Baghdatis, who shocked the tennis world by reaching the final of last year's Australian Open, where he lost in four sets to Roger Federer, said he was ready to handle the pressures of extra expectations.

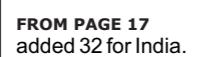
"There is pressure, just trying to live with it," he said.

"That's the way it is. Just try to accept it, just try to enjoy it and just try to play."

"Every time I go on the court, just try to fight, just try to give my best, and that's the only thing you can do."

Czech fifth seed Tomas Berdych fought back from dropping the opening set to oust compatriot Ivo Minar 6-7, 6-0, 6-4 and will now face Austrian Jorgen Melzer, who beat Australian Chris Guccione 7-6, 6-3 in 70 minutes in a night match.

Big guns cruise



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added 32 for India.

Victoria's Pakistani spinner Jafar Qureshi captured four wickets.

SCOREBOARDS

Scoreboards of the Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League matches at different venues yesterday:

Young Pegasus v Old Dohs

YOUNG PEGASUS

Karim c Shahin b Mahmud 26

Asif c Shahin b Dollar 0

Mohon c Mahmud b Dollar 6

Moniruzzaman lbw Dollar 0

Saif c Nadif b Shahadat 1

Sharif lbw Razzal 10

Jubair c Nadif b Enamul 15

Raisul c & b Mehrab 32

Delwar b Shahadat 8

Mortuza b Shahadat 5

Kamal not out 0

Extras: (lb-8, nb-1, wd-14) 23

Total: (All out in 40.1 overs) 126

Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-17, 3-22, 4-36, 5-52, 6-71, 7-80, 8-106, 9-116, 10-126.

Bowler O M R W

Shahadat 10 1 36 3

Dollar 5 0 13 3

Razzak 8 0 26 1

Mahmud 6 3 9 1

Enamul 6 0 15 1

Mehrab 5.1 0 19 1

Result: Pegasus won by 8 wickets.

SONARGAON

Tamim c Jubair b Kamal 54

Mehrab c Moniruzzaman b Saif 4

Ehsan not out 44

Nadir c Mortuza b Kamal 0

Akram Khan not out 5

Extras: (lb-2, nb-3, w-16) 21

Total: (For 3 wickets in 36.3 overs) 128

Fall of wickets: 1-21, 2-95, 3-99

Bowler O M R W

Ejaz b Rezaul 7

Al Shahriar c Raquibul b Dipazzal 1

Alok not out 13

Marshall not out 9

Extras: (lb-1, w-14) 15

Total: (For 2 wickets in 10.4 overs) 45

Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2-16.

Bowler O M R W

Rezaul 5.4 0 25 1

Dipazzal 5 0 19 1

Aslam 0.1 0 1 0

Result: Sonargaon won by 8 wickets.

INDIRA ROAD

Arifur b Wasel 32

Ashiq not out 15

Rasel c Nasir b Jaffer 11

Result: Indira Road won by 9 wickets.

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