

Bermuda to top minnows' field

AFP, Nairobi

Bermuda will be out to shed the tag of being the underdogs in the ICC World Cricket League Division One when they renew rivalry with Kenya in the opening match on Monday.

The Americas Cup champions believe their World Cup preparations are on track after recent losses in the Intercontinental Cup and one-day internationals in Africa and the Caribbean.

"We went to the America's Cup in Toronto as the underdogs and came home as champions," Bermuda team manager Lionel Tannock told AFP.

"Now we are in Kenya for the World Cricket League and we are being labelled the underdogs again. We hope to see the team through to the final."

Bermuda played out to a draw with Kenya in their Intercontinental Cup qualifier in November before losing 3-0 in the one-day internationals played in Mombasa.

The Bermuda Cricket Board has promised a cash bonus of 4,000 dollars to each player if they finish first or second in the tournament, of which the top two teams will qualify for the Twenty-20 World Championships in South Africa later this year.

The Islanders will welcome back their South African-born Saleem Mukuddem, who was the most consistent player during the tour of Kenya. The 35-year-old all-rounder has not played since injuring his lower back in South Africa in November.

Kenya, buoyed by a tri-series win in Mombasa earlier this month will however start as favourites to win the tournament which has an added bonus of 250,000 dollars for the winners.

The other competing countries are Holland, Ireland, Scotland and Canada.

Irfan gets

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Robin Uthappa. Fraser, however, said it remained to be seen how much rhythm Pathan would be able to maintain during the match here on Wednesday.

"How he translates this rhythm into practice in the match (on January 31) remains to be seen. India lacks a genuine all rounder and Irfan has the potential to become one," the Australian said.

Muktijoddha

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Chittagong Abahani will meet the press on Wednesday at 3:00 pm at the same venue.

SQUADS

MUKTIJODDHA: Saifur Rahman Moni (captain), Aminul Haque, Titumir Chowdhury, Nur-e-Alam Khan, Rajani Kanta Barman, Hasan Al Mamun, Firoz Mahmud Titu, Deen Mohammad, Matiur Munna, Arman Miah, Ajmol Hossain Biddyt, Parvez Babu, Arman Aziz, Saiful Islam, Kanchan, Alfaz, Enamul, Al Arman and Umar Faruq Babu.

CTG MOHAMMEDAN: Asif Yusuf (captain), Rashed Chowdhury, ATM Khairul Alam, Sumon, Mohammad Sohel, Israfil Hossain, Sanwar Hossain, Mohammad Tareq, Zasimuddin, Mohammad Uzzal, Kazi Imrul Islam, Nur Hossain Daulat, Nurul Azim, Mohammad Zahid, Shah Alam, Razib, Kamara Saifullah, Mohammad Yusuf, Mohammad Tauhid, Mohammad Anis, Dipu, Saikat and Ripon Khan.

Matrix pleads

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have always paid for my mistakes in the past, but this time I did nothing wrong," concluded Matrix.

Del Vecchio accepted that his reaction could not be defended, although he insisted that he was provoked by his opponent.

"I made a mistake and I apologise for it, but I would like Materazzi to admit that he provoked my reaction," said the Doriano. "He said that I wanted to hurt Adriano and Julio Cesar, that is not true. If he had spoken to me in a different way I wouldn't have reacted that badly. What I did was wrong, but you should read Materazzi's lips."

McLeish takes

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the unexpected departure of Walter Smith earlier this month.

"I am sure all of Scotland will get behind Alex in support of the national side as we try to build on the improved performances of recent times."

Scotland top Euro 2008 qualifying Group B with nine points from four games and their next fixture is against Georgia on March 24 at Hampden Park.

McLeish was due to be presented at a news conference at Hampden at 1100 GMT on Monday. His first engagement with the national team will be on Feb. 4, when the Scotland squad starts a three-day gathering at Tumberry Hotel in Ayrshire.



PHOTO: AFP

West Indies coach Bennett King (R) inspects Shivnarine Chanderpaul's bat during a training session in Vadodara yesterday. They will play their fourth and final match against India tomorrow.

Gilchrist wants Hayden



AFP, Perth

Australian wicketkeeper-batsman Adam Gilchrist believes Matthew Hayden is the right man to partner him at the top of the order at the upcoming World Cup.

Hayden made the most of three missed chances, two before he reached double figures, to score his first one-day international century in almost two years against New Zealand here on Sunday.

Hayden's 117 against the Black Caps was his first substantial score in the tri-series, having controversially been recalled to the Australian side for the tournament.

Gilchrist believes the century was the turning point for Hayden's endangered one-day career and said he was confident the big left-hander would be his opening partner in the West Indies.

"I fully expect Haydos to go to the World Cup," Gilchrist said here Monday.

"I think he is re-establishing

himself at the top of the order very well and he'll be much better for the innings the other night.

"We started this series well by way of partnerships, and haven't had too many big ones since then, but that is something we will work on.

"It was really pleasing to see Haydos come through with an individual result. Hopefully that will settle him down and keep the concerns away about what that (opening) partnership is going to be."

Gilchrist has opened with the forgotten Simon Katich and the injury-plagued Queensland all-rounder Shane Watson recently, batting with Watson at last year's Champions Trophy.

However, he said he was comfortable with his fellow 35-year-old at the other end.

"It feels like it has worked well when we have played together," he said of Hayden.

"He is terrific to bat with and I think we complement each other pretty well."

Australian captain Ricky Ponting also threw his support behind Hayden.

"I think Matty started the series off really well, but let a couple of scores get away," he said.

"Today was exactly what he was after and what the team was after.

"We can all look forward to some more big scores from him in the next couple of weeks."

Hayden admitted the World Cup was a significant carrot being dangled in front of him and was thrilled to score his first century since February 2005.

"I really enjoyed that hundred," Hayden said.

"It was pretty frustrating at the start and could say it was lucky, but from the time I was dropped that second time it was a good performance.

"It was good to put a big score on the board -- batting is confidence."

Hayden said he never lost belief he could succeed in one-day internationals, despite his extended absence from the team.

"It has been a frustrating few years -- my record doesn't lie," he said.

"When I was dropped I had a very good record."

No room for Ranatunga

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's World Cup winning captain Arjuna Ranatunga has once again been ignored for a ministerial berth in the first reshuffle of President Mahinda Rajapakse's government.

The 43-year-old, who led Sri Lanka to World Cup success in 1996, is one of only four members of the ruling party who were not given portfolios when the cabinet was enlarged and reshuffled on Sunday.

Ranatunga entered politics in 2001 and made it clear he wanted to be the sports minister. Instead he was made the deputy minister of tourism.

He resigned the post last year after claiming that the president had promised him the coveted position as head of the country's cash-rich cricket governing body, Sri Lanka Cricket.

The authorities denied they had made such an assurance and since then Ranatunga has remained a backbencher in the government -- without a ministry or a post in the cricket establishment.

Ranatunga fell out of favour with Rajapakse because he was seen as a loyalist of the former president, with whom Rajapakse crossed swords.

The Ranatunga family has firmly established roots in the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party. His father Reggie, a former senior minister, is now the governor of a province while one of his brothers is a provincial minister.

Ranatunga declined to comment on the matter.

Rajapakse appointed 52 ministers, 33 non-cabinet ministers and 19 deputy ministers on Sunday.

Injury woe

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"The final decision will probably be made (Tuesday). He did some running out there today and we will see how he rocks up (Tuesday)."

Flintoff said the loss of Anderson was particularly disappointing for England, as he had run into his best form of an otherwise disappointing tour in recent tri-series matches.

Anderson has a history of back problems and is suffering from back soreness, but Flintoff said the seamer just needed a rest.

"He's been fantastic, I think he has got better and better on this trip," the skipper said.

"He's found his pace again and been swinging it at pace. He's bowled well with the new ball, especially in these one-day games."

"No one wants to miss games of cricket, but we have to get him right and I'm sure he will be."

Flintoff said England were considering shuffling their batting order on Tuesday, while vocal wicketkeeper Paul Nixon is under pressure to retain his place ahead of Chris Read.

Paceman Sajid Mahmood has been lively in the nets and could also win a recall to spice up the England attack.

Toure saves

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Kenwyne Jones before City made it 2-1 before half-time thanks to former England international striker Darius Vassell and Joey Barton.

United States international DaMarcus Beasley made the game safe for City 20 minutes from time.

But the result was partly overshadowed by City manager Stuart Pearce's post-match announcement that he had accepted the part-time post of England Under-21 manager.

"I have been offered the job and I have accepted it," said former England captain Pearce. "Now, it is down to the club and the FA to both be comfortable with the situation."

The draw for the fifth round of the FA Cup takes place Monday.

Inter continue

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Palermo who went down 3-0 at home to Lazio on Saturday.

Catania are tied for fourth place with Lazio on 30 points after their 1-1 draw at Atalanta, while Empoli's goalless draw at Chievo left them joint fifth on 29 points with Udinese, who beat Torino 3-2 on Saturday.

AC Milan, struggling to cope with an eight-point penalty for their role in the Serie A match-fixing scandal, had veteran striker Filippo Inzaghi to thank for their unconvincing 1-0 home win against Parma.

Milan lacked a cutting edge before Inzaghi pounced 14 minutes from time, and the expected arrival of Brazilian striker Ronaldo from Real Madrid this week will no doubt be warmly welcomed by coach Carlo Ancelotti.

Despite a limp display at the San Siro, Milan are now only three points adrift of fourth place.

Fiorentina, hampered by a 15-point deduction for their match-fixing crimes, came from behind to beat Livorno 2-1 in a fiercely-contested Tuscan derby.

Reggina boosted their survival hopes with a 2-0 win at Cagliari, while two late goals from Michele Paolucci gave bottom club Ascoli a 2-1 victory at Messina.

Imran rues lost chance



AFP, Karachi

Pakistan made too many mistakes and spoiled a golden opportunity to win their first-ever Test series in South Africa, former cricket greats said on Monday.

South Africa earned a five-wicket win in the third Test at Cape Town on Sunday to take a hard-fought three-match series 2-1.

Former captain and all-rounder Imran Khan said the selectors' decision to drop fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar from the tour was wrong.

Akhtar was flown to South Africa after injury to the main strike bowler, Umar Gul, and destroyed the South African top order on the opening day of the second Test match, which Pakistan won.

He pulled a hamstring after bowling just 11 overs, during which he took four wickets. He was later sent back home for treatment and rehabilitation.

"Pakistan committed the blunder of not taking Akhtar from the start of the tour and his injury at Port Elizabeth could have been because he wasn't match fit," said Imran of Akhtar.

"Some good things have also come out and now the team management realise Tests can only be won through match winners,"

Imran said.

Jacques Kallis and Ashwell Prince hit half-centuries during their 117-run fifth wicket stand as the hosts successfully chased a challenging 161-run target on a tricky Newlands pitch.

South Africa won the first Test at Centurion by seven wickets. Pakistan squared the series with a five-wicket win in the second Test at Port Elizabeth.

Imran praised spearhead Mohammad Asif for putting up a good show.

"Asif is well on his way to become one of the greats. If he gains a little bit of pace through weight training he can be more lethal," said Imran of the 24-year-old paceman, who claimed 19 wickets in the series.

Imran, now a member of Pakistan's parliament, said not selecting batsman Yasir Hameed in the first Test was also a blunder.

"Hameed's 35 in the second innings of the third Test showed his class and to me his progress was halted by not selecting him earlier."

And Imran criticised the decision to bat captain Inzamamul Haq at six and Mohammad Yousuf at five.

"Yousuf is the best batsman alongside Australian Ricky Ponting at the moment but how many times Ponting has batted below three? And Ponting always leads from the

front," Imran said of the Australian captain.

Imran said leg-spinner Danish Kaneria had talent but lacked the temperament of the now-retired Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne.

"Temperament was the biggest of Warne's assets and he used to perform when his team needed the most and when under pressure," said Imran of the legendary Warne, who retired earlier this month from Test cricket with a world record 708 wickets.

Another former captain, Zaheer Abbas, blamed players' fitness and poor fielding for the series loss.

"We fought well in the series but our fitness and fielding left a lot to be desired," said Abbas, who was nicknamed Asia's Don Bradman because of his ability to score big runs.

Abbas disagreed with Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer that the hectic schedule was the reason for Pakistan's frequent injury problems.

"You need to have good back-ups (for injured players). South Africa was struggling but they were fitter and were a good fielding side," said Abbas.

He said Pakistan's fielding would be further exposed in the one-day series starting with the first match at Centurion on February 4.

Bob blasts scheduling



AFP, Cape Town

Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer criticised a "ridiculous" international schedule as injuries finally caught up with his team when they lost the series-deciding third and final Test against South Africa by five wickets on the third day at Newlands on Sunday.

Jacques Kallis (51) and Ashwell Prince (59 not out) steered South Africa to a 2-1 series win after coming together when their side were wobbling at 39 for four in their quest for a target of 161 on a tricky pitch.

They put on 117 for the fifth wicket before Kallis was bowled by Shahid Nazir when just five runs were needed for victory.

Kallis and Prince had to work hard while opening bowler Mohammad Asif and leg-spinner Danish Kaneria bowled superbly in tandem.

"They put us under a lot of pressure and we just had to absorb it," said Kallis.

"But there is no way you can carry on doing it all day and there had to come a period where they would crack and perhaps start trying a few things. It happened after lunch and once we got the momentum things became a lot easier."

Pakistan's problem was that their other bowlers could not maintain the standard set by Asif and Kaneria,

especially with Mohammad Sami having split the webbing of his bowling hand while fielding Saturday.

Woolmer pointed out that three of his leading bowlers were back in Pakistan. "The current schedules are ridiculous," he said.

"You are already seeing players like Shaun Pollock and Makhaya Ntini who are exhausted and today Asif was an example. Fatigue leads to injuries. It's a proven equation. If you have too much fatigue, your back goes or you twinge a hamstring or get a stress fracture.

"Cricket has to look at it. As a coach I have to manage these things. We've got Umar Gul, Shoaib Akhtar and Shabbir Ahmed sitting at home. Somewhere along the line the commercial aspects and the physical aspects of looking after players have to be revisited."

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq was off the field for much of the final day with a back injury. "We don't know the severity of it yet but he couldn't bend down so he came off the field. He's had the same injury before," said Woolmer.

He said it was too early to make a call on the likelihood of Inzamam being fit for a five-match one-day series which starts next Sunday following a Twenty20 international in Johannesburg Friday.

Woolmer said the series loss was disappointing but he said it showed Pakistan had improved since losing all three Tests of a series in Australia

two seasons ago on similar, bouncy pitches.

Asif took two early wickets, dismissing South African captain Graeme Smith and Hashim Amla, to put the home side under pressure.

When Asif was rested half an hour before lunch he had bowled a spell of 11 overs in which he took two wickets for six runs, while South Africa had advanced by just 18 runs in 22.5 overs from their overnight total of 36 for two.

"Asif has been incredible," said Woolmer. "He's a top quality bowler. He's still young in Test cricket and has got a long way to mature but he's very close to the top of his trade already."

"With fine tuning and greater fitness levels he'll be a real force in the future of Pakistan cricket."

Platini confirms

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the smaller federations. But it's not always a question of money," said the former France and Juventus legend.

"Why don't we, for example, invite coaches from countries like Georgia to come and reap the benefits of the French national training centre for two weeks ... all at the expense of UEFA?"

Platini said he had already brushed off criticism of his plans from England and Germany.

"The important thing is to work for the greater good of football."

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