

Rossi signs new Yamaha deal

AFP, Paris

Former world champion Valentino Rossi will stay with Yamaha for the next two years despite seeing his crown snatched by America's Nicky Hayden on a Honda in 2006.

The next two seasons will see Rossi ride as part of Yamaha's official factory team, with whom he has already won two MotoGP world championship titles since joining in 2004.

The Italian, who turns 28 this month, has won 25 Grand Prix during his three seasons with Yamaha and currently stands third in the all-time Grand Prix winners list.

Rossi, who is spearheading the rider development of Yamaha's new 800cc motorcycle in the run-up to the new MotoGP season, will be back in action next week for Yamaha's second test of the year in Sepang, Malaysia.

WC booklet kicks up race row

AFP, Georgetown

An allegedly racist photograph caption in a brochure for the 2007 Cricket World Cup has opened up longstanding racial tensions between Guyana's East Indians and its African-descendant population, an official said Friday.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) ticket brochure captions a photograph of the India-financed Providence stadium being built for coming games, saying that "with Guyana's distinct Indian heritage you are sure to experience the fusion of West Indian and East Indian culture."

Following outcries by the main opposition Peoples National Congress Reform-One Guyana, which is mainly supported by descendants of African slaves, as well as by Georgetown Mayor Hamilton Green, the government has written the ICC seeking an explanation.

"The words on the brochure are unfortunate. It was never the intention of the LOC (Local Organising Committee) or anybody in Guyana to have any sort of division," said Sports and Culture Minister, Frank Anthony, a member of the mainly East Indian-supported government.

Guyana's political landscape is divided between East Indians -- descendants of migrants from India -- who make up about 43 percent of the 751,000 citizens. Meanwhile, some 30 per cent are descendants of African slaves.

Anthony said copies of newspaper articles and letters have been dispatched to the Cricket World Cup (CWC) 2007 chief executive Chris Dehring and Guyanese authorities have asked for an explanation.

Denying claims by Green that Guyana's local organizing committee had contributed to the offending caption, Anthony blamed CWC for unilaterally publishing marketing and promotion materials.

India's Vice-President Bhairon Singh Shekhawat in November flew to Guyana to participate in dedicating the stadium being built at a cost of 25 million dollars to host CWC games.

Malik's ban maybe lifted

PTI, Karachi

Former Pakistan captain Salim Malik could have the life ban on him for alleged involvement in match fixing lifted by the Supreme Court, Cricket Board (PCB) sources said on Saturday.

Malik moved the Supreme Court after his appeal was rejected in all the lower courts of the country. His petition is now being heard by a bench headed by the Chief Justice of Pakistan.

The Supreme Court had said Friday that it would examine all important documents before giving a ruling on the punishment to the batsman by the PCB.

"The Chief Justice appears keen to reach a conclusion on the appeal. At the first hearing on Thursday he made it clear he wanted to know under which laws the board or the International Cricket Council (ICC) was Malik banned and also talked about the evidences to support the ban," a PCB source said.

The Chief Justice also noted that Malik had made a big contribution to Pakistan cricket and that the court wanted to know the reasons and laws under which the player had been banned.

"The full bench said they wanted to examine the evidence and circumstances and the laws justifying the ban on Malik," the source said.

Unfortunately, Malik had hired a weak lawyer to represent him in the case, the source added.

Malik played in 103 Tests before being banned in 2000.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Martina Hingis of Switzerland waves to the crowd after her semifinal victory over Elena Dementieva of Russia at the Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo on Saturday.

SHARAPOVA PULLS OUT Hingis-Ivanovic final

Tennis

AFP, Tokyo

Former world number one Martina Hingis beat defending champion Elena Dementieva on Saturday for a place in the final of the Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament against Ana Ivanovic.

The Swiss second seed, seeking a record fifth Tokyo indoor title this week, avenged her loss in last year's final with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over the Russian third seed.

Ivanovic, the fifth seed from Serbia, received a free ticket to the final after current world number one Maria Sharapova of Russia pulled out of her semifinal match with a left hamstring injury at 6-1, 0-1.

"I know I'm playing 10 occasions and it's my eighth appearance in the finals and the chance to make it a record five, so of course I'm excited about it. I'm gonna play my best possible tennis tomorrow against Ana," said Hingis.

Hingis attacked Dementieva's

backhand side and chalked up a 5-1 lead in first set. She was never in danger afterwards, forcing a break in the eighth game of the second set and wrapping up the win in 70 minutes.

"That's my strategy for most of the time," Hingis said of her attack on Dementieva's backhand -- because I feel like my backhand is a stronger part. "She also hit a lot of backhand cross-court rallies. I also tried to change up to go down the line. It's definitely my big weapon, my backhand cross court."

Dementieva said: "She was solid. She was very consistent during the whole game, playing very smart as usual."

"I think I didn't play my best. I made too many unforced errors. I just didn't take an advantage of short balls to come to finish the points. I think she was better by playing a lot of rallies," she added.

Ivanovic, who had beaten her compatriot and fourth seed Jelena Jankovic in three sets on Friday, said her victory over the injured Sharapova was not a good way to

win a match.

"From the beginning of the match, I didn't notice anything, because she was moving pretty well and also serving OK," said the Serbian.

"I was really surprised that at the end of the set she called a physician and straight away retired. It was surprising that she had a problem."

Ivanovic added: "It's never nice to win the match that way. I felt pretty confident and I was happy that each match I played better and my serve was working really well -- that's very important to play against top players."

"I also think I was moving pretty well on the court and I was very aggressive, which is very important to play against Maria, not to give any time, and I was pretty happy with my performance today."

Sharapova said: "It's always disappointing to end a tournament that way. I definitely tried to find the way, hoping the pain was settled and would get better. That's why I tried to play the first set."

'Mother Teresa changed my life'

PTI, Melbourne

A meeting with Mother Teresa proved to be the "turning point" in Australian legend Steve Waugh's life providing him the inspiration he needed to walk away from cricket and devote his life to charity.

"The turning point for me was meeting Mother Teresa," Waugh said ahead of the official opening of his Australian children's charity. "I was in Calcutta and went along to meet her at the Mother (Teresa) House."

"I witnessed an early morning mass and it was an overwhelming experience. I felt something special with her giving to the poorest of the poor," the former captain said.

Waugh, who has been associated with Udayan, a home for children of leprosy patients, has now taken his charities to the needy in his home country.

"I never see myself as a cricketer. I see myself as being involved in charities," Waugh told The 'Daily Telegraph' on Friday.

The first charity of its kind in Australia, the Steve Waugh Foundation has been established for sick kids who slip between the cracks of established support organisations.

The 41-year-old former cricketer decided he wanted to help the sickest of the sick and spent months researching where charity funds were missing in Australia.

Have your hair cut, now!

CRICINFO, undated

While some may argue that Zimbabwe Cricket has not got enough on its plate, what with continuing internal unrest and a national side that has lost 12 ODIs on the trot, it has decided to take a firm stand on one of the game's more serious issues.

It has emerged that three of the national side -- Keith Dabengwa, Tawanda Mupariwa and Christopher Mpofu -- were ordered to have their hair cut or be dropped as part of a new board dress code.

Mpofu and Dabengwa were the first to be chopped, although Mupariwa tried to resist and even wrote a letter to a ZC board member explaining why he wanted to keep his hair. However, he eventually gave up on Saturday evening and was seen spotting his new look when he took to the field for Zimbabwe A on Sunday.

It is not yet clear whether pace bowler Douglas Hondo, who has been spotting locks since he started playing for Zimbabwe in 2001 and is eyeing a comeback after injury problems, will agree to comply.

A stakeholder, who did not wish to be identified, said that it was a surprising move given the rather more pressing concerns facing ZC. He added, tongue firmly in cheek, that the ZC leadership were not likely to be affected by the new rules as neither Peter Chingoka, the chairman, or Ozias Bvute, the managing director, are overly hirsute. On a more serious note, he also asked whether national selector Vumindaba Moyo, who is dreadlocked, would be asked to cut his locks since he is a full-time employee of Zimbabwe Cricket.

Rather like Samson, the lack of hair seemed to sap the strength from the Zimbabweans as they crashed to a heavy defeats at the hands of South Africa A last month.

Odoyo brings amazing win

REUTERS, Nairobi

Kenya vice-captain Thomas Odoyo slogged an unbeaten 61 off 36 balls with three sixes and two fours to hand his side another victory in the World Cricket League tournament on Friday.

Opponents Ireland had posted 284-4 after centuries from William Porterfield (104 not out) and Kevin O'Brien (142).

At 231-9, it all looked over for Kenya but Odoyo turned the game on its head, hitting two successive sixes, a four and a two in the 49th over to clinch victory on 286-9.

It was the Kenyans' third win of the pre-World Cup tournament after successes over Bermuda and the Netherlands.

Kenya to fight

Third-placed Ireland play Canada while the Netherlands take on Bermuda at Nairobi's Ruaraka Sports club grounds.

The tournament has served as a strong warning for Bermuda, the Americas Trophy champions, ahead of their debut in the World Cup, which should expect the worst against bigger teams including former champions Sri Lanka and India.

Bermuda, coached by former West Indies star batsman Gus Logie, has lost all their three matches in the series and remained at the bottom of the table.

Onus on the Kiwis

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

New Zealand can make resurgent England's task of reaching the finals even harder if they can build on recent form and hand tri-series leaders Australia a second successive loss in their one-dayer here Sunday.

The Kiwis must win at least one of their two remaining pool matches, against Australia and against England in Brisbane on Tuesday, to play in the tri-series finals.

Captain Stephen Fleming said England's breakthrough 92-run win over Australia in Sydney on Friday made things tougher for his team but the Black Caps have to get used to winning when it matters.

New Zealand and England are

locked on nine points behind Australia's 27 points heading into the final two pool matches.

"This is what we wanted," Fleming said Saturday. "We want it to be a semi-final, a pressure game, where we continue the momentum we build."

"That's what the World Cup's about, so if anything we couldn't ask for much more."

"It's uncomfortable because you want to win these next two games, but we certainly don't want to miss out on the finals so we've got to play accordingly."

New Zealand have been continually improving in the tri-series and got to within eight runs of beating Australia in a high-scoring game in Perth last Sunday.

The Black Caps gave the Aussies a fright thanks mainly to Jacob Oram's magnificent century but still have lost 18 of their past 20

matches against Australia.

Fleming said his side's form was encouraging but New Zealand must start beating Australia.

"While we're close it's okay to walk away saying 'Gee, we're not far away'. But far away could be eight runs, it could be 58 runs. We've got to get across the line."

New Zealand have to wait until Sunday before announcing the make-up of their bowling attack, as strike bowler Shane Bond will be rested in one of the remaining two pool games to give his troublesome back further time to settle.

Bond played in New Zealand's win over England last Tuesday, but could be replaced by Kyle Mills.

Batting all-rounder Scott Styris is also likely to come into the side after overcoming back problems, which could force Craig McMillan out.

Press happy at last

Cricket

AFP, London

Britain's newspaper sport editors breathed a collective sigh of relief Saturday after England's cricketers at last gave them something different to write about: a comprehensive win against Australia.

After the tourists recorded their first win at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday, the tabloid Daily Mirror asked in a headline: "Q: Why is it called One day cricket? A: It's the One day we beat Australia!"

Headlines in the early editions were similarly tongue-in-cheek. "Cricket sensation" screamed The Sun. "We've won!" The Daily Mail said simply "At last!"

Others reflected on England's fruitless efforts since arriving Down Under in November last year. "After three months, 9,119 minutes of play and 12,588 balls, England finally beat Australia," said The Guardian.

All praised the efforts of and noted the irony in the Irishman who largely spared England's blushes, Ed Joyce, who notched up his first international ton with 107 off 142 balls in a match-winning total of 292.

'Worst beat the best'

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

The Australian media on Saturday welcomed England's first cricketing victory over their hosts but still rated the hapless side as the worst to ever tour Down Under.

"At Last" said Sydney's Daily Telegraph following England's 92-run one-day victory over Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday night, adding, "world's worst team beat the best".

The Australian newspaper pointed out that it took the tourists 94 days to notch a win over Australia, declaring, "England breaks out of coma".

In that three months, England have slumped to the first 5-0 Ashes Test whitewash in 86 years and been humiliated by Australia three times in the one-day arena.

"The accepted wisdom was that England had been so bad for so long that this physically and mentally deficient team would simply roll over, have no chance of playing in the finals and make a dash for the airport by the middle of next week," the Australian said.

It said that before the match, many cricket fans disgruntled at the lack of competition had attempted to sell their tickets at a fraction of their face value and more than 5,000 failed to turn up to the sold out venue.

But the Telegraph said the absent fans missed an England win that was nothing short of a miracle, noting the embattled side produced its second highest one-day total against Australia.

"After a one-sided summer, the dramatic events at the SCG unfolded as if England and Australia had simply swapped shirts," it said.

England even snatched a bonus point to keep alive its chances of securing a finals spot in the triangular series at the expense of New Zealand.

However, the Sydney Morning Herald's Peter Fitzsimons said the win was too little too late after the huge expectations that preceded England's arrival to defend its stunning Ashes win of 2005.

"Their sin is not merely losing, it is the way they have done it in such a wimpy way that you can barely credit this is much the same side that beat the Australians 18 months ago," he said.

"Where is their grit, their fight, their 'in-defeat-defiance', as ol' Winston so eloquently put it?"

"Does anyone even remember an expression of anger out of them at the fact that they had only one win (against New Zealand) to show for 17 games before last night's SCG victory?"

The Australian's Mike Coward offered a similar damning assessment of the touring England side.

"It is passionless, utterly passionless," he said. "It has not only lost matches, it has lost respect."

"It is hard to think of any team in any sport that has failed quite as dismally as this and the long-term consequences may be very severe indeed."

Youngsters satisfy Flintoff

BBC ONLINE, undated

Andrew Flintoff has praised his younger players after celebrating his first win against Australia as England captain.

Ed Joyce hit a maiden century, Ian Bell a fifty and Liam Plunkett and Sajid Mahmood starred with the ball to help England to a 92-run in Sydney.

Flintoff said: "One of the real pleasing things about it is that it was the young lads who won the game for us."

"They carried us through -- that gives you a lot of heart and shows these lads can play."

It was the first time in three months -- 10 matches, 9,119 minutes of play and 12,588 balls -- England had beaten Australia.

Flintoff won the toss and England posted 292-7 in their 50 overs -- a record one-day score for them against Australia.

They then skittled Australia out for 200 to keep their hopes of making the finals of the Commonwealth Bank Series alive.

"The one thing we had to do was keep the belief we could beat Australia," said Flintoff.

"A combination of everything -- winning the toss -- came together."

"We went back to the basics of one-day cricket: your opening batsman bats through, gets a hundred and the others bat around him."

"Then, with the ball in your hand defending 290, there is a real belief you can do it. The fielding was fantastic and we didn't let up."

England played New Zealand on Tuesday in a winner-takes-all match to see who will meet Australia in the best-of-three finals.

Mohammedan

FROM PAGE 17 (Shahriar 15, Hannan 39, Imran 74, Fahadullah 20, Anisur 1, Bashir 13, Shahdual 1 not out, extras 8; Mahbubul 1-21, Obaidul 1-28, Kapali 1-27, Sunny 3-38) **SONARGAON:** 144-7 in 26 overs (Shahriar 11, Sunny 54, Jayantha 9, Kapali 31, Ayub 9, Dhiman 10 not out, Mahbubul 0, Salim 2, Fahim 3 not out, extras 15; Shahdual 2-19, Bashir 2-25, Ghosh 1-21) **Result: Brothers win by 10 runs by D-L method.**