



ICC weakens umpires

REUTERS, Mumbai

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has amended its laws so that match referees, rather than umpires, will decide whether games should be terminated if a team refuses to play.

The amendment to Law 21.3 follows last year's row at the Oval when Pakistan lost to England by forfeit for refusing to take the field after being accused of ball tampering.

The rule change was adopted at a two-day ICC board meeting which ended in Cape Town on Friday. It takes immediate effect.

"The Board's decision reflects the fact that the match referee is the chief executive of the match, the person who has overall responsibility for the way the game is played and officiated," ICC chief executive officer Malcolm Speed said in a statement.

"This decision does not, however, detract from the on-field role of the umpires and they would, of course, still remain an integral part of the process of awarding a match in those circumstances."

The ICC said umpires would

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Did U Know?

Javed Burki, Majid Khan and Imran Khan are all cousins who were captain of Pakistan in Test cricket.

What to WATCH

ESPN
English Premier Football League
West Ham v Tottenham
Live at 9:55 pm

STAR Sports
English Premier Football League
Bolton Wanderers v Blackburn Rovers
Live at 7:30 pm

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh A v England A
Fourth Day, Second Four-Dayer
Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium, Bogra
National Cricket League
First Day (Four-Day)
Rajshahi v Barisal
Venue: Rajshahi Divisional Stadium
Chittagong v Khulna
Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium

TALK TURKEY



Sir Garfield Sobers

(West Indies cricket legend)
"It's a great honour to declare the Cricket World Cup open. I'm taking it in my stride and I'm looking forward to the occasion."
Who will open the event in the West Indies on March 11.

Brothers' bright start

Khulna Abahani blank Rahmatganj



SPORTS REPORTER

Both the home teams recorded comfortable victories on the second day of the B. League after opening day's goalless affair.

A brace from Nigerian striker Elijah Junior gave Brothers Union a 3-0 win against Chittagong Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday but the winners' evening was ruined when midfielder Monwar Hossain was sent off five minutes from time for his second bookable offence.

In Khulna, Prashanta Dey scored the first goal in the history of professional football in the country as Khulna Abahani blanked capital side Rahmatganj 2-0.

Unlike their Chittagong wing, Abahani enjoyed superior ball possession and home advantage at the Khulna Stadium but had to wait 42 minutes to take the lead when Prashanta broke the deadlock. Mamun sealed three points for the Khulna outfit in the 68th minute.

Two-time Dhaka Premier League champions Brothers Union, on the other hand, struggled after Faisal Mahmud's powerful drive

went just wide in the seventh minute.

A shadow of the previous two seasons' mighty side, the Oranges dominated but failed to break a tidy five-man backline of Abahani, who came close to stun their Dhaka rivals.

However, twin saves by Mohammed Ali kept Brothers alive when the goalkeeper stopped striker Jitu's shot from close and held Anwar's long range effort on the rebound in the 18th minute.

Brothers, under the guidance of India's ex-national coach Syed Nayeemuddin, fielded only one foreigner although they have registered four and the selection was justified when Junior outfoxed the rival defence with speed and power to score in the 37th minute.

The Nigerian headed down a right-flank cross by Faisal to go past Dhiman and blasted a right-footed volley into the near post to separate the two sides.

After long range efforts by both sides tamed by the keepers early in the second half, Junior capitalised on a defence lapse to make it 2-0 65th minute. Narayan intercepted a through by Brothers' substitute midfielder Shakil but the tall Abahani defender played it back into his own area, handing Junior a chance to shrug off Mintu and neatly place home.

Five minutes later, Faisal, who

left Mohammedan this season, did brilliant work at left to chip a pinpoint cross at the far post, where his ex-Mohammedan teammate Manju needed a simple nod to put the match beyond the port city side.

Junior should have completed a hatrick but he wasted two great chances and his spawework at left wing went down the drains as substitute Rony mishit a chance from handshaking distance.

Swapan Das's boys from Chittagong, who host Khulna Abahani in the second round, will have to play with an all-local side till the mid-season transfer window begins as they have failed to register any foreigners.

The B. League will resume on Tuesday with Sheikh Russel KC hosting Chittagong Mohammedan in Dhaka.

Red card: Monwar (Brothers)
Yellow card: Anwar (Ctg Abahani)

TEAMS

BROTHERS: Ali, Shuvra, Jewel Rana, Masud Rana, Lajuk, Rintu (Mamun), Monwar, Faisal, Jalal (Shakil), Manju (Rony) and Junior.
CTG ABAHANI: Kamal, Gobinda, Narayan, Sohel, Mintu, Dhiman, Nurul Islam, Johnny (Tripti), Khokon, Anwar (Towhidul) and Jitu (Jahangir).

Referee: Ramkrishna Ghosh.



PHOTO: STAR

Brothers Union's Nigerian striker Junior races past Chittagong Abahani defender Mintu (R) during their B.League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Handy lead for England A

SPORTS REPORTER

The visiting England A rode on Nick Compton's 92 to consolidate their position after third day's play in the rain-interrupted second and final four-day match against Bangladesh A at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra yesterday.

At stumps, the second string English side, who are leading the series 1-0, scored 251-8 to take a 99-run first innings lead after wrapping up the home team for 152.

Compton steadied the tourists' innings after the scoreboard read 38-2 with a 181-ball 92, which saw five boundaries before being bowled by left-arm spinner Mehrab Hossain. Steve Davies made second team highest 39 off 67 balls with the help of three boundaries.

Like the first game, Enamul Haque and Mosharraf Hossain troubled the English batsmen most to take two wickets each.

Interestingly, Nadif Chowdhury, a left-arm spinner turned medium paceman, also took one wicket while new ball bowler Nazmul Hossain captured the other wicket by giving the breakthrough removing Will Jefferson.

Earlier, wicketkeeper Sahagir Hossain and Enamul helped the home team to improve the first innings total to 152 from their overnight 121-8.

Sahagir made 47 off 107 balls that featured three fours while Enamul added 24 off 103 balls.

Stuart Broad finished as most successful England A bowler with 4-72.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH A: First innings 152 all out in 59.1 overs (overnight 121-8) (Jahurul 0, Mehrab 20, Nasiruddin 12, Marshal 8, Tushar 19, Nadif 17, Mosharraf 1, Dollar 0, Sahagir 47, Enamul 24, Nazmul 0 not out, extras 4; Broad 4-72, Onions 2-38, Bresnan 2-24, Adil 1-15).

ENGLAND A: First innings 251-8 in 81 overs (Jefferson 13, Compton 92, Yardy 1, Carberry 26, Prior 37, Davies 39, Loudon 9, Bresnan 10, Adil 9 not out, Broad 0 not out, extras 15; Nazmul 1-28, Enamul 2-65, Nadif 1-14, Mosharraf 2-59, Mehrab 1-18).

NCL 9th round from today

SPORTS REPORTER

The ninth round of the Ispahani Mirzapore 8th National Cricket League begins today with two matches. Table-toppers Rajshahi host Barisal while Chittagong meet Khulna at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium.

Second-placed Dhaka will start their campaign tomorrow against Sylhet at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium after the tournament committee rescheduled the fixture.

Rajshahi are leading the table with 34 points and are followed by Dhaka, two points shy from the leaders. Chittagong have 22 points while Sylhet and Barisal both secured 20 points each. Khulna are the bottom-side with 14 points.

Woolmer looks to luck

AFP, Karachi



agonisingly missing out on World Cup glory.

A former England batsman, Woolmer was South Africa's coach in the 1996 World Cup in the sub-continent when a quarterfinal defeat at the hands of the West Indies shattered his dreams.

Three years later in England, his talented South African side were in tears after they tied their epic semifinal against eventual champions Australia and bowed out on inferior net-run-rate.

Woolmer has not forgotten those setbacks.

"It is always disappointing as a team not to achieve the ultimate goal, but it was not for the lack of trying. Cricket is a game where anything can happen and nothing should ever be taken as granted," said Woolmer.

A two-year stint as International Cricket Council's High Performance Manager allowed Woolmer to work with fledgling cricketing nations, like Kenya, Namibia and the

Netherlands during the 2003 World Cup.

Fate brought him to Pakistan in 2004 as coach, regarded the country's hottest post which had seen five changes since 1999 until his arrival.

He forged a strong relationship with captain Inzamamul Haq and saw to it that the skilful cricketers always remained strong in basics.

Woolmer believes Pakistan have been moving in the right direction in their preparations for the World Cup.

"There is completely different dynamics with the Pakistan team from that of South Africa. I have enjoyed coaching them and if they play up to their potential they have a great chance to win the ultimate prize," said Woolmer.

Former Pakistan captain Rameez Raja said Woolmer had done a reasonably good job.

"I would not say that everything is perfect with Pakistan's team. There are still some problems, but I guess Bob is a facilitator. He is not going to bat or bowl in the middle. He is there to identify talent and make a strategy," said Raja.

"There are positives that Pakistan are number three in both the Tests and one-day rankings. I hope Woolmer will finish with a bang at the World Cup."

Born in the Indian city of Kanpur in 1948, Woolmer played 19 Tests for England in 1970s but missed the

inaugural World Cup in 1975 due to injury.

"I broke my left hand so I was left to do the 12th man duties," recalled Woolmer, whose career ended prematurely as he first joined Kerry Packer World Series Cricket and then went on rebel tours to South Africa in 1980s.

He steadily developed into a renowned coach, who is credited with pioneering the use of computers in cricket.

His creative and adventurous ways helped South Africa become a formidable team which started the 1996 World Cup as one of the favourites.

"We had a good plan in 1996, but were undone by a great performance by (century-maker) Brian Lara in the quarter-final," said Woolmer, under whom South Africa won the inaugural Champions Trophy in 1998 and were hot favourites for the 1999 World Cup.

"It was cruel to lose by a run-rate of 0.01 which was the closest of margins."

"It was very depressing for the team, but (skipper) Hansie Cronje rallied the troops saying that they should be proud of their achievement."

The 58-year-old now gets another chance to scale the summit --- and bury the past.

Smith's simple maths

AFP, Port of Spain



World Cup will have the best chance of emerging champions.

Many of the venues being used for the seven-week, 16-team tournament are brand new and boast freshly-laid wickets.

That applies to the eight-million-dollar Warner Park in St Kitts where South Africa will play their first round matches. The pitch there is predicted to be easy-paced with predictable bounce.

"We have a good bowling attack," said Smith.

"We have got a lot of variation so I think we back ourselves pretty well and I think this will be the key with the wickets not being tested and the team that adapts best will be able to get the most out of it."

"We are trying to get as much information about what we are up against and hopefully adapt to what we are going to face."

South Africa recently deposed world champions Australia as the number one side in the world and coach Mickey Arthur insists the team have prepared well for a tournament which has brought them nothing but heartache in the past.

"It is all about peaking at the right time and I think, for us, things have been going nicely this season. We have shown an upward curve so hopefully our planning is coming to fruition," said Arthur.

South Africa defeated Australia at home last year and have also won seven of their last eight matches.

South Africa, who were knocked out in the first round on home soil in 2003, play Ireland and Pakistan in warm-up matches here on March 5 and 9 before opening their cam-

paign against the Netherlands in St Kitts on March 16.



PHOTO: INTERNET

South Africa captain Greame Smith answers to the media upon arrival in Trinidad on Friday.

'WC or bust'

AFP, London



revealed that he set himself a World Cup deadline in order to salvage his career.

"I would have tried for a certain period of time," Ganguly said when asked if he'd ever thought of quitting during his time away from the Indian team.

"I would have tried till the World Cup. If after that it (a recall) wouldn't have happened, probably I would have taken other decisions."

The 34-year-old left-hander lost his place after an acrimonious fall-

out with coach Greg Chappell but regained his place in January and has not looked back.

He hammered a robust 98 against the West Indies at Nagpur and was the top Indian scorer with 214 runs in a three-Test series in South Africa.

Ganguly's triumphant return also solved India's major problem of finding effective openers in both forms of the game, especially after Virender Sehwag's slump.

He then played a major role in his team winning the one-day home series against the West Indies, scoring 179 runs in three matches. He continued his form with knocks of 62, 48 and 58 in the series win over Sri Lanka.

However, Ganguly, who skippered India to the runners-up spot at the last World Cup in 2003, played down his fairytale come-

back.

"I have changed my technique, a bit with my stance, a bit with my initial movement. I use a slightly lighter bat compared to my earlier days," he said in an interview in March's edition of Cricinfo magazine.

Ganguly also insists that the prospect of captaining the team again, one of the most demanding jobs in world cricket, does not interest him.

He was briefly in charge when skipper Rahul Dravid and deputy Sachin Tendulkar were off the field in the recent series against the West Indies in Baroda.

"I knew it would be for only 4-5 overs. So I was just trying to do a job that Rahul would have done. (But) it doesn't excite me anymore."

Ganguly also said that his rela-

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PHOTO: STAR

England A batsman Matt Prior drives the ball towards extra-cover during the third day's play of the second four-dayer against Bangladesh A at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium yesterday.

Chappell's last duty?

AFP, New Delhi



coach rests on how Rahul Dravid's men perform in the Caribbean.

The former Australian captain's two-year term as India coach, arguably the most high-profile and nerve-wracking job in the business, ends after the showpiece event finishes on April 28.

India's cricket chiefs, who are known to move fast only when it comes to financial windfalls, have not even begun negotiations with Chappell, preferring to keep their options open till after the World Cup.

"What is the rush?" Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Niranjan Shah told AFP. "Our first priority is to do well at the World Cup, other things can wait."

There is little concern for the fact

that one tournament alone cannot judge a good or bad coach. Or that Chappell may understandably want an early settlement on his future.

The 58-year-old has so far declined to comment publicly if he wants to continue in a job that reportedly gives him an annual salary of 300,000 dollars plus handsome perks.

For the record, Chappell prefers to play with a straight bat.

"I can't say about the future. I know as much as you probably do. Right now, I'm thinking about the World Cup."

No other Test-playing nation has so far publicly indicated their interest in hiring Chappell, perhaps waiting for the BCCI to make up its mind.

The outspoken Chappell has made more headlines in 22 months as India coach than his predecessor, the genial John Wright of New Zealand, did in five years on the job.

His public spat with former captain Sourav Ganguly divided the cricket-crazy nation like never before, as did his policy to continue experimenting

with the batting order at the cost of the team's success.

Chappell has been rebuked by the country's lawmakers for suggesting that "MPs are paid to talk in parliament" and was assaulted by a fan for ignoring players from the eastern state of Orissa.

Even his desire to take a quiet holiday with his wife, Judy, in the backwaters of Kerala ahead of the World Cup created a ruckus with the local police.

The owner of the houseboat where the couple was staying was hauled up by police for not reporting the presence of foreigners as required by law.

It is rumoured that the local media forced police to take action against the houseboat owner because journalists were peeved they were not informed the Indian cricket coach was holidaying in the area.

Under the Chappell-Dravid combine since July 2005, India have played 18 Tests and 59 one-day

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