

Agents, sponsors up against BCCI

PTI, New Delhi

Miffed at the BCCI's decision to curtail players' endorsements, the business managers of cricketers are planning to get united and also rope in the major sponsors of the national team to consolidate their stance.

"We have already contacted sponsors like TCL, Puma and Sahara which have agreed to unite and also talking to others over the issue," Shalendra Singh of Percept D'Mark told PTI. The company handles accounts for Sourav Ganguly and Yuvraj Singh.

"Our interest is to set up a united front to consolidate and represent the sponsors and the players' interest because some where down the line the focus is being lost," he said.

In its meeting, BCCI on Saturday announced that players would not be allowed to endorse more than three products and would need prior permission from it before signing contracts.

Singh said the BCCI should have at least taken the sponsors in confidence before making such a move and informed that the media managers of the players would meet later this week to put up a collective issue with the Board.

"The focus needs to be on the amount of money which comes into cricket and who is going to be answerable for that. Some 25-30 clients have put serious money into the sport, what about the accountability for that," Singh said.

The business agents are terming it as a populist move, which may face legal hurdles and may not be implemental.

They took it

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"There is still an opportunity with three big games coming up and we need to be competitive and it's important that we regroup," added Smith, whose team spent almost two weeks in Guyana and were known to be frustrated with the facilities and unpredictable weather.

"It's difficult to come up with answers after the Bangladesh defeat. We didn't do the basics well and gave them an opportunity. They grabbed it with both hands."

South Africa, who sent Bangladesh in to bat on a slow-paced wicket at the National Stadium here, allowed their opponents to post a challenging 251-8.

In reply, South Africa faltered against Bangladesh's spinners and folded at 184.

Left-arm slow bowlers Abdul Razzak (3-25), Shakib Al Hasan (2-49) and Mohammad Rafique (1-25) bowled superbly after paceman Syed Raseel gave Bangladesh two early wickets.

"Their spinners bowled very well and I think we allowed them to bowl very well because we were under pressure. We lost a few wickets in a clutch and put ourselves under pressure," said Smith.

"Once we lost those wickets we became tentative and allowed them to grow in confidence. All credit to Bangladesh."

Bangladesh were reeling at 84-4 before middle-order batsmen Mohammad Ashraful (87) and Aftab Ahmed (35) steadied the innings with a 76-run stand.

Their efforts overshadowed a career best 5-45 from recalled paceman Andre Nel.

Smith praised man-of-the-math Ashraful.

"His innings changed things, he set it well, worked the field well and kept us under pressure through the 50 overs from when he came into bat."

For South Africa Herschelle Gibbs, batting at number seven with a runner due to a calf injury, top scored with 56.

But Smith feared Gibbs may not be available for the crucial match against the West Indies.

"His injury is being reassessed and he has a 50-50 chance for the next match."

Ash feels great

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fans plenty to cheer about in both Tests and one-dayers with his exciting stroke-play.

He was only a teenager when he grabbed the headlines with a brilliant hundred against a strong Sri Lankan attack at Colombo six years ago, using his feet remarkably well against ace off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran.

It was India's turn to suffer in 2004 when Ashraful treated their seamers and spinners with disdain in his career-best 158 not out in the second and final Test at Chittagong.

Ashraful batted as if he was playing in a one-dayer, hitting three sixes and 24 fours in his 194-ball knock.

"I never think about the bowlers when I am batting. I just watch the deliveries," said the 22-year-old.

He said his team needed a big win in the second round to boost their confidence ahead of the remaining three matches against England, the West Indies and debutants Ireland.

"When we scored 250, we thought we could win," said Ashraful.

"We need this kind of victory. We came to the Super Eights and did not do well in the initial matches. Now we have three games remaining and if we play well, we have a good chance."



PHOTO: AFP

England batsman Ian Bell cuts the ball hard as Australia wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist looks on during their World Cup Super Eights match in St John's on Sunday.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

With his win over FM Aminul Islam in the sixth round of the 33 rd National Chess Championship yesterday, IM Abdullah Al Rakib maintained his solo lead.

Rakib now has accumulated six points, closely followed by GM Ziaur Rahman who has 5.5 points.

Ziaur beat Abdul Malek in the day's other important game.

NATIONAL CYCLING

The three-day 31st National Cycling Competition will begin in Narail on April 11.

Some hundred participants representing teams from different divisions, districts, universities and the services will compete in the meet.

PRIME BANK GOLF

Col Zafar clinched the Prime Bank Cup Golf tournament at the Maynamoti golf and country club in Comilla.

Major General Abdul Hafiz finished runner-up while Major Ashfaque won the Best Gross trophy.

Delwar and Col Ashfaque won the best front nine and back nine

respectively in the two-day meet.

DIV 4 CRICKET

Agrani Bank rode on half-centuries from Rumi and Nayan to post a 56-run win over Rupali Bank in the Kai-Altech First Division cricket league at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

Batting first after having won the toss, Agrani Bank reached 256 for eight in their stipulated 50 overs. In reply, Rupali Bank were bowled out for 202 runs in 43.4 overs.

Rumi stroked 63 while veteran Nayan chipped in with 59 runs in the end. Saimon and Monty took two wickets each.

When Rupali batted, Hasan held fort but his unbeaten 42 was the only score of note for the bankers. For Agrani, Uttam took three wickets.

LOWER DIVISION CRICKET

Azizul hammered a ton to guide Sinha Textile to a huge 154-run victory over Udayachal Club in a match of the Kai-Altech second division cricket League at the City Club ground.

Azizul scored 108 off 107 balls as Sinha piled up 349 runs for 8 wickets in the allocated 50 overs. In reply, Udayachal Club wrapped up their

innings for 195 runs in 44.2 overs.

In the third division, DCA beat Hillol by two wickets at the Uttara Friends Club ground.

Chasing 244 for victory, DCA rode on Babur (59) and Rohan (43) but it was Al Amin's last-ditch effort which saw them through to victory by four balls to spare. Al Amin scored an unbeaten 26.

WOMEN'S CRICKET

Bangladesh will take part in the first Women's Cricket Championship in Kuala Lumpur from July 11.

Ahead of the championship, the women's cricket team began their practice camp on Saturday with the selected 30 players at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex.

Apart from Bangladesh, the emerging Asian cricket nations Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, UAE, Thailand, Nepal and China will also compete in the meet.

Ireland given more money

BBC ONLINE, undated

Ireland's World Cup cricketers have received a donation of more than 100,000 pounds from a prominent businessman to help ease their financial burden.

The Irish team of amateur players are having an unexpectedly long stay in the Caribbean after reaching the Super 8s.

Telecoms multi-millionaire Denis O'Brien has given the money directly to the 15-strong Irish squad.

"It did not pass through the union," Irish Cricket Union chairman Murray Power told the Sunday Times.

"I am aware of a donation from Denis O'Brien to the players, not the union.

"It was a reward for the players reaching the Super 8s."

O'Brien already has a financial interest in the sport as his Digicel mobile phone company sponsor the West Indies team.

The Irish team's official sponsor, the Bank of Ireland, paid the squad an extra bonus of around 35,000 pounds prior to the Super 8 game against England.

The Irish Cricket Union is expected to earn around 750,000 pounds from the competition.

Organisers tone down

AFP, Bridgetown

World Cup organisers, widely accused of pricing local fans out of the tournament and for stifling atmosphere inside the grounds, have been forced into an embarrassing climbdown.

In a desperate attempt to salvage the World Cup's reputation as the event enters its final three weeks, fans will now be allowed to take musical instruments into grounds without first applying to the local organising committees.

In another move to try and cure the problem of matches being played in virtually empty stadiums, the controversial policy of no re-entry has also been abandoned.

Starting from Saturday's Bangladesh v South Africa Super Eights match in Guyana, spectators can turn up with their musical instruments and be given approval as they pass through security.

"Safety must be paramount at matches but we do want everyone to watch cricket in a festive and lively atmosphere," said World Cup chief executive Chris Dehring.

"This has already been happening at several matches. There were lots of people with bands and instruments and noise-makers in Jamaica and we have seen the same elsewhere, in Guyana and other venues.

Bob tests may

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murder, the investigators remained adamant that Woolmer was strangled to death and say "factors known only to them suggest foul play." Meanwhile, Shields said the results of the CCTV footage from the hotel have been encouraging.

"They (the Met police) are doing quickly what we would do more slowly. They have more resources and more practice at putting it together," he said.

The Jamaica Police will also be sending a team to Pakistan to question the country's cricketers after "ambiguities" came to light in their initial statements to the police.

Proteas vilified

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where are we? Sometimes we have to think on our feet," said Henry who was himself a left-arm spinner.

"We have gone in with a very one-dimensional approach," agreed Wessels.

"We do not have the bowling options. We were exposed, badly exposed."

While South Africa were one of the pre-tournament favourites, the defeat has again raised questions about the mental toughness of a team that earned itself a reputation for "choking" after early exits at previous tournaments.

Legendary batsman Barry Richards, commenting from the West Indies, said he had heard of stories of dressing-room unrest with players frustrated at being holed up in rainy Guyana for the last fortnight.

Star batsman Jacques Kallis has in particularly shown signs of tetchiness after coming in for criticism over his slow scoring rate in a previous match against Australia.

Seemingly stung by the criticism, Kallis played an uncharacteristically belligerent innings on Saturday but was caught for 32 when trying to hit Syed Raseel over the top.

As the top order was gradually skittled out, South Africa appeared to give up their run chase and seemed to be just trying to bat out their innings as Herschelle Gibbs made an unbeaten 56.

"They gave up. It was as if Gibbs was having a glorified net," said Henry. "It was a pain to watch."

Irish await daunting task

AFP, Georgetown



The focus may have been on defending champions Australia in the ongoing World Cup, but New Zealand are silently emerging a major threat with their clinical performances.

Stephen Fleming's New Zealanders have been marching menacingly towards the semifinals and they now need to beat debutants Ireland in their Super Eights match here on Monday to strengthen their chances.

Like Australia, New Zealand are the only unbeaten team in the tournament, having defeated England, Canada and Scotland in group games and the West Indies and Bangladesh in the second round. They have six points from three matches.

Ireland look unlikely to stop the Kiwi juggernaut despite improving with every match. They have fought well against big teams in the second round, but failed to produce a big performance when it mattered most.

They caught the eye in group matches when they upset Pakistan and also tied their game against Zimbabwe. That they deserved a place in the Super Eights was proved when they tested both

England and South Africa before losing.

"Up to now, we've done everything we've been expected to do. It's important we take two points against Ireland. It will set us up for the toughest week with South Africa, Sri Lanka and Australia to play," said Fleming.

"I agree Ireland know more about us than we do about them, but we have received some good information about them and we'll go out and do our best."

Fleming has already given a good account of himself both as captain and a top-order batsman, having scored 280 runs in five matches with one century.

The New Zealand captain is not the only player in form as middle-order batsmen Scott Styris and Craig McMillan have also contributed.

New Zealand's bowling has more variety, with pacemen Shane Bond and James Franklin capable of doing the early damage and spinners Daniel Vettori and Jeetan Patel keeping the batsmen silent in the middle overs.

Ireland have a pair of effective seamers in Trent Johnston and David Langford-Smith, but will require more from other bowlers to raise hopes of restricting New Zealand to a modest total.

They also need a big innings, so essential in setting or chasing a stiff

target. Most of their batsmen got starts against South Africa and England, but could not convert them into a big knock.

"I'm happy most of the batsmen have good starts and that means they can play a long innings," said Ireland coach Adrian Birrell.

"We are playing at the highest level (for the first time) and to beat big sides we need to give 100 percent. We have to take every chance, but I am happy the guys are doing very well considering the circumstances."

"It's a daunting task before us, but they have not played against us before, so that's an advantage."

SQUADS

IRELAND (from): Trent Johnston (captain), Kyle McCallan, Andre Botha, Jeremy Bray, Kenneth Carroll, Peter Gillespie, Dave Langford-Smith, John Mooney, Paul Mooney, Eoin Morgan, Kevin O'Brien, Niall O'Brien, William Porterfield, Boyd Rankin, Andrew White.

NEW ZEALAND (from): Stephen Fleming (captain), Shane Bond, James Franklin, Peter Fulton, Mark Gillespie, Brendon McCullum, Craig McMillan, Jacob Oram, Jeetan Patel, Scott Styris, Michael Mason, Ross Taylor, Daniel Vettori, Chris Martin, Hamish Marshall.

Umpires: Steve Bucknor and Simon Taufel.

Best-trained side: Flemo

AFP, Georgetown



Stephen Fleming could complete a century of wins as New Zealand skipper over the next eleven days and take a huge step towards a first-ever World Cup title at the same time.

Fleming, who completed ten years in charge on the day when New Zealand beat Canada in the World Cup group phase last month, pits his wits against world number one South Africa, defending champions Australia and former champions Sri Lanka in their upcoming Super Eights campaign.

Before those testing duels, the Black Caps will face Ireland here on Monday.

Fleming, who holds the record of most one-day matches as captain with 213 -- 20 more than the

second place Arjuna Ranatunga of Sri Lanka -- has a record of 96 wins, 103 defeats, one tie and 13 no results.

"Leading this current team is different. This is a very skilled side and we have come here with a fair idea of what is needed and we are very confident of winning," said Fleming.

Under Fleming, New Zealand bowed out of the 1999 World Cup in England at the semifinal stages. In 2003, in South Africa, they failed to qualify for the Super Sixes.

"Apart from my own experience, the difference is in the level of training. I don't think we have trained in other Cups better than this," said Fleming, whose team won all three matches in the first round.

They have since beaten Bangladesh by nine wickets and the West Indies by seven wickets and are third in the Super Eights table behind Australia and Sri Lanka.

Fleming's own form with the bat has been instrumental, hitting two half-centuries and an unbeaten hundred against Bangladesh. He now needs just another 36 to become the first New Zealander to score 8,000 one-day runs.

"To be honest the hardest part of the job and the toughest week is coming up with the top three to play, but up to now we have done everything that's been asked and we have a good chance of winning."

Fleming said it was important to keep consistency in selection.

"We want to play a consistent side. I have been involved in the World Cups where we chopped

and changed too much. If you have 12 guys in form and they are doing well then keep them," said the captain.

The New Zealand skipper ruled out any possibility of resting spearhead Shane Bond in the match against Ireland.

"Bond will play against Ireland, it's important that he plays throughout and we want to get two points and for that we need to put out the strongest side. Mark Gillespie has also come back into contention (after injury), so we have more options available."

Fleming praised his team's all-round abilities.

"We are a capable side in all elements. Some of the bowlers haven't been able to bowl as much as they would have liked but we are training specifically to give them more nets."

Fleming believes the next week will reveal the line-up for the semifinals.

"It looks like South Africa, Australia, Sri Lanka and New Zealand, and there may be some twists, probably England and the West Indies might do something but the next few days will tell us exactly."

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Rahul Dravid, captain of the Indian team, has said that it was not correct to "project this whole issue (endorsements) as a conflict of commercial interests of the players and the BCCI", in a release sent out to the media on Sunday afternoon.

"Let me clarify that there is no conflict between the players and the BCCI. The interests of the players and the BCCI are inclusive and not exclusive," he added.

Dravid then sought to make it clear that there was no misunderstanding between the BCCI (Board of Control for Cricket in India) and the players. "The BCCI has always been very caring and considerate about the players' interests and I am sure that the BCCI would discuss

the issue with the players at a suitable time," he said. "When this opportunity arises then we shall jointly examine the areas of concern and bother and crease out the irksome issues and work out a package that can take care of the collective interests and concerns of the BCCI and the players."

Dravid added that he had spoken to Ravi Shastri, the newly-appointed cricket manager of the Indian team about the issue. "I have spoken to Ravi Shastri and a number of the players and they all feel that with a healthy dialogue with the board which there always has been all issues can be sorted out."

India's cricketers are clearly shaken by the developments of the last two days, with the cricket board striking very close to home -- the endorsements of players, but Dravid called for restraint from the media and the public. "Meanwhile I



PHOTO: COURTESY

Winners of the Prime Bank Cup golf tournament pose with chief guest GOC 33, Padatic Division and senior vice president of Mainamoti Golf and Country Club Major General Abdul Hafize during the prize giving ceremony at Comilla Cantonment on Friday.