



Indian players pose with the GrameenPhone ODI Series trophy at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium on Tuesday after the third and final ODI was washed away giving the tourists a 2-0 win over the hosts.

OPINION

When WC minnows talk big

Cricket

SHAKIL KASEM

...then it not only appears out of place but also smacks distinctly of bad taste. The recent utterances of a visiting cricket team manager went thus, "We will show no mercy. We will not take any prisoners." One could have been forgiven if one thought this was John Buchanan, coach of the all-conquering Aussies. But, no, surprise, surprise it was the manager of the visiting team from India, the recently concluded World Cup's overrated and over-hyped minnows.

The remark was not just only in bad taste but also unbecoming of a visiting team official. Granted, the Indians are on a rehab and therapeutic mission to salvage some pride after a disastrous and foolhardy mission to the WC where they were put in their place not just by Bangladesh but Sri Lanka too. A team that could not reach 200 runs in two out of three matches in spite of boasting of the most egotistic batting lineups in international cricket is obviously suffering from

an aggro based inferiority complex. Granted, the big mean batting machine spluttered to life just in time to spare the blushes of a billion aggrieved souls when finally the batting clicked and the full might of the newest cricket superpower Bermuda succumbed to it. Show no mercy, did I hear someone say? Strange, mercy was exactly the sentiment the Indians were expecting from Bermuda, as they hoped this nation with a population of just enough population to fit inside the Eden Gardens, would beat Bangladesh. Without saying so in so many words, Bangladesh naturally showed no mercy.

Take no prisoners, did I hear that too? For the better part of the 1st ODI the Bangladesh team controlled the match. Had it not been for a missed run out, and the fact that our captain's thought processes were on an extended sabbatical that afternoon, the Indians would certainly have been biting the dust. Like it or not, it was the Indians who broke out of jail because the warden Habibul Bashar was looking the other way. We missed out on a whole lot of prisoners that day.

Let us come now to the bottom

line. I for one am sick and tired of hearing about Bangladesh's supposed lack of grit and ability to survive at the top level of the game. This is what we hear incessantly from cricket experts and commentators from all those ubiquitous TV channels from across the border. Hey, take a deep breath gentlemen, and yes, lady, you too. When was the last time you won a test series outside the comfortable retreat of your home ground? About the same time Haley's comet was last sighted. For how long was India playing test cricket when they were 0 for 4 against England, arguably still the worst display of batting in test history? And what about that score of 42 all out at Lords. Even the song The Summer of 42 lasted longer than that innings.

Moral of the story, Bangladesh, remember if you beat anybody once, make sure you make it a habit. Never let up, the world of cricket is not for nice guys any longer. See, what happens, even the minnows talk big given half a chance. We can do it too. Given half a chance.

(The author is a former Bangladeshi cricketer)

Magath aims big

AFP, Berlin

Former Bayern Munich coach Felix Magath ended speculation Monday that he has joined VfL Wolfsburg, insisting that he wants a job with an elite club outside Germany.

"I'm keen on a move abroad. I want to go to a country which has a lot of teams qualified for the Champions League, such as England, Italy or Spain, because one day I want to win the Champions League," said Magath.

Despite leading Bayern to successive Cup and league doubles, Magath was sacked in February after the reigning champions slipped in the table.

Bayern are currently fourth, ten points behind leaders VfB Stuttgart.

Magath had already turned down offers from Hamburg and Hertha Berlin.

FIFA joins in Tevez affair

Football

AFP, London

World football governing body FIFA confirmed Tuesday they will investigate whether West Ham should have been docked points for breaching Premiership rules over the signings of Carlos Tevez and Javier Mascherano last year.

An independent commission fined West Ham 5.5 million pounds (10.8 million dollars), but several clubs felt they were let off lightly.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter said: "We will look at this. We will ask for the file once it has been decided how and why the decision was made."

"If we feel something was wrong in this decision then we have to open our file."

Several top flight clubs are considering legal action against the Premier League over the commission's sanction, claiming the Hammers should have been deducted points.

Sheffield United, who were relegated on the final day of the season as West Ham survived, are leading the fight against the decision.

Argentine striker Tevez played a key role in West Ham's escape from relegation as he scored seven goals in the club's last 10 games.

Blatter said in terms of timescale a "decision would have to be taken immediately."

He added that according to FIFA's files the transfer of Tevez and Mascherano from Brazilian side Corinthians to West Ham had complied with international transfer regulations.

Blatter added: "We will monitor this situation very carefully and once this situation is dealt with by the league and the (Football Association) FA we will ask for the files and have a look because we have the right and the responsibility to see how such cases are dealt with."

"The matter is linked with a club in Brazil - Corinthians - and with the ownership of this club and the ownership of the two players."

"According to our files the transfer of Tevez was done correctly according to the international transfer of players."

Blatter said a recent ruling by the Swiss federal court against Spanish third division side Rayo Vallecano meant FIFA did have jurisdiction over individual clubs.

He added: "Yes we have the

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Newcastle appoint Allardyce

AFP, Newcastle

Newcastle United announced on Tuesday the appointment of former Bolton coach Sam Allardyce as their new manager on a three-year contract.

The 52-year-old will officially be unveiled as Glenn Roeder's successor at a press conference later in the day.

Allardyce had been the hot favourite to get the job since Roeder was sacked, and held several rounds of talks with club chairman Freddy Shepherd.

He flew in to Tyneside by helicopter in the morning after attending the League Managers' Association dinner in Nottingham the previous night.

He first visited the training ground, where he met those players who have not already started their summer break, but his focus is already on the new season and the task of reviving the club's ailing fortunes.

Allardyce said that Shepherd had quickly convinced him to make the move to the northeast.

"Once Freddy Shepherd made it clear he wanted me then there was no doubt where I would be going," he told www.nufc.co.uk.

"After leaving Bolton Wanderers last week I was expecting a longer

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Gerrard close to new deal

AFP, Liverpool

Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard revealed Tuesday that he is close to signing a new contract with the Premiership club.

The 26-year-old has two years left on his current deal but the Anfield club are keen to sign him on a new four-year contract.

New owners Tom Hicks and George Gillett are also willing to sanction a £20,000 pounds (237,000 dollars) weekly wage for the England midfielder.

Gerrard said: "Talks are progressing and I am ready to sign a new contract any time now. It's just around the corner."

"I am not sure when it will be done but I am ready to sign. As soon as the contract is put in front of me, I will sign it."

Despite reaching their second Champions League final in three

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Egypt axe 'Mido'

AFP, Cairo

Tottenham Hotspur striker Ahmed 'Mido' Hossam has been axed by African Nations Cup title holders Egypt.

Coach Hassan Shehata told reporters here that 'Mido' was discarded for a Group 2 qualifier in Mauritania on June 3 because he had lost his first team place at the English Premiership club.

Another Tottenham player, Hossam Ghaly, has been included despite a 40,000-pound fine for flinging his shirt to the ground after being substituted in a league draw with Blackburn Rovers last week.

Egypt beat Mauritania 3-0 here in March to open a three-point lead

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Scalping a streaker

Football

AFP, London

The lawyer of Britain's top serial streaker accused the police of "using a sledgehammer to crack a nut" after they banned him from baring all at Wednesday's UEFA Cup final in Glasgow.

But Mark Roberts, 42, insisted Tuesday that he never intended to streak at or even attend the match between Spanish sides Sevilla and Espanyol at Scotland's Hampden Park national stadium.

Police slapped yet another three-year football banning order on Roberts, barring him from every British soccer ground and forcing him to surrender his passport and register with the police when a British team plays in Europe.

Roberts' lawyer Laurence Lee

said he was instructing a Scottish colleague to appeal against the order.

"Football banning orders were intended to tackle hooligans, not harmless pranksters," he said.

"The police are using a sledgehammer to crack a nut."

Roberts, from Liverpool, suspected Strathclyde Police of "sour grapes" following his last appearance at Hampden Park back in 2002.

He streaked at the Champions League final when Spain's Real Madrid beat Germany's Bayer Leverkusen 2-1, and had Brave Tarts written on his back.

"I think the police up there have probably got a case of sour grapes against me because of that, but I can honestly say I had no intention of going to the UEFA Cup final or any other football match in the UK," Roberts said.

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Malouda looking for exit

INTERNET, undated

Lyon and France star Florent Malouda has expressed a desire to leave the club after revealing that clubs in England and Italy are tracking him.

After a great World Cup with France, Malouda has claimed that he is after a new challenge after collecting his fourth league-winner's medal in Ligue 1.

The 26 year old told French newspaper Le Progres: "I am going to make it very clear, I really want to try a fresh challenge."

"Big clubs abroad, both English and Italian, have made known their interest in me and are preparing to enter negotiations with OL."

"Last summer, after the World Cup, I was already being tracked."

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Sevilla's treble mission

AFP, Madrid



Reigning champions Sevilla will be looking to fire the first shot in their bid for a hat-trick of titles this season when they take on Espanyol in the UEFA Cup final in Glasgow on Wednesday.

The winner of the first all-Spanish final will become the third victor from the country in the last four seasons, following in the footsteps of Valencia in 2004 and Sevilla 12 months ago.

Sevilla, who are also in contention for their first Spanish league title in more than 50 years and who have reached the Spanish Cup final as well, will inevitably start as favourites despite the worries of coach Juande Ramos.

The Periquitos - The Budgerigars in English - as Espanyol are nicknamed, are languishing down in 12th place in the Spanish first division so winning the UEFA Cup provides their only means of playing in Europe next season.

"Espanyol have always been a uncomfortable rival for us. There's also a bit of history between me and them because I used to coach there," said Ramos on Monday, hinting that several Espanyol players have axes to grind with him.

"In the two years that I have been the coach at Sevilla, the only time we have beaten Espanyol was just a few weeks ago so I don't want to have the mantle of favourites hanging around our necks," added Ramos.

Nevertheless, despite Ramos' caution, most bookmakers are heavily tipping the Andalusians to become only the second club to win back-to-back UEFA Cup titles after the successes of Spanish giants Real Madrid in 1985 and 1986.

However, Espanyol have a number of good reasons that could lead them to upset the form book. Espanyol have also shown that they have acquired the appetite for the big occasion even if they cannot compete with the leading Spanish clubs on a weekly basis in La Liga.

They have won the Spanish Cup last year and beat Benfica and Werder Bremen in the last two rounds of this season's UEFA Cup to become worthy finalists in Glasgow.

There is also the Barcelona factor.

Traditionally, Espanyol have lived in the shadow of their giant local rivals but this year offers an almost unique opportunity for them to claim bragging rights in Spain's second city.

With the reigning Spanish champions perhaps destined to end the season without anything to their name, Espanyol have a chance to lift a trophy in a year when Barca go empty-handed for the first time since 1940.

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Espanyol coach Ernesto Valverde (L) shakes hands with Sevilla coach Juande Ramos during a press conference at Hampden Park in Glasgow on Tuesday on the eve of their UEFA Cup final match.



Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard (C), Sami Hyypia (L) and Xabi Alonso at a practice session at Anfield on Tuesday. The squad will fly out to Spain later for a training camp ahead of their Champions League final against AC Milan on the 23rd, in an attempt to acclimatise to the hot and humid conditions that will greet them in Athens.

Jose defends signings

Football

INTERNET, undated

Jose Mourinho has defended the contributions of his summer signings after watching Chelsea equal Liverpool's 63-match home unbeaten run against Everton.

A share of the record, set by Liverpool at Anfield between 1978 and 1981, was small consolation for Mourinho after Chelsea surrendered the Barclays Premiership title to Manchester United and lost out in the semifinal of the Champions League to Rafael Benitez's side.

But the Portuguese coach has steered them to a second Carling Cup triumph since his arrival in 2004 and they could yet walk away with the FA Cup when they meet Manchester United at the new Wembley next Saturday.

However, Mourinho is facing a mounting injury crisis ahead of

that game with two of his high profile summer additions set to miss out and another one facing a late fitness test.

Club record 30 million pound buy Andriy Shevchenko and 130,000 pounds-a-week Michael Ballack are almost certain to be sidelined with doubts over the fitness of former Arsenal left-back Ashley Cole.

Ukrainian striker Shevchenko, who underwent a hernia operation last week, has been heavily criticised for failing to settle into English football while midfielder Ballack, recovering from ankle surgery, and Cole have also had their critics.

But Mourinho defended all three along with young striker Salomon Kalou as he prepared for a cup final with just 15 fit first-team players.

Mourinho declared: "Young Salomon has done fantastically for a boy coming from a different culture."

"He is still very naive but his contribution has been very, very good. For Ashley Cole it was not easy to change. Willie's (Gallas) season at Arsenal was also not superb."

"I think it is easier to go from Chelsea to Real Madrid or from Arsenal to Real Madrid. But Ashley has played well. He is one of the heroes who has played injured the whole season and his integration has been smooth."

"Ballack, even against some opinion, has contributed to the team very positively. In big moments, he scored the goal to put Chelsea into the FA Cup final and scored the goal that put us in the Champions League semifinal."

"Sheva's season was not what everyone was thinking, including myself. In his defence he has a history of many years in a completely different culture. That can be on his side."

Chelsea were stunned when James Vaughan gave Everton a 49th

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