

Foreign GMs take over

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh players lost the leading baton in the 8th United Insurance and United Leasing Grandmasters Chess Tournament yesterday as GM Ghaem Maghami Ehsan of Iran and Vietnamese GM Nguyen Anh Dung shared the pole position after six rounds.

The two foreigners jointly led with 4.5 points after Ghaem beat IM Mahmood Lodhi of Pakistan with white in only 19 moves at the NSC conference room and Nguyen defeated Abdullah Al Rakib, the local IM who slipped to second place alongside fellow GM Reefat Bin Sattar, IM Enamul Hossain Rajib, FM Nasir Ahmed and Indian IM PDS Girinath on four points.

In the 6th round, Girinath shocked local GM Ziaur Rahman, Reefat drew with Rajib, Nasir upset GM Niaz Murshed, FM Abu Sufian Shakil beat FM Aminul Islam, GN Gopal of India beat FM Mehdi Hasan Parag, Lalith Babu of India beat Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagar, FM Syed Mahfuzur Rahman Emon beat FM Talbur Rahman, Monir Hossain beat Mohammed Javed, FM Rezauul Haque drew with Mohammad Ali and Abdul Maleq beat Sobel Chowdhury.



IM Abdullah Al Rakib (R) makes a move against GM Nguyen of Vietnam during the United Insurance and United Leasing eighth Grandmasters chess tournament at the NSC conference room yesterday.

Captaincy later, says KP

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Kevin Pietersen insists he is quite happy just being one of the troops in England's one-day side, despite suggestions from some high-profile pundits, including Graham Thorpe and David Lloyd, that he should be offered the one-day captaincy in place of Michael Vaughan.

Writing in his column on Teletext Sport, Thorpe suggested that Vaughan should retire from one-day cricket in a bid to prolong his Test career. "Some people may find this surprising but I'd like to see Kevin Pietersen take over as one-day skipper," added Thorpe. "I believe it could be the making of him. You need people with that hunger to play ODIs, and I think Pietersen could inspire a new-look one-day team."

Pietersen did not rule out the

prospect of one day bidding for the captaincy, but insisted that for now his weight was firmly behind Vaughan, who made an emotional return to the Test team at Headingley last week, where he made his 16th Test century. "It's definitely something that you think about," said Pietersen. "In the future it would be magnificent to captain my country, but I've clearly stated that Michael Vaughan is the captain of England."

"I got on really well with Michael," said Pietersen, who was unveiled as Adidas's new signing at a sponsored event in London. "He's a really good friend of mine, and during some of his dark days in the 18 months he was out [of the side] I used to text him and ring him and say 'you'll be back'. His leadership is fantastic. Vaughan is captain of England and I'm very happy being one of the troops."

For the time being, Pietersen is quite content to concentrate on his batting, with which he scaled new

heights last week with his maiden Test double-century. In the world Test rankings, only Ricky Ponting and Mohammad Yousuf are now rated above him, and he admitted that Ponting in particular was a player he looked to as a role model.

"Ricky Ponting is a serious player," said Pietersen. "He's achieved everything in the game, and that's what I want to do. I've watched legends of the game like Viv Richards and Everton Weekes. But I can only really comment on guys I've played against, and he's the one I look to."

But, for all the allure of big scoring and the personal glory that comes with it, Pietersen insisted that he wasn't bothered about pursuing Ponting's No. 1 ranking. "That's not really my focus," he said. "I just want to win Test matches for England, and fulfil my role for the team. That's all I'm interested in. I just want to keep working harder and harder, and helping England win matches."

No Premier relegation this year

SPORTS REPORTER

The Premier Cricket League is set to be bloated to fourteen clubs next season after relegation for this season looked set to be put aside.

The board meeting on Saturday will decide the fate of Brothers Union, City Club and Indira Road but it is most likely that there would be no relegation league as the dry season in Bangladesh is virtually over.

None of the three clubs are willing to risk relegation as the matches held now could be hampered by seasonal rain but the Super League, held after nearly three months of the first round of the Premiership, was held almost without any trouble. Only one match -- Abahani v Old DOHS -- was rained off.

It would have been wise for the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) to run the relegation league during that time as they had adequate grounds.

All other relegations and promotions in first, second and third divisions will, however, take place.

Hoggard in doubt for 3rd Test

CRICINFO, undated

Matthew Hoggard looks set to miss the third Test against West Indies at Old Trafford, starting on June 7, after aggravating his groin injury in the nets ahead of Yorkshire's one-day fixture against Derbyshire at Headingley.

Hoggard, who withdrew from England's attack after bowling just 10.1 overs in the first Test at Lord's, had been optimistic about his rehabilitation. He was hoping to play for his club side Baildon on Saturday, as well as today's match, but with a long international season ahead of England, he will not now be back.

The news is a further setback for England's new coach Peter Moores, who had hinted in the aftermath of the Headingley Test that Hoggard's injury was more serious than the medical team had first believed.

With Andrew Flintoff set to miss the rest of the West Indies series due to further surgery on his injured left ankle, England's pace attack is down to the bare bones, with the onus yet again on Steve Harmison to locate his best form.

In Hoggard's absence, Ryan Sidebottom, the left-arm seamer who took eight wickets in the Headingley win, is almost certain to retain his place in the side.

BD lose to India

PTI, Jaipur

Bangladesh lost to defending champions India 3-0 in the men's team event in the 17th Commonwealth Table Tennis Championships yesterday.

Mohammad Hanif lost in straight sets to Sharath Kamal 9-11, 7-11, 8-11 while Al Mahbub Billah showed some resistance as he levelled against Anirban Nandi but still lost 1-11, 11-6, 11-11 and 11-5.

Sharath Kamal set the tempo by beating Mohammad Hanif 11-9 11-7 11-8 and then Anirban Nandi lost a game before surging to 11-1 6-11 11-1 11-5 win over Al Mahbub Khondoker Billah.

Pathik Mehta carved out a 11-5 13-11 11-2 win against Manash Chowdhury in the third set.

Azzurri duo

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Nazionale is scheduled to return on Sunday before flying to Lithuania, when both absentees are expected to be available.

Italy will have to adapt to the severe climate ahead of this weekend's clash, as the temperature has rarely been higher than 12°C in the past few weeks and Torshavn is swept by gusts of wind of up to 60 kph.

Blatter to serve

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realise that football can "contribute to a better world. Football is not just about kicking a ball."

During Blatter's previous two mandates, there were accusations of corruption within FIFA, with the prime example surrounding the bankruptcy of ISL and Kirch, companies involved in marketing and TV rights for the 2002 World Cup.

Venus sets

FROM PAGE 24
Pierce in Zurich which was broken by Dutch veteran Brenda Schultj-McCarthy who hit a serve of 209kmh (130mph) in Cincinnati last July.

However, that came in the qualifying competition.

Williams, the 26th seed, next faces either Serbian fourth seed Jelena Jankovic or Colombia's Catalina Castano for a place in the last 16.

Prasad, Singh should stay

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

Ricky Ponting never forgets to acknowledge the contribution of the support staff at the presentation ceremony. As the leader of a team which has given a new dimension to dominance on the field, he understands that the support staff form an important part of Australia's phenomenal success.

A seven-member group, including the chief coach, prepares the Australians for the tough mental and physical contests. Supreme fitness is the reason behind the country's unmatched conquests for close to a decade now.

In modern cricket, the support staff has a critical role to play and the Indian team has come to accept that there is a place for a bowling coach, a fielding coach and also a batting coach, not to forget the physiotherapist, trainer and a masseur, all striving to keep the players in shape in the most testing conditions.

That Robin Singh and Venkatesh Prasad worked behind the scenes to bring about a refreshing change in the way the team prepared for the just-concluded series in Bangladesh is something that the

team management, coach Ravi Shastri and the players will readily acknowledge.

Robin, a mentally tough player who displayed controlled aggression during many match-winning performances, settled into his role nicely, getting the players to understand their bodies well and making them react well to different situations, especially when anticipating catches.

Prasad, a wily seamer with an admirable quality to effect breakthroughs, worked tirelessly with the bowlers, motivating them and getting the best out of them with his brilliant analysis. Prasad's advantage is his immense international experience, and it showed in the performance level that Zaheer Khan attained.

Loss of confidence was the reason for Zaheer struggling to put the ball in the right areas but Prasad's words of wisdom made the left-armers realise his potential. On a placid pitch, which was two-paced only on the third afternoon, Zaheer came up with an enviable display of seam bowling.

Prasad had analysed the pitch astutely and to Zaheer's credit, the bowler returned his first five-wicket haul in three years. "Mainly injuries," was the reason Zaheer professed for his inconsistency, but there was no doubt that it was a

mental thing. Once Zaheer realised that he had an efficient guide in Prasad, who had gone through similar problems during his playing days and managed to overcome them, he settled down to bowl a length that proved difficult to handle for the Bangladesh batsmen.

Prasad had devised a plan and Zaheer executed it perfectly. There was support from Rudra Pratap Singh, who got some of his swing and pace back. The constant monitoring by Prasad helped R.P. Singh become an improved bowler.

Robin played his part quietly and effectively. He worked on the fielding drills with a fresh approach, and more importantly, made the players enjoy them. It was a welcome break from the monotonous exercises the team had been following.

Shastri was all praise for Prasad and Robin. "They shared the responsibility and did an excellent job. Their experience helped the bowlers a lot and brought in a professional touch," he said.

For their outstanding work, Prasad and Robin deserve a proper contract from the Board. It would help them concentrate on their jobs better. Needless to say, they have the support of the captain and the coach.

Where's Monty the artist?

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Every time Monty Panesar floats up to the bowling crease it is impossible not to put in the mind's eye the finest left-arm spinner most of us have had the privilege of watching, Bishan Bedi.

It is what Monty strives for. He has spoken with the great man and has absorbed the teachings. Like Bedi, he is balanced, fixed on his target, calm, metronomic and, at his best, mesmerising. There are few flourishes or idiosyncrasies. The art comes in the repetition and the tiniest changes in angle, flight, turn, pace. It is like watching a coaching manual come to life.

But Panesar is in a minor dilemma of sorts. Bedi operated in more conventional times, before

jumbo bats, flat tracks and reverse sweeps. Before Twenty20 and four-runners-an-over Tests, before the energy level of batting rose and spinners saw their best deliveries irreverently swatted into the distance. Patience is not the virtue it was and subtly is neither appreciated nor much understood.

Increasingly, spinners are required to produce magic. For the first months of Monty's rapid rise, wickets came as regularly as the praise -- and economically, which pleased Duncan Fletcher. Panesar bowled to instructions and did little wrong. But the reason he did little wrong might also be the reason his effectiveness dissipated over the winter.

Monty's gifts of control and incremental changes were respected but not menaced. At the World Cup, he did not surprise good, adventurous batsmen.

Panesar's tidy, formulaic bowling -- seven wickets at 40 in eight matches -- was respectable, workmanlike. Muttiah Muralidaran, who has no textbook, finished second only to Glenn McGrath. It is not comparing like with like, but that only serves to underline the challenge that faces Panesar: at the highest level of the modern game, in the long or short form, spinners have to reinvent themselves. Monty is aware of this. For all his droning sound bites at press conferences, he is a thoughtful cricketer. But he is innately conservative and unless he grows as a bowler, he runs the risk of turning into a machine.

Panesar, like Daniel Vettori, is a classicist. Yet, when we spoke last

year about how he regarded his art, Monty talked more like a tradesman. Time and again, he repeated his mantra: "I don't want to get too complicated or do things too fancy. Keep it simple, do the basics." Yes, he said, he had been experimenting with a left-arm doosra, but, no, it would not be getting an airing. And maybe the odd Chinaman? Yes, he'd bowled a couple against Pakistan last summer, but, no, he'd be keeping it "nice and tight".

I got the clear impression this pressure on Panesar to conform, to play it by the book, came from the top. Fletcher (who would later praise Panesar as the best finger-spinner in the world), at first ham-fistedly aired doubts, about the bowler's credentials as a "multidimensional" Test cricketer. What Fletcher wanted was an Ashley Giles substitute, another Mr Reliable.

This, I think, inhibited Panesar. If he had no other strengths (and that dropped catch in his third Test in Mumbai reminded him of his frailties), he was determined not to fail as a bowler, to meet at least some part of Fletcher's expectations of him as Giles's stand-in. That insecurity must have been fed on the Ashes tour when Fletcher opted for Giles in Brisbane. That Panesar emerged with credit had as much to do with circumstance and desperation as any Damascus conversion by Fletcher.

This is not to say Panesar has to come up with a new mystery ball every season. His control is his strength -- but, now that Fletcher is gone, he might feel he has the freedom to experiment. Just a little. He is good enough. He has the shoulders for a wicked arm ball and the long, strong fingers and supple wrist for a doosra.

The game has moved on fast in so many ways. Cricket has become a more intuitive exercise. Players, even very good ones, who do not respond to the shifting rhythm of the game, are becoming paralysed by their method. Batsmen have shrugged off caution and spinners are, increasingly, having to do so.

It was painfully evident at the World Cup that orthodoxy is dying. England's one world-class performer, Kevin Pietersen, kept them in the game with textbook watchfulness, but powered them to the line with his 'flamingo', his charges down the wicket to the fast bowlers. Down the order, rare successes sprung not from expected sources

but newcomers with nothing to lose. While Andrew Flintoff painfully disintegrated in front of us, his instincts neutered by self-doubt, it was the cool-eyed resistance of Ravi Bopara and Paul Nixon's almost obsessive reverse-sweeping that got England over the line, or at least near to it.

Everyone says Peter Moores is an excellent coach. He has all the qualifications, some of the results, the trust of those who employed him and nowhere to go but up.

But whether or not he succeeds will not be down to his certificates, his sterling work at Sussex and the academy, his cheery demeanour and stop-start soundbites. It will have much more to do with his instincts. If Moores lets the players express themselves, if he abandons the conservatism that did for the team in the final days of Fletcher's otherwise exemplary reign, he will give himself the best chance of turning England around again.

And the bowler he has to nurture is the one with the most potential, Monty Panesar.

Ivanovic

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Her path seems to be clear through to a potential quarter-final clash against third seed Svetlana Kuznetsova of Russia, her victim in the Berlin final.

For Mirza there was the consolation of having made it past the first round at Roland Garros for the first time in three attempts and she will now turn her attentions towards preparing for her third Wimbledon campaign.

Whatmore

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The general secretary also spoke on the occasion. "I am sure you will follow the progress of your boys wherever you are even if you are in the opposition camp and the players will remember their favourite coach who was the architect of our first Test win," said Mahbubul Anam.

The Tigers posted their one and only Test win, against Zimbabwe by 226 runs in 2004-05 at home, under Whatmore's tutelage and exceeded expectations in the World Cup where they reached the Super Eight stage.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Swaboolombi Society fought back from a set down to beat Dhaka Sporting Club 3-1 in the National Bank Dhaka Metropolis First Division Volleyball League at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium yesterday.

After going down 17-25, Swaboolombi Society hit back with three consecutive sets, winning 25-22, 25-18 and 25-15.

In the second division, Bhai Bhai Sangha crushed Nabajatak Majlish 25-8, 25-9 and 25-14.

BOOSTU-13 CRICKET

Asif's four-wicket haul ensured Discovery's place in the last four of the Boost Power Cup under-13 cricket tournament at the Kalabagan Cricket Ground yesterday.

After Discovery scored 205 for eight in 25 overs, they bowled out Altaf Cricket Foundation for only 154 runs.

The little

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meeting of the Board of Directors today in Turin to discuss the options for the future following Deschamps' departure. Director Marco Tardelli denied he was set to step down from his position.

As for DID, he will not be taking over at Lyon. The rumoured switch fell through, as today the French club announced that Alain Perrin had replaced Gerard Houllier.

McClaren plays

FROM PAGE 24

Beckham won't be the only player with a burning desire to make up for lost time when the teams walk out beneath the Wembley arch. Michael Owen is set to start his first senior England match since suffering a knee injury at last year's World Cup that wiped out most of the striker's season.

London has become familiar territory for Brazil, who are back in the capital city for the fourth time in 10 months as they continue their policy of playing lucrative friendlies around Europe rather than in front of their own fans.

Brazil coach Dunga has been rebuilding since the Selecao's disappointing World Cup campaign. Relatively unfamiliar names like Wagner Love, Elano, Gilberto and Helton are likely to feature at Wembley as Dunga fine-tunes preparations for Brazil's defence of their Copa America crown in Venezuela next month.

Star quality is never in short supply when Brazil are in town though and Kaka, fresh from winning the Champions League with AC Milan, should figure, along with Barcelona's Ronaldinho.

Neither of Brazil's playmakers will have faced Nicky Shorey before and the Reading left-back, who is in line to make his England debut just six years after playing in League Two, with Leyton Orient, is still pinching himself at his remarkable rise.

"It is unbelievable to think I started at Orient," Shorey said. "I look back and think 'how did I get here?'"

"I was in Marbella with Reading when I found out. I just woke up and saw there was a message on my phone."

"It was a bit of a shock when I listened and it was Steve McClaren. I could not believe it, so I kept on playing it back."

Asoka fails

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Asoka de Silva and Tyrone Wijewardena, figure in the ICC international panel.

The aggrieved umpires said umpiring standards in the island were dropping due to bungling and favouritism practised by officials.

They want the examination results to be ignored and selections based on individual performances.

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

On an unknown square in a far-off land, something familiar is stirring. What is it about that slap through extra cover and that toss of the hair to acknowledge another fifty? Fourteen thousand miles from the country that turned its back on him, The Ego has landed in New Zealand.

Whisper it softly around Birmingham; button your lip in the corridors of Channel 4 -- Dermot Reeve is rebuilding his life. Thus far, the most successful captain Warwickshire ever had and, some would say, the most irritating commentator C4 ever engaged is keeping to the shady side of the street for fear of recognition. By the end of this summer the former England all-rounder may be ready to declare his complete recovery from cocaine addiction and his desire to get back into the professional game. He has already taken his first steps by agreeing to write a monthly column in Spin magazine.

Bizarrely, news of Dermot's rehabilitation coincides with the publication this week of a harrowing autobiography called Wasted? It is written by Paul Smith, another vital member of that Warwickshire team which did the treble in 1994 before starting to implode. Bob Woolmer was the coach, Brian Lara the record breaker and Reeve the driving force. Barely concealed in the changing rooms and fleshpots of England, a more sinister force was on the loose: drugs. They cost Smith his job, his family and his home.

Ten years after his ECB ban, Smith is doing valuable charity work in Los Angeles and with the Prince's Trust in Britain, but is still without paid employment.

"As long as I've got a roof over my head I'm OK," he says. He is angry about Warwickshire's lack of chap-

laincy over the drugs affair, however. Warwickshire in turn refuse to allow him book-signing sessions at Edgbaston, which in the circumstances is surprising.

Smith writes fondly about Reeve but less effusively about another teammate, Keith Piper, the Warwickshire wicketkeeper who tested positive for cannabis. Smith told me: "The club could have informed the Professional Cricketers' Association and organised proper treatment, but it was easier not to bother."

I requested an interview with Dennis Amiss, who was Warwickshire's chief executive at the time. He did not get back to me, however. Fame was the corruptive influence, as a bunch of unsung cricketers were catapulted into a counterfeit world of wine, adoring women, ecstasy and cocaine.

"I didn't go home for two years," Smith explained. "Success attracted the wrong people for the wrong reasons. All young sportsmen should beware -- it's not the people in the game, it's those outside who are the trouble." Although Warwickshire have disowned Reeve and Smith, Piper, now fully rehabilitated, is their second-team coach.

"Funny that," Smith says. "I wish Keith well, but why should there be one rule for him and another for Dermot and me? Cricket is full of hypocrites. Neither of us will find work in Birmingham again."

He has not seen his old captain since they played together in an Isle of Man cricket tournament soon after Channel 4 sacked Reeve from their commentary team in the summer of 2005. "Recovery is a long, slow, lonely process," Smith says. "I know what he's going through."

For those who have worked with him or listened to him broadcast, the concept of Dermot Reeve maintaining a low profile is as alien as the West Indies winning another Test match. If

he had been an oyster he'd have swallowed himself whole. For the past 18 months he has been as fragile as straw.

"People forget that he's getting over a very serious illness," says George Dobell, the Birmingham Post cricket correspondent, who is one of only two people in Britain to maintain contact with Reeve. The other is his mum.

Reeve is playing club cricket and coaching at an undisclosed location in New Zealand while striving to find a work/life balance more generously slewed towards the wife and children he almost sacrificed during his cocaine-fuelled excesses.

"I don't want to be part of the rat race," he admits now. "I've been there and done that. I was caught up in a life of proving myself, of trying to get on. I don't want to do it again."

Reeve's drug-taking was exposed by the Mail on Sunday. He confessed that cocaine had been undermining his television career and his family life for two years, but that the trouble started earlier, at Edgbaston in the aftermath of Warwickshire's treble-winning success.

Retreat was the only sensible option. The Reeves sold their home in Birmingham and moved as far away as they possibly could. They are now sustained by his benefit fund, which was close to £500,000. He wrote in Spin: "I'm in a lovely position through the kindness of the Warwickshire public. Their support of my benefit season means I don't need to chase a living."

Reeve has the cockiness to re-establish himself in this country, even though that aspect of his personality puts some people off. He certainly has the credentials to be a major figure in the game and heaven knows, we need progressive thinkers -- but he may decide that the simple life is better after all.

Kaif's brush with fate

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you could be facing life as a lower division clerk somewhere instead of a cricketer."

And then, almost inaudibly, he murmurs, "I sometimes wonder about that." The dreamy look is gone and he looks up. "I didn't make the probabilities camp of 40 but was called back by Sarkar Talwar, a selector and the u-15 coach. God knows what he liked about me but whatever it was, I had had my first brush with fate. I did well in the camp and practice games and later, being part of that squad gave me a slight edge when I played grade cricket for UP. My journey began there. But I still had to work really hard. There's no substitute for that."

It's been a strange journey for Kaif, a man often dubbed a future India captain till recently not just because of an ability to keep a steady head on his shoulders in pressure-cooker situations and win matches for India coming in at a difficult No. 7, but also because he showed none of the off-field quirks of character or unsteadiness that some of his contemporaries displayed.

Now though, life has taken another twist and the future seems less certain. He seems unperturbed. "Everything is an experience and you are moulded by how you use them. I think I've used this time well. I've been able to under-

stand myself and my reactions, I've calmed down through the years, am less bristly with people, more accepting. I've been growing and growing up with all these experiences."

"Let's see... I believe in myself and more importantly, so many ordinary people, on the streets, in trains, in planes, at functions, they come and tell me they believe in me, that I belong with India. Often, I don't sleep straightaway. I lie in bed thinking about life, about what could have been and what is. And finally, I always say, if it wasn't for cricket, I wouldn't have been me. This has been my life and it always will."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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