

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Discovery and Metro CA were declared joint champions as rain ruined the final of the Boost Power Cup Cricket (under-13) at the Alabaman Krira Chakra ground yesterday.

The match stopped after only eleven overs following heavy rain and all efforts to resume the game went in vain.

Former national captains Aminul Islam and Khaled Mahmud were present as special guests while Mohammad Aminul Islam Khan, secretary of National Sports Council, distributed prizes as chief guest.

VOLLEYBALL LEAGUE

Madartek Mitali Sangha earned a 3-2 victory against Dhaka Sporting Club in the National Bank First Division Volleyball League at the outer stadium volleyball stadium.

Munaf fully fit

PTI, Mysore

Indian team's fitness trainer Gregory King on Friday certified that speedster Munaf Patel has recovered fully from the back injury he sustained on the tour of Bangladesh and was fit for the forthcoming tour of Ireland and England.

"All the bowlers are fit for the forthcoming tour of Ireland and England. Injured bowler Munaf Patel is also fit," King told reporters on Friday after the conclusion of the four-day fitness-specific camp for bowlers held at the Infosys campus here.

The injury-prone Patel broke down during India's tour of Bangladesh last month after complaining of lower back pain and was replaced by Delhi rookie Ishant Sharma before the second Test at Chittagong.

Patel was also replaced by teammate S Sreesanth in the Asia XI team in the Twenty20 fixture against Africa XI held here on June 5 as part of the Afro-Asia Cup tournament.

The Indian team is scheduled to play three offshore ODIs at Belfast, Ireland, against South Africa and a one-off ODI against Pakistan at Glasgow, Scotland, before moving over to England for a full tour comprising three Tests and seven ODIs against the hosts.

King and left-arm pacer Rudra Pratap Singh, who addressed the media, sounded pleased over the outcome of the training camp, with bowling coach Venkatesh Prasad in charge, which commenced on June 4.

The duo was all praise for the excellent facilities available for the players at the Infosys campus.

During the camp the bowlers were taught lessons in communication skills and leadership qualities at the Infosys Leadership Institute situated inside the campus.

The bowlers trained by jogging, swimming and working out at the state-of-the-art gymnasiums.

'Crazy' times for Justine

AFP, Paris

Known for her steely determination and unflappability on court, Justine Henin insists that there is another, more "crazy" side to her character.

Speaking on Friday, the day before her fourth French Open final in five years against Ana Ivanovic, Henin was happy to give a brief insight into what she is like away from the courts.

"Even if I look serious, I can be a crazy person," she said.

"I have a lot of humour and I talk a lot. I love to be with good people around me and I need to share everything.

"I am pretty serious in my job, but I can be very funny, maybe not in a press conference because I'm still in a professional attitude.

"But I can make the differences between my professional life and my private life. And I'm a very different person."

Henin knows that a win on Saturday will elevate her at just 25-years-old in the annals of French Open history.

She would be just the fourth woman in the history of the tournament to win three in a row after American Helen Wills Moody (1928-30), German Hilde Sperling (1935-37) and Serbian-turned American Monica Seles (1990-92).

And she would join Wills-Moody (four wins), Margaret Court (five), Steffi Graf (six) and Chris Evert (seven) among the ranks of women who have won at least four times at Roland Garros.

But Henin insists that at the moment making history is the furthest thing from her mind.

"It's going to be 50-50 tomorrow because it's a Grand Slam final and anything can happen," she said.

"Everyone is waiting for me, but I just have to forget about that and just be ready and try and play my best tennis."

"If I am win the third one in a row, that would be a great achievement.

"But right now, it's not my main goals. I'm focussed on winning the title and that's it."



PHOTO: STAR

Players of Metro Cricket Academy and Discovery pose with the Boost Power Cup under-13 cricket competition winners' trophies after the final between the two sides was abandoned due to rain at the Kalabagan Krira Chakra ground yesterday.

From pool to Paris

AFP, Paris



Ana Ivanovic's dramatic journey to the French Open final began with a TV advert, was nurtured in a swimming pool and survived

NATO bombs.

Now the vivacious 19-year-old Serbian hopes to crown her remarkable voyage to a first Grand Slam final by depriving overwhelming favourite Justine Henin of a third successive Roland Garros title.

But Ivanovic's career didn't have the most promising of starts.

She took up the game at five years old after seeing a commercial on television and being inspired by watching compatriot Monica Seles, the last Serbian to win here in 1992.

Then, after being given a racquet for a present, she faced the problem of trying to find somewhere indoors to practice during Serbia's biting winters.

In a country where tennis courts were almost unheard of, there was a novel solution.

"I played in a swimming pool. It was too expensive to keep it warm during the winter and there weren't

many people using it anyway so they emptied the water, put a carpet on the floor and put in two tennis courts," recalled Ivanovic.

"It was impossible to play crosscourt because the wall was too close. All we could do was play down the lines."

But Ivanovic, with the encouragement of her lawyer mother Dragana and father Miroslav, an economist, wasn't deterred by the chronic lack of facilities.

Things would improve in the summer when she could play outside, combining six hours of school with two hours of tennis every day of the week.

"I was always very active when I was a kid," she said. "I never played with dolls."

However, in 1999, her world was turned upside.

The west lost patience with Slobodan Milosevic's regime, and its ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, and Belgrade burned beneath a firestorm of NATO bombs.

"It was tough," said Ivanovic who was just 11 at the time of the eight-week bombing campaign.

"I thought it would be impossible to continue as we didn't know how long it would go on. We had troubles travelling because it was hard to get visas.

"There were no flights from

Serbia. We had to go to Hungary, so we'd take a bus for six, seven hours just to catch a flight."

Times were hard but the youngster's potential was spotted by Swiss businessman Dan Holzmann who invested 300,000 euros in her career when she was just 14 and took over as her manager.

She switched her base to Basel, where she now lives, and despite the problems of her early Balkan years, she hasn't looked back rising to seven in the world and winning her first title in Berlin last month.

Ivanovic's courageous and single-minded rise into the big time won applause from Maria Sharapova whom she swept aside 6-2, 6-1 in a brutally one-sided semifinal on Thursday.

The former world number one endured her own epic journey to fame and fortune, leaving her mother and Russian home at the age of six to carve out what has become the most high-profile and lucrative career in women's sport.

"My family did everything to make my dream happen," said Sharapova.

"All these young girls who were brought up that way and didn't have everything in their hands and having to work for everything.

"It's very inspiring."

Bordeaux get a Blanc cheque

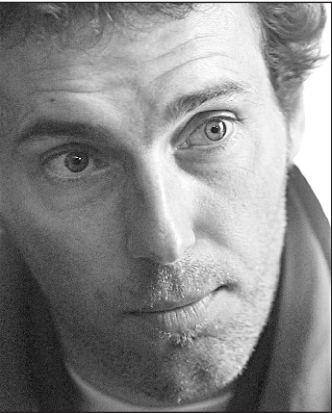
AFP, Bordeaux

World Cup winning defender Laurent Blanc became a coach for the first time on Friday when he took over at League Cup winners Bordeaux.

The 41-year-old signed a two-year contract and replaces Brazilian Ricardo, who left the club to take over league rivals Monaco.

"I want to be a coach who takes this squad to another level," commented Blanc, who did not play in the 1998 World Cup final after being controversially sent-off in the semifinal win over Croatia.

"I want to try and retain all the



LAURENT BLANC

good players at the club if possible."

Blanc, who was capped 97 times and also won the Euro 2008 title and numbered Napoli, Barcelona, Marseille and Manchester United among his clubs, said that he had started to become frustrated at not being a coach.

"I had the diplomas but every time I came to be interviewed by clubs the sticking point was my lack of experience at coaching," said Blanc, who provided one of the most notable habitual moments of the 1998 World Cup in kissing the bald pate of goalkeeper Fabien Barthez as a lucky omen.

"They were right but at the same time it was starting to irritate me."

Blanc said that two managers he had served under had made the biggest impression on him and he would take the lessons he learnt from them into his job.

"For me, the ideal coach is the one who gets the best out of his players," said Blanc.

"And if he can do that and also extricate the team from the bad moments in a season then that is even better.

"I know of coaches with these qualities, especially two, Marcello Lippi (who coached him at Inter Milan), and Sir Alex Ferguson (who he played under at Manchester United).

"The two of them may not have been the types to be there all week on the training ground, but on the day and eve of the match they took things in hand and spoke to you individually and with the squad in its entirety."

Flintoff

FROM PAGE 17 getting back on the field.

"I've just had an operation on my ankle, I've got a rehab programme in front of me. All my focus and all my energy have got to go into that because I desperately want to get out on the cricket field."

The hard-hitting batsman and fast bowler said: "The way I play and the way I bowl, I've got to be 100 percent fit. I want to get back to bowling late 80-90mph and to do that I need a fit ankle."

Flintoff's ability to bowl at top pace in international cricket has now been questioned but he said: "I have had ankle operations in the past and come back from them and hopefully I can do again.

"It's frustrating I'm not playing but I'm confident I can and I have the utmost faith in the medical staff."

Chance to prove form



HARSHA BHOGLE

One man's poison is another man's candy. While Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar saw no value in playing the Afro-Asian Cup, Virender Sehwag and Harbhajan Singh should have been queuing up to have a go. While some might criticise the peculiar timing of the tournament, it gives Sehwag and Harbhajan three games to show their form, not their ability for that is not in question, before the selectors meet again.

Sehwag couldn't have asked for a better surface than the excellent pitch that the KSCA provided for the first match. There was bounce and carry and on most occasions, it was true which is wonderful for a virgin surface. And to be honest, Sehwag looked quite good against an attack which, though not world class, was reasonably demanding.

With most batsmen, it is the shots they play that determine whether or not they are in form. The back foot punch from Tendulkar, the flick wide of mid-on for Dravid, the cover drive and the pull for Ganguly. But with Sehwag it is what he doesn't do that gives a better clue. When Sehwag is not reaching out to balls wide off his stumps with his feet firmly planted on leg stump, you feel optimistic.

You get the feeling that he is putting a price on his wicket, for more often he surrenders it rather than forcing the bowler to earn it.

That is why I was quite excited seeing him play the initial overs in Bangalore. His left foot was forward and moving towards the ball, often he left it alone, and his best shots were played from close to the body.

Suddenly it wasn't a case of Russian roulette any more, it seemed there was intent behind facing every ball. Then he showed why he can be breathtaking and frustrating. In his forties, the feet found some glue, the bat, like an errant child, drifted away, lunged at the ball and the inner edge easily went through the resultant gap onto his stumps. The resolve wasn't strong enough but at least it had surfaced.

That is one of the problems with allowing bad habits to creep into your cricket. Often you know what to do with them but can't get yourself to do it because instinct, not logic, drives you when you drop your guard. That is why I believe that the non-striker could be crucial for Sehwag just to keep reminding him of his resolve; maybe just a word every couple of overs, maybe even a little gesture, anything.

I remember we did something similar in my first couple of years in live television. Out of a desire to get things done quickly, I spoke too fast. Our producer worked out that if he reminded me to "breathe" a few seconds before we went on air, I would consciously slow down. It became a game between us and from time to time, in my ear, I would hear the words "remember, breathe" coming in. It helped me enormously to the extent that I now say it to myself sometimes.

Like Sehwag, Harbhajan too

needs all the help he can get to move out of this mid-career crisis. Currently he seems confused and the guile, so much a part of his extraordinary basket of offerings, is on leave. A spinner like Harbhajan is a storyteller, he must have the time to pick his words, his pauses, he must tease his audience and to do that he must be patient. Today, he seems in a hurry, do a quick précis and off again. A précis has little of the charm of the original, it merely states facts concisely and that is what I suspect he is doing. I wonder if he is insecure but these are precisely the areas a good coach will address when he has people with unbounded ability but fluctuating attitudes.

Some people have it in them to convert a setback into a stepping stone because it serves to strengthen their resolve. Others get crushed by even a small dip in performance, they lose confidence, they start thinking of failure when all they need is a little nudge back towards success.

A coach needs to have the time to understand his players enough; to know what drives them and what stifles them. That is why we should have completed the process of appointing a coach a month ago so that in Bangladesh he could have just watched and learnt and been ready to take over the side.

Now, the new man must get into the thick of things straightaway. It is not ideal and it has come to this because having a coach is not high on anyone's priority list. Sometimes our priorities tell us who we really are!

Remembering Bob



INTERNET, undated

"You've only lost a game of cricket... It's not the end of the world and you'll be playing many more matches... The mood now reminds me of how the South Africans felt (in Birmingham) after failing to make the 1999 final... Come on, lift yourselves..."

According to senior pro Mohammed Yousuf, those were the late Bob Woolmer's last words in the Pakistan dressing room (Sabina Park, Kingston) after the shock defeat at the hands of Ireland, a loss which ended the 2007 World Cup campaign in the first-round itself.

Recounting that at the Bangalore airport on Thursday afternoon, waiting to board a much-delayed Jet flight for Chennai, an emotional Yousuf told The Telegraph: "I've worked with many coaches, but Bob was special... He knew his job and, to give an example, structured training sessions in such a manner that everybody came away better prepared... Bob was a zabardast coach..."

In India for the Afro-Asia Cup (he top-scored for Asia in Wednesday's opener), Yousuf added: "I'm not sure who is going to be our next coach, but Bob will definitely be missed."

Yousuf, in fact, took the same elevator as Woolmer when the devastated team returned to the Jamaica Pegasus.

"Shoaib Malik and a couple of other players were also there and when it stopped on my floor (third), Bob quipped 'ladies first'... We laughed... I didn't get to see him after that..."

Being very particular about his prayers (Yousuf became a convert a few years ago), he was up around five the next morning and, then, went back to sleep.

"I got up again at about 11.30 and was informed that Bob had been taken to hospital... I assumed he'd fallen ill because of the stress... I never suspected foul play... Of course, it became unbearable when Bob's death began to be treated as murder... Main aap se kya bataoon... (What do I tell you)? Every minute seemed an eternity and look at the way we were treated a throat swab was taken... Then, we were fingerprinted... It was terrible till we left the West Indies..."

The Jamaica police claim to have fresh information but, earlier this week, they somersaulted and announced that Woolmer's death on March 18 had actually been of natural causes!

It's no surprise that Yousuf, too, wants the Jamaica police to be sued. "Obviously, we can't do so as individu-

als... After what each one of us went through and we can't forget those days it's for the Pakistan Cricket Board to do what's necessary."

Yousuf, who didn't touch a bat for weeks after the World Cup shock, dismissed the charge that most of the players had been devoting more time to religious activities.

"Woh koi baat hi nahin hai (It was not important)... When a Muslim is out of his house, he can say short two-minute prayers... People must find some excuse... People have to make an issue... Surely, the Indians weren't saying namaaz... Why did they (also) crash out? Yeh koi baat nahin banti... If anything, Allah is only going to answer your prayers..."

Yousuf added: "Fact of the matter is that we didn't play well... It's strange that we wouldn't have got any credit had we beaten Ireland, but got crucified for losing... In sport, there will be winners and losers."

Clarifying that he never staked a claim for the captaincy after the World Cup, Yousuf endorsed the decision to appoint Malik. "I'm not disappointed... Shoaib brings a lot of energy in the field... He has begun well (in Abu Dhabi last month)..."

Young Malik should feel more assured, Yousuf, after all, has been a stand-in captain.

Chalk and cheese



CRICINFO, undated

Ray Mali is to Percy Sonn what milk is to moonshine. Their shared nationality and lives in cricket aside, two less connectable figures have never existed.

Sonn, whose tenure as ICC president ended when he died on May 27, was an acerbic fighting cock of an administrator. Cricket South Africa president Mali, who will serve the last 13 months of Sonn's term as acting ICC president, is an affable countryman of gentlemanly demeanour.

City slicker Sonn thrived on a potent mix of politics and cricket, and in his spare time he was a hotshot lawyer and crime fighter. Mali, who rose to prominence from the dust of the Eastern Cape, where he became a teacher, wears a broad, benign smile unless he has reason not to.

Sonn spoke a high-octane dialect that dipped often into a deep well of profanity. If Mali knows any four-letter words, he has yet to be heard using them. And, no, Mali is not in the slightest danger of falling prey to a wardrobe malfunction.

In his time as president of the United Cricket Board (UCB), Sonn was a standard-bearer for active transformation and woe betide anyone who stood in his path. Mali is a unifying influence, a soother of savaged breasts. Try as they might, fires fail to ignite in his calming presence. Perhaps Mali is simply a product of his own time and place as much as Sonn was.

So, to gain a clearer understanding of who Mali is, a trip to a town called Alice would be instructive.

In economic and social terms the Eastern Cape has been left behind in South Africa's surge to democracy. This is an acid irony considering the struggle was most fervently fuelled by men, women and children who call this impoverished province home. Among them are Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki. But the streets and buildings of Alice, which

is in the heart of the Eastern Cape, resemble an inner city slum more than they do a small town on the cusp of long awaited and deserved prosperity. Fort Hare University, the alma mater of Mali and Mandela as well as Robert Mugabe, sprawls along the road leading into the town.

Alice itself slips into the review mirror mercifully quickly, and then the hills present themselves to be climbed. These hills sing of ancient sunsets, soaking summer rains that bring forth the perfume of the earth, and of the kind of smile Mali can't help beaming.

They also sing of cricket. It is here that British missionaries and mineworkers who returned from digging South Africa's wealth out of the ground brought a strange game more than a century ago. In time each hill became home to a different club, and they competed fiercely among themselves.

Not many hills away, in the Middledrift district, they still play the Amacalegushie tournament -- the Slaughter of the Sheep tournament. Ten teams take part, and nine of them get to watch the winners devour their barbecued prize.

Raymond Remember Mali was born into this rich tradition 70 years ago. He grew up playing cricket and rugby -- he was a strapping number eight until a shoulder injury ended that career -- and discovered a passion for administration.

When South Africa was re-admitted to international cricket, Mali had become prominent enough to made manager of the national under-19 team that toured the West Indies alongside Kepler Wessels' side in 1992. Eight years later he became president of the Border Cricket Board, and three years after that he succeeded Sonn to the presidency of the UCB.

Mali may seem to be the epitome of the old-fashioned committee man, but it was during his tenure as UCB president that South Africa made the leap from a moribund provincial structure and into the brave new world of franchise cricket. He has also been an enthusiastic proponent of 20-over cricket, which is destined to save the game from a fate worse

than croquet.

Whatever else Mali achieves, he will remain proud of turning a bumpy patch of land that nestled among Alice's hills into a cricket ground fit for international teams. Ntselamanzi, or Place of Water, was aptly named, what with the Ncera River oozing alongside it. But before Mali convinced Ali Bacher to spend money on the place in the early 1990s it was just another green, vaguely oval shape with a dusty rut for a pitch somewhere near its centre. UCB funds paid for irrigation and ground maintenance, and touring teams became regular visitors. It was as if Mali was giving back to Alice, and to cricket in Alice, what he had been given.

Stand by for more of the same over the next 13 months.

Rahmatganj

FROM PAGE 17 Apu, Mohiuddin, Francis and Figo (Mamun).

RUSSEL: Shakil, Hassan, Jahirul, Burdif, Mishu, Pappu, Sadaane, Iqir, Tanvir, Younes and Bulbul (Sentu and Rikta).

Referee: Mansoor Azaad.

TOP SCORERS

12 goals: Paul (MSC)

8 goals: Junior (Brothers)

6 goals: Nicodemus (Arambagh)

5 goals: Robin (Farashganj), Alfaz (Muktijoddha)

4 goals: Moni (Muktijoddha), Younes (Russel), Prashanta (Khulna Abahani)

3 goals: Mamun (Khulna Abahani), Iqir (Russel), Ibrahim (Abahani), Khokon, Abraham (Ctg Abahani), Emeke (Mohammedan), Brahim (Muktijoddha)

2 goals: Yusuf, Asif (Ctg Mohammedan), Enoch, Faisal (Brothers), Emly, Abul (Abahani), Munna (Abraham), Ali Hossain (Farashganj), Mohammed Rony (Mohammedan), Tajul, Pikul (Khulna Abahani), Biketi, Iddi (Arambagh), Apu (Rahmatganj).