



Bangladesh national footballers practise on the Circuit House hilltop at Cox's Bazar yesterday as part of their special training programme.

Trans-Tasman T20 soon

CRICINFO, *undated*

New Zealand teams could compete in Australia's domestic Twenty20 competition as soon as 2008-09. The boards of Australia and New Zealand are discussing the potential for a Trans-Tasman tournament, with the top sides going on to compete against teams from India, England and South Africa in the newly-announced Champions Twenty20 League.

Glenn McGrath and Stephen Fleming were in New Delhi on Thursday for the launch of the ICC-sanctioned competition, which is seen as an official alternative to the Indian Cricket League (ICL). Although no players were named as definite participants Fleming and McGrath, both of whom had been courted by the ICL, would appear likely to play. Shane Warne's decision not to sign with the ICL has also fuelled speculation he might join the Champions Twenty20 League, which will start in October 2008.

The details are still being fine-tuned but the initial plan is for domestic teams that progress to the international tournament to be allowed to top up their squads with guest players. That could mean Warne or McGrath might sign with an Indian or England domestic team, for example, while an Australian side could try to lure top players from other countries.

"That is certainly a possibility in the Champions League and, in some respects, that is part of the attraction," Cricket Australia's CEO James Sutherland told the Age. "It's a concept where we have the best of the best at domestic level playing against each other. Previously, apart from really isolated instances, this just hasn't happened before."

In the first season, the two Australian states that reach the KFC Twenty20 final will earn a place in the Champions League. However, after 2007-08 the states will probably have extra competition for a spot in the worldwide tournament.

"We have had preliminary talks with Cricket Australia about establishing a trans-Tasman league which will feed into subsequent global championships," New Zealand Cricket's CEO Justin Vaughan said. "Both New Zealand Cricket and Cricket Australia are interested in exploring this potential further with the possibility of a trans-Tasman league starting as early as the 2008-09 cricket season. The two top teams from this league would then progress to the Champions Twenty20 tournament to play teams from Indian, African and European leagues."

A bigger defeat

INTERNET, *undated*

Australia's shock Twenty20 loss to Zimbabwe cost cricket punters around the world tens of millions of dollars.

Betfair, one of the world's largest cricket betting outlets, revealed it traded a thumping \$24 million in matched bets on Australia to win.

"It was a phenomenal night of betting. Almost all of the betting centred around Australia at ludicrously short prices," Betfair's Hugh Taggart said.

"We matched \$27,679,06 on the match, amazing figures for an opening round Twenty20 game like that, and \$24 million of it was traded on Australia."

Not even skinny odds stopped the punters.

"When the Aussies got into \$1.01 we still matched more than \$400,000. That's the shortest odds possible," Taggart said.

"What's even more staggering is that a further \$2.8 million was matched at \$1.02."

"It's safe to assume there's more interest in Twenty20 than we first thought."

TAB Sportsbet's Glenn Munsie said Australia's defeat was a monstrous upset.

"They were considered such good things we didn't even put up a head-to-head market on it," Munsie said.

Taggart said there were some daring punters who cashed in on Zimbabwe.

"They did get out to as much as \$80 to win," he said.

"More than \$1000 was matched on Zimbabwe between \$60 and \$65 and another \$5000 between \$45 and \$55."

Australia's defeat saw its odds to win the title ease from \$2.72 to \$3.80 with Betfair.

McLaren fined, docked points

AFP, Paris



McLaren boss Ron Dennis has refused to accept the FIA's decision to strip his team of their 2007 constructors' championship points for their involvement in the Formula One spy saga.

Formula One's governing body has also fined the British team 100 million dollars for incorporating illegally obtained Ferrari intellectual property on their MP4-22 car.

The material concerned is a 780-page dossier given to then-McLaren chief designer Mike Coughlan by ex-Ferrari engineer Nigel Stepney in April.

Dennis has protested McLaren's innocence since the story broke in early July and continued to do so after Thursday's decision.

"The most important thing is that

we will be going motor racing this weekend, the rest of the season and every season. This means that our drivers can continue to compete for the world championship.

"However having been at the hearing today I do not accept that we deserved to be penalised in this way," he said.

"Today's evidence given to the FIA by our drivers, engineers and staff clearly demonstrated that we did not use any leaked information to gain a competitive advantage.

"We have never denied that the information from Ferrari was in the personal possession of one of our employees at his home. The issue is: was this information used by McLaren?

"This is not the case and has not been proven today."

McLaren's drivers Lewis Hamilton, the British rookie who is leading the drivers' championship, and defending double world champion Fernando Alonso escaped FIA sanctions in return for fully complying with the investigation.

Dennis's team had led the constructors' championship by 23 points but not only have they been excluded from this year's title race, there is also the possibility of further penalties, concerning the 2008 season, to follow in December when the FIA examine the McLaren car for next season.

Dennis thought is bullish that there will be no further problems and insists that his team will emerge victorious from this year's drivers' championship.

"There will be no issue for the 2008 season as we have not at any stage used any intellectual property of any other team," he added.

"We have got the best drivers and the best car and we intend to win the world championship."

McLaren have not yet decided if they will appeal Thursday's decision.

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Rooney battles for place

Football

AFP, London

Emile Heskey believes his telepathic partnership with Michael Owen can help the Newcastle striker break Sir Bobby Charlton's England goal-scoring record.

Heskey has established a rapport with Owen that brings the best out of England's premier forward and they combined to terrorise Israel and Russia in their country's Euro 2008 qualifiers.

Owen has struggled to find his best form for England when he has played alongside Peter Crouch, Alan Smith and Wayne Rooney. But, reunited with Heskey in the past week, he has been a player transformed.

Three goals in two matches got England's stuttering bid to reach Euro 2008 firmly back on track and moved Owen to within nine goals of Charlton's all-time record of 49.

Heskey and Owen's relationship goes back over a decade to their time together in England's Under-18 team, when the youngsters first started to dovetail their contrasting talents.

The Wigan star's muscular presence has been the perfect foil to Owen's ripper finishing ever since. They linked up to good effect at Liverpool and, when England manager Steve McClaren was short of forwards for the last two matches, Owen was quick to speak up on Heskey's behalf.

"I've played with Michael since

we were in the Under-18s together. We know each other's style very well and we benefit from it," Heskey said.

"It's almost telepathic between the two of us. We've been there a long time."

"With Michael, he only needs half a chance to score a goal. He's definitely going to test the keeper. That's why he's chasing records."

"He's been doing it from a very young age and he's never going to change."

A gap of three years since they last played together was no hindrance and Heskey performed well enough to raise doubts over Rooney's chances of regaining his place when the Manchester United star returns from injury.

Heskey never doubted his ability to make a positive impact for England if he got another chance.

"I knew I could slot back into the side," he said. "I never thought the chance had gone. I always had confidence in my own ability."

"I just had to wait for the manager when he needed me. He showed by recalling David Beckham and Sol Campbell that there are chances there, so you can never give up."

Such was the force of Heskey's impact that McClaren now faces an previously unthinkable dilemma. Could he leave out Rooney for Heskey?

If he does opt to keep faith with the muscular Wigan striker, few would complain.

Certainly not John Terry, who appreciated how well the front two

combined as Heskey's physical presence helped Owen score three times in the two qualifiers.

"Emile's been different class," the England captain said. "You find yourself on the pitch when he holds the ball up saying 'fantastic, fantastic'."

"All through the game and in the last game as well, he was different class, and the partnership he struck up with Michael has been fantastic."

"Michael's always showed he has that cutting edge. Whenever you get chances you can't wish them to fall to anyone else than Michael Owen. He's such a great finisher and works so hard."

Heskey, Gareth Barry, Micah Richards and Shaun Wright-Phillips all played key roles against Israel and Russia, leaving the likes of Rooney and Beckham sweating on their places.

"No one's guaranteed a place now," Terry said. "Everybody feels it. I really feel I've got to go back to Chelsea now and perform at my highest because there's players like Wes Brown, Joleon Lescott and Michael Dawson in the squad."

"We've got to maintain our level of performance week in, week out, when we're away with England, training every day and in the games."

"Everybody coming into the squad really wanted to fight for their place."

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