

Dilip issues warning to seniors

AFP, New Delhi

India's chief selector Dilip Vengsarkar put the senior players on notice Saturday, saying they could not take their places in the team for granted.

India's Twenty20 celebrations have been abruptly cut short by Australia, who have raced to a 2-0 lead in the seven-match series after the first game was abandoned due to rain.

The reversal has put the spotlight on the seniors who were not part of the team that won the recent ICC World Twenty20 Championship in South Africa.

While senior-most member of the squad Sachin Tendulkar has scores of 0, 16 and 43, former skipper Rahul Dravid has managed 31 and 0. Sourav Ganguly is yet to put on his batting pads as he is recuperating from a hamstring injury.

Vengsarkar hinted that selectors might have to make tough choices if they continued to fail, amid clamour from fans to bring back youngsters from the triumphant Twenty20 squad.

"Definitely, the threshold has reduced, no question about it," he was quoted as saying in the Mid-Day newspaper.

"There are many players like S. Badrinath and Suresh Raina who are performing with the India A side. These guys are waiting for their chance and you cannot ignore them."

"It's a professional set-up and nobody can take their place for granted," said the former Test opener.

India's cricketing great Sunil Gavaskar also took a swipe at the home team's below-par performance in the series so far.

"The heady experience of watching some stunning saves and incredible catches at the ICC World Twenty20 seems like a distant dream," he wrote in his syndicated column for the Times of India.

"The Indians have talked the talk but have not walked the walk as yet and on present evidence they hardly seem like doing so."

The next two matches of the series will be played in Chandigarh on Monday and in Baroda on Thursday.

Dav could head NCA

AFP, New Delhi

Former Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore could be hired as the director of India's National Cricket Academy, according to an official statement Friday.

The 53-year-old Australian is holding discussions with NCA chairman Ravi Shastri, cricket board secretary Niranjan Shah said in a press release.

"Ravi Shastri, after taking over as chairman of the National Cricket Academy, is in discussion with Dav Whatmore for appointment as director, operations, at the NCA," Shah said.

Whatmore had earlier been widely tipped to succeed Greg Chappell, who quit as India coach after the World Cup debacle in April.

India are still without a coach and have been managing with stop-gap arrangements since Chappell's exit.

Chappell, however, has returned to India to take over as adviser to a local cricket academy in the western Indian state of Rajasthan.

Whatmore guided Sri Lanka to World Cup triumph in 1996 and helped minnows Bangladesh reach the second round in the Caribbean this year after a shock win over India.

Brothers, Indira

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the reason for a discussion was unclear.

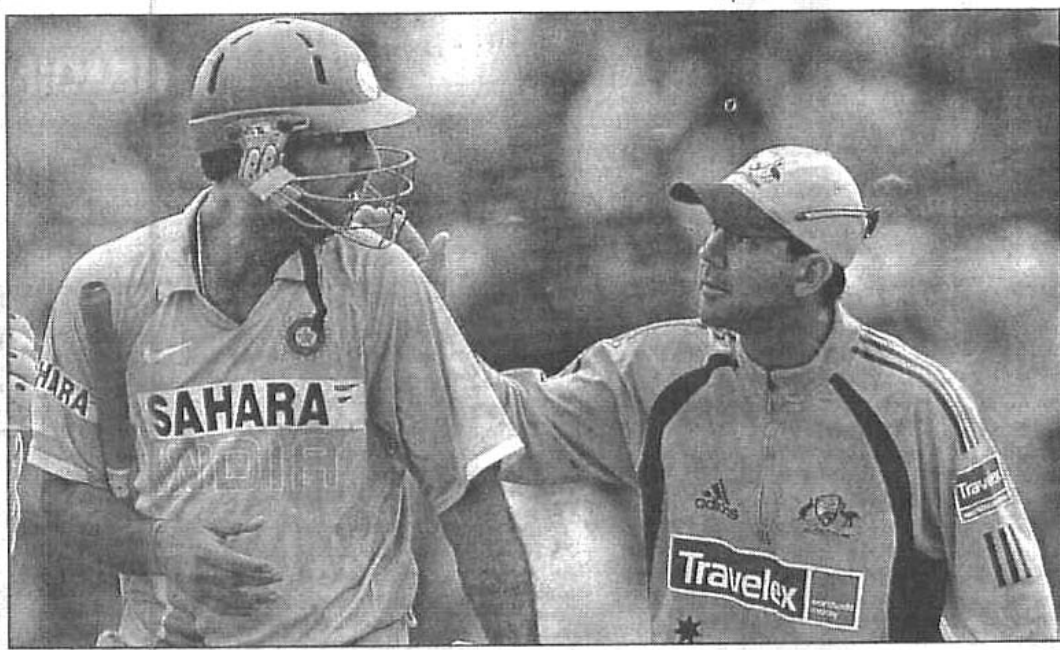
"The clubs also expressed their desire in a letter to meet him but they said it was for cricket's greater interest". To be honest, we don't know what that meant," said the experienced cricket organiser.

BCB took this decision for the greater interest of the game, there is no doubt. It will serve as a lesson for elements that creep up to create trouble.

In order to follow through on this decision, BCB must also recognise the reaction from the two clubs as they have already threatened with legal consequences. If that happens, Premier and First Division competitions would be held up: a thought that was echoed by players and officials alike.

"I don't know what would happen if they want to go for a legal battle. I am also unsure if this decision will have an impact on the upcoming season. But we are hoping for the best," observed Lipu, a former national captain.

Lipu also admitted that City Club, who were with Brothers and Indira all the way through, are fortunate to be saved. If it hadn't been for the fixture, it could have been them who got demoted but now, it will be interesting to see what they do.



Yuvraj Singh (L) is congratulated by Australian captain Ricky Ponting after the Indian batsman scored a century during their third one-day international match at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad on Friday.

Ponting makes a point

CRICINFO, undated

Ricky Ponting feels some of India's cricketers have 'misinterpreted what aggressive cricket means' during the ongoing one-day series. His comments come in the wake of Mahendra Singh Dhoni's revelations about Australia's cricketers using 'harsh words' in the third one-day in Hyderabad.

"Both teams can still play aggressively, but when the Australian team speaks about playing aggressively I think a lot of people get the wrong idea," Ponting wrote in his column for the Australian newspaper.

"I don't mean talking aggressively or showing aggressive body language. That's exactly the opposite of what aggressive or positive cricket is all about. A few of the Indians have reacted very much with aggressive body language and trying to force themselves upon us, and I think the way some of them are playing their cricket that they

have also misinterpreted what aggressive cricket means.

"I suppose if some of the players don't understand it, a lot of people watching the game in the stands or at home don't understand it either. It's not jumping up and down, sledging, giving people send-offs and that sort of stuff. When the Australian team talks about playing aggressively, we are committing ourselves to playing hard: there's nothing given and there's nothing asked to be given."

Though the Hyderabad game was hardly as hot tempered as the match at Kochi, Dhoni had enough to complain about. "We discussed with the referee about not using harsh words, but Ponting did, and a couple of their players did," Dhoni said after the game. He didn't reveal what the players exactly said, though.

Ponting felt his team had stayed within the confines of the spirit of cricket. "Some years back the Australian team committed itself to uphold the spirit of cricket," he said.

"A lot of the current players weren't involved, but every player

who comes into the team is clearly briefed on the idea and given direction on what's acceptable and what's not. We treat it very seriously and nobody comes in without understanding what we expect. I think it's been a very positive thing if you look back at our recent history. It's something I'm proud of. I think we have been one of the least reported teams in the world."

Ponting felt his side didn't indulge in sledging, a term he said was associated with "swearing" or "making a personal attack" on the opponents.

"If you look at any sport, Australian football, soccer, anything, there is always some sort of dialogue between players, and I think that's part of sport at the highest level. But it's very important that every Australian cricketer understands what he can and cannot do. It is why we have the spirit of cricket concept. It was brought in so we would not have our blokes reported. We have our own set of rules that we can act on to keep things from getting out of hand."

demand a leisurely informality. He once made 114 and 85 in a Test at Old Trafford and barely broke sweat. It remains one of the most quietly commanding performances of the modern era.

Let's get one thing straight: Inzy is one of cricket's all-time greats. He has scored more than 20,000 international runs, and needs another 20 to break Javed Miandad's Pakistan Test record of 8,832. He averages 50 and once scored 329 in a single innings against New Zealand, batting for almost 10 hours in the heat of Lahore to stick two gentle fingers up to those who teased him about his weight.

This was part of his charm. Few sportsmen in the modern era have combined such apparent indolence with such devastating hand-

eye co-ordination. He gave new meaning to the phrase "economy of movement", mainly because he wasn't fussed about using his foot, either at the crease or between the wickets. He was run out 40 times in one-day internationals (only Sri Lanka's Marvan Atapattu, with 41, has suffered more). His attitude to practice would have driven Duncan Fletcher to distraction. His press conferences were tedious (Vic Marks called them 'much Urdu about nothing'). Yet few could match him. He was the lumbering antithesis of modern sport's obsession with bleep tests, energising drinks and fat-free diets. Perhaps he encouraged us to think we had a chance too.

There were dark moments, of course: he once waded into a crowd in Toronto with a bat to accost a spectator who had been bellowing 'aloo' (Hindi for potato) through a megaphone; he was accused by Justice Qayyum, compiler of Pakistani cricket's most famous report into match-fixing, of suffering "partial amnesia" about a suspect game in Christchurch; he was accused of taking his devotion to Islam too far for the good of the team ethic; and he was at the centre of the abandonment of the Oval Test last year, when his insistence that a nation had been insulted began to wear thin.

Somehow, these moments all added to, rather than detracted from, the legend. And to understand it properly, you have to go back to the beginning. It was in the 1992 World Cup semi-final against New Zealand at Auckland that Inzamam -- svelte, beardless, and barely 22 -- made a staggering 60 off 37 balls to rescue a match that had seemed lost. In the final, he hit England for 42 off 35 deliveries. As Imran retired, Inzamam took the baton and settled down to the business of scoring runs. Lots of them.

Australia and South Africa generally got the better of him, which was no disgrace. But against all odds he scored at will. Across two Test series against England in 2001 and 2005-06, he made nine successive scores of 50 or more. That sequence included two centuries at Faisalabad, where he seemed to assume the status of a demigod. When England ran him out for 97 in the next Test, it felt like a success.

Now, he has one more chance to stir the memories. The chairman of the Pakistan board is already referring to the Lahore match against South Africa as the 'Inzamam Test', which places him on a Pakistani pedestal already inhabited by Imran, Javed and Wasim Akram. After that, he will play in the ill-conceived Indian Cricket League. There will be some meaty pulls, a run-out or two and a nice cheque at the end of it. Heck, he just about deserves it.

NCL fixtures released

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) released the official fixture of the National Cricket League which starts across the country from October 19.

The matches, to be played on home-and-away basis, comprise a four-day match followed by a limited-over game and will end by December.

The tournament committee has named seven venues including three in Dhaka -- Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium (SBNS), Fatullah Cricket Stadium (FCS) and the BKSP cricket ground -- for the six-team competition.

Chittagong will play their home matches at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Ruhul Amin Stadium (BSSRAS). Rajshahi play at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium (RDVS) and Khulna will host the matches at the Birshreshtha Matir Rahman Stadium (BSMRS).

Sylhet and Barisal don't have their own venues. Shaheed Chandu Stadium (SCS) in Bogra and FCS will be used as their home venues respectively.

FIXTURE

October 19-22, 23
Dhaka v Khulna (SBNS)
Barisal v Chittagong (SCS)
Rajshahi v Sylhet (RDVS)

October 26-29, 30
Sylhet v Dhaka (SCS)
Rajshahi v Barisal (RDVS)
Khulna v Chittagong (BSMRS)

November 2-5, 6
Dhaka v Barisal (SBNS)
Chittagong v Rajshahi (BSSRAS)
Sylhet v Khulna (FCS)

November 9-12, 13
Dhaka v Chittagong (SBNS)
Khulna v Rajshahi (BSMRS)
Barisal v Sylhet (FCS)

November 16-19, 20
Rajshahi v Dhaka (RDVS)
Chittagong v Sylhet (BSSRAS)
Barisal v Khulna (SCS)

November 23-26, 27
Sylhet v Rajshahi (FCS)
Chittagong v Barisal (BKSP)
Khulna v Dhaka (BSMRS)

November 30-December 3, 4
Dhaka v Sylhet (SBNS)
Barisal v Rajshahi (SCS)
Chittagong v Khulna (BSSRAS)

December 7-10, 11
Barisal v Dhaka (FCS)
Rajshahi v Chittagong (RDVS)
Khulna v Sylhet (BSMRS)

December 14-17, 18
Chittagong v Dhaka (BSSRAS)
Rajshahi v Khulna (RDVS)
Sylhet v Barisal (SCS)

December 27-30, 31
Dhaka v Rajshahi (SBNS)
Sylhet v Chittagong (FCS)
Khulna v Barisal (BSMRS)

Note: The first segment of the dates are four-day matches and the second is the one-day match.

Shakil Open Rating chess champ

UNB, Dhaka

FM Abu Sufian Shakil emerged unbeaten champion in the Pragati Insurance Open International Rating Chess Tournament securing 7.5 points after the end of the eighth and final round at the federation hall-room yesterday.

His Destiny teammate and national junior champion Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagar became runner-up with the same points.

In the day's last round matches, Shakil drew with Sohail, Sagar beat Amin, Parag drew with Alamgir while Emon drew with Robin.

FM Mehdi Hasan Parag finished third.

Managing Director of Pragati Insurance Company Limited AKM Rafiqul Islam and former Minister Shaifur Gani Swapan distributed prizes among the winners with Leonine Chess Club president Capt (ret) Imam Anwar Hossain in the chair.

Marion Jones announces retirement

AFP, New York

US track star Marion Jones announced her retirement from athletics on Friday and made an emotional plea for forgiveness from her fans, shortly after admitting to taking banned drugs.

"Because of my actions, I am retiring from the sport of track and field, a sport which I deeply loved," Jones told reporters outside a court in White Plains, New York, where she had earlier admitted to using steroids.

"It is with a great amount of shame that I stand before you to tell you that I have betrayed ... your trust," the Olympic gold medal winner told the crowd.

"I want to ask for your forgiveness for my actions," she added. Earlier the 31-year-old athlete admitted for the first time to using banned drugs as she pleaded guilty to lying to US agents about her steroid use, in a move that could see the American sprinter stripped of her medals and jailed.

Akhtar wants to play IPL

Cricket
AFP, Lahore

Under fire Pakistani paceman Shoaib Akhtar is set to play for a recognised Indian league next year, saying he has sought permission from Pakistan's cricket authorities.

"I have been approached by the Indian Premier League (IPL) and I have applied for permission from the Pakistan Cricket Board to sign the contract," Akhtar told AFP on Saturday.

"I always liked the Indian crowd and have always loved to play in India. Hopefully I will be in the Pakistan team for next month's tour there and will also play in the league," he added.

Akhtar faces disciplinary action for hitting teammate Mohammad Asif with a bat a few days before the Twenty20 world championships in South Africa last month.

The maverick bowler, who was sent home following the incident, has appeared before a three-man committee, which is likely to announce its decision later Saturday.

The IPL -- a Twenty20 competition scheduled to be launched next April -- was set up by Indian authorities to rival the breakaway Indian Cricket League (ICL), which is being bankrolled by India's largest media group.

The IPL -- sanctioned by the International Cricket Council -- will offer three million dollars in prize money and feature eight franchises participating in a 56-game season.

The top four teams will then

face off in the semi-finals, with the winners contesting the championship match.

Akhtar was offered a contract to play for the ICL, which he declined after Pakistan officials, warned that any player signing with the rebel league would be ineligible to represent the national team.

The Pakistan Cricket Board has backed the IPL and announced that star batsmen Mohammad Yousuf and Inzamam-ul-Haq -- who both signed for the ICL last month -- will play for the IPL.

Yousuf last week cancelled his contract with the ICL, making himself available to play for Pakistan. He was included in the team for the first Test against South Africa in Karachi, but had to pull out at the last minute due to lack of match fitness.

The multi-million dollar rebel ICL, which plans to hold Twenty20 tournaments between city teams for the next three years, has been unable to fix a date for the first event, which was originally supposed to take place in October.

PTI adds: PCB would not punish Akhtar again for the offence but question him about subsequently holding a press conference and playing a charity match in England without its permission.

Shoaib would also be interrogated about making serious allegations against teammate Shahid Afridi in a disciplinary committee hearing which is expected to give a decision in the case on Saturday.

A senior PCB official said the fast bowler has already been punished for his row with Asif as the team manager sent him back from South Africa before the Twenty20 World

Cup in South Africa last month.

"The factual situation is that we have not included the primary charge in the fresh show cause notice sent to Shoaib as he has already been penalised for this offence by being sent back from South Africa," said Shafiqat Naghmi, the PCB's Chief Executive.

"It is an old charge and during the hearing we have to decide if he deserves more penalty for this particular offence," he added.

Naghmi said the show cause notice sent to Shoaib contained fresh charges of him addressing a press conference and going to play a charity match in England without the Board's permission and making serious allegations against teammate Shahid Afridi.

DFA okayed

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constitution would be made official.

The BFF however remained silent about further development in its Friday's meeting before Roy served the spanner in the mysterious tale.

"I'm not sure whether the BFF officials have misinterpreted the FIFA observations on the DFA constitution or it may have not perceived the content. It's certainly a failure on their part and they should immediately quit," said Roy acidly.

"It will be wise for the BFF to hold an EGM immediately so that the councillors can give a guideline over the future formation of the BFF."

Messi wary of Agüero

FROM PAGE 20

more attack-minded "three little men" (Xavi, Deco and Andres Iniesta) to share the defensive duties in midfield.

At the back, Carles Puyol and Gabi Milito have both shaken off knocks to be ready in time for Sunday's match.

Samuel Eto'o and Gianluca Zambrotta remain sidelined. Barca are unbeaten in the Primera Liga this season, but sit

two points behind bitter rivals Real Madrid in fourth place.

The Catalans were struggling for goals earlier in the campaign and could only draw away to Racing Santander and Osasuna, but have won their last five games, scoring 15 times in the process.

Following a disappointing start to the season, Atletico Madrid are also enjoying something of a purple patch. Javier Agüero's side have also

strung together five consecutive wins in all competitions, scoring 17 goals without reply.

However, nine of those strikes came in a two-legged UEFA Cup qualifier against Turkish side Kayserispor and Agüero knows his team will be in for a much tougher test on Sunday.

"Barcelona play the best football in the league and even with players missing will make things very difficult for us," he said.

Goalkeeper Leo Franco has recovered from injury and should return to the side, but Motta, Miguel De Las Cuevas and Luis Perea remain sidelined.

Atletico have an enviable record at the Nou Camp, having won two and drawn one of their last three matches.

Former Barca winger Luis Garcia hopes the form of Agüero can produce another upset on Sunday.

"We are a team that understands each other well and we can make things difficult for Barcelona. Let's hope that 'Kur' (Agüero) can make the difference in the Nou Camp," he said.

Atletico are fifth in the table, three points behind Barca.

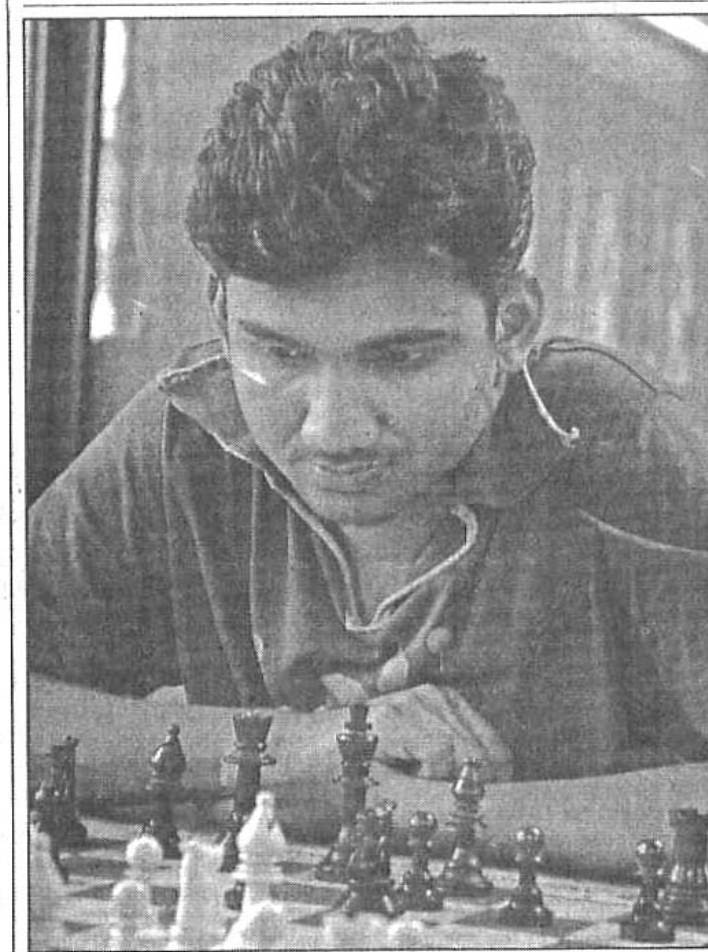
Hitzfield sings

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dollars) switch from Italian side Fiorentina last summer and has forged an elite partnership with Miroslav Klose and the pair have 14 Bundesliga goals between them.

"Beneluxes were a very well organised team, and we had trouble breaking them down," said the 30-year-old Italian.

"We needed to be more patient, bide our time and wait for the breakthrough."

Bayern are back in league action this weekend looking to cement their place at the top of the Bundesliga when they host struggling German Cup holders Nuremberg on Sunday.



FM Abu Sufian Shakil ponders a move during his eighth and final round game against Sohail in the Open International Rating Chess Tournament at the federation hall-room yesterday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

- 1 Apiece
- 4 Enthusiastic
- 8 Look lasciviously
- 12 Keatsian work
- 13 Emulsifying agent
- 14 Recognized
- 15 Accomplished
- 16 Goner
- 18 Bar perch
- 20 Puppy's sound
- 21 "— and Circumstance"
- 24 Ross or Rigg
- 28 Stamped
- 32 Winter forecast
- 33 Basic learning
- 34 Farm structures
- 36 Driver's site
- 37 Brat's stocking
- 39 They're good for a breather

DOWN

- 2 Tend
- 3 Start over
- 5 In older times
- 6 Hellum, e.g.
- 7 Bohemian
- 8 Giraffes' kin
- 9 Wildebeest
- 10 "— Misérables"
- 11 Flam's ma'am
- 17 Scoundrel
- 19 Choose
- 22 Primary
- 23 Silcom sample
- 25 Oppositionist
- 26 Yuletide tune

Solution time: 21 mins.

OPERA PATRIOT TOP
ABOVE SCENE ALIVE
TANNED RITE
FAIRY CAJON
OFTEN TADA
DOOR PROPOUTS
OUR PEATIE LOU
ELEGANT SLIDE
TODD DOMOR
LITNER TRIO
AGE TANNING
MOB ADAR NOVEN
ENS LOPE SNOOD

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CRYPTOQUIP

P L A A I Y L U I Q U W T K L V Z
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M Y P C U M A K S F V A R C
F X E U W U C X S Z I P S S P
F A T C H X P C.
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF HELD IN A CANYON, I GUESS ANY SPORTS COMPETITION MIGHT BE BILLED AS A GULF TOURNAMENT.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: L equals P