

Bucknor should quit: Bird

Cricket

AFP, London

Legendary English umpire Dickie Bird believes Steve Bucknor has "gone on too long" and that it is now time for him to retire from international cricket.

Bucknor found himself involved in a major controversy after making several debatable decisions during last week's second Test between Australia and India in Sydney.

An incensed India demanded the 61-year-old be replaced for the upcoming third Test in Perth and, on Tuesday, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said New Zealand's Billy Bowden would take the West Indian's place.

Bucknor has stood in a world record 120 Tests but Bird believes age has finally caught up with the Jamaican, one of the officials whose failure to correctly interpret bad light rules led to the farcical finish in darkness of April's World Cup final in Barbados.

"When you get to that age... I have said to Steve, 'Don't go on too long, get out while you are still respected'. I think he has gone on too long," added Bird, who retired from the international game in 1996, having stood in a then record

66 Tests, told Sky Sports on Monday.

India were also angered by the decision of Mike Procter, the match referee in Sydney, to suspend off-spinner Harbhajan Singh for three Tests for racially abusing Australia all-rounder Andrew Symonds.

They effectively put their tour on hold as they appealed against the bowler's punishment although Board of Control for Cricket in India secretary Niranjan Shan said later Tuesday the tour "should continue for the present".

Bird, who during the course of his career was well-known for his ability to defuse on-field tensions between players before they escalated into major incidents, said Bucknor and on-field colleague Mark Benson could have done more to prevent matters getting out of hand in Sydney.

"I think the umpires should have got the captains together on the field in front of everyone and said, 'Let's get on with this game and play it in the correct spirit and finish the Test without any problems'."

He added: "If they (India) feel that an umpire is not up to I think they have the right to say so. That is my view of it."

"But I do believe if umpires are appointed to a Test match they should see it through. That has not

happened in this instance."

Meanwhile former England fast bowler Andy Caddick, still playing first-class cricket for Somerset, said umpires weren't helped by being put under pressure by players.

"It is part of the sport, it is what it has evolved to," the 39-year-old told BBC Radio. "You try to influence the umpires. Some days you'll get a decision and some days you won't."

He added: "Umpiring under the scrutiny of TV is a very difficult job to do. Umpires do get things wrong and players get things wrong, unfortunately it's always the umpires that stay in the limelight."

"Players will try to influence the umpires' decisions. It's up to the individual umpire to be strong enough in character to sort that out -- but perhaps the players need to be reprimanded rather than the umpires."

As debate continues throughout the cricket world regarding 'sledding' -- the practice of players trying to verbally intimidate their opponents -- Caddick said it was something top-flight performers had to accept.

"It's professional cricket, things will be said -- that's life. At the end of the day if you're a strong enough character you'll get over it. It's part and parcel of the sport."



A Barnak Samaj defender tries to stop a rampant Bangladesh Navy attacker during their Dhaka Bank Victory Day hockey tournament clash at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday. Navy won 2-0.

Army finish their job

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Army all but confirmed a final berth in the Dhaka Bank Victory day hockey tournament when they finished their league campaign in an advantageous position in a three-way race for the final.

Army blanked Bangladesh Air Force 2-0 at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday to end with 12 points from five league matches.

Army were level with all-win Sonali Bank, who have a match in hand -- against contenders BKSP today.

If BKSP have an inferior goal difference, beat the bankers, all three teams will stand on equal points. BKSP would still need a big victory while a draw or a win for Sonali Bank will see the bankers and Army through to Saturday's final as the two top teams in the fray.

In yesterday's crucial encounter, Hadiuzzaman put Army ahead in the 18th minute while Alo sealed Army's fourth victory in the 46th minute.

In the other match of the day, Bangladesh Navy blanked bottom-table Barnak Samaj 2-0 with a brace from Mortuza.

V-DAY FOOTBALL Mohammedan eye Jan 26 kick-off

UNB, Dhaka

The Profiti Pharmaceutical Victory Day Club Cup football tournament, organised by Mohammedan Sporting Club, will begin on January 26 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

"We've finalised the date after getting verbal assurance from the National Sports Council (NSC) about the availability of the ground," Mohammedan's additional general secretary Mostaqur Rahman told yesterday.

"We are expecting an official letter in this regard from the NSC in a day or two," said Mostaqur.

The tournament was earlier scheduled to begin on January 11, but deferred by two weeks due to the renovation work at the Bangabandhu Stadium.

Mostaqur added that they are negotiating with Bangladesh Television and other private satellite channels for live telecast of the matches.

Eight clubs will take part in the tournament. They are Mohammedan, Abahani, Mukti Joddha, Arambagh, Victoria, Youngmen's, Wanderers and Badda.

Aussie media slam BCCI

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australian media Wednesday accused Indian cricket bosses of arrogance and bullying after world officials bowed to their demands in rows over racism and umpiring.

"Bullies prosper and sport suffers," the Daily Telegraph headlined an editorial describing the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) as "the powerful new rajahs of world cricket."

"India has intimidated and bullied the International Cricket Council into dispensing with umpire Steve Bucknor for the final two Tests of the series against Australia," the papers said.

India had complained about Bucknor's performance, accusing him of bungling key decisions in the explosive second Test in

Sydney, which ended Sunday in accusations of bad sportsmanship and racism.

Indian officials also effectively put the four-Test tour on hold while they appealed a three-Test ban for bowler Harbhajan Singh, who was accused of racially abusing Andrew Symonds, the only black player in the Australian side.

But India's cricket board announced late Tuesday it would go ahead with the tour after the ICC said Bucknor would be replaced and Harbhajan would be eligible to play while his appeal against the ban was pending.

"The Indian board's stance amounts to attempted blackmail and it cannot be tolerated," The Australian newspaper said in an editorial headlined "Time to stop whining and play the game."

"Holding the game to ransom in such a way is arrogant and bad sportsmanship."

Those charges -- arrogance and bad sportsmanship -- had been made first against the Australian side after their behaviour on the tense final day when India was defeated in the penultimate over.

Indian captain Anil Kumble accused the hosts of not living up to the spirit of the game and found an unusual ally in Australian newspapers on Tuesday.

Several commentators called captain Ricky Ponting's team "boorish" and "arrogant" for taunting the visitors, pressuring the umpires and indulging in ungracious victory celebrations.

But by Wednesday most newspapers had rallied around the world champions, with The Australian dismissing calls for Ponting to be sacked as "the ultimate absurdity crowning an extraordinary week of cricket and an extraordinarily silly week of cricket politics."

Higher training for jumper Al Amin

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) will send long jumper Al Amin to Malaysia for high performance training for the coming Olympic Games in Beijing.

Al Amin was picked months ago for the trip but South Asian Games gold medalist Mahfuzur Rahman Mithu's desertion from Italy last year while being in the training camp under the Malaysian camp delayed the trip.

A BOA official yesterday informed that this time, tight security measures would be taken so no athlete can defect from camp. Al Amin, who finished fifth with a best leap of 7.14m in the 10th SA Games in Colombo in 2006, is expected to leave Dhaka in mid-January and will stay in the camp till the Beijing Games, which start August 8 this year.

NZ judge to hear

FROM PAGE 17 Cricket Council's (ICC) Code of Conduct Commission.

Singh was punished with a three-match ban after the commission upheld a complaint from Australian skipper Ricky Ponting that Singh insulted Australian all-rounder Andrew Symonds by calling him a monkey.

The finding and sanction enraged the Indian tourists who were already upset by several umpiring decisions that went against them in the Test which they narrowly lost to go two down in the four Test series.

The Indians briefly suspended all travel on their tour prompting the ICC to stand down umpire Steve Bucknor, who had been the main target of the Indian anger.

The ICC said it had received official notification of the appeal from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Monday and appointed Justice Hansen in line with ICC Code of Conduct processes.

No time, date or venue for the appeal have yet been fixed, but the

process indicates that the appeal should be heard within seven days of the commissioner being appointed. This time period may be extended if circumstances dictate.

In the meantime, Harbhajan may continue to play pending the verdict of the appeal being given. The BCCI announced late Tuesday that the tour in Australia would go ahead.

The ICC decision to jettison the 61-year-old Bucknor has been slammed, however, by West Indies legend and former Test match referee Clive Lloyd.

"You wonder what confidence this gives umpires," he told BBC Radio 5 Live.

"I don't think anybody is out there to cheat anybody. The umpires I have had, particularly at ICC level, have been excellent. They are people who are very honest and who I trust implicitly."

"Every time something goes against you it doesn't mean the guy is cheating. Nobody is infallible. We all make mistakes -- we have to accept it as that."

Mirza crashes out of Hobart

AFP, Hobart

India's Sania Mirza paid dearly for not taking advantage of her numerous break point chances to crash out of the Hobart International in the quarterfinals on Wednesday.

The sixth seed looked to be heading for the semifinals when she levelled the match in the second set for the loss of just one game, but Italian Flavia Pennetta came roaring back to win 7-5, 1-6, 6-3 in 92 minutes.

Mirza, who finished last year at 31 on the WTA rankings, converted just five of 12 break point opportunities while Pennetta capitalised on five of eight.

"It was not a very good match for people to watch," Pennetta said. "There were a lot of mistakes from both players."

Pennetta said she was nervous before the match but regrouped in the final set to progress to the semis.

Dhoni captain

FROM PAGE 17 Kumble gave enough hints that he was taking the game seriously, for he wanted to get a measure of the bench strength.

"We have been in Australia for the last three weeks and some guys haven't still had a hit in the middle," he said.

Two other players who are least likely to take the game casually are Yuvraj Singh and Wasim Jaffer.

Proteas think

FROM PAGE 17 Herschelle Gibbs will come in for Neil McKenzie.

Gibbs's poor form led to him being replaced by McKenzie for the second Test.

"Herschelle has never been the most technically correct player, he's relied on his eyes," Smith said. "He needs to go back to what has successful to him, he can't be a Jacques Kallis."

"He needs to back his ability and be confident in himself."

SQUADS

SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme Smith (captain), Herschelle Gibbs, Hashim Amla, Jacques Kallis, AB de Villiers, Mark Boucher, Shaun Pollock, Ashwell Prince, Andre Nel, Paul Harris, Dale Steyn, Makhaya Ntini, Monde Zondeki.

WEST INDIES (from): Chris Gayle (captain), Dwayne Bravo, Patrick Browne, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Pedro Collins, Fidel Edwards, Daren Ganga, Ravi Lewis, Runako Morton, Brenton Parchment, Darren Powell, Denesh Ramdin, Darren Sammy, Marlon Samuels, Devon Smith, Jerome Taylor.

Jatrabari's

FROM PAGE 17 for a concert for two days (January 10 and 11).

The concert will be held tomorrow but the NSC informed the Metropolitan Football League Committee (MFLC) yesterday that it has given the concert organisers an added day for preparation.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) had earlier opposed the decision stating that it would need time and money to repair the pitch following the concert. A concert last month had damaged the ground and the football authority needed about Tk 2 lakh to repair the ground.

However, BFF's appeal to not allot the venue for such a programme was not considered.

The MFLC in its meeting last night decided that it would request the NSC to take steps to repair the ground. The 13 clubs, meanwhile, sought compensation of Tk 25,000 for each team from the NSC for running the camp for extra four days.

India resume tour

FROM PAGE 17 Australia's Brad Hogg is meanwhile facing a ban of up to four Tests after being charged with making an offensive remark to India's captain Anil Kumble and vice-captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

The match was also marred by umpiring bungles from Bucknor and ended with Kumble branding the Australians unsporting, overshadowing the hosts' record-equalling 16th straight Test win.

ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed admitted the highly respected Bucknor was "the meat in the sandwich" in the row but said his removal at India's insistence did not set a dangerous precedent allowing teams to demand the sacking of officials.

"What we have here is a unique situation; we've got allegations of racism, we have unhappiness with umpires, players being suspended, we've got an international incident that's running out of control," he told public radio.

"We need to get it back on track, one of the ways we can do that is to get a new umpiring team in place, I don't think we'll have those circumstances again. If we do, then it'll be dealt with at that time."

However, Australian media,

who had earlier rounded on their own cricket stars, were incensed at the "blackmail" of the ICC by India, which wields significant financial clout in the sport.

"Bullies prosper and sport suffers," the Daily Telegraph headlined an editorial describing the BCCI as "the powerful new rajahs of world cricket."

The Australian newspaper said in an editorial headlined "Time to stop whining and play the game" that "the Indian board's stance amounts to attempted blackmail and it cannot be tolerated". It added: "Holding the game to ransom in such a way is arrogant and bad sportsmanship."

After arriving in Canberra, Indian team manager Chetan Chauhan said of the Sydney Test: "We have left that behind."

"They can play thanks to the efforts of the BCCI and also it's very nice to have the ICC come together and hopefully everything will be settled and we will play good cricket."

The Indians were due to have a light training session at Manuka Oval late Wednesday ahead of a three-day game against an ACT Invitational XI starting Thursday.

Annual sports of Police held

UNB, Dhaka

LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal inaugurated the annual sports of Bangladesh Police at the Rajarbag Police Lines ground yesterday by releasing balloons and pigeons.

He also witnessed the colourful march past and different events of the competition.

Later, LGRD Adviser's wife Dora Anwar distributed prizes among the winners. High police officials and their family members were present.

Kumble asked

FROM PAGE 17 had already reported it to the on-field umpires.

"When that incident happened I did make a request to Ricky Ponting that it should be handled, if it can be sorted out, whatever," Kumble told reporters in Canberra on Wednesday.

"His response was that it had already been reported."

"Having played cricket for this long, I (knew) such an allegation would definitely spiral into what it has now. I anticipated that it would spiral into a larger issue."

Ponting said he had been under instructions from the International Cricket Council (ICC) to report any racial incidents and financial clout.

But Cricinfo's Charlie Austin does not see that happening in the near future.

"Unless China or America starts playing cricket in a big way in the competitive arena, I don't see it coming," said Austin.

India's influence meanwhile looks likely to increase, with BCCI president Sharad Pawar taking over as ICC vice-president in June before taking the top post in 2010.

Blues are

FROM PAGE 20 for the way his side matched Chelsea in the second half.

"We know we will have the advantage of the crowd behind us but basically we are still playing a really good team. That's the problem. We will have to play really well to go through," Moyes said.

"I've been waiting for games like this at Goodison since I arrived; a cup semifinal second leg. I'd rather be drawing or winning but we're not out of it yet."

Women's WC qualifiers out of Pakistan

AFP, Karachi

The International Cricket Council Tuesday announced the women's World Cup qualifying rounds have been shifted from Pakistan to South Africa on the guidance of independent security reports.

"The eight-team qualifying rounds, scheduled to be staged in Lahore, Pakistan from 18-24 February, will now take place in South Africa instead," the ICC said in a statement.

"The decision was arrived at following independent security reports and extensive discussions by ICC management and the ICC Women's Committee," said the ICC.

The tournament was to originally take place in Lahore last November but was postponed for security reasons until after the proposed election date of January 8, the ICC said.

"With the rescheduling of the elections in Pakistan until February 18, the decision was made to move the event to South Africa," the statement added.

The qualifiers involve eight teams -- Bermuda, Ireland, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Scotland, South Africa, and Zimbabwe -- with the top two sides going forward to the ICC Women's World Cup in Australia in 2009.

'Choose best

FROM PAGE 17 who refused to take the field, a stance which forced the umpires to award the match to England -- the first forfeit in Test cricket's long history.

The ICC later removed Hair from its elite umpiring panel.

Raja said the best umpires should officiate future matches, whether they were from neutral countries or not.

"There is a need to increase the number of umpires in the Elite Panel because with eight umpires you don't give them a chance to acclimatise and maintain their performance," he said.

"To me good umpires should officiate the match, even if it is played by his home team, so that we have the best men in the centre. The credibility factor should be taken into account while posting umpires."

A first-class bonus

FROM PAGE 17 the top position would go to Khulna for the first time in three seasons.

THUMBS DOWN TO PITCHES AND UMPIRING

Some match results were altered due to poor decisions and in one instance, the umpires' lapses were heavily exposed on live television. There seem to be a giant gap between the good and average umpires and with half the season already left to play, a look into their allocation, education and most importantly, their professionalism is a must.

So too should be on pitches. It is astounding that BCB has no technical support in this regard. Players have repeatedly questioned the quality of pitches but so far, nothing has gone in the right direction in this case as well.

PILING UP THE RUNS

Twenty-two centuries were scored this season with Shakib Al Hasan, Imrul Kayes, Alok Kapali and Intiaz Hossain notching two each. Almost all the usual suspects reached that milestone but the most unlikely of

them was that of Rajshahi's number 10 batsman Mohammad Shahjada. Chittagong's Nazimuddin made 720 in 20 innings, closely followed by his captain Ehsanul Haq with 688.

Rokibul Hasan, the forceful Barisal batsman, mirrored Kayes's consistency as the two headed the one-day batting charts. Kayes led the way with 486 with two centuries while Rokibul notched up 432 runs. Unfathomable Alok Kapali had a good run in both forms of the game and it's fitting that his 168 against Barisal at Fatullah is the highest score by a batsman this season.

But 168 was as far the batsmen could go. Let alone a triple like Rokib's 313, there were no double hundreds to show for.

THE SEARCH IS STILL ON

NCL have unearthed several talents but with the disputed position of a wicketkeeper in the national side lingering since Mashud's waning, it is regretful that none of the stumpers in action had much of an impact. Some faith was placed in Dhiman Ghosh after his summer showing in Australia with Academy

team but he too frustrated with his unpredictability.

And yes, a good off-spinner is still not in sight. BCB must address this issue at the grassroots, i.e., age-group camps where the ratio of left-arm spinners to leggies or offies are too high.

ASUITABLE HEIR

While off-spinners were missing in action, left-arm spinners led the roost, particularly Mosharraf Hossain Rubel. Some would say that the man from Kishoreganj has finally reached his potentials but he has a long way to go. Apart from his 44 wickets that put him on top of the first-class bowlers' list, it was his match-winning ability that always kept Dhaka in the hunt.

After some gutsy performances with the bat, the revolving door of Dhaka's batting line-up saw him in number three in the one-dayers from where he struck three fifties. That translated into Rubel being predicted as Mohammad Rafique's long-time replacement in the national side.

Rafique himself has said that Rubel has a bright future.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS									
1	Cowboy's ally	32	Little devil	53	Cutlass, e.g.	20	Pinnacle	21	Let fall
5	Wood-working tool	35	Duo	DOWN					
8	Deck for a 10-count	36	Benevolent	1	Insulation material, for short	23	Aware of		
12	Henry —	37	Unsequestered	2	Melody	24	Desiccates		
13	Wahine's bestiality	41	Adversary	3	Carnival city	26	Weaver's skill		
14	Acknowledged home, new	42	Whoopee's head	4	Knuckle-drama	27	"Buenos —"		
15	Enemy of Charles I	43	Long horn?	5	Pub orders	28	Send forth		
17	Tour de France need	48	Sheltered	6	Bonito — Toro	29	Aglio		
18	Existed	49	Scoot	7	Scads	31	Coffee additive		
21	R2-D2 or C-3PO, e.g.	50	Zodiac feline	8	Japanese	34	Made catcalls?		
24	Van Dyke or Van Patten	51	Dweeb	9	Eager	35	Colorado city		
25	Lease	52	Still	10	Oxen's burden	37	Comic DeLuxe		
26	Title statements			11	Unpaid	38	Terrific guy?		
30	Feedbag tidbit			12	Bankroll	39	Cleo's waterway		
31	Down East					40	Swerve		

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