

Nat'l handball from today

SPORTS REPORTER

The zonal round of the Exim Bank 18th National Handball Championship begins at the Jamalpur Stadium today.

Apart from hosts Jamalpur, Rajshahi, Rangpur, Chapainawabganj, Natore, Panchagarh, Joypurhat and Gaibandha have been included in Group A of the competition.

The six-team zonal matches in Chittagong will begin on February 18 while the 11-team zonal matches in Jessore will begin on Feb 28.

Twenty-five district teams, split into three groups, are taking part in the national meet, organised by Bangladesh Handball Federation.

The 12-team final round with eight zonal champions, hosts Dhaka and the three Services teams - holders Bangladesh Rifles, Bangladesh Police and Bangladesh Ansar - will be held in the second week of March.

Gold Cup Cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Dasara Palli Mangal Samity (DPMS) beat Nizam Samsul Smriti Sangsad (NSSS) by seven wickets in the opening game of the Gold Cup cricket tournament here at the Shaheed Miraz-Tapan Stadium yesterday.

Batting first, NSSS were bowled out for 121 runs in 26.1 overs. Tuel struck 43 while Saddam contributed 22. Sakib of DPMS took three wickets and two wickets also came through Shahin and Liton.

In their reply, DPMS reached their target in 16 overs, losing three wickets. Sakib top-scored with 57.

Nasir upsets Russian GM

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Nasir Ahmed recorded his third successive win in the International Chess Festival of Moscow Open when the Bangladesh FIDE Master defeated Russian GM Evgeni Vasiukov in the fifth round on Wednesday.

Nasir pushed their tally to three points, half a point behind GM Abdullah Al Rakib, who maintained his unbeaten run but drew with local GM Vladimir Potkin at the Russian capital.

International Master Enamul Hossain Rajib stuck to 2.5 points after losing to Emilis Pelecks of Lithuania.

Nat'l badminton

SPORTS REPORTER

Title contenders Parash and Enayet won their respective men's singles matches in the Islami Bank 28th National Badminton Championships at the Woodenfloor Gymnasium yesterday.

Parash defeated Yasin 21-10, 21-2 while Enayet beat Anisuzzaman 21-13, 21-8.

Arambagh

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scored the infamous own goal on Tuesday that helped Mohammedan score the equaliser in a controversial Group A finale, then connected a left-flank lob but his header was fisted out by goalkeeper Nehal at the Badda goal in the 50th minute.

Domenic found the net soon after but the Kenyan's goal was ruled out for offside shortly before Badda wasted a freekick just outside from the area.

Arambagh, who concentrated to break through the flanks, failed to make most of a poor clearance by Nehal on a right-side cross but the pressure told in the 80th minute.

This time, Iddi floated the ball from the right and Liton sliced through two centre-backs to stab a sharp header into the far post.

Iddi then sealed the victory in the stoppage time with a scorching left-footer after Domenic used his chest to set him inside the penalty box after meeting a right-side cross by Monu.

Yellow card: Ratan (Arambagh)

TEAMS

ARAMBAGH: Piru, Monu, Ramjan, Akram (Ratan), Wahid, Karim, Juku, Liton, Faisal (Imu), Domenic and Iddi.

BADDA: Nahal, Rashed, Russel Sr, Russel Jr, Hafiz (Nahid), Kamol, Sohag, Nasir, Imon (Shamim), Milon and Rana.

Referee: Ramakrishna Ghosh.

Press

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Beckham, the latter not even making Capello's squad. "Cold Capello keeps Owen and Beckham in limbo" it said.

The Daily Mirror described England's showing as a "no frills win" while suggesting Capello would have his work cut out to make England a force again.

"Now Fabio Capello knows why he's earning six million pounds (\$11.78 million) a year" said another headline, with a report suggesting there were periods of the game that looked worryingly like the 3-2 defeat by Croatia that ended Steve McClaren's reign as coach.



Archers prepare to sling arrows on the opening day of the 3rd National Archery Championship at the Outer Stadium yesterday.

Arthur could be axed

AFP, Johannesburg

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's cricket coach Mickey Arthur was facing the axe Thursday over accusations he abused the country's top cricket official in a row over the number of black players to tour Bangladesh, a report said.

According to The Star newspaper, Cricket South Africa (CSA) president Norman Arendse has laid formal charges against Arthur, accusing him of being "abusive and disrespectful" and "cocking a snoot at his employees' policy of (racial) transformation". The charges are to be dealt with by CSA chief executive Gerald Majola who is likely to set up a disciplinary committee hearing, the report

added. Arendse was quoted as saying that Arthur's position had become "untenable" after he told the president, who is not a selector, not to interfere in selection matters.

"The more I was asking questions about transformation, the more (Arthur) said they did not have a transformation policy," said Arendse.

"If a coach says, 'There's no transformation policy' (among selectors), if he says 'Sorry, I'm not prepared to implement Cricket South Africa's policies', then his position is untenable."

While the board does not have official racial quotas, most squad selections reflect an unofficial target that half must be players of colour.

However it is understood that the

provisional squad to tour Bangladesh dropped short of that target, with veteran opener Herschelle Gibbs left out after a string of low Test scores.

The upcoming fast bowler Monde Zondeki was also omitted from a tour seen by some observers as a perfect opportunity to cut his teeth.

Rows over the lack of black players also played a large part in the departure of Springbok coach Jake White who announced he was quitting only weeks after South Africa won the rugby World Cup last year.

While fast bowler Makhaya Ntini and Ashwell Prince are both regulars in the Test team, Gibbs was one of only three black players in the starting line-up in the Proteas' last ODI on Sunday against the West Indies.

'CA prying unfair'

AFP, Sydney

AFP, Sydney

Australian captain Ricky Ponting said here Thursday it would be 'unfair' if interference from Cricket Australia prevented players from participating in the inaugural Twenty20 Indian Premier League.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India has said Australian players risked losing their lucrative IPL contracts because Cricket Australia was seeking global protection for its own sponsors.

The six-week IPL is slated to start in April and clashes with Australia's scheduled tour of troubled Pakistan, which is still in doubt.

Indian cricket chief Lalit Modi said the tournament would go ahead with

or without the Australians.

Ponting said the Australian Cricketers' Association, which represents the players, would take a dim view of any moves by Cricket Australia that might jeopardise their participation.

"There are already some globally-protected sponsors of Cricket Australia, there are a couple of them," he said.

"I don't think Cricket Australia would be able to make any of their other sponsors global sponsors."

"If they tried to do that I'm sure the players' association would have something to say about it."

"It would be a little bit unfair if that was the case."

Ponting pointed out that retiring wicketkeeper-batsman Adam Gilchrist was the only current Australian international likely to be able to play if the tour of Pakistan went

ahead.

Although there is an agreement that international players have to be retired for two years before playing IPL, Gilchrist is expected to be granted an exemption by CA.

Ponting said Cricket Australia should have no issue with the IPL contracts, comparing the competition to playing county cricket during the Australian off season.

"It's a domestic competition, as county cricketers," Ponting said.

"There's never been any worry about Cricket Australia releasing guys to go and play county cricket."

"That's the reason Cricket Australia backed it all in the first place, because it was a domestic tournament and it wouldn't be actually taking Australian players away from their domestic competitions or the Australian team."

Weather still a factor

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cordon, (Andrew) Symonds coming in, Michael Clarke moving around first and second slip. It seems like if there's a half-chance or a hard chance we're putting them down but the more hard work we do they're going to start to stick pretty soon."

Matthew Hayden's return -- Ponting said he was a definite starter after missing the opening game with a hamstring problem -- should help as he slots back into his customary position at first slip. The news might not be so good for Australia's other notable absentee from the Brisbane match, Stuart Clark, who remains on the fringes of the limited-overs team.

"The current make-up have done a pretty good job," Ponting said of the attack led by Brett Lee. "We'll wait and see what the weather does but I guess he's probably going to find it hard to leapfrog over one of the other guys in the side."

Brad Hogg, who was overlooked

in Brisbane, should earn a call-up, although the final side will depend on the conditions on Friday.

Between rain periods on Thursday Jayawardene glimpsed a dry-looking pitch and he was hopeful of some reverse-swing for Lasith Malinga, however he would not commit to any particular starting line-up. As long as Jayasuriya turns up to open the innings, the Sydney fans will be happy.

TEAMS
Australia (probable): Adam Gilchrist (wicketkeeper), Matthew Hayden, Ricky Ponting (captain), Michael Clarke, Andrew Symonds, Michael Hussey, James Hopes, Brad Hogg, Brett Lee, Mitchell Johnson, Nathan Bracken.

Sri Lanka (probable): Upul Tharanga, Sanath Jayasuriya, Kumar Sangakkara (wicketkeeper), Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Tillakaratne Dilshan, Chamara Silva, Chamara Kapugedera, Chaminda Vaas, Lasith Malinga, Ishara Amerasinghe, Muttiah Muralidaran.

Italy, Germany cruise

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we've shown once again that we're a great team," beamed Italy coach Roberto Donadoni.

Germany, gunning for their fourth European title this summer, were similarly untroubled as they muscled past Austria 3-0 in Vienna with goals from Miroslav Klose, his 37th for his country, Thomas Hitzlsperger and substitute Mario Gomez.

German coach Joachim Loew was nevertheless not happy with a first-half performance which consisted of cruising at the Ernst Happel Stadium.

"We just did not play football in the first 45 minutes, neither in attack nor defence," said Loew. The two neighbours face off again on June 16 in Vienna in Group B.

Also in hot form were Holland, who handed Croatia their biggest home loss since independence

from Yugoslavia in 1991, 3-0 in Split.

The Dutch dictated the game from the start despite lacking such luminaries as Ruud Van Nistelrooy and won with goals from John Heitinga, Klaas Jan Huntelaar and Vennegor of Hesselink.

In the Euro 2008 finals Croatia will have to do much better with the Germans in their path.

France also have room for improvement after a 1-0 loss to Spain in Malaga.

Joan Capdevila netted from close range with 11 minutes left of an encounter between two former European champions currently rebuilding.

Raymond Domenech's French line-up included three stalwarts of the 1998 World Cup win in the shape of Patrick Vieira, Lilian Thuram and Thierry Henry but it is the new kids on the block such as

Lyon star striker Karim Benzema who have caught the eye in recent months.

Benzema saw a header come off the bar late on to see Spain hold on.

Awaiting Spain in the summer are holders Greece, Russia and Sweden, while France play Italy, Holland and Romania in a tough group.

Also Wednesday, Greece came from behind to see off Finland 2-1 in Athens while in Istanbul, Turkey and Sweden parted 0-0.

Israel beat Romania by the only goal, Slovenia bowed 2-1 at home to Denmark and Poland scored an impressive 2-0 win away to the Czech Republic.

In Dublin, meanwhile, a Robinho strike was enough to give Brazil victory against the Republic of Ireland.

Sagar retains junior title

SPORTS REPORTER

Minhajuddin Ahmed Sagar retained his crown when the FIDE Master emerged unbeaten champion in the 29th National Junior (Under-20) Chess Championship yesterday.

Sagar defeated Sharif in the ninth and final round at the federation hall-room to win all his matches and finish with nine points.

Shamima Akhter Liza finished runner-up with eight points while Rezaul Islam Babu (7.5 points) clinched third place.

Int'l Jr tennis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Local boy Ranjan Ram paired with Taipei's Keng-Cheng Lin to move into boys' doubles quarterfinal in the Grameenphone International Junior (U-16) Tennis Championships (Group-3) at the Zafar Imam Tennis Complex here yesterday.

The duo thrashed Indian pair Mansingh Athare and Sumeet Shinde 6-1, 6-2 in the evening.

A total of 32 matches were held on the day with 13 seeded players reaching the boys' and girls' singles.

Base Bashar win title

SPORTS REPORTER

BAF Base Bashar lifted the Inter-base tennis title of the Bangladesh Air Force at their home ground in Dhaka yesterday.

Base Bashar defeated runners-up BAF Base Matu Rahman 2-1 in the doubles match and BAF Base Zahurul Haque 2-0 in the singles on the concluding day.

Imran Majid of BAF Base Bashar was adjudged the player of the meet.

Air Officer Commanding of BAF Base Bashar Air Commodore M Delwar Hossain witnessed the final day's competition as chief guest and distributed trophies.

Bagerhat women's athletics champs

SPORTS REPORTER

Bagerhat emerged champions and Munshiganj finished runners-up in the inter-district women's athletics competition that concluded yesterday at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex.

Bagerhat clinched the top slot with 15 points while Munshiganj had 13 points.

Nazmun Nahar of Bagerhat emerged as individual champion in the meet securing 11 points and Munshiganj's Fouzia Akhter and Mina Begum of Kurigram were runner-up securing 10 points each.

A total of 123 athletes representing 27 districts took part in the meet.

England stay

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Brendon McCullum said his side needed to be more accurate all round to be competitive.

"To be on the receiving end of another hiding was very disappointing," he said.

"After we pulled back the initial onslaught I thought we were setting ourselves up for a 150-160 chase but two experienced guys put together a very, very good partnership which sent them to a score which was well beyond our reach."

New Zealand started their chase for 194 to win with a Jesse Ryder boundary off the first ball but lost their way soon after.

Halfway through the innings they were four wickets down and well behind on the run rate with only 72 on the board.

Without Jacob Oram, who brought some respectability to New Zealand's first match performance, the home side had little chance of a late run fest.

Jamie How top scored with 31, Kyle Mills was not out 30 and Ross Taylor made 21 but no one appeared at ease against a tight bowling attack.

Ryan Sidebottom was again miserly with two to 19 off his four overs while Mascarenhas finished with two for 25 and Graeme Swann two for 30.

BRIEF SCORES

ENGLAND: 193-8 in 20 overs (Collingwood 54, Shah 47; Southey 2-22).

NEW ZEALAND: 143-8 in 20 overs (How 31, Mills 30; Sidebottom 2-19).

Result: England won by 50 runs.

Eto'o, soon

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five to overtake Mulamba Ndaye of the Democratic Republic of Congo, scorer of nine when his country lifted the 1974 Nations Cup in Cairo.

And the supreme African football predator is also closing on the all-time Cameroon record of 33-goal Patrick Mboma, needing four to draw level with a star of the 2000 Nations Cup-winning team.

Only time though will tell whether the film is able to include a scene where Eto'o lifts aloft Cameroon's record equalling fifth African Nations Cup trophy on Sunday.

Gill's bat cracks

Cricket

THE AUSTRALIAN

If you were to look in a catalogue, the blade is known as a Puma Ballistic. But this one has a tongue-in-cheek nickname taken from a Simpsons episode where Homer makes a baseball bat with supernatural powers.

Bats might all look roughly the same, but the wicketkeeper-batsman says this one had that hard-to-define element that made it the best bat he has owned.

And he's owned a few. Homer's Wonder Bat was created when lightning struck a tree. Gilchrist's came about in a more conventional fashion and landed in his kit before the previous Ashes series.

The bat fell right from the start and lightning struck when Gilchrist took it home to Perth for the third Test against England.

Gilchrist crashed his way to a famous 100 from 57 balls that day and knew the bat was something special.

"It's just the best bat I've ever had. We're spoilt for choice at this level, the sponsors look after us with quality bats, but this one in particular just felt great," Gilchrist said.

"I've really hung on to it and I've tried to save every bit of life out of it."

Modern bats don't last that long, but Gilchrist has nursed the Wonder Bat as if it was an orphaned marsupial.

It has been glued and pinned and preserved at every turn. If staying up nights with a cold flannel and a bottle of milk would have done the trick, Gilchrist would have been there.

The axemen of the team will carry six or eight blades in their kit, but Gilchrist carries just three: the much-loved Wonder Bat, a practice bat and a spare.

Once he was aware just how good this model was, it was immediately excused from training. By the time last year's World Cup came around, it was starting to show some fragility.

"Occasionally I was using another bat in some of the earlier games just in the hope that I might be able to use that one in the finals. Unveiled the Wonder Bat, if you like," he said with a laugh.

An insignificant squash ball placed inside the glove got a lot of exposure after Gilchrist smashed 149 from 104 balls (including 13 fours and eight sixes) in the World Cup final, but in his heart the batsman knew it was his trusty piece of willow that was responsible for his Homeresque epic.

Wonder Bat, like a loved shirt, has been hanging on to life by a thread or two.

It was there in Hobart when he hit his 100th six so far they had to put out an all points bulletin to find the ball.

And it hung in there for the final Test series against India, just long enough to wave goodbye at Adelaide Oval. But that was it.

Last Friday's Twenty20 encounter proved one game too far for the Wonder Bat. One lusty blow too

many and the Wonder Bat's handle came loose. Like its owner, it has had enough. But unlike the man, it seemed uninterested in seeing out the one-day series.

Gilchrist said the blade is basically beyond repair, but there is some hope it might be revived for one last innings. "I hadn't totally blown it apart when I changed it at the Twenty20," he said. "I'll see, I might try and see if there is any more life in it."

"It's beyond fixing, it's been glued up and pinned up and now the handle has sort of gone."

"It's sad in a funny way, it's been a good, faithful servant."

He is not so superstitious as to be carried away with the loss of Wonder Bat.

"It was with me for those two big 100s," he said. "And quite a few failures in between."

Gilchrist has been a bit of a one-bat man but has always shown the right amount of respect to fallen former partners.

While the Wonder Bat could fetch extraordinary amounts from well-heeled tragics, it will not be sold and instead will join his trophy collection at home.

Some years ago, Gilchrist had a frame made up to house any bat he made a significant 100 with. A lack of foresight saw the cabinet made with only 16 places and now it needs extensions to make room in the harem.

Doubt over Samuels

Cricket

AFP, London

West Indies' Marlon Samuels is to undergo independent analysis of his suspect bowling action on Monday at England's National Cricket Academy at Loughborough University, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said in a statement on Wednesday.

The analysis will be performed by Dr Mark King, a member of the ICC panel of human movement specialists.

Samuels, primarily a batsman, was reported by the umpires last month for a suspected illegal bowling action with regard to his 'faster ball' during the third Test against South Africa in Durban.

He has taken just seven Test wickets as an off-spinner at an expensive average of 127.

But the 27-year-old got through more overs than usual in Durban because of an injury to Chris Gayle.

On-field umpires Simon Taufel (Australia) and Aleem Dar (Pakistan), together with third umpire Brian Jerling, were concerned by Samuels' action.

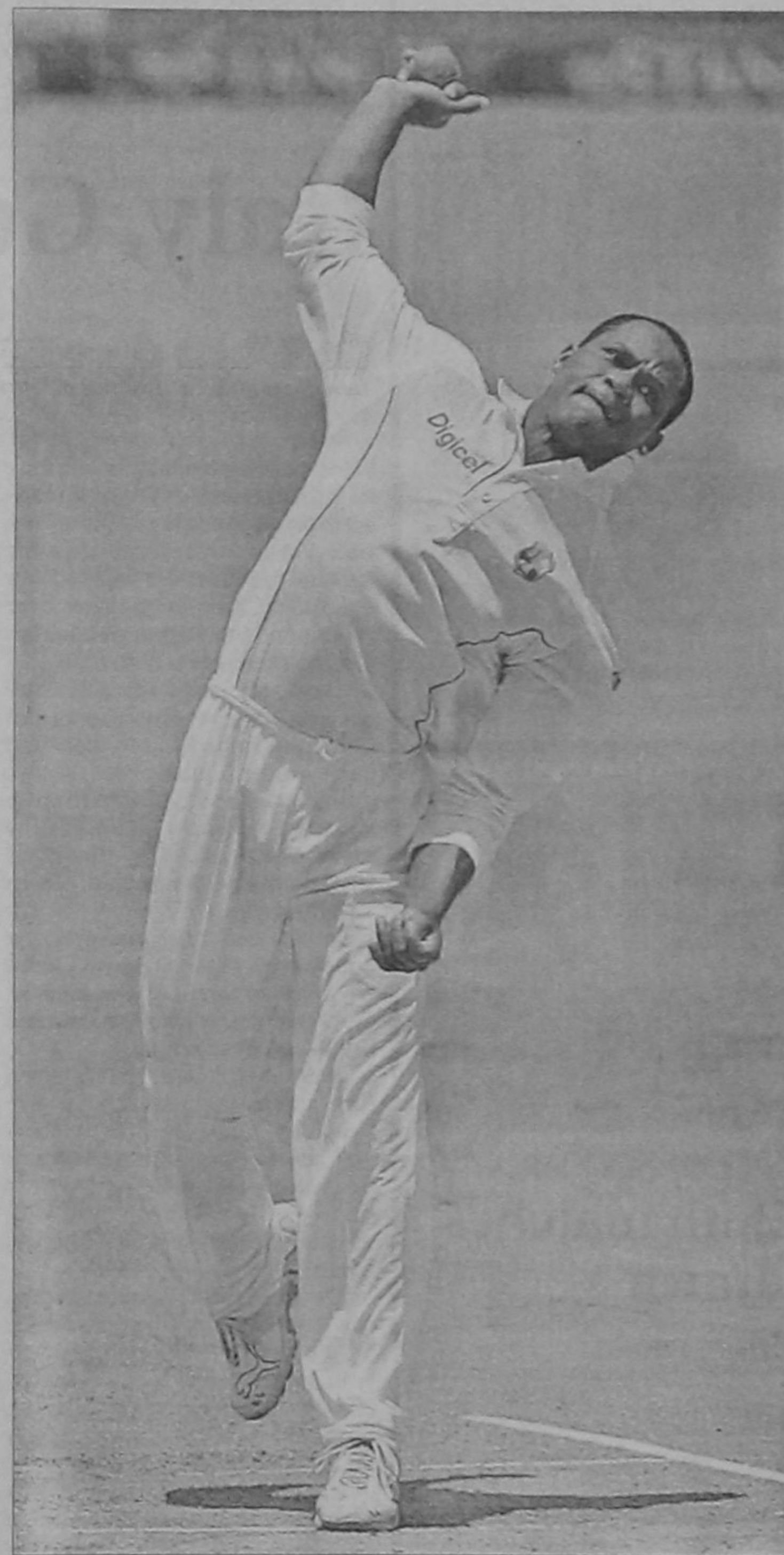
Match referee Roshan Mahanama then informed both the West Indies tour management and the ICC in accordance with the rules regarding suspect actions.

If Samuels is found to have been bowling with an illegal action he will be suspended from bowling that particular delivery in international cricket with immediate effect.

Although only his 'fast' deliveries have been reported as suspect, the ICC process requires his action generally to be analysed.

Should the analysis confirms it is his quicker deliveries only that are illegal, then he would be allowed to continue bowling in international cricket without using that delivery but subject to the warning that should he bowl his 'fast' ball he would run the risk of being reported a second time.

However, the ICC said that if this month's analysis concludes that Samuels generally bowls with an illegal action, he will be suspended from bowling in international cricket until such time as he has



MARLON SAMUELS

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 She had a 2001 hit with "Thank You"
5 Some-where out there
8 Office part-timer
12 October stone
13 Rage
14 Notion
15 Was curious (about)
17 Compos-ition
18 Weeding tool
19 Starbuck's orders
21 Und-bergh's view
24 Rover's playmate
25 Piece of hardware
26 Catered (to)
30 Savings plan
31 Shines up, maybe
32 Eggs
33 Made a bid

DOWN
1 DuPont rival
2 Wall St. debut
3 Quarter-back
4 Passé
5 Confla-gration
6 Exit
7 Discrim-nated, as an insurer
8 Walk
9 Tense texts
10 Apportion (out)
11 Proves profitable
16 A billion years
20 Tosses into the mix
21 Last write-up
22 Heart of the matter
23 Verve
24 Sends quickly
26 Pasta enhancer
27 Actress
28 Always
29 Pub
31 Healthy
34 Slupely
35 Mainte-nance
37 More-over
38 Multi-colored
39 "Do...others..."
40 Great enthusi-asm
41 "Bus Stop" play-wright
42 Coffee vessel
43 Wish otherwise
46 Historic time
47 Web address part

