

Dhoni asked to change gloves

REUTERS, Sydney

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was asked to change his wicketkeeping gloves during his team's tri-series match against Australia on Sunday after pulling off a spectacular catch to dismiss Adam Gilchrist.

Former Australia wicketkeeper Ian Healy, commenting on local television, said the gloves were in breach of the rules because they had extra webbing between the thumb and the forefinger.

Under the sport's regulations, the webbing is not allowed to protrude "beyond the straight line joining the top of the index finger to the top of the thumb".

Dhoni said he had agreed to change his gloves as soon as he was informed that the match referee wanted to inspect them.

"There was no point creating controversy so I said I'll change the gloves," he told a news conference. Dhoni said he was unaware there was any problem with his gloves as he has been using the same type all season.

"It's up to the match referee, I've been using them for quite some time," he said. "It's an exact replica of the ones I was using in the test series so that's all I know about it."

WOMEN'S CRICKET

South Africa rout Pakistan

AFF, Stellenbosch (South Africa)

Opening bowler Alicia Smith took five wickets for seven runs as South Africa crushed Pakistan by eight wickets in the final of the Women's World Cup Qualifier tournament at the Stellenbosch University ground Sunday.

Pakistan were bowled out for 61 after winning the toss and batting in sunny weather. South Africa needed only 13.4 overs to secure victory.

Consolation for Pakistan was that they qualified for the Women's World Cup in Australia in March 2009 because the top two teams from the tournament went through.

Smith struck with her first delivery when she trapped Bismah Maroof leg before wicket and she conceded only two runs off the bat in eight overs. She bowled five wides.

Extras were the highest contributor to the total with 26, including 15 wides.

Only opener Tasqeen Qadeer, with 12, reached double figures for Pakistan -- and she was dropped at second slip off Dinesha Deyarain off the third ball of the match before she had scored.

Pakistan's strength during the tournament was their bowling and Asmavia Iqbal struck twice with the new ball to reduce South Africa to 13 for two. But Claire Terblanche and Susanna Benade put on an unbeaten 48 for the third wicket.

South African captain Cri-Zelda Brits said her team had worked hard. "Now we want to be a team that competes at the World Cup," she said. South Africa were forced to play in the qualifying event after finishing seventh of the eight teams that played in the 2005 World Cup played in South Africa.

Pakistan captain Urooj Mumtaz said she was disappointed with her team's batting but proud that they had qualified for the World Cup.

"We don't play that many international games but we know that we will be facing some good teams at the World Cup so we will have to step up as far as our batting is concerned," said Mumtaz.

Ryder out for three months

AFF, Wellington

Rising New Zealand star Jesse Ryder is out of cricket for up to three months after injuring his hand in a bar celebrating New Zealand's one-day series win over England, officials said Sunday.

Ryder damaged an index finger and thumb when he broke a window early Sunday while trying to access a toilet which had been locked.

New Zealand officials said it would be six weeks before Ryder could start light training and up to three months before he can play competitively again.

The 23-year-old requires a reconstruction to the exterior tendon on his index finger, a flap reconstruction and a skin graft.

Ryder partnered Brendon McCullum at the top of the New Zealand innings in Christchurch on Saturday when they put on 100 in 11 overs to lay the platform for a 34-run win to take the series 3-1.



Did U Know?

The prize money in the 1968 edition of the Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championships was 2,000 pounds in Men's Singles, 750 pounds in Ladies' Singles, 800 pounds in Men's Doubles and 450 pounds in Ladies' Doubles.



Russian star Maria Sharapova makes a forehand return against Polish Agnieszka Radwanska during their Qatar Open semifinal in Doha on Saturday.

Sharapova marches on

Tennis

AFF, Doha

Maria Sharapova maintained her unbeaten record in 2008 with a hard-hitting win over Agnieszka Radwanska which carried her to the final of the 2.5 million dollar Qatar Open on Saturday.

The Australian Open champion beat the 18-year-old Pole, who has just reached the world's top 20 for the first time, 6-4, 6-3, a scoreline which also means Sharapova has still only dropped one set this year.

Sharapova will now face compatriot Vera Zvonareva, who ended the giant-killing run of China's Li Na, 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 in the other semifinal.

The great improvement in Sharapova's serving shown in Melbourne - made possible by the recovery from the shoulder problem which blighted her tennis last year - was again in evidence, and was supplemented by a strident policy with her returning.

"I was a little bit worried coming here because I had done a lot of travelling and when I got here I had a little cold, and because of the court change my body was feeling it. I thought 'here we go again,'" said Sharapova, referring to her health and fitness problems of 2007.

"But once I got more practice on the courts I felt better and it all started to come together."

"I do feel physically stronger," she said when complimented on the quality of her court coverage in this match. "But the most important thing is to go into a match you really want to win and to consistently do it."

Sharapova took the ball early

and forcefully, risking a few errors but creating constant pressure, a policy which particularly paid off during a crucial phase in the middle of the second set.

"It was a good opportunity for me to play someone who had beaten me," Sharapova said, referring to the fact that she had lost to Radwanska the last time they met, at the US Open in New York five months ago.

"Radwanska played well at the start of the match and I almost went 3-0 down," the fourth seed added.

"I had to play good tennis to get it back. It wasn't an easy match; it was quite tough out there, but I was able to do the job."

After regaining parity early on, Sharapova made a breakthrough in the seventh game, being particularly severe on any second serves, and converting the break point with a withering inside out forehand winner.

She then prevented an immediate break back from Radwanska, who at this stage was sometimes the more creative and dangerous player in the longer rallies, with some brilliant defending.

Sharapova was 30-40 down on her serve, and though not known as the quickest player about the court, scrambled the ball back three times to inducing a smashing error from Radwanska.

That helped her to 5-3 and Sharapova closed out the first set with her most impressive game, a service game to love, which included two fine first serves, setting up winners and an ace.

After exchanging breaks in the opening two games, the second set hinged on the fifth game, when

Sharapova's threatening returns pressurized Radwanska into a double fault to go love-40 down.

When she saved two break points in the eighth game, it effectively ended Radwanska's resistance, though she had done enough to suggest she should be a top ten player of the not-too-distant future.

"I lost to Zvonareva the last time I played as well, so I don't want to lose to her again either," Sharapova said ominously.

However, Zvonareva looks to have recovered from the ankle injury which was bothering her recently and could be dangerous again.

Always a player displaying great talent, but sometimes of variable temperament, discovered the ability to impose herself on the match at two crucial moments.

First she broke back for two-all in the second set and took nine points in a row to change the character of a contest which the heavy-hitting player from Wuhan had dominated.

Then, after going a break down again in the final set, Zvonareva hit a hot streak at the finish, dropping only six points in the last four games.

Li, who had beaten three top 20 players in the previous three rounds, eventually began to lose some of her consistency and contributed to her own downfall with a rising error rate.

She attributed her good form here to "her husband who has given her a credit card", a piece of humour which disguises what is almost certainly a great deal of work whilst off the circuit for half of 2007.

India reject Pak invite

REUTERS, Karachi

India has rejected an invitation to play a three-match one-day series in Pakistan in March, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said on Sunday.

Pakistan asked India to play the matches from March 12 in Lahore after Australia's tour was reduced to under a month from 44 days.

"The president of the Indian cricket board, Sharad Pawar, called up and spoke to the (PCB) chairman explaining the tour was not possible due to the tight schedule of the Indian players," a spokesman for the PCB said.

"The Indian board has said that their players have been on tour for the last three months and start a home series against South Africa from March 26 and are fatigued."

The spokesman said the Indian board had promised to play the three matches in Pakistan before the ICC Champions Trophy is held in September and October.

"Obviously we are disappointed because our players are already short of cricket activities. But we are hoping the Australians tour from March 29 will go ahead as scheduled," he added.

Australia are set to send a delegation to Pakistan to inspect the venues and security arrangements before they confirm their tour. Some of their players have concerns about playing in Pakistan.

Pakistan has also invited Sri Lanka to play a one-day series.

Youths crash

FROM PAGE 17
plays first-class cricket in Port Elizabeth and looks up to former South African opener and India's new coach Gary Kirsten, emerged the tournament's leading bowler with 14 wickets from four matches.

Abraham Pienaar chipped in with two wickets in one over.

India, seeded second behind defending champions Pakistan, proved the lucrative Indian Premier League was no distraction as they thrashed England at the Kinrara Oval.

India sent England in to bat and shot them out for 146 with left-arm spinner Iqbal Abdullah taking 3-29 and seamer Siddharth Kaul and left-arm slow bowler Ravindra Jadeja picking up two wickets each.

Opener James Taylor was the only batsman to defy the accurate Indian attack with 41.

Indian openers Sreevats Goswami and Taruwar Kohli saw off the new ball with a slow but steady start of 65 in 20 overs.

Essex off-spinner Tom Westley created a minor scare in the Indian camp by removing star batsman Tammy Srivastava and skipper Virat Kohli in successive overs.

Taruwar Kohli, who hails from Jalandhar in northern Punjab, guided India home with an unbeaten 63 and became the tournament's leading scorer with 207 runs in four matches.

It can be mentioned that the Indian team here have been besieged with phone calls from IPL agents over the past week offering contracts reportedly ranging from 20,000 to 50,000 dollars.

BRIEF SCORES
ENGLAND: 146 all out in 46 overs (James Taylor 41, Ben Brown 24; Iqbal Abdullah 3-29, Siddharth Kaul 2-21, Ravindra Jadeja 2-23)

INDIA: 149-3 (Taruwar Kohli 63 not out, Sreevats Goswami 26)
Result: India beat England by seven wickets at Kinrara Oval.

SOUTH AFRICA: 242-8 in 50 overs (Jonathan Vandiar 45, Wayne Parnell 57; Subhashish Roy 2-30, Rubel Hossain 2-41)
ENGLAND: 41 all out in 11.5 overs (Nasir Hossain 17; Wayne Parnell 6-8, Matthew Arnold 1-25, Abraham Pienaar 2-8)

Result: South Africa beat Bangladesh by 201 runs at Bayuemas Oval.

IPL causes cash frenzy

Cricket

AFF, Kuala Lumpur

Cricket is poised for a revolution like never before as the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL) takes shape, but there are fears it could change what was once a leisurely afternoon sport for ever.

It is not about nations playing traditional Test cricket, the soul of the game for more than a century, or even one-day internationals or World Cups. The IPL is essentially an Indian Twenty20 domestic competition between eight city teams owned by corporate giants and movie stars who have hired the world's best cricketers at mind-boggling prices.

It is the nearest thing to Fantasy Cricket and cricketers are rubbing their eyes -- and wallets -- in disbelief at the huge pay packets offered to them to take part in the inaugural 44-day, 59-match extravaganza starting across cricket-mad India from April 18.

In a sport where only a handful of top stars net more than a million dollars a year in fees and endorsements for their respective countries, the IPL has showered riches like never before.

In an unprecedented auction of players in Mumbai last week, bids ranged from a whopping 1.5 million dollars for India's Twenty20 captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni to the lowest of 100,000 dollars for Sri Lankan youngster Chamara Silva.

Young batsman Manoj Tewari, who has played a solitary one-day for India, was picked up by Delhi for 675,000 dollars even as world-

beating Australian captain Ricky Ponting went for a surprisingly low 400,000 dollars to Kolkata.

"The market is determining the players' price. That is how a free economy market flows," said Inderjit Bindra, a former Indian cricket board president and an influential member of the IPL's governing council.

Pundits regard the IPL as a revolution that will change the way cricket is played and governed, similar to Australian tycoon Kerry Packer's rebel World Series Cricket 33 years ago.

Packer, denied TV rights to Australian cricket, bought the world's best players in 1975 for a private series, introducing colour clothing and day-night matches for maximum television exposure.

The players were banned from official cricket before a compromise with the Australian Cricket Board three years later saw Packer's Channel Nine win the home rights for all Tests and one-day internationals.

There is no threat of a ban on IPL players because it is run by the official Indian body and has the blessings of the International Cricket Council (ICC) and boards around the world.

"The IPL will make the Packer years look like a storm in a teacup," said noted cricket writer Peter Roebuck. "Now, for a second time, authority totters under assault from players aware of their market value."

With dollars jingling in their pockets, cricketers will put aside fears of burnout from the already overcrowded international schedule to strut their stuff in the unbearable heat of the Indian summer.

But Ponting fears the IPL could lure cricketers away from the traditional Test and one-day games.

"With the amount of money being freely paid... there is a real danger that some guys will find the IPL more attractive than playing for their countries," Ponting wrote in The Australian newspaper.

"And if there are potential stars of Test or one-day cricket who might have any sort of thoughts like that, I think it is really dangerous for the game."

A consortium of Singapore-based World Sports Group and India's Sony Television Network paid 1.026 billion dollars for media rights of the IPL over the next 10 years.

The amount matches what Pan-Asian ESPN-Star Sports bid last year to win the rights for all ICC events till 2015, which includes two World Cups, three Champions Trophy events and the first two world Twenty20 tournaments.

IPL chairman Lalit Modi is confident franchise owners, who include top Indian businessmen Mukesh Ambani and Vijay Mallya and movie stars Shahrukh Khan and Preity Zinta, will get handsome returns for their combined investments of around 800 million dollars.

"When you go out to set up a business, it takes you a few years to plan the same," said Modi. "The franchisees have bought a team, which is an asset for life. If they build it correctly, the sky's the limit."

But critics remain sceptical. "If the IPL is about money first, it will fail," wrote Simon Barnes in The Times. "We watch sport for the passion, for the real thing, for the love."

"Whoring simply doesn't make the Earth move."

Buchanan's yes to tour

Cricket

AFF, Sydney

Former national coach John Buchanan has urged Australia's cricketers to tour Pakistan next month as Cricket Australia prepares for a government briefing about travelling to the strife-torn nation, reports said Sunday.

The latest Australian government travel warnings for Pakistan highlight "a very high threat of terrorist attack, sectarian violence" and "credible reports indicating terrorists are in the advanced stage of planning attacks."

But Buchanan, who retired as coach after Australia's World Cup triumph in the Caribbean last April, believes the tour should go ahead to prove terrorists cannot disrupt daily life.

"I think it's bigger than cricket," Buchanan told Sydney's Sun-Herald newspaper. "Cricket would be the medium by which you can keep making life as normal as possible."

"In terms of terrorism or any of those things that tend to dictate how people behave, my point of

view would be to keep living like you would normally live."

"I guess that's a philosophical stance, but my opinion would be definitely to go, not just to Pakistan but if there were similar issues anywhere."

"That would be my personal viewpoint, obviously without access to the information Cricket Australia might have."

Buchanan recalled how Australia's Ashes squad of 2001 toured England and stayed in Belfast under the threat of attacks from the IRA.

In 2005, Australia's players had strong concerns about their safety after the London bombings, in which attacks on a bus and three underground trains killed 56 people.

"We were heading down to London when the tubes were bombed," Buchanan said.

"That was a concern but we took the approach to get there and make our own assessment."

"On the 2001 tour, when we travelled to London, there had been some IRA bombings before we got there. Once we got there the locals told us the areas that were safe and the areas that weren't."

"A lot of the time our impressions of how dangerous things may be are somewhat exaggerated when you are actually in the place."

"Remember being on a tour to Sri Lanka. (Assistant coach) Tim Nielsen and I, along with the Australian High Commissioner, were the first white people to get on a military plane and head up to Jaffna."

"There was a ceasefire, we were the first plane up there, and we did a little coaching camp for them. There are issues in most countries."

Cricket Australia spokesman Peter Young said the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's advice would be crucial in a final decision to tour Pakistan.

"There will be a visit to Canberra for a government briefing in early March," Young said Sunday.

"It'll involve Cricket Australia and the players' association. We will talk to the department and take a briefing from them. We'll be keen to know what various government agencies are advising."

"We'll get the most detailed inside information before we sit down with the players and the players' association to make the next step."

Hosts flying high

FROM PAGE 17
outrunning local Nazmunnahar Beauty in photo finish after both the sprinters got to the finishing line in 11.9s.

Asadur Rahman won the men's 110m hurdles while fellow Bangladeshi Abdul Hafiz Rupa took silver and visiting Santosh Saha bronze.

Selim Miah added another gold for Bangladesh in the 1500m while the local men's team (Afzal, Moinul, Mozammel, Taher) won the 4x400m relay. The women's 4x400m relay gold went to West Bengal.

SHOOTING

The hosts swept all four shooting gold medals at BKSP to maintain their domination with a total of nine gold compared to the tourists' three.

In 10m air rifle, Bangladeshi shooter Gunodhina Singh won the gold and Anjan Kumar silver before the pair secured the team event.

Sharmim Akhter Ratna won the

women's 10-metre air rifle before helping her partners win the team gold.

SWIMMING

Bangladesh and West Bengal shared the fastest swimmer titles with Nazrul Islam becoming the fastest male and West Bengal's Monalisa the fastest female.

Monalisa Mondol, who hails from Hugli district, grabbed the 50m freestyle in 29.43s with Bangladesh's Dolly Akhter and West Bengal's Shalini Bannerjee following her.

Monalisa also won the 100m backstroke and 100m butterfly to maintain her supremacy.

In women's 200m breaststroke, top local swimmer Dolly Akhter won gold.

Nazrul finished the 50m freestyle in 25.31s and was followed by his teammates Jewel Ahmed and Rafiqul Islam.

Unlike the other disciplines, the tourists put on a tight show at the

pool, winning exactly half of the ten events decided yesterday. Silver medals were also equally shared while the local natants took six bronze to West Bengal's four.

Still, the hosts led the swimming table with 12 gold against West Bengal's nine.

West Bengal's Akbor Ali Mir edged Bangladesh's Rubel Rana (silver) and Rubil Alam (bronze) in 100m backstroke and the Indian swimmer also won the 400m freestyle.

Bangladesh claimed all three medals in men's 200m breaststroke with Jahangir Alam leading the pack. Niaz Ali and Karar Samedul Islam won silver and bronze respectively.

Jewel Ahmed added the 100m butterfly gold honours his credit and finish the day with three gold.

Rubel Rana also claimed three gold for Bangladesh when he won the men's 200m medley defeating Akbor Ali Mir.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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