

Aussies to tour Pakistan twice

AFP, Karachi

Australia have agreed to split their postponed tour to Pakistan in two parts and will tour in April-May next year and again in 2010, a joint statement from the two boards said Monday.

The tour, due to take place in March-April this year, was put off after several Australian players hesitated over touring Pakistan in the wake of a series of suicide bombings before the February 18 national polls.

But security has improved in Pakistan since the new government took over last month.

Australia will return to Pakistan in August-September 2010 to play three Test matches, with final dates and venues to be agreed depending on each nation's Future Tours Program (FTP) obligations," said the statement.

"As well as agreement for the Australian team to tour Pakistan, the PCB has also confirmed its tour to Australia in 2009-10 for three Tests, five one-day internationals and a Twenty20 international."

PCB chairman Nasim Ashraf said he was pleased with the outcome "although disappointed that the tour couldn't be completed as originally scheduled."

CA chairman Creagh O'Connor said Australia had been committed to reschedule the tour.

"We are pleased to have reached agreement to travel to Pakistan to complete the postponed matches and to play in them in Australia as agreed under the FTP," O'Connor said.

'Anna won't marry me'

AFP, Madrid

Many women might wish to be in her place, but Spanish pop singer and heart-throb Enrique Iglesias says his girlfriend, tennis champion Anna Kournikova, keeps turning down his proposals of marriage.

"I always try, but she doesn't want to," the Madrid newspaper ABC quoted Iglesias as saying in Santo Domingo, capital of the Dominican Republic, where he arrived last Friday for a concert.

Iglesias, who turns 33 next month, is touring Latin America in support of his English-language album "Insomniac".

The Madrid-born son of veteran crooner Julio Iglesias has been romantically linked to Russian-born Kournikova, 26, for several years.

They were rumoured to be engaged in December after Kournikova was spotted wearing a large diamond ring on her wedding finger.

But earlier this month she told People magazine that a walk down the aisle was not part of her plans. "I'm never getting married. Everything is good," she said.

Iglesias, who made his recording debut in 1995, last month released a compilation of his greatest hits in Spanish, titled "95/08".

Negatively

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It only helps you do even worse in the next assignment.

What many believe is that Bangladesh cricket team has been missing a hard task-master like Whatmore because no one is now worried after he gives away his wicket or fumbles in the field.

There might be a debate on the role of a coach in cricket but for Bangladesh, it is as important as having a captain out in the middle.

Just one example can be good enough to understand the importance of a coach. During Whatmore's reign, the national players once believed that they have the ability to turn the table on any team on their day. But now they have started to believe that these recent performances are what they actually are capable of.

So time has come for the authority to reassess everything before things get out of control. Our goal, the 2011 World Cup, is not too far away.

Who to support?

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reached yet, and for Rahul Dravid, so used to being the darling of fans in this country wherever he goes, the experience was a novel one. "It was a fantastic atmosphere," he said, "but I'm not used to a crowd like that. Whenever I've played here before for India, the crowd have been rooting for you. But here, I hit a four and no one clapped. I think I'll have to get used to that over the rest of the tournament."

Mark Boucher, who used all the experience garnered in 263 one-day internationals for South Africa to help Bangalore over the line, said he had expected a football-style reception in advance, which might have explained the cool head he kept as the required rate rose to more than ten an over. He admitted that a couple of the younger members of his side might have been intimidated by the pressure of Friday's opener in Bangalore, but he appeared to thrive in the Wankhede cauldron. If this kind of mood can be replicated at venues other than here and Eden Gardens, the IPL organisers might begin to breathe a little more freely.



GM Ziaur Rahman (L) makes a move against FM Abu Sufian Shakil on the second day of the National Chess Championship at the National Sports Council yesterday.

To cheer or not...

Cricket

PRADEEP MAGAZINE

The night is still young, the sky radiating many hues of the myriad coloured artificial lights, as thousands of spectators inside the stadium wait with intense expectation for the entertainment to begin. Bangalore's Chinnaswamy Stadium has never looked so bright, colourful and, some might say, even garish.

The decibel levels are as high as can be expected in a gathering like this as the opening match of the IPL has been billed as an extravaganza of almost epic proportions where cricket, Bollywood, dance, laser show and even elements of circus join hands to enthrall the crowds.

In the press box, where even the international media is represented in good numbers, fingers are banging on the laptops and on a few screens it can be seen written "toss report". This is a ritual for agency reporters before the start of any international match, where they tell the world the final team combination and the winner of the toss.

Before the "toss report" can be filled, the stadium is jolted by iconic singer Shankar Mahadevan, who belts out a few musical numbers and the crowd sways to his tunes.

Malik to play in Aisha's city!

Cricket

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan skipper Shoaib Malik does not foresee any problem in playing the Indian Premier League matches in Hyderabad despite his long running feud with an Indian family who claim that he has married their daughter and is not granting her divorce as per Islamic laws.

The Siddiqui family claims Malik performed 'nikah' with their daughter Aisha in 2002 on telephone and is now refusing to divorce her.

Malik says he never married the Indian girl and the girl's family tried to trap him in an internet marriage scam.

Siddiqui has threatened to move court in Hyderabad against Malik. But the Pakistan skipper said he was leaving for Hyderabad this morning to play in the IPL.

"If you know there are two

The mood is set and what follows for an hour or so is a breathtaking spectacle of dancers, trapeze artists, a laser show and finally the sky is lit with fireworks, the likes of which one may have watched only in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

The thousands, who have for months been told that this new cricket event will revolutionize the way they see and watch cricket, feel their "own" Vijay Malia has not cheated them and are now waiting for more.

Then begins the cricket. Blood starts to flow again in the frozen fingers of relieved journalists who start completing their "toss report" though not sure how to combine the entertainment with the "reality" of cricket.

It does not matter to the crowd that their own Bangalore team is being ripped apart by some mind-boggling hitting by a New Zealander who is playing for the Kolkata team.

Most in the audience don't even know his name McCullum is even otherwise hard to pronounce. It does not matter for a while as they have all come for entertainment but as the minutes turn into hours, the response of the raucous crowd somehow goes tepid, not knowing whom to support.

Whether to enjoy Sourav Ganguly's dismissal or to celebrate Ishant Sharma's pace magic in shattering their own Rahul

Dravid's stumps.

The second half of the show is turning into a huge disappointment as not only is the home team losing, the contest is too lop-sided to be enjoyed and it is difficult to be as loyal to a state team as they are to India.

In the high-priced ticket area, liquor is flowing, keeping the crowd in good humour, but disappointment is visible, even though one can hear the scorer in the press box shouting the bowling figures of Ishant with all earnestness.

"I feel sorry for Malia," says a young enthusiast and admits there is somehow an emotional disconnect in watching this kind of cricket which, as another man puts it, "can't evoke a response which an India-Pakistan match will".

As the crowd disperses somewhat confused with to savour and what not to many feel that to get the stadium packed again, Malia will have to replicate the same kind of opening ceremony for all other six games scheduled at the ground.

The first day, first show is houseful, but not so the second day, second show in Mohali, though the crowds have turned up in huge numbers for the Delhi game.

The Kotla, in comparison to when the DDCA organizes a match, may have been less chaotic, but that is not saying much.

(Pradeep Magazine wrote this article on the Hindustan Times website)

Eng-India four Tests in 2011

REUTERS, London

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has ensured England will play four Test matches against India at home in 2011.

The ECB also said on Sunday that the tour to India later this year would comprise two Tests and seven one-day internationals, the preferred schedule of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

England begin their tour of India in November.

With the growth of Twenty20 cricket on top of the one-day internationals, ECB chief executive David Collier said it was important that Test matches formed a strong part of the home series against India.

"I am delighted that India will play four Test matches on their tour of England and Wales in 2011," he said in a statement. "The ECB has been strong and consistent in its insistence that Test cricket is still the predominant form of the game."

Collier also said England would have preferred to play three Tests on their tour of India.

Boucher Bangalore hero

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the hapless Kallis for three fours -- two bludgeoned down the ground, one flicked fine -- and a huge six over long-on. When he fell against the run of play, run out by a direct hit from Zaheer, Mumbai needed a steady hand to guide the innings, and Uthappa played that part well.

His familiarity with the opposition bowlers -- Vinay Kumar, Sunil Joshi and B A Kihl are all state-mates in first-class cricket -- helped him along too, as Vinay was late-cut delightfully and then hooked for six off successive balls. Uthappa improvised cleverly, moving to leg to clip the ball fine, or walking down the pitch to upset the bowlers, but he also reined in his attacking instincts, knocking the ball in the gaps during the middle overs.

When he fell just two short of his half-century, though, Mumbai only had 125 on the board with just 19 deliveries to go. Enter Pollock, who immediately turned it up a few

gears. After Abhishek Nayar had creamed a straight six off Vinay, Pollock dismissed the same bowler for a four and a six off consecutive balls. Praveen and Zaheer were taken for boundaries as well, as 40 came off the last five overs. The opposition team, though, had two other South African heavyweights to seal the deal.

SCORES IN BRIEF
MUMBAI INDIANS: 165 for 6 in 20 overs (Ronchi 8, Jayasuriya 29, Uthappa 48, Shah 19, Nayar 20, Pollock 28, Harbhajan 2; Zaheer 2-17, Akhil 2-17, Kumar 1-29)
BANGALORE ROYAL CHALLENGERS: 166 for 5 in 19.4 overs (Chanderpaul 16, Dravid 32, Taylor 23, Kallis 25, Kohli 23, Boucher 39 not out, Akhil 3 not out, Nehra 1-45, Kulkarni 1-19, Jayasuriya 1-39, Harbhajan 2-36)
Result: Bangalore Royal Challengers won by 5 wickets.
Man-of-the-match: Mark Boucher.

Toss: Mumbai Indians.
Umpires: Steve Davis and Daryl Harper.

Twin tons

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But it was the slow scoring rate that eventually prevented the home team to make at least another 20 to 30 runs.

Bangladesh may now wish for that coveted win in the final.

BRIEF SCORES
NATIONAL CRICKET ACADEMY: 243-6 in 50 overs (Sadat 9, Shamsur 79, Farhad 19, Mushfiqur 25, Mehra 36, Nasir 27, Nadif 3, Dollar 15; Aamir 2-48, Anwar 3-56, Shehzad 1-27).
PAKISTAN NATIONAL ACADEMY: 246-2 in 43.5 overs (Manzoor 12, Majeed 5, Shehzad 100 ret'd, Khalid 105, Azhar 19; Robin 2-38).
Result: PCA won by eight wickets.
Man-of-the-match: Ahmed Shehzad.

Four take lead in nat'l chess

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Biman duo Grand Master Abdullah Al Rakib and GM Ziaur Rahman were among four players who shared the lead in the 34th National Chess Championship at the federation hallroom yesterday.

International Master Enamul Hossain Rajib of Destiny and Monir Hossain of Pritam Club are the other players along with Rakib and Ziaur who have two points each.

They all won their respective matches on the day.

Sultan rejects resign letters

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president SA Sultan did not accept resignation letters of 13 executive committee members.

"What FIFA told us was to hand over the power to Election Commission after completion of the AGM (Annual General Meeting). That means, one should be released from the post before starting of the voting otherwise his voting rights will be null and void. That's why I didn't accept their resignation letters," explained Sultan yesterday.

Thirteen executive members out of 18 submitted their resignation letters to the BFF president few days back.

Meanwhile, after scrutinising the nomination papers, only one (Habibur Rahman from Pabna) was cancelled out of 60 papers submitted on Sunday for the elections of April 28.

WB to probe Eden snags

PTI, Kolkata

The West Bengal government on Monday constituted a three-member committee to probe mismanagement in the Eden Gardens during the Indian Premier League match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Deccan Chargers Sunday night which lowered the prestige of the famed ground.

Announcing the decision, the state's Sports Minister Subhas Chakraborty said the committee would look into the reasons for the disruption in power supply which had halted the match for 31 minutes as also the non-availability of adequate drinking water on the ground.

The committee would submit its report to the state government before April 29, the date for the next match at the Eden, suggesting measures to the Cricket Association of Bengal to prevent any recurrence of such lapses, Chakraborty said.

Holding the CAB officials responsible for the mismanagement, Chakraborty told newsmen, "I think such lapses occurred because of their inexperience. The CAB also failed to coordinate with the state government which could have made the arrangement foolproof." The committee would comprise an official each from the sports, PWD and police department, the minister said adding that the lapses should be rectified before April 29 or the second match in the Eden Gardens on that date would be deferred.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

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In other matches, Green Leaf (128-7) beat Kalindi Krira Chakra (125 all out) by three wickets at the City Club ground and Kakrail Boys (113-5) defeated Rayer Bazar Athletics (112 all out) by five wickets at the Dhaka University ground.

PREMIER VOLLEYBALL
Sonali Bank smashed Wari Club in a straight sets 25-23, 25-22, 25-20 victory in the Premier Division Volleyball League at the Volleyball Stadium yesterday.

In the day's other match at the same venue, Titus Club overpowered Water Development Board 14-25, 25-19, 26-24, 25-23.

Power Development Board take on the might of Fire Service in today's fixture.

DIVIII CRICKET
Gulshan Youth notched up a five-wicket win over Bangladesh Police in the Third Division Cricket League at the Uttara Friends Club ground yesterday.

Batting first after winning the toss, Police scored 132 for all in 36.4 overs with Raihan making 24. Nadim and Delwar claimed three wickets each.

In reply, Gulshan Youth reached their target in 25.2 overs for the loss of five wickets with Ashish contributing 57. Daulat grabbed two wickets for 16 runs.

In the day's other matches, Lalbagh Anwar (236 all out) defeated Uttara Friends Club (120 all out) by 116 runs at the Dhanmondi Club ground and Progati Seba Sangha (260-8) beat Sheikh Russell (199 all out) by 61 runs at the Gulshan Youth Club ground.

Federer ends title drought

Tennis

AP, Estoril

Roger Federer ended a long drought with his first title of the year, and it took a leg injury to his opponent to ensure victory for the world's top-ranked player.

Federer captured his 54th career title Sunday, winning the Estoril Open when second-seeded Nikolay Davydenko retired with a left leg injury while trailing 7-6 (5), 1-2.

"I think it's the first time in my life I play a final and someone gave up," Federer said. "I guess if you put yourself in the position so many times it's going to happen eventually, but you don't hope for it."

Federer returned to his winning ways in his fifth tournament of the season. It had been eight years since Federer had needed so many events to reach a final. He won despite windy conditions and the fact that he was playing on his most challenging surface. "It's great to win a title again, and to

straightaway win my first clay-court tournament of the season gives me great confidence going into Monte Carlo," the 26-year-old Swiss star said. "I guess now, if you get better conditions, (I'll) play so much better."

"Two months ago when I didn't have enough matches and because of my sickness everything looked a little more up in the air," said Federer, who has battled mononucleosis.

Davydenko, who is ranked fourth in the world, broke Federer's serve to start the second set before pulling out of the match.

"I was running to the left and I felt some stretched muscles and (it was) painful," said Davydenko, who had received 3 minutes of medical attention at the close of the first set. "Maybe I can finish match but I don't want to lose 6-2. I have the Masters tournament coming up, so what can you do? It's really tough."

Davydenko, who fell to 0-12 against Federer, said his opponent was as tough as ever.

"He had good control, he kept the same (play) as before," the

Russian said. "I don't see anything different between (the) last matches and now."

Federer added Estoril to his schedule in a bid to boost his chances of winning the French Open. The 12-time Grand Slam winner also recruited clay-court specialist Jose Higueras as coach to help win the only major championship missing from his collection.

Federer leveled his record in clay-court finals at 7-7 on a day on which cold and intermittent rain left both players reacting rather than dictating the play.

"Today was just the toughest conditions. You can't chase the line any more at all, you just try to keep the ball in play," Federer said. "It's just not easy to play aggressive tennis, it's more of a waiting game."

Maria Kirilenko beat Iveta Benesova 6-4, 6-2 to win the women's crown her third career title.

The second-seeded Russian broke Benesova's serve five times, helped by the Czech's five double faults. It was the third straight tournament in which Benesova lost in the final.

Fletcher warns fallen pace duo

BBC ONLINE, undated

Former England coach Duncan Fletcher says Steve Harmison and Matthew Hoggard may struggle to regain their Test spots after being dropped in New Zealand.

And Fletcher also believes that Andrew Flintoff needs to improve his batting as he is "not a Test match number six".

He told the Sunday Telegraph: "Harmison will find it hard. He'll need some consistent performances."

"I was not surprised (about Hoggard being dropped) -- he always struggled when he was the main strike bowler."

Fletcher led England to their first Ashes series win in 18 years when his team beat Australia 2-1 in 2005, as Harmison and Hoggard weighed in with 33 wickets while Flintoff scored over 400 runs and took 24 wickets.

However, Flintoff missed the recent Test series win over New Zealand with injury, while Harmison and Hoggard were dropped after England lost the first Test -- and went on to win the series without them.

But the fact that the pace pair are no longer first choice does not surprise Fletcher.

"It's typical Harmy -- he could and should be the number one bowler in the world but he can't seem to put it all together," he said.

"I saw an interview where he was having a go at some current players who had criticised him and saying something about not being able to wait to see them from 22 yards."

"Why does he need things like that to motivate himself?"

Hoggard's lack of pace is a worry for Fletcher, and he explained: "His speed has been dropping for a while."

"I heard someone say he's lost his nip, but I thought it had gone a while ago."

And on Flintoff, Fletcher added: "I hope his foot does allow him to bowl properly because otherwise his batting will need to improve."

"I think it has become pretty obvious he is not a Test match number six. He is a number seven."

High-scoring
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goal in the 46th minute and Imran Ahmed Sohail scored the second field goal in the 47th minute.

Mustafizur Rahman gave the final touch by capitalising on a penalty corner in the 64th minute to silence the Abahani fans.

Earlier, in the first game Wari Club blanked Bangladesh Sporting Club 3-0 to taste their first win in the competition.

Rana Das struck twice in the 19th and 63rd minutes, while Mahmudul netted the other goal in the 61st minute for the winners.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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| ACROSS | 35 Buck's mate | 54 Afternoon social | 19 Crony |
| 1 Fashion magazine | 36 Quiz answer, maybe | 55 Remove | 21 Annoy |
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| 8 Gush | 40 Eric-a-- | 2 Place | 24 Yuletide |
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| 14 Take-order | 43 Rapper's home | 6 Got the ball rolling | 27 Twosome |
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| 20 -- | 48 Exceptional | 11 Court | 36 Aviate |
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| 22 Mise-en-scene | 50 "So ba'it" | 13 Court | 39 Shadow |
| 26 Divulge a secret | 51 "So ba'it" | 14 Court | 40 Birthright |
| 29 Tattooist's supply | 52 "So ba'it" | 15 Court | 41 Barter |
| 30 Sticky stuff | 53 "So ba'it" | 16 Court | 42 2007 movie, --and the Real Girl |
| 31 Appellation | 54 "So ba'it" | 17 Court | 44 Worry |
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| 33 Periodicals, for short | 56 "So ba'it" | 19 Court | 46 Pirates' drink |
| 34 Intention | 57 "So ba'it" | 20 Court | 48 Tail tale |

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CRYPTOQUIP

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OIDMVXDBXJC UFNCOV
ODJED: "PNIDQYJF FJVNFD."
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHEN LAWYERS ZIP
THROUGH COURT SESSIONS RAPIDLY, I GUESS
THEY COULD BE CALLED TRIAL BLAZERS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: A equals Z.