

Pup to miss first Test

AFP, Sydney

Australian vice captain Michael Clarke will miss the first Test against the West Indies after delaying his departure to the Caribbean for family reasons, the player and officials said Friday.

Cricketer Australia said Clarke, also known as Pup, will arrive in Kingston, Jamaica on May 23 -- the second day of the first Test -- after staying in Australia to be with his fiancée following the death of her father.

"I will miss the first Test and am sure the boys will serve Australia well," Clarke said in a statement, noting that he would be "ready to go" for the second Test in Antigua.

Cricketer Australia's Michael Brown said: "I've spoken with Michael and he has Cricket Australia's absolute support. During this difficult time it is appropriate he spends a little more time with his fiancée's family in advance of leaving for the West Indies."

Brown said that Brad Hodge, who was added to the squad to replace the batsman, would be released from duties if he was not selected for the first Test.

Australia will play the first Test in the West Indies in Jamaica starting May 22, moving to Antigua for the second from May 30 and the final Test in Barbados on June 12.

The tour will also include one Twenty20 international and five one-dayers.

Kumble on Dravid's side

CRICINFO, undated

Anil Kumble has firmly backed Rahul Dravid, the captain of the Bangalore Royal Challengers, and said it was time "people who matter" understand what sports is all about.

Kumble's statement comes in the wake of the comments made by Vijay Malaya, the liquor baron who owns the franchise, where he defended his decision to sack Charu Sharma, the CEO, and also said his biggest mistake was to trust Dravid on matters of team selection.

"What's important though, is that at this time, you need all the support and backing you can get," Kumble wrote in his column for Hindustan Times. "You need the people around you, the people who matter, to understand what sport is -- all about, to realise that no one goes out there to lose."

"What's unfortunate is that, invariably, everyone starts pointing fingers at the captain. So it stands all the more to reason that people within the camp then stand up and say 'we believe in you and your team'. That's what's most important in this kind of situation. I do understand that the IPL is different and there is a corporate look and feel to the whole concept. But having said that, at the end of the day, it is a cricket match -- one that a cricketer does not want to lose."

Kumble admitted that his side had fallen too far back in the tournament -- after losing seven of their first nine games -- but felt there was still an opportunity to get back the winning feeling. "As players, we go through various ups and downs in our careers, there are phases when nothing one does is wrong and there are others where the same things that come so naturally to you seem like alien concepts," he wrote.

Mishra sinks

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hatrick, the second of the IPL. Mishra's calm under pressure ensured the calculated assault from Gambhir and Dhawan earlier in the innings was not in vain. They lost Sehwa in the first over, slashing a short and wide ball to third man, and it wasn't until the fourth over, when Gambhir pulled RP for consecutive sixes over midwicket that the innings finally gained momentum.

Gambhir went past 400 runs in the tournament during his 79 and he and Dhawan accelerated between overs 10 and 14 -- a period during which Delhi scored 64. Dhawan came into his own once the support bowlers -- Sarvesh Kumar and Styris -- operated, punishing anything full on the pads. He even reverse-swept Rao for four, and hit Afridi out of the attack with consecutive boundaries in an over that went for 18.

Delhi missed powerful finishers in previous matches but today the Sri Lankans -- Farveez Maharoof and Dilshan -- found the boundary several times to take them close to 200. That proved crucial in the end and Delhi could take heart from the fact that the architects of the victory were largely the local players and not the overseas recruits.

SCORES IN BRIEF
DELHI DAREDEVILS: 194 for 4 in 20 overs (Gambhir 79, Dhawan 68 not out, Maharoof 19, Dilshan 16, Tiwary 4 not out; Vijaykumar 1-24, Ojha 2-19)

DECCAN CHARGERS: 182 for 9 in 20 overs (Gilchrist 14, Afridi 33, Gibbs 22, Sharma 35, Styris 29, Rao 34, Teja 9, RP Singh 1; McGrath 2-42, Maharoof 2-39, Mishra 5-17)
Result: Delhi Daredevils won by 12 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Amit Mishra.
Umpires: BG Jerling (South Africa) and GA Pratapkumar
Toss: Deccan Chargers.

Federer in semis

AFP, Hamburg

Defending champion Roger Federer booked his place in the semifinals of the Hamburg Masters Series with a straight sets win over Fernando Verdasco on Friday.

World number one Federer looked very comfortable as he beat the Spaniard 6-3, 6-3 in 80 minutes and will face either unseeded local hero Nicolas Kiefer or Italy's Andreas Seppi in Saturday's semi-final.

Verdasco, 28th in the world, had removed fifth-seed David Ferrer and tenth-seeded Russian Mikhail Youzhny in previous rounds but a foot injury in the second set compromised his bid to oust his Swiss opponent.

"It was quite a tough match, he's a very talented player who is capable of beating any player on any surface, I had to work hard," said Federer.

"I thought he would come out and go for aces, but he hit some great shots off his back-hand."

Federer has won four of the last six tournaments in Hamburg and beat left-handed clay-court king Rafael Nadal in last year's final.

The Swiss star admitted it was good experience to face left-handed Verdasco, especially if he plays Nadal again in Sunday's final.

"It's always good to face left-

handed players, especially with Roland Garros coming up," he said.

"If you face a left-hander in

Paris it always helps if you have faced one a week ago rather than five months before."

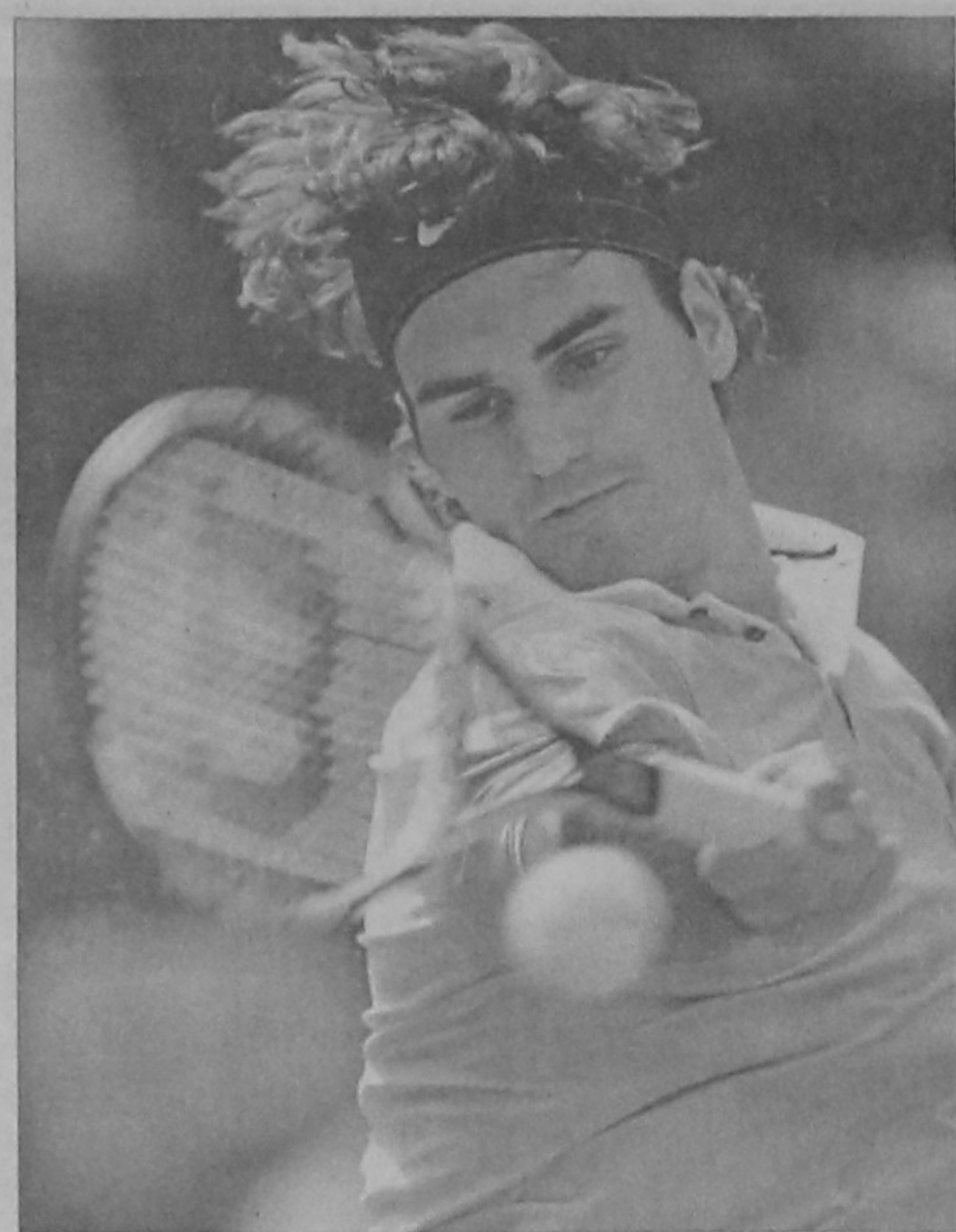


PHOTO: AFP

Swiss world number one Roger Federer plays a forehand return against Spaniard Fernando Verdasco during the quarterfinal of the Hamburg Masters tennis tournament on Friday.

Time to rise for WI: Dyson

AFP, St John's

West Indies coach John Dyson believes his team's daunting, imminent challenge against Australia could be the making of his Caribbean team.

The Windies face the world champions in the first of three Tests in Jamaica from May 22 with Dyson predicting some of his younger players will seize their opportunity against Ricky Ponting's men.

"This is the time for our guys to play their best cricket. This is a really great opportunity for them. As I look at the main players it is a chance to further enhance their reputations," said Dyson.

"When you look at the less high profile players, it is a golden opportunity for them to put their hands up and say: 'I have arrived', and really put some big numbers on the board."

"I have been telling them this is the time to really deliver and be counted, and what better occasion than against the best side in the world and in front of your supporters on home turf. If everyone delivers the team will surely benefit."

The West Indies have been training here since Monday and according to Dyson, the players have worked hard on getting ready for the three Tests, five ODIs and one Twenty20 international.

Sehwa hit by stones

CRICINFO, undated

Less than a day after Glasgow Rangers supporters went on the rampage in Manchester, it was the Delhi Daredevils' turn to reflect on morose behaviour from so-called fans. The game was tantalisingly poised, with the Deccan Chargers needing 24 from 11 balls and the in-form Venugopal Rao on strike. At that moment, Virender Sehwa ran in from the boundary to speak to Brian Jerling, the umpire. There was a lengthy delay, with no one quite sure what was going on. Only later, at the post-match press conference, did the reason come forth.

"It's a matter of shame that something like this happened in Delhi," said Sehwa. "And that too a stone thrown at a Delhi player." When asked about the identity of the player, he said: "Virender Sehwa". Perhaps the imbecile who threw the projectile was grumpy about zeroes in consecutive matches, including Thursday night, and he clearly didn't have the powers of recall to remember the thrilling knocks that had inspired Delhi to victory earlier in the competition.

The sordid incident wiped the smile off Sehwa's face, though there was considerable satisfaction at ending a four-match drought. With three more home games to play on a surface that suits their hard-hitting batsmen, Delhi are once again in the semifinals shake-up.

As well as the batsmen played today though, it was the bowlers that pulled this one out of the fire. The headlines on Friday may well

Brendon shifts talent

REUTERS, London

Brendon McCullum transported the special skills of limited overs cricket to the spiritual home of the game on Thursday in a bittersweet day for the New Zealand wicketkeeper.

McCullum rescued New Zealand's first innings on the opening day of the first Test against England at Lord's with a run-a-ball 97, taking the visitors from a precarious 104 for five to a comparatively respectable 208 for six.

A boundary short of his first Test century against England he then missed a straight ball from Money Panesar and was bowled.

While Panesar and the England team celebrated without restraint, McCullum stood for a minute with his head bowed before walking slowly back to the pavilion.

Four years ago he fell four short of a century at Lord's batting at number three.

"If we had been bowled out for 150 there was only one team that could have won this game," McCullum told a news conference.

"England are on top but for us it's not a bad day either. It was pretty bittersweet, I'm proud but a touch disappointed."

"Last time I got very nervous through the nineties. I have spend

the last four years thinking about it.

"This time I felt quite comfortable, I just thought remain aggressive, I just missed a straight one."

McCullum battled hard and had a share of luck in his first 50 runs. James Anderson was the pick of the England attack with three wickets but the ball moved around for all the bowlers after Michael Vaughan had won the toss and asked the Kiwis to bat.

"It was extremely tough batting conditions. You could be happy with playing an ugly innings for a period of time," McCullum added.

"Runs on the board was going to be the most significant aspect. At 100 for five it was teetering and in real danger of being rock and roll."

After reaching his ninth test half-century, McCullum began to take charge, moving down the pitch in a manner he has introduced to one-day cricket where he bats at opener.

"We have got plans for him but it's disconcerting," Anderson confessed.

McCullum said his good form in one-day cricket helped in what he called "the pinnacle of the game."

He was also self-deprecating about a magnificent six over extra-cover off the distinctly quick Stuart Broad.

"I think it was the only one I hit in the middle. It was quite nice," he said.

once again did the business. Gambhir is fast becoming a master of this cricket genre, playing to his strengths with genuine aplomb. He strikes the cross-bat shots as well as any Indian, and his footwork to the spinners was also hugely impressive.

Sehwa's blob didn't hurt them either, with Shikhar Dhawan once again showing off his maturity and tremendous bat speed. Whether it was hustling the ball through the covers or whipping it off the pads to fine leg, he struck it with such a punch that even fielders in the vicinity didn't bother to chase. The quick thrashes from Maharoof and Dilshan at the end were a nice little bonus.

Gilchrist laughingly called this losing run "good for the soul", but he wasn't smiling when he spoke about Delhi's use of substitute fielders. Mohammad Asif, who looked well short of form and fitness, went off and then came back on to bowl, prompting Gilchrist to say: "I think I should express my concern. If a bowler's fit enough to bowl, he's fit enough to field." He cited the catches taken by de Villiers and Shoaib Malik (who came on for Asif), but his insinuations about Delhi bending the rules evoked a sharp response from Sehwa.

"It was an external injury (split webbing on his hand) that Asif had," said Sehwa. "You can check the rules. When blood is being spilled, the umpires allow you to go off and then come back on. If they have no problem, neither should Gilchrist."

That pretty much summed up the mood of the evening. Deccan, down, out and lost even for good excuses, Delhi's sense of relief soured by the stone-throwing buffoon. Some days, no one wins.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

BKSP blanked Mukta Jiban 2-0 in the inaugural south zone match of the Pioneer Football League at the Mohammadpur Idgah ground yesterday.

Saifuddin and Nahid scored for the winners in the 31st and 46th minutes respectively.

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) vice president and former national footballer Badal Roy inaugurated the south zone matches as chief guest.

NATIONAL CRICKET CHAMPIONSHIP

The final round of the 28th National Cricket Championship, which was scheduled to begin from today, has been deferred by four days and now will kick off on May 21.

Dhaka will play against Comilla at the Sylhet Stadium in the opening match.

Eight venue champions qualified for the final round and the other teams are Narayanganj, Khulna, Barisal, Nilphamari and Rangpur.

DIVII CRICKET

Eskaton Sabuj Sangha defeated Dhanmondi Cricket Academy by 20 runs in a low-scoring encounter of the Second Division Super League at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Batting first, Eskaton were bowled out for 161 runs in 43 overs with Shama and Adil taking three wickets each. In reply, DCA were skittled out in the 47th over for only 141 runs. Shaiful took three wickets for Eskaton although Rumman put up some fight with the bat, scoring 25.

UNIVERSITY CRICKET

Hosts University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB) managed a seven-run victory over Brac University to reach the final of the ULAB Fair Play Cup Twenty20 tournament at their campus ground in Ramchandrapur.

ULAB scored 109-8 in stipulated 20 overs with Sohail scoring 25 runs and then restricted BRAC University for 102-9.

State University will face BRAC University in today's match.

DIVII KABADDI

Prisons Directorate and Swarnali Sangsad advanced to the final of the Second Division Kabaddi League by winning their respective semifinals at the outer stadium kabaddi court.

Prisons Directorate trounced Orbachin 76-11 in the first semifinal while Swarnali Sangsad crushed Institute of Kabaddi 67-21 in the second.

Usha keep

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reduce the arrears two minutes from time.

Meanwhile, Azad Sporting Club moved to fifth place with their third win when they came from behind to thrash second-from-bottom Bangladesh Sporting Club 6-2.

Azad secured nine points to topple Mariners in the table and brightened a chance to reach the superleague.

Pushkar Khisha scored two while Mansoor, Ajit, Jamil and Belal added the rest for Azad who led 3-2 in the first half.

Sajib and Anik scored for the losers.

POINTS TABLE

Teams	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	Total
Abahani	6	6	0	0	30	5	18
Usha	6	6	0	0	36	12	18
MSC	6	5	1	0	21	5	16
Sonali Bank	6	3	1	2	17	16	10
Azad	6	3	0	3	10	17	9
Maniners	6	2	1	3	10	17	7
Ajax	6	1	1	4	10	17	4
Wari	6	1	0	5	3	16	3
BSC	6	0	1	5	6	27	1
Bima	6	0	1	5	3	28	1

Sidebottom

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with the new ball, Sidebottom bowled Kyle Mills for 10 with an inswinger.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the second day of the first Test between England and New Zealand at Lord's on Friday:

NEW ZEALAND: First innings (overnight 208 for 6)

Howe c Ambrose b Anderson	7
Redmond c Cook b Anderson	0
Marshall c Strauss b Broad	24
Taylor c Collingwood b Broad	19
McCullum b Panesar	97
Flynn b Anderson	9
Oram c Strauss b Sidebottom	28
Vettori b Sidebottom	48
Mills b Sidebottom	10
Southe b Sidebottom	1
Martin not out	0
Extras: (b-16, lb-14, w-1, nb-3)	34
Total: (All out in 86.2 overs)	277
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 18-3, 41-4, 76-5, 104-6, 203-7, 222-8, 258-9, 260-10, 277-11	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Sidebottom	28.2	12	55	4
Anderson	20	5	66	3
Broad	24	4	85	2
Collingwood	3	1	11	0
Panesar	11	2	30	1

ENGLAND: First innings

Strauss not out	9
Cook not out	16
Extras: (nb1)	1
Total: (For no loss in 12 overs)	26
To bat: Vaughan, Pietersen, Bell, Collingwood, Ambrose, Broad, Sidebottom, Panesar, Anderson.	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Martin	6	2	15	0
Mills	5	0	10	0
Southe	1	0	1	0

Toss: England
Umpires: Simon Taufel (AUS) and Steve Bucknor (WIS)

'ACL revamp essential'

Football

THE-AFC.COM, Kuala Lumpur

With D-Day scheduled for May 20, when the AFC Pro-League ad-hoc committee announces the list of countries eligible to participate in the revamped AFC Champions League (ACL) next year, AFC president Mohamed Bin Hammam said he would like to make the elite competition comparable to its European relative.

"Professionalism in life means discipline, quality, accuracy, caring and a desire to continuously raise one's standards in all spheres. When these principles are inserted into the management of clubs, leagues and players aiming for top quality football, the product is bound to be remarkable. This is what a professional league is all about," said Hammam, who is spearheading the new wave of professionalism in the continent.

Replying to a question, the AFC boss said his organisation has selected the ACL because it is the biggest club competition and the jewel in the crown of Asian football.

"We did the groundwork by introducing slow reforms since 2002 but the time has come now to click up a gear for not just the Champions League but all competitions. We want the Champions League to be our creme-de-la-

creme and match the best football in the world. The AFC Champions League should be comparable to top European football."

He was, however, dismissive of the fears that due to the strict assessment criteria adopted by AFC, quality playing talent might be penalised for lack of infrastructure and other peripheral issues.



MOHAMED BIN HAMMAM

"I can assure everyone that quality players will not be penalised in anyway just because their clubs don't have the right infrastructure. The all-round steps and reforms we have undertaken will ensure that a player will have more opportunities to play outside his own country, in other leagues, get paid more, all depending on how talented he is

and how much his services are in demand. We are unleashing the market forces in Asian club football for the benefit of all."

He added that countries which do not meet the criteria for the new AFC Champions League, will play in the AFC Cup.

"From 2009 onwards, only those countries and clubs which meet the FIFA Club Licensing Regulations will be eligible to play in the AFC Cup. FIFA has set a deadline for all confederations to have their own club licensing regulations by the 2009-10 season and AFC is determined to meet it."

"The member associations are to transform the confederation's club licensing regulations into national club licensing regulations and implement the club licensing system at the national level by the 2010-11 season at the latest. If countries/clubs do not qualify for the AFC Cup then they will play at the lower level in the AFC President's Cup."

Hammam praised the pro-league committee, saying he was very happy and proud with the work they have done.

"They have produced documents and guidelines of very high quality and if implemented it will ensure the advancement of our football. They have exceeded our expectations."

Blanc plays down chances

AFP, Paris



Former World Cup winner Laurent Blanc has played down his chances of claiming the French league

title this weekend after his first full season as manager of Bordeaux.

Bordeaux go into their final match of the season, away at relegation-threatened Lens, with a two-point deficit on leaders Lyon, who are also away from home at Auxerre.

While there is still room for an upset for either club, Blanc believes Lyon will go on to claim a seventh consecutive league crown.

"You have to be realistic in football, we've got only a small chance of being crowned champions," the Bordeaux manager said Friday.

"We've done everything possible to make this end of season the most exciting one possible, and that's the way it's turned out -

which is great.

"But first of all we have to win at Lens, and that won't be easy because they are fighting relegation. They sure won't make things easy for us."

"We have to go there with a winning mentality or else we'll be 2-0 down after 20 minutes and Lyon will be champions."

Apart from the lure of beating the champions, Auxerre have little at stake in their final match of the season having secured their top flight survival in recent weeks.

Blanc believes that could heap the pressure on Lyon, but he also believes Alain Perrin's side have the mettle to beat any team.

"Auxerre will be totally liberated, and at home with the public behind them," added Blanc, who during France's World Cup winning campaign began the good luck trend of kissing the bald head of former France keeper Fabien Barthez.

"Lyon will have the most pressure, but they have the kind of team that can win anywhere."

A Bordeaux victory at Lens could send the northern 'Red and Gold' outfit - one of the best supported in the country - into the second division. Paris St Germain and Toulouse will join Lens this weekend in battling to avoid joining already relegated Metz and Strasbourg.

A draw for Lyon at Auxerre meanwhile will be enough to secure them a seventh consecutive crown, even if Bordeaux win at Lens.

Perrin admits the pressure is on, but has vowed that Lyon have been mentally preparing for the challenge.

"The pressure is on and it's not going to be easy," admitted the Frenchman, whose future at the club is reported to be hanging in the balance.

"We will be going to Auxerre knowing we have to dictate the match and not sit back and wait for them to take the match to us."

"Auxerre have a good side so we're expecting a Cup-like match that will be played at a high tempo."

Pistorius makes history

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