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Did U Know?

An electronic service-line monitor - later known as 'Cyclops' - was first introduced at the Wimbledon Championships in 1980.



Arjen Robben

(Dutch winger)
"It's amazing that a Dutch team with so much quality can get beaten. It's a difficult night for us. It's a sad story."

After losing to Russia in the quarterfinals of the Euro 2008 Championship on Saturday.



What to Watch

ESPN
Asia Cup Cricket
Bangladesh v UAE
Live from 4:00pm
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 7:30pm

STAR Cricket
Asia Cup Cricket
Pakistan v Hong Kong
Live from 4:00pm

STAR Sports
Wimbledon Championships
First Round
Live from 5:00pm

TEN Sports
West Indies v Australia
First ODI
Live from 7:30pm

Irfan causes a concern

CRICINFO, undated

India have a minor concern before their Asia Cup campaign takes off with reports that all-rounder Irfan Pathan has picked up a knee injury after the Kitchy Cup last week.

"It is a minor injury and he might sit out for one-odd game," Niranjan Shah, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary, told Cricinfo.

Pathan was set to visit the MRF Pace Foundation in Chennai last Saturday to discuss his bowling with TA Sekar, the chief consultant. However, failed to turn up for the session.

"He wanted to discuss certain aspects about his technique but later on, reported about some stiffness," Sekar said. It was also reported that Nitin Patel, the team physio, had noted that Pathan was fifty per cent fit and will need rest to recover completely.

Pakistan on safety test

REUTERS, Lahore

Pakistan's ability to host an international tournament without any security problems will be examined when the six-nation Asia Cup begins on Tuesday.

India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and associate members Hong Kong and United Arab Emirates contest the event with questions remaining over the International Cricket Council's (ICC) decision to award September's Champions trophy to Pakistan.

ICC officials said last week that the Asia Cup would be monitored closely ahead of the eight-team tournament after Australia postponed their planned tour Pakistan in March following a spate of suicide bombings.

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Asian war begins today

Tigers take on UAE, Pakistan meet HK

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan and Bangladesh both face minnows as the ninth Asia Cup begins on Tuesday, with the hosts hoping the event passes smoothly to pave the way for more international cricket in future.

Pakistan face Hong Kong in Karachi while Bangladesh play the United Arab Emirates in the first round. Defending champions Sri Lanka and India are the other teams in the six-nation event which runs until July 6.

The Asia Cup serves as a dress rehearsal for Pakistan's hosting of the eight-nation ICC (International Cricket Council) Champions Trophy in September.

Several foreign teams, led by Australia who postponed a Test and one-day tour to Pakistan in March-April this year, are considering a boycott of the Champions Trophy over safety concerns.

Pakistan has been hit by political upheaval and a wave of suicide

bombings in the past year, which have claimed more than 1,000 lives, although the violence has tailed off in recent months.

However, if Pakistan stages the Asia Cup without any trouble then foreign teams will be left with little choice other than to take part in the ICC event.

The ICC last week gave Pakistan the all-clear for the September tournament but said it will continue to monitor the situation.

Pakistan, which is staging the Asia Cup for the first time since its inception in 1984, is confident of a positive start to the competition.

"We are confident that if we play tough cricket we can win the competition," said captain Shoaib Malik ahead of his team's Group B match, adding that the match against arch rivals India on Thursday will be the key to reaching the final.

"We will take it match by match. First up is Hong Kong and we don't want any let ups in that match which we should win without any discomfort," said Malik.

Hong Kong's English coach

Aftab Habib said his side would remember the Irish feat of upsetting Pakistan in the World Cup held in the Caribbean last year.

"Cricket is a funny game and we should remember there were lots of upsets in the 2007 World Cup so we must give it our best to upset Pakistan," said Habib, who played two Tests for England in 1999.

In Lahore, Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful is eyeing a spot in the second round with a win over the UAE.

"Our first target is to get a place in the second round so we should play quality cricket to beat the UAE and then focus on the bigger game against Sri Lanka," said Ashraful.

For UAE they have no choice but to try to upset Bangladesh.

"We have prepared well for this competition and know that the only chance to reach the second round is to beat Bangladesh," said UAE captain Saqib Ali.

The top two teams from each group will qualify for the super league where each side will play each other to decide the July 6 finalists. Asian war begins today.

Stop the decline, please

Football

AL MUSABBIR SADI

After national team, disaster has struck our football in club level too.

Not so long ago, a mediocre club from Dhaka would go to Nepal and win a club tournament comfortably.

In the 80s, scoring at will against a Maldives club was as easy as putting eight goals past their national team. Those days are over now.

After the national team were overwhelmed by lower-ranked teams like Afghanistan and Bhutan, Abahani's humiliating defeat to Nepal Police Club in Sunday's AFC President's Cup match in Kuala Lumpur proves that.

Shocking? No. There had been no competitive football at the top level since August 1, 2007 when the B. League had concluded. The writing was on the wall for long. We just ignored it while Bangladesh's world ranking slid down to as low as 183.

Now Bangladesh don't even get

to play in the 2011 Asian Cup pre-qualifiers, which they did December 2005 and went on to compete in the qualifiers after a 0-0 home draw with Pakistan and a 1-0 away victory. There goes the chance of playing at least six international matches, three at home.

It all happened because Bangladesh were relegated to the third-tier (the least developed) of Asian team due to poor performance.

It is not difficult to trace out where the rot began, how did it continue or who are responsible for this.

A visiting Sri Lankan introduced football to the Maldives in the 1970s, when Bangladesh had already had their affiliation with FIFA and AFC.

The game is now played by just over 5,000 of the Indian Ocean island chain's below 3-lakh population. Their first division comprises with just six clubs and when they played in the regional SAF Games, Maldives immediately became the wooden spoon of their group, losing 5-0 to Bangladesh in 1984 and 8-0 in the following year.

In 1986, Maldives became affili-

ated with AFC and FIFA and continued improving, reaching the final of the inaugural SAFF Championship in 1997.

Holding Asian football powerhouse and 2002 World Cup finalists South Korea to a goalless draw in the 2006 World Cup qualifiers might have put the entire nation to a standstill but their triumph in the fifth SAFF Championship earlier this month after beating India in the final stands as the best result in the brief history of Maldives football.

It proves how planning and dedication can lead even a small nation to glory.

Nepal were also on the decline after winning two SAF Games soccer titles but now seem to take the right road through club football.

Their national team have yet to re-establish their status in the region but it would not take them long to cash on a club's success. Nepal Police Club finished runners-up in last year's President's Cup and began exactly where they had left off.

Why talk about Nepal's club
SEE PAGE 18 COL 6

ODI battle starts today

Fresh Aussies aim to upend the Windies

Cricket

AFP, Kingston

World champions Australia hope that some fresh faces, fresh legs, and a different format will help them dominate their five-match one-day international series against West Indies, starting on Tuesday at the Arnos Vale Sports Complex here.

Although Australia won the preceding three-Test series 2-0, West Indies were far more competitive than expected, and gave strong evidence that they may be turning the corner on their wretched status in international cricket.

Australia have been boosted for the series by the arrival of a half-dozen limited-overs specialists

whom they hope will carry them over the top. They are Nathan Bracken, James Hopes, David Hussey, Shaun Marsh, Shane Watson, and Cameron White.

The six have arrived at a crucial time for Australia with Andrew Symonds nursing a sore back. Brad Haddin recuperating from a broken finger, and Brett Lee still trying to overcome his exertions on unforgiving pitches in the Test series.

They could all expect to feature in the first ODI as Australia start to shop around for players to defend the ICC Champions Trophy scheduled to be contested in September in Pakistan.

Australia will also be mindful of giving the players as much opportunities as possible in a period when their side is going through a

transition. They will want to make it as seamless as possible and avoid the pitfalls of other sides around the world, most notably their hosts.

West Indies will be looking to play as competitively as they did during the Tests, and give further proof that they are truly beginning to "turn the corner".

Their feisty performance in the Tests, and a comfortable win in the badly rain-affected Twenty20 International last Friday have boosted West Indies' confidence.

But if they are to win, they will have to grasp every opportunity they receive which is where they will admit they failed in the Test matches.

They will be at full strength for the series, and they too, have added
SEE PAGE 18 COL 8



India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (R) and one of his teammates stretch during a practice session at the National Cricket Stadium in Karachi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Spanish football fans celebrate their national team's progress to the semifinals of the Euro 2008 on the square of Colon in Madrid on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

SCORE AGAINST DANDRUFF WITH CONFIDENCE

CLEAR men

NO DANDRUFF*

Mahbubul spearheads Bangladesh A

SPORTS REPORTER

Mahbubul Alam gave Bangladesh A team a bright start in their tour opener three-day match against Ireland A in Dublin yesterday.

The right-arm pacer claimed five wickets for 57 runs in 16.3 overs as the home team were bundled out for 159 in 55.3 overs after tea on the first day.

The second string Irish side lost wickets at regular intervals after Mahbubul started the carnage by removing Hall for naught.

The only resistance came from opener Reinhardt Strydom who made 41 before being caught by Rajin Saleh of Mahbubul.

Syed Rasel, Nazmul Hossain, Suhrawardi Shuvo, Arafat Sunny and Nayeem Islam took one wicket each.

Abahani play Regar today

SPORTS REPORTER

After crashing 4-0 to Nepal Police Club on Sunday, Abahani will take on Tajikistan league champions Regar-TadAZ in their second match of the AFC President's Cup Group A match today in Kuala Lumpur.

The match will kick off at the MPPJ Stadium in the Malaysian capital at 4.30pm Bangladesh time.

The Bangladesh professional league champions must win against the mighty Tajiks, who had won the competition's inaugural edition in 2005, to stay in contention for two of the semifinal berths yet to be occupied.

Tajikistan also got off to a winning start, beating Pakistan WAPDA 2-1 in Sunday's second match.

Group A winners and the best runners-up side from the three pools qualify for the semifinals to be held in Kyrgyzstan capital Bishkek from September 19-21.

Ashgabad of Turkmenistan and defending two-time champions Dordoi-Dynamo of Kyrgyzstan have already reached the semifinals.

India outlaws ICL players

AFP, New Delhi

The proposed 10-million-dollar Twenty20 Champions League was thrown into turmoil on Sunday after India rejected the participation of English counties that field 'rebel' players.

Indian cricket chiefs said they will host the tourney in September-October featuring the top two
SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Lightweights march on

AFP, Paris



now.

Whereas Europe's "Big three" of Germany, Italy, France have regularly picked off World Cup honours, where the European Championships are concerned the glory has in contrast been spread around with nine different winners suggesting smaller nations are punching above their weight.

Inspired by Dutch, Danish and Greek wins in the past two decades the likes of Portugal and the Dutch themselves arrived for Euro 2008 looking to show that you don't need a big population to finish top of the heap.

Now, while the Euro drought goes on for the Italians and 2000 champions France must embark upon a period of self-searching and renewal - accompanying absent England down that twisting road - the four countries who have made it to the last four are a curious mix of what the European game has to offer.

Germany are, as ever, at the forefront, a squad that looks somewhat thin on major stars seemingly

able to move up a gear almost at will, as the Portuguese found out to their cost in the quarters.

The reputation of Die Mannschaft always goes before it with three titles and two finals as well as three World Cups.

But the remaining semifinalists, while not small fry, hardly come to the table covered in past glories.

Were one to ask the Russians and the Spanish, who face off Thursday in Vienna, as well as the Turks, who must stop the German juggernaut, to "show us your medals," the former pair could proffer just one European title each - Russia in 1960 (as the Soviet Union) and the Spanish four years later.

The Turks meanwhile reached their apogee to date with third-place at the 2002 World Cup.

The semi-finals, then, consist never-write-them-off Germany and three historical underdogs of war.

Form is not much of a guide with Joachim Loew's side bested by Croatia in the group and the Spanish are the only group winners still in contention after Guus Hiddink turned "traitor" as his Russia sent his native Dutchmen flying.

Form goes out of the window almost when a Russian side which outplayed a Dutch team that had thrashed Italy and France began its tournament by crumbling to Spain.

Only the Germans can call on their experience of excelling con-

sistently both at World Cup and Euro level - something which their abiding eminence grise Franz Beckenbauer believes could be a crucial advantage as Loew and company build up a head of steam.

"By knocking out Portugal, we eliminated one of the favourites, who had excelled in the group stages.

"But that's often what happens in tournaments: Whoever excels in the early stages rarely goes all the way," Kaiser Beckenbauer told the mass daily Bild Zeitung.

Beckenbauer and former international teammate Gunter Netzer maintain when push comes to shove, the last men standing will normally - Greece were a once in 30-years miracle according to coach Otto Rehhagel - be those who can point to a long record of achievement.

That usually means the Germans or the Italians, who both tend to begin cautiously but then embark upon a continual upward curve.

With the Italians put on the spot and eliminated by the Spaniards Kaiser Franz says "Europe now fears" the Germans have had their blip, survived and are now ready to pounce for their first silverware since Euro 96.

"I couldn't see any weaknesses in the team at all. With more performances such as that one [against
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Hail 'Saint' Casillas

AFP, Madrid



beat world champions Italy on penalties on Sunday.

'Publico' led the way in hailing the progress of Luis Aragones' players as they ended 88 years without a win in a competitive match against Italy and a series of penalty shootout losses in quarterfinals on June 22.

"Spain has laid to rest the curse," commented Publico.

"The two penalty saves by Iker (Casillas) saw Italy go out and handed a ticket for the semifinals to the Spanish team for the first time since 1984," it added referring to Spain's reaching the Euro '84 semis where they went on to the final only

to lose to hosts France.

'El Mundo' agreed with them, a fact underlined by King Juan Carlos who said exactly the same thing to Spanish TV on Sunday, and it also praised Casillas to the high heavens.

"Spain as a country has one less complex, that of its football team which had eaten away at national pride, in a modern country which has been incapable till now to reflect that progress in sport which is the metaphor for so many things," it added rather portentously.

Sports journal 'Marca' also gave Casillas the big thumbs up.

"Casillas laid to rest the ghosts," it wrote about the Real Madrid star.

"This is a goalkeeper that likes strong emotions, and he wanted this moment after three relatively easy group matches."

As ever, though, noted the paper the 'Furia Roja' had made it difficult for themselves.

"La Roja had possession and

several chances but were not able to ensure the victory until the last moment," wrote Marca.

Marca's rival 'AS' claimed that Spain had outclassed Italy and deserved victory, while Casillas was one of the heroes of the evening.

AS said that Casillas was 'perfect' and that Brazilian-born midfielder Marco Senna had been 'phenomenal'.

However, there were some rather less complimentary appraisals such as 'El Pais' for example.

"Spain played for its future in the tournament on penalty kicks, which has traditionally not been lucky for them," said El Pais.

"Those came after a bad match against Italy, without any goals and barely any scoring chances."

"ABC" was just glad that the old refrain would not be heard again. "At least from today we will not hear the refrain: 'we played as well as we ever had and lost like we always do, in the quarterfinals'."