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Messi going to Beijing

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona striker Lionel Messi says he will defy his Spanish club's orders and join up with Argentina's Olympic squad this week.

The Argentina international has been at the centre of a tug of war between club and country with Barcelona trying to retain him for their Champions League qualifier tie in August.

Messi, speaking before a FIFA judge declared that clubs were under an obligation to release their under-23 players for Beijing, said: "If FIFA says I should be there then I'll go without waiting for CAS [Court of Arbitration for Sport] ruling."

Barca have announced they will contest FIFA's ruling to CAS.

Messi added: "If CAS says that I have to return then I'll come back but for the moment I want to be with my country and my teammates."

The player has until Friday to link up with coach Sergio Batista's Argentina's Olympic squad in training in Japan.

Messi's stance was backed by the FIFA-appointed judge's ruling confirming clubs were obliged to release players aged 23 for the Olympics.

A statement issued by world football's governing body FIFA confirmed the judge of the Players' Status Committee, Slim Aloulou, agreed with FIFA's previous ruling that it was "mandatory" for players to be released for Olympic duty.

The judge was called to rule on the matter after Werder Bremen, Schalke and Barcelona questioned FIFA's stance as the Olympics do not appear on FIFA's official calendar.

Bremen and Schalke are unhappy with the inclusions of Diego and Rafinha, respectively, in the Brazil squad.

CAS will now have the final say on the matter after Bremen, Schalke and Barca filed complaints.

Marshall returns

Cricket
SPORTS REPORTER

After a year in wilderness, talented batsman Marshall Ayub is all set to play competitive cricket as the right-hander was included in the 14-member GP-BCB National Academy squad for their South Africa trip.

Chief selector Rafiqul Alam said while declaring the team in a press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday that the promising cricketer has fully recovered from his knee injury.

"Marshall is now fully fit to play competitive cricket and has been practicing with the academy players for the last one and a half months," informed Rafiq.

Academy operations manager and former national captain Khaled Mahmud was excited with the return of the talented batsman.

"It's good news because he has a lot of potential to serve the game for a long time. His left knee was successfully operated and now he is fully fit," said Mahmud.

The Academy side will leave Dhaka on August 4 to play two four-dayers and three one-day matches against their South African counterparts in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

This time there was no Test player but Rafiq however didn't make it clear whether they changed their selection policy for the Academy side.

"We picked the best side from the available 19 Academy players as six of them are traveling with the Bangladesh A team in England. We excluded the players touring in England as getting South African visa for them from England would be difficult," responded Rafiq.

The new development committee boss Shakil Kasem spelled out the importance of the Academy team with the fact that our domestic competition is still not organised enough to groom the players for the highest level of the game.

"It is the breeding ground. The next four-five years is very important for us because we have to produce some quality players to fill the gap. As our domestic competitions are not still organised enough, from where actually do these players get seasoned before entering into the international stage? So we have to concentrate more on the Academy team," explained the newly-appointed development committee chairman.

"We can't perform as well in international cricket as we should do, so we try to take care of these potential young cricketers, the future of Bangladesh cricket, through sending them to different countries in line with bilateral agreements," he added.

The former cricketer said that for an additional input they have decided to arrange a discussion session on August 2 where former and current national players like Mohammad Rafique, Khaled Mashud and Mohammad Ashraf will share the knowledge of their

ITINERARY

Aug 8-11	1st four-dayers, Pretoria
Aug 14-17	2nd four-dayer, Pretoria
Aug 20	1st one-dayer, Johannesburg
Aug 22	2nd one-dayer, Pretoria
Aug 24	3rd one-dayer, Johannesburg

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NORTHERN DELIGHT: Players of Rajshahi jump for joy after clinching the Spectra Group National Women's Kabaddi Championship title at the Kabaddi Stadium yesterday.



Grameenphone's marketing director Rubaba Dowla (2nd from R) speaks as BCB development committee chairman Shakil Kasem (2nd from L), chief selector Rafiqul Alam (L) and GP-BCB operations manager Khaled Mahmud listen during a press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Glamour couple splits

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Australian swimming's glamour couple, Stephanie Rice and Eamon Sullivan, have split up just before the Olympic Games but insist their preparations have not been affected.

Sullivan is the 50m freestyle world record holder and Rice set world marks in the 200m and 400m individual medley earlier this year, although the latter has since been eclipsed.

Both are considered hot medal contenders in Beijing.

"It was a mutual decision. We decided to take a break to allow us

to focus entirely on the Olympics," Sullivan said Wednesday in Kuala Lumpur where the Australian team are training and acclimatising.

"If it was going to distract us in any way then we wouldn't have made that decision. We're still friends and I don't regret anything that I have done over the past two years."

He added that no one else was involved.

Asked if they would resume the relationship after the Games, he said: "You never know what the future holds but we are not thinking about that at the moment."

Rice, 20, and Sullivan, 22, were hailed as Australia's sporting power couple in the lead up to the Olympics, with marketing experts predicting a successful Games would lead to millions of dollars in sponsorships.

Party photos of the pair -- showing Rice in a series of raunchy poses -- helped build their image and they were back on Australia's front pages this month promoting a new underwear brand.

Despite the love split, which was announced on their Facebook pages, Australian head coach Alan Thompson insisted Wednesday both were professional enough to maintain their focus and denied it had affected the rest of the team.

"It doesn't concern anyone else in the team, it's not a nasty breakup, it's a mutual decision between two kids," he said.

"I haven't spoken to them about

BCB seminar concludes

SPORTS REPORTER

A two-day training seminar for managers of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) concluded at the Spectra Convention Centre in the city on Tuesday.

Organised by BCB game education wing of the game development department, the seminar was presented by renowned Sri Lankan International Marketing Consultant and Corporate Trainer Dr Upali Mahanama.

Mahanama, a former executive committee member of the Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC), touched and elaborated on corporate management principles and professionalism and ways to operate more efficiently within the modern day corporate cricket structure.

"A short course like this will not turn you into a different person overnight. However, if you can take two or three key points from here and improve your knowledge, skills, discipline and leadership then you will become a better professional," said Mahanama in his closing speech.

"Those of you who work as managers at the BCB have responsibility that can not be compared to that of other corporate houses or multinationals. You are directly involved with the aspirations and dreams of millions of this nation. I am sure you all have gained from



Australian Olympic swimming star Stephanie Rice stretches during the second day training camp at Bukit Jalil Sports Complex on Wednesday. The Australian swimming team is in Malaysia for a final week-long training.

Rajshahi clinch kabaddi title

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi clinched the title of the Spectra Group National Women's Kabaddi Championship when they beat Bangladesh Ansar 20-18 in a keenly contested final at the kabaddi court yesterday.

The winners bounced back in the second-half after trailing 6-10 in the first session and they managed one creditable 'lona' in the final.

Fatema Akhter Sheela of Rajshahi was adjudged the player-of-the-tournament.

In the semifinals Bangladesh Ansar outplayed Faridpur 38-12 while Rajshahi beat Narail by 24-12 points.

Ashiqur Rahman Miku, general secretary of the District and Divisional Sports Associations

A Lankan fortress

Galle Test begins today

Cricket
CRICINFO, Galle

Galle has been something of a fortress for Sri Lanka: they have lost just one of their last nine Tests here since July 2000. Both Mahela Jayawardene and Kumar Sangakkara have spoken of the fact that having fewer Test venues in the country gives Sri Lanka an advantage, as they know the conditions better. Six wins from 12 matches in Galle, with just two defeats, sums up that confidence.

The only two teams to beat Sri Lanka in Galle, Pakistan and Australia, did so because they managed massive totals. In 2000 Pakistan scored 600 for 8 and won by an innings and 163 runs. In 2004 Australia faced a 161-run deficit but made 512 in their second innings to win the match by 197 runs.

Sri Lanka's strategy at home has always been simple: put up a large total and hand it over to Muttiah Muralidaran and Chaminda Vaas.

Before the tsunami of 2004 demol-

ished the old ground, the majority of Sri Lanka's six wins were engineered by Murali, who took 87 wickets in those games. And as Jayananda Warnawera, the curator who has virtually lived all his life at the stadium, pointed out on the eve of this Test, this is a spin-friendly track.

Muralidaran has always loved playing in Galle, and 51 of his 91 Test wickets here have come in victories. "He troubled the Indian batsmen, the only Test played between the two at Galle in 2001, taking eight wickets to inspire a 10-wicket victory. As repeatedly stressed, the pressure from Ajantha Mendis, who proved an able ally at the SSC, will offer India little respite.

Dammika Prasad's call-up to a squad of 15 was seen in some circles as pressure on Chaminda Vaas, but Jayawardene said Sri Lanka will not change their XI from Colombo. Spin is certainly Sri Lanka's strength but Jayawardene credited Vaas' success in similar conditions as key against India in this Test.

"When you have two quality

Sharmin will carry flag

SPORTS REPORTER

Sharmin Akhter, SAFF Games gold medalist shooter, will carry Bangladesh's flag in the march past during the Galle opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympic, scheduled for August 8 to 24.

The decision was taken at the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) meeting yesterday.

"Sharmin has been given the honour considering his previous successes and she is the best among six athletes taking part in the meet," said BOA secretary general Kutubuddin Ahmed.

Sharmin, who secured gold, silver and bronze medals from regional extravaganza and finished fourth in Asia Shooting Championship, will compete in 10m air rifles event in the Beijing Olympic.

Apart from Sharmin, five more

Nel nails England

Cricket
AFP, Birmingham

Andre Nel took three wickets and sparked a slump by England on the first day of the third Test against South Africa at Edgbaston here on Wednesday.

England were 173 for six at tea, a disappointing total after they won the toss and made a solid start on an easy-paced pitch.

Nel, making his return to the Test side in place of the injured Dale Steyn, dismissed England's top three batsmen at a cost of 43 runs.

He could have done even better because he twice induced edges from Ian Bell which fell just short of the slips. Bell went on to make 50.

might have got a faint edge to the ball.

Three overs later Kevin Pietersen tried to play Jacques Kallis to leg and the ball looped off his pad to Ashwell Prince at backward point. He was given out caught although the ball probably did not touch his bat.

Ironically he could have been given out leg before wicket as replays showed the ball would have hit his stumps. Cook made an impressive 76 off 125 balls before Essex county colleague Nel had him caught low down by a diving Kallis at second slip.

Paul Collingwood, recalled after being dropped for the second Test, looked out of touch and took 18 balls to score his first runs, a cover drive for four off Morkel.

Vaughan looked surprised at the decision but replays indicated he

Army back on track

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Army bounced back from their first match defeat when they blanked Bangladesh Customs Krira Parishad 2-0 in the Citycell Federation Cup football tournament's qualifying round at the Army Stadium yesterday.

Ahsanur Rahman was the hero who struck twice in either half in the Group C encounter.

The winners took lead when



South Africa paceman Andre Nel removes England captain Michael Vaughan, who fell for a golden duck, in the first innings of the third Test at Edgbaston in Birmingham on Wednesday.



Did U Know?

The winner of the Indianapolis 500-Mile Race, often shortened to Indianapolis 500 or Indy 500, in 1915 had to get out and push his broken car for more than the last mile of the race.



Shoaib Malik

(Pakistan cricket captain)
"A good close shave makes you feel you can do anything and be the best at everything."

What to WATCH

TEN Sports
Sri Lanka v India
Second Test, Day One
Live from 10:45am

ESPN
AFC Challenge Cup
North Korea v Sri Lanka
Live from 4:25pm
Myanmar v Nepal
Live from 6:55pm
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

STAR Cricket
England v South Africa
Third Test, Day Two
Live from 4:00pm