

Yousuf laments fewer games

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan batsman Mohammad Yousuf has expressed disappointment at the lack of international cricket opportunities available to the national team.

Pakistan will go without a Test this year as Australia postponed their tour to Pakistan because of security reasons.

Yousuf, one of Pakistan's most accomplished batsmen with 79 Tests and 269 one-day internationals behind him, said he was concerned about the future of Pakistan cricket in the existing circumstances.

"It is very disappointing that Pakistan hasn't played a Test match this year. I don't think such a thing has happened to any country in the past," Yousuf said.

To make matters worse the Champions Trophy which was to be held from September 12 in Karachi and Lahore was also postponed because of security concerns.

Yousuf said lack of Test cricket would affect the progress of Pakistani cricketers.

"We would have played at least three Tests had Australia toured Pakistan but it is very sad that we are having a year without Tests. The more Test matches in Pakistan, the better for the country since Test cricket is the real test of a player's temperament and skill," Yousuf said.

Pakistan last played a Test in December in India and their next match would also be against archrivals at home in January.

Yousuf also dispelled the impression that he had started to lose interest and passion for cricket because of his growing religious commitments.

"My religious duties are a way of life for me and cricket is my profession and passion. I don't mix both of them. I opted out of the Champions Trophy because I had prior commitments in Ramadan," he said.

PCB to go on with lawsuit

PTI, Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) legal counsel on Saturday said that even though the Champions Trophy has been postponed, it had not affected the status of the legal notice sent to fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar, which had asked him to pay a fine of seven million rupees.

The PCB had sent a notice to the controversial paceman asking him to pay the fine or he would not be considered to play in the Champions Trophy despite being selected in the final squad of 15 players.

Tafazzul Rizvi said that the notice to Shoaib did mention the Champions Trophy because it was the next tournament in line.

"But now the notice applies to any tournament or series that Pakistan plays next. Before he can the wear the Pakistan colours, he has to pay the fine or he gets an injunctive order from any court against the fine," Rizvi said.

Rizvi confirmed that Shoaib had received the notice and so has his lawyer.

"We sent it to the pacer via courier and to his lawyer by e-mail, fax and courier and it has been received. But so far they have not responded to the notice," he added.

Shoaib was asked to pay the seven million rupees fine by an appellate tribunal which in June reduced a ban of five years imposed on him by the PCB's disciplinary committee to 18 months.

The fast bowler filed a writ petition in the Lahore high court against the ban and fine. The court will hear the petition from next month and suspended the ban till the case is heard but didn't pass any stay on the payment of the fine.

Rizvi said he hoped that the fast bowler would make his position clear on the payment of the fine soon.

Ballack doubtful for friendlies

AFP, Frankfurt

Germany captain Michael Ballack is doubtful for next month's 2010 World Cup qualifiers against Liechtenstein and Finland because of a niggling foot injury, the German Football Federation (DFB) said on Saturday.

Ballack spoke by telephone on Friday with Joachim Loew (Germany coach) to tell him that his foot injury picked up at the start of the English championship was still painful, "the DFB said.

"It's probable that he will need a longer break."

The 32-year-old, who has won 87 caps and scored 38 goals for the national side, will join the German team on Tuesday to have his injury further assessed.

Ballack already missed an international friendly against Belgium, and will not play in Sunday's Premier League tie against Tottenham.

Germany play Liechtenstein on September 6 at Vaduz and Finland four days later in Helsinki.



Indian players celebrate on top of their skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni's prize at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo on Friday after their 3-2 ODI series win over Sri Lanka.

Dhoni hails team spirit

Cricket

CRICINFO, Colombo

At the end of a series few expected India to win, their captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni readily paid tribute to his young bunch of hopefuls, who came to Sri Lanka under criticism for their defeat in the Asia Cup final. Stressing a collective effort rather than the need to rely on experienced or individual players, Dhoni credited a group that, while not always in form, stuck together to give India their first bilateral series win on Sri Lankan soil in 23 years of trying.

"Cricket's not a game in which you can rely on form in the sense that you can get a good start but the bowler running in is in better touch," he said. "If you get a start and the rest bat around you, you get a chance to put up a big score. If we win series like this we can afford to carry the players who aren't in form. You know what they're capable of and they've paid dividends in the past. But you cannot rely on one individual."

That was India's leitmotif all series, and it's paid off. India lost key players to injury and Dhoni was quick to admit this series win was a real achievement, stressing on the importance of continuance. "You can't sit back and say you won the World Twenty20 or the CB Series or this series. Sachin [Tendulkar] and [Virender] Sehwag help achieve consistently, but there were injuries. We didn't have Ishant Sharma and Sehwag was in prime form. But the others contributed and I'm glad with the contributions of the new players."

The single-biggest gain, Dhoni felt, was how his batsmen handled the threat of Ajantha Mendis and Muttiah Muralidaran. "These were slow tracks and it was important to rotate strike," he said, "and we were able to do that and played the process you come across equally consistent

Murali well, which has been tough over the years in Sri Lanka, and we tackled Mendis well. I was impressed by the way we handled these two in the middle overs. It wasn't just about playing Mendis; it was about scoring off him. Whoever got set in made it big. A70 on such tracks was immense."

Dhoni spoke of winning "crucial" games, and in a season where India lost consecutive finals he was relieved to have nipped this one in the bud with a game to spare. "If this was the last game of the series, I'd be 2-2, and we lost people would start saying that in the last 23 finals India have lost 18", but neither this team nor I have played 23 finals. It was crucial we finish the series before reaching this game."

It has been almost a year since Dhoni took over the limited-overs captaincy and lead India to the ICC World Twenty20 title. Reflecting on his tenure, he felt he had been given the right team and that made his job easier. "It's about the 16 guys in the team and the bench strength... a captain is only as good as his team," Dhoni said. "A captain shares responsibilities, finds problem areas, and sends the best guy to rectify that problem. A good team makes a good captain, not the other way around. You have to let players go in the right direction; after that it's up to the individual."

The selectors have backed Dhoni's vision of youth, not without criticism, and Dhoni felt it was necessary because of the demands of today's game. "You want to have batsmen who run quickly, who can convert ones into twos and put pressure on the fielders," he said. "It is good to have a side like that. If you've scored a par score and have a fielding side which is safe than you add 15-20 more runs."

It's not about randomly selecting players," he said. "The players who have done well domestically and on A tours have been rewarded. In the selection process you come across equally consistent

Unstoppable Bolt

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which also marked 35-year-old multi-medal winning Maria Mutola's last competitive international race.

Led magnificently through 600 metres by Russian pacemaker Svetlana Kyuka, who was fourth in the men's 400m hurdles in Beijing, the double Olympic champion winning in 48.07sec.

But Bahrain's Olympic 1500m champion Rashid Ramzi was beaten into second in the 1500m and Belgian high jumper Tia Hellebaut crashed out at a miserly 1.90m.

LaShawn Merritt was beaten into second in the men's 400m by American compatriot Jeremy Wariner and Lolo Jones also redeemed herself after her disastrous showing in the 100m hurdles, beating Olympic champion Dawn Harper.

"I am so tired," said Jelimo. "But this was my best race with the best pacemakers. The world record is now closer but I'm not sure I can do it this year, maybe next. There's still one race to go for the jackpot."

It was a mixed night for the 10 other Olympic champions on show.

World record holders Kenenisa Bekele of Ethiopia and Yelena Isinbayeva of Russia won the men's 5000m and women's pole vault with ease, the former clocking a world lead of 12:50.18 and the latter clearing 4.88m.

Cuban 100m hurdler Dayron Robles beat American archrival David Oliver by one-hundredth of a second.

Spurs start against Magpies

AFP, London

second in 12.97sec for his third Golden League win of the season.

Norwegian javelin thrower Andreas Thorkildsen dominated the field with a best of 90.28m to follow up on his Olympic success.

And Angelo Taylor saw off Kieron Clement in a re-run of the men's 400m hurdles in Beijing, the double Olympic champion winning in 48.07sec.

Manchester United take on Middlesbrough at Old Trafford. Arsenal will take on Sheffield United at the Emirates in a repeat of last season's fourth-round clash.

Everton, who were beaten in the last four by Chelsea, will travel to face Blackburn. Rafa Benitez's Liverpool host Crewe.

"It was no revenge for me because I beat myself in Beijing. I wasn't beaten by the other girls in a clean race," said Jones.

Two Kenyans who failed to qualify for the Beijing Games also shone on the track, in the men's 1500m and 3000m steeplechase.

African champion Haron Keitany outspurts Ramzi to win the 1500m in 3:32.06, while Paul Koch, a bronze medallist at the 2004 Athens Games, won a fast 3000m steeplechase in 8:04.26.

"This was my Olympic Games," admitted Koch. "The pacemakers did their job well."

Dhoni happy

FROM PAGE 17

difference and they were doing just that," Dhoni said, before adding "But of course you miss individuals, specially the great players." Looking back, Dhoni said India negated the threat from Sri Lanka's two-pronged spin attack and played well in the 20-40 over stretch to win the series 3-2.

KP wants 5-0

Cricket

AFP, London

one-day sides we have played against recently."

Flintoff's 77-ball innings and 31 from Patel carried England to 296-7 from 50 overs and South Africa were never up with the rate as they were bowled out for 170 with Patel taking 5-41 to cap a memorable fourth international match.

Patel said: "It has always been a dream to play for England. As an individual you couldn't ask for more. I played against South Africa for the Lions and although it was always going to be tough they knew I could do it."

The South African chase flickered only briefly when Albie Morkel hit Patel for two sixes in an over but having planted him into the stands for a second time the batsmen offered a low return catch that Patel took low down.

England are now chasing only the second 5-0 series win in their history after they triumphed over Zimbabwe by the same margin in 2001-02.

Pietersen said: "The 5-0 thing puts a lot more extra pressure on us as it would take us up to second in the world rankings."

"That is the kind of pressure we want -- pressure is a privilege and if we win 5-0 it takes us right up to the top. It is something we have talked about and if we deliver we can win 5-0. The dressing room is very happy place."

"We are putting pressure on their batters and playing to our potential. We're hitting their good balls for four and doing a really one-day international retirement."

Flintoff survived a nasty blow to his temple on 38 when he was late on pulling a Morne Morkel bouncer but recovered to hit nine fours and a six. The pick of the South African bowlers was Johan Botha who took 2-35 from nine overs with this spin.

After being put in England's Matt Prior played and missed during the early overs but found his range when he clubbed 14 runs off Makhaya Ntini's second over including a six over long on from a free hit.

Ntini's first five overs disappeared for 47 but stand-in captain Jacques Kallis forced a breakthrough when Morne Morkel had Prior caught off a top edged pull that Herschelle Gibbs ran round to catch. Ntini looked a tired bowler at the end of a long tour as he conceded 68 runs in nine overs.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the third one-day international between England and South Africa at The Oval on Saturday:

ENGLAND: 296

SOUTH AFRICA

Gibbs ct Shah b Anderson	12
Amila ct Prior b Harmison	46
Kallis ct Patel b Flintoff	9
De Villiers run out	12
Duminy ct Prior b Flintoff	18
Boucher ct Patel	19
A Morkel ct Patel b Patel	16
Botha ct Patel	17
M Morkel ct Broad b Patel	6
Steyn not out	5
Ntini ct Prior b Patel	0
Extras: (b-5, lb-4, w-1)	10
Total: (All out in 42.4 overs)	170
Fall of wickets: 1-19, 2-67, 3-77, 4-82, 5-114, 6-134, 7-142, 8-160, 9-170.	
Bowler	O M R W
Anderson	7 0 17 1
Broad	6 1 28 0
Harmison	9 1 28 1
De Villiers	7 0 33 1
Duminy	9.4 2 41 5
Boucher	4 0 14 0
Botha	10 0 44 1
M Morkel ct Broad b Patel	1
Steyn	0 0 28 1
Ntini ct Prior b Patel	0
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Bowler O M R W

Anderson 7 0 17 1

Broad 6 1 28 0

Harmison 9 1 28 1

De Villiers 7 0 33 1

Bowler O M R W

Anderson 10 1 31 0

Broad 6 0 42 3

Harmison 10 0 55 1

De Villiers 10 0 46 2

Duminy 10 0 44 1

Botha 4 0 28 1

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