

Akram slams shock bans

Cricket
AFP, New Delhi

Fast bowling legend Wasim Akram said Thursday bans on key players for their dismal performance in Australia had made Pakistan's cricket "a laughing stock" and should be reconsidered.

Akram was commenting on the Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) decision Wednesday to ban former captains Younus Khan and Mohammad Yousuf indefinitely from the national side following this year's disastrous Australian tour.

In a humiliating whitewash, Pakistan lost all three Tests, all five one-day internationals and the lone Twenty20 international while touring Australia from December to February.

A committee appointed to investigate the fiasco blamed the result on infighting between Mohammad Yousuf and Younus Khan and, among other sanctions, recommended they "should not be part of the national team in any format."

The six-man panel headed by PCB chief operating officer Wasim Bari also banned Shoaib Malik and Rana Naved-ul-Hasan for one year on charges of violating the players' code of conduct.

Other recommendations included a three-million-rupee (35,500-US-dollar) fine for Shahid Afridi, who was caught by TV cameras biting the ball during the Australian tour's final one-day match, in Perth.

The Akmal brothers, Kamran Akmal and Umar, were also fined and put on a six-month probation for violating discipline on tour.

Akram, who was a member of the committee but did not attend any of its meetings held

last month, said the bans on Mohammad Yousuf and Younus Khan were embarrassing.

"These penalties have made Pakistan cricket a laughing stock in the world," Akram told AFP from Mumbai, where he is on a coaching assignment.

"You don't ban players for such problems. Had I attended any meeting or given recommendations I would have suggested fines, but not bans."

The former left-arm pace bowler said Pakistan cricket could not afford such decisions.

"Pakistan cricket is in turmoil," said Akram. "We are anyway not playing (international) cricket (at home) for security reasons and this will further embarrass our players."

"No board in the world deprives cricketers of their livelihood. If there were discipline problems, it was the duty of the captain Yousuf, coach Intikhab Alam and manager Abdul Raqeeb to deal with them."

"I have been hearing Malik has been a disruptive influence since last year. If that is so, why was he kept in the team in the first place?"

He said the penalties, ahead of Pakistan's defence of the World Twenty20 title in the West Indies next month, would wreck the national team.

"Pakistan has already been weakened due to various problems and this will further hit it badly," he said. "We can't even find 11 good players because of lack of talent in the country."

He said that both Younus Khan and Mohammad Yousuf were still needed in both Tests and one-day cricket.

"What I suggest to PCB is to stick with heavy fines, but don't implement the bans because we still need Yousuf and Younus in Tests and one-day cricket."

"With the World Cup in 2011 so close, this decision will hurt our team badly."



Carlos Moya of Spain plays a volley against Tim Smyczek of the United States during their Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on Thursday.

Afridi, Akmal in T20 WC squad

CRICINFO, undated

Pakistan's selectors have not named a captain in the final squad for the ICC World Twenty20 in April-May but have included Shahid Afridi and the Akmal brothers, who were fined heavily by the PCB based on the inquiry committee's report, in the 15-man list. There were recalls for Misbahul Haq and Salman Butt while under-19 allrounder Hammad Azam was chosen after a good World Cup.

Parachute chess

SPORTS REPORTER

Indian WIM Kiran Manisha Mohanty and Russian Minina Veronika shared the lead in Parachute Advanced International Chess Tournament at the close of the sixth round at the conference room of Uni Resort in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

Both Mohanty and Veronika earned 4.5 points each as Mohanty drew against FM Abu Sufian Shakil while Veronika won her game.

Shakil is now in the second position with four points, followed by FM Syed Mahfuzur Rahman Emon with 3.5 points.

In the day's other matches, Emon drew with Malaysian FM Peter Long, Shamima Akther Liza beat FM Abdul Malek, and Saif Uddin beat Indian Dhyani Dave.

'Inquiry report confidential'

Cricket
CRICINFO, undated

A day after carrying out the most comprehensive player cull in Pakistan cricket in recent memory, the PCB remained tight-lipped about the nature of charges laid against senior players and the procedure followed in punishing them.

Seven senior players were punished by the board following an inquiry committee report into a disastrous tour of Australia. Younus Khan, Mohammad Yousuf, Rana Navedul Hasan and Shoaib Malik were handed bans, while the Akmal brothers and Shahid Afridi were fined.

But concerns have been raised about the legal process followed in handing out the punishments and the lack of information on the charges. Calls have been made to make the complete report of the inquiry committee public but the board is unwilling to do so. "It is a confidential report and not one for public consumption," Ijaz Butt, chairman PCB, told Cricinfo. "If a certain level of people ask we will give them, but essentially this is a confidential report."

But insisted, however, that the committee - the composition of which has also been criticised -- had carried out its objectives fairly. "We have given everyone a fair hearing," he said. "The committee has spoken to many people, almost all of those concerned, we have collected evidence, everything has been done properly and all of it is documented and is

available. It was a very thorough and comprehensive report. We have given details in the press release."

Butt was unwilling to comment on individual charges, such as the one-year ban on Naved, who had no previous disciplinary transgressions, or the nature of charges against Younis, Yousuf and Malik. Because of the lack of details, there remain concerns that the punishments are of an arbitrary and inconsistent nature. But the board says the players were punished not under the code of conduct that governs central contracts, but under the "inherent powers" of the board.

"The punishments are not given under the central contracts code of conduct," Taffazul Rizvi, the board's legal advisor and a member of the six-man inquiry committee, told Cricinfo. "These are under the inherent powers of the board. The disciplinary policy of the board applies to all players who play for Pakistan, not just those on central contracts and that's what has taken effect here."

The players can appeal against the punishments, Rizvi confirmed, though he clarified that is not a right the board gives, but an intrinsic right of the punished in any matter. "That is their fundamental right, it isn't the board's to give." None of the players has yet issued a public response.

Those who have criticised the PCB have also asked why no action has been taken against the board hierarchy or whether any will. Butt's response was only that "some action has already been taken."

Northants seal Sehwa

CRICINFO, undated

Northamptonshire have secured Virender Sehwa to head their Twenty20 challenge during the coming season. It's a major coup for the county who were beaten in the semi-finals in last year's competition.

Sehwa, 31, is currently ranked as the world's leading Test batsman. He has established himself as one of the most destructive players in the game but curiously, given his reputation, Sehwa's Twenty20 international record is a relatively modest average of 24.07 although his strike-rate is 153.43.

Having played county cricket for Leicestershire in 2003, Sehwa has experience of English conditions and Mark Tagg, the Northamptonshire chief executive, believes Sehwa's signing could lift Northamptonshire to the top of the domestic game.

"This is absolutely fantastic news for the club and shows everyone that we want to continue our year on year improvement," he said. "Hopefully this shows our fans we are serious in our ambitions to become the best club in the country."

Sehwa is still awaiting clearance from the BCCI but said: "I am looking forward to the T20 campaign and I am delighted to have joined the county."

He is the latest big-name signing for the Twenty20 tournament with counties going around the world for star attractions. Tillakaratne Dilshan has joined Sussex, Shahid Afridi and Abdul Razaq are with Hampshire, Herschelle Gibbs is heading to Yorkshire and Cameron White is due with Somerset.

Moya rolls back the years

Tennis
AFP, Indian Wells

Carlos Moya withstood a determined challenge from qualifier Tim Smyczek in the first round Thursday at Indian Wells, the tournament where he seized the world number-one ranking in 1999.

The veteran Spaniard held off the 22-year-old American to triumph 7-6 (9/7), 7-6 (7/5).

Moya is playing the Masters 1000 tournament, which runs alongside a WTA premier event under the BNP Paribas Open banner, for the first time since 2008.

Smyczek, playing his third ATP Tour event and his first Masters 1000, had set points in each set, but Moya managed to outlast him in each.

"I'm hitting the ball well and training well," said the Spaniard, who was hindered by a series of injuries last season. "But I can see I'm having trouble closing out matches."

"That's not something you can practice for. My goal now is to try and play as many matches as possible. In the first set I had so many chances. I made it very difficult to win."

Moya received a wildcard into the main draw. The top 32 seeds, led by Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal, enjoy first-round byes.

Djokovic will open against American Mardy Fish -- the man he beat in the final here in 2008.

Fish rallied Thursday for a 1-6, 6-1, 6-3 victory over Germany's Michael Berrer.

Fish said the chilly wind that prevailed during their match as darkness fell made it hard to get into the contest. But he was looking forward to tackling Djokovic again.

"We've played three or four times, we've had some great matches," Fish said. "He beat me at Wimbledon the last time we played in straight sets. Other than that it has gone the distance. We've had some great matches."

The women continued to jockey for position with first-round matches.

Italy's Roberta Vinci booked a second-round clash with two-time champion Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia, the 21st seed, with a 3-6, 6-3, 6-0 victory over rising US teen star Melanie Oudin.

Unheralded American Sloane Stephens, 16, booked a second-round match with defending champion and 12th seed Vera Zvonareva of Russia.

Stephens, ranked 747th in the world, beat Czech Lucie Hradecka 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (9/7).

While men's first-round action continues on Friday, the women's second round gets underway.

Second-seeded Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark opens her campaign against American Vania King. Fourth-seeded Russian Elena Dementieva and 10th-seeded compatriot Maria Sharapova will also be in action, along with China's two Australian Open semi-finalists, Li Na and Zheng Jie.

Li, seeded seventh, will take on British qualifier Elina Baltacha while 18th-seeded Zheng will face Romanian Sorana Cirstea.

Former world number one Justine Henin, playing just her third tournament since launching a comeback after an 18-month retirement, will try to follow up her dominant first-round victory when she meets 31st-seeded Gisela Dulko of Argentina.

Friday night will feature the Hit for Haiti exhibition for the benefit of Haiti earthquake relief efforts.

Federer and Pete Sampras will play Nadal and Andre Agassi in one doubles match, then Steffi Graf and Lindsay Davenport will play Henin and Martina Navratilova.

The event is sold out and organizers hope to raise one million dollars for earthquake relief.

A similar event quickly arranged by Federer ahead of the Australian Open in January raised more than 600,000 US dollars.

News channels end IPL boycott

ANI, New Delhi

News broadcasters Friday ended their boycott of the third edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) after an agreement with the cash-rich Indian league authorities.

The development came hours before the IPL was scheduled to begin with a match between 2009 champions Deccan Chargers and Kolkata Knight Riders in Navi Mumbai Friday night.

As per the new guidelines issued by the IPL, "there has to be a minimum of a 10-minute delay from the live telecast by the official broadcaster before telecast of any match footage by a news broadcaster."

However, the 'news' broadcasters will be allowed to telecast an exceptional event (newsworthy event of an exceptional nature) occurring during the course of a match with a minimum of a five-minute delay from the conclusion of the live telecast of such exceptional event."

The 15-point guidelines include a clause that news and current affairs broadcasters will be allowed a maximum of 5.5 minutes of 'fresh footage' per match in a day, including not more than 4.5 minutes of deferred live coverage of match play and not more than 1.5 minutes of deferred in-stadium entertainment footage."

Only one winner

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the opening day of the first Test between Bangladesh and England at the Zahur Ahmed Stadium in Chittagong on Friday:

ENGLAND: First innings
Cook not out 158
Carberry lbw b Mahmudullah 30
Trott c Mushfiqur b Rubel 39
Pietersen b Razzak 99
Collingwood not out 32
Extras: (b-4, lb-3, nb-7, w-2) 16
Total: (For three wks in 90 overs) 374
To bat: Bell, Prior, Broad, Swann, Bresnan, Finn.
Fall of wickets: 1-72, 2-149, 3-319.
Bowler O M R W
Shahadat 12 2 50 0

Rubel 13 0 79 1
Shakib 21 2 80 0
Nayeem 11 1 38 0
Mahmudullah 14 1 45 1
Razzak 17 1 71 1
Aftab 1 0 2 0
Tamim 1 0 2 0

BANGLADESH: Tamim, Imrul, Zunaed, Aftab, Mahmudullah, Shakib, Mushfiqur, Nayeem, Razzak, Rubel, Shahadat.
Toss: Bangladesh
Umpires: Tony Hill (NZL) and Rod Tucker (AUS)
TV umpire: Enamul Haque (BAN)
Match referee: Jeff Crowe (NZL)

Johnson refutes head-butting charge

ANI, Auckland

Australian left-arm fast bowler Mitchell Johnson has refused to accept the charge that he head-butted New Zealand middle order batsman Scott Styris during the first one-day international of this year's Chappell-Hadlee series played at Napier.

ICC Match Referee Ranjan Madugalle fined Johnson 60 per cent of his match fee for the incident, which Johnson has accepted.

Lara lauds

FROM PAGE 17

definitely want to see him bat like Sachin," said Lara.

Lara further said that Tendulkar even has the capability of surpassing his score of unbeaten 400 in Test Cricket.

"I'd be happy if Sachin breaks my record of 400 not out in Test cricket," he said. Lara further said that security has been a major concern during the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) after several terror threats, and urged miscreants to stay way from sporting events.

"I am begging all those who are thinking of anything negative to please allow the game to go on. Please allow this tournament to go on and not just this tournament, any sporting discipline that is taking place in this part of the world. I believe in what the sportsmen and sportswomen stand for, we should not be subject to such a behaviour," he added.

Australia-Germany

FROM PAGE 17

Luke Doerner and Glenn Turner scored once in each half, before Taeke Taekema converted a penalty stroke 12 minutes from the end to narrow the margin.

Doerner and Taekema, the two leading penalty corner specialists, head the goal-scorers list in the tournament with seven goals apiece.

Germany won the last two World Cup finals against Australia in 2002 and 2006, before adding the gold medal at the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

The Germans, hoping to become the first team in history to bag a hat-trick of titles, outclassed England 4-1 in the other semifinal to avenge their defeat in the European Cup final last year.

Germany took a 2-0 lead by the 11th minute as Jan-Marco Montag converted a penalty corner and Oliver Korn deflected in a pass from the right.

England, playing their first World Cup semi-final since 1986, made it 1-2 in the 19th minute with their lone penalty corner of the match when Richard Smith scooped the ball into the net.

Martin Haner and Linus Butt scored on either side of the break to seal the emphatic win

Kevin delivers

FROM PAGE 17

"I think we're going to get a good score now. We need to work out what we want to get and when to declare and work out how many overs we think our bowlers can bowl in a day."

"We need to decide how many runs we need to get. Alastair [Cook] has done an amazing job today and first of all 'Chef' needs to get his highest score in Test cricket and then go and get 250."

"It was brilliant. I did say to him that emotion took over my hundred (on captaincy debut) at the Oval and I got out the next ball. So I said to him to dig deep, I said 'you've got a big, big hundred to score here'. A hundred is great but 158 is even better," he said.

But for all that Pietersen must thank Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan to give them a chance to exploit the fine batting conditions and the stylish batsman didn't hesitate to say that they were surprised by the home side's decision.



Winners of the Korean Cup golf tournament pose with chief guest Bangladesh Navy chief Vice Admiral Zahir Uddin Ahmed at the Kurmitola Golf Course yesterday.