



Kyrgiakos quits int'l football

Defender Sotiris Kyrgiakos has quit international football after playing just one game under new Greece coach Fernando Santos. The 31-year-old, who won his 61st cap in the 1-0 friendly win over Serbia on Wednesday, made the announcement on his personal website. "The Greek national team was one of the most important chapters in my career," said Liverpool defender Kyrgiakos. "At this time I would like to close this chapter. I want to wish all the best to the national team."

-REUTERS



Blackpool make dream return

AFP, Wigan

A double by new signing Marlon Harewood gave Premier League newboys Blackpool a fairytale start to their first ever season with a 4-0 victory away at Wigan on Saturday.

Harewood's brace and goals from midfielder Gary Taylor-Fletcher and defender Alex Baptiste gave the visitors their first away win among the elite since the last time they graced the top flight with a win over Newcastle on August 29, 1970.

The defeat suggests that last year's worst Premier League defence -- they let in 79 goals -- is going to be equally generous this time round.

Away at Villa Park, hosts Aston Villa routed West Ham United 3-0 as Stuart Downing, Stylian Petrov and James Milner scored.

Blackpool got a dream start after a close season which saw manager Ian Holloway struggling to get a full 25-man squad together and building work at their stadium meaning they had to ask Wigan if they could switch the match to their ground.

Taylor-Fletcher, who began his career playing non-league football with Northwich Victoria, was found by Harewood, one of Holloway's six signings this week, and the 29-year-old midfielder stroked the ball home.

Harewood, who was released by Aston Villa at the end of last season, was in good form and forced Wigan's keeper Chris Kirkland into a smart save in the 26th minute.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Tottenham Hotspur striker Peter Crouch (R) is under pressure from Manchester City's Shaun Wright-Philips as he attempts an ambitious bicycle kick during the English Premier League opener at White Hart Lane in London yesterday.

City's Spurs stalemate

AFP, London



Manchester City had goalkeeper Joe Hart to thank for a point as their Premier League title bid started with a goalless draw away to Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane here on Saturday.

For all the millions at City's disposal, it was their bargain signing from fourth-tier Shrewsbury in 2006 who excelled on the opening day of the season.

The 23-year-old, after making his first England start during the week, pulled off save after save in the first half to keep out the side that denied City a place in the Champions League last season.

City manager Roberto Mancini has overseen huge spending that has left him with intense competition in his squad, meaning the likes of Emmanuel Adebayor and Joleon Lescott were on the bench.

Republic of Ireland goalkeeper Shay Given was also among the substitutes as Mancini started with Hart.

In the early stages Hart gave three examples of why he has edged ahead in the race to be City's first choice.

His first save was an instinctive effort from Jermain Defoe's close-range volley, after Aaron Lennon had carried the ball to the goalline and lofted a cross for Peter Crouch to head down.

Tom Huddlestone then went close, returning the ball from a cleared corner with a powerful volley that Hart saved at full-stretch.

To complete his hat-trick of early saves, Hart tipped over the crossbar after Benoit Assou-Ekotto unleashed a volley that was deflected and headed towards the top corner.

England manager Fabio Capello was in the stands to watch his goalkeeper and would have been impressed with his early saves. Hart also drew applause from Given from his seat in the dug-out.

Spurs edged closer to a goal but when Hart was finally beaten, by Gareth Bale with an angled drive, the ball cannoned off the post.

Hart was called into action again just after the half-hour mark when Huddlestone's long ball released Defoe, who had his finish blocked and was beaten to the rebound by Kolo Toure with the goal unguarded.

Spurs also had a decent appeal for a penalty when Bale was challenged by Micah Richards as he carried the ball into the penalty area.

It was a tough start for City debutants Aleksandar Kolarov, SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Naved wants ban revoked

CRICINFO

Pakistan fast bowler Navedul Hasan has said he is desperate to meet with Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Ijaz Butt so he can get his ban revoked, even going so far as to making several unsuccessful trips to the Gaddafi Stadium in the hope of arranging a meeting.

"I am getting desperate now because if the PCB chairman goes abroad once again my appeal against the ban will be left pending for another month or so," Naved told PTI.

The appellate tribunal headed by retired Justice Irfan Qadir is due to hear Naved's appeal on August 21, but has asked him to meet with Butt before that.

"I hope I can get some time with the PCB chairman so that I can state my case to him and have this ban removed," he said. "If I am unable to meet with the PCB chairman before the next date of my appeal then I am afraid it will be prolonged for another month or so."

Naved, along with several of his teammates, was punished by the PCB following the SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Haider doubtful



CRICINFO

Zulqarnain Haider, Pakistan's highest-scoring batsman in the England series so far, is in danger of missing the remainder of the series, due a finger injury. He is scheduled to meet a finger specialist when the team reaches London on Sunday and the team management will take a call -- whether to send him back or retain him -- based on the diagnosis.

"He picked up a hairline fracture to his little finger. We don't know yet if he will stay but we will wait for to hear from the specialist," Yawar Saeed, Pakistan's manager told Cricinfo.

Haider, on the verge of earning the unwanted honour of getting a king pair on debut last week, bounced back with a resolute 88 in the second innings which injected belief into an otherwise deflated Pakistan batting. But an injury to his little finger on his right hand, which he picked at a training session during the Leeds Test against Australia, resurfaced on the eve of the warm-up match against Worcester on Thursday.

Haider complained of pain and subsequent X-rays at a local hospital in Worcester revealed a minor fracture to the bone in the finger. Back in Leeds the injury was minor and he just got the finger taped and impressed during in his debut game both with the gloves and the bat in hand.

Haider was drafted into the team on the eve of the Edgbaston Test after the Pakistan team management felt their first-choice keeper Kamran Akmal needed to rest and sort out the mistakes he was committing with regularity. Akmal was struck on his right eye during practice on Friday and was holding an ice pack but is SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Onus on Ashraf, Mahbubul



SPORTS REPORTER

The last few years has seen a lot of talk about the proper running of the Bangladesh A team, but nothing has come to fruition so far.

Everybody has admitted that there is a huge vacuum in the pipeline and the authorities must give proper attention to the second-string Bangladesh side and Academy to make sure there is ample supply coming through the channel. But unfortunately, these very vital cogs of the country's cricket seem to be nobody's business.

The current board under the leadership of AFM Mustafa Kamal always loves to form special committee and there was no exception in this regard, though this time two influential board officials -- senior vice-president Mahbubul Anam and director Gazi Ashraf Hossain -- have been given the responsibility of overseeing these areas during last meeting of the board directors on July 29.

But the question has been already raised: why is there a need to appoint someone to look

after the matter when there are particular committees like cricket operations committee and game development committee to run the show?

It was believed that the professionals under these particular committees would take care of everything and implement the decisions that come from the board members. But this is not the case right at the moment, because many believe that professionalism has already been thrown out of this board.

And it was proven after the resignation of Shakil Kasem as head of the management committee for the GP-BCB National Cricket Academy that making committee is not a solution to make things happen. Former cricketer Kasem walked out of pure frustration, as he had to sit idle for eight months due to non-cooperation from the board's high-ups.

Will there be anything different this time after the appointment of the two influential members?

"I will not do anything scrappy. I will make a concept paper for the A team within a very short time and discuss the course of action with the president," said Mahbubul Anam.

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PHOTO: AFP

American sprinter Tyson Gay (R) runs towards the finish line in course of clocking the fastest time of the season with a 9.78sec finish in the men's 100 metres final in the Diamond League meet at Crystal Palace, London on Friday.

Super fast Gay



AFP, London

America's Tyson Gay followed up his Stockholm win over Usain Bolt by clocking the fastest 100m time this season in a blistering triumph at a rain-soaked London Diamond League meeting on Friday.

Gay won in 9.78sec in miserable, damp conditions at Crystal Palace to easily see off Jamaica's Yohan Blake (9.89sec) and Trinidad's Richard Thompson (10.05sec).

"The last few weeks have been really great," said Gay, who sent Olympic champion and world record holder Bolt to a first defeat in two years in Stockholm last week.

Bolt refused on financial grounds to take part in London before then pulling out of the rest of the season with back pain. Former world record holder Asafa Powell pulled out of the meet earlier in the week, also because of a back injury.

Gay's time on Friday eclipsed the previous best this season of 9.82sec, set by both Bolt and Powell.

"I wasn't expecting to go that fast in these conditions but I knew I was in good shape and was going to go fast," Gay said.

"I think there's more to come. It's great to be on top of the world, that's important to me. I wasn't necessarily sending a message to Asafa and Usain, I was just running my own race."

Gay's time was superb considering the conditions and he also finished the race with a groin complaint.

"I was hobbling a bit at the end -- my groin is a little sore but I'm sure it's OK," he said.

"This is not the best shape I've ever been in because I'm still dealing with a few little injuries. My coach said that I can run 9.7

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Kim, Maria advance

AFP, Cincinnati

Reigning US Open champion Kim Clijsters, former world No. 1 Ana Ivanovic and Russian beauty Maria Sharapova reached the WTA Cincinnati Open semifinals with straight-set triumphs Friday.

Belgian fourth seed Clijsters, who made her return to tennis at this event last year ahead of her second Grand Slam title at the US Open, ousted Italy's Flavia Pennetta 7-6, 6-4, to book a semifinal date with Ivanovic.

Clijsters, who had taken a two-year break to start a family, fired seven aces and connected on 67 per cent of her first serves but the Italian would not go out easily, saving 11 of 14 break-point chances by Clijsters.

"There are moments when it's good, moments when it's not good," she said. "Each match has gone better. That's what I'm looking for."

Serbia's Ivanovic dominated without facing a break point in a 6-1, 6-3 triumph SEE PAGE 18 COL 4



PHOTO: AFP

Russia's Maria Sharapova celebrates her quarterfinal win against Marion Bartoli of France in Western & Southern Financial Group Women's Open in Cincinnati on Friday.

SPORTS POLL
TODAY'S QUESTION
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