

# Asterisk removed finally

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Having beaten a full strength New Zealand 3-0, it can no longer be said that the Bangladesh cricket team does not belong in the top echelons of world cricket. Through ten years of gradual at times frustratingly gradual improvement, a constant refrain from experts and journalists around the world has sounded out Bangladesh's ineligibility to play alongside international cricket's elite teams.

Over the past two years there has been a marked upturn in the team's fortunes; yet the asterisks remained. Even with a Test and one-day series won in West Indies, credit was only grudgingly given because the home team was ravaged by a war between the first-choice players and the board. The lasting impression from that tour was that of a hollow victory.

That is why this latest achievement of the national team will be such a source of joy for their supporters and also, it can reasonably be hoped, a genuine turning point for their fortunes. There are no ifs and buts in this victory, it is as clear as the score line: 3-0.

New Zealand arrived with a full strength team. Even with the first few days of their tour being washed out, it cannot be said that they were unduly hampered by their inability to acclimatise to sub-continental conditions; their last international assignment ending not more than a month before they set foot in Dhaka was the triangular series in Sri Lanka, where they beat India in a league game. Even then, their squad did not include world-class players Brendon McCullum, Daniel Vettori and Jesse Ryder, which it does on this ongoing tour.

In fact, had the score line read 3-0 in favour of New Zealand which was the odds on result before the series started Bangladesh would have had a better case for being considered the unfortunate side. They entered this series without Tamim Iqbal, who has been such a talisman for the team of late, and lost their captain and pace spearhead Mashrafe Mortaza by the first over of their fielding effort in the opening game.

This series has highlighted two immensely pleasing aspects of Bangladesh's growth on the world stage a burgeoning bench strength and an ability to win in pressure situations. Their early history is littered with heartbreaking losses when a catch held here or a wide less there could have made all the difference. In this series, two of the three matches were won in the last over with the opposition still in with a chance. In both those games, Bangladesh rose from a position of weakness to emerge victors.

It is also fitting that the player who has done more than anyone to raise the profile of Bangladesh cricket, Shakib Al Hasan, has been at the forefront of this landmark victory, with stellar performances with both bat and ball, and also as stand-in captain.

Websites and news media around the world will probably report this as more New Zealand's failure than Bangladesh's success, The Kiwi captain, however, very graciously admitted that Bangladesh "deserved this victory and they have shown us how to play in these conditions".

With the World Cup in February at home their next big assignment, those words from a top international captain proves that the team and their supporters can look forward to February with high expectations.



## Klose injury adds to woes

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's hopes of emerging from a prolonged slump with a home win over Hanover 96 on Saturday was dealt a severe blow when striker Miroslav Klose became the latest name on the champion's growing injury list.

Klose picked up a torn thigh muscle while on international duty for Germany in Kazakhstan on Tuesday and will be out of action for at least 10 days.

"He will not play against Hanover and he will not be available for the Champions League match against Cluj (next week)", the club said in a statement on Thursday.

Bayern, 12th in the standings and 13 points behind leaders Mainz after seven games, will also be without Bastian Schweinsteiger and captain Mark van Bommel, whose aggravated an injury on international duty for the Netherlands this week.

Striker Ivica Olic is another player doubtful for the match against third-placed Hanover after breaking his nose in Croatia's qualifier against Israel on Oct. 9 and undergoing surgery on Tuesday.

"Further tests will determine whether he can play with a protective mask," the club said.

Bayern have only scored five goals in the league after losing Arjen Robben and Franck Ribery to long-term injuries early in the season and with his preferred strikeforce unavailable, coach Louis van Gaal will be forced to turn to Mario Gomez.

The Bundesliga's most expensive signing at around \$30 million has yet to deliver on his inflated fee since joining Bayern last year and has spent most of his time on the bench.

Gomez, however, was on target in Germany's 3-0 against Kazakhstan when he came on as a substitute for Klose.

"The goal I scored was a step in the right direction and the confirmation of my hard work in the past weeks. Now I hope I can also score against Hanover," Gomez told reporters.

Surprise leaders Mainz, who have won all seven of their games with the most potent attack in the league, will break the record for the best start to a Bundesliga season if they beat visitors Hamburg SV on Saturday.

## Rooney injury-free

Football

AFP, London

Wayne Rooney looks set for a collision with his boss at Manchester United, Sir Alex Ferguson, after claiming he has been injury-free all season.

Ferguson said Rooney had been suffering from a "straightforward ankle injury" when asked to explain why the striker did not travel to Valencia recently for a Champions League clash.

And the United manager blamed the injury again when he left Rooney out of the game at Sunderland 11 days ago, saying at the time: "I have to take the view that this injury has been niggling away for a while and he kept on playing."

Rooney, however, claims he has been injury-free this season. When asked after England's midweek draw with Montenegro if his ankle had caused any problems, Rooney replied: "No, I've had no ankle problem all season."

Then when asked "Why did Alex Ferguson say you had?" Rooney laughed and replied: "I

don't know."

Rooney first encountered problems with his ankle in the Champions League quarterfinal with Bayern Munich on March 30 but was deemed fit enough to return for the second leg.

Although Rooney was believed to be suffering from the injury in the run up to the World Cup, he is adamant he was fully fit for the tournament even though he was a shadow of his normal self before starting the season for United.

Rooney concedes, however, that he is currently lacking in some sharpness and needs a run of games.

Rooney said: "I felt better against Montenegro. You need the games to get your fitness in."

"I started the season, played a few games and felt I was getting sharp, and then missed three or four games so you don't feel as sharp as I thought I would do."

"Towards the end of last season I was injured but during the World Cup, I trained every session and had no problems fitness-wise."

"I think in this league you need to keep playing because, if you are not at full fitness, then it's difficult to break teams down."

## Benayoun out for season

Football

AFP, London

English Premier League champions Chelsea will be without Israeli national captain Yossi Benayoun for virtually the rest of the season after he underwent an operation to repair a torn Achilles tendon.

The 30-year-old faces six months rehabilitation treatment following the operation on the injury which he discovered when he went away for international duty for the recent Euro 2012 qualifiers with Croatia and Greece.

"Yossi Benayoun underwent surgery on his Achilles (tendon) on Monday," read a statement on the club's website.

"The Israeli international returned to the club from international duty last week, and will now be out of action for approximately six months."

## Serbia arrests 19 fans

AFP, Belgrade

Police detained 19 football fans upon their return from Italy after clashes between Serbian fans and Italian police that forced the cancellation of a Euro 2012 qualifying match, a minister said Thursday.

"So far, 529 football fans returned to the country and 169 of them had previous police records," Interior Minister Ivica Dacic told B92 radio.

Nineteen of those fans had been detained, Dacic said, adding that they were to be taken before an investigative judge.

Dacic promised a thorough police probe into the incidents, urging judicial authorities to speed up their actions against suspected hooligans.

Local media reported that the buses carrying Serbian fans from Italy had been checked for more than five hours on entering Serbia.

Serbia's National Security Council, the top security body, was directly supervising the operation, state-television RTS reported.

UEFA said it had ordered a thorough disciplinary investigation into "serious" crowd trouble that forced the Euro 2012 qualifier between Italy and Serbia to be aborted.

## New twist in L'pool saga

Football

REUTERS, London

Liverpool's bitter ownership wrangle rumbled into Thursday after George Gillett and Tom Hicks launched an 11th hour legal bid to stop the club being sold to Boston Red Sox owner John W Henry.

Weeks of bitterness appeared to be drawing to a close late on Wednesday after London's High Court ruled that Hicks and Gillett could not block the 300 million pounds (\$476.7 million) sale of the club by sacking members of the board.

However, with Henry having flown in to attend a meeting in London with Liverpool chairman Martin Broughton and other board members to finalise the deal, Gillett and Hicks issued a statement saying they had been granted a temporary restraining order by a Texas court prohibiting the sale of the club.

It poured cold water on the euphoric celebrations of Liverpool fans who had waited outside the High Court earlier on Wednesday, although the club later issued a statement saying it was determined to remove the latest obstacle.

"Following the successful conclusion of High Court proceedings today, the Boards of Directors of Kop Football and Kop Holdings met tonight and resolved to complete the sale of Liverpool FC to New England Sports Ventures," Liverpool's website said.

"Regrettably, Thomas Hicks and George Gillett have tonight obtained a Temporary Restraining Order from a Texas District Court against the independent directors, Royal Bank of Scotland PLC and NESV to prevent the transaction being completed."

"The independent directors consider the restraining order to be unwarranted and dam-

aging and will move as swiftly as possible to seek to have it removed."

The court order may have also revived Singapore billionaire Peter Lim's hopes of buying the club after the tycoon made an increased 320-million-pound offer.

"The situation is in flux, Peter is monitoring the latest developments. He remains interested in buying Liverpool Football Club," a spokesman for Lim told Reuters on Thursday.

Lim, 57, is the Southeast Asian city-state's eighth richest man with assets of \$1.6 billion according to Forbes magazine.

Among a range of interests, he has exclusive rights to own and operate a chain of Manchester United-themed restaurants and bars in Asia, a connection that rankles Liverpool supporters.

A source close to the billionaire, who has a box seat at Old Trafford according to Singapore media, said if successful Lim would sell off his Manchester United interests to show his commitment to the Merseyside club and its supporters.

English football's most protracted and bitter takeover could still be completed by the time Liverpool face Everton on Sunday but the soap opera appears to be short of its conclusion, even as an Oct. 15 deadline for the repayment of 200 million pounds of debts looms.

The NESV deal was to have cleared the path for the debts' repayment to major creditor Royal Bank of Scotland.

Failure to meet the Friday deadline could see the five-times European champions put into administration and docked nine points in the Premier League.

In a further twist, Hicks and Gillett said in a statement that they had filed a lawsuit against the club's lender Royal Bank of Scotland, Liverpool chairman Broughton and other board members, describing themselves as victims of an "epic swindle".

## English WC bid impresses Sepp

Football

AFP, London

FIFA President Sepp Blatter said Wednesday he had been "personally impressed" by England's bid for the 2018 World Cup and said the country was ready to host the tournament immediately. Blatter was speaking after meeting British Prime Minister David Cameron in Downing Street, where he received a presentation on the English 2018 bid less than two months before the final December 2 vote in Zurich.

Blatter watched Cameron perform at Prime Minister's Questions in Parliament before officials outlined the English bid's global legacy plans, which include matching FIFA's 75 million pound annual investment in grassroots football.

"Now England can organise the World Cup tomorrow, England can organise the World Cup - that's not a problem, but what you are doing is a World Cup for the world," Blatter said after the meeting.

"The situation is such that your bid has impressed me personally, I will report to the executive committee when they meet at the end of October before the December 2 decision," Blatter said.

The influential global football supremo also paid tribute to the progress England had made in building modern all-seater stadia and eradicating hooliganism from the domestic game.

Blatter urged other national associations to replicate the all-seater stadiums and lack of fences, saying the crowd problems which forced the abandonment of Tuesday's Italy v Serbia international in Genoa were unlikely to

have happened in England.

"England is the motherland of football. England has given so much to football, and England is going on to carry on giving much to football."

"Your predecessors were in a very difficult situation during the years from 1985 to 1989 and so on. I don't want to speak about what happened then, but the reaction you have made."

"You have given to the world security in the stadiums. You have built all your stadia, there are no fences and everyone is sitting."

"If this had been the case we would not have had the problems we had in Genoa yesterday at the match."

"This is a big legacy, an important legacy you have given to the world."

"If only all the national associations in the world, and their leagues had stadiums like this, we would have more fair play in our game."

"You did it - it's a question of organisation and it is also a question of discipline and respect. You did it here - and now we say where are the hooligans?"

"They are not in the stadium and this is a compliment to your government and your predecessors," Blatter said.

England 2018 chief executive Andy Anson said the visit had been "excellent" for the bid.

"One thing the president mentioned today was our long-established credibility in dealing with hooliganism and that's fantastic to hear," he said.

England's rivals for the 2018 event include Russia, the United States and joint bids from Portugal and Spain, and Belgium and the Netherlands.

## Blame game continues

AFP, Rome



Italy and Serbia blamed each other on Wednesday for intelligence failures after clashes between Serbian fans and Italian police that forced the cancellation of a Euro 2012 qualifying match.

"We have found flaws in the information system, the results of which are clear to everyone," Roberto Massucci, an interior ministry spokesman for efforts to combat football hooliganism, said at a press conference.

"Had we had specific information we would have put better security measures in place... but the information didn't detail any risky profiles," he said.

"Our best weapon is intelligence, but there just wasn't any," he added.

Massucci praised the Italian police for their "professionalism" when dealing with the riot and for preventing the situation from spiralling out of control.

But he said that Italy had received no warning of the seriousness of the threat, and that measures should have been taken by Serbian officials.

"The violent fans could have been prevented from leaving their country," Massucci said.

Italian security officials had received an Interpol document listing the Serbian fans who were travelling to the match but it was incomplete, Antonello Valentini, director general of the Italian Football Federation, said.

Interpol said around 1,300 Serbian fans were arriving, but the number was much higher, there were 1,800 of them, around 180 of which came in on buses and minibuses that were not reported at all," he said.

Serbian Interior Minister Ivica Dacic said the preparations for the match had not been adequate and his Italian counterparts had not asked for any information on the arriving fans.

"They didn't get in touch with us at all. We sent them a list of the Serbian supporters and the route they would take on our own initiative," he said.

"The intervention by Italian police could have been better," he added.

Police made 17 arrests and 16 people were hospitalised after the clashes in Genoa, in Northern Italy. The injured included two policemen.