

SPORT

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Kabze punished for spitting

Montpellier's Turkish striker Hasan Kabze has been handed a five-game ban after spitting at an opponent during a lower league match, the French football federation said Saturday. The incident occurred during a reserve team game against fifth division opponents Gardanne and led to Kabze being sent off. Kabze has been sidelined with a thigh injury since the start of the year. The suspension means he will be unable to play in France's top flight until April 2, when his League 1 side meet Toulouse.



Their WC!

PRANABESH CHAKRABORTY
In Ctg

Chaity is a computer science student at Premier University and has come along with her younger brother to enjoy the warm up match between Canada and Bangladesh. Traffic police stopped their vehicle at Sagarika. And they had to walk about one and a half kilometres to get to the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

Walking down the road, she said she was feeling lucky to have the opportunity to enjoy the match.

"I have never seen a cricket match from inside the stadium. All matches that I have seen were on TV," she said.

However, her coming to the venue was not an easy one. Her mother needed to be convinced by Arnab, her college going brother, that it was no ordinary game.

Arnab said though it is a warm up match but it's part of the World Cup. So we could enjoy all the excitement like a World Cup match. I could make our mother understand it. At last, she allowed us to watch the match.

"But it is true had we got World Cup tickets, we could have enjoyed much more," they rued.



Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan appeals for a wicket during his stellar display with the ball in yesterday's warm-up match against Canada at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Perfect practice for Tigers

BISHWAJIT ROY, from Chittagong



Bangladesh made a confident start handing a nine-wicket defeat to Canada in their first lead-up match to the World Cup at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday.

In front of a strong 12,000-plus crowd in the new-look stadium, the Tigers once again established their supremacy against the ICC associate nations and rubbished all the pre-match talk about a repeat of the 2003 World Cup setback as they simply toyed with their Northern American opponents by finishing the one-sided affair in one session.

The bowlers first did the job by wrapping up helpless Canada for 112 runs in 37.3 overs and then the Tigers achieved the brittle target in just 19.2 overs with the loss of one wicket. Local hero Tamim Iqbal entertained the jubilant crowd during his fiery knock of 69 from 50 deliveries with seven fours and three big sixes (two over long-on and the other a straight one).

But the question was whether it was a wise decision for Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan to bowl first after winning the toss rather than giving the batsmen enough opportunity as well as testing the bowlers under lights before the big matches.

Shakib's deputy Tamim, however, defended their decision by saying that their main focus was to win the match first.

"Winning is a habit and our main target was to win the game first. We did well in the 2007 World Cup because we went into the tournament after winning some games. So, it's nice

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'Don't take Pakistan lightly'

SPORTS REPORTER



Shahid Afridi's eyebrow titled, head arched and posed smile at the cameras during photocall might have cracked up the crowded press conference in Mirpur, but the Pakistani captain left behind a steely message for all: underestimate us at your own peril.

Pakistan, he warned, is not a team that should be taken lightly.

"We are focused and we are keen," said Afridi. "Everyone, including myself, has specific individual and team goals and we have a good mix of youth and an experience. I think the message for everyone would be not to underestimate us," he said.

In reality, this should go without saying, but the lingering feeling is that this Pakistan team does not hold a candle to its predecessors who were always one of the most dangerous teams in a World Cup tournament. The stark figures, however, do not validate these statements. On the back of a marvellous run in New Zealand, the confidence is flowing in the Pakistan camp.

"The team has gelled together as a unit," said Afridi adding that a lot of it might have been down to the contro-

versity that has surrounded this Pakistan side over the past year. But Afridi was looking only at the positives. "I think we have gone through a very tough situation, but this team has come together and now my job is to improve morale and build up the team."

The Pakistan captain was reluctant to name names and single out players but he did welcome the return of Kamran Akmal to the side. "It's good to see Kamran back in the team. Misbah [ul Huq] is also in good nick and Younis [Khan] is also back and we have Shoaib [Akhter] as well."

Add to the mix a talented bunch of youngsters and two genuine spinners, and it is hard to see why the Pakistan captain should not be confident. In this regard, Afridi was quick to laud the work of coaches Intikhab Alam and Waqar Younis in keeping this team together as a unit. "Our dressing room atmosphere now is much better," he said.

And the recurrent theme about the team being a unit was restated when Afridi responded to a query by saying that he as counting on all fifteen of his players to be match-winners. "I think all my fifteen players are match-winners. That's what I believe. Cricket is a team game now. All of them are key

players and they are all match-winners."

There was some talk about whether playing a series down under was adequate preparation for the World Cup that will be played on the spinner friendly tracks of the sub-continent, but Afridi was quick to brush aside such concerns.

"The important thing is to get wins under your belt. In world cricket at the moment, the pitches are not really that different wherever you go. It is rarely about the spinners or the quick bowlers, and we all know that pitches in the sub-continent are heaven for batsmen," he said. "I am not sure exactly how the pitches will be here, but we also know that under the lights the ball seams around a fair bit," he continued.

The Pakistan captain could be forgiven for being a little upset that his nation had lost hosting rights of the tournament due to lingering security concerns, but the all-rounder seemed unfazed at having to play the tournament in India, Sri Lanka and possibly Bangladesh.

"Asia is a cricket-loving place. I know we are not playing in Pakistan but we have got very good support in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. If we manage

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Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi answers questions during a press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

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