

Doping talk rejected

AFP, Sydney

Former Australian football officials have angrily denied there was any deal to prevent drug testing before the country played Argentina in a 1993 World Cup qualifying play-off, reports said Friday.

Julio Grondona, president of the Argentine Football Association, said this week that doping controls were deliberately overlooked so as to prevent Diego Maradona fouling foul of a test.

Ian Holmes, who was Australian Soccer Federation (ASF) chief executive in 1993, said no deal to drop the controls was ever discussed with his side.

Grondona, who is also a FIFA vice-president, was responding to a claim from former legend Maradona that the Argentinians had arranged to have drug testing procedures dropped so they could benefit from illegal substances.

But Grondona said the controls were dropped specifically for Maradona's own benefit, after the player was suspended from football for 15 months in 1991 for failing a drug test, for cocaine, in Italy.



Papia Rani Sarkar (L) and Ariful Islam stretch to win the women's and men's 100m races in the 27th Junior National Athletics Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.



PHOTOS: STAR

NAT'L JUNIOR ATHLETICS C'SHIP Ariful, Papia fastest

SPORTS REPORTER

Ariful Islam of Kurigram and Papia Rani Sarker of BKSP became the fastest boy and girl in the U-18 group on the opening day of 27th National Junior Athletics Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Ariful, who passed his Secondary School Certificate exams this year, impressed all by clocking 11.25 seconds to win the 100m sprint. Ariful had finished second in the last edition. Al Amin from Mymensingh won silver clocking 11.28 seconds while Shahjahan from Khulna finished third with a timing of 11.57 seconds.

Ariful informed that BKSP coach Farid Ahmed had a good contribution in his grooming as he received training for one month at the BKSP in Khulna. The promising athlete is now seeking a chance to run for BJMC, which will ensure him a job.

Papia Rani of BKSP clocked 12.40 seconds to win the girl's 100m sprint while her teammate Irin Akhter finished second with a time of 12.60 seconds. Sohagi of Cox's Bazar won bronze clocking 13 seconds.

"I had earlier become champion in the U-14 group in 2008 and now won the 100m sprint gold in the U-18 group. I am now looking forward to improving myself for the senior level," said class XII student Papia.

However, despite the promising display from the youngsters, this performance is not an accurate measure of the timing since hand timing is being used in this event instead of modern electronic timing system. Despite earlier promising to use electronic board in this meet, the Bangladesh Athletics federation once again resorted to hand timing.

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Road to redemption

AFP, London



Wayne Rooney's long road to redemption will finally be complete if the Manchester United striker can win his duel with Barcelona's Lionel Messi at Wembley on Saturday.

Rooney's place in the United pantheon seemed assured by the time he helped Sir Alex Ferguson's team to a third successive Premier League title in 2009.

But less than 18 months after that triumph the 25-year-old was locked in a bitter war of words that looked set to end his stay at Old Trafford.

Fed up of what he perceived as United's lack of ambition, Rooney demanded a transfer in October last year. However, Rooney had spectacularly misjudged the mood at United.

His poor form had already disillusioned some supporters and, rather than protest against their club's transfer policy, United fans made it clear that their star player was guilty of mutiny when reports linked him with rivals Manchester City.

Ferguson cleverly added to that perception when he suggested Rooney might not find the grass greener else-

where and the saga took a sinister turn as a group of balaclava-clad United supporters turned up at the player's house in the middle of the night to try to firmly persuade him to stay.

Whether it was that menacing intervention or Ferguson's mind games that made the difference remains unknown but within days of asking to leave, Rooney did a complete U-turn and signed a new, improved five-year contract.

Even then, it took him some while to apologise for his behaviour and his name was rarely chanted by the United faithful.

Tormented by lurid stories about his private life, Rooney's form continued to slide alarmingly and he scored only once in the league before Christmas.

The tide finally started to turn when Rooney won the derby against City with a breath-taking bicycle kick in February.

Although Rooney earned a two-match ban for an obscene rant into a television camera against West Ham, it was his brilliant hat-trick in the same match that was more significant.

There was a renewed sense of joy about Rooney's play as he revelled in the extra space afforded by a deep-lying role behind Javier Hernandez.

He scored crucial goals against

Chelsea and Schalke that helped Ferguson's side advance to the Champions League final.

And inevitably, Rooney converted the penalty that clinched United's record 19th league title.

United defender Rio Ferdinand admits Rooney's decision to stay was pivotal to their success.

"Rooney staying was a big part of what we achieved this season," Ferdinand said. "There was a sense of relief from the players. Wayne is one of the best three players in the world, so to have him on our team-sheet is a bonus."

Rooney himself is just glad to be enjoying life again.

"The first half of the season was a bit of a write off for me. But since the turn of the year I feel I have contributed to the team and helped us win games. I have really enjoyed it," he said.

Now Rooney has unfinished business in the Champions League.

Although Rooney won the tournament when United beat Chelsea on penalties in 2008, he didn't live up to his potential in that final.

Deployed out of position on the left wing, he flopped again when United were beaten 2-0 by Barcelona in the final a year later.

FIFA 2014 WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Rubcic recalls Aminul, Munna



Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Veteran goalkeepers Aminul Haq and Biplob Bhattacharjee, defender Rajani Kanta Barman and midfielder Motiur Munna have been recalled to the national fold as Croat coach Robert Rubcic yesterday announced a 27-member preliminary squad for the FIFA World Cup qualifiers against Pakistan in June-July.

Bangladesh will host Pakistan on June 29 before facing them in the away match in Lahore on July 3.

Apart from the veterans, defenders Ariful Islam, Mamun Mia, and winger Yousuf Ali have been recalled to the national camp while promising striker Sohel Rana, midfielder Maruf Ahmed and Denmark-born Bangladeshi booter Jamal Bhuiyan have also been included in the preliminary squad.

"We have just put him (Jamal Bhuiyan) in the preliminary squad. Jamal, who is playing for Hellerup IK in the Copenhagen League in Denmark, showed his interest to play for Bangladesh and we will consider him after seeing his performance. The midfielder is

currently trying to collect a Bangladeshi passport," said BFF technical director Bayazid Jubair Nipu.

The coach, however, dropped three players -- defender Mintu Sheikh, midfielders Mehdi Hasan Ujjal and Shahedul Alam -- from the squad that played three matches in the AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers in March. Bangladesh lost all three matches in the qualifiers against Palestine, Myanmar and Philippines.

The squad will be short-listed to 18 members in the second week of June and the camp will start after the completion of the ongoing Bangladesh League, scheduled to end on June 21.

SQUAD:

Aminul Haque, Biplob Bhattacharjee, Mamun Khan, Mohammad Nehal, Rajani Kanta Barman, Ariful Islam, Mamun Mia, Ashraf Mahmud Linkon, Mamun Mia, Rezaul Karim, Uttam Kumar Banik, Atiqur Rahman Mishu, Yeamin Munna, Nasirul Islam Nasir, Mamunul Islam, Monaem Khan Raju, Zahid Hossain, Shakil Ahmed, Abdul Baten Komol, Motiur Munna, Maruf Ahmed, Yousuf Ali, Mithun Chowdhury, Shakawat Hossain Rony, Zahid Hasan Emily, Sohel Rana and Jamal Bhuiyan.

Thuram in racism row

AFP, Brussels

A former football World Cup winner, France's Lilian Thuram, accused staff in an upmarket restaurant of racial discrimination during a visit to Brussels, a Belgian newspaper reported Friday.

Thuram, his country's most capped footballer who also played for top clubs Barcelona and Juventus, told Le Soir a staff member in the restaurant, La Paix, told Thuram the toilets were "reserved for clients" when he was dining there on Tuesday lunchtime.

A leading rights and education campaigner, Thuram said he was "stunned at this discrimination visibly linked to the colour of (my) skin" while in town to promote an anti-racism campaign.

Thuram left the restaurant "shocked and baffled" after rejoining his table, the paper said.

The manager David Martin said there had been a "misunderstanding," saying "we didn't know he was a client and I admit I didn't recognise him. There was no wilful discrimination."

Thuram, who was born in Guadeloupe, has recently spoken out against a "scandal" in French football over recent weeks concerning suggested quotas for French-speaking footballers of African, Caribbean or Pacific origin going through national player academies.

Batista won't call up Tevez



Football

AFP, Resistencia

Argentina coach Sergio Batista has indicated he will not call up Manchester City striker Carlos Tevez for the Copa America in July.

Tevez is coming off a long but successful season with City with whom he won the FA Cup and also qualified for the Champions League but Batista said he had to determine what was best for the squad as a whole with World Cup qualifiers looming after the Copa.

"I understand people when they say he is a great player (but) afterwards there are qualifiers and then the World Cup," said Batista, who prefers to have Lionel Messi and Gonzalo Higuain as his forward line.

"Today, perhaps, he can't be at the Copa America - but I don't mean he is out of the team. Afterwards there are the qualifiers and the World Cup," he noted, suggesting that Tevez would still have a future role to play.

Tevez is a crowd favourite nonetheless and with the Copa on home soil many Argentina fans would hope to see something of the former ex-Boca Juniors man.

Batista further indicated that his country must target renewed World Cup glory and not be satisfied with a Copa America win as they prepare to stage the latter tournament this summer.

Speaking after their friendly win over Paraguay, Batista, whose task it is to rejuvenate the side after their pummeling by Germany in last year's World Cup under the tutelage of Diego Maradona, said the Argentinians have to chase the biggest prize.

"Argentina need to win a World Cup more than the Copa America," said Batista, although he conceded expectations were high for the latter owing to home advantage.

Argentina have won the continental crown a record 14 times but the last success came back in 1993, largely inspired by Gabriel Batistuta's goalscoring exploits.

Their only silverware since then came in the past two Olympic tournaments.

Batista is determined to use the Copa, where Brazil are the holders, as a springboard for the next World Cup in 2014 which their rivals and neighbours will host.

Sepp under investigation



SEPP BLATTER



Football

AFP, Paris

FIFA announced they have opened an investigation into president Sepp Blatter on Friday as the corruption scandal gripping world football took another extraordinary twist.

Football's governing body said Blatter would appear before FIFA's ethics committee on Sunday after claims he knew about alleged cash payments at the centre of a corruption probe targeting his election rival Mohamed Bin Hammam.

Bin Hammam had demanded the corruption investigation be widened to include Blatter on Thursday as the two men prepare to contest a June 1 election for control of world football.

The announcement came two days after Bin Hammam, FIFA vice-president Jack Warner and two Caribbean Football Union officials were summoned to the ethics committee to

answer corruption allegations.

Bin Hammam and Warner were targeted after Chuck Blazer, general secretary of regional footballing body CONCACAF, reported possible misdeeds during a May 10 and 11 meeting in Trinidad.

British media reports said Bin Hammam and Warner are accused of offering \$40,000 cash gifts to national associations at the Trinidad conference in return for their votes in next week's presidential election.

FIFA's statement on Friday said Blatter had been summoned to appear before the ethics committee to answer claims that Warner had told him in advance of alleged payments made at the meeting.

The statement continued: "Subsequently, the FIFA Ethics Committee today opened a procedure against the FIFA President in compliance with art. 16 of the FIFA Code of Ethics."

Joseph S. Blatter has been invited to take position by 28 May 2011, 11:00

CET and to attend a hearing by the FIFA Ethics Committee at the Home of FIFA (Zurich) on 29 May 2011."

Blatter issued only a brief statement on Friday following FIFA's announcement.

"I cannot comment on the proceedings that have been opened against me today. The facts will speak for themselves," the Swiss powerbroker said. Blatter has denied suggestions from Bin Hammam that he had orchestrated the charges against the man seeking to unseat him, dismissing them as "ludicrous."

"I take no joy to see men who stood by my side for some two decades, suffer through public humiliation without having been convicted of any wrongdoing ...," Blatter wrote in his column on the respected InsideWorldFootball blog.

"To now assume that the present ordeal of my opponent were to fill me with some sort of perverse satisfaction or that this entire matter was somehow masterminded by me is ludicrous and completely reprehensible."

The civil war which has erupted within FIFA's echelons this week follows weeks of corruption allegations involving the organisation's officials.

FIFA opened a separate inquiry after accusations made in the British parliament regarding the bidding process for the 2018 and 2022 World Cups.

Former English Football Association chairman David Triesman told a committee he had witnessed "improper and unethical" behaviour by four FIFA voters -- including Warner -- while campaigning for England's failed 2018 World Cup bid.

Benzema wants Real stay

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's French international striker Karim Benzema insisted Friday he is not interested in a move away from the Spanish club next season.

The 23-year-old initially struggled to impress following his 35-million-euro move from Lyon in 2009 before settling in at the club where he has a contract until 2015.

After a difficult start to the season, when he was criticised by coach Jose Mourinho for his lack of ambition, the French striker has managed to impose himself in the absence of the injured Gonzalo Higuain.

And despite being the subject of a much-speculated move to Juventus, the Frenchman, who scored 26 goals in all competitions this year, compared to nine last season, said he was happier than ever in the Spanish capital.

"People talk a lot: that he (Mourinho) hasn't got confidence in me, that he wants to sell me," Benzema told Spanish sports daily Marca.

"But if you look at the number of matches he had me play (48 in total), I don't think that he doesn't count on me. If he didn't want me he wouldn't have me play as much, would he?"

"He asks a lot of me but he has helped me to improve. He's someone who loves winning and so do I. He made me a winner as a footballer and as a person."

"I feel very good at Madrid, in the team, I adore the fans, the people, the stadium... I'm going to stay for many years."

SPORTS POLL

Do you think the BCB can hire the new head coach by June 15?

Yes 52.4%
No 47.6%

TOTAL VOTES: 124

WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think Shakib Al Hasan is being overworked?

Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast vote

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DAY'S
EVENT



Bangladesh League
Arambagh v Mohammedan
Time: 4:15pm
Venue: Birshreshtha Mostafa