

Joy repents actions again

SPORTS REPORTER

Arif Khan Joy, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) vice-president and director of the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) team, once again repented his careless actions in entering the field with a firearm during the Federation Cup tie between Mohammadian and Team BJMC on October 16.

Joy made the remorseful gesture at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday. Only BFF members Bijn Barua and Iqbal Hossain were present on the occasion along with some former and current national booters. The journalists were invited on behalf of BFF.

"For my unintentional act, I am expressing my disappointment and I am still repenting my actions," said Joy.

Joy went on to explain that he always carried a fire-arm for personal security. He said that usually it was not visible due to the fact that he wore a blazer, but on that occasion he had entered the field hurriedly without a blazer and thus bringing it to everyone's notice.

Third straight washout

CRICKET

Rain seems to be following the IPL sides wherever they go.

A third successive evening game in the Champions League Twenty20 was washed out in Durban. While some play had been possible in the previous no-results, even the toss could not take place at Kingsmead as a persistent, but not heavy, drizzle set in. It was Delhi Daredevils' turn to be satisfied with two points, after Kolkata Knight Riders and Mumbai Indians on the previous two evenings.

While the rain had knocked Knight Riders out, and left Mumbai Indians hoping for a Yorkshire win against Lions, it did not impact Daredevils' chances as much. They were still placed second on the points table, behind Titans, and ahead on net run-rate of Auckland Aces, who also pocketed two points.

SC rejects Chargers' plea

CRICKET, Mumbai

The Supreme Court on Friday rejected Deccan Chargers' plea to put a stay on the Bombay High Court order which upheld the BCCI termination of the franchise from the IPL. The chief justice of India, Altamas Kabir, heard the case but refused to grant a stay to the franchise owners, who approached the apex court immediately after the Bombay High Court yesterday overruled the arbitrator's order to put a stay on the expulsion.

The development means the Chargers are now completely out of the IPL. The only way they can now make a comeback is if the Bombay High Court-appointed arbitrator CJ Thakkar finds the grounds of the termination were not correct.

The BCCI had terminated the franchise after it had failed to meet the deadline stipulated to raise the Rs. 100-crore bank guarantee (\$19 million).



Bangladesh Football Federation vice-president and director of Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation Arif Khan Joy (C) addresses a press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Haas joins 500-win club

Tennis

AFP, Vienna

German veteran Tommy Haas celebrated a piece of personal history on Thursday when the former world number two became only the fourth active player to win 500 matches.

The 34-year-old Haas, whose career has been plagued by injuries, reached the landmark by beating American Jesse Levine 6-4, 6-2 in the Austrian Open second round.

Florida-based Haas, ranked 20 in the world, joins an elite group of active players made up of Roger Federer (871 wins), Rafael Nadal (583) and Lleyton Hewitt (566) to reach the 500-win mark.

Pakistan for sure

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payments. If they don't, then we will take a decision regarding the BCB's relationship with these teams in the next board meeting which will take place on the 24th," said Kamal.

Earlier, a report published by the Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh had stated that 54 players who played in the BPL hadn't yet been given their due wages.

The board also confirmed a franchised-based event featuring the top 80 performers of the 14th NCL, which is scheduled to take place after the end of the National Cricket League. According to officials, the teams in the tournament will represent different Zonal Franchises with the country divided into four zones.

The meeting also discussed the problems regarding Richard Pybus, head coach of the national cricket team. The officials decided to give Pybus one last opportunity to retain his job based on the existing conditions between the two parties and have asked him to return to Bangladesh before the series against the West Indies.

"Pybus is a professional coach, but we cannot accept the long leaves that he requires to meet his family abroad. We'll take a final decision soon, based on his reply," said Kamal.

The board also raised the issues regarding umpire Nadir Shah and the allegations made against him by journalists from the India TV, a private Indian Television Channel. "The committee formed to handle the investigation have been given three weeks time. They can even invite the journalists from India for questioning if they want to. We want a fair trial," said Kamal.

The board has also decided to train BCB's umpire Anisur Rahman in an attempt to appoint him as the TV-umpire for the upcoming series against the West Indies. "Nadir Shah's suspension has caused a slight shortage in the number of umpires available for the series. While we have enough on-field umpires, we, however, require a fourth umpire or a TV umpire," said Kamal.

The day also witnessed Kamal, officially handing over the presidential throne to Papon in a glitzy environment which saw various party supporters come by to congratulate the new president.

Emily breaks MSC

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square for Abouakacem who finished from close range.

The marauding Zahid had found his mood and the winger crashed the bar soon after. But just when it looked like they had seized the initiative, Zahid picked up a second yellow card after foolishly striking a deadball against Mohammadian's Shohel Rana.

The incident saw the game decent to almost a farce as play was halted for ten minutes. After the return, the play never reached the heights, but Russel still had enough of their wits about them to grab the late winner in the ninth minute of injury time.

National striker Emily rose highest from a Mamun corner and finished with aplomb to silence the partisan crowd. It was his sixth goal in five matches and the striker seems to have found his form again after some time in the wilderness.

"Scoring the second goal against a team like Sheikh Russel is tough job and the equaliser was due to a defensive error," Mohammadian coach Saiful Bari Titu said. "We lost our ball possession in the second half to allow them to attack."

Sheikh Russel coach Maruf Haque said that the motivation was the tonic for the triumph.

"The players were complaining about the field and the pitch was not ideal for the passing game," Maruf said. "But I told the local players, especially Zahid Hossain that they grew up and turned into star players playing this ground and they have ability to do better than the first half and I think it played a vital role in them performing well."

Small steps to normality?

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

International cricket of a sort returns to Pakistan this weekend for the first time since the Sri Lanka team were attacked in 2009, but a resumption of tours by overseas sides remains a distant prospect.

An International World XI captained by Sri Lankan legend Sanath Jayasuriya and featuring several former South African and West Indian Test players will take on a Pakistan All Stars side led by Shahid Afridi in two Twenty20s in Karachi on Saturday and Sunday.

It is the first cricket featuring top foreign players in Pakistan since a deadly militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore in March 2009, which prompted overseas sides to stop touring the cricket-mad but troubled country.

After a three-and-a-half year drought, enthusiasm for this weekend's games is high, with fans snapping up tickets and players talking up the short tour, a personal initiative of the sports minister of Sindh province Mohammad Ali Shah.

"I took it as a challenge," Shah, himself a club-level cricketer, told AFP. "I don't claim it will instantly revive international cricket in Pakistan but I am sure that these matches will change views on our country."

The Lahore attack, which left eight Pakistanis dead and seven of the Sri Lankan contingent injured, turned the Pakistan team into cricket nomads, forced to play "home" series at neutral venues in England, New Zealand and the United Arab Emirates.

While security in much of Pakistan has improved since 2009, bombings and shootings are a near-daily occurrence as the country battles home-grown Taliban, and the chance of any high-profile tours looks very distant.

"We have planned to build a huge stadium (in Islamabad) along with a hotel within the premises that will allow surveillance with heavy security and teams will be carried from the airport to the stadium with the help of helicopters," he said.

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Shakib Al Hasan's early return from South Africa, gives him the chance to play one game for Khulna, and provides him with a respite from the shorter version of the game.

While a portion of the selectors' focus will remain on the performance of the national players, they will, however, also keep an eye on the cricketers who have an outside chance of making it through to the national team for the series against the West Indies.

Enamul Haque Jr and Naeem Islam's consistent performances for the A team, for instance, will definitely provide the selectors with some food for thought. A vacant opening slot at the top of Bangladesh's batting order will also encourage competition amongst the batsmen.

The fact that Bangladesh played their last Test match way back in December, last year, will also be playing in the minds of Akram Khan

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) almost convinced Bangladesh to tour in April this year, only to have their hopes dashed by the Dhaka High Court, which blocked the tour on security grounds.

Ehsan Mani, the former president of the International Cricket Council, the sport's governing body, hailed this weekend's matches as a step on the way to normalising Pakistan's position.

"This is a commendable effort," Mani told AFP. "The visiting team has some well known players and I am sure when they return they will tell people about Pakistan and it could prove a small step in a long process."

But the PCB has done its best to keep this weekend's matches at arm's length, terming them "unofficial" and insisting it bears no responsibility for security, fearful that any breach would set back the rehabilitation process.

Indeed, since the Bangladesh humiliation the PCB has been very reluctant to say anything about its efforts to persuade overseas sides to visit, leading many to wonder if they are making any efforts at all in this direction.

Mani criticised the PCB for its apparent lack of a clear strategy.

"I don't think they have gone about reviving cricket in a normal way," he said. "It seems they are making efforts on an ad-hoc basis and not getting involved in these matches in a big way. It is disappointing."

PCB chairman Zaka Ashraf said luring international teams back to Pakistan was not easy, but insisted the board was taking measures to restore confidence.

"We have planned to build a huge stadium (in Islamabad) along with a hotel within the premises that will allow surveillance with heavy security and teams will be carried from the airport to the stadium with the help of helicopters," he said.

All said and done, this year's NCL has a lot at stake. With the arrival of the national team's head coach, Richard Pybus, still uncertain, the league may just be the only serious warm-up session that the national players get to attend before the series against the West Indies.

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Jayasuriya, 43, the big-hitting opening batsman who helped Sri Lanka to their historic World Cup win in 1996, was optimistic as he arrived in Karachi on Thursday.

"I am happy to be part of these matches," Jayasuriya told reporters. "It depends on country to country (whether they tour Pakistan) but in my opinion Pakistan is a safe country."

West Indian double World Cup-winning batsman Alvin Kallicharran, who is coaching the international side, was similarly bullish.

"I think they (other countries) will have to have a look," he said. "With the success of these matches there will go a good message."

"Pakistan is a part of world cricket and we are here to show that Pakistan is a place to play cricket."

It is encouraging that players such as Jayasuriya, and South Africa's Andre Nel and Nantie Hayward, are willing to come, and a successful weekend will undoubtedly send out a positive message about the country as a cricket destination.

But the top names on the International World XI team sheet are all players at least five years past their peak.

Bringing a high-profile team such as England or Australia, who would be a prime target for any of Pakistan's numerous militant groups, would be a very different prospect.

While minnows such as Bangladesh balk at visiting, it is hard to see how bigger name teams will be persuaded.

Whatever the long-term chances, for now Pakistan's tens of millions of cricket nuts are just delighted to have a couple of games on their doorstep.

"It will surely be fun," said Usman Siddiqui, looking for tickets. "At least we have some cricket on our grounds, which have been completely unused. Let's keep our fingers crossed, we will have big teams some day."

Wozniacki dethrones Cibulkova

AFP, Moscow

Third seed Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark on Friday defeated defending champion Dominika Cibulkova of Slovakia to advance to the WTA semifinals of the Kremlin Cup.

Former world number one Wozniacki won 6-2, 6-7 (1/7), 6-1 to record her ninth win over Cibulkova, who is 14th in the WTA rankings, in their 12th head-to-head meeting.

"It was a very good match today as both of us played very well," Wozniacki said.

The 22-year-old Dane, who is currently 11th in the world but could still break into the WTA's top 10 by season's end, broke twice in winning the opening set.

The rivals traded with breaks throughout the second set, Cibulkova pulling the scores level at one set all after winning a tiebreak.



Caroline Wozniacki of Denmark hits a forehand return against Dominika Cibulkova of Slovakia in the Kremlin Cup quarterfinal in Moscow yesterday.