

SPORT



HOME ARE THE HEROES

World champion Germany footballers have a ride on an open-top double-decker during a celebration parade in Berlin on Tuesday. (Inset, top) Earlier the aircraft named Victor Plane that carried the players home from Rio de Janeiro was given a water salute on its arrival at the Tegel Airport in the German capital while (bottom) the players dance a conga during the victory parade at landmark Brandenburg Gate.

PHOTOS: REUTERS

Ticket scam suspect surrenders

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

A British World Cup ticketing executive accused of involvement with a scalping network blamed for fraud worth tens of millions of dollars turned himself in on Monday after a manhunt, authorities said.

Ray Whelan, a director of FIFA partner Match Services, who had left his Rio hotel before police could detain him last Thursday, surrendered to a judge in the city, prosecutor Marcus Kac told AFP.

Police confirmed Whelan, 64, had been detained after turning himself in to examining magistrate Rosita Maria de Oliveira Netto.

Authorities had been looking for Whelan after a judge ordered him and 10 other suspects to be held over a World Cup ticket fraud involving 1,000 tickets per match alleged to be worth tens of millions of dollars.

The group allegedly began its activities at the 2002 World Cup.

Match Services AG is a wholly owned subsidiary of Byrom plc, a British-based company that has provided services to FIFA and World Cup Local Organizing Committees since 1994.

Attempts by the company to mount legal challenges to the arrest order foundered.

BERLIN

a city of joy

REUTERS, Berlin



FIFA WORLD CUP Brasil

About a million jubilant Germans welcomed their triumphant national soccer team home to Berlin on Tuesday, many waving flags and banners saying "We are all World Champions!" as they basked in the nation's fourth World Cup victory.

Hundreds of thousands of revellers packed Berlin's "fan mile", a 1.3 km stretch of road running from the west of the capital up to the Brandenburg Gate, for a huge party. Many more lined the streets in the city centre along the team's route.

The players danced and sang their way onto a stage at the Gate, a potent symbol of the Cold War, dressed in black T-shirts with the number 1 emblazoned on them and threw footballs into the crowd.

Young and old fans alike were decked out in Germany shirts, many with their faces painted black, red and gold and with wigs and bandanas in the national colours. Many had started drinking beer hours before the team's arrival from Brazil.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, it's something to remember," said Sabine Kopf, 42, who travelled by train from the western city of Cologne with her husband and 11-year-old son who wore a shirt with "Jogi's Joker" on the back.

A black open-roofed bus drove the players, who jumped, screamed, waved and held up the golden World Cup trophy, through the streets of Berlin at a snail's pace for about 2-1/2 hours.

"I am really excited to welcome the World Cup winners during my lifetime. I am from East Germany and this is important," said Guenther Richter, 51, from East Berlin.

Sunday's 1-0 victory over Argentina in Rio de Janeiro marked the first time a reunified Germany has been world champion, with West Germany having won the trophy in 1954, 1974 and 1990.

The success of the national team since 2006, when Germany hosted the World Cup, is widely seen as having helped Germans take greater pride in their nationality. History had previously made them uncomfortable about displaying such feelings.

Television channels blanketed the airwaves with coverage of the party and newspapers dedicated whole editions to the win.

"This is what four feels like!" splashed top-selling Bild on its front cover, with a picture of the team with hands raised.

"Welcome, World Champions!" Berliner Zeitung wrote on its front page.

Soccer enthusiast Chancellor Angela Merkel however did not receive them on Tuesday as she was in Croatia. Berlin mayor Klaus Wowereit welcomed the team in Berlin and the players signed the city's roll of honour.

A roar went up from the crowd in the "fan mile" when the team's plane circled overhead. "Football's coming home!" bellowed fans when it touched down at the airport.

Captain Philipp Lahm led the team down the plane's stairs holding above his head the golden trophy secured in Sunday's final, with midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger close behind him wrapped in a German flag.

Argentine president no soccer fan

REUTERS, Buenos Aires

Argentina's President Cristina Fernandez admitted on Monday she had not watched a single one of the country's matches in the World Cup soccer tournament including the final.

A day after soccer-mad Argentina lost the World Cup final to Germany by a score of 1-0, Fernandez received the national team in the capital, giving each of the downbeat players, dressed in black suits and ties, a consolatory hug.

Fernandez had earlier declined an invitation from Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff to attend the final, saying she was recovering from a sore throat. In a televised speech, Fernandez, flanked by Lionel Messi and the rest of the team, said: "As you know I'm no soccer fan."

"I didn't see a single match, not even the one yesterday," she said, adding that she rang Argentine Coach Alejandro Sabella after the match because it felt like the team had won.

"That's how I felt and how 40 million Argentines felt too."

Some fans took to social media site Twitter to vent their derision toward Fernandez.

"There is poverty, she doesn't see it. There is insecurity, she doesn't see it. Argentina's in the final, she doesn't see it. CFK blind woman," said one Twitter user, using the president's initials.

'Focus on fresh start, not just Shakib'

SPORTS REPORTER



CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA

Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha has said that it would be unfair to call the Bangladesh team weak without the presence of ace allrounder Shakib Al Hasan.

Shakib, who has been suspended from international cricket for six months, will not be able to take part in Bangladesh's tour of the West Indies in August and their home series against Zimbabwe in October.

When asked if Shakib's suspension would affect the team Hathurusingha said, "It's very unfair to think that way because there are another 10 players playing. It's a team. For me it's the Bangladesh team. Whoever replaces him or whoever comes into the team, I expect them to do their best. For me it's the Bangladesh team that is going forward."

He however did not provide a clear answer when asked if he would ask the board to reconsider their decision.

"That's an internal matter. I don't want to discuss it in public. What we are doing is what we are doing. The board has made the decision and I am working for the board. It's for the betterment of Bangladesh cricket as well as betterment of the individual players. We will do the best for Bangladesh team," said the Sri Lankan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium at Mirpur today.

The Sri Lankan, who arrived on Monday night, observed the national team's training camp yesterday afternoon and had multiple meetings with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) acting CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury and directors Akram Khan and Khaled Mahmud.

While he was present during the ODI series against India this year, he officially begins his stint this month. Bangladesh are yet to win an ODI this year. They lost nine out of the ten ODIs they played in 2014, with the other being washed out.

It was a rude awakening of sorts for the Sri Lankan who saw his side go down to an Indian team without their top players. On a typical batting track at Mirpur, Bangladesh, despite scoring 272 -- their fourth-highest score against India in Dhaka -- were trampled over by India's batting.

The condition of the wickets in the next two ODIs however saw a huge change as both the Indians and the hosts struggled in conditions which saw plenty of assistance for pacers.

A rare sight in Bangladesh, the change surprised many in the cricketing community. The Sri Lankan admitted that the change was a part of the plan.

"For me it's the India team (not a weakened side) because they are a pretty good team. We played different ways, like in the first game we played on a batting wicket and I think we batted okay. The second and third games we changed the conditions just to see how we can cope."

"I was pretty happy with the bowlers, but then again I understand the conditions helped. Overall we need to improve in both batting and bowling," said Hathurusingha.

In a bid to guide Bangladesh out of their rut Hathurusingha said that the board has hired a mental conditioning coach in order to help the players prepare.

"We have asked one of the mental conditioning coaches to come and work with us as well. That's one area we are seriously considering to give the players some support. It's all about starting new and starting fresh," he said.



CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA