



ICC to review tampering sanctions

AFP, London

The International Cricket Council is set to review its punishment for ball-tampering in light of the Australia cheating scandal.

Cricket Australia has banned Steve Smith and David Warner from international and domestic cricket for a year while opening batsman Cameron Bancroft was exiled for nine months over the incident during the third Test in South Africa.

The ICC were unable to impose more than a full-match fine and a one-Test ban on Smith under its current code of conduct.

Richardson said a wide-ranging review, likely to be informed by respected former players such as Allan Border, Anil Kumble, Shaun Pollock and Courtney Walsh, would be an opportunity to "draw a line in the sand".

"With the full support of the board, we'll be undertaking quite a wide-ranging review into player conduct - and in particular the spirit in which the game is played," he said.

"We want member countries, across the board, to be more accountable for the behaviour of their players -- take responsibility for it."

To all of my teammates, to fans of cricket all over the world, and to all Australians who are disappointed and angry: I'm sorry.

What happened in Cape Town has already been laid out by Cricket Australia. Tonight, I want to make clear that as captain of the Australian cricket team I take full responsibility.

I made a serious error of judgment and I now understand the consequences. It was a failure of leadership, of my leadership.

I'll do everything I can to make up for my mistake and the damage it has caused.

If any good can come of this, if it can be a lesson to others, then I hope I can be a force for change. I know I'll regret this for the rest of my life. I'm absolutely gutted. I hope in time, I can earn back respect and forgiveness. I've been so privileged and honoured to represent my country and captain the Australian cricket team.

Cricket is the greatest game in the world. It's been my life, and I hope it can be again. I'm sorry and I'm absolutely devastated.

STEVE SMITH
AT A PRESS CONFERENCE AT THE SYDNEY AIRPORT YESTERDAY, WHERE HE HAD AN EMOTIONAL BREAKDOWN.

PHOTO: AFP

'Stain on the game'

AFP, Sydney

Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft returned to their respective hometowns with the weight of the world on their shoulders yesterday. Having been caught red-handed implementing a ball-tampering ploy on the third day of the third Test against South Africa in Cape Town on Saturday, the trio were handed harsh sentences (one-year bans for captain Smith and vice-captain Warner, and a nine-month ban for rookie batsman Bancroft) and sent home in disgrace.

Smith gave a tearful press conference upon his arrival in Sydney. Warner, a divisive figure who was charged with developing the plot and instructing Bancroft to carry it out, also broke his silence to say sorry and admit his actions had been "astain on the game".

"Mistakes have been made which have damaged cricket," he told his 1.6 million Instagram followers as he made his way back to Sydney.

"I apologise for my part and take responsibility for it.

"It's a stain on the game we all love and I have loved since I was a boy," he added.

In handing out their tough punishment, cricket chiefs bowed to uproar at home where sportsmen and women are held in high esteem and expected to act in the best interests of the game.

Authorities also needed to act decisively to counter mounting concern from sponsors over reputational damage.

CA's response wasn't enough to save an estimated Aus\$20 million (US\$15 million) partnership with naming rights sponsor Magellan which tore up its three-year contract Thursday after barely seven months.

The financial cost for the players is also growing with sporting goods company ASICS ending its relationship with Warner and Bancroft. Electronics

Lehmann the latest casualty

AFP, Johannesburg

A tearful Darren Lehmann said on Thursday he would quit as coach of the scandal-tainted Australia cricket team after the fourth and final Test of the ongoing series in South Africa.

"This will be my last Test as head coach of the Australian cricket team," Lehmann told a press conference on the eve of the match.

"Saying goodbye to the players was the toughest thing I have ever had to do.

"After seeing events in the media today with Steve Smith and Cameron Bancroft, the feeling is that Australian cricket needs to move forward and this is the right thing to do.

"I really felt for Steve and as you see I'm crying in front of the media. All the players are really hurting."

Lehmann, who was due to leave the job after the 2019 Ashes series in England, is quitting despite being cleared of any role in the ball-tampering scandal that has rocked the sport.

"My family and I have copped a lot of abuse over the last week and it's taken its toll," added the 48-year-old Lehmann.

"I am ultimately responsible for the culture of the team and I've been thinking about my position for a while.

"Despite telling media yesterday that I'm not resigning, after viewing Steve and Cameron's hurting, it is only fair that I make this decision."

'Players benefit because of us'

SPORTS REPORTER

The players remain tight-lipped about what they discussed during Wednesday's meeting at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. It is however no secret that the agenda of that meeting, where a significant number of cricketers were present, was the concern about the lack of a real platform that can address their problems properly to the board. The sudden move of the players basically brought the non-functioning existence of the Cricketers' Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) to the fore.

Although the players did not make any noise about their meeting, yesterday Khaled Mahmud's public reaction made the situation clear. The former national captain turned BCB director Mahmud, who also holds the post of vice-president of CWAB besides his numerous other roles, opined that the meeting could have taken place following the players' discontent over the players-by-choice system for the Dhaka Premier League.

While he was talking to the media, Mahmud not only defended the players-by-choice system but also gave enough evidence about which side of the fence he currently stands. It looked like a club official talking in favour of his club when he said: "I think there has been much talking because of the players-by-choice system. But the board has logic behind the system. I think players get the maximum considering the amount in BPL

[Bangladesh Premier League]. BPL franchises recover their investments from sponsorship deals, but that is not case for the clubs. Still, the clubs are spending Tk 4-5 crore, which is big in a Bangladeshi context. Players should think about that."

Mahmud also said that the players' move will send a wrong message and they cannot achieve anything by 'fighting' and instead have to negotiate and at one point he also said: "Players are getting much benefit because of us [the former players including Mahmud, Naimur Rahman, Jalal Yunus, Mahub Anam and Akram Khan] and they will not get anything if we are not here."

Although Mahmud claimed that their major responsibility is to uphold the interests of the players, his overall observation regarding the initiative taken by the players only serves to highlight that Mahmud can in no way be the true voice of the players when it comes to performing that major responsibility. Instead, it only showed that when one is part of the establishment like Mahmud is, one cannot be a true representative of the players. It is precisely for this reason that the players' congregation on Wednesday was justified as they need to create a platform from where they can raise their voices and negotiate with the authority to ensure their best interest.

"Our duty is to get out the best possible solution through discussion, their [players] interest, board's interest and club interest, we must ensure those because it is like a tripartite agreement," said Mahmud.

By that time, it was clear in which capacity he was speaking.

Another Ashrafal ton in vain

Nafees condemns Kalabagan to second tier

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Ashrafal yesterday hit his fourth century in the Dhaka Premier League, the most by a player in the country's List A competition this year. Still, it was not enough for Kalabagan Krira Chakra to avoid a stinging six-wicket defeat against Agrani Bank in the first relegation playoff match at the BKSP in Savar, where the bankers rode on an equally impressive ton from discarded Bangladesh opener Shahriar Nafees to keep their hopes of staying in the top flight alive.

More importantly, the match hammered the last nail in Kalabagan's coffin as the defeat confirmed their demotion from the top-tier with two more games still to be played.

Kalabagan will face Brothers Union on April 1, but with four points against Brothers' eight and Agrani's ten, they can now only play for pride before the crucial Brothers-Agrani game on April 4, which will decide the other team to be relegated.

Ashrafal, the disgraced former Bangladesh captain who returned to action last year after

SCORES IN BRIEF
KALABAGAN KC: 246 for 5 in 50 overs (Ashrafal 103 not out, Taibur 82, Riyazul 27 not out; Soumya 2-46)
AGRANI BANK CC: 250 for 4 in 45.5 overs (Nafees 109, Soumya 24, Salman 83; Nahid 2-52)
Result: Agrani Bank won by 6 wickets.

serving three years of a five-year domestic ban for match-fixing, struck an unbeaten 103 as Kalabagan recovered from a shaky start to post a fighting 246 for five in their share of 50 overs. The right-hander shared 163 runs for the fourth wicket with Taibur Rahman after Kalabagan were reduced to 36 for three in 13.1 overs. Taibur struck a 117-ball 82 that included 10 boundaries.

Ashrafal carried his bat till the end in his undefeated 137-ball knock that contained eight fours and a couple of sixes. It was the 33-year-old's second century on the trot after 127 against Mohammedan in their last group league fixture of the first phase. Unfortunately three out of his four centuries, including 104 against Prime Doleshwar, ended up being for a lost cause.

Interestingly his other century, 102 not out also against Agrani Bank, fetched Kalabagan one of two rare wins in the first phase.

Shahriar Nafees was dismissed on 99 in that game. However, the experienced left-hander made amends yesterday when he scored 109 as the bankers raced to victory and finished on 250 for four, with more than four overs to spare. The southpaw struck 13 fours and two sixes in his 142-ball knock. It was his second ton after 121 against leaders Abahani.

In the match, Agrani Bank did not seem troubled even once as their other opener, Soumya Sarker, gave them brisk start, hitting 24 in an opening stand of 45 in just 6.3 overs. But the most disappointing aspect of the talented left-hander is that he failed to make it big, despite getting starts in almost every innings he played in the League. Shariar and Salman put on 172 runs for the second wicket to take their side close to the comfortable win. Salman scored a fine 83 off 93 balls studded with 11 fours before being dismissed by Nahid Hasan.

Shahriar became one of the two victims of Ashrafal's mixed bag of spinners, but by that time Kalabagan's fate was sealed.



Ahead of his Indian Premier League stint next month, Shakib Al Hasan got much-needed T20 match practice in a hastily arranged game between BCB Red and BCB Green at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Shakib's BCB Red won the match by six wickets over the Mahmudullah Riyad-led BCB Green.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED