

Blatter, Platini cleared of fraud

REUTERS, BELLINZONA

Former FIFA President Sepp Blatter and France footballing legend Michel Platini were both cleared of corruption charges by a Swiss court on Friday after a seven-year investigation during which they were booted out of the sport.

A judge said the pair's account of a 'gentlemen's agreement' for FIFA to pay Platini 2 million Swiss francs (\$2.05 million) for consulting work was credible, and serious doubts existed about the prosecution's allegation it was a fraudulent payment.

As a result Blatter, who led FIFA for 17 years, was cleared of fraud by the Federal Criminal Court in the southern city of Bellinzona.

Platini, a former France national team captain and manager, was also acquitted of fraud.



Australia's T20 cricket captain Aaron Finch (3rd L) holds the trophy with former international players Shane Watson (L), Waqar Younis (2nd R), Morne Morkel (R) and Australian women's players Georgia Wareham (2nd L) and Tayla Vlaeminck (3rd R) as 100-day-countdown ceremony for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2022 was held in Melbourne on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Jamal, Saif share the spoils of an entertaining draw

SPORTS REPORTER

Saif Sporting Club and Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club shared the spoils of an entertaining 2-2 draw in their Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Bishreshtha Flight Lt Motiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

The two sides have been in a dogfight for a top-three finish and the result left neither team in a better position.

Midfielder Shonanur Rahman gave the home side, Sheikh Jamal, the lead in the 37th minute with a header on a corner from Shakil Ahmed.

The hosts held on to the lead for 40 minutes before Emery Bayisenge equalised for Saif in the 76th minute, scoring from the spot after Jamal Bhuyan's corner kick hit Sheikh Jamal midfielder Mazharul Islam on the hand inside the box.

Saif thought they had nicked all three points when Asror Gafurov scored one minute into stoppage time with a fine solo effort. But another penalty – this time Sohan's shot hitting Saif defender Abid Ahmed on the hand inside the box – came to Sheikh Jamal's rescue as Vali Jonov Otak made no mistake from 12 yards out.

The draw saw Saif move to 34 points from 19 matches in third position while Sheikh Jamal were just behind them, level on points but having an inferior goal difference. Both teams are 14 points behind league leaders Bashundhara Kings.

With this fixture, the top-tier professional league of the country went into a five-day break for the Eid-ul-Azha.

Kyrgios' secret to success

REUTERS

Nick Kyrgios's mum believes the Australian's success in reaching his first Grand Slam final at Wimbledon is down to leaving his video games behind in his hotel room and getting out to see the world.

Nil Kyrgios told Australia's Nine Media that she had seen a big change in her son's outlook on life since the Australian Open at the start of the year.

"It was so hard for us to get him to do anything," she said. "He was happy to sit in his room and play video games all the time. His shoulder would hurt him from how much he would play."

"In Beijing, we wanted him to walk the Great Wall of China with us. Who wouldn't, right? But Nick wouldn't go. He was happy to sit in his room and order in, that's what worried me."

"I remember in Canada we said, 'Let's go to Niagara Falls'. He wouldn't even go there. I actually went on my own on the tour bus. Nick wouldn't want to do those things."



T20I humbling offers scope for introspection

SPORTS REPORTER

Yet another disappointing performance from Bangladesh on Thursday saw the visitors lose the three-match T20I series against the West Indies 2-0 after a five-wicket defeat in the third and final T20I in Guyana.

Bangladesh's inability to adapt to the shortest format of the game has seen questions raised about a lack of power-hitting, which is proving the biggest concern ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup, scheduled for later this year in Australia.

The three-match T20I series in West Indies was expected to be the start of the build-up to the mega-event for Bangladesh, with the team management expressing hopes of forming a balanced squad.

After a disastrous T20 World Cup campaign last year, there was plenty of talk about reforming the Tigers' T20 approach. But things do not look to be in good shape overall. A failure to have an impact in the Powerplay overs is another major concern, as is the team's search for a stable opening duo.

While Tamim Iqbal's future in the



format is still in limbo, the Bangladesh Cricket Board, selectors, T20I skipper Mahmudullah and head coach Russell Domingo need to come up with a solution in order to improve the Tigers' fortunes, especially at the top.

There are questions over the lack of power-hitting towards the latter stages of innings as well, which keeps Bangladesh from getting quick runs and crucial momentum. There are also questions regarding Mahmudullah's capabilities as a batter and also as captain.

The experienced cricketer has been

unable to lead the side from the front since the last World Cup and, with Bangladesh scheduled to play at least 12 games before the T20 World Cup this year, it will be important to settle those questions.

It has been a difficult Caribbean sojourn for the visitors so far. Bangladesh lost the two-match Test series comprehensively prior to the T20I series defeat. However, the visitors can take some positives heading into their favoured 50-over format, with the first of three ODIs scheduled for July 10 in Providence.

Bangladesh won the first ODI in the same venue during their last tour in 2018 and went on to win the series 2-1. Bangladesh's performance in the ODI format under Tamim this year has been remarkable. They won a historic ODI series in South Africa in March this year after winning a series against Afghanistan at home to begin the year.

However, it will be important for Bangladesh to gain confidence, which at the moment seems very low. In the absence of veterans like Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim, the ODI series is expected to pose a tough challenge for the visitors.

Labuschagne, Smith tons drive Aus

AFP, Galle

Marnus Labuschagne and Steve Smith both hit centuries to give Australia opening day honours against a Covid-hit Sri Lanka in the second Test on Friday.

The tourists reached 298 for five at stumps after electing to bat first in their bid to clinch the two-match series in Galle. Smith, on 109, and wicketkeeper-batsman Alex Carey, on 16, were batting at close of play after debutant left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya took three wickets.

Smith smashed fast bowler Kasun Rajitha for a cracking cover drive to

bringing up his 28th Test hundred as he raised his bat to an applauding dressing room.

It was the former captain's first hundred since January last year during the third Test against India in Sydney.

Labuschagne, who made 104, and Smith put on 134 runs for the third wicket to take the attack to the opposition bowlers after Australia lost their openers in the first session.

Labuschagne recorded his seventh Test century and his first away from home in an attacking knock before Jayasuriya got him stumped at the stroke of tea.



Wimbledon braces for a new queen

AFP, London

Ons Jabeur said that the seeds of her history-making charge to the Wimbledon final were sown 12 months ago when she told her coaching team: "I'm coming back for the title."

Jabeur became the first African woman to reach a Grand Slam final in the modern era when she beat close friend Tatjana Maria, 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 in the semi-finals.

She will face Russian-born Elena Rybakina, now representing Kazakhstan, for the title on Saturday. Twelve months ago, Jabeur, 27, made



the quarter-finals for the first time, losing to Aryna Sabalenka.

But on the way she knocked out five-time champion Venus Williams, 2017 winner Garbine Muguruza, as well as current number one Iga Swiatek. Having never previously got past the second round at the All England Club, that run gave her the taste for more.

Russian and Belarusian players are banned from this year's tournament following the invasion of Ukraine.

But there will be a Russian presence in the final after Rybakina, playing in her first Slam final, switched allegiance to Kazakhstan in 2018.

"I'm really happy representing Kazakhstan. They believed in me. There is no more question about how I feel," said the 23-year-old.

"It's already a long time my journey as a Kazakh player. I played Olympics, Fed Cup."

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