

SA name new coaching staff

REUTERS, Johannesburg

South Africa have named Rob Walter as their new head coach in limited overs cricket with Shukri Conrad to take over the Test team, officials confirmed on Monday.

Mark Boucher, who had been in charge across all formats, resigned following the recent Twenty20 World Cup in Australia to take up a role in the Indian Premier League with the Mumbai Indians.

South African Walter has previously worked as a strength and conditioning specialist with the national team but spent the last seven years coaching in New Zealand domestic cricket.

Conrad is an experienced head coach in South African domestic cricket and was most recently in charge of the national Under-19 side.

He will have a light workload early in his tenure with South Africa scheduled to play just three more tests in 2023, starting with a two-match series at home to West Indies that gets underway on Feb. 28.

Both coaches take up their roles from Feb. 1.

South Africa's director of cricket Enoch



Nkwe confirmed they will have interim coaching for the three-match home One-Day International series against England that begins on Jan. 27.

"Their leadership is very strong and they are clear in their minds about how to move South African cricket forward," Nkwe told reporters. "Not just the national teams, but also our (domestic) system."

Nkwe said it was important to lay the foundations for success in the 50-overs Cricket World Cup in 2027, which South Africa is co-hosting with Namibia and Zimbabwe.

Bangabandhu Sports Education Scholarship on the cards

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangabandhu Krirasebi Kallyan Foundation (BKKF) is set to introduce the Bangabandhu Sports Education Scholarship for sportspersons and their children after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina recently allocated Tk 20 crore to the foundation.

The BKKF has been providing monthly financial assistance to distressed, injured and disabled athletes while also bearing any costs related to treatment since being established in 2011.

The foundation, which falls under the banner of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, is now taking the initiative to provide the financial assistance for the education of athletes as well as their children.

"We believe the introduction of the Bangabandhu Sports Education Scholarship will inspire sportspersons across the country to concentrate on their disciplines since they will now get scholarships to pursue their education and their children will also get scholarships," State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel said while finalising the policy with stakeholders at the National Sports Council conference room yesterday.

The draft policy allocated Tk 2,000 for each scholarship per month. However, following discussion, the sports minister said they would make three slabs for scholarships for school students, college students and university students. He added that applicants must meet the criteria the BKKF have outlined in its policy.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Rafael Nadal recovered from a second-set wobble as the Spaniard successfully kicked off his title defence with a 7-5, 2-6, 6-4, 6-1 win against Britain's Jack Draper, while France's Tiafoe, as well as Victoria Azarenka of Belarus, grabbed attention with the Nike-designed psychedelic-patterned singlet they wore in the first-round fixtures at the Australian Open on Monday.

Nadal in bizarre mix-up

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Rafael Nadal's victory march in the first round of the Australian Open was briefly held up on Monday when a ball boy took his racquet.

The bizarre incident happened between games in the first set, with the Spanish great leading 4-3 against Britain's Jack Draper at Rod Laver Arena.

"I need the racquet back," the 36-year-old defending champion, looking bewildered, told the chair umpire.

It was not immediately clear what happened, but it seems that Nadal asked for his racquet to be restrung, only for the ball boy to take the wrong one.

"The ball boy took my racquet!" a smiling Nadal shouted to Draper, explaining what the hold-up was.

It did not overly affect the 22-time Grand Slam champion as he went on to win the match, despite a second-set wobble, 7-5, 2-6, 6-4, 6-1.

"Not distracting, just a funny situation," Nadal told Eurosport later.

"I said 'I need the stringer', but I needed the stringer to look at the other racquets."

"So he picked up my racquet I was ready to play (with). But okay, he took it and no problem at all."

Azarenka turns 'obnoxious' soccer mom

Victoria Azarenka is known for her cool and composed demeanour on the tennis court, but the two-time Australian Open champion says she turns into a loud and obnoxious "soccer mom" on the sidelines of her son Leo's games.

A Paris St Germain fan since ex-England midfielder David Beckham briefly played for the French club a decade ago, Azarenka said her affiliation has rubbed off on six-year-old Leo, and both of them often wear matching PSG shirts.

"Leo is extremely into football now. I call it football, he calls it soccer - we have this debate," Azarenka told reporters after downing another former champion, American Sofia Kenin, in straight sets



to move into the second round of this season's Grand Slam opener.

"He wants to play in Paris St Germain, that's his dream. I'm a soccer mom now and I love that. I'm obnoxious, like absolutely the most obnoxious."

"...It's a completely different emotion for me to support my son. I have no shame in screaming for him, like zero. But I'm very supportive. I want him to do well, I want him to achieve his dreams."

Azarenka, who won the Australian

Open in 2012 and 2013, had a year-long maternity break in 2016-17, while a split with her partner and a custody battle over Leo was not settled until 2018.

Leo travels with Azarenka on Tour, and he stole the show in one post-match news conference in Melbourne last year when he sat on her lap and answered questions about her performance.

"It's been quite an experience for me just to go to his games, for example," Azarenka added.

"I actually even asked him, 'Leo, do you like when mommy supports you?' He goes, 'Yeah, I love it, mom'."

"Am I not too loud?" He goes, "Well, sometimes, but it's okay, I like it." So it's a wholesome moment for me."

Tiafoe dazzles in colourful kit

Frances Tiafoe won his first-round match at the Australian Open on Monday but it was the American's outrageously colourful kit which set tongues wagging.

The world number 17 wore a matching vest and shorts that had squiggly haphazard lines of blue, purple, red, yellow and white.

Tiafoe's brazen outfit in his four-set win over Germany's Daniel Altmaier was the talk of social media.

"This outfit deserves to get to the second week minimum," wrote one Twitter user.

"Pink camouflage singlet? Only Tiafoe can rock this look," said another. Not everyone was impressed, however.

"You know Tiafoe is my guy," wrote one. "But that outfit."

Ambrose's sage advice for Taskin

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chattogram

Taskin Ahmed's transformation to a complete fast bowler has been a highlight for Bangladesh cricket in recent times and the pacer has continued to impress in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League as the sole light for a Dhaka Dominators side that has lost three of their four matches.

Dhaka fell to a five-wicket defeat against Sylhet Strikers after managing to post a paltry 129 runs yesterday, but Taskin showed his class with the ball in the low-scoring game even as his team fell short yet again.

The 27-year-old bowled his heart out and was also a little unfortunate, but he ended up conceding just 12 runs from his four overs while scalping the big wicket of Mushfiqur Rahim with a brilliant yorker.

After the game, Taskin was speaking to West Indies legend Sir Curtly Ambrose, who is engaged in the commentary panel of the BPL. The conversation proved productive, with Ambrose sharing his wealth of knowledge and giving Taskin pointers on how to develop as a pacer in all three formats.

"It's always difficult for fast bowlers to maintain their workload, especially with so much cricket being played these days. It is important to know limitations and work on strengths instead of trying to do too much in a short time. It is important how you cope with the different formats. But the most important is the mindset you adopt before you go out on the field," Ambrose told Taskin.

"You have to adapt to the surface. Sometimes, there is not enough pace or bounce on the surface. That's when you realise how important it is to work on your line and length."

Taskin has had to contend with multiple injuries since the early stages of his career and often remained sidelined. So, the keen enquirer wanted to learn how to cope with those injury-related issues which have hampered his rhythm over the years, derailing him sometimes even when in peak form.

"It is important for a fast bowler to be fit and you need to be disciplined to stay fit. It is also important how you manage your workload. As a fast bowler, it is very important you get enough rest and recovery before and after every game. T20 cricket can take a toll on pacers since it is a fast-paced game. So make sure you don't take it too hard on yourself," the legendary fast bowler advised.

Although Taskin's efforts were in vain, Ambrose had some encouraging words to cheer up the seamer.

"Remember, when things aren't going your way, remain positive and aggressive and always keep your head high. If you remember, during my playing days my aggression made me the cause of batters' headaches. As a fast bowler, it is important you remain aggressive and hungry all the time," Ambrose added.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Gavi's 'contagious heart and soul' power Barca

AGENCIES, Riyadh

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said Gavi's "heart and soul" was contagious for the rest of the team after the midfielder inspired the Catalans to a 3-1 win in the Spanish Super Cup final against Real Madrid on Sunday at the King Fahd International Stadium in Riyadh.

The 18-year-old opened the scoring before creating goals for Robert Lewandowski and Pedri as Barcelona comprehensively defeated Madrid to win their first trophy under Xavi.

"Gavi is spectacular. He can never stop growing, we all know that," Xavi began. "He is a kid that excites everyone. When you see him compete like that...the heart, soul and character that he plays with are contagious for the rest of the team."

"He's a born leader, too, that all comes naturally to him -- and at the age of 18. He is spectacular. I have said it many times, but I don't get tired of praising him. He has no ceiling, so don't slow him down."

Barca were trophy-less last season and won just one Copa del Rey in the last three years, under Ronald Koeman in 2021. Xavi hopes Sunday's trophy -- the team's first in the 21st century without Lionel Messi -- will provide the platform for further success following a difficult period in the club's history.



"We have a really good generation of players and you can see the hunger they have for trophies," Xavi added. "I hope this will be a point of inflection as you say, but this doesn't stop. On Thursday we have the Copa, next weekend La Liga."

"I am happy for the players, though. They have received a lot of criticism, unfair in many cases, and they were liberated today."

It's a massive morale boost and we can work with more peace of mind. It's also important for the fans. This club has seen everything in recent years: financial problems, the departure of Leo [Messi] was big. I hope this will be the first trophy of many."

Barca are still in pursuit of three more trophies this season. They travel to third-division side AD Ceuta in the round of 16

of the Copa del Rey on Thursday and then return to action in La Liga when they host Getafe on Sunday. They are currently three points clear of Madrid at the top of the table.

They also have the Europa League coming up in February, where they have been pitted against Manchester United in the round of 32.

Carlo Ancelotti, on the other hand, was in a less buoyant mood. One journalist asked if this was a humiliation for Real Madrid. To that, Ancelotti curtly replied:

"To say this was a sporting humiliation is a lack of respect. We lost a match to Barcelona, just as we won a match against them in La Liga. Barcelona were better today. That's it. To say humiliation, that's too much. In sport, sometimes you win, sometimes the opponent wins."

Ancelotti was also unwilling to say that the situation was out of hand, attributing it to the ups and downs of a season.

"It's not a critical situation, but it's a difficult situation. You have difficult moments in a season and we have to fix this soon with commitment. When you concede three goals, you need to be better in defence. We need to work on that. We're not playing well right now. But, this team has the quality to be competitive in all the tournaments we have left. Real Madrid usually win finals, and we've lost this one, but we have a long season left."