



Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi says he would sell AC Milan only to someone better for the club than him and nobody suitable has yet emerged

Mumbai, Wednesday, November 4, 2009

newsmaker >



Spectators are packing the stands, TRPs are going through the ceiling, games are getting closer... this Ind-Aus contest is turning out to be — as DNA once headlined — a SUPER SERIES



DNA Correspondent, Mumbai

Grudge series, Honour series, Race for No.1, Bigger than the Ashes... The India-Australia series seems to be living up to all what the promos had stated. The race for ICC's No.1 ranking in ODIs has also heated up.

Marketing-wise, the series seems to be a hit already. The TRP ratings have not come yet but authoritative sources in the trade claim they will be much higher than the ratings for the Champions Trophy and Champions League Twenty20.

According to E-map, the TRP ratings hover around 5. The number could be much bigger in the accepted Tam ratings. A 10-second commercial slot is being sold for Rs4 lakh for the series and for Rs3.5 lakh as far as bulk bookings are concerned. The price may go up as the series goes further down the wire. A 2-2 scoreline is a dream for the broadcasters, advertisers, spectators and, not the least, television viewers.

"The series is going to do to ODI cricket what the 2005 Ashes series had done for Test cricket," says Harish Thawani, the chairman of Neo Sports, which is telecasting the series. "It will break all TRP records. The ratings are going up after each match and it will cross 10 by the end of the series," he comments. Thawani says the success of the series is a triumph of international cricket over club cricket. "I never had doubts that nation versus nation is bigger than club cricket. This series has proved that point," Thawani said.

The broadcaster believes ODI cricket needed this kind of a series to be alive. "ODI cricket is complete cricket. It gives equal opportunity to batsmen and bowlers much unlike the T20 where the game is unifocal."

Thawani's marketing team is confident that it will meet the target set for the series. "We had a target of Rs150 crore from the series. We are confident of achieving it," said Abhishek Verma, the marketing head of Neo Cricket.

The expectations from the series were high even before a ball was bowled. India was coming off an average Champions Trophy, where they lost the game against Pakistan, had the match against Australia washed out and beat West Indies.

However, the washed out game against Australia in Centurion meant there was some unfinished business between the two sides. The seven-match series provided the perfect platform for the two competitive sides to lock horns.

There was a lot at stake in this series. The No.1 ranking was there for the taking and along with it a lot of pride and bragging rights. Though the Australians subdued their pre-series aggression, it was clear they meant business when the action started.

The Australians came out all guns blazing in Vadodara. Tim Paine, Cameron White, Ricky Ponting and Mike Hussey hit centuries to post a competitive total. However, India showed gumption as Harbhajan Singh and Praveen Kumar added 84 runs for the eighth wicket to run the Australians close.

India went onto to win in Nagpur and New Delhi, while Australia struck back in Mohali while defending a rather modest total. Even with their depleting resources, Australia proved that they can hold their own.

They came without Michael Clarke and Brad Haddin and have now lost fast bowlers — Brett Lee and Peter Siddle — and also wicketkeeper batsman Tim Paine. The good news for skipper Ponting is that the half-strength side has managed to hold their own so far against the Indians at home.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni has played out of his skin to ensure that India are neck-and-neck with Australia. Harbhajan Singh, who loves to get under the skin of the Australians, has performed with the willow even as his poor form with the ball has come under intense scrutiny.

However, with the most important stretch of the series still ahead, it is time for Virender Sehwag and Sachin Tendulkar to fire on all cylinders. With three matches to go, the series is turning out to be a bookies' delight.

Wanna bet? Do it at your risk, don't blame us that we have not warned you.

SERIES STAKES
India 4/7 Australia 11/8 — BET 365
India 4/7 Australia 5/4 — William Hill

AUSTRALIA

THOSE WHO HAVE CLICKED...

Mike Hussey has made 247 runs in four games, including an unbeaten 81. For someone who wasn't in the best of form, he has delivered when it mattered most with three half-centuries in four innings.

Ricky Ponting has been in prime form scoring three half-centuries in four innings. In all, he has made 197 runs at an average of 49.25. He has shown positive body language not only while batting but also while on the field.

Cameron White has been the quiet performer in the middle-order. In all, he has made 136 runs, including a high score of 62. He also made two half-centuries. The hard-hitting batsman, who is Victoria captain, has adjusted well to the slower wickets.

WAITING TO FIRE...

Shaun Marsh was expected to put to good use his experience of playing in the Indian Premier League but so far the 26-year-old hasn't succeeded, making just 21 runs in two innings. A lot will be expected from him during the rest of the series.

MEN WHO MATTER

THOSE WHO HAVE CLICKED...

Skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni is the top run-getter for the side making 255 in all in contrasting styles. His hundred in Nagpur was a swashbuckling innings, one that was in contrast to his unbeaten 71 in New Delhi.

Gautam Gambhir missed the fourth game in Mohali as he was struck on the neck while fielding close-in during the third match. However, India will want him to be firing on all cylinders and continue his good form, which has seen him hit two half-centuries.

Yuvraj Singh's 78 against New Delhi proved that he has the ability to play well against spinners and on slower tracks. He along with Dhoni took the team to victory as India went into a 2-1 lead in the series.

WAITING TO FIRE...

Sachin Tendulkar approaches another milestone — completing 17,000 runs in ODIs. However, he hasn't been in the best of form returning scores of 14, 4, 32 and 40. India will be hoping the Little Master fires as a big one is due from him.

INDIA

AUSTRALIA FINED

The Australian team has been fined for slow over-rate during their 24-run victory over India in the fourth ODI in Mohali on Tuesday. Chris Broad of the Emirates Elite Panel of ICC Match Referees imposed the fines after Ricky Ponting's side was ruled to be two overs short of its target at the end of the match when time allowances were taken into consideration. As per ICC rules, players are fined five per cent of their match fees for every over their side fails to bowl late.

SIDDLE OUT

Australia suffered yet another blow on Tuesday when fast bowler Peter Siddle was ruled out of the rest of the one-day series in India because of a side strain. Siddle is the fourth player after fellow fast bowler Brett Lee, all-rounder James Hopes and wicketkeeper Tim Paine to be sent home with injury. The tourists were already missing one-day regulars Michael Clarke, Brad Haddin, Callum Ferguson and Nathan Bracken, all out of the tour with various niggles.

PACKED HOUSES

That ODIs are alive and kicking could be seen in the stands. Packed houses in Mohali, New Delhi, Nagpur and Baroda are testament to the continuing popularity of the 50-50 format. The atmosphere has been electric and the cricket in the middle has been the value-for-money kind. If the healthy turnout during the Champions Trophy pointed to the fact that there was still a market for the ODIs, then this series has more or less secured the future of the game, at least in India. With the series tied at 2-2, you can guess what could be turnout in Hyderabad, Guwahati and Mumbai



HOT RIVALRY GETS HOTTER

This series has been played in the right spirit and both teams have shown a great deal of intensity on the field. There is no doubt that the India-Australia rivalry is one of the marquee contests in world cricket. There have been no ugly incidents triggered by players from both sides. With the younger players in their side still learning the ropes, the Australians have toned down their aggression. However, both teams have fought tooth and nail in the middle

RACE FOR NO.1

Whenever these two teams have met in the recent past the Race to No.1 has always been a hot topic of discussion. Australia, after being knocked off their perch, fought back with a domineering series-win over England and then defended the Champions Trophy title. India have flirted with the No.1 ranking but haven't been able to produce consistent performances. Australia have lost key players to injury and India are without Zaheer Khan but playing each other brings the best out of these two teams. The winners of the series will be the No.1 ODI team

topstories

ANAND BEATS KARPOV

World champion Viswanathan Anand tamed former champion Anatoly Karpov of Russia in two successive encounters to win the rapid four-game chess series 3.5-0.5. The Indian, who was leading the series 1.5-0.5 after two games, beat Karpov in both the remaining games to ensure a spectacular victory.

DUBAI TO BID FOR 2020 GAMES

Dubai has stepped up its work on a possible bid to host the 2020 Olympic Games by setting up a committee to supervise the project. "An executive sub-committee was formed to oversee plans for the 'Dubai 2020', an agency report said.

PHELPS EYES REVENGE

Olympic hero Michael Phelps will be out for revenge against Germany's Paul Biedermann when the pair clash in Berlin in the short-course World Cup meeting on November 14-15, it was announced on Tuesday.

'DECISION WASN'T RATIONAL'

Michael Schumacher's abortive decision to return to F1 last season as a replacement for the injured Felipe Massa was "emotional not rational", the seven-time champ said.

on the tube

13:30 AC Milan vs Real Madrid	18:00 Winter X Games
16:00 WWE Bottomline	23:00 Hitz
17:30 Glitch	18:00 Chilli Factor
21:00 Score Tonight	20:00 Serie A H/L

ACE ANCHOR

RICH & FAMOUS EPL STARS ARE VICTIMS OF VIOLENT CRIME

Scary side of a footballer's life

Paris: When Marlon King was convicted of sexual assault and actual bodily harm last week, many foreign players in the English Premier League would have derided his belief that excess is excused by celebrity status.

Unlike the ex-Wigan striker, now behind bars for 18 months, there's a host of international imports in English football's top flight who know what it's like to be victims of violent crime.

Tottenham's Honduran midfield international Wilson Palacios almost gave up football after his youngest brother, 16-year-old Edwin, was kidnapped in October two years ago. His body was found in May this year despite a £125,000 ransom being paid.

"I and my brothers were thinking of giving up football," he told *The Times*. "The family comes first. But Edwin would have wanted me to keep on playing and my family had the same view," added Palacios, who is set to play in next year's World Cup finals.

Palacios, who moved to Spurs from Wigan for £14 million, admits he is finding the tragedy easier to talk about as

time moves on. "My brother is always in my thoughts and mind when I go out on the pitch, when I am training, when I am doing anything," said Palacios who intends to build a school in memory of his brother. "With the passage of time, it gets easier to deal with. Answering questions about him becomes easier than it used to be. But every night I go to sleep I have a quiet moment of reflection."

darktruth

Manchester City's Brazilian superstar Robinho also considered giving up the game when his mother was kidnapped in November 2004 as she prepared a barbecue at their home. "The days she was missing were the worst," he said. "I can hardly describe how horrible it was. I could barely eat. I stopped playing football (he was playing for Santos at the time). "I wondered if my career was worth risking the safety of the people I love," added Robinho.

Over at Manchester United, Bulgarian star Dimitar Berbatov can also relate how crime came right up to his doorstep

when he was still playing in his country. Aged just 18, but already displaying the striking talent for Levski Sofia that would first take him to Bayer Leverkusen, Spurs and United, he was kidnapped by thugs working for the chairman of league rivals Levski Kjustendi, who was determined to force him to sign for them. The chairman, a gangster called Georgi Iliev, who was later shot dead, was forced to release him when Berbatov's father Ivian intervened on his behalf.

The most notorious example of a player falling victim to the criminal underworld was that of Colombian defender Andres Escobar, who was shot dead following his side's surprise first round exit at the 1994 World Cup finals. Colombia's fate — and that of Escobar — was sealed after his own goal allowed the United States to win 2-1. —AFP

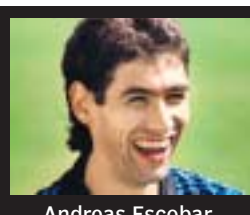
EASY PICKINGS?



Wilson Palacios



Dimitar Berbatov



Andreas Escobar

HORRIBLE TIMES: Man City's Brazilian superstar Robinho considered giving up the game when his mother was kidnapped in 2004 — GETTY IMAGES

'French Open could leave Roland Garros'

Paris: The French tennis federation (FFT) is considering to move the French Open out from Roland Garros if its extension project does not get the green light within a year. The project was agreed on earlier this year and an architect was appointed but the Paris City Council is developing cold feet. FFT director-general Gilbert Yvern told reporters on Tuesday.

"It seems that the mayor's entourage has become more hostile to our project — which was not the case when we launched it," Yvern said. "Add to that the residents' opposition and we are now forced to look for other options, including that of leaving the premises."

Last May, tennis officials said a new centre court equipped with a retractable roof would be used at Roland Garros for the French Open by 2013 or 2014.

Of the four Grand Slam events, the Australian Open has two courts with a roof, while Wimbledon's Centre Court unveiled its new translucent retractable roof this year. The Paris City Council and the French government were set to invest 20 million euros (\$29.26 million) each in the project which is estimated to cost 120 million euros. Officials at Paris City Council could not be immediately reached for comment. —REUTERS

