

Azharuddin goes for a six, Ajay Jadeja for five

No leniency for players as BCCI upholds CBI findings in match-fixing scam

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CHENNAI: Scorching growing public scepticism that the Board of Control for Cricket in India was not serious about punishing players involved in match-fixing and betting, BCCI president

A.C. Muttiah slapped life bans on former skipper Mohammed Azharuddin and Ajay Sharma and five-year suspensions on Ajay Jadeja and Manoj Prabhakar. With this, the most controversial chapter in Indian sport approached culmination.

Also banned for five years was former physiotherapist of the Indian team Dr Ali Irani for his complicity in the scam. But wicket-keeper Nayan Mongia was exonerated for lack of evidence.

However, Mr Muthiah pointed out that the players could appeal to the Board. "But there is no

scope for criminal action," he added, although the BCCI, as a sports body, could take action within the ambit of its rules.

The Disciplinary Committee of the BCCI, which met here for the better part of the day, reached this conclusion nine months after the scandal first broke when the Delhi police recorded a conversation between visiting South African captain Hansie Cronje and some bookies. A couple of months later, some of the biggest names in Indian and international cricket were dragged into the controversy, inviting government intervention and compelling the cricket board to ask the CBI to investigate the matter. Ironically, the man who blew the whistle on the involvement of Indian players in this scandal, Manoj Prabhakar, was himself found by the CBI to be 'heavily' involved with bookies.

There were grave reservations that the BCCI would go soft on the tainted players because of pressures from within and outside.



M. Azharuddin

Ajay Sharma

Ajay Jadeja

M. Prabhakar

But their clear-cut indictment by the Central Bureau of Investigation, reaffirmed by the Madhavan report, appeared to have provided no scope for leniency.

Azhar becomes the fourth international cricketer to be banned for life after the Pakistan Cricket Board suspended Salim Malik and Ata-ur-Rehman and the South African Cricket Board came down heavily on former captain Hansie Cronje.

Players from other countries named in the scandal are Arjuna Ranatunga and Aravinda de Silva of Sri Lanka, Alec Stewart of

England, Mark Waugh and Shane Warne of Australia, Martin Crowe of New Zealand and Brian Lara of the West Indies. Significantly, Kapil Dev, who was named by Manoj Prabhakar as the player who had offered him Rs 25 lakhs to underperform in a match against Pakistan in 1994, has got away scot-free after the CBI inquiry found no evidence to indict him.

Announcing the ban, Mr Muthiah said the 'tainted' players would not be eligible for their benevolent fund as well. "Mohd. Azharuddin is debarred from playing cricket matches conducted

or authorised by the ICCBCCI or affiliated associations and is also debarred from holding any position in the ICCBCCI or any of its affiliated associations for life, commencing from December 5, 2000. He will also not be eligible for any benefit matches allotted/conducted by the BCCI or its affiliated members and the BCCI's contribution to his benevolent fund, accrued as of today, will be forfeited with effect from December 5, 2000," Mr Muthiah said.

The same applied to Ajay Sharma and Dr Irani, while for Jadeja and Prabhakar, a similar ban was imposed for five years beginning December 5. Mr Muthiah said that it was a sad day for Indian cricket.

Significantly, the three-member disciplinary committee was reduced to two as BCCI vice-president Kamal Morarka, who is said to be against any harsh decision, was absent. The decision to ban was taken by Mr Muthiah and K.M. Ramprasad, also a vice-pres-

ident.

Mr Muthiah said that Mr Morarka was unable to attend the meeting due to a "pressing commitment". When asked if the decision of the committee would be affected if Mr Morarka later objected to it, Mr Muthiah said that it was final.

"I spoke to Mr. Morarka earlier but I could not convey the decision as he was in transit," Mr Muthiah added. "I know that he has spoken out about the CBI report, but that is in his personal capacity and it is not a statement of the board."

He further said that the disciplinary committee had carefully considered the facts and findings of the Madhavan commission on the CBI report before taking a decision.

On Nikhil Chopra, Mr Muthiah said that he had not been cleared as yet. "The Madhavan commission has been asked to go into his case too and it will take another two months to come to a decision."

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