

IQBAL KHAN

Former Proteas coach dies at age 77

OFF THE BALL
by Iqbal Khan

*Former South Africa all-rounder Mike Procter has died aged 77. Procter played seven Tests for South Africa before they were banned from international cricket in 1970 because of the country's apartheid government. His wife Maryna said he had suffered complications during surgery. The phrase 'Proctershire' was very apt for Mike. He put in the biggest performances in the biggest games. Procter was on the winning side in six of the seven Tests he played - all against Australia - between 1967 and 1970 and took 41 wickets at an average of just 15.02 before his international career was cut short. His reputation as a formidable fast bowler was well earned and in 401 first-class games from 1965 to 1988, he took 1,417 wickets at 19.53, with a further 344 wickets at 18.76 in List A cricket. Procter was Proteas coach from 1991 to 1994 and he led the side to the semi-finals of the 1992 World Cup. He later became an International Cricket Council match referee.

*Manchester United's 26-year-old England striker Marcus Rashford is on Paris St-Germain's shortlist to replace 25-year-old France forward Kylian Mbappe, who intends to leave the club at the end of the season. Club president Florentino Perez has told the Real Madrid players that Mbappe will be joining the Spanish side at the end of the season.

*Arsenal have made a stunning start to 2024 in the Premier League as they aim to win the title for the first time in 20 years. The Gunners are in blistering form, scoring 21 goals in their five league games during January and February. Mikel Arteta's side have recorded 5-0 wins over

Crystal Palace and Burnley as well as beating Nottingham Forest 2-1. The two most impressive results in the run have been a 3-1 home win against title rivals Liverpool and a 6-0 away thrashing of West Ham.

*England spiralled to a miserable and massive defeat by India on the fourth day of the third Test in Rajkot. In perhaps their worst performance since captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum took charge, England were dismantled by Yashasvi Jaiswal's 214 not out, then capitulated with the bat. Set a notional 557 to win, the tourists were bundled out for an embarrassing 122 in a blur of irresponsible strokes. The 434-run margin of defeat is England's largest in terms of runs since 1934 and India's biggest of all time. India, who take a 2-1 lead in the series, were led by the brilliant Jaiswal's second double century in as many Tests. The opener returned on 104 after retiring hurt on the third evening and took his tally to 12 sixes, equalling the record for a single Test innings. In partnership with Sarfaraz Khan, who made 68 not out, Jaiswal took India to a declaration on 430-4. Left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja ran through England's middle order for figures of 5-41, to go with the century he made in the first innings. The fourth Test begins on Friday in Ranchi, where an India win will preserve an unbeaten home record that stretches back to 2012.

*To best understand what it is that makes Xavi tick and also why he has already decided this will be his last season as Barcelona boss, it is worth looking back at what happened back in 2008 when Pep Guardiola was appointed as first-team coach. Then, Xavi had just returned to Barcelona from a hugely successful European

Championship that Spain had won and where he had been voted player of the tournament. But mentally he wasn't in a particularly good place. There had been no titles in the previous two seasons, a lack of synergy at the club and the disappointment of seeing talented players go to waste. Xavi did not want to go, but neither was staying an option unless he received reassurances from Guardiola regarding his plans for this most demanding of clubs. His one-on-one with Pep was as brief as it was defining. Xavi: "I won't beat about the bush, Pep. I have one question for you: do you count on me?" Pep: "I don't see this team without you in it. I just don't see this working without you." Meeting over; the rest is magnificent history. In Xavi's first full season, though, the team won the league by a clear 10 points. Great success as a player does not come with a guaranteed right to attain similar achievements as a coach. Xavi, at the end of his time at the club, will have to ask himself if he wanted it all badly enough.



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