

in brief

GILCHRIST BREAKS BAT DUCK

Australian wicketkeeper-batsman Adam Gilchrist has become the first international cricketer to carry commercial bat sponsorship. Following a relaxation of ICC rules covering bat branding, Gilchrist's blade in the current triangular VB One Day Series in Australia features a small logo advertising Travelex, the foreign currency company which shirt sponsored Steve Waugh's Australian team for the recent Ashes series. The deal will see Gilchrist wielding a Travelex-branded bat up to and including next year's World Cup in Africa.

WRC GETS GLOBAL SPONSOR

The World Rally Championship has announced that global communications company Immarsat Ltd has signed on to become its first global sponsor. Immarsat will benefit from the branding opportunities offered during the course of the 14-race season, with the WRC acting as a global showcase for its communications solutions such as Global Area Network, ISC, owners of the TV rights to the WRC, targeted Immarsat for the role due to the strength of its technological applications, capable of boosting the Championship's live TV coverage. The WRC runs from January to November with 14 races on four continents.

NEW EVENTS STIMULUS

Stimulus UK, a new events organisation, has been formed by the merger of two leading Warwickshire-based sportsmen's promotion companies. Andy Lloyd, former Warwickshire and England batsman and Richard Blundell, England Colts and Coventry hooker, have formed the new company to concentrate on corporate hospitality, conferences and incentives. Clients lined up to work with Stimulus include PwC, BT and Barclays.

DIGITAL NEWS

Wisden launches net coverage

Internet history will be made on January 22, when the first One Day International between England and India will be broadcast live over the web. This represents only the second occasion when a full England international fixture has been the recipient of a live net broadcast, the first leg of England's Euro 2000 play-off against Scotland representing the only other example.

The cricket coverage, launched by Wisden Publishing's website wisden.com, will make individual games in the six-

match series available for £10, with access to the full tournament costing £50. Coverage will stream BSkyB's pictures and commentary.

The broadcasts come after Wisden secured a deal with India's state TV company, which has a rights contract for cricket coverage with the BCCI, India's cricket board. Though Wisden does not expect to entice many UK subscribers, it has pinned its hopes for profit on the large number of ex-pat Indians working in North America to buy into the coverage.

■ In further cricket news, CricInfo, the world's biggest dedicated cricket website, has signed two recent deals to boost its coverage. The site has entered into a deal with MPP Global Solutions to provide CricTxt, a global SMS cricket scores service. CricTxt will send text messages to subscribers' mobile phones every time a wicket falls in every Test or One Day International. In addition, the site has agreed terms with betting specialist bet365 to provide its users with a comprehensive worldwide betting service.

SPONSORSHIP NEWS

Budweiser becomes Man U tippie

The world's biggest football club has signed a new sponsorship deal with a global beer brand for the 2002/03 season. Manchester Utd and Budweiser have agreed terms for the new contract, which will make Budweiser a Platinum Sponsor of the club and the Official Beer of Manchester United as of the start of next season. It replaces Carlsberg as Man Utd's official beer partner. No terms were disclosed.

"Budweiser's partnership with Manchester United is an

outstanding fit, bringing together two brands with a commitment to quality and dedication to being the best that is unmatched in each of their respective fields," states Tony Ponturo, vice president of global media and sports marketing, Anheuser-Busch, Inc.

"As football fans know, the club's reach – like Budweiser's – is truly global and this deal allows us to promote our brand to millions of Manchester United supporters in dozens of

international markets across Europe, Asia and Latin America."

As the club's official beer sponsor, Budweiser will have exclusive beer pouring rights at Old Trafford stadium, receive on-field, in-stadium and concourse signage and have the right to use the official marks and logos of the club in advertising, promotions and packaging.

Budweiser is now finalising its marketing campaign for the deal, which will be unveiled at the end of this season.

LEGAL NEWS

RFU's Cotton's shirts face Nike writ

Cotton Traders, the leisurewear company directed by former England and British Lion great Fran Cotton, is being sued by the Rugby Football Union and Nike over an alleged copyright infringement. The company is said to have sold replica England rugby shirts bearing the red rose, a move said to be in breach of an agreement made between Cotton Traders and the claimants six years ago.

Nike took on the role as the official supplier of England's kit in February 1997, buying out

Cotton Traders' supply contract for £2m, with a further £8m spent on securing exclusive rights with the RFU. The contract signed at that time stipulated that Cotton Traders would cease to produce sportswear bearing the red rose, English rugby's national emblem, by the end of that year.

However, the RFU and Nike contend that the company has continued to produce goods which are similar to Nike's own merchandise, confusing the public into thinking that the Cotton Traders' line is officially

sanctioned by the RFU itself. Cotton Traders' defence is that the agreement did not prohibit the use of the red rose on its kit as it is a national emblem.

The case is a major embarrassment for the RFU since Cotton is a high-powered administrator within the Union. It is believed that RFU CE Francis Baron unsuccessfully attempted to mediate between Cotton Traders and Nike before last week's writ issue by the claimants. The case went before the High Court last week.