

ICC contract to keep "ambush marketing" clauses

Despite threats of a boycott by leading players, the International Cricket Council says that it will retain its "ambush marketing" provisions for ICC events for the Champions' Trophy to be held next month.

Clauses in the ICC contract barring players from endorsing products of rival companies 30 days either side of a tournament, written into the contract to protect official sponsors, has outraged top cricketers from several countries who have refused to sign the contract.

ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed, however, says that despite the opposition from players the ICC would not allow any company to cash in on its events secured through the large sums of money paid by official sponsors. He says that while there is a separate agreement for each event, they are substantially the same. The ICC could carry out a future review of its contract, but he doesn't foresee any major alterations with regards to the clauses in question. "There may be some minor changes. As we go through each event we will learn from the experience of running that event. We'll have feedback from players. But it'll substantially be the same because, having entered into the agreement for \$550 million (until 2007), having guaranteed the sponsors they will have exclusive rights, there is not much room to move," he said.

The controversial contract will remain in place for next year's World Cup, to be held in South Africa, and all players signing it will be bound to play under its terms. The Indian cricket board has warned that although national boards are obliged to field their best sides in ICC tournaments, it could be forced to send an under-strength squad to Sri Lanka for the Champions Trophy if top players refused to sign.

Many English and Australian players supported the stance of the Indians, but this week the Australian Cricket Board reached agreement over players' rights that addresses players' concerns over the use of their images, but also protects the ICC's commercial partners by accepting the proposed terms of the contract. The English Cricket Board says that it is close to an agreement on the conditions which specify that boards and players meet the obligations of tournaments and their commercial partners. If an agreement is reached it will mean that the Indians will be isolated in their protest.

The New Zealand players are unaffected by the dispute as they have already signed contracts for the ICC Trophy. Says New Zealand Cricket chief executive Martin Snedden, "The issue is a crisis and all parties need to do more to resolve it. If the issue is not resolved it will have serious consequences for the ICC, its member nations and players. This is not a time to apportion blame, it is the time to find a pragmatic solution before the crisis results in serious financial consequences for all parties."