

Sehwag dislikes to open in Test

As India seek a settled opening pair in Test cricket, the one batsman certain to be given the slot this season wants to drop down the order.

Hard-hitting Virender Sehwag, who opened the batting at the World Cup and also in India's last Test series in New Zealand, said on Tuesday he was eyeing a place in the middle-order.

"I'm a middle-order batsman and that's where I'd like to bat in Tests," Sehwag said, but added he was willing to wait his turn.

"I haven't spoken about it with the team management as the present batting line-up is doing a good job and I don't want to disturb it. As and when a slot opens in the middle, I'll stake my claim."

India has struggled for a pair of effective openers for a long time before Sehwag arrived on the scene and began dominating rival bowling with a wide range of attacking strokes.

Zaheer ready to fill Javagal void

India's fast bowler Zaheer Khan on Tuesday promised to solve his team's major problem this season, saying he was ready to play the role of a strike bowler.

"It'll be great to take up that role," the left-armed said amid speculation veteran pace spearhead Javagal Srinath may not be available for two home Tests against New Zealand in October due to a knee injury.

Srinath opted out of the ongoing training camp for Indian probables here and was expected to make a decision on his international career before the series starts.

"I'm ready if Srinath is unavailable. I'm looking forward to the Test series against New Zealand and confident of doing well," said Zaheer, who has improved rapidly since making his Test debut against Bangladesh three years ago.

India will also figure in a triangular one-day series involving world champions Australia. They will then travel to Australia for four Test matches and a tri-series with Zimbabwe.

Shaun won't be 'missed'



REUTERS, Leeds

South Africa captain Graeme Smith and England's Michael Vaughan do not think the absence of Shaun Pollock from the tourists' side for the fourth Test at Headingley will be a decisive factor.

Pollock, South Africa's main strike bowler and a powerful middle-order batsman, misses the match to attend the birth of his first child, with the two sides locked together at 1-1 in the series following England's 70-run victory in a fluctuating third Test at Trent Bridge on Monday.

"We will miss Shaun, he is a world-class cricketer but it is up to others to take responsibility," Smith said.

"Gary Kirsten should be fit to return to the side and we are confident we can continue to play the fantastic cricket we have done to dominate the series until this match."

Kirsten, the most experienced batsman in the South African squad, missed the third Test because of an arm injury but should be fit to return at Headingley, possibly in place of Boeta Dippenaar, who failed twice at Trent Bridge.

Seam bowler Dewald Pretorius will also probably come in, though he will have to perform well to fill the

boots of Pollock, who took six wickets in England's second innings with his nagging fast-medium deliveries to bring his career total of Test victims to 299.

Vaughan believes Pollock, who also contributed a handy 62 with the bat, will be a loss, though he still expects South Africa to bounce back, just as his side did from their



SHAUN POLLOCK

drubbing in the second Test at Lord's.

"He's one hell of a player to replace," Vaughan said.

"Shaun is a world-class performer, especially on wickets which suit his style of bowling. But the pressure is now on us to continue where we left off at Trent Bridge and we know South Africa will come back at us hard."

Vaughan said England had made a candid assessment of their poor performance in the second Test.

"We were honest after Lord's and said we didn't play well as individuals or as a unit," he said. "Headingley should be a result wicket and if we exploit the conditions we will have a chance."

England are likely to make one change to their side because fast bowler Steve Harmison picked up at calf injury at Trent Bridge, with experienced Surrey seamer Martin Bicknell and Worcestershire fast bowler Kabir Ali added to the squad.

"It was important to win at Trent Bridge and we all feel elated but we realise it's only 1-1," Vaughan said.

"There was a bit of tension and a few nerves early but we stuck to our disciplines well."

Smith is confident his team can recover their momentum quickly.

"We are not too down on ourselves, just a little irritated to lose the Test match. We did well to take the match to five days and I think lesser teams might have crumbled," he said.

"Day one of a Test match is always important" Smith added.

"The first morning sets the tone and it's about who performs best on the day. We will go to Headingley and practise hard. Now it's our turn to bounce back."

Eng turn back to Bicknell



AFP, Nottingham

Veteran fast bowler Martin Bicknell admitted on Tuesday that he was amazed to be recalled to the England team ten years after his last Test.

"I was pretty stunned when I was told the news," the 34-year-old Bicknell told Sky Sports News after hearing he was in the 13-man squad to face South Africa in the fourth Test which gets underway at Headingley on Thursday.

"Two or three years ago my name was mentioned and I thought I had a chance of playing, but didn't and I thought that was it my chance had gone.

"The news came as a bit of a shock, I thought someone was having a laugh. I know there are a few injuries around and if I can get onto the pitch I can hopefully do myself proud.

"This season I've been doing okay, but I've had better seasons and my focus has been on Surrey, I've not really given England a thought but if I get my chance I won't let anyone down."

Bicknell, who made two Test appearances against Australia back in 1993, was called-up after Durham quick Stephen Harmison sustained a right calf injury during England's 70-run third Test win at Trent Bridge.

Worcestershire's uncapped 22-year-old seamer Kabir Ali was also included in the squad.

However, Harmison still retained his place.

Glen Chapple, a member of England's squad at Trent Bridge where the hosts levelled the five match series at 1-1 but not included in the team, was omitted following the recurrence of an ankle injury.

Worcestershire off-spinner Gareth Batty, like Chapple uncapped, was dropped from the squad after failing to make the Trent Bridge team.

Headingley traditionally favours seam bowlers but left-arm spinner Ashley Giles, who played at Trent Bridge, retained his place.

Bicknell has been a cornerstone of the Surrey side that has won the County Championship three times in the last four seasons.

Worcestershire off-spinner Gareth Batty, like Chapple uncapped, was dropped from the squad after failing to make the Trent Bridge team.

In his two Tests he took four wickets at an average of 65.75 with a best of three for 99 at Edgbaston.

Bicknell, who has also played seven one-day internationals, was

described by England's chairman of selectors David Graveney as a "horses for courses" choice.

Graveney added: "Bicknell is one of the unlucky players not to be selected before."

"He's sometimes been injured but Andrew Caddick and Darren Gough have been the mainstay of our attack. Their absence has created opportunities for others."

Gough retired from Test cricket after England's second Test innings and 92-run defeat at Lord's.

But Caddick is one of several England pace bowlers currently sidelined through injury along with Matthew Hoggard, Richard Johnson and James Ormond.

Looking ahead Graveney said Harmison was still the selectors' first choice, provided he was fit.

However, he said: "If Harmison's calf was the same as it was on Sunday it would be foolhardy for us to send him into a Test match."

SQUAD

Michael Vaughan (captain), Kabir Ali, James Anderson, Martin Bicknell, Mark Butcher, Andrew Flintoff, Ashley Giles, Stephen Harmison, Nasser Hussain, James Kirtley, Ed Smith, Alec Stewart, Marcus Trescothick.

TB inspires England



REUTERS, London

Almost inconceivably, England head for the fourth Test at Headingley level with South Africa and with every chance of snatching a series lead.

Anyone who sat through the first two Tests would not have given them a prayer.

England batted poorly, fielded abysmally and flung down copious quantities of badly aimed pies, leaving coach Duncan Fletcher to cite his bowlers' inexperience in mitigation.

South Africa captain Graeme Smith, meanwhile, demolished one

batting record after another.

It is England, however, who have the edge this week after winning at Trent Bridge (TB) to square the five-match series at 1-1.

Fortune played its part but Michael Vaughan will not apologise for that.

South Africa, foiled by rain at Lord's after a win at Edgbaston which prompted Nasser Hussain's departure as captain, won the first two tosses of the series.

The third, won by Vaughan, proved even more important as the Trent Bridge track began to crumble from Day Two.

England, in effect, won the game on the Thursday. Smith, indeed, pointed out that his side had done well to compete for as long as they did. "My boys," he said. "Showed

immense character to take the match into five days."

They will need to show even more at Headingley, especially if they lose the toss again.

Shaun Pollock is the one world-class bowler in either side and took six for 39 in the second innings in Nottingham. But he will miss the match to be at his wife's side for the birth of their child.

Without him, the sides look reasonably matched. Both Smith and Vaughan know Pollock's value. "He's one hell of a player to replace," said Vaughan.

England may start without strike bowler Steve Harmison (calf problem) but his omission may yet prove a blessing in disguise.

Kiwis recall

FROM PAGE 13 "We still feel he has something to offer the team at the top of the order particularly in the conditions we expect to face in India."

But all-rounder Andre Adams has been dropped after failing to impress in the one-day series in Sri Lanka.

Hadlee said Ian Butler had been recalled to the one-day squad in the absence of Bond.

"Ian will give Stephen Fleming a pace bowling option," Hadlee said. "He is maturing gradually as a pace bowler and he will gain more valuable experience on this tour."

The Test squad leaves for Brisbane for an eight-day training camp on September 10 before returning to New Zealand before leaving for India on September 21.

SQUADS

TEST: Stephen Fleming (captain), Nathan Astle, Ian Butler, Robbie Hart, Richard Jones, Michael Mason, Craig McMillan, Jacob Oram, Mark Richardson, Scott Styris, Daryl Tuffey, Daniel Vettori, Lou Vincent, Paul Wiseman.

ONE-DAY: Stephen Fleming (captain), Nathan Astle, Ian Butler, Chris Cairns, Chris Harris, Paul Hitchcock, Brendon McCullum, Craig McMillan, Kyle Mills, Jacob Oram, Scott Styris, Daryl Tuffey, Daniel Vettori, Lou Vincent.

Champions hockey Argentines down Germans

AFP, Amstelveen

Argentina defeated Germany 3-1 in the only match of the men's Champions Trophy field hockey tournament here on Monday.

The result could have been 2-2 had Alexander Sahmel converted a penalty-stroke and had Jan-Marco Montag not conceded an own-goal.

Two penalty corner conversions by Argentina's seasoned flicker Jorge Lombi and Mario Almada's conversion of his run along the left, with Montag's help, had Argentina in command on the scoreboard throughout.

Argentina found their rhythm and confidence early and converted their chances while Germany's young team could only convert one of the many opportunities they had when Niklas Meinert knocked in a bobbling rebound off the pads of Pablo Moreira late in the match.

"There was a bit of tension and a few nerves early but we stuck to our disciplines well."

Smith is confident his team can recover their momentum quickly.

"We are not too down on ourselves, just a little irritated to lose the Test match. We did well to take the match to five days and I think lesser teams might have crumbled," he said.

"Day one of a Test match is always important" Smith added.

"The first morning sets the tone and it's about who performs best on the day. We will go to Headingley and practise hard. Now it's our turn to bounce back."

"That is our goal. We want to play as competitive as we can because we want to prove that our side is much better now than in the past," said Mahmud.

His Pakistani counterpart Rashid Latif rated Bangladesh very highly considering their recent performance in Australia.

"There is no question of taking Bangladesh lightly. They have shown tremendous improvement since what I saw last year. So, we are very serious," said Latif.

Coach Javed Miandad also thought that it would not wise to take Bangladesh lightly.

"Our mission will be to win the series and that's what we are looking forward to achieving," said Miandad.

Shoaib warns BD

FROM PAGE 13 county cricket and now think that it is an ideal stage for a bowler to attain maturity."

Shoaib's bowling action has been questioned three times by officials but the International Cricket Council (ICC) cleared him of chucking on the grounds of a deformity in his bowling arm.

Clash of titans

FROM PAGE 13 crucial match because of a family problem.

"Definitely our midfield will be further weakened without Prakash playing. Already we were missing Rana although young Zahidul Islam Rajan could replace him. And even though the reserve bench is not every strong, I think our team spirit will carry us through," Abahani skipper Hedayetul Islam Rajib said yesterday.

However, Mohammedan were more concerned about their misfiring forwards.

"On the whole we are a balanced side but our strikers are not providing the finishing touch. They are missing too many chances in each game," Mohammedan captain Musha Miah said.

The defender hoped that Pakistani recruits Kamran Ashraf, Mohammad Anis and Selim Amir would start firing in tomorrow's match.

TV replays

FROM PAGE 13 side as we play the game hard and fair.

"There are times when an individual gets carried away, but I do think sledging is being spoken about far too much," he said.

Meanwhile, the Australian captain said he admired Shane Warne, currently serving a 12-month doping ban, and hoped he would be back in the team soon.

"We have two world class bowlers in Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath who both have 400 Test wickets."

"Of course, Shane is having a bit of rest at the moment. He is pretty busy making headlines outside cricket and he will be back," Waugh said.

The skipper said the Australian cricket team always thought a step ahead of the opposition and was constantly trying to improve.

"The key is the characters we pick in our team. That is important to any organisation following the right direction and the goals we set," he said.

Waugh said the Test match series against India scheduled for October next year was a "big challenge" at which his team would play "aggressively".

Pitch poses

FROM PAGE 13 unfit, the match referee will take over. It's the home board that decides the character of the pitch and the visiting team has got nothing to do with that."

He however, said that the two pitches in question appeared totally different in character to him.

Top guns Agassi, Clijsters



REUTERS, London

World number ones Andre Agassi and Kim Clijsters were named top seeds on Monday for next week's US Open.

Agassi, runner-up to Pete Sampras in 2002, will be hoping to

seeded sixth, and Russia's Marat Safin in 26th are the other former champions in the field.

Switzerland's Roger Federer, who emerged victorious at Wimbledon last month, has been seeded second while French Open winner Juan Carlos Ferrero is third.

Among the new generation of Americans, Andy Roddick, twice a Grand Slam semifinalist this year,

and Mardy Fish have been slotted in fourth and 24th respectively.

Fifth seed Guillermo Coria will lead a strong Argentine challenge at Flushing Meadows.

He is joined by compatriots David Nalbandian in 13th spot, Agustin Calleri (19th), Mariano Zabaleta (27th) and Gaston Gaudio (30th).

Newly-crowned world number one Clijsters heads the women's draw while her fellow Belgian Justine Henin-Hardenne is second.

With Serena Williams unable to defend her title after undergoing knee surgery earlier this month, this marks the first time that Belgium players occupy the top two spots at



KIM CLIJSTERS



ANDRE AGASSI

live up to his top billing when the year's final grand slam gets underway in New York next Monday.

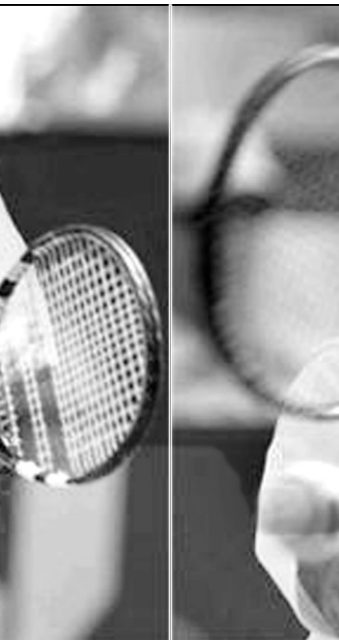
The last time the American entered the tournament as the number one seed, in 2000, he lost in the second round.

Having won the event twice, Agassi is one of only three former champions in the men's draw.

Sampras, winner of the hardcourt Slam five times since 1990, has not played competitively since capturing his 14th Grand Slam crown at the Open 12 months ago.

Although he has yet to announce his retirement, the 32-year-old will not defend his title.

Australia's Lleyton Hewitt,



Clijsters -- the only player to be ranked number one without winning a grand slam title since WTA rankings were introduced in 1975 -- will be bidding to achieve her breakthrough at the Open.

Americans Lindsay Davenport and twice champion Venus Williams -- who has not played since losing the Wimbledon final to her sister Serena last month -- have been seeded third and fourth.

"The draw for the US Open, which will be held from August 25 to September 7, will be made on Wednesday.

Motivated Belgians



REUTERS, New York

Kim Clijsters and Justine Henin-Hardenne are the rival countrywomen who require success at the US Open not only to sate their own ambitions but to gain the upper hand in their personal rivalry.

Capitalising on the absence of Serena Williams, who is recovering from knee surgery, Clijsters seized the world number one ranking when she won the WTA title in Los Angeles earlier this month.

Although no-one denied the amiable 20-year-old such an honour, it was quickly pointed out that she was the first number one not to have a Grand Slam title on her resume.

As a character, Henin-Hardenne is harder to relate to, so much so that she has been compared to both Martina Hingis and world heavyweight boxing champion Lennox Lewis by media in recent weeks.

But while Henin-Hardenne has one major title to her name -- this

year's French Open after a sweet victory over Clijsters in the final -- the world number three remains an enigmatic figure.

Victory at Flushing Meadows would help correct that imbalance, although the 21-year-old will have to overcome a great deal in New York, not least an unsupportive crowd.

They are expected to give Henin-Hardenne a rowdy reception to avenge her behaviour towards Serena Williams in the American's controversial semi-final defeat at Roland Garros in June.

Clijsters has won many admirers for her demeanour and, while once she may have been referred to just as Lleyton Hewitt's girlfriend, she is now a respected force on court.

A Grand Slam title would turn her into a feared champion.

"It's a very special feeling to be number one," said Clijsters.

"It's nice to hear 'number one' when they announce you on court at the beginning of a match.

"But, of course, winning a Grand Slam motivates me very much. I like the challenge.

"The US Open will be tough because without Serena playing,

there will be a lot of players who think they have a bigger chance to win."

Since Serena will not be defending her title, Clijsters' biggest threat in New York is expected to be Henin-Hardenne.

"She's the main challenger but there are other players who would like to get a win there too," said Clijsters.

"If I'm going to challenge her, it's going to be in the semis or final and I have to get there first.

"But if I play her, I'm definitely looking forward to revenge."

The Belgian duo have also recently engaged in a war of words after Clijsters accused Henin-Hardenne of using an injury time out as an excuse to regroup in the final of the Accura Classic earlier this month.

But Clijsters insists she and Henin-Hardenne are not enemies.

"Really, there is no problem with Justine, we just have two different characters," she has said.

However, the longer they both remain at the top of the game, and competing for the same honours, the more the rivalry will intensify.

Can he handle it?



REUTERS, New York

A thunderbolt serve, a peerless recent record and a celebrity girlfriend have turned Andy Roddick into the hottest property in American tennis.

Yet the world number four still requires a Grand Slam title to become the 'complete package'.

It sounds almost churlish to suggest this, but can the 'A-Rod' handle the pressure?

A win-loss record of 30-2 since the French Open, and a 20-1 return on North American hardcourts this summer, would indicate the question should remain strictly rhetorical.

His partnership with coach Brad Gilbert, not to mention a high-profile relationship with singer and actress Mandy Moore, has seen Roddick blossom from a reckless dynamo into a mature, 20-year-old contender.

His serve of 149 mph earlier this season equalled the world record speed, while he carries himself with great confidence and now understands how to manipulate different situations on court to his advantage.

He has scooped three titles in his last four tournaments, including back-to-back Masters Series crowns at Montreal and Cincinnati.

Moreover, he has the backing of many American fans who are eager for Roddick to assume the glorious mantle held by Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi down the years.

Yet being the overwhelming favourite for a tournament such as the US Open does not sit comfortably with everyone.

Roddick's temperament has improved significantly, but it remains untested at the end of a tight five-setter in a cauldron like Flushing Meadows.

So, too, has his ability to 'go the distance' at a Grand Slam event. At the Australian Open and Wimbledon this year, he fell at the most agonising stage of all -- the semifinals.

How will those memories play on his mind in New York?

"I prefer to look forward," he says.

"I'm also not into 'ifs' and 'buts'...I'd like to think I've improved as a player since the Australian Open, and even since March this year.

"I'm playing with confidence...I feel as though when I walk on court I will win. Hopefully it will continue.

"Obviously, I'm happy for the

summer I've had so far, but now I need to regroup, calm down and get ready for a whole new tournament."

It is true he has improved, in every department. Even his formidable serve has got better for he now mixes up the delivery. This weapon will be key in determining his progress at the Open.

But there is a lingering suspicion about his ability to rise to the ultimate occasion, to produce his best tennis when there is no room for error.

Australian Lleyton Hewitt, who has triumphed at Wimbledon and the US Open, is yet to reach a final at his home Grand Slam event in Melbourne Park. The focus on him every year in his own country is huge and it has undermined all his efforts.



ANDY RODDICK

Star WHIZZ KID COMPETITION 19. Tick the correct answers, post to The Daily Star. Win attractive prizes. Competition closes at 8 pm August 29, 2003 and draw shortly afterwards.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer. ACROSS 37 Coop denizen, 1 'Auld Lang --', 5 Differently, 9 Kitten's comment, 12 Jack Sprat's diet, 13 Go cold turkey, 14 Mimic, 15 Choir member, 16 Radius' neighbor, 17 Big fib, 18 United nations, 19 Sort, 20 Barber-shop mishap, 21 Go frog-style, 23 Historic period, 25 Coral formations, 28 Perches, 32 'Damn Yankees' portrayal, 33 Inuit transport, 34 Slowly, Stokowski, 36 Cheap.