

Pakistan A's tour delayed

AFP, New Delhi
The first visit by a Pakistan cricket team to India in almost five years...

Pakistan's second-string team, led by aggressive batsman Shahid Afridi...

The series will now be held at the same venue from December 22-30...

The tournament will feature a mix of international players and the cream of young talent...

A Pakistan cricket team last toured India in February-March 1999 when the senior side under Wasim Akram played three Test matches...

REVISED SCHEDULE
Dec 22: India v S Lanka
Dec 23: Pakistan v S Lanka
Dec 25: India v Pakistan
Dec 26: India v S Lanka
Dec 27: Pakistan v S Lanka
Dec 28: India v Pakistan
Dec 30: Final

Akram to fight

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licity-seeking, frivolous cases be dismissed with cost on the petitioner...

A private citizen, Najmul Abbas, has applied for a court order barring Wasim from coaching Indian players...

"Wasim was never offered an Indian coaching job so there was no question and even if an offer was made it did not come under the court's jurisdiction..."

"Unfortunately our legal system is so weak that such cases can be filed easily..."

Wasim, who took a world record of 502 wickets in one-day cricket and 414 in Tests...

Pace bowler Shoaib Akhtar has taken two civil court cases, including one over an interview with a British newspaper...

A separate petition calls for a public apology after Shoaib attended a fashion show on a Muslim holy night...

Nepal rout

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With their second defeat on the trot, Pakistan were eliminated from the three-nation qualifying round...

Only the group winners qualify for the competition proper scheduled to be held in Malaysia in September 2004.

Yellow card: Akhter (Pakistan)

NEPAL: Bikash, Subash (Birat Thapa), Prashant Giri, Pradeep, Pralaya Rajbhandari, Bijay Gurung, Raj Kumar, Prabhu Manandhar, Anjan, Lok Bandhu and Shekhar Thapa.

PAKISTAN: Zulfiqar (Abdullah), Akhter, Umer Farooq, Mubashar, Saleem, Imran, Farooq Shah, Rafiq, Shakoor (Misbah), Ejaz Ahmed and Ahmad (Waqas).

Referee: Nishantha Pingamage (Sri Lanka).

Get that signature, now



REUTERS, London

As sporting greats go, Sachin Tendulkar is something of a puzzle.

It is easier to recall the career statistics than the individual innings. His body of work is magnificent but the signature seems to be missing.

The next few weeks, in Australia and against the world's best side, provide him with a perfect opportunity to put that right.

All he needs to do is to serve up one of those "I was there" days.

Lined up against him in the four-match Test series will be Steve Waugh, a man with perhaps less natural talent but with as glorious a track record.

Waugh, on the brink of retirement as the most capped player of all time, has 32 Test centuries, one more than Tendulkar and two short of Sunil Gavaskar's all-time benchmark.

Waugh has more runs he is only the third player to pass 10,000 Test runs and, at 51.25, an equally imposing average.

The Australia has other strings to his bow he is a captain without peer. More importantly, however, while hardly the most expressive of men, he has produced moments of real sporting romance.

His match-winning century against South Africa in the 1999 World Cup has become the stuff of legend even if Waugh in fact never said: "You've gone and dropped the World Cup, mate" after being given a life by the butter-fingered Herschelle Gibbs.

His 157 not out, completed on one leg, against England at The Oval in 2001 was pure, obdurate Waugh he was batting with a calf muscle torn only weeks before as was his Sydney century against the

same opponents at the start of this year, completed off the final ball of the day just as the selectors prepared to force him into retirement.

Waugh has a massive advantage over Tendulkar, of course, in that he is surrounded by so many other players of the highest calibre.

Tendulkar is expected to carry his team.

He has never disappointed against the Australians, having made six Test centuries against them, three of those on enemy soil (none of which, however, led to victory).

But think of recent Indian cricketing romance and you do not think Tendulkar.

You think Anil Kumble and his 10 wickets in an innings against Pakistan or Vangipurappu Laxman and that dazzling 281 against Waugh and company at Calcutta in 2001.

Or even Harbhajan Singh's 32 wickets at 17.03 runs apiece in the same series. The next most successful India bowler in the series was part-timer Tendulkar himself, with three wickets, each costing 50.33.

Tendulkar has rarely featured in such romantic, colourful and ultimately decisive actions.

Wisden reflected the point last year when they classed him as the second-best Test batsman ever, yet did not include any of his centuries among the top 100 individual innings of all time.

Tendulkar is as formidable a one-day player. His last four one-day innings against the world champions have been 100, 68, 89 and 45.

But the match that really mattered came in March, in the World Cup final in Johannesburg. Ricky Ponting revelled on the big stage with a match-winning 140 not out.

Tendulkar made four.



Johansson eyes a comeback



REUTERS, Stockholm

In 2002, Thomas Johansson stepped out of the shadows of compatriots Magnus Norman and Thomas Enqvist when he won the Australian Open, taking Sweden's first Grand Slam title in nearly 10 years.

But now nearly two years have gone by and the Swede has still to live up to the instant status he gained after overcoming the odds to beat Russian Marat Safin in that Australian Open final.

"I proved to myself that when I play my best tennis I can fight with the best," Johansson told Reuters in an interview.

The win in Melbourne was only his seventh career title and he has not won another tournament since.

Johansson missed all of 2003 due to a severe knee injury but has recovered and is now aiming for a comeback on the ATP tour in January, either in Doha or in Adelaide.

"I'll be starting from zero...With the exception of the eight tournaments that I'll be able to enter with a protected ranking (23rd), I'll have to hope for a wild card (into the main draw) or a wild card for the qualifying rounds," he said.

"I never got a decent chance to prove myself last year because the injury came so early," said Johansson, who played his last ATP tour match in November 2002 in the Masters Cup.

The 28-year-old Swede, who has postponed his comeback more than once after undergoing surgery in February, admitted he had considered retirement.

His prize purse since he turned professional in 1994 stands at \$4.4 million (2.54 million pounds).

"Of course there have been days when I've wondered what I'm doing - Should I retire? Do I have the strength to invest all the time needed to get back? - but at the same time I think I've stayed pretty positive."

"They set an approximate date for when I was supposed to be back and the talk went that it would be in time for the Swedish Open (in July) but that turned out to be nowhere near. That's when you get a little depressed, when specialists have said 'another two months and it will be okay'," said Johansson.

Law to end

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few days.

The Board this year has decided to give a professional outlook to the National League after a lackluster event last season when it turned into a Dhaka-based tournament with makeshift arrangements.

It was learnt that the BCB was thinking of paying honorarium to the top fifteen players of each team. But that proposal would be finalised in the next Board meeting on December 6.

The tournament committee has also proposed to pay Tk 15,000 to each player of the participating divisional teams. But this financial benefit would be applicable only for those cricketers who have played at least three consecutive seasons for a team.

Besides, each team will receive Taka 2 lakh as appearance fees. The champions of the four-day competition will get cash awards of Taka 2 lakh while the runners-up will receive Tk 1 lakh. The winners of the one-day competition will be richer by Taka 1 lakh while the runners-up will get Taka 50,000.

One spinner each?

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difficult to pick both spinners. I don't think it's going to assist the spinners much, but we'll have to see what happens tomorrow morning," Ganguly said.

Australia have a formidable record at the Gabba, where they have won 10 of their last 14 Tests and drawn the other four.

Waugh is anxious to zero in on the Indians from ball one on Thursday.

"It is important to get off on the right foot," Waugh said. "Generally, if you win the first session, you win the first day and you win the first Test. And if you win the first Test you normally win the series, so it is pretty important."

"We must be sharp and ready to go and we're all positive. Nice and relaxed but really focused for that first session."

Ganguly knows Australians love to exploit the first-day conditions at the traditionally seam-friendly Gabba but believes day one, and the toss, will have minimal impact on the rest of the four-match series.

"If you look through the record of tosses at the Gabba, there are times when Stephen (Waugh) has won the toss, put the opposition in and won the Test match," he said.

"But it's how good you play over the whole five days of the Test match... I don't think the toss makes a difference."

Australia have won eight of the past 12 tosses and elected to bat four times.

Each time Australia have opted to bowl first they have won, including a crushing 10-wicket victory over India the last time they played in Brisbane in 1991-92.

TEAMS

RECENT FORM

Australia have not lost a series at home to any nation in over a decade. They have won eight of their last 10 series, home and away. They warmed up for the Ashes with a 2-0 clean sweep at home to Zimbabwe. India have won just three of their last 10 series, those wins all at home. They have won just six of their last 68 Tests away from home. In their most recent series, they drew 0-0 at home to New Zealand. They drew both of their warm-up matches in Australia.

KEY PLAYERS
AUSTRALIA: Steve Waugh. Cricket's most capped player, second highest run-scorer, second-highest century-maker and most successful captain is retiring after the series. Will be desperate to keep his brilliant record intact and finish his career on a high.
INDIA: Sachin Tendulkar. India's best batsman and already one of the greatest players in the sport's history. On the verge of becoming just the fourth player to score 9,000 Test runs. Topped the Indian batting averages on their last tour of Australia.

VENUE
The Gabba. Test cricket has been played at The Gabba since the early 1930s. Prior to that, matches in Brisbane were held at the Exhibition Ground. The Gabba is the home of the Queensland state cricket team and the Brisbane Lions, the reigning Australian Rules Football champions. The oval was also used to host soccer matches during the 2000 Olympics as well as the opening Test in the 2001 rugby union series between Australia and the British and Irish Lions.

FACTBOX

Factbox for Australia versus India first Test starting at the Gabba on Thursday.

HEAD-TO-HEADS

Australia and India first played each other in 1947-48 with Australia winning their first five-match series 4-0. They have since met 60 times with Australia winning 29, India 13, 17 matches draw and one tied.

Home ground advantage plays a big part in Australia-India matches. While India haven't lost a series at home to Australia since 1969-70, they have only ever won three Tests in Australia.

India won their most recent series, 2-1 in India two years ago, but were beaten 3-0 when they last toured Australia four seasons ago.

BHF looking

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Meanwhile, Bangladesh have been billed in Group A along with Hong Kong, Iran and Singapore in the AHF Under-21 qualifying round while Group B comprises Taiwan, Macao, Oman and Sri Lanka. The event will be held in Singapore from December 21-28.

Top two teams will join Pakistan, India, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan and China in the final round.

The venue for the final round is yet to be fixed, but Bangladesh have a good chance to hold the final round.

A 27-member preliminary team, which includes eight national players, is currently having a camp under the supervision of Ehtesam Sultan and Mahbub Harun.

The final 18-member squad will be announced after a week but the federation already selected the officials for the competition.

They are Ehtesam Sultan (team leader-cum-coach), Mahbub Harun (coach), Masirul Kabir Ritu (manager) and Kamrul Islam Kismat (assistant manager).

Tendulkar, work

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the ball comes out well from his hand and that's the day when you make him bowl quite a bit. Sachin can turn the ball. He turns it in a big way, but there are days when he bowls a few loose balls and that takes the pressure off the batsmen.

"But leg-spin is a difficult art and you have to keep practising, especially the control."

"As a captain I try to tell him he should bowl more leg-spin and to practise it in the nets but he also keeps on telling me that he doesn't want to practise leg-spin because he's a batsman and he's trying to work hard on his game as a batter."

Murali strikes a balance

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Flintoff took three wickets, off-spinner Gareth Batty two and Johnson one.

Samaraweera was caught behind edging a Flintoff out-swinger, while Chandana was trapped leg-before by a ball which came in sharply off the pitch.

Fast bowler Richard Johnson was the other wicket-taker in the morning session when he trapped left-handed Sangakkara leg-before playing across the line off his first delivery with the second new ball.

Sangakkara, 39 overnight, hit one six off Giles and nine fours in his 141-ball knock.

Giles ended the Sri Lankan innings when he had Muralitharan caught cutting by wicketkeeper Chris Read for his fourth victim.

Scoreboard at stumps on the second day of the first Test between Sri Lanka and England at the Galle International Stadium on Wednesday:

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists players like Hoggard, Johnson, Flintoff, C'wood, Batty, Giles, etc.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes solution time: 25 mins.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers. Includes solution: UL S M AS WS UAD UH WSN.

Marshall can't stop

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Razaq hit Michael Mason for 23 runs in the 47th over to finish with 34 off just 16 deliveries with two boundaries and two sixes to help Pakistan add 113 in the last 10 overs.

Inzamam, who made 25, became the seventh player in all and second Pakistani to appear in his 300th one-day.

"It's a great honour to play 300 one-day games and the win is icing on the cake for me," Inzamam said.

SCOREBOARD
Full scoreboard of the third one-day international between Pakistan and New Zealand on Wednesday:

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists players like Walsmsley, Cairns, Walker, Harris, Vettori, etc.

NEW ZEALAND
Cumming c Moin b Akhtar 10
Jones c Hameed b Razaq 23
Sinclair run out (Youhana) 32
Marshall not out 101
Harris b Sami 46
Cairns c Shabbir b Sami 9
McCullum lbw b Sami 1
Walker st Moin b Farhat 10
Vettori not out 9

Extras: (b-1, lb-9, w-5, nb-7) 22
Total: (For 7 wickets in 50 overs) 263
Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-58, 3-81, 4-188, 5-206, 6-213, 7-226

PAKISTAN
Hameed c Cumming b Walsmsley 63
Farhat c Marshall b Vettori 91
Youhana c Marshall b Walker 64
Inzamam b Cairns 25
Razaq c Marshall b Walker 34
Malik c and b Walker 15
Shabbir 10 1 42 0
Moin c Cumming b Walker 1
Sami not out 1
Elahi not out 4

Extras: (lb-1, w-12, nb-3) 16
Total: (For 7 wickets in 50 overs) 314
Fall of wickets: 1-142, 2-183, 3-236, 4-289, 5-308, 6-309, 7-309

Did not bat: Akhtar, Shabbir
Bowler O M R W
Mason 10 0 74 0

Man-of-the-match: Imran Farhat. Toss: Pakistan.