

SA's eyes on World Cup

PTI, Durban

South African skipper Graeme Smith on Friday said the five-match one-day cricket series against Australia was a good opportunity to prepare for the next year's World Cup.

"With the Cricket World Cup just more than a year away, South Africa hopes to use the series against Australia to iron out flaws and gear them up for the event," Smith said ahead of their tour opening Twenty20 match at Johannesburg.

Smith said the hosts would leave no stone unturned to bring about a reversal of their recent poor performance in Australia.

"Already, reinforcements have been called in to assist the team in their quest to topple the Aussies," he said.

Jonny Rhodes has taken charge of the fielding drills, while pace-man Allan Donald kept a watchful eye over the bowlers.

Meanwhile, both teams are dealing with injuries ahead of the Pro 20, a 20-overs-a-side match, slated later today. From the home side, Justin Kemp has been ruled out, while Shaun Pollock will play only as a batsman.

In the Australian camp, Andrew Symonds suffered a thigh strain and will miss the opening match of the tour.

Replying to a question on the possibility of the home crowd turning hostile against the Aussies, Smith said it was a part and parcel of every tour but maintained that he would not like to see that kind of reception given to the visiting Australians.

There are fears that spectators might hurl abuses at the visitors in retaliation for the racial taunts that the Proteas encountered on their recent trip to Australia.

DUBAI OPEN

Maursemo, Hingis exit

AP, Dubai

Top-seeded Amelie Mauresmo's run of three consecutive tournament wins ended, while Maria Sharapova defeated Martina Hingis in straight sets Friday to reach the semifinals of the Dubai Open.

Mauresmo lost 7-6, 6-4 to Svetlana Kuznetsova of Russia in a match postponed a day by heavy rain. Sharapova, who lost to Hingis in the semifinals in Tokyo earlier this month, won 6-3, 6-4.

Justine Henin-Hardenne beat Francesca Schiavone of Italy 6-4, 7-6, while second-seeded Lindsay Davenport needed three sets to beat Maria Kirilenko 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 in the other quarterfinal.

Sharapova will play Davenport in the semifinals later Friday, while Henin-Hardenne faces Kuznetsova.

Mauresmo, ranked No. 2 in the world, won the Australian Open and tournaments in France and Belgium. A win in Dubai would have displaced top-ranked Kim Clijsters, but Mauresmo never looked in control against Kuznetsova.

ULAB Cup cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Independent University (IU) defeated State University (SU) by eight wickets in the fourth match of the ULAB Fair Play Cup cricket tournament at the ULAB ground yesterday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SU: 85/10 in 17.2 overs (Reazar 34; Farabi 32/4, Parag 5/3).
IU: 88/2 in 16.3 overs (Farhan 27, Asif 23*; Shahriar 18/1).

Cruciani

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"Goalkeeper Aminul was responsible for the first goal, which came inside ten minutes and had we survived that early pressure, things could have been less painful. The second one was from a fluke penalty and the last goal was scored by Maksim Shatskikh, the Dynamo Kiev player who dribbled past five players to find the net," told Kanan.

"Cruciani was more disappointed because he claimed that no side coached by him had ever conceded five goals. The players were a bit nervous and looked under pressure on a cold night before a 30,000-strong crowd.

"I think the Uzbeks were too good for us. They were fast, used long ball as the tall players took the advantage and when needed, built up attacks with quick short passes," said Kanan adding that Aminul, who was replaced after ten minutes due to an injury, is fit to start against Hong Kong.

Cruciani, suspended for the Hong Kong match as well, will retain the same 18 booters for the next game. His fate, however, will be decided at the AFC disciplinary committee meeting on February 28.



AS Roma forward Vincenzo Montella (L) is under pressure from Club Brugge defender Birger Maertens during their UEFA Cup clash at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Thursday.

Marseille, Roma move on



REUTERS, London

Beaten 2004 finalists Olympique Marseille overcame a shocking blunder by France goalkeeper Fabien Barthez to defeat Bolton Wanderers 2-1 on Thursday and book a place in the last 16 of the UEFA Cup.

Favourites AS Roma ousted Club Brugge while 2004 Champions League finalists Monaco were eliminated 2-1 on aggregate by Swiss side Basel.

Marseille needed Franck Ribery and a Tai Ben Haim own goal to turn around their tie after Barthez had handed Bolton the lead in the tie after a goalless first leg.

Barthez, sent off in Marseille's 2004 final defeat by Valencia, inexplicably dropped Jay-Jay Okocha's cross under no pressure to allow Greece winger Stelios Giannakopoulos to fire the Premier League side ahead midway through the first half.

"I could hardly expect a worse start to the match," Barthez told reporters.

"But after my blunder the guys told me that I shouldn't worry. They did everything it took to win this match and to stop me feeling bad."

Midfielder Ribery headed home Samir Nasri's cross in first-half

injury time to haul Marseille level and Israeli defender Ben Haim touched Habib Beye's cross into his own net to book Marseille a meeting with Zenit St Petersburg.

The Russian side knocked out Norway's Rosenborg Trondheim 4-1 on aggregate.

Roma hardly missed the presence of injured playmaker Francesco Totti, goals from Brazilian Mancini and Cesare Bovo enough to beat Bruges 2-1 at the Olympic Stadium for a 4-2 aggregate victory.

Serie A's in-form side, who could set a league record of 11 successive wins by beating Lazio this weekend, can now look forward to a last-16 tie with Middlesbrough.

The English side, 2-1 up from the first leg against VfB Stuttgart, conceded an early goal at the Riverside to Christian Tiffert but held out to progress on away goals.

Sweden Daniel Majstorovic's second-half goal accounted for Monaco and earned Basel a tie with Racing Strasbourg. Italy striker Christian Vieri had cancelled out Basel's advantage from the first leg with a penalty.

Rapid Bucharest brushed aside goal-shy Hertha Berlin 2-0 to seal a 3-0 aggregate success and a last-16 clash with Hamburg SV.

Strikers Daniel Niculae and Mugurel Buga netted for Rapid, who began in the first qualifying round back in mid-July and have

scored 23 goals to date. Niculae and Buga have hit 13 of them.

Hamburg skipper Daniel van Buyten notched a first-half double in a 2-0 win over Swiss side Thun, overturning a 1-0 first-leg defeat.

Van Buyten converted Piotr Trochowski's cross inside two minutes and the combination worked again in the 33rd minute, with Belgian defender Van Buyten heading in a Trochowski corner.

Hamburg had David Jarolim sent off in the 82nd minute for handball.

Midfielder Emil Angelov, called into Bulgaria's squad for the first time this week, scored twice as Levski Sofia cruised past Slovak champions Artmedia Bratislava 2-0 (3-0 on aggregate).

The Bulgarians have yet to concede at home in the UEFA Cup this season.

A goal early in extra-time from Real Betis defender Melli broke AZ Alkmaar's hearts.

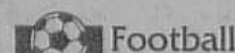
AZ, semifinalists last season, had cancelled out their 2-0 first-leg defeat in Seville through Shota Arveladze and Kew Jallens but Melli settled the tie from close range.

Betis's city rivals Sevilla cruised through 3-0 on aggregate thanks to a 2-0 win over Lokomotiv Moscow, extending their unbeaten home record in Europe to 25 games.

Also into the last 16 are Schalke 04, Udinese, Palermo, Lille and Steaua Bucharest.

PRIMERA LIGA

Barca eye Zaragoza revenge



AFP, Madrid

After Barcelona's impressive 2-1 win over Chelsea in the Champions League on Wednesday the Spanish league leaders will be looking for another fighting performance at Real Zaragoza on Saturday.

Zaragoza have knocked Barcelona out of the Spanish Cup for the last two years, and like with the English Premiership leaders, there is a similar sense of revenge brewing with the Catalan club.

"They are a similar side to Chelsea, they play well on the counter-attack," analysed Barca's Edmilson on Thursday.

"We lost there 4-2 in January but this time we will be playing closer attention to Diego Milto and Everthon (who scored two goals apiece in the defeat)," added the Brazilian midfielder.

However Barcelona may have to visit Zaragoza's imposing La Romareda stadium, where Real Madrid also sensationally crashed

6-1 in the Spanish Cup three weeks ago, without Ronaldinho.

The World Player of the Year suffered a slight sprain to his left ankle against Chelsea and Barca medical staff said that Ronaldinho would have a fitness test on Friday to see whether he travels to Zaragoza.

By contrast, Zaragoza welcome back midfielder Albert Celades after suspension to face his former club where he started his professional career and spent seven seasons.

Barcelona have a six-point lead over second-placed Valencia who play host to Getafe on Sunday.

The 2004 champions might have to face their visitors from Madrid's southern suburbs without two key players.

Goalkeeper Santiago Canizares, who has kept a clean sheet in eight of his last 12 games, didn't train on Thursday, while top scorer David Villa ended the session early with muscular twinges in his right leg.

Real Madrid are one place and one point behind Valencia in third

and will be looking to recover from their shock 1-0 defeat by Arsenal with a good outing at Real Mallorca on Sunday.

If Ronaldinho isn't fit for the short trip across the Mediterranean then club captain Raul Gonzalez could step into the breach, despite him only just returning to full fitness after three months out with a knee injury.

Another injury worry for Real coach Juan Ramon Lopez Caro is Jose Maria 'Guti' Gutierrez, who also had problems with his left thigh in the wake of the Arsenal encounter.

FIXTURES

(1600 GMT kick-off unless stated)
Saturday
Atletico Madrid v Malaga (1900), Real Zaragoza v Barcelona (2100)
Sunday
Athletic Bilbao v Villarreal, Real Betis v Real Sociedad, Celta Vigo v Cadiz, Espanyol v Sevilla, Valencia v Getafe, Alaves v Racing Santander (1800), Real Mallorca v Real Madrid (1800), Osasuna v Deportivo La Coruna (2000)

Eriksson fears Azzurri attack

INTERNET, undated

England boss Sven Goran Eriksson believes Italy's vast striking options will make them a real threat at the World Cup Finals.

Although the Azzurri have a reputation of progressing in tournaments thanks to their defensive capabilities, Eriksson feels Italy could prosper with a more adventurous approach.

"Italy are one of the favourites," he told in an interview for an Italian television programme.

"They have a good team with some very good strikers, like Luca Toni who is having a fantastic season."

"If Italy get it right, and I think they will get it right, you never know what could happen."

Eriksson is also adamant that the Italian national side have the right man at the helm in the form of Marcello Lippi.

"He is a very good Coach," he added. "His record says it all. He is confident and he should be."

Eriksson is also focused on Germany '06 and insists the announcement of his departure after the World Cup won't affect him.

"Now we have a big aim we've qualified for the World Cup," continued Eriksson, who will be looking forward to the Rome derby on Sunday seeing as he bossed both sides.

"I couldn't care less about what happens after the World Cup. The dream for all of us is to win the trophy and what happens after that, no one is really thinking about."

Advantage

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Khan mopped the tail taking 5-51 from 19 overs. Spinners Yasin Arafat and Raibhanuddin gave good support by sharing four wickets evenly as the last six home batters failed to cross the double-figure.

Visiting openers Masumud-dowlah and Gazi Salahuddin failed to put on any run on the scoreboard in their two overs batting.

SCORES IN BRIEF
BARISAL: First innings 168-3 in 53.4 overs (Imran 22, Faruk 18, Shahin 23, Nadif 45, Arafat 24, Shafiq 2-36, Alamgir 3-43, Mushfiq 2-42, Kamrul 3-29).
RAJSHAHI: First innings 134-3 in 36 overs (Farhad 46 batting, Nayeem 77 batting, Sajid 1-31, Anis 2-21).
SYLHET: First innings 203 all out in 69 overs (Rezaul 64, Mawla 25, Rana 21, extras 45, Mahbulul 2-36, Talha 3-53, Ashrafui 2-14, Munir 1-25, Rahul 1-11).
DHAKA: First innings 30-2 in 16 overs (Anwar 13 batting, Kamrul 11, Munir 0 batting, Ashiqur 1-10, Hasibul 1-9).

KHULNA: First innings 292 all out in 89.2 overs (Sadat 103, Salim 22, Sahajir 101, Sajjadul 22, Ehsanul 1-30, Yasin 2-61, Sabbir 5-51, Raihan 2-78).
CHITTAGONG: First innings 0-0 in 20 overs.

Sourav

FROM PAGE 12

them to the conditions and to make the bowlers practice under the strict vigil of Lillee.

Among the bowlers were Simon Jones and Kabir, a one-day specialist. There was also one Sajid, who is not in the side but currently the fastest English bowler and few more promising ones. These English boys had a good stint on the flat tracks and got the feel of the balls used in India.

Troy feels that irrespective of the wickets in India, three fast bowlers (Andrew Flintoff, Steve Harmison and Simon Jones) bowling around 90 mph and in the right areas, the fielding team can always be in the game. After all it is the bowlers who win matches.

(The article is a column by former India pacesman Javagal Srinath)

A Gambhir

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and Dinesh Karthick caught in the slips.

The hosts declared after Vikram Rajvir Singh, who put on 29 for the eighth wicket with Ramesh Powar, was bowled by Flintoff.

England's 16-man touring squad has been wrecked with injuries and illness, the main worry being captain Michael Vaughan's troublesome knee.

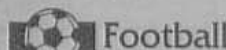
Vaughan was given a cortisone injection to speed up recovery and make him fit in time for the first Test.

Star batsman Kevin Pietersen is suffering from a back strain, fast bowler Simon Jones and off-spinner Shaun Udal are recovering from stomach bugs and all-rounder Paul Collingwood has been afflicted with a back spasm.

BRIEF SCORES

ENGLAND: First innings 238 (Pietersen 47, G Jones 46, Plunkett 37, Blackwell 33, Straus 23; Patel 5-59, Paul 2-26)
PRESIDENT'S XI: First innings 342 (Gambhir 108, Raina 62, Jaffer 48, Rao 25, Powar 23; Harmison 3-72, Flintoff 3-74)
ENGLAND: Second innings 10 for 1 (Patel 1-4)

Messi is my successor, says Maradona



INTERNET, undated

Diego Maradona believes that Barcelona superkid Lionel Messi has all the attributes to inherit his position as the darling of Argentinian football.

Scores of promising Argentinian stars have been labelled with the tag of 'the new Maradona', including such names as Andres D'Alessandro and Pablo Aimar, but all have failed to live up to the monumental legacy of the World Cup winner.

However, after yet another outstanding display against Chelsea in the UEFA Champions League, in which he ran Asier Del Horno ragged until the Spaniard was sent off, Messi has now

caused Maradona himself to exclaim the Barca star is his natural successor in the national



Diego hugging 'the new Maradona'

team. The 18-year-old is expected to be one of the breakthrough stars of the World Cup with his bewitching dribbling skills, and Maradona believes Messi is a unique talent in world football.

"I've seen the player who will inherit my place in Argentinian football and his name is Messi," said Maradona.

"He is beautiful to watch -- my kind of player in our blue and white jersey."

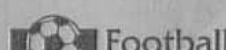
"He's a leader and is offering classes in beautiful football."

"He has something different to any other player in the world."

Messi's international debut was a disaster as he was sent off after just three minutes in a friendly against Hungary, but he is expected to play a prominent role for Jose Pekerman in the

PREMIERSHIP

Chelsea seek home comfort



REUTERS, London

Chelsea get a chance to put their Champions League misery behind them against Portsmouth, while Liverpool can boost their hopes of finishing second when they host Manchester City in Premier League action this weekend.

Chelsea's 2-1 defeat by Barcelona in the first leg of their first knockout round tie in the Champions League has even left coach Jose Mourinho wondering if his team should concentrate on domestic duties for the rest of the season.

"It will be very difficult in Barcelona. Can we go there to compete because if we can't we might as well go with a B team and concentrate on the FA Cup and Premier League," he said.

Champions Chelsea will be determined to stretch their lead over Manchester United, who face Wigan Athletic in Sunday's League Cup final, to 15 points with a win

over Harry Redknapp's relegation contenders at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.

Liverpool can move level on 54 points with United if they beat Stuart Pearce's Manchester City at Anfield on Sunday and would open up an eight point gap over fourth-placed Tottenham Hotspur, who have already played their fixture against Wigan.

Arsenal, buoyed by a stunning 1-0 win at Real Madrid, have a chance to close the gap on their north London rivals to two points with victory at Blackburn Rovers as the battle for the final Champions League qualifying spot heats up.

"We now need to do something good against Blackburn. We need to do the same thing in the Premiership as well," said defender Kolo Toure. "We have the second half against Real and it's going to be tough. But we just need to think of the next game."

Rovers will provide tough opposition at Ewood Park, though, as Mark Hughes's team battle for a European place of their own. Blackburn are a point behind

Arsenal and West Ham United after an impressive run of six victories in nine league games.

With eighth-placed Wigan preoccupied in Cardiff and West Ham without a game this weekend, Bolton Wanderers can climb to sixth with a win over poor travellers Fulham at the Reebok on Sunday.

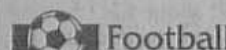
At the bottom, Birmingham City will be desperate to take all three points from their clash with basement side Sunderland at St Andrews. Steve Bruce's team are six points adrift of West Bromwich Albion who are in the safety zone with a game in hand.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT kick-off unless stated)
Saturday
Birmingham v Sunderland, Blackburn v Arsenal, Charlton v Aston Villa, Chelsea v Portsmouth, Newcastle v Everton (1715)
Sunday
Bolton v Fulham (1300), Liverpool v Man City (1215), West Brom v Middlesbrough (1500)

SERIE A

All eyes on the Olympico



REUTERS, Rome

AS Roma coach Luciano Spalletti says his players will need a huge group effort to make up for the absence of Francesco Totti and win the Rome derby against Lazio on Sunday.

Totti fractured his ankle when he went down under a heavy challenge during last weekend's 1-0 win over Empoli.

That result lifted Roma to fourth on 51 points, 16 behind leaders Juventus, and equalled the record of 10 consecutive Serie A wins, a feat last achieved by Bologna in the 1963-64 season.

A win against arch-rivals Lazio would set a new record of 11 consecutive victories.

The player on whom expectations will weigh most heavily is Totti's replacement, Vincenzo Montella, who has only recently come back from a long injury lay-off.

His team mates will try to block

out their captain's absence, a near-impossible task considering the blanket coverage the story has been given by the Italian media.

Reports have covered everything from Totti's first request after waking up from the anaesthetic - pizza - to the tearful apology of the Empoli defender who tackled him and the bedside visits of Italy coach Marcello Lippi and the country's Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

Roma's veteran midfielder Damiano Tommasi argued that he and his teammates would not lack motivation.

Totti's absence will favour Roma's arch-rivals on Sunday, though Lazio striker Paolo Di Canio denied he was pleased to be playing an weakened side.

Even with Totti in the team, Roma would need to be in form to beat Lazio, who are unbeaten at the Olympic Stadium this season and still in with a chance of a UEFA Cup place after defeating fifth-placed Fiorentina 2-1 in their last game.

In the other matches, Juventus aim to protect their 10-point advantage over second-placed Milan by beating relegation-threatened Lecce at the Stadio delle Alpi.

Juventus drew 2-2 with Messina last weekend but should be far too strong for Lecce, who have earned only four points on the road this season.

Milan continue their pursuit at Palermo, though their players will approach the match warily, especially after their 3-0 Italian Cup defeat by the Sicilians last month.

Inter, two points behind Milan, host Udinese and will hope to take advantage of any slip-up by the top two.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT kick-off unless stated)
Saturday
Reggina-Livorno (1700), Parma v Fiorentina (1930)
Sunday
Ascoli v Messina, Cagliari v Chievo, Empoli v Treviso, Inter Milan v Udinese, Juventus v Lecce, Lazio v Roma (1930), Palermo v AC Milan, Siena v Sampdoria

Bangladesh have a point

FROM PAGE 12

included Tapash (Baisya). You know Tapash has the experience to handle such situations. On the other hand, we thought that Rana (Manjarul Islam) would be more effective with his spin and batting," explained Bashar.

Coach Dav Whatmore was also optimistic about clinching the

series.

"All the ingredients are with us and still the momentum is with us. Everything is there to win tomorrow, we will try hard and play like the second match. We will have to do well in all the three departments," said Whatmore.

Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene was also confident

that his team would come back from their maiden loss against Bangladesh and win the series.

"We didn't take Bangladesh lightly in the previous game but they made a brilliant comeback. It can happen in cricket anytime. We are confident to win the series by beating the home side on Saturday," said the visiting skipper.

He however pointed to a couple of areas for their defeat.

"Our bowlers did not do well and the batsmen took too much pressure in the first 10 overs," said Jayawardene who on his first assignment as captain.

SQUADS

BANGLADESH (from): Habibur Bashar (captain), Khaled Mahbul (vice-captain), Javed Omar, Shahriar Nafees, Mohammad Ashrafui, Aftab Ahmed, Alok Kapali, Mohammad Rafique, Manjarul Islam, Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza, Tapash Baisya and Syed Raseel.

SRI LANKA (from): Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Kumar Sangakkara, Upul Tharanga, Sanath Jayasuriya, Ishan Mubaraq, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Chamara Kapugedera, Farveez Maharoof, Ruwan Fernando, Damika Prasad, Dilhara Fernando, Ruchira Perera, Chamara Gangagama, Malinga Bandara and Kaushal Lokuarachchi.