

Australia name chief selector

AFP, Sydney

Cricket Australia played it safe and Friday promoted Andrew Hilditch, a 10-year veteran of its national selectors team, to replace Trevor Hohns as the panel's chairman.

The promotion of Hilditch, a former Test opener and vice captain of the national team, defied calls for some new blood in the much-criticised selectors panel before Australia tries to regain the Ashes from England next season.

Hilditch, 46, has served on the panel since 1996, the year Hohns became the chairman.

Hohns announced his retirement on Tuesday, saying he needed to devote more time to his sports wholesale business.

But the long-time chairman had been under growing criticism over a series of selection choices, notably failing to use spinner Stuart MacGill and batsman Michael Hussey during last year's Ashes series, which Australia lost for the first time in 16 years.

Cricket Australia chairman Creagh O'Connor said the choice of Hilditch had the full backing of the board.

"He is an experienced member of what has been a successful selection panel," O'Connor said, calling Hilditch an "excellent communicator" who has a very good rapport with the players.

Hilditch said that he was "very excited" by the appointment.

"Trevor has done a fantastic job in the time he has chaired the panel and I can only hope to perform to a similar level," he said.

Cricket Australia said it was still looking for a fourth selector to join Hilditch, David Boon and Merv Hughes.

Sachin may be back early

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Sachin Tendulkar is recovering fast after shoulder surgery and could pick up a bat again as soon as the start of next month, the national cricket board said on Thursday.

Tendulkar, 32, returned home on Wednesday, nine days after undergoing the surgery in London.

"He was assessed prior to leaving London by the surgeon Andrew Wallace and he reports to be very happy with his progress to date," the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said in a statement.

The batsman can now hope to play some part in the test tour of West Indies starting on May 16, after doctors initially said he could be sidelined for up to three months.

Tendulkar, who holds the record for most test and one-day hundreds, will be put on a phased rehabilitation programme by the team physiotherapist John Gloster, it said.

He will be assessed on April 21 before he starts strengthening exercises in a bid to begin sessions with a light bat by the beginning of May, it said.

Although Tendulkar appears unlikely to play in the five-match one-day series in the Caribbean from May 18 to 28, he could return for the four-test series starting on June 2.

India's premier batsman has suffered a series of injuries in the last six years, largely attributed to wear and tear of constant cricket since his debut as a 16-year-old in 1989.

Atapattu out of Eng tour

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka captain Marvan Atapattu remains a serious injury concern for the Test and one-day tour of England starting later this month.

Atapattu, 35, was forced out of the recent home Pakistan series with a painful lower back injury that left him with numbness in his legs.

Sri Lanka's selectors are meeting next week to finalise their selections and Atapattu will be given until April 16, three days before the squad departs, to prove his fitness.

Sri Lanka's veteran swing bowler Chaminda Vaas, who also missed the Pakistan series because of a side strain, will return to the squad.

Sri Lanka will play three Tests and five one-day internationals during the 11-week tour of England.

BKSP champs in Manikganj cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

BKSP became champions of the AM Sayedur-Rahman Memorial Cricket Tournament defeating Prabhath Sangha by 58 runs in the final at the Shaheed Miraj-Tapan Stadium in Manikganj on Friday.

Batting first BKSP made 169 for 4 in the curtailed match of 25 overs due to rain. In reply, Prabhath Sangha were bundled out for 111 in 22.2 overs. Shaheen rattled the Prabhath Sangha batting by picking up four wickets.

Suhrawardi Shuva was adjudged man-of-the-match for topscoring with 82 runs and taking a wicket.



Middlesbrough's Italian forward Massimo Maccaroni (L) celebrates late winner against FC Basel in their UEFA Cup quarterfinal second leg match at the Riverside Stadium on Thursday.

Late Boro show stuns Basel



AFP, Paris

Middlesbrough produced a four-goal fightback to secure a miraculous victory over Swiss side FC Basel that put the English strugglers into the UEFA Cup semifinals Thursday.

Trailing 2-0 after a calamitous first leg defeat, Steve McLaren's Boro looked to be out for the count when Eduardo fired the Swiss visitors into a 23rd minute-lead at the Riverside.

That left Boro needing to conjure up four goals to go through to the last four, a daunting task against opponents who had comprehensively outplayed them in Switzerland a week earlier.

Yet Australian striker Mark Viduka gave Boro hope just after the half hour mark to make it 1-1 on the night, and added a second on 26 minutes to give McLaren's men further belief.

Jimmy Floyd Hasselbaink -- furious at being left out of the starting line-up -- slammed in a stunning 22-

yarder to make it 3-1, before Massimo Maccaroni steered in a dramatic fourth in the dying seconds to spark pandemonium.

Boro will now play Steaua Bucharest in the semifinals after the Romanians and former European champions secured a 0-0 draw with their city rivals Rapid to advance on the away goals rule after the first leg finished 1-1.

In other matches, Spanish side Sevilla drew 1-1 with Zenit St Petersburg of Russia to win 5-2 on aggregate, while Germany's Schalke 04 eased into the semifinals with a 4-2 aggregate victory over Bulgaria's Levski Sofia.

But the result of the night was in England, where Middlesbrough's victory was greeted with unforgettable scenes of jubilation at the final whistle.

Hasselbaink said he had wanted to make a point after being left on the bench by McLaren. "I was gutted that I didn't start," Hasselbaink said.

"I so wanted to win a European medal in my career and now I still can.

Absolutely magnificent, what a night. We needed to score four goals and we've done it. We've made bloody history. Brilliant."

Middlesbrough could well end up facing Schalke in the Eintracht final next month. Schalke secured the result they needed to go through but were given a scare by Levsiki after going 1-0 down on 24 minutes by Emil Angelov.

"We knew it would be difficult with the lead in the back of minds," said Schalke coach Mirko Slomka.

"Sevilla will be a tough test too but are more than capable."

Schalke, who won the 1997 UEFA Cup on penalties against Inter Milan, are the only previous winners left in the competition and Germany's sole representatives in Europe.

The Gelsenkirchen club also became the first German club to reach the semifinals of a European club competition in four years.

Bayer Leverkusen and Borussia Dortmund reached the finals of the Champions League and UEFA respectively in the 2001/02 season.

PRIMERA LIGA

Barca eyeing title



REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona could move within touching distance of a second successive Primera Liga title if they can beat struggling Racing Santander away on Sunday.

Frank Rijkaard's side, who hold an 11-point lead at the top of the table with seven games left, overcame Benfica 2-0 in the Champions League on Wednesday to set up a semifinal against AC Milan in two weeks.

Injuries still hamper Barcelona with Rafael Marquez, Thiago Motta, Xavi and Lionel Messi all recovering, though Edmilson did return to action on Wednesday.

Racing, who are only two points clear of the relegation places in 14th, have only won one of their eight previous outings, and share the worst home record in the league with Malaga and Cadiz.

Real Madrid are almost resigned to fighting for second place after managing only a 1-1 draw in the Nou Camp last weekend.

On Saturday they entertain relegation-threatened Real Sociedad, who are 18th, but will be without suspended fullback Roberto Carlos and possibly England captain David Beckham who is suffering with a rib injury.

Two points behind Real in third

place are Valencia, who face a tough away fixture at sixth-placed Celta Vigo, while a point further back in fourth are Osasuna, who are away to another relegation candidate Alaves.

Eighth-placed Villarreal's best chance of qualifying for the Champions League next year now lies in winning the tournament after they made the semi-finals at the expense of Inter Milan during the week.

Villarreal, who play seventh-placed Deportivo Coruna at home on Sunday, are seven points adrift of the top four, but by winning the Champions League at the first attempt would deprive the fourth-placed finisher in the league of a shot at next year's competition.

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday
Malaga v Getafe, Cadiz v Real Betis (1600), Real Madrid v Real Sociedad (1800), Celta Vigo v Valencia (2000)

Sunday
Espanyol v Atletico Madrid, Athletic Bilbao v Real Mallorca, Alaves v Osasuna, Sevilla v Real Zaragoza (1700), Racing Santander v Barcelona (1700), Villarreal v Deportivo La Coruna (1900)

India worth a billion dollars!



AFP, New Delhi

Sponsorship and media rights around the Indian cricket team touched one billion dollars on Friday following a new five-year deal for one-day matches across the world.

Indian media firm Zee Telefilms agreed to pay 219 million dollars for 25 one-dayers over the next five years at venues in the United States, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, England, Singapore and Malaysia.

The ambitious plan of five matches a year features the Indian team against Pakistan, Australia, England and the West Indies and is in addition to the regular Test programme drawn up by the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Indian cricket board vice-president Lalit Modi, who announced the new deal, stressed it would not put additional burden on the already overworked cricketers.

"We have committed to the players they will not play more than 15 Tests and 30 one-dayers in a year as stipulated by the ICC," said Modi.

"We will only rework the schedule in a way that attracts maximum sponsorship."

"The total value of sponsorship deals now stands at 1.052 billion dollars," said Modi.

The Indian deals are almost double the 550 million dollars the ICC got from the Global Cricket Corporation for sponsorship of two World Cups and three Champions Trophy tournaments between 2000 to 2007.

The biggest deal struck this year was 612 million dollars for global media rights secured by Indian marketing company Nimbus in February for all Test and one-day cricket played in India over the next four years.

Among other deals, Indian business house Sahara were made sponsors of the national team in a five-year deal worth 70 million dollars, while US giant Nike bagged the rights to kit out the team after paying 43 million dollars.

Cricket-crazy India, with its vast television audience, is the sport's economic powerhouse. Five of the six global sponsors of the ICC are India-specific.

Ronnie bamboozles Casillas

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas has been sent the wrong way by Barcelona's Ronaldinho, both off the field and from the penalty spot.

The two rivals met to shoot a television advert recently and the Brazilian told Casillas he usually fired his penalties to the right of the keeper.

When a penalty was awarded to Barca in Saturday's top-of-the-table game against Real, Casillas thought he had the measure of Ronaldinho - who promptly fired into the opposite corner. "On Saturday I did think about diving the other way to the way he had told me, but I thought if he shoots as he said I would look like a fool," Casillas was quoted as saying in sports daily Marca on Friday.

Barcelona were held to 1-1 draw by Real.

Dravid rewarded with rest

AFP, New Delhi

Indian captain Rahul Dravid was on Friday rested for the next two one-dayers against England after his team clinched an unbeatable 4-0 lead in the seven-match series.

Chief selector Kiran More said vice-captain Virender Sehwag will lead the hosts in Guwahati on Sunday and in Jamshedpur next Wednesday before Dravid returns for the final match in Indore on April 15.

"With the series in the pocket, it is sensible to give the overworked captain a break," said More a day after India scored a four-wicket win in the fourth match in Kochi.

"Not often does a team get a chance to try out new players and experiment with tactics, so we must make full use of it."

"This is not being done to belittle our opponents, but it's a common sense approach as we build for next year's World Cup."

Upcoming fast bowler Vikram Rajiv Singh will replace Dravid for the next two games, More said.

Dravid has led from the front on England's current tour of India. His 309 runs from three Tests were the highest on either side and he has scored 150 runs in the four one-dayers so far.

More hopes the additional responsibility on Sehwag will help the aggressive opener return to form. Sehwag managed just 19 runs in five of his six Test innings and has scored only 74 runs in four one-dayers so far.

"Veeru is too good a batsman to fail for long," the chief selector said. "There are not many batsmen around like him who can single-handedly win matches."

The travelling British media, meanwhile, feared the worst was yet to come for Andrew Flintoff's tourists.

"The home side may be flattered by the 4-0 scoreline but, with England's senior players tired and the next tier falling short, the margin of victory may yet become greater still," said the London Times.

Kyrgyzstan last

FROM PAGE 12

matches on consecutive days and it was difficult to go all out under the tremendous afternoon heat. Kyrgyzstan rushed early blood and Andrei Krasnov, who raced into the box with a deflected through from Vadim Harchenko in the 25th minute, went round the keeper but found himself too wide of the post to shoot.

Ablakimov, who partnered Krasnov in the attack in absence of Vladimir Verevkin -- scorer of the lone goal in the two sides' scheduled group clash which was washed out after 31 minutes -- put Kyrgyzstan ahead in the 35th minute. Under pressure of two defenders, Ablakimov shrugged off both to beat Macau goalkeeper Hon Ming Chu with a deft side-footed flick after Aibek Bokoev found him inside the seven-yard box with a through from the left flank.

The central Asians wasted a series of chances before Ishenbaev, who came onto the pitch at the break in place of Krasnov, sealed victory in the 58th minute. The substitute striker got the ball from Bokoev and neatly put a low curler from a tight angle into Hon Ming Chu's far post.

"We wanted to win this match badly and had planned accordingly," said Kyrgyzstan coach Boris Podkorytov. "I am happy that we won comfortably."

Masanaga Kageyama was unhappy but the Macau coach admitted the learning curve was on the rise.

"I missed services of a key central defender through injury and this had a telling effect on the match. But now I know what needs to be done to improve Macau," said Japanese coach Kageyama, who has been with the side for just over two weeks.

GROUP TABLE

Teams	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tajikistan	3	2	0	1	6	1	6
Kyrgyzstan	3	2	0	1	3	1	6
Pakistan	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Macau	3	0	1	2	2	8	1

Lehmann gets the nod over Kahn



AFP, Berlin

Arsenal goalkeeper Jens Lehmann has won the race to keep goal for hosts Germany at the 2006 World Cup finals, the German Football Federation (DFB) announced Friday.

The question over who out of Lehmann and Bayern Munich's Oliver Kahn should keep goal for the hosts in the World Cup has dominated the sporting news in Germany for two years, ever since former World Cup winning striker and national team coach Jurgen Klinsmann adopted a controversial rotation policy in the position.

"That was the toughest decision of my career," said Klinsmann who was appointed to the post in July 2004.

Kahn, who was voted player of the tournament at the last World Cup in Japan and South Korea in 2002 - the first time a goalkeeper has netted the accolade, cast doubts over his international future after Klinsmann's revelation.

"I am very surprised and hugely disappointed by this decision," the Bayern captain said. "I will reflect on my international future over the next few weeks," added the 36-year-old who has 84 caps to his name.

Lehmann, also 36, has been capped 29 times and Tuesday declared himself "hopeful" of securing the number one jersey, despite Kahn insisting last month that he had been given assurances by



OLIVER KAHN

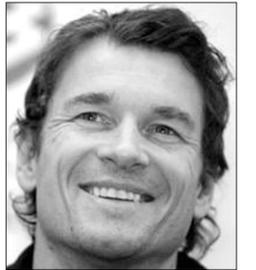
Klinsmann.

"Before the match against Italy (which Germany lost 4-1 with Lehmann in goal) Jurgen Klinsmann told me that I was the number one. I'm taking him at his word," Kahn said at the time.

Klinsmann adopted a rotation policy over the goalkeeping position in a bid to appease his two headstrong stoppers who both believed they should be their country's number one.

The policy served only to irritate both men, although neither was willing to be confined permanently to the bench.

In recent weeks, public opinion had favoured Lehmann who is in fine



JENS LEHMANN

form for his club side as they embark on a thrilling Champions League venture that sees them tackling Villarreal of Spain later this month for a place in the final.

Kahn, on the other hand, has made some recent high-profile and costly blunders, including gifting a goal to bottom-of-the-table Cologne in a weekend 2-2 draw in Munich, an embarrassing result for the league's pace-setters.

PREMIERSHIP

Man U have Chelsea in sights



REUTERS, London

Manchester takes on the pride of north London in the Premiership this weekend as United host Arsenal and City head for the capital to play Tottenham Hotspur.

United have slashed Chelsea's lead at the top by 11 points to seven since the start of March after eight wins in a row and the champions from west London, who entertain West Ham United in a London derby on Sunday, are now looking over their shoulder.

Similarly, Arsenal have hit a rich vein of form, noticeably with Champions League success over Real Madrid and Juventus but also at home by thrashing Charlton Athletic and Aston Villa.

The pair meet at a pivotal stage of the season with United chasing an unlikely title and Arsenal desperate to overhaul north London rivals

Spurs to snatch the coveted fourth place.

The Old Trafford will be packed to the rafters as two teams with a great deal of history between them prepare to do battle.

"In my mind, and in a lot of the lads' minds, we are still concentrating all our efforts on finishing second," United's Rio Ferdinand told the Manchester Evening News this week.

"If anything happens above and beyond that it would be fantastic," added the England defender, who described Sunday's showdown with Arsenal as "massive".

United have yet to visit Stamford Bridge to face Chelsea so there could still be some mileage in the title race even though the top two only have six games left to play.

The local battle for fourth spot has raged all season with Tottenham finally finding some form under Dutchman Martin Jol after years of living in the shadows of

their neighbours.

Arsenal will welcome Spurs for the last north London derby at Highbury on April 22 as they prepare to move to their new Emirates Stadium a short walk away from the marble halls.

The Gunners could find themselves five points adrift of Spurs when they enter the cauldron of Old Trafford if Tottenham beat Manchester City at White Hart Lane on Saturday.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday
Portsmouth v Blackburn, Sunderland v Fulham, Tottenham v Manchester City (1245), Wigan Athletic v Birmingham (1615)

Sunday
Aston Villa v West Brom (1100), Chelsea v West Ham (1100), Liverpool v Bolton (1300), Manchester Utd v Arsenal (1500), Middlesbrough v Newcastle

Jose's new United joke



AFP, London

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has said he is more concerned about bird flu than about the prospect of being overtaken in the Premiership by Manchester United.

Brushing aside suggestions that his team were under pressure he turned attention to the discovery of a swan found with avian flu in Scotland this week.

He said: "Pressure? No. For me, pressure is bird flu. I'm serious. I'm feeling a lot of pressure with the swan in Scotland."

"You are laughing but I'm serious - it's not far. I am more scared of the swan than football. What is football compared to life?"

"For me the swan is the drama of the last two days. Maybe I have to buy some masks or something."

Mourinho admits he has been impressed by the performances of

United, who have won eight games in a row to finally set the championship race - which Chelsea have led since the opening day of the season - alight at last.

He said: "They have been very good, eight consecutive victories is fantastic."

"But to say I am concerned I don't think is the correct word. I can say I'm not happy with the points we dropped because we should beat Fulham and Birmingham."

"If Man United beats Arsenal the difference can still be seven points if Chelsea beats West Ham."

"The difference is the Manchester United people will watch Chelsea-West Ham with a very high heartbeat - and we can watch Man United against Arsenal very, very calm. Very, very cool. Or even don't watch at all!"

"We depend only on our own results. If we win our matches at home we are champions so our situation is a very good situation."

Ponting admits mistake

FROM PAGE 12

below our best in that game, for various reasons. But that's long gone and we have rectified that by doing well against Bangladesh in the next match. Now we are sitting before a Test match, so I hope we start well on Sunday, after our successful series against South Africa," he explained.

Ponting also talked about his side's ups and downs in the shorter-version of the game.

"Not too many worries in my Test team but as ODI cricket is always bringing teams closer, teams are usually stretched out. There is more luck involved but I'm happy with my team's performance even though we lost that one match against Bangladesh and lost the series to South Africa."

"We are trying to give young players more exposure ahead of the World Cup. It's a transitional sort of phase and it is an exciting time for the Australian cricket," he added.

The Australians had their first practice session at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday morning where the first Test of the two-match series will start tomorrow.

"We came here from South Africa after a successful tour. Everything's

gone according to plan, we have had our training today, got a lot out of our training, trying to freshen up as much as we can after a tiring long tour and the 17-hour flight," he said.

"The wicket is quite bare, and it will assist the spinners as it will turn. It would be favourable for Bangladesh but we have good quality spinners, world-class leg-spinners. It's quite a flexible squad, lots of good fast bowlers and all-rounders," he added.