

## Eng batters to fight for place

BBC ONLINE, undated

England middle-order batsman Paul Collingwood says he is prepared to fight to keep his England Test place.

The Durham all-rounder is set to be named in the starting eleven for the first Test against Sri Lanka on Thursday.

But once England captain Michael Vaughan returns from injury there will be competition for batting places with Alastair Cook and Ian Bell.

"I've been in plenty of England squads and not had the opportunity until now and I want to take that with both hands," Collingwood told BBC Sport.

"I want to continue with that and establish myself as a Test cricketer. I want to cement my place in the Test team."

Collingwood has played eight Test matches for England since 2003 but only became a regular last winter and scored his maiden century against India in Nagpur.

Meanwhile, Alastair Cook has announced himself ready to bat anywhere for England ahead of his first Test appearance at Lord's.

Cook is normally an opener, but will go in at three against Sri Lanka after Marcus Trescothick and Andrew Strauss.

"I've been picked to bat three. I'll give it my best shot and score as many runs as I can," he told BBC Sport.

"It's the same game -- you could be in second ball, you be in after 50-60 overs. I'll approach it the same way I approach every game."

## Freddie relishes home captaincy

AFP, London

Andrew Flintoff has admitted that standing in for Michael Vaughan as England captain had given him a taste for leading his country.

All-rounder Flintoff took over the captaincy from Vaughan in India and led England to a highly creditable 1-1 Test series draw in a campaign where the tourists were without several key players because of injury and illness.

And with Vaughan's knee injury still keeping the Yorkshire batsman on the sidelines, Flintoff is set to lead the team on home soil in the first Test against Sri Lanka starting at Lord's here Thursday.

"Getting the chance to captain your country is always an honour and it's something I want to do more often to be honest," the 28-year-old Lancashire star said.

"To have the chance to do it at Lord's this week is going to be fantastic. To lead the side out at Lord's, the home of cricket, in a Test match, I don't think you could ask for anything more," he also told Sky Sports.

## Monty selection surprises Warne

BBC ONLINE, undated

Australia Test star Shane Warne is surprised England coach Monty Panesar ahead of Shaun Udal in their squad for the first Test against Sri Lanka.

Northamptonshire left-arter Panesar is the only spinner in the 13-man squad for the match at Lord's on May 11.

Warne said: "I was a little surprised Shaun Udal didn't get the nod, especially with his all-round cricket."

"He is a very good lower order batsman -- what you would call an all-rounder over here."

But Warne, who is a team-mate of off-spinner Udal at Hampshire, admitted he had also been impressed with Panesar.

"I've only seen him a couple of times on TV, not live, but he looks pretty good," Warne said.

"He looks like an accurate left armer and did pretty well with the ball in India."

There has been speculation that England could select an all-seam attack at Lord's, but Warne thinks captain Andrew Flintoff would be wise to choose Panesar.

"They might play four seamers if the weather stays like it is, but it's very dangerous to go in without a spinner," Warne said.

"Freddie (Flintoff) would have a good understanding of spin bowling, especially coming from Lancashire, where spin bowling plays a huge part."

"And I'm sure he'll give Monty a lot of love."

## BITS AND BOBS

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and prove their knowledge of the game in Neus Isenburg, Germany.

For the first time FIFA is using referee trios from the same country or at least the same confederation at the World Cup in order to improve the quality of officiating.

Mexico and Spain are the only countries with two referees.



PHOTO: STAR  
Bangladesh Hockey Federation president Air Vice Marshall Fakhru Azam (3rd from left) speaks during the press conference of the Jamuna Bank Asian Games qualifying round tournament at a local hotel on Tuesday.

## Lara relaxed with team



AFP, Georgetown

West Indies captain Brian Lara is feeling more at ease with his side, after they completed a convincing 82-run victory over Zimbabwe in the fourth one-day international on Sunday at Bourda Oval.

The 37-year-old Lara had demanded steady improvement from his men from match-to-match in the series against the under-strength Zimbabweans, as they prepare for a much tougher assignment against India later this month.

"I am happier, but I still think there are areas which we can work on, and I think the guys batted really well in this game," he said.

Terrence Duffin, the Zimbabwe captain, had his thoughts on what went wrong with his bowling that allowed West Indies to plunder 333 for six from their allocation of 50 overs.

"We struggled to find the areas in the beginning and we struggled to bowl to a plan," he said.

## Vaughan needs more time

AFP, London

England captain Michael Vaughan will have to wait a while longer before making his comeback from injury.

Vaughan has not played since being forced home from the tour of India in February by a persistent knee problem.

But there had been reports suggesting that having resumed training with Yorkshire, he would play in the County Championship clash with Kent at Canterbury starting on Wednesday.

"Michael won't be playing. There has been talk of him coming back this week but that's absolute eye-wash," said Yorkshire's director of cricket David Byas.

But Byas insists Vaughan will not be compelled to rush back into action.

"If he comes back sooner than he should then it would be a waste of time," Byas added.

"He's very keen to come back, but come back when he's ready."

"He's worked very hard to get where he is -- he's the captain of England -- and he's a mature, professional cricketer, so he's not going to throw that away."

## Windfall for SLC

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) said on Tuesday its finances were on a good wicket after clinching commercial sponsorship rights for the sale of television rights and ongoing tournaments.

Net profits for 2005 were 35 million dollars compared to a loss of 32 million dollars in the previous year.

The governing body of the island's most profitable and popular sport saw its total income jump to 88 million dollars from 28 million dollars in 2004.

"Nearly 80 per cent of our revenues came from selling television rights," the board's finance manager Upali Seneviratne said.

SLC signed a record 50 million dollars television deal last year with Taj Television, the Dubai-based owners of TEN Sports.

Visiting teams from the West Indies, Bangladesh and a tri-series between the West Indies, India and Sri Lanka had also helped swell coffers.

However, the December 2004 tsunami left the board with a 52.43-million rupee bill as giant tidal waves flooded and destroyed the Galle International Cricket Stadium, the stadium said.

Sri Lanka pays a frenzied, cross-cultural obsession to cricket that is worshipped like a national religion rather than merely a game.

## Powell-Gatlin battle in UK

AFP, London

World record-holder Asafa Powell of Jamaica and Olympic champion Justin Gatlin of the United States will go head-to-head over 100 metres for the first time this year at next month's British Grand Prix, the Press Association reported on Tuesday.

The world's two fastest men will headline the opening meeting of the UK's international schedule of events in Gateshead on June 11.

Powell last June set his world record of 9.77 seconds in Athens, while Gatlin clocked a time of 9.88secs in Helsinki when adding the World Championships title to his Olympic success.

The speedsters last met on the track at the London Grand Prix last July when Powell pulled up after a few strides with a groin problem which ended his season.

Gatlin won that race in a fast time of 9.89 and he also defeated the Jamaican in Eugene, Oregon two months earlier in a thriller where they were both credited with the same windy time of 9.84.

The American, who won the Olympic gold medal when Powell finished fifth, currently has the edge over his Jamaican rival with six wins to three.

## Bridge brawls at nightclub

AFP, London

Wayne Bridge, a player selected for England's World Cup, was caught up in a brawl at a London nightclub party featuring a host of Premiership stars.

Police officers at a nearby station became involved when the disturbance at the Embassy Club in Mayfair, central London, spilled out onto the streets on the early hours of Monday morning.

Wayne Bridge, a defender named later Monday in England's squad for next month's World Cup finals in Germany, was punched in the face.

Three people were arrested, none of them players, according to a report in Tuesday's London Evening Standard at a party where Chelsea and England duo Joe Cole and John Terry were also present as well as a host of leading players from other London clubs.

"It was a great end of season party and we had almost every London Premiership player you can name," said nightclub owner Mark Fuller.

"The altercation happened at 2.55am. Everyone was coming outside then anyway as it (the club) closes at 3.00am."

"It was basically a boys' party with umpteen Page Three girls (barebreasted models in the Sun) such as Lucy Pinder and Lauren Pope," Fuller also told the Standard.

## Federer wary of Nadal



AFP, Rome

Roger Federer has spent hours practising with left-handed coach Tony Roche in an attempt to end his poor run against the world's best 'lefty', Rafael Nadal.

Federer has won just one of their five meetings and the Swiss world number one is determined to stop the rot.

"Thank God I have a 'lefty' coach," said the top seed after his comfortable 6-2, 6-1 first round victory over Juan Ignacio Chela at the Rome Masters on Monday.

"At least I get to see a 'lefty' sort of spin. I spend a lot of hours with him on the court and I'm going to spend 10 weeks on the road with him right now."

"So I'll get to see a lot of 'lefty' spin and it changes a lot in the game."

Federer, who was absent here last year due to a foot injury, lost to Nadal in the Monte Carlo final last month.

But his most painful defeat to the

Spaniard was in the semifinals of the French Open last year, which Nadal won.

Federer, still missing the Roland Garros title from his Grand Slam collection, next faces Italian Potito Starace, who beat Dmitry Tursunov of Russian in straight sets.

The biggest casualties on day one at the Foro Italico were Croatian number three seed Ivan Ljubicic and American number seven seed James Blake.

Ljubicic was beaten by Slovakian Dominik Hrbaty, while Blake was dumped out by Frenchman Florent Serra.

Hrbaty, who defeated Ljubicic in five sets in their last meeting in the Davis Cup final in December, next faces Frenchman Fabrice Santoro, who fought back from a set down to beat Argentinian Juan Monaco.

Serra's reward is a second round meeting with Croatia's Mario Ancic.

Ljubicic tried to look on the positive side after his early exit.

"It's always better if you win, but this will give me a chance to train well for the

tournaments ahead, for Hamburg and for the Team Cup. Then there is the French Open, so perhaps I can make good use of this time off."

Argentinian Jose Acasuso defeated the 11th seed David Ferrer 7-5, 6-0 for his fourth win in five meetings with the Spaniard.

Chilean 10th seed Fernando Gonzalez beat Switzerland's Stanislas Wawrinka 6-4, 6-4 to set up a second round clash with Russian Mikhail Youzhny.

Youzhny disappointed the home crowd by beating Italy's Andreas Seppi 6-2, 7-6 (9/7).

Nadal, who will equal Guillermo Vilas's record of 53 consecutive claycourt wins if he successfully defends his title here, begins his campaign on Tuesday against fellow Spaniard and good friend Carlos Moya.

Nadal chalked up his 47th straight victory on his preferred surface when he defeated Tommy Robredo in the final of the Barcelona Open last month.



PHOTO: AFP  
World No. 1 Roger Federer serves against Juan Ignacio Chela of Argentina (not in picture), during the first round of the ATP Rome Masters on Monday.

## NZC accepts its failure



CRICINFO, undated

John Bracewell, New Zealand's coach and convener of selectors, has admitted that New Zealand Cricket (NZC) has made little progress towards establishing a solid opening combination.

After a season of mass experimentation, which saw four different opening combinations in the space of four Tests, Bracewell said that all efforts had resulted in failures.

Following New Zealand's 0-2 Test series loss to South Africa this week, Bracewell told Radio Sport that the management was still looking for a solution.

"We used three different combinations in three Test matches, two of them because of injury, but we're still no further ahead in that department," he said. "It's something we need to nail down as selectors, but in the end when you give guys an opportunity, they have to stand up and do it."

Bracewell lamented all this shuffling, which followed years of makeshift partnerships attempting to fill the gap.

"You can't put your hand in the hat and pull out (a Australian opener) Justin Langer," he said.

Bracewell's comments also hinted at a return for the discarded Vincent and Mathew Sinclair: "If we want to play our best players, the

likes of the Sinclairs and Vincents and people like that, if they want to play, do they want to play there?"

With New Zealand's next Test series only in November against Sri Lanka, Bracewell said the hiatus would be beneficial as they searched for a solution. "That's probably a good thing because it may in fact give us time to try and stabilise and look deeper into what we're trying to achieve in that position."

## Hollywood braces

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German late-night comedian Harold Schmidt thought up an even better way to bring couples together during the divisive World Cup season. Tackling the twin problems of sold-out World Cup matches and Germany's dangerously low birth rate, Schmidt offered free World Cup tickets to couples who give birth before June 9. The contest set off a mini baby boom among Schmidt's feuding viewers, and last month Schmidt handed out 216 tickets to grateful new moms.

"It was the only way I could get my husband to agree (to having a baby)," commented winning mom Frau Lehmann-Stein, proving that it is true what fans here say: The World Cup is a matter of life and death.

## Moody angry at De Mel

BBC ONLINE, undated

Sri Lanka coach Tom Moody has lodged an official complaint about the team's new chairman of selectors.

Former seam bowler Asantha de Mel spoke out about the team's performance under Moody on Monday, just two days after being appointed to the post.

"We were number two in the world rankings when John Dyson was coach and since Tom Moody took over last year we have slipped to number six," he said.

Moody has now protested to the Sri Lanka Cricket board. He said De Mel's comments had hurt him and the team and were unhelpful just two days before the start of a Test against England at Lord's.

Moody, a former Australia all-rounder, joined Sri Lanka last June after working as Director of Cricket for English county side Worcestershire.

They have won Test series against West Indies and Bangladesh since then, but lost to India and Pakistan.

Their record in one-day cricket, meanwhile, is moderate with 15 wins and 20 defeats in 36 matches played.

"We're looking towards the next 10 years now, putting systems in place, methods of preparation and match play so things will hopefully be better in the future," he said.

De Mel, however, believes errors were made when the squad to tour England was chosen and that former skipper Sanath Jayasuriya should have been persuaded to prolong his Test career.

## A serious joke

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willing to play anywhere upfront, left side or right.

His selection caught many pundits by surprise despite newspaper reports on Monday morning that he was in the picture.

Since then his presence in the much-discussed squad has provoked a heated debate with some saying it was a masterpiece of decision-making by Eriksson and others dismissing it as the biggest mistake he has made during his time in charge of England.

Walcott though said he was not bothered by the talk and only concerned with meeting up and getting to know the rest of the England players.

First though he would have to tell his family that the holidays they had planned together in the summer would have to be cancelled and then he would have to find a new date to complete his driving test, the second part of which had been scheduled for June.

## Warne hits back at Waugh



AFP, London

Australian spinner Shane Warne has hit back at former captain Steve Waugh who claimed his team were too friendly with the English players during last year's Ashes series.

The teams often met after a day's play in the series, which England won 2-1, and Waugh felt it contributed to the Australians' surrender of the Ashes for the first time in 17 years.

But Warne said: "It has not got anything to do with it. If we had batted a bit better then we would

have done better. "We have been pretty successful, apart from one series, and you can read too much into it. It is easy to sit back when you are not playing and say we should be doing this and should be doing that. There is no disgrace in getting beaten by a better side."

Warne was speaking as he signed a new five-year sponsorship deal in London. As part of the contract he will head up a search throughout England for young spin bowling talent. Eventually he will undertake a similar project in other parts of the world.

And Warne, who has 685 Test wickets, is not worried if any of his

proteges bowl England to an Ashes victory in the future.

He added: "If that's the case then that's great. I want to see spin bowling go on and on and on. In England there is a lack of spin bowling and a lot of that is down to the attitude of captains who always revert to the medium-pacers with one slip, a third man and a ring field."

"The most exciting things in cricket are fast bowling or a spinner with someone like Kevin Pietersen coming down the wicket to them and trying to slog them for six. There is nothing wrong with being hit for six -- you always get the ball back and you can have another go."

## Smith hails his players

BBC ONLINE, undated

South Africa captain Graeme Smith paid tribute to his players after his team did enough to beat New Zealand on Sunday to wrap up the Test series 2-0.

"We're a very battle-hardened team after Australia," said Smith.

"Often on these sort of pitches it is the battle-hardened teams and the key performers who come through under pressure and make the difference."

Smith said a key factor had been South Africa's new-ball attack of Makhaya Ntini and Dale Steyn in the series.

Ntini took 19 wickets in the three matches to claim man-of-the-series honours while the much less experienced Steyn took 16.

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming also singled out the Ntini-Steyn combination as crucial.

He said: "They were superb. They bowled really well and made us work very hard from ball one. That extra bit of pace on some of the wickets we played made a big difference."

## Langer hints at Ashes farewell



AFP, Sydney

Australian opener Justin Langer has given his strongest indication yet he may retire from cricket after the Ashes, telling a Sydney newspaper he "can't see what the future holds" beyond the series.

Langer said the last Ashes series, which Australia lost for the first time in 16 years last September, "really hurt."

"I would love to leave the game knowing that we had regained the Ashes, and the next Ashes team would have it in their possession," he said.

"Physically and mentally, we can probably play a long time these days," he said. "We are compensated well and looked after well. But to be frank, the hardest thing for me now is the time away from home, and it has become excruciatingly hard."

## Pvt channels the winner



AFP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court banned state television on Tuesday from showing the national team's upcoming cricket series in the West Indies in a victory for private satellite broadcasters.

The court upheld a petition by Dubai-based TEN Sports, which holds the rights to India's tour of the West Indies challenging a government ruling to share

the feed with terrestrial broadcaster Doordarshan.

TEN Sports argued that it had paid a lot of money to buy the rights for the series, which starts next week, and would suffer huge losses if it was forced to share the live telecast with Doordarshan.

The Court ruled that Doordarshan will "not take any coercive step or action for taking the live feed of the matches" from TEN Sports, the Press Trust of India reported.

The Indian team leaves

Friday to play five one-day internationals and four Tests on the seven-week tour of the West Indies.

The Indian government had in October ruled that satellite TV channels screening cricket matches involving India will have to share the feed with Doordarshan.

The order, applicable to both local and international TV companies, also applied to international sports events like the Olympics and Asian Games.

The government ruled that 75

per cent of the revenue generated from the telecast would go to the rights holder while Doordarshan would retain 25 per cent.

India's vast cricket-mad audiences ensure high ratings -- and massive advertising revenue -- for any TV station broadcasting matches involving the national team.

Earlier this year, Indian marketing firm Nimbus bought the rights for all cricket played in India in the next four years for 612 million dollars.

The government ruled that 75