PHOTO: AFP

Australian cricketer Michael Clarke (L) looks on as Brett Lee cuts a giant Ashes urn cake with the Opera House as a backdrop in the Sydney Harbour on Monday. The eagerly anticipated Ashes are a hundred days away.

Ashes wound still fresh

Cricket

AGENCIES, *Sydney*

Australian coach John Buchanan said Tuesday his team cannot wait to seek revenge for last year's Ashes defeat when the latest series against England begins in 100 days.

Buchanan said he still smarted at memories of England's wild celebrations after winning the famous urn for the first time in 18 years.

"Those pictures and memories are indelibly etched into history, as well as into the feelings of all the Australian team that gathered solemnly to congratulate the opposition," Buchanan said on the Cricket Australia website.

"Since that moment, I think all of us, in our own ways, began preparing for the next Ashes series clash."

Some members of the team attended a countdown ceremony on Tuesday overlooking the iconic Sydney Opera House, at which fast-bowler Brett Lee cut a cake replica of the urn bearing the words "100 days to go."

Buchanan said despite injury fears over England stars such as Andrew Flintoff and Michael Vaughan, he expected the tourists "will present a side in Australia very similar to that which we faced in England, in name and approach."

He predicted the Australians would prove more resilient to the swinging ball that perplexed them during the last series in England and had eliminated the "wayward" catching and bowling that also cost them dearly.

"We will be more mentally prepared for the tussle this time as there has been a good break away from the grind of 10 months a year of cricket," he said. "So physical, technical and tactical foundations should be good."

The series has generated huge interest in Australia, where tickets sold out in record time.

Buchanan said Australian supporters, as well as players, faced a huge challenge when thousands of "Barmy Army" supporters arrived down under to cheer on England.

"They will arrive in numbers, in strong voice and hearty song, and draped in the red and white crossed flag of St. George," he said.

"I hope our crowds are ready to do battle in song, in green and gold colour and in support of their national team."

After last year's defeat, about 60 Barmy Army members rubbed salt into Australia's wounds by hiring an open-top bus and parading through Sydney in noisy celebration.

Meanwhile, Australia middle-order batsman Michael Clarke is trying not to get too far ahead of himself as he looks forward to his team's bid to win back the Ashes.

The one-time golden boy of Australian cricket was dropped last year and is now focused simply on earning a place in the side for the first Test in Brisbane starting on November 23.

"Only 11 guys can play in the first Test and I'll just be looking to work as hard as I can and get some runs under my belt," he told reporters on Tuesday.

"The selectors have a few tough calls to make."

Clarke made a composed 91 in the second innings of the first Test against England at Lord's last year, the highest individual score of the match, helping set up Australia's crushing 239-run win.

Knocks of 40 and 30 at Edgbaston, seven and 39 at Old Trafford, 36 and 56 at Trent Bridge and 25 at The Oval completed a satisfactory Ashes bow for Clarke, but he was dropped from the Test side during the series against West Indies in November.

The dashing right-hander had to watch from the sidelines as the Australians won a tough series in South Africa before earning a recall for the trip to Bangladesh.

Fast bowler Brett Lee also admitted he was still feeling the pain of last year's Ashes defeat.

Lee said Australia's two-run defeat in the second Test at Edgbaston summed up the 2-1 series loss to England, who won back the Ashes for the first time in 18 years.

"We were so close to winning and we didn't," he said. "But all credit to England because they played fantastically well in the whole series."

Adriano wants Inter future

INTERNET, *undated*

Adriano wants to remain at Inter this season despite continuing links with Manchester United, his agent confirmed on Tuesday.

Reports in Italy are insisting that the Premiership club are ready to offer £32m to bring the striker to Old Trafford following the sale of Ruud Van Nistelrooy.

Inter owner Massimo Moratti opened the door for some high profile player departures on Monday which was not welcomed by the Brazilian's representative.

"If the club has something they want to talk to us about then they should call me," stated Gilmar Rinaldi.

"Adriano wants to remain at Inter, he does not care about the recent arrivals of Hernan Crespo and Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

"He wants to stay where he is and I have not had any conversation with other teams," concluded the Emperor's agent.

Moratti has admitted that the time has arrived for Inter to sell, after a heavy summer of spending, and did suggest that nobody was untouchable.

Blackwell eyeing

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because we will name you in the 30 and we will take it from there'.

"I'm doing some bowling drills at the moment but I am only bowling from about 13 yards and not pushing the shoulder too much."

Blackwell, who played the most recent of his 34 one-dayers for England in India in April, is one of four spinners named in the 30.

Apart from Dalrymple, Ashley Giles -- also working his way back from a lengthy injury absence -- and Alex Loudon have also been included.

Changes galore

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stand it then, but later I realised more. It was not just a disaster for Chernobyl, not just for the Ukraine, but the whole world."

He recalled being moved to live temporarily on the eastern coast, near Donetsk, and playing football all the time. He remembered, too, failing a football exam -- his dribbling skills let him down -- that would have secured entrance to a specialist sports school. But, by the time he was 13, he was playing for Dynamo Kiev and his brilliant career had begun.

Goals flowed -- he was top scorer at a tournament in Wales where he won the Ian Rush Cup and a pair of the Liverpool striker's boots -- and he progressed rapidly. In 118 games for Kiev, as a professional, he scored 60 goals before he joined Milan.

He scored a further 127 goals in 207 appearances for the Italian club and became the first Ukraine player to win the European Cup when his penalty at Old Trafford, Manchester, defeated arch-rivals Juventus. He also tasted European Cup final defeat when Milan lost on penalties to Liverpool in 2005 and he missed his spot-kick.

"I have learned that the difference between winning and losing is so little," Shevchenko said. "Sometimes just luck. So, I don't predict anything now for Chelsea. I just want to work hard, learn English and hope for success."

Life *sans*

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drift inwards from the wings and McClaren wants his side to play with more pace and attacking threat from the flanks.

He is likely to stick with Eriksson's tried-and-trusted defensive foursome of Ashley Cole, Rio Ferdinand, Terry and Gary Neville.

However, World Cup fringe player Stuart Downing, McClaren's left winger at his old club Middlesbrough, could feature more prominently and Tottenham forward Defoe could get the chance to stake his claim in the absence of knee injury victim Michael Owen.

West Ham striker Dean Ashton, 22, has been called into the squad for the first time and fancies his chances of establishing himself in the team.

He said he had been listening closely to 40-year-old Hammers team-mate Teddy Sheringham, an England veteran from the Venables era.

"I've got belief in my own ability. I believe I am good enough to play at this level," said the confident and newly-slimline Ashton.

"I think I'm a different type of striker to most who are in the squad. I'd like to think I've got different qualities."

He talked up his "old-fashioned" centre-forward credentials, namely his bustling style -- as opposed to the sheer pace of Defoe.

The game is not expected to be a sell-out, with England fans' reserve of enthusiasm seemingly run dry by the disappointing World Cup experience.

But McClaren will be hoping England's performance against Greece will get them coming back in greater numbers, with belief renewed in the national side.

Another Wright revelation

Cricket

PTI, *undated*

In an explosive moment in the Indian dressing-room during the NatWest Trophy in England in 2002 Virender Sehwag was grabbed by the collar by John Wright who was the coach then. This was after Sehwag had played a reckless shot to get out.

Wright has written about the incident in his just-published book, Indian Summers, while referring to the Indian team's tour of England.

He recalls that India had bundled out Sri Lanka, the third team in the tournament, for 202 on a flat wicket at The Oval. "I had been trying to get Sehwag to temper his boldness which too often of late had crossed the line into recklessness," he writes. Shortly after Sourav Ganguly had got out in the second over, Sehwag holed out trying to blast one back over the bowler's head, leaving India at 26 for 2.

"I had enough of players trotting out the 'natural game' line as an excuse for failing to take responsibility and disregarding the match situation. When Sehwag wandered in, I decided it was time for a sort-out. Not realising that my exasperation levels had soared into the red zone, I went up to him, grabbed him by the collar and barked: 'What the hell's going on? How can you come back in here after playing a shot like that and unbuckle your pads as if nothing's happened.' Everyone froze -- it was like someone had pulled out a gun -- and I turned on my heel and stomped out."

Wright says in the subsequent team meetings he was told by the players that he had been a "bit rough" and he accepted that he had indeed gone overboard. Wright also said he had a face to face with Sehwag at the team hotel. "Sehwag told me bluntly that he didn't like what I'd done. I acknowledged that he was entitled to feel aggrieved, but added that I didn't give a damn if he poured his heart out to every newspaper in India."

Justifying his action, Wright says there was an urgent need for something to be done because it had not got to the point where the single-minded commitment to winning overrode all other considerations of the players. "The volcano had been rumbling for a while, and it just happened to be Sehwag who triggered the eruption. He took it better than some of the others would have and we remained mates."

Wright says the Sehwag episode did not do the rounds by word of mouth or find its way into the press which showed "we were a pretty tight team". He also says he used Andrew Leipus, the team physiotherapist, and trainer Adrian Le Roux to keep track of the "temperature and mood" of the dressing-room. "From time to time outsiders who read too much into my public persona suggested that maybe I was too soft for the job, but I don't think that view held sway on the other side of the dressing-room door."

Wright says whenever the players thought he had crossed the line from being frank to brutal, they gave him the cold shoulder. "When you say 'good morning', they look right through you and keep walking. When that happened to me I'd answer for them -- 'Good morning, John', and take on the broad message that there was a bit of bridge building to be done. Sometimes it would come out of the blue and I'd wonder what's up with him, but usually the player was reacting to a verbal rocket or being dropped."

Wright says he had to do a bit of "ego massage" at times when he realised that there was some justification in their sulk. "The core message that I wanted to come through in everything I did and said was that I cared. I cared for them as people, and as cricketers, and I cared for our team."

Bell priority

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victory over Australia for the first time in 18 years.

Bell failed to score in either innings of that final Test and has endured a rollercoaster time since.

He was dropped at the start of the summer but recalled when Andrew Flintoff underwent ankle surgery and has scored centuries in three successive Tests against Pakistan.

Bell put his successful return down to extra work not only on technique but also on his presence at the crease, after being described as diffident during the Ashes.

"I've matured, I've learnt more, I've had some ups and downs and those experiences have helped me become a better player," he claimed.

"It wasn't all technical things -- there were a lot of mental things, body language and having a bit more presence at the crease.

"It's not going to the extreme of being arrogant -- it's just having that positive body language so when someone looks you in the eye you stand up."

With Flintoff expected back in the side in time for the Ashes, Bell faces a battle with Alastair Cook and Paul Collingwood for two batting places in the side.

But he played down direct comparisons, saying: "There is so much cricket you need a squad of 15 or 16 people -- you're not going to play all year with 11 players.

"The way it is in the England side you've got to take your chance when you get it because there are so many good players around."

PHOTO: AFP

Sachin Tendulkar tosses the ball during a practice session of the Indian team at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo on Tuesday.

SL tri-series on track

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between Sri Lanka and India at the Premadasa Stadium.

The original series opener between South Africa and Sri Lanka, which was rained off on Monday and cancelled again on Tuesday following South Africa's reluctance to play, will now be held on August 29.

The final, earlier scheduled for August 29, will take place on September 2.

Each team plays the other twice in the league before the final. A reserve day has been kept aside for all matches in case of rain.

Meanwhile, as doubts persisted on South Africa's participation, Sri Lanka and India went about their preparations for Wednesday's day-night encounter.

With the rain clouds having migrated, Sri Lanka practised under a blistering hot sun at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground.

Tom Moody, their coach, insisted that there had been no let-up in intensity on the part of his boys, saying: "Regardless of whether South Africa stay on or leave, we're playing India tomorrow."

His confident assertion may also have had much to do with an awareness of behind-the-scenes parleys between Sri Lanka Cricket officials and their Indian counterparts.

As for the Indians, they skipped an Independence Day function at the Indian high commission Tuesday morning and went for their practice session in the afternoon amid tight security.

REVISED SCHEDULE

Aug 16	Sri Lanka v India
Aug 19	India v South Africa
Aug 21	Sri Lanka v South Africa
Aug 24	Sri Lanka v India
Aug 26	India v South Africa
Aug 29	Sri Lanka v South Africa
Sept 2	Final

Target damage

FROM PAGE 17

Bangladesh team captain Arif Khan Joy also promised to present a competitive match today.

"We would try to keep the margin of goals as low as possible," he said.

Qatar, the Asian side of Group F table, have already accumulated six points following their 3-0 success against Hong Kong and 2-0 victory over Uzbekistan.

Bangladesh will play their away match on September 6 while their two remaining home matches will be held against Uzbekistan and Honk Kong on October 11 and November 15 respectively.

The Bangladesh team held training yesterday at the Halishahar Police Lines field after an incident that forced them to vacate the MA Aziz Stadium. Since the Qatar team was also training at the same time their officials protested the presence of the Bangladesh team forcing the hosts to look for an alternative venue.

PHOTO: COURTESY

AKTEL head of marketing Asif Iqbal (5th from R) poses with the winners of the AKTEL World Cup Football 2006 SMS Quiz contest at their office premises on Tuesday.

Nathalie sails, Sania fails

AFP, *Montreal*

Italy's Alberta Brianti rallied to defeat India's Sania Mirza 2-6, 6-1, 6-2 here Monday in a first-round match at a 1.3 million-dollar WTA hardcourt tennis tournament, a US Open tune-up event.

Brianti booked a second-round date with Slovenian 14th seed Katarina Srebotnik, who ousted Dutch standout Michaella Krajicek 6-3, 7-5.

French veteran Nathalie Dechy also rallied to reach the second round, outlasting Israeli qualifier Tzipora Obziler 6-7 (3/7), 6-2, 6-1.

Dechy will next face Russian 15th seed Maria Kirilenko, who beat Croatian Jelena Kostanic 6-3, 4-6, 6-1.

Swiss seventh seed Martina Hingis learned her second-round opponent after her bye. She will face Italy's Mara Santangelo, who rallied to eliminate Austrian Sybille Bammer 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 6-2.

Belgium's Kim Clijsters, the top-seeded defending champion, will open against the winner between Canadian wild card Stephanie Dubois or Italy's Tathiana Garbin, whose match was halted by rain.

Many of the reigning US Open champion's top rivals have pulled out of the event, including French world number one Amelie Mauresmo, the Wimbledon and Australian Open champion, and Justine Henin-Hardenne, the French Open champion.

Russia's Maria Sharapova, American Lindsay Davenport and US stars Venus and Serena Williams also withdrew.

Blake leads US assault

Tennis

AFP, *Cincinnati*

Sixth seed James Blake led a trio of Americans into the second round of the 2.45 million-dollar ATP Cincinnati Masters here Monday with a sweep of French opponents.

Blake upended Gallic racket master Fabrice Santoro, a double-fisted threat off of both wings, with a 6-4, 6-4 victory.

Patchy compatriot Robby Ginepri, the 15th seed who has failed to follow up on last year's US Open semifinal run, managed to come good with perfect timing as he stopped Paul-Henri Mathieu in a 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 comeback.

And 2003 finalist Mardy Fish, a 65th-ranked wild card, put out Nicolas Mahut of France 6-1, 6-3 to complete a good day for the hosts at the US Open warm-up event.

Ginepri, ranked 18th, admitted to the jitters as his form has slipped in recent months.

"I'm feeling pretty nervous out there on the court," said Ginepri. "It's not allowing me to play the potential of my game. I'm not moving the same and not setting up for my shots."

Blake is fighting to escape a slump following his Indianapolis title last month, where he beat Andy Roddick.

Blake came in as a wild card a year ago, losing to Roger Federer in the first round. He is now the top-ranked American.

"There's plenty more pressure, but pressure is a good thing. It's an opportunity to do something good. The expectations have changed."

Third seed David Nalbandian, fighting off a virus, took a step toward full form, ousting South African qualifier Rik De Voest 6-0, 6-4.

A week after losing badly in Montreal due to an illness which he has still not totally shaken, the third seed squeezed through despite more than two hours of rain delays.

"I'm playing better, the first round is always tough. But I'm feeling much better than last week," said the Argentine, who was hammered a week ago in Toronto by Italian Davide Sanguinetti in the first round.

The 2003 quarterfinalist earned his 32nd victory of the season.

"I'm not one hundred percent yet, I feel a little bit tired yet," he confessed. "You need few days to recover power and energy.

"But the match for today was good, I think every single day will be better for me. Short matches, short points, less games -- everything is important."

Another under-achiever from last week also showed major improvement with Australian Open finalist Marcos Baghdatis eliminating 2002 Melbourne winner Thomas Johansson 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/3).

Baghdatis is on the prowl for a first career trophy.

"I just went in and tried to win every point and tried to win the most important ones," said the smiling Cypriot, who won hearts during his run to the Aussie final against world number one Roger Federer in January.

"It was a weird match, not a lot of rhythm," said Baghdatis. "But I played well on the important points, and that made the difference. It's more humid here and the balls are heavier (than last week at Toronto)."

With a fortnight to go before the start of the US Open, the cement event will be another test of nerve for Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal.

The anticipated finals showdown between the world's best pair never materialised in Canada, Nadal losing in the third round to Tomas Berdych while Federer lifted his lucky seventh title of the season.

Russia work horse Nikolay Davydenko, who has played in 24 of 25 possible tournaments this season, maintained his marathon man status, but lost 6-4, 2-6, 6-2 to Argentine Juan Ignacio Chela as well.

Davydenko remains without a cement victory this summer after coming to Canada and losing in the first-round last week just after winning his second title of the season on clay in Sopot, Poland.

Bangladesh

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of the game. We are hoping to recover from this tomorrow," said the fullback.

Afghanistan's Chief de Mission Habibullah Niaji, who watched Bangladesh's match against Nepal, said he was confident his side could win.

"We did not have any target when we came here but the way we played against India, we think we will go far. I don't think Bangladesh are stronger opponents than India.

Coach Yusuf Kargal said he would rely on key players Bashir, Reza and Maharoof to deliver the goods against Bangladesh.

Rising to reputation

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the prized scalp of Kenyan skipper Steve Tikolo on way to his career-best figures.

His previous best was 4-41 against Zimbabwe in the first match of the five-ODI series and the latest effort placed him 24th on the elite list of all-time ODI best bowling.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the third and final one-day international between Bangladesh and Kenya at the Gymkhana ground in Nairobi on Tuesday:

KENYA

Otieno lbw b Rasel	0
Ouma b Rafique	14
M Patel lbw b Mortuza	15
Tikolo c Razzak b Mortuza	14
Mishra b Mortuza	12
Odoyo c Mashud b Mortuza	29
Obuya lbw b Mortuza	8
B Patel c Reza b Mortuza	1
Odhiambo lbw b Razzak	0
Ongondo b Rasel	14
Ababu not out	0
Extras: (lb-2, w-9)	11
Total: (All out in 41.2 overs)	118

Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-35, 3-40, 4-63, 5-67, 6-83, 7-87, 8-89, 9-110, 10-118.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Rasel	8.2	1	18	2
Reza	3	1	8	0
Rafique	6	0	16	1
Mortuza	10	0	26	6
Razzak	6	0	20	1
Hasan	8	0	28	0

BANGLADESH

Nafees c Otieno b Odoyo	18
Ashraful c Tikolo b Ongondo	15
Aftab c Tikolo b Ongondo	5
Imran run out	2
Hasan not out	25
Reza not out	41
Extras: (lb-4, w-5, nb-5)	14
Total: (For 4 wkts in 27 overs)	120

Did not bat: Mashud, Rafique, Mortuza, Razzak, Rasel.

Fall of wickets: 1-38, 2-43, 3-45, 4-55.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Odoyo	8	0	20	1
Ongondo	10	4	37	2
Odhiambo	6	1	27	0
Ababu	3	0	32	0

Result: Bangladesh won by 6 wickets and clinched the three-match series 3-0.

Man-of-the-match: Mashrafee Bin Mortuza.

Man-of-the-series: Mashrafee Bin Mortuza.