

Focus back on Tigers

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The World Cup euphoria is over. For the last one month, local sports had taken a backseat during the greatest show on earth but from now on, the focus definitely would shift from football to domestic circuit, especially to activities of the national cricket team.

"We also got immensely involved with the World Cup fever but at that time, we have had very intense training since the beginning of June for the upcoming Zimbabwe and Kenya tours," responded skipper Habibul Bashar after yesterday's training at the under-construction Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur.

"The exciting fact is we have hardly missed the outdoor practice despite the monsoon season. We have so far played two practice matches against the newly formed Academy squad. Most of us have not played competitive cricket since the home series against Australia in April and you all know nothing can be a substitute for match practice," he added.

The 33-year old Tigers captain, however, was little bit disappointed with the uncertainty over the Kenya tour, which was scheduled before the five-match one-day series against Zimbabwe.

Bangladesh will now leave Dhaka on July 23 for Zimbabwe where they are due to play a warm-up match against a second string Zimbabwe side on July 26 before the first one-day international against the hosts.

"It would have been a good warm-up series if could first visit Kenya. These matches are very important before the Champions Trophy in October in India. You all know that we will not play any international match before next year's World Cup. It is very frustrating," Bashar bemoaned.

"The team had been taking a shape but unfortunately we have no Tests until the 2007 World Cup. It is really frustrating for us and it could prove to be a setback for our plans," he said repeating his frustration.

The national selectors had already announced a 15-member squad for the African trip but Bashar hinted that there is a chance to see an additional player in the squad.

"It has yet to be decided but we are thinking about the inclusion of left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak. There

are only two left-arm spinners in the squad (Mohammad Rafique and Sakib Al Hasan) and one is a newcomer. We have already noticed that spinners are dominating for the A team," explained Bashar.

"Our pace attack is okay as Mashrafe (Bin Mortuza) is fully fit and bowled brilliantly in the practice games while Syed Rassel has already proved his worth in the shorter-version game. Most importantly, Shahadat Hossain has also showed his maturity to be a good and effective change bowler in the one-day game. Forhad Reza's performance with the A team indicates that he could be a very good seaming all-rounder, so my pace department is very encouraging," he added.

Meanwhile, it seems that there is a deficiency in the spin attack due to the dubious inclusion of young wicketkeeper cum batsman Mushfiqur Rahim as the second stumper as backup to Khaled Mashud.

Mushfiqur, the Bogra lad, had been branded as a longer-version cricketer time and again by the selectors but surprisingly, he was included in the one-day squad for the tour raising many eyebrows.

Kaneria wants to rule

Cricket

AFP, London

Pakistan leg-spinner Danish Kaneria is looking forward to playing a major role in the four-Test series against England starting at 'home of cricket' Lord's on Thursday.

Kaneria, who has played county cricket with great success for Essex, hopes he can take his form in English conditions with him to Lord's and follow in the footsteps of Australia leg-spin great Shane Warne, who took 40 wickets in last year's Ashes series.

"Lord's has something special

because cricket was born in England and this is a ground where people make their name," Kaneria, 25, said. "Everyone remembers a special performance at Lord's more than anywhere else.

"I've dreamed about it for years and now it's about to happen: a Test match at Lord's and an opportunity to make my name at the historic ground.

"Lord's is a ground every cricketer wishes to perform at, the whole Lord's experience is wonderful and I would love to do well for my country and be on the winning side."

Kaneria, who claimed 11 wickets in the three-Test series that Pakistan won 2-0 in November and

December (including a match-winning six for 99 at Lahore), is aiming to emulate the success earlier in the season of Sri Lanka off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan.

Murali finished the drawn three-match series with England with 24 wickets and Kaneria is confident he can have a similar impact, having already taken 156 wickets in 36 Tests.

"People have said the ECB (English Cricket Board) scheduled Sri Lanka in the early part of the summer so their batsmen did not have to face Murali in the drier conditions," Kaneria told Bigstar-cricket.com.

"I don't know if that is true but

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England captain Andrew Strauss (L) and his Pakistan counterpart Inzamamul Haq pose with the npower trophy for the upcoming Test series at Lord's on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan overtake England in rankings

REUTERS, Sydney

Pakistan have moved above England into second place behind Australia in the world Test rankings, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Wednesday.

Pakistan have 120 points, 10 fewer than Australia and seven more than England, their hosts in a four-Test series starting at Lord's on Thursday.

England, who beat Australia last year to win the Ashes for the first time since 1987, slipped down following defeat in Pakistan and drawn series in India and at home to Sri Lanka.

Australia captain Ricky Ponting tops the individual Test batting ratings, ahead of India's Rahul Dravid and South African Jacques Kallis.

Sri Lanka off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan heads the bowling list from South Africa fast bowler Makhaya Ntini and Australia leg spinner Shane Warne.

Australia, world champions in 1999 and 2003, have a huge lead in the one-day rankings, with South Africa in second place and Pakistan third.

Australia wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist and South Africa seamer Shaun Pollock lead the individual limited-overs ratings.

No Shoaib till 4th Test

CRICINFO, undated

Shaharyar Khan, chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) ruled out fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar's comeback before the fourth Test at The Oval next month, saying that he still needs time to get match fit.

Shaharyar said that Shoaib is making rapid recovery from an ankle stress fracture but is still far from being fit enough to play international cricket. He also revealed that the team and Board officials were trying to get Shoaib to play some club games in England early next month for the sake of match practice ahead of any international comeback.

"We wanted Shoaib to play some matches in Pakistan but the problem is that there isn't much cricket being played there at this time of the year," he said. "Now we are trying to find some good matches for him here in England."

Shoaib had earlier expressed plans to be fit in time for the second Test at Old Trafford from July 27. But Shaharyar made it clear that it was not a possibility. He even ruled out Shoaib's chances of playing in the third Test at Headingley early in August saying that the best Shoaib can do is to feature in the final Test at The Oval and later in the five-match ODI series.

Shoaib last played for Pakistan in the Karachi Test against India in January this year. He has been out

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Missing the cutting edge

Eng-Pak first Test starts at Lord's today

Cricket

AFP, London

Just how much England miss irreplaceable all-rounder Andrew Flintoff is set to become apparent when they take on Pakistan in the first Test at Lord's starting here Thursday - a match where both sides could be without several key players because of injury.

The opening encounter of a four-Test series will see England minus Flintoff (ankle), Ashes-winning captain Michael Vaughan (knee), pacemen James Anderson (back) and Simon Jones (knee) as well as left-arm spinner Ashley Giles (hip).

Meanwhile experienced swing bowler Matthew Hoggard is struggling with a freak hand injury sustained during a warm-up in last

week's A team draw against the tourists.

But as Stephen Harmison, set to be England's lone senior quick, observed it is Flintoff who will be the biggest loss for the hosts this week in a match where Andrew Strauss leads the team for the first time in a Test in the absence of the Lancashire hero.

"I can be replaced, everybody else can be replaced," the Durham quick said.

"But, at this moment in time, Fred (Flintoff) can't be replaced because we haven't got anybody else in the country who can bat at six, bowl at 90mph and stand at slip," Harmison insisted.

"I don't think you'll ever replace that."

England are set to bat Ian Bell at six and use his occasional medium-pacers, along with those of Paul Collingwood, to supple-

ment Harmison, Liam Plunkett, Jon Lewis and left-arm spinner Monty Panesar, if Hoggard fails to overcome his right hand injury.

Harmison, a less obviously self-confident performer than

Ashes ace Flintoff, insisted he could still be effective in the absence of his great friend despite bowling just 32 first-class overs this season because of a shin problem and struggling for rhythm during England's recent 5-0 one-day series thrashing Sri Lanka.

"We are good mates but we are not totally inseparable. It's not like we sit in that corner and nine others sit in that corner. We are not like that."

"Anybody would miss him. You take 'Fred' out the team, we're not the same team. But we go with what we've got."

"The one thing we haven't been doing in recent times is nailing Test matches," Harmison explained. "We've got to get back to doing the basics well scoring 400 plus (in the first innings) and taking 20 wickets."

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England wicketkeeper Geraint Jones (L) dives low to take a catch as teammate Marcus Trescothick looks on behind during a practice session at Lord's on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Chuck out chuckers'

Cricket

AFP, London

New Zealand great Martin Crowe launched a thinly-disguised attack on Muttiah Muralitharan here Tuesday as he called on officials to make sure 'chuckers' were "chucked out" of cricket.

Changes to international regulations brought about by investigations into controversial Sri Lanka off-spinner Muralitharan's action mean elite bowlers are now allowed a maximum of 15 degrees of straightening in delivery.

But there is no room for manoeuvre under the Laws of Cricket and former Test batsman Crowe insisted that was right.

"I have zero tolerance of 'chucking' in cricket," said Crowe while giving the 2006 Cowdrey Lecture at Lord's here Thursday. "I'm sick to death with the hypocrisy of the last 10 years."

"I don't care about talk of 15 degrees here or 10 degrees there... if with the naked eye a bowler is clearly chucking - even by one degree - he should be chucked out... To straighten your arm from any bent position is a massive advantage over other bowlers who bowl properly."

Then, in a reference to Muralitharan, he added: "Having been pinned in the head by

'chuckers' over 15 years, having been dubiously bowled first ball in a Test by a certain Sri Lanka bowler, having tried to bowl a decent ball myself with a straight arm, I've had more than enough of this aspect of

delivery (a ball which turns away from the right-handed batsman, the opposite of a standard off-spinner) was reported by match referee Chris Broad, the former England opening batsman.

That led to a general inquiry into throwing by the International Cricket Council (ICC) which in turn sparked a relaxation of the rules governing Test, one-day and first-class matches after it was found that many bowlers were bending their arms in delivery.

Meanwhile, in a wide-ranging speech, Crowe, who exactly 23 years ago Tuesday scored a Test century at Lord's, called for the World Cup to be shortened and one-day games to feature two innings per side.

He added minnows Bangladesh and Zimbabwe should be thrown out of Test cricket, saying they were "clogging up the works".

Crowe, now 43, scored over 5,400 runs in 77 Tests at an average of above 45 with 17 hundreds before his career was cut short by a knee injury which led to his retirement in 1995.

The Cowdrey Lecture was inaugurated six years ago by Lord's owners Marylebone Cricket Club in memory of the late England captain Colin Cowdrey.

Two years ago his 'doosra'



MARTIN CROWE

South Africa hosts World Cup 2010

SOUTH AFRICA

Source: Fifa 100706

Stadium venues for the World Cup