

ECB to review Fletcher's role after WC

REUTERS, London

Duncan Fletcher's position as England coach will be reviewed after next year's World Cup following the loss of the Ashes, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said on Monday.

Australia regained the Ashes after beating England by 206 runs in the third Test to take a 3-0 lead in the five-match series.

"I think that can be true," ECB chief executive David Collier told BBC Radio Five when asked if coaches have a shelf life.

"But we're in the middle of a series still. We've got two important Test matches in Sydney and Melbourne, we've then got the one-day series, we then go into the World Cup," Collier added.

"After the World Cup is the time we will truly reflect on where we go for the next four years. We tend to work in four-year cycles."

Fletcher has been widely criticised for England's lacklustre performances and for selecting left-arm spinner Ashley Giles ahead of Monty Panesar for the first two Tests.

Wicketkeeper Geraint Jones was also brought back for the series but has been short of runs and questions have been asked about England's lack of preparation time.

The Times newspaper on Monday said Fletcher tried to resign as an England selector several months ago but was talked round.

The newspaper said Fletcher believed it would be better he were not party to crucial decisions such as whether Andrew Flintoff or Andrew Strauss should captain the side in the absence of the injured Michael Vaughan.

Sourav sets

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"It helps knowing what the conditions will be. It is my third visit to South Africa. When you have played in countries like South Africa, Australia and England you have to think about the adjustments you need to make."

Ganguly said he was grateful for the support he had received from many fans after he was dropped.

"It's been nice but it would have been the same if (current captain) Rahul Dravid or Anil Kumble was dropped."

He took a philosophical view of selection decisions.

"It's part of professional sport. Rahul has been dropped from the one-day side, Anil has been dropped. The only guy in this team who has not been dropped is Sachin (Tendulkar). You get picked, you get dropped and you come back again."

Inter juggernaut

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"But we haven't won the title yet and we have to fight right up till the end because there are some very big teams behind us."

Materazzi described the booking he received after an altercation with Messina's coach Bruno Giordano as "scandalous".

He picked up the yellow card after Giordano refused to give him the ball for a throw-in while the Messina manager accused the player of "playing the sheriff".

This result took Inter's tally to the season to 13 wins and three draws with 34 goals scored, the best attack in the Italian first division.

They have the second meanest defence, having leaked only 14 goals so far and if they manage to maintain this form it's hard to see them being deprived of the title even with 22 games to go.

On Saturday struggling city neighbours AC Milan were saved from defeat when striker Alberto Gilardino scored in the final minute to earn a 2-2 draw at Fiorentina.

Gilardino's 90th-minute header, beating Fiorentina keeper Sebastian Frey following good work from Cristian Brocchi, meant AC Milan avoided a fifth defeat as they continue to try to bounce back following their eight-point, pre-season deduction for match-fixing.

Gilardino had given Milan a fourth-minute lead but Adrian Mutu converted a 20th-minute penalty to equalise, after Kakha Kaladze had handled in the area, and then Mutu put Fiorentina ahead in the 76th minute.

Their seventh draw of the season moved Milan up one place in the standings to 14th with 14 points.

England defeat

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lose a wicket and let England back into the game, and as we've seen right through this series we just haven't done that," he said.

"If we've had a partnership going we've made it into a big one and just haven't given England the opportunities to compete with us this time round."

Ominously for the tourists Ponting said there would be no let up in the intensity, with the Australians, a number of whom will be playing in their last Ashes series, determined to record a clean sweep and win the remaining two Tests in Melbourne and Sydney.



Argentine legend Diego Maradona (R) controls the ball on his thigh as tennis star David Nalbandian watches on during a friendly 'soccer-tennis' match against Spaniards Carlos Moya and Guillermo Canas in Buenos Aires on Sunday.

Hail Hussey's meteoric rise

AFP, Perth

He was a controversial onlooker as Australia handed over the urn in 2005, but Mike Hussey capped a remarkable introduction to Ashes cricket when he was named man-of-the-match in the series clinching third Test win over England at the WACA Ground here Monday.

Hussey's fine double of 74 not out and 103 -- his first hundred against England -- on his home ground got him the nod.

The award was yet another plaudit in a remarkable start to his Test career for a player that wasn't even in the Australian team when it handed over the Ashes 15 months ago.

The disciplined left-hander took his series tally to 415 runs at 138.33 with his efforts here, having scored

at least a half-century in every one of his Ashes innings.

Speaking after the Australians had wrapped up a 206-run win to take a 3-0 lead in the series, Hussey said even though he didn't play in the 2005 campaign regaining the Ashes was clearly a special moment.

"It is going to take a long while to wipe this smile off my face," he said.

"We have had to work very hard, but all the hard work has been worthwhile."

"Just to be a part of something like this is just really, really special. I actually saw a tear in Matty Hayden's eye out there, so it really meant a lot to him and I know he felt a lot of hurt after last year."

"I really meant a lot to all the guys."

With the benefit of hindsight, it is hard to believe the 31-year-old Hussey, nicknamed 'Mr Cricket' by his teammates for his dedication to the sport, didn't win promotion

during the 2005 Ashes despite the woes of some of his fellow tourists.

He eventually made his debut against the West Indies in Brisbane last November and now boasts 1,554 runs at the Bradman-like average of 86.33 in his first 14 Tests.

Hussey said he simply treated every match as another chance to consolidate his spot in the side.

"I've had to work very, very hard to get into the team, but that is what playing for Australia is all about," he said.

"Everyone has to work very hard, put a lot of runs on the board or take a lot of wickets to earn the right to play for Australia and that is the way it should be."

"I just really want to try and make every innings count for as much as I can and never take anything for granted."

"The baggy green cap means so much to me, so I really want to try and do as well as I can."

Akhtar, Asif in provisional squad

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan Monday recalled Shoab Akhtar and Mohammad Asif for the preliminary 25-man squad for next month's tour of South Africa despite uncertainty over their doping cases.

Akhtar and Asif launched successful appeals earlier this month after a tribunal in November banned them for two years and one year respectively for testing positive for the banned steroid nandrolone.

The new-ball pair could still be stopped from playing after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) last week decided to challenge the lifting of the ban in the Court of Arbitration of Sports (CAS) in Switzerland.

But the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) insisted the doping matter was closed and Akhtar and Asif were free to play, with chief selector Wasim Bari saying Akhtar and Asif would be selected on the basis of fitness.

The 31-year-old Akhtar featured in a four-day first-class match which ended here on Monday while Asif, who turns 24 on Wednesday, was scheduled to play the domestic Twenty20 championship starting here from December 21.

Cannavaro wins

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sent off in the World Cup final, is second this time with 454 votes.

Zidane also spent the last five years of his club career at Real Madrid. Brazil and Barcelona's 2004 and 2005 winner Ronaldinho is supposed to be third this time with 380 votes.

Real Madrid coach Fabio Capello said that he believed Cannavaro would be a worthy winner.

"It's not difficult to understand that he should receive this award because the World Cup is the World Cup and there he was the major player in the world," said Capello.

If Cannavaro was to win it would more than make up for him being sent off on Sunday for the first time since he accompanied Capello and joined Real Madrid from Juventus in the summer.

"It was an unfair sending off because the ball hit him in the face and didn't touch his hand, like the referee thought," added Capello.

"It's difficult to accept. I've got a red face and a red eye as well. The ball didn't touch my hand," commented Cannavaro about the circumstances of his second yellow card which saw him also get a red card after 53 minutes.

The Cadena SER report about the FIFA World Player of the Year refutes the widely-held opinion that Ronaldinho was about to lift the award for the third successive year.

Zimbabwe's tour

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match. His four-hour knock featured one four and two sixes in 162 balls. Skipper Stuart Matsikenyeri played a quickfire 32 off 37 balls with three sixes.

Zimbabwe A had scored 293 in their first innings and conceded an 87-run first-innings lead to the home side, whose 380 all out was shaped by Test discard opener Javed Omar's 173.

The southern Africans will take their fight for home today after a month-long tour of Bangladesh.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ZIMBABWE A: 293 and 295 for three in 108 overs (Mawoyo 47, Hove 38, Chibhaba 70, Williams 85 not out, Matsikenyeri 32 not out, Shahjada 1-35, Sharif 1-31, Kapali 1-46).

BANGLADESH A: First innings 380 (Javed 173, Jahurul 59, Marshall 53, Garwe 4-100, Chigumbura 4-47).

Quarterfinals

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Mirpur City Club ground in the other two quarterfinals tomorrow.

The two semifinals will be held on December 21 at the Jagannath hall ground and at BKSP.

The final is slated for December 23 at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

Sevilla grab

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after his second yellow card, his first sending off since being signed by Madrid in the summer.

Capello immediately replaced Robinho with central defender Alvaro Mejia.

Capello also decided to leave Ronaldo on the bench until the last five minutes but his rearguard tactic paid off and Real got a crucial win.

The Spanish capital's other two team's met later on Sunday with Atletico Madrid winning 1-0 over Getafe.

Atletico's Portuguese midfielder Maniche headed the only goal of the game midway through the first half from right on the penalty spot, following a looping pass from out on the right flank by Fernando Torres.

At the other end of the table, Real Sociedad came from behind twice to beat fellow strugglers Gimnastic Tarragona 3-2 and notch up their first league win in eight months.

Boje slams selection policy

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Nicky Boje, who announced his retirement from international cricket earlier in the week, has slammed South Africa's selection policies, and expressed fears that there could be something of an exodus once the World Cup squad is named early in 2007.

"Enough is enough," he said in an interview with Rapport, an Afrikaans Sunday paper. "I'm fed up with reading in newspapers and hearing on a daily basis that I am not good enough, that I am not Warne or Murali. They are good, but take them out of the picture and see what world cricket is left with."

Boje was named in the Test squad for the series against India, but it's thought that comments made by Haroon Lorgat, convener of the selection panel, triggered his decision to retire. "The time comes when you have to ask yourself where you are going and where your loyalties lie," said Boje. "And mine are not with the Proteas anymore. The last straw was Lorgat's comment that apart from our spinners, our bowling attack is on par with Australia. There was a

long build-up to my retirement, but it was still a difficult decision as I feel I still have a lot to offer the country."

Boje's relationship with Graeme Smith, captain since 2003, has frequently been an uneasy one, and it was noted in many quarters that he communicated his decision to retire to Tony Irish, of the players' union, and Gerald Majola, Cricket South Africa's chief executive. Lorgat and Mickey Arthur, the coach, were not initially informed. "Haroon did try to phone me," says Boje, "but unfortunately I missed the call."

Lorgat's unflattering comments about South African slow bowlers had come after a shock recall for Paul Adams, and Boje admitted that it was a decision that did little for the morale of other spinners in the country. "We have got spinners that can do a good job for SA," he said. "Claude Henderson, Con de Lange, Paul Harris and Johan Botha have got the potential to do well. Thandi Tshabalala is still young, but with the right leadership, he can become a factor. He just needs to know he's got the selectors' backing."

"It's funny that they say we don't have spinners of quality in the country, but yet the spinners are

the leading wicket-takers in domestic cricket. I will share my experience with the young spinners in the country, but for now I'm focusing all my attention on the Eagles. They, after all, pay my salary."

Boje clearly feels that he never had the support from those that matter. "They treated me poorly," he says frankly, and another player quoted in the article also spoke of poor channels of communication between the selection panel and the players. "You never know what is expected of you or what your role should be," said the player, name withheld by request. "And you never know for sure that, despite a good performance, you will play in the next match."

With the so-called quota system the source of considerable disquiet - Kevin Pietersen weighs in with a comment every other week, or so it seems - Boje fears that things will only get worse. "I feel sorry for [someone like] Boeta Dippenaar," he said. "It can happen that some players decide to play overseas once the World Cup squad is selected, and they're not in it. With this uncertainty about their places, I get the idea that some players only play for themselves. That's not healthy for cricket in South Africa."

Moody admits Silva gamble

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

Coach Tom Moody admits Chamara Silva's inclusion in Sri Lanka's Test squad for the drawn series with New Zealand was a gamble after revealing he "hadn't seen a lot of him".

Silva's maiden Test century had guided Sri Lanka to 365 all out in the second innings of the second Test against New Zealand to set the home side a substantial 504 to claim a 2-0 series whitewash.

But after spin wizard Muttiah Muralidaran ripped through the New Zealand batting order the tourists claimed a 1-1 draw after dismissing the Blackcaps to claim a 217-run victory on the fourth day at the Basin Reserve.

"To be frank I hadn't seen a lot of him," admitted Moody. "I saw him about two months ago and asked the question where this guy had been all this time."

"He was picked for the A team and soon made an impression and quickly made it to the senior side."

"Sri Lanka are blessed in that way as there are many talented young players. I haven't seen that

much talent anywhere else in the world and we are extremely fortunate."

Silva completed his century on day three in 144 balls with 12 fours and went onto score 152 not out after plundering 61 in the first innings.

"Sri Lanka played great cricket. Over the last year they have emerged as a credible and strong Test team," said Fleming.

"They have one of the greatest spin bowlers (Muralidaran) and an action which is very difficult to pick (Lasith Malinga)."

"That about sums it up. It was a wonderful comeback from a team who had lost the first Test."

Fleming paid tribute to the tourists, who had restricted the Blackcaps to just 130 in their first innings on the second day after posting 268 in their first innings.

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India post

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Sreesanth	25	8	59	3
V Singh	18	4	67	0
Ganguly	1	0	11	0
Kumble	20	4	54	3

Result: India won by 123 runs.
Man-of-the-match: S Sreesanth.
Umpires: M Benson (Eng), D Harper (Aus).
Match referee: R Mahanama.
Remaining Tests: Dec 26-30, Durban; Jan 2-6, Cape Town.

Flintoff beaten but not bowled

Cricket

AFP, Perth

The Ashes are gone but England captain Andrew Flintoff said his side would be out to regain lost pride in the last two Tests of the series.

A disappointed Flintoff said the England camp were hurting deeply after the 206-run loss in Perth that handed Australia an unbeatable 3-0 lead just three Tests into the most anticipated Ashes series ever.

While Flintoff said Australia undoubtedly deserved to win the series, he urged the Barmy Army and fans at home to stick with the side and he dismissed the need for wholesale changes to the team.

Having enjoyed the highs of the 2005 upset win, Flintoff found it hard to describe his emotions after the loss, but vowed his side would bounce back in the Melbourne and Sydney Tests.

"It hurts, it's hurting a lot for the lads, but we have to get over it because we have got two more Test matches to play," he said.

"We can't mope around, we've got two big Test matches still and we want to give a good account of ourselves."

"It is going to be a tough couple of

days, but there is a lot of pride and character in our dressing room."

"There are a lot of lads who want to prove they can win a Test match in Australia and prove they can play against Australia."

While much has been made of the pressure he is under and his own indifferent form, Flintoff said he wanted to retain the captaincy for as long as possible.

"I am so proud to be England captain and I always will be," he said.

"It has its moments, but no regrets whatsoever -- as long as I get the opportunity to do so, I always will be."

Having needed to bat for more than two days to save the match or score 557 to record an unlikely win, Flintoff admitted there were times he thought they could achieve the impossible as they defied the Australian attack.

"We decided to go out there positive," he said.

"It was working for period and you dare to dream."

Flintoff said the English had played better than three straight defeats suggested, but hadn't been able to maintain pressure on the Australians at key stages of each Test.

"At the 'Gabba, Australia came

out strong and put us on the back foot and it was hard to come back," he said.

"Adelaide was bitterly disappointing. In this game we bowled them out for 240, we were hoping to score at least 350 and try and apply some pressure to Australia, but fair play to them they didn't allow us to."

"They hit us hard, had the lead, and then (Adam) Gilchrist took the game away from us."

Despite the defeat, Flintoff said there were plenty of positives the English could take from the tour.

"At times, we have shown on the field how talented we are," Flintoff said.

"There have been some great things come out of this trip so far. The young lads have emerged, the likes of Alastair Cook scoring hundreds, Ian Bell, Paul Collingwood, Kevin Pietersen, the bowling of Matthew Hoggard and Monty (Panesar)."

"But we've not been able to apply the pressure as much as we would have liked to have done."

"Every time we have had our foot in the door, they have closed it on us."

Murali makes SL smile

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Muralidaran went straight to Chamara Silva at mid-wicket to end the innings. He gave Muralidaran 10 wickets for the fifth time in his last six Tests.

But the man of the match award went to Silva who overcame a double duck in the first Test to set up Sri Lanka's win in the second with a 61 in the first innings and 156 not out in the second.

The series now turns to limited over cricket with two Twenty20 matches before the first of five one-dayers on December 28.

SCOREBOARD

Final scoreboard on the fourth day of the second Test between New Zealand and Sri Lanka at the Basin Reserve on Monday:
SRI LANKA: First innings 268 (Sangakkara 156 n.o., Silva 61; Martin

3-50, Vettori 3-53)

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 130 (McCullum 43; Malinga 5-68, Muralidaran 4-31)

SRI LANKA: Second innings 365 (Silva 152 n.o., Vaas 47; Vettori 7-130)

NEW ZEALAND: Second innings (overnight 75 for 2)

Cumming c Sangakkara b Muralidaran 20
Howlbw b Malinga 33

Sinclair c P Jayawardene b Muralidaran 37
Fleming c Sangakkara b Malinga 27
Astle lbw b Muralidaran 9
McCullum b Muralidaran 17
Oram lbw b Vaas 4

Vettori lbw b Muralidaran 51
Franklin c Silva b Muralidaran 44
Bond c Sangakkara b Maharoo 6
Martin not out 4

Extras: (b-9, lb-7, w-11, nb-7) 34
Total: (All out in 85.1 overs) 286

Fall of wickets: 1-56, 2-60, 3-115, 4-139, 5-156, 6-161, 7-163, 8-259, 9-278, 10-286

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Vaas	18	2	64	1
Malinga	16	1	62	2
Maharoo	11	1	47	1
Muralidaran	34.1	9	87	6
Jayasuriya	6	3	10	0

Result Sri Lanka won by 217 runs and levelled the two-match series 1-1.

Man-of-the-match: Chamara Silva.

Toss: Sri Lanka

Umpires: Simon Taufel (AUS), Brian Jerling (RSA)

Match referee: Javagal Srinath (IND)