

Buchanan plans post-Warne era

AFP, Sydney

Australia coach John Buchanan admitted Thursday that Shane Warne's Test retirement would leave a huge void in his side, but insisted plans were in place to cope with a changing of the guard.

Veteran paceman Glenn McGrath is tipped to be the next Australian to call stumps on his career, and Buchanan said it was only a matter of time before Matthew Hayden, Justin Langer and Adam Gilchrist retired.

Batsman Damien Martyn has already departed, shocking his teammates when he walked away from the game on the eve of the third Ashes Test.

The Australian team threw England's "Dad's Army" jibes back in their faces by crushing the tourists to take an unbeatable 3-0 series lead and reclaim the Ashes last week, but questions remain about what happens when the crop of ageing champions move on.

Buchanan said Australia had the infrastructure in place to handle the strain of a mass exodus, unlike the 1980s when Dennis Lillee, Greg Chappell and Rod Marsh's departure crippled the national side.

"One of the significant differences that has occurred is that there are things like the Centre of Excellence program, Australia A, and we have seen the emergence of young talent," he said.

"The transition from moving the older, great players out (for) newer, younger players should be a bit easier than in the past.

"(Retirements) will occur, whether that be within two, three, six or 12 months, but it heralds an exciting time in Australian cricket."

Buchanan, who will step down in April after the Cricket World Cup, hinted that Warne's departure may force Australia to rethink the positive, attacking game plans that have allowed it to dominate world cricket in recent decades.

"Certainly from a selection point of view and looking into the future that will now be a huge void that will take maybe generations to fill," he said.

"When you lose one of your great players it does mean you have to re-think and re-look at your team, its balance and the way you want to play your game."

New ball

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from public use, it would be difficult to maintain quality," said the CDDM boss adding that he would consider not holding the second tier of the Premiership at Dhanmendi.

"We have superior grounds outside the capital and if needed, we will move out. If we wait for the National Sports Council, the facilities will never improve, so I will request the board to renovate the dressing rooms at its own cost."

TODAY'S MATCHES

Sonargaon v Indira Road (Fatullah); Mohammedan v Brothers (BKSP-2); Abahani v Young Pegasus (DCS) at 9am; Old DOHS v Kalabagan (Fatullah), Victoria v Biman (DCS), City Club v Partex (BKSP-2) at 1pm.

Inter smash

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absorbed the early pressure and started to show their class late in the first half.

After Hernan Crespo had clipped a shot wide, Inter went ahead with a goal made in Argentina.

Crespo surged into the box before cutting the ball back for Cambiasso whose left-footed shot squeezed past Angelo Peruzzi.

Inter were reduced to 10 men just before the break when Ibrahimovic was cautioned for a second time for booting the ball away after being flagged offside.

The second booking was harsh on the Swedish international who connected with the ball just a fraction of a second after referee Gianluca Rocchi had blown his whistle.

Peruzzi had to get down low to repel Dejan Stankovic's driven free-kick before Julio Cesar tipped Lazio captain Massimo Oddo's volley over the bar.

Materazzi ended Lazio's resistance in the 85th minute, rising at the back post to meet Luis Figo's crossed free-kick wide out on the left wing.

Huelva make

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from the penalty spot 19 minutes into the second half after Luis Fabiano had tumbled over in the area.

Luis Fabiano produced a bullet header from an Alves free-kick before Alves added the icing on the cake by curling the ball over the wall and into the net from a 20-metre free kick.

Depor, who have gone nine games without a win, are 15th, four points off the relegation zone. Osasuna collected their fifth league win in a row, a 2-1 victory over struggling Levante lifting them to eighth.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Winners of the 'CityCell Cric Freak' contest pose with chief executive officer of CityCell Chye Hoon Pin and other officials in a prize giving ceremony at the Pacific Center in the city recently.

Crunch time for India

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Kingsmead has few happy memories for India, outside of the 2003 World Cup, but they arrived in Durban on Wednesday afternoon aware that five days of the discipline and grit shown at the Wanderers will take them close to perhaps their most celebrated Test series win in recent memory.

Less than a month ago, they left Durban with abuse from Indian supporters still resounding in their ears, having been bowled out for 91 in a 157-run one-day defeat, and the old-timers like Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid will still grimace when they recall the slide to 100 and 66 all out against Allan Donald and company a decade ago.

It doesn't help that India do poor encores. The scarcely believable victory at Adelaide -- Australia had made 400 for 5 on the opening day -- was followed by a nine-wicket defeat at the MCG, where they squandered the initiative given them by Virender Sehwag's audacious 195.

A few months later, in Pakistan, they slipped up again. Rahul Dravid led India to their first win on Pakistani turf, a comprehensive triumph by an innings at Multan, but a week later at Lahore, the batting order crashed and burned against Umar Gul, with only Yuvraj Singh and Irfan Pathan saving face.

That too was a nine-wicket defeat, and Dravid admitted at the post-match press conference in Johannesburg that India needed to be wary of a similar blip in Durban.

Luckily for India, South Africa have plenty of problems of their own. Dale Steyn limped out at the Wanderers, and is doubtful for this game. In his absence, there was a sameness to the attack that would have worried the team management, despite a splendid performance from Shaun Pollock, who went past 400 Test victims in the game. Makhaya Ntini was flat and erratic, while Andre Nel veered between two extremes, bowling some excellent deliveries interspersed with phases where he let ego and aggression dictate matters.

Even before the first-Test debacle, Mickey Arthur, South Africa's coach, had requested for pitches with plenty of pace and bounce, adding that he didn't fancy a grassy surface. After his top order was ruthlessly exposed on a surface that offered bounce without being especially quick, it remains to be seen what instructions will be passed on to the curator at Kingsmead.

Only Sourav Ganguly and VVS Laxman made half-centuries for India, but several of the others also showed far greater application and awareness of the conditions than their South African counterparts. With the exception of Ashwell Prince and Jacques

Kallis, the batting was simply wretched, and a reshuffle of sorts is expected, with AB de Villiers moving up to partner Graeme Smith at the top of the order.

Smith's travails epitomise those of his team. He made some bold pronouncements in Australia last summer, and was then taken apart by an Australian pace line-up that takes considerable joy in exposing shallow talk.

The misery continued in the return series, and with the exception of the Centurion one-day game earlier this month, he has barely put bat to ball against the Indians. Both Zaheer Khan and Sreesanth have zoomed in on his tendency to play across his front pad, and Durban will be a real test of his character, with the team also under the pump.

From being prohibitive favourites to win the series -- Haroon Lorgat, convener of the selection panel, spoke confidently to an Indian newspaper about a 3-0 whitewash -- the South Africans will arrive in Durban on Friday staring at the spectre of only a second that offered bounce without being especially quick, it remains to be seen what instructions will be passed on to the curator at Kingsmead.

As for the Indians who left Durban last month as badly beaten as one of Mike Tyson's early victims, they must resist the urge to pinch themselves and focus on the task in hand, starting with a two-day game against a KwaZulu Natal Invitation XI on Friday.

Pigeon stays tight-lipped

Cricket

REUTERS, Sydney

Australian fast bowler Glenn McGrath was keeping a low-profile on Thursday amid growing speculation he was about to follow Shane Warne into retirement.

Rumours have been rife in Australian media that McGrath is planning to follow Warne and quit after next month's final Ashes Test in Sydney.

Warne confirmed his retirement plans at a news conference in Melbourne on Thursday but there was no word from McGrath or his management team.

Cricket Australia officials would not comment on the speculation but the fact McGrath has not denied the claims has fuelled the media's

belief he will make an announcement in the next week.

The Sydney Morning Herald reported on Thursday that McGrath had abandoned his dream of pursuing a third World Cup title in West Indies next year in order to take care of his sick wife.

Jane McGrath was diagnosed this year with her third bout of cancer and has been undergoing treatment since.

McGrath took eight months off from the game to care for the couple's two young children before making his comeback in September.

He helped Australia win the Champions Trophy for the first time, then rejoined the Test side for the Ashes.

McGrath's fitness played a pivotal role in the Ashes series in England last year. He was named

man of the match after steering Australia to victory in the opening Test but stepped on a ball on the morning of the second Test and missed the game.

Australia went on to lose the series 2-1 and the Ashes for the first time in 16 years.

The 36-year-old McGrath has been troubled by niggling injuries for most of the past few seasons but remains as dangerous as ever whenever he is fit.

He took six wickets in Australia's first Ashes Test win in Brisbane last month but struggled on a flat pitch in Adelaide and was noticeably sluggish in the field in Perth, where Australia regained the Ashes.

Ronaldinho

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The 26-year-old former Paris Saint Germain player joined Barcelona in 2003, winning the Champions League with the club last year.

His Mexican teammate Rafael Marquez recently obtained Spanish citizenship.

Apart from Ronaldinho, the only other non-EU player at Barcelona this season is Cameroon's Samuel Eto'o, who is currently injured.

Ronaldinho's obtaining Spanish citizenship would allow young Mexican-Brazilian player Giovanni dos Santos move up to Barcelona's first team.

Dhaka-BKSP

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In reply to Dhaka's 226 for seven in 50 overs, Nilphamari managed only 119 in 48.5 overs with Hanif, Raisul and Sharifullah sharing seven wickets.

In the other semifinal, the home side thrashed Rajshahi by 96 runs.

Batting first, BKSP posted a modest total of 168 in 47.4 overs with Nasir hitting 41 and Mahmudul Hasan 35. Delwar Hossain took four wickets.

Rajshahi failed miserably with the bat, being bowled out for 72 in 21.2 overs. Delwar starred with the bat as well, scoring a quickfire 33. Kibria took four wickets while Riaz and Mahmudul chipped in with two wickets each.

The final will be held at BKSP on Saturday.

'Tendulkar, Lara best'

AFP, Melbourne

Outgoing Australian spinner Shane Warne on Thursday said India's Sachin Tendulkar and the West Indies' Brian Lara were the toughest batsmen he played against.

Reflecting on a stellar Test career, which will end when the current Ashes series finishes in January, Warne said Tendulkar and Lara were the batsmen he feared most.

"Sachin Tendulkar and Brian Lara are the two best batsmen of my era," he said.

"I think those two guys have been the toughest at international level. Brian Lara because of his placement. I can't believe it, it's just amazing his placement in cricket.

"He can dominate a game, as we've seen over the years, no matter who's bowling."

Warne, no stranger to the spotlight, praised the way Tendulkar handled scrutiny in India.

"I really admire Sachin for what he has to go through every day in India, with a billion people wanting him to do well," he said.

"There's 50,000 people outside the stadium and when he walks up to bat they all charge in. One of the hardest things when you've been a successful player is everybody else's expectations. They can wear you down after a while."

Warne rated Australia's loss to Sri Lanka in the 1996 Cricket World Cup as the lowlight of his career.

He said this month's Test victory over England in Adelaide was a highlight, along with a Test against Sri Lanka in 1992 in which he took three quick wickets to help Australia to a come-from-behind win. He said it made him feel part of the Test team for the first time.

Arambagh rope in Morshed

SPORTS REPORTER

Arambagh Kriya Sangha recruited their second professional footballer in two days when they registered Abu Morshed yesterday.

The forward, who played for the same club last season, has signed a one-year contract for the B. League -- the inaugural Professional Football League, which is scheduled to kick off from February 15.

Sachin salutes

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him for a six, and he said something. I didn't really follow what he said because I started walking towards the square-leg umpire. I caught up with him after the game and told him: 'Now you can tell me what you wanted to say on the field'. We shared a joke, and since then we've been good friends."

India are scheduled to tour Australia in a year's time, and Tendulkar was asked if the game would be poorer for the personal rivalry having come to an end. "I've always said that it's not about Shane Warne and Sachin," he said.

"It's Australia and India. People like to build up these things. In time to come, there will be someone else."

As for what had made Warne so special, Tendulkar pointed to his legendary accuracy and a spirit that remained unbowed no matter how tough the situation. "You had to be awake to play Warne (smiles)," he said. "There was no breathing space at all. Warne being such a fierce competitor, you knew that at no stage could you bat him out of the game. He was always coming back at you. That kept me on my toes.

"I've already sent a message to him," he said. "I want to wish him all the very best. And above all, good health."

Chelsea, Spurs

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of opening the scoring on 27 minutes when his superb 25-metre shot hit the underside of the bar and bounced off the line.

Andriy Shevchenko came close for Chelsea on the stroke of halftime when his angled drive clipped the far post while Lampard also struck the woodwork with a chip in stoppage time.

Tottenham were given a scare by second division bottom club Southend, who beat Manchester United 1-0 in the previous round.

The first 90 minutes at White Hart Lane ended goalless and it was another 25 minutes before England striker Jermain Defoe scored the winner from a Mido pass.

Mascherano

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cessful here. But if I'm still not playing, things get complicated.

"Our teammates have welcomed us well and, what with the language problem, I can't complain as to how they have treated us.

"I came to the Premier League really excited about it all, because I wanted to be successful at West Ham.

"This was my aim and it still is, but I haven't had enough opportunity to see if this will be possible."

World expresses shock

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

The cricket world heaped praise on retiring Australian great Shane Warne on Thursday while many expressed shock at his sudden departure.

"Shane Warne is without doubt the finest leg-spinner the world has ever seen," former Australian Test captain, leg-spin bowler and cricket commentator Richie Benaud said. "You would certainly have Warne right up there as one of the greatest Australians to ever step on the field," he said, adding Warne would leave a huge gap in the game.

Former England captain Mike Gatting, who fell prey to Warne's 'ball of the century' in 1993, heaped praise on his former adversary.

"He's the best leg spinner there's ever been," Gatting said. "He'll be hard to replace -- not just by Australia but by cricket in general."

Many were surprised at Warne's announcement he would retire at the end of the current Ashes series while still at the height of his powers, even though he is aged 37.

"I just got the inkling that he was even considering one more tilt at England in England (in 2009) and that would see him out, but it's just caught everyone by surprise," said former Australian captain Allan Border.

"He's in superb touch, he's bowling well physically," he said. "He's been a breath of fresh air for the game."

Former Australian bowler Geoff Lawson told Fox Sports Warne would have gone on to take 1,000 wickets if he had chosen to remain

in the game.

"I'm absolutely gobsmacked by this -- he's just bowling so terrifically," he said.

"I thought he might still have another three, four years left in the game and in fact I've lost a lot of money because I backed him to take 1,000 Test wickets and it's not going to happen now."

Australian Prime Minister John Howard applauded Warne for his "massive contribution" to cricket.

"I thank him for the massive contribution he's made to Australian cricket," Howard said.

"He's the greatest slow bowler this country has had and the greatest slow bowler the world has seen and he's done amazing things for the art of leg-break bowling."

Cricket Australia chief James Sutherland paid Warne the huge compliment of evoking Donald Bradman, the batsman regarded as Australia's greatest ever player.

"There are a generation of Australians who were privileged enough to see Bradman. We are the generation that will always say we were privileged to see Warne," Sutherland said.

Sutherland described Warne's 699 Test wickets as staggering, but said the bowler's career transcended statistics.

"To personally change the course of so many games, to excite the public imagination about cricket the way he has, and to inspire a generation of Australian kids to take up the once neglected art of leg-spinning takes him beyond the stats and puts him in a league of his own," he said.

Ex-England captain Nasser Hussain described Warne as "the reason you played cricket" and New Zealand great Sir Richard Hadlee, a former Test-wicket

record-holder, said the sport would be poorer for his departure.

"A lot of batsmen in world cricket will be delighted to learn he's leaving the game, but I think the game will be poorer without him," the former seam bowling kingpin told Radio Sport.

"He has been a matchwinner, flamboyant and just incredible to watch."

Damien Fleming, a former teammate of Warne's, said the bowler's place in history was assured.

"He is one of the greatest cricketers of all time and we will never see his like again," he said.

Wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist, whose cries of "bowled Warne" followed many of Warne's deliveries, said he would miss his teammate.

"What he's done for the game, the colour he's added, the character that he's brought to the game, he's going to be tough to replace," he said.

More of Australia's victorious Test team are also expected to pull up stumps next year, with fast bowler Glenn McGrath tipped to announce his retirement soon, while batsman Damien Martyn quit suddenly just before the third Ashes Test.

Australia's opposition leader Kevin Rudd said the ebullient Warne's departure would change the face of Australian cricket.

"I don't know how it's going to unfold in the future without Shane Warne in the team," he told reporters.

Sports Minister Rod Kemp said Warne was a legend of the sport.

"Shane is widely regarded as the world's greatest-ever bowler," Kemp said.

Victim turns admirer

Cricket

AFP, London

Mike Gatting, the man on the receiving end of the 'ball of the century', responded to Shane Warne's impending retirement from international cricket by saying the sport may not see the like of the Australia leg-spin great again.

Warne, Test cricket's most successful bowler, said Thursday he would call time on his Australia career at the end of the current Ashes series against England.

Former England batsman Gatting played a key role in Warne's career when, in 1993, he was bowled by the Victorian's first delivery in Ashes cricket during the Old Trafford Test.

The astonishing leg-break, soon afterwards dubbed the 'ball of the century', confirmed Warne's emergence as a world-class bowler.

"It is more than 13 years since I faced my first ball from Shane

Warne. No matter how much time passes, I am still asked about it regularly and I expect I always will be," Gatting wrote in Thursday's edition of The Times newspaper.

"I suppose I can say that 'I was there' at the moment he first indicated his potential to the wider world. There or thereabouts, anyway," he also told the British daily.

"Anyway, as everyone knows, that particular ball at Old Trafford spun a long way... Having pitched way outside leg stump, it had somehow found just the right angle to go past quite a wide fellow with a bat in his hand and nudge the off ball.

"It was extraordinary," added the stout former Middlesex skipper.

Gatting, the last England captain to win an Ashes series in Australia, during the 1986-87 tour, and renowned as a fine player of slow bowling said only Pakistan's Abdul Qadir came close to Warne in his experience of leg-spin.

But while he reckoned Qadir had the greater variety, Warne was the more accurate of the two.

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