

Sunnydale lift b'ball trophy

Sunnydale lifted the Aga Khan School girls' basketball tournament when they beat Scholastica 14-6 in the final at the Aga Khan School premises yesterday.

'McGrath gap can be filled'

Bowling coach Troy Cooley is confident Australia have the young bowlers to fill the gap left when Glenn McGrath retires after the World Cup in April.

"We've got a few bowlers that have been in and out. It's a huge chance for one or two of them to step up," he said.

"We'll miss the experience but we're looking forward to the next bowler to try and fill those huge shoes."

Mitchell Johnson, Nathan Bracken, Shaun Tait and Shane Watson were on the sidelines as Australia won the Ashes.

"The headache comes more from a selector's point of view. I'm pretty happy that we've got some good talent there," Cooley told BBC Radio Five Live.

Johnson, described as a "once in a generation" player by Dennis Lillee eight years ago, has yet to play a Test but has impressed as part of the one-day squad.

Fellow left-armers Bracken struggled during his first spell in the Test side while McGrath was injured three years ago but has returned with better control and variation.

Watson would have played as an all-rounder in this Ashes series but suffered a hamstring injury playing for Queensland before the opening Test.

Tait is still to build on a jolting Test debut during the 2005 Ashes in England, when he was fast but a little too wild.

McGrath is the most successful seam bowler in Test history, with 555 wickets from 122 Tests, and he also has 342 scalps from 230 one-day internationals.

Cooley believes he has provided a wonderful template for aspiring fast bowlers to follow.

"With his strength of character, the way he goes about his work, the way he prepares himself, he's an absolute role model for any young bowler that wants to get into the game and enjoy a successful career," he said.

Aussie opener Matthew Hayden said both McGrath and Shane Warne, who announced his retirement earlier this week, would be sorely missed.

"Both have had amazing tenacity and longevity; they're both courageous and incredibly positive in the face of adversity," he said.

"The secret to Glenn's performance is just in his consistency. He is totally ruthless in his delivery of line and length. It's so difficult to get on top of him."

"His under-rated skill was his ability to adjust no matter where a batsman stood, to place the ball exactly where he wanted it."

Captain Ricky Ponting said the two announcements marked the end of an era in Australian cricket.

"We're going to be losing two of the all-time greats in a pretty short period of time," he said.

"We've now got to push on in the next few weeks. We've known for a long time that these two weren't going to go on forever."

"So as much as it's a sad time, it's an exciting time too because a lot of younger players will get their opportunities."

Marseille fire

Taiwo out on the left. The Nigerian centred for Pagis who launched himself at the ball to volley into the back of the net and seal all three points.

"Personally, it always gives me pleasure to score," Cisse told Canal+ at full time. "But the most important thing is to challenge the top three or four in the league."

Warne facing

Executive Brad Grapsas had first told Warnaweera that the Club should get more than 50,000 dollars and Warne was to present a cheque for 54,000 dollars to the Sri Lankan cricket team in January but pulled out at the last minute, citing "a family holiday".

Grapsas then emailed Warnaweera, saying "less than 5000" wristbands, which cost dollar 3 each, were sold and collections equalled the cost of manufacture.



World number one Roger Federer of Switzerland (3rd from R) plays a game of cricket with tsunami affected villagers in Kinnur Pudupettai in south Chennai on Saturday.

Three big hits away



Australian players are currently breaking a lot of records and Adam Gilchrist is on the verge of adding to his impressive collection. Fresh from a 57-ball century against England in Perth, Gilchrist is only three sixes away from becoming the first to hit 100 in Tests.

Brian Lara is his nearest rival with 88 from 131 games while Gilchrist's 97, which include four in his second innings at the WACA, have come in 88 matches. Gilchrist told The Australian his most memorable strike came off Muttiah Muralidaran when he was batting at No. 3 due to a Ricky Ponting back injury in Kandy in 2004.

Muralidaran was "on song" and Gilchrist didn't have the confidence to charge down the wicket.

"I didn't leave my crease because I thought he was going to spin one past me," he told the paper. "Then finally I saw him throw up a big doosra. For the first time I was absolutely, 100 per cent sure it was a doosra so I ran down, took a great, big swing, and dinged it

straight back over his head. That's the most hard-fought, keenly contested battle I've had with anyone."

During a training camp at the Academy when he was in an under-17 squad Gilchrist was singled out because he hit too many boundaries. "One of the coaches dissected an innings that each of us played during a match and the feedback I got was that they were disappointed because I hit 24 with six fours," he told The Australian.

"The impression I got was that they were disappointed I didn't rotate the strike and pick up ones and build an innings. I've never forgotten that."

"I didn't do it to spite them but I just thought 'I want to keep my aggressive side rather than restricting it. It's worked many times, and many times it has brought my downfall.'"

While Gilchrist has a personal record to aim for, he will also become an even more important figure for Australia with the upcoming retirements of Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne. Gilchrist said Australia can remain the world's best team without the two bowlers.

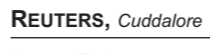
difficult to maintain that playing style or types of standards we've hit under the guidance of Warne and McGrath," he told AAP. "But we've been without them before -- and at the same time -- and we've still been quite to win, but maybe it's not been quite as comprehensive, it's been more of a fight. They'll be very tough shoes to fill but I do think we can maintain our standards as being one of the most competitive teams in the world if not retain that No. 1 position."

Gilchrist, 35, does not feel like the end of his career is near. "It's fair to say there's probably a group of us considering where we're at and what further part cricket's got to play in our lives, but not to the point where it's a real sit-down decision-making time," he said.

"The time comes to you and it will really reveal itself when it is the right time, and I certainly don't feel that's the case at the moment."

"Physically I feel exactly the same as I've felt for five or six years, so that's pretty much most of my Test career. Probably starting late has allowed me to remain pretty fresh."

Federer makes cricket debut!



Roger Federer swapped his tennis racket for a cricket bat on Saturday to the delight of scores of child survivors of the Asian tsunami in India.

The Swiss world number one, a UNICEF goodwill ambassador, hit a tennis ball with the wooden bat bowled by enthusiastic boys at a permanent shelter camp in Cuddalore district in the southern state of Tamil Nadu.

Around 8,000 people were killed in Tamil Nadu when the tsunami slammed into its crowded coast on December 26 2004. Tens of thousands including many children were made homeless.

In the Pudupettai rehabilitation colony, 180 km south of Chennai, the state capital, hundreds watched the improvised cricket game played on an old red car mat that was placed on a makeshift pitch.

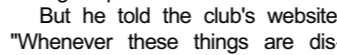
"It was good fun playing cricket here," Federer on a two-day UNICEF trip to the region, told Reuters after knocking a few balls that drew huge applause from tsunami survivors.

"I know the sport is huge here. I follow it myself," said Federer, whose mother is South African.

"In the beginning they threw the ball at me slowly, and then realised that I was not that bad after all."

"In the end, they did get me out."

Batty miss upsets Surrey



Surrey coach Alan Butcher has hit out at England's decision to overlook Jon Batty for their one-day squad.

Wicketkeeper Batty, 32, is four years younger than Leicestershire's Paul Nixon, who has been called up for the forthcoming series in Australia.

Butcher said Nixon was renowned as a "good professional".

"But he told the club's website: 'Whenever these things are discussed, JB never seems to come into the equation. I think that is ridiculous.'"

Batty has been Surrey's first-choice keeper since the retirement of Alec Stewart and as well as more than 550 catches and stumpings during his career, he has also scored over 8,500 runs in all forms of the game, including 12 first-class centuries.

"Nixon has had a long career and with no disrespect, his (batting) average has been helped by the fact that nearly a quarter of his innings have been not outs, an advantage that JB, who regularly opens the innings, does not have."

"JB has, I believe, suffered from the perception that he was Alec Stewart's understudy. He has more than stepped away from that now and has produced results that have put him with the best of his type in the country," said Butcher.

"It should also be recognised...he has also kept wicket consistently to one of the world's best mystery spinners in Saqlain Mushtaq and the best English leg-spinner of his generation, Ian Salisbury. What more does he have to do?"

BFF trims

FROM PAGE 17 (Rahmatganj), Rony (Mohammedan), Kashem (Victoria), Jahirul, Aminul (Sheikh Russel), Waly (Abahani), Imdadul (Bangladesh Boys) and Rajib (Farashganj).

The Hammers then found themselves down to ten men after referee Chris Foy deemed Konchesky committed a professional foul on Routledge following a Fulham counter-attack.

It was a harsh decision from Foy, as Konchesky had got a piece of the ball before making contact with Routledge, though Franck Queudrue squandered the ensuing free-kick chance for the home side.

In the end, both sides had to settle for a hard-fought point after a pulsating derby clash on Saturday.

Machine grinds to a halt



REUTERS, Sydney

Australia's Glenn McGrath made fast bowling look so simple it was easy to forget how hard he worked to get to the top.

McGrath, who is retiring after the 2007 World Cup, was not the quickest pace bowler the world has ever seen, but he was the most successful with 555 Test wickets.

His recipe for success was simple: unerring accuracy, subtle movement off the seam and sharply rising bouncers only a man of 1.95m (6ft 5in) could generate.

His stock delivery was the ball that pitched on a length and was aimed just outside the off ball, in the so-called "corridor of uncertainty".

While other fast bowlers tried to intimidate their opponents with blistering speed, McGrath played with their minds, moving the ball away from batsmen who dared to hit him and cutting the ball back at those who dared not.

He often made batsmen look like fools as they shouldered arms to a ball that suddenly darted back and crashed into their stumps or nicked a ball that moved away off the seam and could have been left alone.

McGrath's simple approach to the game belied the fact that he was one of the hardest working fast bowlers Australia ever produced and few people gave him any hope of ever making a career out of it.

He grew up in Narromine, a dusty outback town in western New South Wales, and was a slow starter. He never played junior

representative matches and by the time he was 16, his own teammates were telling him he would never make it as a bowler.

When he finished school, a career as a professional cricketer was the last thing on McGrath's mind, so he spent the next few years in a variety of jobs, including working as carpenter, in a bank and at local farms harvesting cotton.

But by 19, the ambitious McGrath was dreaming of greater things so he packed his bags and headed to Sydney. He spent the next 13 months living in a caravan while playing club cricket, before he caught the eye of former Test players Jeff Thompson and Rod Marsh.

Both saw something in the wafer-thin paceman that others had missed and pushed for his promotion. He made his first-class debut for New South Wales in 1992 and a year later, aged 23, he made his Test debut, as a replacement for Merv Hughes.

It was not long before McGrath began to stamp himself as one of Test cricket's great seamers and to antagonise the world's best batsmen by publicly naming his favourite targets. He dismissed England opener Michael Atherton 19 times and West Indian world record holder Brian Lara on 15 occasions.

McGrath's greatness was there for all to see when he took the astonishing figures of eight for 38 in the second Test at Lord's on his first Ashes tour in England in 1999 and was named Wisden Cricketer of the Year in 1998.

He won his first World Cup in 1999, was awarded the Allan Border Medal as Australia's best

player for 2000 and took a Test hat-trick against West Indies in Perth later that year.

McGrath won a second World Cup in 2003, taking career-best one-day figures seven for 15 in a pool match against Namibia, but injured his ankle the following year.

Despite his advancing years and claims his best days were behind him, McGrath returned in 2004 better than ever. He scored his first and only Test half-century with the bat when he made 61 against New Zealand and took eight for 24, the second-best figures by an Australian in Test cricket, against Pakistan.

He became only the fourth bowler to capture 500 Test wickets when he dismissed Marcus Trescothick in the first Ashes Test at Lord's in 2005 and was named man of the match after steering Australia to victory.

However, he stepped on a ball on the morning of the second Test and missed the match as Australia went on to lose the series 2-1 and the Ashes for the first time in 16 years.

McGrath took an eight-month break from international cricket in 2006 to care for his wife Jane after she was diagnosed with cancer for the third time but made another comeback in September.

He helped Australia win the Champions Trophy for the first time and regain the Ashes from England to complete all his unfinished business before announcing he would retire after the 2007 World Cup, bringing a close to one of the finest careers in the history of the game.

Tables turned on SA



AFP, Durban

South Africa are under pressure ahead of the second Test against India starting at Kingsmead on Monday.

They suffered a shock 123-run defeat in the opening encounter of the three-match series in Johannesburg.

India, meanwhile, go into the match high on confidence after what was acclaimed as one of their best Test wins in recent years.

The spotlight is firmly on South African captain Graeme Smith and coach Mickey Arthur. Although both have been appointed until after the 2007 World Cup in the West Indies, there is growing criticism of their performances.

One South African newspaper this week called for Arthur to be sacked after a dismal run of results in Test matches.

Since Arthur was appointed in May 2005 South Africa have won seven and lost 11 Tests. They have won three series -- against Zimbabwe, West Indies and New Zealand, none of which count among cricketers' superpowers -- and lost five.

Smith's form has dipped since the heights of 2003 when he pounded two double centuries against England and hit 1,198 runs in the calendar year at an average of 63.05.

Since the start of the 2005-06 season, Smith has made only 453 runs in nine Tests at an average of just 26.64. He has made no centuries and only two half-centuries, both in one match against New Zealand at the end of last season.

In a radio interview selection convener Haroon Lorgat said there had been no discussion yet about dropping Smith but admitted that the captain's batting was a concern.

Lorgat has also been criticised for naming a squad for all three Tests

despite the poor form of some of the batsmen and for deciding that most of the players should rest ahead of the first Test instead of playing in domestic matches.

Smith looked woefully out of touch when he was dismissed for five and 10 in the first Test against India but reacted testily when he was asked about the cheap dismissals of the top three in the South African batting order, who made a combined 32 in six innings in Johannesburg.

"Both teams struggled with their top order," he said. "In the last year we have had wickets with bounce which have been difficult to bat on up front."

Indian openers Virender Sehwag and Wasim Jaffer also failed in Johannesburg and both teams may change their opening combinations.

AB de Villiers is likely to open with Smith, with Herschelle Gibbs dropping down the order, while Gautam Gambhir made a challenge for Jaffer's place in the Indian team when he scored 79 against an admittedly weak invitation XI in a two-day practice match for the tourists in Durban. Jaffer, with a top score of 10 in five innings on tour, was out for two.

Gambhir played in a two-match series against South Africa in India in November 2004 and made 96 in the first Test in Kanpur, sharing an opening partnership of 218 with Sehwag.

South Africa went into the first Test as strong favourites with their pace attack expected to be too strong for India's batsmen.

Instead, it was the Indian new ball pair of man of the match Shanthakumaran Sreesanth and Zaheer Khan who made the biggest impact on the outcome, making better use of the conditions.

Kingsmead is usually a seam-friendly ground. In 1996-97 India were blown away for 100 and 66, with Allan Donald claiming match

figures of nine for 54. This time, though, there will be some trepidation about leaving too much grass on the pitch after the way Sreesanth and Khan bowled at the Wanderers.

India seem likely to strengthen their pace attack, with Munaf Patel, recovered from injury, set to replace VRV Singh, who was not impressive in Johannesburg.

South Africa, meanwhile, are likely to wait until Sunday before deciding on the fitness of fast bowler Dale Steyn, who left the field with a high strain in the first innings in Johannesburg and did not bowl again in the match.

Flintoff to

FROM PAGE 17 keen to put on a good performance in Melbourne after the disappointment of losing the first three Tests and the Ashes.

"We want to show we can win out here, we want to show we can win two Test matches, it's a big occasion for us," he said.

"There's been a few things happening in the world of cricket over the past week, but it can't affect our preparations," he added, referring to Australians Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath announcing their retirements.

Flintoff said his team were looking forward to playing at the Melbourne Cricket ground in front of around 90,000 spectators.

"There's a lot of character and a lot of pride in the dressing room and they will be keen to go out and show what good cricketers and what a good team we are," he said.

"I've only been here once before and you walk into the ground the other day, you see the size of it and you see the stands, it's something that's exciting," he added.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution time of 24 mins and Friday's answer.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers. Includes the text 'CRYPTOQUIP OSKXESNX, HGIXE VKT VWK W T P G E B T I C I A K W B . N H I K R R B T I G C K A C G O N X H W G X P R E G C K R . Friday's Cryptoquip: I IMAGINE TASKS LIKE CHOPPING DOWN TREES AND SPLITTING WOOD MIGHT BE EXPRESSED AS AX ACTS. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals P'

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

Hammers claim Cottage draw

FROM PAGE 20 best chance of the half, though he was fortunate to get his shot off after standing in an offside position when he neatly took down Bowyer fine cross from the left.

From close range, the former Nottingham Forest hitman struck his half-volley against Niemi's near post and away for a goal kick.

The half ended with Fulham creating two decent chances in injury time, as Green saved from the onrushing Moritz Volz after the German took a fine forward pass from Routledge before the former Norwich City custodian stopped a low drive from Brown.

The high-energy pace of the contest continued after the restart, with Radzinski again wrong-footing

his marker Spector before striking a low drive at Green.

The West Ham number one then needed to make an assured stop to McBride's fierce header after Radzinski picked out the American goalscorer in the visitors' box with his cross.

Fulham then needed to do some timely defending to keep the game scoreless after Niemi spilled Reo-Coker low shot to Harewood, as Rosener cleared the rebound strike from the West Ham striker off the goalline.

West Ham's back-line remained solid throughout, with Konchesky doing well to block Routledge's shot after Radzinski found him with another cross from the left.

Benayoun tried his best to break the deadlock after coming on for Bowyer, but Niemi was able to block away his shot after Harewood found the Israeli playmaker in the Fulham box.

The Hammers then found themselves down to ten men after referee Chris Foy deemed Konchesky committed a professional foul on Routledge following a Fulham counter-attack.

It was a harsh decision from Foy, as Konchesky had got a piece of the ball before making contact with Routledge, though Franck Queudrue squandered the ensuing free-kick chance for the home side.

In the end, both sides had to settle for a hard-fought point after a pulsating derby clash on Saturday.