

Ponting urges Lee to lead

CRICINFO, undated

Ricky Ponting has called on Brett Lee to regain his devastating form and become Australia's leading fast bowler with the retirement of Glenn McGrath. Ponting said Lee's form in the Ashes series -- he took eight wickets at 58.37 in the first three Tests -- was a concern but was unlikely to be a long-term issue.

"Brett might have to stand up a bit more as a real strike, wicket-taking option," Ponting told The Australian. "What Brett has done in one-day cricket and Test cricket over the last few years is get early wickets with that brand new ball by swinging it at express pace.

"That's what his game is all about, and he probably hasn't done that as much as he would have liked in the first few games. I've got no doubt, going forward, that he's going to be that wicket-taking option that the team needs."

Ponting said Lee's inability to extract much swing at Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth was unfortunate. "He would be a little disappointed with that," Ponting said. "He's worked really hard in the last

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Ching lifts V-Day title

UNB, Dhaka

Ma Hi Ching lifted the girls' under-16 of the Pacific Pharmaceutical Victory Day Tennis Competition when she defeated Sadia Hossain 6-1, 6-2 at the Ramna Tennis Court Complex yesterday.

In the men's singles, Amal Roy booked his place in the final beating Ranjan Ram in the semifinal 3-6, 6-2 6-4 while Dipu Lal moved to the final defeating Anwar Hossain 6-4, 6-3.

In the women's singles, Ho Jo Fosako advanced to the final eliminating Masuma Sultana 6-0, 6-0 in the semifinal.

In the boys' singles (16 years group), Delwar Hossain reached the final when he beat Rezwan Ahsan in the semifinal 6-2, 6-3 where he will meet Omar Sunny.



PHOTO: AFP

HERE WE GO AGAIN: Australian legspin superstar Shane Warne starts to celebrate his world record 700th Test wicket on the first day of the fourth Ashes Test against England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Tuesday.

Warne's beautiful day

Five-for drowns England

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

Shane Warne created Test history by becoming the first bowler to claim 700 wickets as dispirited England collapsed on the opening day of the fourth Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Tuesday.

The master leg-spinner, playing in his penultimate Test match ahead of his farewell Sydney Test next week after announcing his retirement, captured 5-39 off 17.2 overs -- his 37th five-wicket Test haul -- as England succumbed for 159 after winning the toss.

Australia reached stumps at 48 for two off 11 overs in reply with Matthew Hayden 17 not out and Ricky Ponting yet to score after Justin Langer (27) and nightwatchman Brett Lee (0) were both caught behind off successive Andrew Flintoff deliveries.

It was a case of the bigger the stage the bigger the performance as Warne bowled Andrew Strauss for his 700th wicket just before tea and went on to claim four more scalps to take his career tally to 704 in his 144th Test.

Warne produced his Boxing Day theatrics before an Ashes record crowd of 89,155, just shy of the world record single day's Test attendance of 90,800 for the second day of the fifth Test against the West Indies at the MCG in 1961.

England would have been dismissed even more cheaply if not for some wretched Australian fielding, with wicketkeeper Adam

Gilchrist making a horrible hash of an attempted stumping when Kevin Pietersen was on his way to scoring 21.

Paul Collingwood was dropped by Gilchrist on two before making 28. Topscorer Andrew Strauss was put down by Matthew Hayden in the gully off Warne on 41 -- a straightforward chance -- and went on to score 50.

But it was Warne's day on his home MCG pitch, receiving a sustained standing ovation when he was introduced into the bowling attack in the 41st over late in the middle session.

Thirty minutes later the vast stadium was in uproar when Warne produced a signature leg-break to knock over Strauss's middle stump and claim his 700th scalp.

"There's 699 other guys who've felt pretty bad after getting out to Shane Warne and I'm no different today... It's a great achievement for him and something that will live long in many people's memory, but probably not mine," Strauss said.

Warne, who has been acclaimed as one of the all-time cricketing greats, having revolutionised the art of wrist-spin bowling, thought he had the prized scalp of Hampshire county team mate Pietersen when he was only four.

But Gilchrist mangled a stumping chance with England's big batting gun hopelessly stranded metres down the pitch.

Flintoff continued his wretched batting series when he was out for 13, snapped up by Warne at first slip to give Stuart Clark his second wicket of the innings. Flintoff has scored 133 runs in seven innings in

the series. Chris Read, preferred to Geraint Jones as wicketkeeper for the first time in the series, was all at sea against Warne before lashing out in frustration to be caught by Ponting at short extra cover for three.

Sajid Mahmood gave Glenn McGrath his only wicket of the innings, caught behind for a duck, while Steve Harmison (7), Pietersen (21) and Monty Panesar (4) were dismissed by Warne to end the England innings. Warne has now taken 19 wickets in the series.

Opener Alastair Cook, who scored an obdurate six-and-a-half-hour century in the third Perth Test, was caught by Gilchrist off Lee for 11 in the morning session and Ian Bell was trapped leg before wicket by Stuart Clark for seven.

Australia, stung by last year's series loss in England, regained the Ashes after winning the opening three Test matches and are trying to emulate Warwick Armstrong team's 5-0 Ashes sweep of 85 years ago.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at close on the opening day of the fourth Ashes Test between Australia and England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Tuesday:

ENGLAND: First innings	
Strauss b Warne	50
Cook c Gilchrist b Lee	11
Bell lbw b Clark	7
Collingwood c Ponting b Lee	28
Pietersen c Symonds b Warne	21
Flintoff c Warne b Clark	13
Read c Ponting b Warne	3
Mahmood c Gilchrist b McGrath	0
Harmison c Clarke b Warne	7

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Astle hastens win

Cricket

AFP, Auckland

New Zealand waltzed to a five-wicket win over Sri Lanka in their second and final Twenty20 cricket international here Tuesday to level the series 1-1.

Veteran Nathan Astle was in blistering form with an unbeaten 40 off 37 balls, hitting the winning run with nine balls remaining.

Sri Lanka never fired after being sent into bat first, falling 10 balls short of their allotted 20 overs as their innings came to a halt at 115.

It then became a formality for New Zealand to reach the 116 required for victory, a target they achieved for the loss of five wickets.

Brendon McCullum and Stephen Fleming started the run chase at a rollicking pace, reaching 51 by the sixth over when Fleming drove at Dilharo Fernando and was caught by Chamara Kapugedera at point for 17.

Kapugedera ran out McCullum for 28 to put the brakes on the New Zealand scoring until Astle opened up, taking 15 off the penultimate over by Ruchiro Perero to level the scores.

In the next over, Astle sneaked a single of the third ball by Tillakaratne Dilshan to wrap up proceedings.

The tone of the game was set with the very first ball of the game when television technology detected Upl Tharanga edge James Franklin to wicketkeeper Peter McGlashan.

It was such a faint edge that the players did not even appeal, not that it mattered much as Franklin bowled Tharanga two balls later.

By the 10th over, Sri Lanka were in deep trouble at 58 for six and if it was not for a tail-end bash by Lasith Malinga and Fernando their innings may well have ended much earlier.

Malinga's 27 came from 19 balls and Fernando hit 21 from 14, whacking 44 in four overs for the ninth wicket before Fernando mishit an Astle full toss and was caught by

Andre Adams on the deep mid-wicket boundary.

Franklin was the most successful of the New Zealand bowlers with three for 23, while for Sri Lanka

Fernando backed up his fine knock with the bat by taking three for 19.

Sri Lanka won the rain-affected

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PHOTO: INTERNET

New Zealand batsman Nathan Astle whacks the ball over the off-side field during the second Twenty20 match against Sri Lanka at the Eden Park in Auckland on Tuesday.

Entertainment guaranteed

Twenty20 semifinals today

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The Kai-Altech Premier Division Twenty20 League provided top-class entertainment during the Mohammedan-Sonargaon high-voltage encounter, laced with some brilliant individual successes, two days earlier and there will be no shortage of excitement when the two semifinals take place at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today.

Defending Premiership champions Old DOHS lock horns with a rejuvenated Abahani in the first match at 9:30 am while Mohammedan Sporting Club face off a rather mediocre Victoria Sporting Club at 1:15 pm in the second match for a place in Friday's final, which will also be held at the same venue.

"You can't predict anything about any cricket match and I think its more true in Twenty20 than other competitions of the game. Just imagine even 226 runs looked gettable in 20 overs," said DOHS captain Akram Khan referring to the group match between Mohammedan and Sonargaon on the eve of his side's clash against Abahani.

There is hardly any doubt that the former Bangladesh skipper will desperately want to win the match to move into the final but Abahani are just not another opponent to him as he has special feelings for the club from Dhanmondi.

"Abahani are not only a name to me rather it's an emotion because I spent sixteen years with them. I am really excited that my beloved club formed a good team this season and that's why I hope for a very good match tomorrow. It is really encouraging the way this tournament has progressed, especially some young-

sters who have used the chance brilliantly," he explained.

On the other hand, Abahani skipper Khaled Mashud pinned his hopes on national paceman Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza, who has been showcasing his big-hitting ability in the tournament.

"I don't think there is a big difference in strength of the teams so anybody can win. I am really impressed by Mashrafe's extraordinary performance as he bowled brilliantly besides sparkling with the bat. I only hope my top order batsmen do their job properly," said the national wicketkeeper.

To Mohammedan and Bangladesh captain Habibur Bashar, whose side are still unbeaten like DOHS, the tournament seems to be a mystery as they had to fight hard whatever the score they put up on the board.

"So far we have won all our close

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'KP useless at number 5'

AFP, Melbourne

Shane Warne says Kevin Pietersen is wasted batting at number five for England in the Ashes Test series in Australia.

Debate has raged throughout the series over Pietersen's best value to the England batting, with many pundits claiming he should bat higher up the order at number four ahead of Paul Collingwood.

Warne, who became the first bowler to take 700 Test wickets during the opening day's play in the fourth Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground Tuesday, also subscribes to the view.

Pietersen, who is rated England's most dangerous batsman with scores of 92, 158, 70 and 60 not out in the opening three Tests, was batting with the tailenders again Tuesday in his knock of 21.

Pietersen finally perished when he holed out to long-off to be the ninth wicket down and become one of Warne's five scalps in England's feeble first innings of 159 off 74.2 overs.

"He should be batting three or four, I reckon, he's a world-class player and we've seen that during the series," Warne said of his Hampshire county teammate.

"If it was England I would definitely be putting him up the order, that's for sure... but I'm not."

BFF consolidates at AGM

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

With the coming election in sight, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday adopted a resolution in its annual general meeting that the present executive committee thinks would help them to stay in power.

The tenure of the present committee expires on April 30, 2007 and the probability of a power switch in next month's general elections has instigated the EC, backed by the recent past government, to strengthen their position ahead of the polls.

According to the new resolution, even if the elected body of the federation is abolished, all the present councillors will retain their status. Also, any ad-hoc body would not be allowed to change councillors, the opposite of what had happened when this committee went into the polls.

The election 'mechanism' apart, the new constitution in line with the

FIFA guideline has been approved without much argument from the 88 out of total 128 councillors present in the daylong AGM -- held after a more than two years' gap -- at the BFF Bhaban.

The councillors got copies of the new constitution two months earlier but most of them even forgot about that.

"We came, we ate and received gifts. We are now leaving," said one of the councillors who is from outside Dhaka. "It was like a get together. There was hardly any discussion."

Two Asian Football Confederation delegates were also present.

Although there had been hints at attacking the members of the executive committee for their numerous failures including absence of a major football league in the capital or country and mishandling the national team management committee which was ultimately abolished after all its members including chairman Kazi Salahuddin resigned, the AGM ended peacefully.

It was learnt that top BFF officials had visited the councillors' hotels on

Monday night for 'negotiation' to avoid unpleasant situations and they succeeded as the so-called rebel group chose to be absent.

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What to WATCH

ESPN

Australia v England
Fourth Ashes Test, Day 2
Live at 5:30 am

English Premiership
Charlton Athletic v Fulham
Live at 1:55 am (Thursday)

STAR Sports

India v South Africa
Second Test, Day 2
Live at 2:00 pm

New Zealand v Sri Lanka
First ODI
Live at 4:00 am (Thursday)



Did U Know?

Tom Graveney of England and Australia's Barry Jarman captained their respective sides in just one Test and never led again.



Brian Lara

(West Indies cricket captain)
"I want to speak to Shane (Warne) and Glenn (McGrath) before I say anything publicly. But, yes, I was surprised. I didn't see it coming. Australian cricket will miss them. Shane and Glenn are as good as anyone I have played against."

After the two Australians announced their decision to retire.