

Sport

Brian to back in business

PORT OF SPAIN, Trinidad, Dec 27 Brian Lara is set to make his playing return to cricket on Friday for Trinidad and Tobago in a Red Stripe Cup trial match, reports Reuter.

Theo Cuffy, the Trinidad and Tobago cricket manager, told Caribbean news agency CANA that Lara, who withdrew from the West Indies party for the current tour of Australia, has accepted the captaincy of the team for the first-class cup competition starting next month.

"Brian is set to play on Friday and we are all looking forward to seeing him back making runs. It will be great to see him out there," said Cuffy.

"He has had his rest and he wants to get back to playing cricket. He is looking relaxed and at ease, this holiday has done him a world of good."

He also intimated the record-breaking batsman would be back playing for the West Indies in the forthcoming World Cup.

Lara, holder of the world record scores for Test (375) and first-class cricket (501 not out), withdrew from the West Indies squad for Australia after being fined 10 per cent of his fee for breaches of contract during the tour to England earlier this year.

It was reported that he was in conflict with other members of the party, including West Indies skipper Richie Richardson, and threatened to quit the tour and even retire from cricket.

FIVB vice president quits

TOKYO, Dec 27: The vice president of the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) Yasutaka Matsudaira, stepped down Tuesday as head of Japan's volleyball governing body, but denied the move had anything to do with an ongoing scandal, reports AFP. Matsudaira, 65, told a news conference he had quit for health reasons and not due to a series of recent magazine articles which questioned his handling of sponsorship money and his dealing with ticket scalpers.

"My resignation has nothing to do at all with reports in some magazine" said the president of the Japan Volleyball Association. He has repeatedly denied the charges.

He recalled that he even had to be sidelined for a rest during the volleyball World Cup in Japan last month. "I have lacked physical fitness and vigour in the past few years. I have taken it upon myself to stop causing any more trouble to the association."

Matsudaira's resignation was accepted at an executive meeting of the Japanese association and he was also expected to quit as FIVB vice president, head of the Asian Volleyball Federation and vice president of the Japanese Olympic Committee.

He served as head coach of the national men's team from 1965 to 1972, piloting them to an Olympic gold medal at the 1972 Munich Games.

Incentives for Indian booters

MADRAS, Dec 27: The All-India Football Federation secretary, PP Lakshmanan today announced special monetary incentive to all members of the Indian football squad which emerged victorious in the seventh South Asian Federation (SAF) Games here today, reports PTI.

The AIFF would organise a special function soon for this purpose where the player would be honoured.

'Super Eagles' set for Kenya

LAGOS, Dec 27: Nigeria's soccer manager Jo Bonfrere said on Tuesday his squad would prepare in Kenya for next month's African Nations Cup finals in South Africa, reports Reuter.

The national team, 'Super Eagles', had planned to prepare in the Netherlands, but the Dutch embassy in Lagos refused them visas because of the European Union sanction, resulting from the hanging last month, in defiance of worldwide appeals for clemency of nine minority rights activists.

A switch of training camp to Tel Aviv was ruled out after the Israeli embassy also denied the team visas.

"After my tour of some countries last week to search for a training camp and based on my agreement with Nigerian football officials we have finally settled for preparing the team in Kenya," Bonfrere said.

Bonfrere will be picking a squad of 22 for the tournament in South Africa where Nigeria play in Durban against Zaire, Gabon and Liberia in the group matches.

Lankans' misery lurking



MELBOURNE, Dec 27: Sri Lanka off-spinner Muralidharan survived further scrutiny today after being officially censured over his suspicious bowling action as the tourists endured another punishing day in the second Test against Australia, reports Reuter.

Muralidharan, who was no-balled for 'throwing' seven times by Australian umpire Darrell Hair on Tuesday, bowled 20 more overs in three spells on the second day without new censure.

While the 23-year-old spinner escaped further penalty, his team suffered a dismal session at the Melbourne Cricket Ground as Australia amassed a massive 500 for six declared from 165 overs.

At close of play, Sri Lanka, trailing 1-0 in the three match series, were 29 for one in reply after losing opener Roshan Mahanama for three with the total on the same score.

All-rounder Steve Waugh guided Australia to a declaration one hour before the scheduled close, overcoming the handicap of a strained left hamstring to compile an unbeaten 131 for his 10th Test century.

After his troubles on Tuesday, Muralidharan operated entirely from the members' end at the MCG under the watchful gaze of New Zealand umpire Steve Dunne.

Despite his obvious distractions, Muralidharan did make a significant impact by holding two catches to dismiss Australia number three David Boon for 110 and Ian Healy for 41.

Muralidharan, who was introduced into the attack by Sri Lanka captain Arjuna Ranatunga in the seventh over of the day, finished with one for 124 from 38 overs.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) issued a state-

ment on Tuesday in response to events on the first day, expressing its trust that Sri Lanka officials would work to resolve the situation.

Sri Lanka were exonerated by the ICC on Monday of ball tampering during their innings defeat in the first Test in Perth two weeks ago.

Their current woes were reflected in a dismal fielding performance, culminating in

three. Australia lifted the run-rate throughout the day after Boon took 23 balls to score the seven runs he needed to reach his 21st test hundred.

Boon hit 10 boundaries during an innings lasting 363 minutes and 286 balls before slashing a wide ball from pace bowler Pramodya Wickremasinghe to Muralidharan.

Ricky Ponting, playing in his second Test, made another strong impression with a fine 71 to follow his 96 in Perth.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard on the second day of the second Test between Australia and Sri Lanka at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Wednesday:

AUSTRALIA: First innings (overnight 234 for three)
Slater c Wickremasinghe b Vaas 82
Taylor b Wickremasinghe 7
Boon c Muralidharan b Wickremasinghe 110
Muralidharan 61
S Waugh not out 131
Ponting c Gurusinha b Silva 71
Healy c Muralidharan b De Silva 41
Reiffel not out 4
Extras: (b-8, w-2, nb-3) 13
Total: (for 6 wks dec), 165 overs 500
Fall of wickets: 1-14; 2-116; 3-219; 4-280; 5-395; 6-488.

Bowling: O M R W
Wickremasinghe 302 9 77 2
Vaas 404 11 93 1
Hathurusinghe 9 0 23 0
Muralidharan 38 7 124 1
Gurusinha 2 0 8 0
Silva 35 5 120 1
De Silva 10 0 47 1

Note: Vaas completed an over after Wickremasinghe left the field injured.

SRI LANKA: First innings
Hathurusinghe not out 16
Mahanama c Taylor b McGrath 3
Gurusinha not out 10
Extras: 10
Total: (one wicket, 13 overs) 29
Fall of wicket: 1-3

Bowling: (to date) O M R W
McDermott 4 1 12 0
McGrath 6 2 10 1
Reiffel 3 1 7 0

Resuming on 234 for

S WAUGH... 131 n.o.

dropped catches by pace bowler Chaminda Vaas and batsman Asanka Gurusinha in the deep off successive balls as Healy hit out late in the innings.

Opener Chandika Hathurusinghe remained unbeaten on 16 at the close with Gurusinha 10 not out at close of play.

Waugh, who returned to the side after missing his side's crushing first Test victory because of groin injury, will take no further part in the match after his latest breakdown.

Resuming on 234 for

Clouds over Murali's career



MELBOURNE, Dec 27: Sri Lanka cricket officials are considering asking for a meeting with Australian umpire Darrell Hair as they try to salvage the Test career of off-spinner Muralidharan, report agencies.

The 23-year-old's future is in doubt after he was no-balled for throwing on Tuesday during the Australian first innings in the second Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Anura Tennekoon, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka, said Wednesday that it was essential to discover exactly what Hair finds illegal about Muralidharan's style of delivery.

Tennekoon, a former Sri Lanka captain, said team management was in the process of reviewing the videotapes of Muralidharan in action during the overs in which he was called for throwing.

"We want to find exactly from the umpire why some were called and some weren't," he said. "Then (we can) establish what the fault is."

Tuesday marked only the ninth occasion in Test history that a player has been deemed to have illegally delivered a ball.

Muralidharan had not previously been no-balled for throwing in a 59-match first-class career.

Hair on Tuesday no-balled Muralidharan — the highest wicket-taker in his country's short Test history — on the fourth and final balls of his fourth over, the second, fourth and sixth balls of his next over and again on the second and sixth balls of his sixth over.

On Wednesday, Muralidharan operated entirely from the members' end under the gaze of New Zealand umpire Steve Dunne, who did not no-ball him at any stage. Hair was silent as he looked on from square leg.

Dunne's lack of action meant he ruled that Muralidharan bowled legitimately.

without straightening his arm while releasing the ball, although there was no apparent change to his bowling action.

Muralidharan, who has taken 81 Test wickets, finished the day with unflattering figures of one for 124 from 38 overs.

Sri Lanka officials met Wednesday afternoon to discuss their approach to the affair.

"It is one of the things we

have cleared him in the past. We thought there was nothing wrong with Murali's action."

"But this umpire felt there was something wrong and called him."

"To be called in a Test match is rather harsh on a player. The fact that it has been done... we have to take some action about it."

When asked if "action" meant making representations to the ICC, Tennekoon said, "No."

A bowler is said to have thrown the ball under law 24.2, if his bowling arm is bent then straightened, partially or completely, before the ball leaves his hand.

The last player called for an illegal bowling action in a Test match in Australia was Australian fast bowler Ian Meekiff against South Africa in Brisbane in December, 1963.

The most recent case was in February this year when Zimbabwean fast bowler Henry Olonga was called in a match against Pakistan.

Hair is not permitted to speak to the media under ICC regulations, while Muralidharan has declined to talk to journalists.

Meanwhile, the International Cricket Council (ICC) has urged Sri Lanka off-spinner Muralidharan to alter his suspect action to guarantee his future as a Test player.

In detailing its past concerns over Muralidharan's bowling action dating back three years, the ICC defended Hair's ruling.

"...it is every umpire's duty to apply the laws of cricket fully and impartially and we stand in full support of those umpires who execute this responsibility to the best of their ability. The relevant law is clear and the game cannot accept any breach of this law," the statement said.

In their statement on Tuesday, the ICC detailed concerns it has held over Muralidharan's action since 1993 and the subsequent action taken.

"The ICC has been talking to us for some time about Murali's action," he said.

"It's just that most of the umpires, neutral umpires,

Windies in endless abyss

BRISBANE, Dec 27: West Indies slumped to their fifth successive limited overs defeat on tour in Australia when they lost by four wickets to Queensland on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Replying to West Indies' 50-over 206 for eight, Queensland cruised to 207 for six with 17 balls to spare.

After three defeats against Australia and Sri Lanka in the World Series tournament and a humiliating loss to the youngsters of the Australian Cricket Academy, West Indies top order failed yet again.

They were in dire straits on 121 for six after 35 overs before off-spinner Roger Harper rallied the innings with an unbeaten 46 from 51 balls.

Harper, who smashed the last ball of the innings for six, shared a 77-run partnership from 88 balls with Jimmy Adams to lift their side to a respectable total.

But it was to prove inadequate when Queensland captain Stuart Law got into his stride.

Law, a member of Australia's limited overs side but overlooked for Test duty, scored 70 from 84 balls.

Weah's benchmark

MONROVIA, Dec 27: Liberia's sports ambassador George Weah said Tuesday he would have to work harder to justify his selection as European Footballer-of-the-Year, reports AFP.

The title poses a great responsibility on me because I must continue to work harder to prove to the world that I deserve it," the AC Milan star said.

Weah, who has also been voted Confederation of African Football's Player-of-the-Year for 1995, added, "My achievements bring pride to the nation and people of war-torn Liberia."

Youth and sports minister, Fancols Massaquoi, called on the Liberian youth to emulate "Weah's shining examples through hardwork, dedication and discipline."

S Africa 230 for 4 on Day 1



PORT ELIZABETH, South Africa, Dec 27: Daryll Cullinan's dashing batting led South Africa to 230 for four wickets at the close on the first day of the fourth Test against England on Tuesday.

The 28-year-old mixed attack and defence with perfect control to finish the day with an unbeaten 83 from 162 deliveries with 13 powerful boundaries.

F's fourth wicket partnership of 118 with Jonty Rhodes rescued South Africa from a precarious 89 for three; wickets after Hansie Cronje won the toss and opted to bat first on low, slow batting wicket that discour-

aged aggressive shot-making. Cullinan defended stoutly and waited patiently for the bad ball which he attacked with full strength.

The pace of the day's play was set in the morning session when South Africa managed just 63 runs for the loss of Andrew Hudson who pushed at a wide away swinger from Dominic Cork on 31 to give Jack Russell a simple catch.

South African captain Cronje took 24 deliveries to score his first run and contributed just four to a second wicket partnership of 28 with Gary Kirsten before frustration forced him into a lofted drive to Mike Atherton at short extra cover.

Atherton, who took the catch brilliantly, had moved himself into place just a few deliveries earlier. Then he had the added pleasure of seeing Kirsten fall three overs later for 51.

It was Kirsten's eighth half century in 19 Tests but three balls after reaching the landmark he edged Mark Iltott to Graham Thorpe at first slip and departed after 130 balls and nine fours.

But Rhodes lived up to his reputation as a man for a crisis and his 49 helped South Africa to recover to 207 for four. He was out after pulling Cork into Robin Smith's midriff at square leg.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard on the opening day of the fourth cricket Test between South Africa and England at St George's park on Tuesday:
SOUTH AFRICA: First innings
Hudson c Russell b Cork 31
Kirsten c Thorpe b Iltott 51
H Cronje c Atherton b Martin 4
D Cullinan not out 83
J Rhodes c Smith b Cork 49
B McMillan not out 3
Extras: (lb-5, nb-4) 9
Total: (for four wickets) 230
Fall of wickets: 1-57; 2-85; 3-89; 4-207

Bowling: (to date) O M R W
Cork 23 6 57 2
Iltott 23 6 40 1
Martin 22 6 66 1
Illingworth 18 5 51 0
Hick 4 0 11 0

— AFP/UNB photo

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Cricket's trials and tribulations

LONDON, Dec 27: If character is shaped by adversity, then West Indies star batsman Brian Lara can be confident that he must be a far stronger and better person than he was 12 months ago, reports AFP.

At the start of the year it seemed that a short of walking on water, there was little the extravagantly gifted left-hander could not achieve.

His rise to international stardom was meteoric as he demolished bowling attacks the world over and smashed age-old records that seemed they would never be surpassed.

A year later, Lara was being told he needs psychiatric treatment while a full-blown storm raged in the Caribbean.

Lara sent shock waves through the world cricket community in November by withdrawing from the tour for the World Series in Australia after being fined for being away from the tour party in England without permission.

But that appeared to be just part of the story as reports of serious disquiet in the West Indian camp continued to emerge.

Some reports said Lara had threatened to retire and was upset with the lack of discipline in the team which he blamed on captain Richie Richardson, while former West Indies' pace star Michael Holding suggested that Lara needed psychiatric help.

1996 will be a crucial year in the life of the man with the talent to become the greatest batsmen the game has ever seen but West Indies manager Wes Hall recognises that Lara is in danger of becoming a victim of his own bewildering success.

"Pressure is what turns a rock into diamond but it can turn it into dust," he warns.

Lara's personal problems have coincided with a decline in the overall standard of West Indian Test cricket after a poor year in which Australia usurped their status as unofficial world champions.

West Indies suffered their first home series defeat in 22 years when Australia grabbed a 2-1 victory in the fourth and final Test in Jamaica by an innings and 53 runs early in May.

It was also the West Indies first series defeat of any kind since they lost 1-0 in New Zealand in 1979 while Australia's victory was all the more remarkable for it being achieved without the services of strike bowler Craig McDermott.

The Aussies struck an early blow in an absorbing series with a 10-wicket victory inside three days in the first Test in Barbados with man-of-the-match pace bowler Glen McGrath taking a total of eight wickets.

After the second Test was washed out by rain, the West Indies bounced back with a nine-wicket win in a low-scoring encounter in Trinidad.

But Caribbean joy was short lived as a 231 first-innings partnership between Steve Waugh (200) and his brother Mark (126) set up a comprehensive victory and

left no-one in any doubt as to which of the two sides could rightfully claim to be the best in the world.

Earlier in the year, Australia cruised to a 3-1 Ashes victory over England whose outclassed squad suffered an unprecedented string of injuries.

England, though showed a marked improvement in the home series against the West Indies which finished 2-2 in the summer.

Swing bowler, Dominic Cork emerged as England's new hero, producing the best analysis (7-43) by an England bowler on his debut in the second Test at Lord's before becoming the first England bowler in 38 years to take a hat-trick in the fourth at Old Trafford.

England's steady improvement continued in South Africa where the first three of the five Test series ended in draws.

Rain washed out the hope

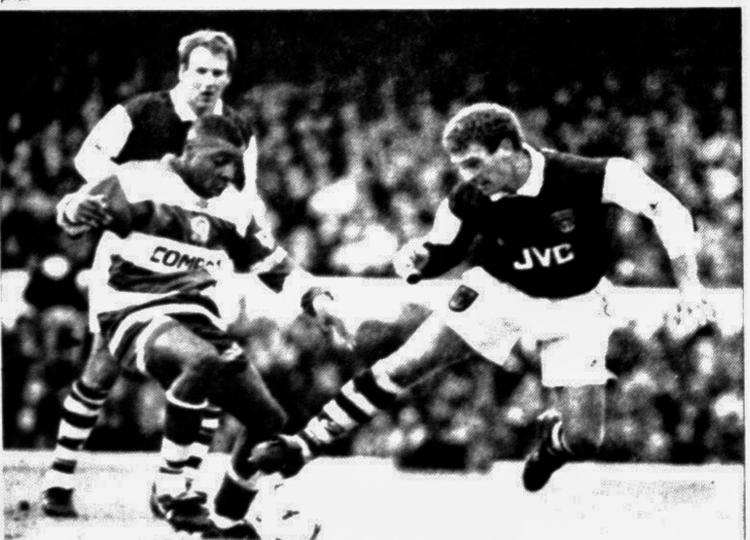
of a result in the first and third Tests but one of the great rearguard actions of all time by captain Mike Atherton denied South Africa victory at the Wanderers in the second.

Centuries by opener Gary Kirsten and Brian McMillan, who has emerged as the best all-rounder in the world, set up a near certain victory for the South Africans who had almost two days to bowl out the English.

But ably assisted by wicketkeeper Jack Russel (29), Atherton (185) batted for 10 and a half hours, facing a staggering 492 balls, to save England and deliver what could turn out to a turning-point in the series.

Earlier in the year, South Africa became the first side since England in 1888 to come from behind to win a three-match rubber when they eventually got the better of a home series against the New Zealand.

Nor was life any more comfortable on the pitch for the Pakistanis who suffered a humiliating defeat by an innings and 64 runs at the hands of minnows Zimbabwe.



John Jensen (R) of Arsenal comes up with a flying tackle on Queens Park Rangers' Paul Marseen during an English Premier league match in Highbury on Dec 26. The Gunners won 2-0. — AFP/UNB photo

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