

Hick may not have to return home early

PERTH, Dec 1 (Reuters/ Internet): England batsman Graeme Hick is expected to stay in Australia for the remainder of the Ashes cricket series, England captain Alec Stewart said.

Hick joined the team in Australia as a back-up for opener Michael Atherton, who aggravated an old back injury before the first Test.

Hick was expected to return to England after Atherton recovered but earned a reprieve when Graham Thorpe had to withdraw from the second Ashes Test in Perth, also with a back complaint.

Hick scored 68, the highest individual score of the match, in England's second innings despite the tourists losing the second Test by seven wickets on Monday to trail 1-0 in the five-match series.

Stewart said Hick's back was still a concern and he would like to see Hick stay with the squad.

"I can't give you a definite answer, but I'm assuming that he's staying," Stewart said after the second-Test loss.

"Thorpe's back is still not right, so to me it makes sense that he stays for the foreseeable future, if not the whole tour. I'd like to think that he will stay."

Stewart said he expected a final decision on Hick to be made in the next few days.

The third test is scheduled for Adelaide from December 11-15.

Aussie bookies jack up odds against tourists

SYDNEY, Dec 1 (AFP/ Internet): Australian bookmakers have joined London bookies in assigning England's cricketers little esteem to win the Ashes after their savaging in the second Test.

English bookmaker William Hill has Australia as 20-1 favourites to retain the Ashes.

Australian agency CentreBet has England 30-1 to win the series with a draw 8-1. William Hill quoted England at 22-1 for the series with odds of 8-1 for a draw.

William Hill has England a 7-1 outsider to win the third Test, starting in Adelaide on Dec. 11, with Australia at 5-4 and the draw 5-4. CentreBet has given the tourists 5-1 for Adelaide. Australia even money and a draw 5-4.

The touring team is 150-1 at William Hill's to win the next three Tests, with Australia quoted at just 4-1.

Australia took a 1-0 lead in the five-Test series with its seven-wicket win in Perth on Monday.

Leeds, Newcastle discuss Batty deal

LONDON, Dec 1 (Reuters/ Internet): Leeds and Newcastle officials are in talks over a deal to bring England international David Batty back to Elland Road.

The Newcastle midfielder waived his right to pick up an estimated 800,000 pounds (1.32 million dollars) in signing on fees by requesting a transfer last week.

Leeds tabled a bid of around 4 million pounds (6.59 million dollars) on Monday but Newcastle reportedly want more for the player who won the championship with Leeds in 1992.

Newcastle chairman Freddie Shepherd said: "We are not giving players away, and David Batty is a current England international."

Leeds manager David O'Leary is waiting for the go ahead from Newcastle.

Gooch refuses to be beaten



PERTH, Dec 1 (Reuters/ Internet): England manager Graham Gooch has refused to write off a side the Australian press has dubbed "rabit stew" after Australia in the second Ashes Test, reports AFP.

"The thing we have to believe is we played under-par in this Test and got beaten," Gooch said.

"We can play a lot better than that and have to play a lot better than that," he added.

"We have to play at our best to compete with the best players in the world. We will talk to individuals and reinforce things but you can only put what you believe are the best policies in place and hopefully they can take that in and put it into practice."

Gooch feared their poor form may have been caused by over-training.

"Too much practice breeds mediocrity," was the surprising comment of a man who as a player forged a reputation as a fitness fanatic.

Gooch and coach David Lloyd told the squad to forget about cricket for two days before travelling to Melbourne for the four-day fixture against a Victorian side, minus Shane Warne, starting at the MCG on Saturday.

The English have enjoyed just one day off since arriving in Australia on October 22 and most of the daily net sessions have lasted more than three hours and been followed by fielding practice.

The England squad was to have travelled today but opted to stay in Perth before flying into Melbourne on Thursday.

Gooch also said batsman Graeme Hick would stay with the squad for the remaining three Tests but not merely as cover for Graham Thorpe.

Hick originally came out because of a scare over Michael Atherton before the first Test in Brisbane and was to have returned home last Sunday.

But he was summoned to the second Test side after Thorpe's troublesome back injury flared two days before the WACA fixture began.

The Zimbabwe-born player grasped the opportunity by making 68 in England's second innings, the highest individual score of the Test, after just a handful of net sessions.

But if Thorpe does recover for the third Test which starts in Adelaide on December 11 he will present England with a dilemma.

"He played very positively and took the attack to the Aus-

tralians which in that position was probably the right way to play," Gooch said.

"It was a big task to come into a Test on probably the most lively wicket in Australia having not played a game since

Bangladesh and he did pretty well."

England's only other bright spot from this Perth debacle was fast bowler Alex Tudor.

But Gooch was quick to play

down claims he might turn into a world-beater.

"We are hoping he will continue to improve on this tour, which was the whole idea of bringing him in the first place," Gooch said.

The boy did well but I don't want to go overboard about him or make any comparisons with anyone else," he added.

Tudor claimed five wickets in Perth but Gooch stressed the 21-year-old lacked stamina.

"It's no good bowling six overs at the speed of light and then 15 overs at military medium — you have to be able to provide about 20 overs a day at the same pace," Gooch said.

But Gooch said his Perth performance did increase his chance of playing in the third Test.

"He is still a young lad with a lot to learn but he has certainly put himself up for selection in every game," Gooch said.

MELBOURNE, Dec 1 (AFP): Batting and bowling averages of leading players after the first two Ashes Tests:

AUSTRALIA

Player I R NO HS 100s Avg

S Waugh 4 176 2 112 1 88.0

I Healy 2 146 - 134 1 73.0

D Fleming 2 71 1 71 - 71

M Waugh 4 111 2 36 - 55.5

M Slater 4 180 - 113 1 45.0

M Taylor 4 110 - 61 - 27.5

J Langer 4 104 - 74 - 26.0

S MacGill 1 20 - 20 - 20.0

R Ponting 2 32 - 21 - 16.0

O M R Wkts Avg

C Miller 12 4 15 1 15.0

J Gillespie 22.2 2 111 7 15.86

G McGrath 92.2 31 199 10 19.9

D Fleming 67 17 186 9 20.67

M Waugh 22 1 73 3 24.33

S MacGill 46 8 121 4 30.25

M Kasprowicz 37 10 110 2 55.00

ENGLAND

Player I R NO HS 100s Avg

M Ramprakash 4 156 2 69 78.0

G Thorpe 2 86 - 77 - 43.0

M Butcher 4 157 - 116 1 39.25

G Hick 2 68 - 68 - 34.0

N Hussain 4 113 - 59 - 28.25

R Croft 2 27 1 23 - 27.0

A Tudor 2 18 1 18 - 18.0

M Atherton 4 64 - 35 - 16.0

D Cork 4 39 1 21 - 13.0

A Stewart 4 49 - 38 - 12.25

O M R Wkts Avg

M Ramprakash 4 1 14 1 14.0

A Tudor 25.2 5 108 5 21.6

A Mullally 84 24 203 7 29.0

D Cork 57 11 165 4 41.25

D Gough 74 18 246 5 49.2

R Croft 43 8 126 2 63.0

A Fraser 43 8 128 2 64.0

Today's Ashes averages

goal to beat struggling Salernitan 2-1 in Simoni's last match in charge on Sunday.

Nevertheless, Simoni appeared to have won a reprieve last week when Inter beat European Cup holders Real Madrid 3-1 in a dramatic Champions' League match at the San Siro.

Simoni said he deserved a deal of credit for the victory. "I deserve it because I've had to endure my fair share of criticism and attacks this season," he said.

Simoni joined Inter at the start of last season from Napoli. He took over at a club which had just bought Ronaldo from Barcelona and was confident of claiming their first Italian league title since 1989 and their 14th in all.

Inter topped the Italian first division for the first half of the season but lost out to Juventus in a tremendous title tussle.

However, Inter's powerful president Massimo Moratti stuck by Simoni.

"Simoni's like quality wine. The longer he's around the better he gets," Moratti once said.

Inter coaxed Roberto Baggio to the San Siro in the close season and again looked to have the firepower to topple Juventus as league champions.

But although they possess

some of the world's most exciting players they have never truly gelled as a unit.

The Central African country is facing severe financial hardship following the devastating six-month civil war that ended last October.

They needed a last minute

FIFA bails out Congo

BRASAVILLE, Dec 1 (Reuters/ Internet): World soccer's governing body FIFA has made a grant of 15 million CFA francs (\$26,500) to cash-strapped Congo Republic to enable the national soccer team to take part in the 2000 Olympics soccer championship, national soccer officials said on Tuesday.

They said the grant was agreed by FIFA's Zurich headquarters following a plea from Congolese Football Federation president Sylvestre Mbongo.

No other details were available.

With a long Diamond suit but 11 HCP South opened his hand artificially and when South showed the actual Diamond suit, North bid 2 No Trumps against West's Spade overcall. With a singleton in Spade, South rebid Diamonds at three level. North counted six tricks in Diamonds and with a probable stopper in spades (as West overcalled Spades), he pushed on to 3 No Trumps. The bid is justified since he held 12 HCP himself against partner's opening hand.

THE PLAY

East led 4 of Spades, and the singleton 3 was played from the dummy. West won with the Ace and the declarer dropped seven. Partners 4 of Spades could not be a singleton as the 6 of Spades was missing. With 6 and 4 partner would have led 6. As the declarer bid No Trump twice, he must have the Queen and probably also the Ten. Hence, West hid the fact that he held the King (by taking the trick with the Ace), and returned his original fourth highest Spade. The declarer failed to guess the location of the Spade King and assuming that it was with the East played the Ten. East got the Jack and thus the defence collected six Spade tricks.

Notice that it was appropriate for West to win the first Spade with the Ace. An experienced declarer could still guess the location of the King correctly, but there was no harm in applying a bit of trickery which might be able to deceive even experienced players some times.

SIX NO TRUMPS

AK Sayeedul Huq

A VERY GOOD DEFENCE BY WEST

(Hand # 141)

West

♦ S AK9852

♥ H J9

♦ D 107

♣ C 052

South (D)

♦ S 3

♥ H A105

♦ D A QJ863

♣ C 1063

Bidding: East-West were vulnerable.

South

1 Diamond*

1 Spade

2 Clubs

Pass

3 Diamonds

Pass

Pass

East

♦ S J9

♦ D K5

♣ C AJ