

Nat'l cricket

Final round starts from March 17

The final round of the National Cricket Championship will take place for the first time at four venues of the country from March 17, reports BSS.

Thirteen teams, will play in four groups at four venues on knock-out basis. The group champions will play in the semifinals in Dhaka.

The teams are: Bangladesh Biman, Faridpur, Khulna, Dinajpur, Dhaka University, Jessore, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Mymensingh, Barisal, Narayanganj, Sylhet and Comilla.

All the final round matches and the semifinals will be three-dayers while the final will be a four-day match.

The semifinals and the final will take place in Dhaka.

FIXTURES

Mar 17-19: Bangladesh Biman vs Faridpur at Rajshahi. Mymensingh vs Barisal at Sylhet.

Mar 19-21: Jessore vs Rajshahi at Kushtia.

Mar 20-22: Khulna vs Dinajpur at Rajshahi.

Mar 21-23: Chittagong vs winners of Mymensingh and Barisal at Sylhet. Narayanganj vs winners of Sylhet and Comilla at Mymensingh.

Mar 23-25: Dhaka University vs winners of Jessore and Rajshahi at Kushtia.

Mar 24-26: Winners of Biman and Faridpur vs winners of Khulna and Dinajpur.

Nash hopes for an upset

CHRISTCHURCH, Mar 15: New Zealand captain Dion Nash said today his side was lucky to be level with South Africa after drawing the first two Tests despite conceding 1,063 runs for just six wickets, reports Reuters.

"The statistics don't look very good and obviously we've had problems taking wickets," said Nash.

finished their second innings on 127 for one.

"But, thanks to the weather here, we are still level and that gives us a chance going into the last Test," Nash said.

Immediately after Monday's draw, New Zealand selection chief Ross Dykes announced an unchanged squad of 12 for the Thursday decider.

But left-arm seamer Shayne O'Connor looks set to replace fellow left-arm Geoff Allott, who has taken a disappointing one wicket for 262 runs in the first two Tests.

Taking wickets is our priority at the moment so Shayne O'Connor is certainly still in the equation," Nash said.

South African captain Hansie Cronje said he rued the loss of 212 overs of the second Test to bad weather but there was little his side could have done to change the outcome.

"Maybe we batted a little too slowly on the second day (when South Africa scored 175 runs in 77 overs) but we didn't know we were going to lose so much time," he said.

"I think we accelerated the scoring well on Day Four but the rain won in the end."

South Africa declared at their overnight 442 for one, leaving the home side 274 runs behind, but Cronje said he considered declaring several times in the penultimate afternoon.

"The possibility of bad light was always there so we thought our best bet was to build a big lead and hope for good weather on the fifth day," he said.

But rain delayed the start of play until 1:40 pm on the final day, leaving time for only 60 overs, instead of the scheduled 105.

The tourists are also likely to make just one change for the third Test, a straight swap between Steve Elworthy and Allan Donald who has a torn stomach muscle.

"Allan is struggling with the injury," Cronje said. "It's a race against time."

"In fact, it's a race against time to have him ready for the last three one-dayers at the end of the tour," he said.

Inter's ticket warning for fans

MILAN, Mar 15 (Reuters/Internet): Inter Milan told fans on Monday that tickets still on sale for Wednesday's European Cup tie against Manchester United could well be forgeries.

The warning followed the arrest in Naples on Friday of three men suspected of printing 5,145 bogus tickets for the quarter-final second leg tie at Milan's San Siro stadium.

"Our advice is to not buy tickets outside the ground," an Inter spokesman said. "All official tickets have been sold so if there are tickets in circulation they could well be forgeries."

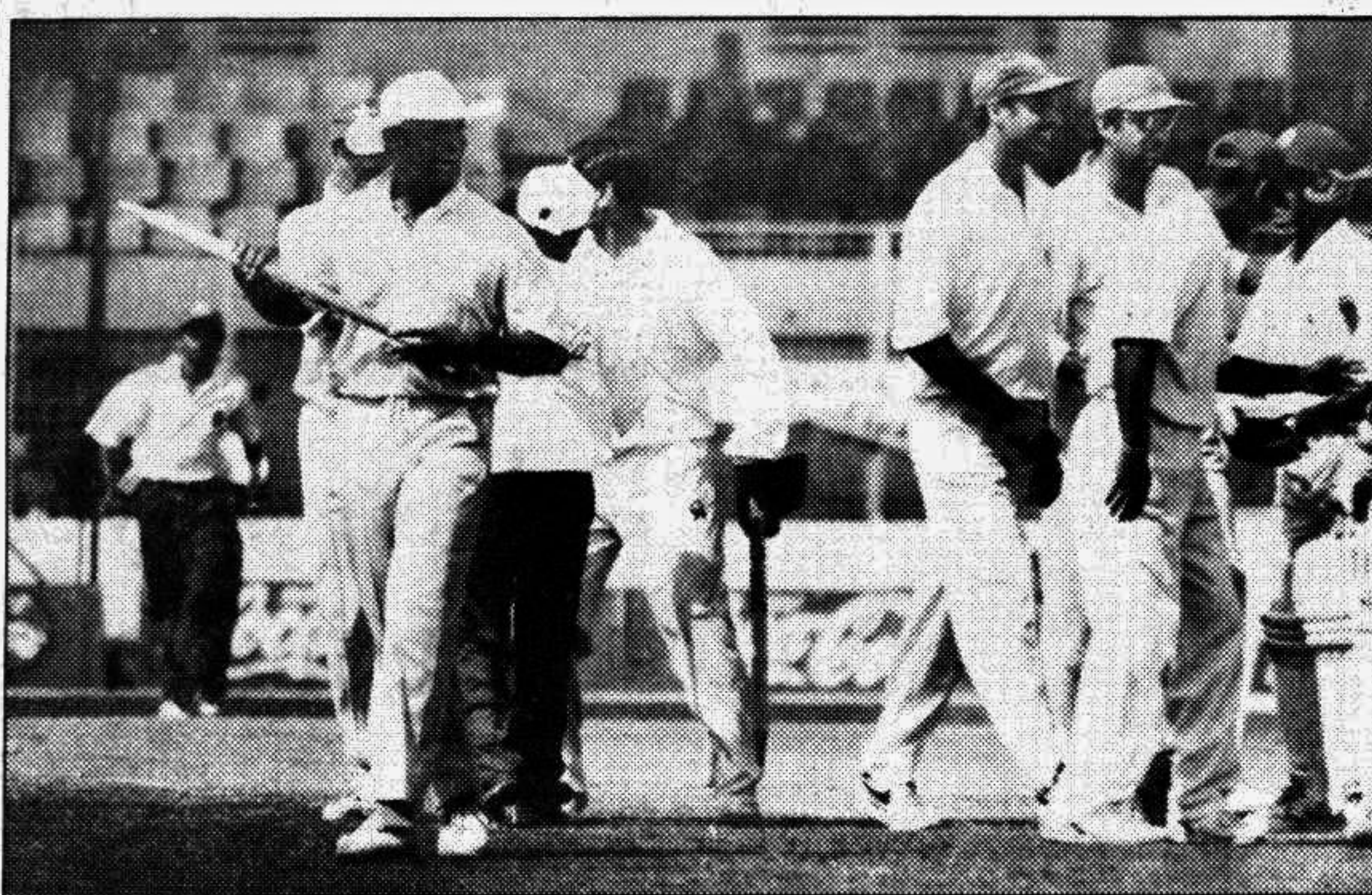
"It's important to stress this for both Italian and English fans," he said. "Italian police have already arrested three people in connection with producing false tickets."

All 80,000 tickets have been sold for the tie, Inter's biggest match of the season so far.

Some 3,500 have been sold to travelling United fans through official channels but additional English fans are expected to travel to Italy in the hope of buying black market tickets.

Italian media have said 1,000 such English supporters will descend on Milan while British reports have suggested the figure could be as high as 7,000.

A police spokeswoman in the city said her office would only reveal details of plans to monitor the match on Tuesday. She declined further comment.



MEMORABILIA: Pakistan speedster Shoaib Akhtar grabs a piece of history (a stump used in the final). —Star photo by Anisur Rahman

Almanac of a distinct star

Hasan Masood

How eventful have been the last four weeks for Pakistani skipper Wasim Akram? It began with the inaugural Asian Test championship match between India and Pakistan at the Eden Gardens on February 16 and concluded with him receiving the trophy at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on March 15.

The world's best left-arm fast bowler inserted his name in different pages of the history book during this momentous period of his life.

It began with an outright 46-run emphatic win over arch-rivals India in that opening match that concluded on March 20 at an empty Eden Gardens following crowd violence that spread over two days. With that historic win, the tall 33-year-old left-hander became the captain in five tries to win an India-Pakistan match at the Eden Gardens.

Then came the second match against Sri Lanka that began at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore from March 4. In that he earned the distinction of becoming the first Pakistani to get a hat-trick in Test cricket since his country began playing at the highest level of cricket at the Feroze Shah Kotla, Delhi, against India in October 1952.

In that that match Wasim bowled three Sri Lankan tailenders—Bandarathilake (0), Wickremasinghe (0) and Sajeeva de Silva (8)—out in three successive balls in the first innings to help Pakistan get full four bonus points.

To follow it up, last Sunday, Wasim went on to get his second hat-trick in as many matches forcing Sri Lanka to nine for three wickets in their second innings on the third day of the final. This time he looked happier as he got the wickets with the new ball and against two top order bats—Avishka Gunawardena (0) and Mahela Jayawardena (1). Nightwatchman Chaminda Vaas (0) was victim number two.

Wasim Akram

With this rare treble, Wasim became only the third person in cricket history, after Australians TJ Matthews and H Trumble, to earn two Test hat-tricks. Wasim, with that three wickets, captured a total of 15 in the Championship and earned the man-of-the-championship award.

"I am definitely feeling very proud, specially with my boys and the way they responded throughout the tournament. Specially after we had one bad year, they really came back well. We played well against India. We worked hard and at the end we got the result," said a beaming Wasim Akram after defeating Sri Lanka by an innings and 175 runs in the final yesterday.

"We had one bad year before I took over once again. Every team goes through a lean patch. The boys wanted to win themselves. Although I said two years back that I would never lead Pakistan again, it was they who really wanted me as their captain and I am very proud the way they responded."

"After today's victory, the whole team is excited. I want to personally congratulate every member of my team," said Wasim.

When asked what was the motivation behind Pakistan performing well these days, the Pakistan captain said that it all began with their series against India.

"After winning the Asian Test Championship, now obviously the World Cup is coming ahead. Before that we have two one-day tournaments in India and Sharjah that is pushing us to win," added Wasim.

"I always believed that Pakistan can win at any stage with our so much of potentials. We were 26 for 6 at Calcutta but then we won that match. We have a lot of talented players in the side, who are capable of turning the fate of a match in favour of their country from any stage and that's our main recipe of success," said Wasim.

Wasim also praised the Bangladesh crowd and supported the idea of holding the final at a neutral venue.

"Bangladesh is my second home and I want to thank the Dhaka crowd for the way they supported us throughout the final. I hope to come back here and play some more cricket in the future," Wasim concluded.

Draw drags on in NZ

CHRISTCHURCH, Mar 15: Bryan Young and Matt Horne put on 107 in New Zealand's first century opening stand for 22 Tests in three years to ensure a draw in the rain affected second Test against South Africa at Lancaster Park today, reports Reuters.

The home side, 274 runs behind on first innings after South Africa declared at their overnight 442 for one, were left just 60 overs to survive for the draw after rain delayed the start on the final day. They did so for the loss of just one wicket.

With the first Test also drawn at Eden Park in Auckland two weeks ago, the series will now be decided in the third Test beginning at the Basin Reserve in Wellington on Thursday.

Horne batted positively to reach his third half century in four innings in the series, but an embarrassing mix-up with Young cost him his wicket as Paul Adams made a diving stop and throw from midwicket to run him out.

Horne's 56 from 134 balls with eight boundaries followed scores of 93, 60 and 36. Young reached his half century shortly before the game ended and finished on 55 from 168 balls with five fours. Roger Twose finished on six not out.

Play did not start on the final day until 1:40 pm bringing the total time lost in the match to 13 hours 57 minutes, equating to 212 overs.

With Allan Donald unable to bowl because of a torn stomach muscle, Lance Klusener was promoted to share the new ball with Shaun Pollock but neither was able to make an impression on a pitch offering little, if any, seam movement.

The grey, overcast skies that had hung gloomily over the match finally lifted during the final afternoon to provide the best batting conditions of the five days.

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Nasimul Ghani in town

Asian development officer of the International Cricket Council (ICC) and former Pakistani Test cricketer Nasimul Ghani arrived yesterday on a week-long visit to Bangladesh, reports BSS.

He will supervise a training course for the Asian under-19 boys at the BKSP. The course will be conducted by another Pakistani cricketer Mushtaq Mohammad, who arrives today.

Nasimul Ghani, who is also one of the ICC's three-member delegation, will visit Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Mymensingh to inspect facilities following Bangladesh's bid for Test status. They will watch a few matches of the final round of the national cricket championship.

The delegation will submit a report, which would be reviewed at the ICC's next conference in London in June.

Nat'l youth cricket

Faridpur in final

Faridpur, moved into the final of the 19th National Youth Cricket Championship beating Munshiganj by two wickets at Faridpur Stadium yesterday, reports UNB.

Munshiganj were bundled out for 67 in 31.4 overs with Babu scoring 15.

Rumel battered the Munshiganj's batting line-up with a five-wicket haul while Ranjan took two.

In reply, Faridpur reached 71 for eight in 24.3 overs with Sohan scoring 13.

Shihab claimed four wickets while Nannu took three.

Away at Joypurhat Stadium, Rajshahi reached the semifinals posting a massive nine-wicket victory over Noagaon.

Noagaon scored 109 all out in 33.2 overs.

Sumon made 31 while Rapon added 12. Sumon on Rajshahi captured four wickets.

In reply, Rajshahi reached the target losing only one wicket in 13.4 overs with Tony making 45. Liton took one wicket.

Lankans for tri-series in India

COLOMBO, Mar 15: Sri Lanka today named a 15-man squad for a tri-nations one-day cricket tournament with hosts India and Pakistan, reports Reuters.

The tournament will be played between March 19 and April 14.

Regular wicketkeeper Romesh Kaluwitharana has been left out due to flu. His place is taken by Prasanna Jayawardena who was keeper for the under-19 team.

SQUAD

Arjuna Ranatunga (capt), Aravinda de Silva, Marvan Atapattu, Mahela Jayawardena, Eric Upasanthana, Ruwan Kalinga, Hashan Tillekeratne, Chaminda Vaas, Promodya Boteju, Russel Arnold, Chandika Hathurusinghe, Avishka Gunawardena, Upul Chandana, Prasanna Jayawardena.

Donovan's suggestion

LONDON, Mar 15: Champion sprinter and world record holder Donovan Bailey believes the Olympic ideal will be worthless if the International Olympic Committee doesn't control drug abuse and corruption, reports AP.

In a week when the IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch faces a confidence vote and members face expulsion over bribery allegations, the 100-metre gold medalist from 1996 said the IOC had to act to clean up its own image.

"The IOC do not have my vote of confidence right now," Bailey, who is recovering from knee surgery, told the BBC's Panorama programme which was screened on Monday.

They have to clean this mess up. If nothing is done the ideals of the Olympics are over. I am sure there are athletes out there taking drugs. If they want to do it, they are not going to think about getting caught," the Canadian star said.

The Panorama programme also has an interview with Bailey's disgraced countryman, Ben Johnson, who was banned after testing positive for drugs at the 1988 Seoul Olympics and also once more after his return to action.

"All the people... in my races was on drugs. Everybody was doing it," Johnson said.

"There are about 6,000 drugs on the market today. Most sprinters, they try different drugs to go with their body and if it doesn't work, they try something else. And, if something works and they are running good, they stick with that."

Panorama also interviewed Professor Arnold Beckett, a former member of the IOC Medical Commission, who believes drug misuse is rife.

"I believe very strongly that drug misuse has increased dramatically because people can use performance-enhancing drugs and not get caught," said Beckett, who has been an outspoken critic of the IOC since his departure. "The system of catching athletes has failed."

He also suggested that some positive tests at Olympics may have been kept private to preserve the image of the sport.

"It is all part of a pattern to prevent too many positives," Beckett said. "In other words, we want to show at the Olympic Games that we are doing our due work in trying to prevent drug misuse in sport... but please don't get too many positives because that will damage the image of the sport."

Lara relives sensation

KINGSTON, Jamaica, Mar 15: Brian Lara hit a magnificent double century as West Indies held Australia's bowlers at bay throughout the second day of the second Test Sunday to take a 121-run first innings lead with six wickets in hand, reports Reuters.

West Indies, 1-0 down in the four-Test series, recovered from a perilous 37 for four overnight to finish on 377 for four at the close in reply to Australia's first innings 256.

Lara rediscovered his finest form to smash an unbeaten 212 and was partnered in a West Indies record fifth-wicket partnership of 321 by fellow left-hander Jimmy Adams who was 88 not out at the close.

The two batsmen afterwards paid each other compliments. "Without Jimmy's help it would not have been possible," said Lara. "He was really special today."

Adams commented: "We just set out to bat as long as possible. When Brian is batting in that form it makes it so much easier."

But after a slow start, Lara, world record holder of the highest Test and first-class scores, tore into the Australian bowling, hitting 28 fours and three sixes.

Adams, who joined Lara after nightwatchman Pedro Collins retired hurt on 10 after being struck by pace bowler Jason Gillespie, gained confidence from his skipper after a hesitant start and hit eight boundaries.

In an absorbing afternoon's play Lara took on possibly the world's best fast bowler, Glenn McGrath, and spinner, Shane Warne, and he won.

Only 69 runs came in the first two-hour session as Lara and Adams attempted to repair the innings.

The crucial moments came just after lunch as Australia employed their big guns of McGrath and Warne in an attempt to break through.

They almost succeeded. McGrath's first ball after the interval had Lara groping outside the off-stump, his fifth had the West Indies captain falling on his back as he avoided a bouncer speared at his head.

Then Warne's final ball of his first over of the afternoon found the inside edge of Adams' bat but a diving Justin Langer at short square leg failed to grasp a hard chance.

Shortly afterwards Lara also had a narrow escape when he was on 47. He edged a short delivery outside the off-stump but the ball eluded the grasp of Mark Waugh diving to his left at second slip.

The two missed chances seemed to turn the tide. Lara reaching his 50 from 140 balls. Suddenly, there was a glint in the eye of the West Indies captain instead of the downcast look of recent, troubled months.

He pulled Warne for four and two overs later stepped down the pitch to lift the leg-spinner over mid-on for six.

Lara moved past 5,000 runs in Test cricket, only the eighth West Indian to reach that target, and also took his own average back over 50.

But it was in the most dramatic circumstances he reached his century, the 11th of his Test career.

Going for a quick run with his score 99, Justin Langer's throw hit the bowler's stumps as Lara attempted to make his ground.

Umpire Steve Bucknor called for a decision by the third umpire and for three agonising minutes Lara and the crowd waited. But to an enormous cheer from the crowd the green light came on.

Lara raised his arms in celebration and obvious relief. His 11th Test century had come from 195 balls and contained 14 fours and one six.

From then on Lara took total control, attacking all the bowlers he was particularly severe on leg-spinner Stuart MacGill and medium pacer Greg Blewett.

In one over from MacGill he hit him for 15 runs, including two consecutive sixes. On 183, Lara moved to 199 with four four off a hapless Blewett.

His double century was greeted with an unwelcome pitch invasion by over-enthusiastic supporters and Lara took temporary safety in the dressing room.

The final session saw West Indies plunder a further 150 runs, 99 of which were scored by Lara. His closing tally of 212, not out required only 340 balls.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard on the second day of the second Test between West Indies and Australia at Sabina Park on Sunday:

AUSTRALIA: First innings 256 (S Waugh 100, M Waugh 67; C Walsh 4-55).

WEST INDIES: First innings Campbell b McGrath 12

Ragoothia lbw b Gillespie 0

Roberts c Warne b McGrath 0

Lara not out 212

Joseph c Blewett b McGrath 14

Collins retired hurt 10

Adams not out 88

Extras: (b-12, lb-8, nb-21) 41

Total: (For four wickets) 377

Fall of Wkts: 1-4; 2-5; 3-17; 4-34

To bat: R Jacobs, N Perry, C Ambrose, C Walsh

Bowler: (to date) O M R W

McGrath 26 9 71 3

Gillespie 26 5 69 1

Warne 23 5 78 0

Watts 18 1 48 0

MacGill 10 2 78 0

Blewett 18 1 48 0

M Waugh 2 0 13 0

Return of the prince

LONDON, Mar 15 (Reuters/Internet): Something special happened at Sabina Park in Kingston, Jamaica.

A man and his team re-discovered their pride.

Those churlish enough might find cause to complain at the pitch invasion by a couple of hundred local fans which saw Brian Lara seek refuge in the dressing room for a few minutes after he reached his double century.

But considering it was his first Test century since June 1997, against Sri Lanka in St Vincent, and West Indies had lost their last six Test matches on the trot, it was not an unexpected reaction.

The most talented batsman in the world, holder of the records for the highest Test and first-class scores, has had a humiliating time since taking over the captaincy of West Indies in January last year.

He has led West Indies through the worst period in their history, a 5-0 whitewash by South Africa followed immediately by a 312-run thrashing by Australia in the opening Test of this series in which they were dismissed for 51 in their second innings.

Lara was given a life when Mark Waugh at second slip put down a difficult diving catch.

Lara reached his half-century only minutes later and then celebrated by pulling Warne for four wide of mid-wicket.

Suddenly there was a glint in his eyes rather than the downcast look of recent months. Lara began to enjoy himself again, something he has done rarely since assuming the captaincy.

His century came with no little drama. Pushing the ball to leg for a quick single he had to race hard to reach the crease as Justin Langer's throw hit the stumps.

Umpire Steve Bucknor called for a decision from the third umpire and it was three agonising minutes before the green light came on. As the crowd gave an enormous cheer Lara raised his arms in celebration and palpable relief.

His first 50 took 140 balls, then he needed only another 55 to reach his century. His 150 came in 257 balls and by the end of the day he had faced 340 deliveries in reaching his undefeated 212. On his way, Lara passed 5,000 Test runs, only the eighth West Indian to reach that mark.

At the beginning of play on Sunday, Lara's captaincy had been very much in doubt after being appointed only for the first two Tests of this series.

After the first test defeat Lara had said: "I need to make a big innings."

Probably he will make none bigger than the one he did on Sunday, including his world record 375.

WINDIES' 5,000 CLUB

Batsman	M	I	N	O	Runs	HS	50s	100s	Avg
Iva Richards	121	182	12		8540	291	45	24	50.24
GS Sobers	93	160	21		8032	365*	30	26	57.78
CG Greenidge	108	185	16		7558	226	34	19	44.72
CH Lloyd	110	175	14		7515	242*	39	19	46.68
DL Haynes	116	202	25		7487	184	39	18	42.30
RB Kanhai	79	137	6		6227	256	28	15	47.53
RB Richardson	86	146	12		5949	194	27	16	44.39
B C Lara	61	104	3		5138	375	28	11	50.87

Army hockey

JESSORE, Mar 15: Two more robin league matches of the annual hockey championship of the Bangladesh Army were held at the Jessore cantonment this morning, reports BSS.

The hosts defeated Dhaka Engineers 4-0.