

No Brian Laras

From page 13
came against Zimbabwe and they were also not in the best of mental state due to the recent political unrest in that country. Our real test will come in the series against Pakistan. But for me there was a turning point and that was in the spirit with which the team played. I attribute that to the leadership skills of Jimmy Adams.

DSS: But the West Indies, with their clear limitations, did play very well specially when you consider that they were without the services of Brian Lara...

TC: Yes, they performed pretty well under the circumstances. But there is no denying the fact that we are a weak side. However the team combined wonderfully under the new captain and played to their potential. There is nothing better than to be a part of a winning team and the Windies needed to revive that feeling.

DSS: The ill-fated tour of New Zealand must have hurt extremely...

TC: It did. Even Bangladesh won't go to New Zealand and lose seven (Two Tests and seven one day internationals) games in a row! But the manner in which the team lost suggested that there was some of the field matters which contributed to that debacle. The West Indies are not that bad a team to be humbled like that.

DSS: What do you think was the reason?

TC: It was very clear that the team was not playing as a unit. Brian Lara who was captain then, wasn't being able to draw the kind of support from the players he desired. Lara is a great cricketer but maybe not a great leader of men.

DSS: Now that he(Laras) has stepped down from captaincy, do you believe it has come as a blessing in disguise for the West Indies?

TC: I think so, both for the team and for himself. Now that the pressure is off, he can really concentrate on his batting and return to the form of old.

DSS: Lara's successor Adams was not in any sort of touch before the series against Zimbabwe, but he displayed great character in leading the team and scored a decisive hundred in the second Test in Jamaica...

TC: You see that's the kind of man he is. He has a big heart. He is still not in good form. He is nothing near his former self. Still Adams went out there and showed his character: 'Look if I can do it, so can you' and they followed suit. He made the team play with him by setting examples and they were back on the winning ways.

Suddenly all the negativity that surrounded West Indies over the last few months—the humiliation in New Zealand, the drama of Lara stepping down from captaincy, Viv Richards not getting selected as the Windies coach and his followers attacking the WIBC office—were forgotten.

The hope has been revived in the Caribbean. Cricket goes far beyond the boundary there. The wins and Courtney Walsh's world record at Sabina Park, have lifted the whole of the West Indies.

DSS: Walsh breaking Kapil Dev's world and becoming the top wicket taker in the history of Test cricket must have been very special?

TC: I'm sure the world wanted Walsh to break that record. He is such an outstanding gentleman. He is admired and respected throughout the universe. The fact that he broke the record at his home ground made the event extra special. It couldn't have happened to a better person.

DSS: What does the future hold for West Indies cricket?

TC: There are a number of youngsters coming through. Batsman Sylvester Joseph has been called up as Shivnarine Chanderpaul's replacement in the side for the tri-series. The board has heavily invested in another upcoming batsman Ramnarain Sarwan. Chris Gayle and Wavell Hinds have just started their international careers.

Unfortunately however there are no Brian Laras in sight.

In the fast bowling department, Reon King is improving with every game and looks a very fine prospect. Franklin Rose has made a great comeback but will have to perform consistently to make a lasting impression.

DSS: Australia's former captain Kim Hughes has recently made scathing remarks that the West Indies are going to lose all their matches in the upcoming five-Test series against Australia in November and even their C team was good enough to beat the Windies. How do you respond to that?

TC: Well it could be true. We will definitely be the weaker side going into that tour as the Australians are playing fabulous cricket and are on an all-time high.

But not so long ago, they were in the same position the West Indies are at the moment. A few years back our third team would have beaten them. Kim Hughes had been a member and a captain of the Australian sides that were walloped by the Windies. He even had to give up captaincy after failing to inspire his side. He can understand the state West Indies are in now.

However, I hope the Windies can play to their potential and as a unit in Australia. That way we will be competitive even if we lose.

But I think the series against Pakistan and England will be more crucial for the future of the West Indies.



Students of Bharateshwary Homes performing during the colourful opening ceremony of the Cricketnext.com Cup exhibition cricket match at the Bangabandhu Stadium yesterday. —Star photo

**S Africans stand by their captain
Hansie denies charges**



JOHANNESBURG, Apr 8: South African cricket skipper Hansie Cronje denied Indian charges of match-fixing Friday, calling them rubbish. United Cricket Board managing director Ali Bacher told AFP.

"I have spoken to Hansie Cronje and he says it is absolute rubbish. There is nothing at all in it," he said.

"The United Cricket Board of South Africa is certain that no South African cricket player has ever been involved in match-fixing," the board said in a statement.

It added that Cronje is adamant that the allegations contained in press reports in India are completely untrue, saying Cronje is known for his unquestionable integrity and honesty.

"If there is any grey side to it, we will take care," he said.

Meanwhile, the South African government on Saturday said it would contact its counterparts in India to voice its concerns about match-fixing allegations levelled against four players, UCBSA said.

Foreign Affairs Minister Aziz Pahad had given assurances that government "would seek an explanation for reports that players' telephones were tapped while they were on an official cricket tour in India."

UCB spokesman Bronwyn Wilkinson said in a statement.

He would also ask for an explanation "regarding the process by which the allegations against the four players were made public."

Bacher said on e-tv television that he had spoken to all four players.

"All deny emphatically that there is any substance to those allegations," he said.

South Africa's cricket-loving public were outraged. One caller to a public SABC radio talk show said South Africa should break off ties with India. Others suggested the claims were a ploy to demoralise South Africa ahead of next week's three-game one-day series against Australia.

"I am more inclined to believe that the allegations are a fabrication," he said.

"Herschelle has been instructed by the UCB not to speak to the press, but he has told me he knows nothing about these allegations," he said.

"These sort of claims do not come as a surprise to me. It (betting) happens all the time on the subcontinent and cricketers, players and managers are often approached to throw games."

"Betting is a big industry on the subcontinent and to me it appears that someone lost a lot of money and is now making up a fabricated story."

Similar charges have also been filed against two Indians and one of them, Delhi-based businessman Rajesh Kalra, had already been arrested.

The other was identified as Sanjiv Chawla, an Indian living in London.

Other officials of the UCBSA Saturday rallied behind Cronje over charges of match fixing while newspapers claimed he had been framed.

Graham Ford, coach of the South African cricket team, said Indian police had been "overhasty" in filing charges against Cronje and teammates.

lieve that the Pope is guilty of multiple bigamy than to believe that Hansie is guilty of being involved in bribery and corruption," said one disbelieving caller.

"Hansie and his guys don't just play for money, they play for pride," said another. "They carry this country with them. We carry them in our hearts."

Another said, "If he was throwing those games, he is in the wrong business. He should be in acting. You can read the pain on his face when he loses."

Gibbs father, Herman Gibbs, said his son denied the allegations.

He, however, called for an independent inquiry into the allegations saying they were "too serious" simply to be dismissed.

"I'd be astonished if it had happened in this instance," Wessels writes in the Saturday Star, "but this thing is rife in cricket and the biggest mistake we could make would be to try to sweep it under the carpet without an investigation."

Bob Woolmer, the former South African coach, said: "My initial thoughts are that this is a bad April Fool's joke. I am convinced that Hansie Cronje is not guilty and that he would not even contemplate such actions. These allegations are absolute garbage. He is not the type of person to get involved in anything like this."

Influential Christian spiritual leader pastor Ray McCauley also joined the chorus of people who rose to Cronje's defence.

McCauley, a spiritual leader of the Rhema Bible Church and the "unofficial" chaplain of the South African team, said he was "very shocked" by the allegations.

"Because I know Hansie as a person of integrity, I cannot believe he would be party to any such allegation," McCauley told The Citizen newspaper.

"I have the highest regard for him and firmly believe that he would not allow himself or his team to be involved in any form of dishonesty."

But she said injury made her miss last year's world championships in Seville and the All-Africa Games in Johannesburg.

"I had a knee injury last year and had surgery on it in London and no-one cared about me. Now, I'm undergoing a rehabilitation programme. The Sydney Olympics are months away and there's no training programme. So how can I successfully defend my title?"

Bangladesh's done
From page 13
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DSS: Pick your favourite batsman in the world today.

MP: It has to be Sachin Tendulkar.

DSS: And from the past?

MP: Graeme Pollock, Garry Sobers are a few names that come to mind.

DSS: After having visited many cricket venues around the world, how do you rate Dhaka Stadium?

MP: I think it's very brilliant. The crowd and the atmosphere is awesome. It's a great venue.

DSS: In the past we have seen South Africa losing some crunch matches despite beginning with a lot of promise. What is the reason behind that?

MP: I think if you look at the South Africa's record, they have lost a few finals but they have also won a lot of tournaments but it's true that South Africa did not click at the final stage of last summer's World Cup.

her details are available, the innocence of Hansie and the others will be fully proved.

"The whole thing is surely nothing more than a misunderstanding."

A senior South African cricket journalist said he had heard the tape of the alleged conversation between Cronje and an Indian bookmaker and strongly doubted its validity, believing the entire issue was a hoax.

Trevor Chesterfield, a journalist for Pretoria News and the Cricinfo website, said that while waiting to be interviewed by the Star radio station in Delhi, he heard the tape alleged to be between Cronje and a bookmaker, Chawla, being played on air.

"My impression was that both voices were of Asian origin. The voice that was supposed to be Hansie's did not have a South African accent. It was definitely not Hansie's voice. And my conclusion was that the whole thing was a hoax."

"Was Hansie framed?" asks the frontpage headline in the Saturday Star newspaper.

Former captain Kepler Wessels said he, too, doubted the allegations and felt the issue had arisen only because South Africa had won the Test series in India.

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India beat S Korea

NEW DELHI, Apr 8: India's chances of victory against South Korea brightened Saturday as they won the doubles match to gain a 2-1 lead in the Davis Cup Asia Oceania Group I tie, reports AP.

India's Leander Paes, the top ranked doubles player on the ATP tour, and young Vishal Uppal beat South Korea's Hyung Taik Lee and Young-II Yoon 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-4, 7-6 (7) on a grass court.

Paes is considered favourite to take India to victory in the reverse singles to be played on Sunday. He will take on South Korea's Hyung-Talk Lee.

On Saturday, the South Korean pair won the opening set in a tie breaker as Paes took time to settle with his new partner Uppal. Mahesh Bhupathi, Paes' regular partner on the ATP tour, is nursing an injury.

Paes and 20-year-old Uppal combined well to win the next two sets comfortably at 6-4, 6-4. They wrapped up the match by winning the final set 7-6 (7).

On Friday, Paes won the opening singles against Yoon 6-4, 6-2, 6-3. But Syed Fazeluddin, playing Korea's No 1, lost the second singles to Lee 6-4, 7-5, 6-2.

Yet Shane doesn't know all about leg-spin!

MELBOURNE, Apr 8: Shane Warne, the only current cricketer in Wisden's top five of last century, said Thursday he was still fathoming out the mysteries of leg-spin bowling, reports AFP.

"I'd like to understand a lot more about leg-spin bowling," he said in a surprising remark from a man considered the art's finest exponent.

"I still have a lot to learn there."

"I think I know how to bowl leg-spin, I don't say I know everything about it, but I know what I'm actually trying to do now."

"In years gone by I just knew how to bowl a leg break, I didn't know when and why to bowl one."

The top five in Wisden's list were Sir Donald Bradman, Sir Garfield Sobers, Sir Jack Hobbs, Warne and Sir Vivian Richards.

"Sir Shane has got a good ring to it," Warne said before breaking out in laughter. "But I don't think that will ever happen."

He recently surpassed Dennis Lillee as Australia's most successful Test bowler and his leg-spin has been a key cog in Australia's record-winning streaks in one-day and Test matches.

"Sometimes you just don't believe it's all happening," Warne said.

"It's sort of happening in fast forward, everything in your life is going full-steam ahead in fast forward and sometimes you just need to take a step back and take it all in and enjoy it."

Warne leaves on Saturday with the Australian team for three one-day fixtures in South Africa before venturing to England for a season of county cricket with Hampshire.

Ajunwa calls it a day

LAGOS, Apr 8: Olympic long jump champion Chioma Ajunwa said on Friday she was retiring from the sport and would not defend her title in Sydney because of a lack of support from Nigerian officials, reports Reuters.

"I'm sick and tired of the frustrations, insensitivity to my welfare and lack of support from my country's AFN (Athletics Federation of Nigeria) and Sports Ministry officials. So I'm quitting and won't go to Sydney for the Olympic Games," Ajunwa told Reuters in Lagos.

Ajunwa stunned the athletics world when, after returning from a four-year drug ban, she leapt 7.12 metres to beat a strong field including defending champion American Jackie Joyner-Kersey to win gold in Atlanta.

But she said injury made her miss last year's world championships in Seville and the All-Africa Games in Johannesburg.

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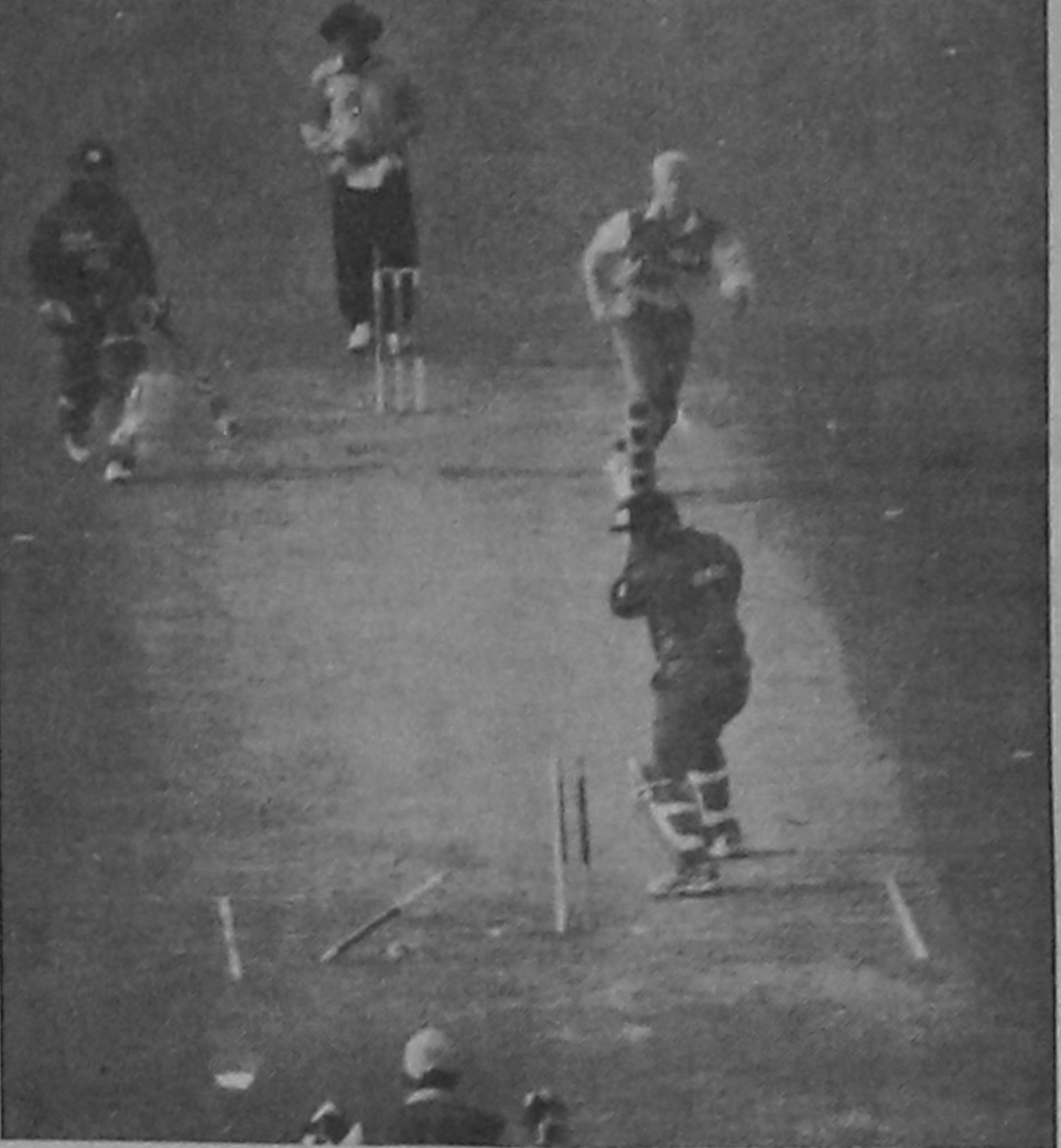
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Asia Eleven captain Wasim Akram's off-stump is sent flying by Nantie Hayward. —Star photo by AKM Mohsin

Cronje affair shocks India

NEW DELHI, Apr 8: India on Saturday lamented the degeneration of cricket, the traditional gentleman's game, following match-fixing allegations against South African skipper Hansie Cronje and three teammates, reports AFP.

Indian newspapers and former Test cricketers unanimously denounced the repeated scandals dogging cricket and mourned the current state of the game.

"Money a great leveller indeed," the Indian Express screamed as the Times of India said: "The game goes for a sixer."

The Asian Age claimed Cronje was "caught at cash point".

Former Indian captain and master batsman Sunil Gavaskar said: "The image of the game should be saved from such people. Take away every run, wicket and catch from those involved in the match-fixing. If found guilty, none should be spared, past or present."

Ex-skipper Dilip Vengsarkar said: "I do not understand how they can do such a thing with so much more money in the game now," adding that if proved guilty they should be "banned for life".

Syed Kirmani, another former Test cricketer, said: "If the allegations are true, I am ashamed to be a cricketer."

Ajit Wadekar, who captained India in the past, deplored the fact that no action was taken "when the South Africans were around."

The Australian Cricket Board, meanwhile, Saturday said there was no official comment as it did not involve Australian cricket in any way.

New Delhi police on Friday said charges of a criminal conspiracy had been registered against Cronje and his teammates Herschelle Gibbs, Nicky Boje and Pieter Strydom for fixing matches during last month's one-day series here.

Similar charges have been filed against two Indians, one of whom has been arrested.

Cronje has vehemently denied the Indian charges of match-fixing.

"The allegations are completely without substance," he said in a statement.

World cricket has been rocked by betting and match-fixing charges in recent years, but this is the first time that actual criminal charges have been

levelled against players.

Former Indian Test cricketer Manoj Prabhakar, who had earlier made allegations about corruption in cricket, said in remarks published Saturday that he had been vindicated.

Four years ago, the former all-rounder had accused an unnamed teammate of offering him 25,000 dollars to play badly in a one-day match in Sri Lanka in 1993.

"Tell me, where are those people who blamed me when I raised these issues of betting and match fixing? Then they were after me. I still maintain that such things have been going on in cricket for a long time," he told the Hindustan Times.

"Oh no, not South Africans! I'm really shocked. I always thought if there was one clean cricket team in the world, it was South Africa."

The Indian charges relate to the five one-day international series South Africa played here between March 9 and 19. India won the series 3-2 after a string of test losses.

Indian police said they had recordings of a telephone conversation between Cronje and bookie Sanjiv Chawla that backed up their allegations.

Jagmohan Dalmiya, an Indian who heads the International Cricket Conference (ICC), did not directly comment on the scandal but warned that "if there is any grey side," the ICC would handle it.

"We have our own way of working. We will cross the bridge when we come to it," he said from Dhaka, where ICC cricket week celebrations on Saturday featuring an Asia XI vs World XI Cricket Cup match were overshadowed by the scandal.

The Indian Express came down heavily on the ICC for inaction, reflecting popular sentiment in India.

"They have taken money in the normal reaction a lay man makes these days when his favourite team loses," it said.

"The ICC cannot turn a blind eye to this challenge facing cricket."

In Dhaka, ICC president Jagmohan Dalmiya said he was unaware of the charges and did not want to comment on them.



SUNIL GAVASKAR



SUNIL GAVASKAR



Players of both Asia Eleven and Rest of the World Eleven pose for photographs prior to the start of the exhibition match at the Bangabandhu Stadium yesterday. —Star photo

Steve sees the other side

SYDNEY, Apr 8: Match-fixing allegations against rival skipper Hansie Cronje and three of his players would bring the South Africans closer together in next week's three-match one-day series in the republic, Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh said Saturday, reports AFP.

Cronje and teammates Herschelle Gibbs, Nicky Boje and Pieter Strydom had charges of criminal conspiracy laid against them by Indian police in connection with last month's five-match one-day series against India.

Prior to leaving here late Saturday for South Africa, Waugh said players found guilty of match-fixing allegations should not be allowed to continue playing.

He was adamant the game's world governing body, the International Cricket Council, would step in to sort out the latest allegations of match-fixing.

Waugh was reluctant to comment specifically on the South Africans, although he did offer a positive character report for Cronje.

"He certainly plays the game hard out in the middle and I've had no problems in the past with him. I am pretty good mates with Hansie," Waugh said at Sydney Airport.

"But what's happened is out of my control. I can't really comment on it because there's a criminal inquiry and if I made any comments, that might prejudice what's going to go on, I

can't make too many comments, but I can say I've enjoyed playing cricket against him."

Waugh was speaking from experience when he said the South Africans would bind closer following the allegations.

The Australians encountered similar distractions when it was revealed Shane Warne

Waugh emphasised the South Africans' case was very different to the one concerning his brother and Warne.

"We knew what was going on to start with and we knew that the guys had made a couple of mistakes, but we didn't see them as really all that serious," Waugh said.

"That weren't throwing matches, they were just giving information on pitches, so I see that as being a lot different to some of the other allegations."

Asked whether players found guilty of match fixing should be hit with life suspensions, Waugh said, "they shouldn't be playing the game."

"If you are found guilty of these sort of charges, you are not playing the game for the right reason, you are selling the spectators short and your teammates."

"There's no room for it in any sport, so if the charge is serious enough then they should have to pay the penalty."

Meanwhile, the Australian Cricket Board (ACB) said Saturday they had no official comment to make of allegations of match-fixing involving South African captain Hansie Cronje and three other players.

An ACB spokesman said the matter did not involve Australian cricket in any way.

ACB chief executive Malcolm