

Sport

'Keepers as apt as anyone'

CANBERRA, Dec 6. The demands of wicketkeeping should not preclude those behind the stumps from being considered as Test skippers.

The outstanding wicket-keeper-batsman is to lead the Prime Minister's XI against the West Indies here Thursday.

However, as the man expected to take over from the injured Steve Waugh as stand-in Australia captain for the third Adelaide Test starting on December 15, he said the busy task ahead of him was one a wicketkeeper could handle.

"I'm sure it's possible," he said. "It's a big task for anyone to captain the Test team. It's a terrific job and there's a terrific amount of responsibility to go with it."

"Keepers traditionally haven't been tried. I'd like to think that whether you're a keeper or a bowler or batsman or an all-rounder, you're never going to be pigeon-holed because of past traditions."

"I just think that if people think you're the right man for the job, give you a go and see what happens."

Gilchrist said he did not see the PM match as a captaincy trial for the third Test.

"I've been asked to captain the team in this one-off game so I'll go out and enjoy it and gain a bit from the experience," he said.

"This was selected long before Steve Waugh was injured. I'm looking forward to it as a great opportunity to learn about captaincy and have a bit of fun," he added.

Gilchrist, who will captain a side largely untried on the international scene, said his plans were in form.

"We've got a team side — a lot of wickets amongst the bowlers and runs amongst the batsmen."

"For Australian cricket's sake we'll be trying to win to make sure we keep them down and us up."

The West Indies players did not have an official practice session Wednesday, having arrived early morning after an overnight flight from Perth.

The tourists are not expected to name a team until the morning of the match.

Prime Minister John Howard is to officially open the new Sir Donald Bradman Stand at the ground during lunch.

RU cricket

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Dec 6: Statistics beat Physics by 81 runs in the Rajshahi University inter-department cricket tournament at RU stadium today.

Winning the toss, Physics invited Statistics to bat. Statistics scored 139 for 8 in the stipulated 25 overs.

In reply, Physics were bowled out for 58 in 23.4 overs. In the other match, Pharmacy received walkover against Anthropology.

From glory

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1990 Wins first Test as captain against Sri Lanka in Chandigarh, in November.

1992: Captains first team to South Africa after end of apartheid, losing series 1-0 after drawing three of the four Tests.

1993: Leads India to a 3-0 sweep of Graham Gooch's England side in India, scoring 182 in the first Test.

1996: Leads India to semi-finals of World Cup against Sri Lanka in Calcutta on March 13 but crowd trouble sees the game abandoned and Sri Lanka declared the winners.

1996: Loses captaincy to Sachin Tendulkar in August.

1997: Dropped from Indian squad for first time in career.

1998: Re-appointed skipper of team in March after selectors leave Tendulkar to concentrate on his batting.

1998: Becomes first player to play 300 one-day internationals, on October 29, in a match against Australia at Dhaka.

1999: First player to score 9,000 runs in one day internationals, against England in Birmingham, on May 29.

1999: Has shoulder surgery after disappointing World Cup and is then sacked as skipper, again replaced by Tendulkar.

1999: Dropped from team for domestic series against New Zealand and tour of Australia.

2000: Recalled to Indian side after strong domestic season.

2000: Plays last Test, his 99, against South Africa on March 2 at Bangalore, scoring 102 in the second innings.

2000: Plays last one-day international on June 3, an Asian Cup match against Pakistan at Dhaka, scoring just one run.

2000: Named on June 15 by former South African captain Hansie Cronje during the King Inquiry into match-fixing as the man who introduced him to bookmaker M K Gupta.

2000: Named on November 1 as one of five Indian players in a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry into match fixing.

2000: Banned for life by BCCI on December 4.

'Lara should start anew'

CANBERRA, Dec 6. Out-of-form Brian Lara needs to dust himself off and start again, former West Indies skipper Viv Richards said Wednesday, reports AFP.

And speculation that his form was being affected by the presence of his girlfriend should stop because it was nobody else's business, the former Caribbean great said.

Richards is here to watch the tourists take on a Prime Minister's XI in a one-day game Thursday.

He would not say whether Lara, who has scored 21 runs in four Test innings so far this summer but is not playing Thursday, should use the game to get some time in the middle.

"He's certainly a little bit short of runs and I'm quite certain he'll be looking at all the favourite means of trying to find form for the next (Test) match," Richards said.

Lara's atrocious form in Australia has seen him drop out of the world's top 10 batsmen for the first time since 1994.

He has plunged from first to 12th in the past six months, dropping two rungs down the ladder in the past week alone.

after a succession of failures. But Richards defended Lara's current slump. "You're going to have your little ups and downs."

"He'll have to fight his way back. I believe in dusting yourself off. There's nothing wrong with that if you're knocked down. Dust yourself off and hopefully come good again."

Richards bristled at questions about the presence on the tour of Lara's girlfriend and whether the world record holder was being distracted from his cricket.

"I don't think that anyone's business on the outside to know what's right or what's wrong with that particular individual," he said.

"It is Brian's call. If the management and everyone around the management team feels good about him having his lady here, that's no one's business."

"Personally I would like to see that that's finished with because, to be honest, some of us comment a little bit too much on something that doesn't concern us."

Richards said he expected the West Indies would play the game hard against the young PM's side, skippered by Test vice-captain Adam Gilchrist.

"Certainly they do need some form to get themselves back from that disaster in Perth," he said.

"When these things do happen it's nice to start fresh and this game, there is no letting up. It's an Australian A team, there's a lot of competition and there would be places at stake to fight for."

"There is no relaxing for the West Indies. They will be at it all the time."

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Waugh may face audit

SYDNEY, Dec 6 (Internet report): The Australian Cricket Board's special investigator into match-fixing, Greg Melick, may seek to subject Australian batsman Mark Waugh to an independent financial audit.

Melick, a Sydney barrister and former member of the National Crime Authority, will accompany the head of the International Cricket Council's anti-corruption unit, Sir Paul Condon, to Madras and New Delhi to interview police and witnesses.

During its inquiry into the involvement of Indian players, the country's Central Bureau of Investigation reported suspicions surrounding seven leading non-Indian players that were based solely on the evidence of bookmaker Mukesh Gupta. Waugh and West Indies batsman Brian Lara were among those seven.

Gupta said he paid Waugh 20,000 USD for information. Waugh has admitted receiving 4000 USD in Colombo in 1994.

Melick is trying to establish whether the larger sum is a fresh incident that Waugh has kept hidden or whether he and Gupta are quibbling over amounts. It is still unclear whether Gupta is the man who met and paid Waugh in Colombo or another bookmaker altogether.

The ACB has already said it would consider an investigation into Waugh's finances, but this would have to be done with his approval. The batsman said some months ago that he would be willing to allow investigators to delve into his financial records and has repeated that assurance in conversations with senior ACB officials.

Two of those victories came against Spain back in 1965 and 1967, both times on grass.

But this time around, the match will be on a specially prepared red clay court inside the 14,000 capacity Palau Sant Jordi in Barcelona and Spain reckon the change of surface will bring a change of luck.

The final, starting on Friday, will be Spain's fourth successive home tie this season, following comfortable wins over Italy, Russia and the United States.

Javier Duarte's side have lost just two out of 15 rubbers in those three matches and they had the satisfaction of seeing off the US 5-0 in a semi-final at Santander in Bulgaria.

Duarte says he has already made a decision over which of his three top-class clay-court singles men to leave out. But he will reveal nothing until a couple of minutes before tomorrow's draw.

Corretja, ranked eighth in the world, will doubtless be the number one choice, with either 20-year-old Juan Carlos Ferrero (ranked 12) or Albert Costa (26) joining him in action.

They will be up against the hugely talented 19-year-old Lleyton Hewitt, ranked above Corretja at seventh in the world but struggling for full fitness after suffering a virus earlier this year, and Patrick Rafter (15).

Absent, however, is Mark Philippoussis, hero of last year's final won over France and of a nail-biting five-set victory over George Bastl of Switzerland in the final rubber of their first round match this season.

Australia then went on to beat Germany, again 3-2, before storming to a 5-0 win in the semifinal against Brazil.

Both Hewitt and Rafter are quality players with strong reputations, but the feeling in Spain is that the home side will have too much class on clay and there has even been speculation that they will win all four singles rubbers.

Hewitt recognised that Spain would provide tough opposition but he said home advantage may not prove enough to make the difference.

"I'm sure this will be an even tougher match than against France last year," said Hewitt.

"I'm not sure playing at home is such a big factor, though. To win at home or away you have to fight."

Corretja beat Hewitt at the Masters Cup in Lisbon and then added insult to injury by accusing the Australian of going too far with his on-court antics.

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SA to give black quickie a go

JOHANNESBURG, Dec 6: Muthu Kumar, a fast bowler from South Africa's black townships, is set to make his Test debut in the third and final Test against New Zealand starting at the Wanderers Stadium here Friday, reports AFP.

Ngam, 21, recorded the fastest delivery in South African cricket this summer, being timed at 150 kilometres (90 miles) an hour during a domestic day-night game for Eastern Province.

He was picked on standby for Allan Donald, who suffered a stomach muscle injury during the second Test in Port Elizabeth last weekend, which New Zealand lost by seven wickets to hand South Africa the three-match series.

Donald will report with the rest of the South African team in Johannesburg ahead of the final Test but physiotherapist Craig Smith said he would only be passed fit if there was no sign of the injury which forced him off the field last weekend.

Selection convenor Rusdi Magriet said he thought the final Test against New Zealand would be an ideal opportunity to blood Ngam, rather than in the series against Sri Lanka which starts later this month.

"There is nobody in the New Zealand batting lineup who is going to take him apart the way a Sri Lankan captain Samath Jayasuriya might. The pitch at the Wanderers is normally a good one for fast bowlers," he said.

Fellow selector Hylton Ackerman said Ngam had the potential to be South Africa's first black superstar. "He is genuinely quick and impressed people in the West Indies with his pace," he said.

If Ngam plays, he will join Makhaya Ntini on the first occasion that two black Africans have played together for South Africa.

Ntini, 23, has become a regular member of the Test team and took six for 66 in the second innings of the first Test in Bloemfontein.

With South Africa having won the first two Tests, New Zealand will be trying to avoid a whitewash at the end of a long tour. Some of the players have been together since a one-day tournament in Singapore in August.

Injuries have taken their toll and New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming admitted after the second Test that the pressure had finally got to his team when they collapsed on a good pitch in the second innings in Port Elizabeth.

"After the way we played in the first two Tests and being away for four months, we would like to finish on a high note," said Fleming.

It will not be easy to motivate an embattled New Zealand team which suffered a 5-0 beating in a one-day series before losing the first two Tests.

Fleming said a string of injuries to key bowlers had been a big blow. "It's disappointing not to have a few top guns here but a positive has been the emergence of young bowlers like Chris Martin, Brooke Walker and Kerry Walmesley," he said.

South Africa, on the other hand, are riding a wave of confidence. "The Wanderers is a ground we enjoy," said South African captain Shaun Pollock, "and there's usually something in the wicket for the bowlers."

Pollock said he hoped good crowds would attend the Wanderers Test after disappointing attendances at the first two matches of the series.

"I think we're playing good cricket and it would be nice to get full stadiums," he said.

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Condon, Melick coming to India

LONDON, Dec 6: World cricket's chief corruption investigator is to fly out to India in the wake of the decision to ban former India captain Mohammad Azharuddin for life and suspend his Test teammate Ajay Jadeja for five years, reports AFP.

Paul Condon, head of the International Cricket Council's (ICC) anti-corruption unit and the Australian Cricket Board's (ACB) special investigator Greg Melick are flying to India to follow up the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) report's allegations of malpractice.

The pair will hold two days of talks with Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) officials, senior Indian Government officials and the chief officer of the New Delhi Police.

The announcement was made at the conclusion of a meeting here Tuesday.

"Today's (Tuesday) talks were a private exchange of information and an update of current status concerning ongoing investigations into the CBI report," said Condon, the former head of London's Metropolitan Police.

"As a result of this both Greg Melick and myself are going to India to seek further information relating to the allegations that have been made against overseas cricketers."

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