

Vaughan the man to stop

AFP, Perth

Australia's fast bowlers will target star England batsman Michael Vaughan with a barrage of short-pitched deliveries in the third Ashes cricket Test starting here Friday.

Andy Bichel, one of the home country's three-pronged pace attack, said here Wednesday he and Glenn McGrath and Jason Gillespie had worked out a strategy they hoped would enable them to dismiss the Yorkshire opener cheaply.

Vaughan hammered 177 and 41 in last week's second Test in Adelaide, even though the tourists were crushed by an innings and 51 runs.

"There is no doubt that in that first innings he looked uncomfortable at certain times against short balls," Bichel said.

"We will definitely be targeting him again at certain times -- there is no doubt about that."

Vaughan has displayed a strong appetite for hooking short deliveries, and is not afraid to loft the ball.

That brand of batting brought him many runs in Adelaide, but it could be much more hazardous at Perth's WACA Ground where the extra pace and bounce of the pitch presents additional problems.

Bichel said he had been surprised to hear talk of a possible 5-0 whitewash by Australia in a series they already lead 2-0 after runaway wins in Brisbane and Adelaide.

Such a result has been achieved only once before in 120 years of Ashes Tests.

Australia's Warwick Armstrong led his side to a 5-0 rout over Johnny Douglas' visitors in 1920-21.

"I was a bit surprised to hear the talk of a whitewash because in recent times in England the Englishmen have played some wonderful cricket," Bichel said.

Muralitharan

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three and six weeks to "get back to work or full activity."

Quintus de Zylva, an Australia-based Sri Lankan team doctor, said it would be three weeks before Muralitharan trained.

"He's recovering okay," de Zylva said on Wednesday.

"But he's unlikely to be fit for competitive cricket until in the New Year."

It was initially understood Muralitharan underwent the operation as a precautionary measure ahead of next year's World Cup in South Africa.

But de Zylva said the operation would ensure the brilliant off-spinner wouldn't be sidelined for a longer spell in the future.

"It was important for it to be fixed, with the amount of physical stress they put themselves through, rather than have an emergency procedure later," he said.

Muralitharan is recovering here and is yet to decide between returning home or awaiting his teammates' arrival.

Sri Lanka will arrive on December 11, in time for their first tri-series clash against England in Brisbane six days later.

Rampant Elahi

Elahi run out (Ervine/Taibu)	108
Youhana not out	100
Afridi c Nkala b Brent	0
Akmal not out	24
Extras: (lb-8, w-14, nb-1)	23
Total: (For 3 wkts in 50 overs)	323
Fall of wickets: 1-154, 2-246, 3-246	
Did not bat: Faisal Iqbal, Inzamamul Haq, Wasim Akram, Saqlain Mushtaq, Waqar Younis, Mohammad Zahid	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Hondo	10	1	58	0
Ervine	10	1	65	0
Brent	10	0	60	1
Nkala	10	0	80	0
G Flower	10	0	52	1

ZIMBABWE: Mark Vermeulen, Dion Ebrahim, Alistair Campbell, Andy Flower, Grant Flower, Craig Evans, Tendata Taibu, Muleki Nkala, Sean Ervine, Gary Brent, Douglas Hondo.

Umpires: K Barbour and D Orchard.

Rashid bids

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the PCB.

Latif's recent replacement, young Kamran Akmal has impressed with both his glove-work and batting. Equally comfortable keeping wickets to both spinners and pacemen alike, Akmal has won the appreciation of several pundits.

With Latif's retirement from Test cricket, it is widely believed that the Pakistan selectors will persist with Akmal in Tests while sticking with Latif in the one-dayers.

The situation however also gives a glimmer of hope to Moin Khan who is playing domestic cricket in Pakistan on three occasions. A safe, if not flashy keeper, Latif chalked up 102 catches and 10 stumpings in Tests. A useful lower-order batsman, Latif came to Pakistan's rescue more than once, scoring one hundred and six fifties in reaching 1277 runs at an average of almost 30.

It is also worth remembering that Latif retired from all forms of cricket once in 1995 due to administrative problems with the Pakistan cricket set up but later reconsidered his decision.

Mike makes Nasser angry

AFP, Perth

Besieged England captain Nasser Hussain responded angrily here Wednesday to criticism by former England skipper Mike Gatting, the last Englishman to lead his side to an Ashes series victory over Australia.

Gatting, whose side beat Allan Border's team here 2-1 in the 1986-87 campaign, condemned Hussain for leaving for Australia two weeks before the rest of his team to travel to Perth with his heavily pregnant wife.

"Nasser hasn't helped the cause by spending time away with his family," Gatting told the London Daily Express.

"Pregnant wife or not, I just couldn't believe he had left for Australia two weeks ahead of the rest of the party."

"It is simply unheard of for a team to travel without the skipper on board."

But Hussain, visibly angry, rejected the criticism at a media conference two days before his side takes on Australia in the third Test at the WACA Ground, aiming for an improved performance after crashing heavily in the first two clashes.

"If that's what an ex-England captain thinks is the difference between the sides, then so be it,"

Hussain said.

"If he believes we are losing 0-2 because I came out two weeks early, then that's his opinion.

"If that is why we are losing to Australia for the last 12 or 16 years, because I came out two weeks early, then English cricket has got some real things to think about."

Hussain was also irritated by a question about the psychological advantage some observers suggest Australia hold over their English opponents.

"I don't wish to be rude, but if I am going to do press conferences I don't wish to repeat myself," he said.

"I answered this question after the second Test, and unless some miracle has happened in the past two days, the answer is exactly the same."

"Australia do not have a psychological hold on us," he insisted.

"What they do have is people who do their disciplines and play the game of cricket at the moment better than us -- simple as that."

"At the moment, they are playing the game, putting the ball in the right areas, being much more positive about their batting and playing the game better."

"It is not a psychological thing -- it is just a technical and ability thing. The sooner we watch them, watch how they practise, watch how they play the game, watch their disciplines when they bowl and when they bat, the sooner we will get better."

"On the injury front, Hussain said fast bowler Andy Caddick, middle-order batsman John Crawley and star opening batsman Michael Vaughan were all fighting to be fit for Friday.

Caddick, who injured his back in Adelaide, faces a fitness test Thursday.

Crawley, who has a torn hip, was rated by Hussain at 65 per cent fit Wednesday.

But Vaughan, struggling with a knee problem, was almost certain to play, Hussain said.

Even though Bradman, considered the greatest batsman of all-time, was no longer chairman of the ACB, Chappell said he dominated two board meetings Chappell attended to lobby for better conditions for cricketers.

At the time the ACB had gate receipts of up to 250,000 dollars (140,000 US) per Test while players received only 200 dollars (112 US) each.

Chappell revealed in the program he was approached three times during his Australian leadership from 1972 to 1975 to play privately-funded exhibition matches outside the normal international program.

Chappell was coaxed out of retirement to lead Kerry Packer's breakaway cricket series from 1977 to 1979 as the media mogul sought to gain exclusive international coverage for his Nine Network, signing 55 players from all Test nations.

Chappell said he had a half-time dressing down after Ireland had pulled a goal back through Jenny Burke for a 2-1 scoreline at the break.

"I told them 'Be more aggressive and stop allowing intercepts through the midfield,'" Bell said.

Australia came out firing in the second half, getting quality passes into the circle but not scoring.

Australia failed to convert six penalty corners as they camped in Ireland's half and failed to add to the

"That's instead of talking about this big blame thing about mental attitude and stuff like that.

"Because that will only get you so far. You really do have to do the game properly -- bat and bowl properly if you are going to beat Australia."

Hussain dismissed suggestions he was under pressure after the side's abysmal start to the tour -- they have lost three of seven games and have yet to register a win.

"I am only answerable to myself and my team."

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Whitewash the target

ICC Cricket World Cup SOUTH AFRICA 2003

AFP, Perth

Steve Waugh's irrepressible Australians set out here Friday to wrap up the Ashes series against a demoralised England -- and move a step closer to a record-equalling clean sweep against the old cricket enemy.

Victory at the revamped WACA Ground would carry the home country -- already two-nil up after runaway four-day wins in Brisbane and Adelaide -- to an unbeatable three-nil lead in the five-match series.

It would also take them closer to a five-nil whitewash, a feat achieved only once before in the 120-year history of Ashes combat.

Warwick Armstrong was at the helm when Australia swamped their English visitors in all five clashes of the 1920-1921 campaign.

England have recorded five wins in a series, but that was in a six-Test programme won 5-1 by the astute Mike Brearley in 1978-1979 when Australian ranks were depleted by the breakaway World Series camp.

Waugh, a captain who likes to tackle one game at a time, must privately fancy his side's chances of matching Armstrong's achievement.

It is no secret that he and his team-mates were bitterly disappointed when, after leading 3-0 in the series in England last year, they lost the fourth Test at Headingley after acting captain Adam Gilchrist made a generous second innings declaration which let England back into the game.

England physiotherapist Kirk Russell said Caddick was to have his condition re-assessed after he had a steroid injection in his back.

"At this stage he is not ruled out," Russell said.

Middle order batsman John Crawley's torn hip will almost certainly sideline him.

There are high hopes that star opening batsman Michael Vaughan, who is averaging 62.75 in the series, will be able to overcome a severely bruised right shoulder.

If Caddick cannot play, he is likely to be replaced by Alex Tudor, one of the five replacements named by England since their touring squad was originally picked.

Tudor shook up the Australian batsmen when he made his Test debut at the WACA Ground four years ago.

Also under consideration for England is all-rounder Paul Collingwood, who has been plucked from Melbourne club cricket to boost the tourists' ailing squad.

Aged 26, Collingwood is a right-hand batsman and right-arm medium-pace bowler who has played in 25 one-day internationals, but is yet to make his Test debut.

Off-spinner Gareth Batty, 25, who is working at England's cricket academy in Adelaide, has been placed on standby to race to Perth if another player is injured.

The outcome of the Perth match appears to hinge on the clash between England's shell-shocked batsmen -- routed for scores of 79 and 159 in the second innings of the first two Tests -- and Australia's champion pace attack, headed by Glenn McGrath and Jason Gillespie.

The WACA Ground wicket is not as lightning fast as in earlier times, but still rewards class pacemen, especially in the early stages. It should be ideal for the Australian pair, who will be probably be supported by the reliable Andy Bichel.

WACA curator Richard Winter said the pitch should reward good bowling and penalise bad batting.

"It has rolled out well and should have some lively pace and bounce," he said.

England's only hope appears to be to bat first and make a competitive total, with skipper Nasser Hussain and the experienced Mark Butcher and Alec Stewart giving greater support to openers Vaughan and Marcus Trescothick before the brittle tail is exposed.

Tyson ready for comeback

Boxing

AFP, Tunica

Mike Tyson cracked jokes and laughed at a news conference here Tuesday announcing his first fight since losing to Lennox Lewis last June, a return to nearby Memphis next February.

In the same ring where British heavyweight champion Lewis knocked him out in the eighth round, Tyson will face fellow American Clifford Etienne in a 10-round fight on February 22 at the Pyramid arena in the Tennessee city.

"I'm happy to be back. You must've loved my last show," Tyson said with a laugh. "I'm just happy to be here."

Tyson, 49-4 with 43 knockouts, will have a layoff of nearly eight months before fighting "The Black Rhino", who fought a 10-round draw with South Africa's Francois Botha in July in his most recent outing.

Former undisputed world champion Tyson was an angry and outspoken fighter before the Lewis fight, which prompted Tyson to proclaim once more his innocence about a rape conviction from a decade ago.

"I don't know about him, but I didn't do what they locked me up for," said Tyson, who spent 3 1/2 years in prison after being convicted of raping a beauty pageant contestant in Indianapolis.

Between having his license suspended for 15 months for biting Holyfield's ear and being jailed for assaulting a pair of motorists near his Maryland mansion, Tyson stopped Botha in five rounds on January 16, 1999 in Las Vegas.

Until the knockout at the hands of Lewis, Tyson had not lost in six bouts since his suspension. Tyson's bout with Etienne will be only his third in 28 months.

In 1986, a 20-year-old Tyson became the youngest heavyweight champion in history when he dropped Trevor Berbick in the second round.

He held the title for nearly four years before being knocked out by Buster Douglas in a stunning upset in 1990 at Tokyo.

Tyson has not owned a major title since 1996 and his chances of claiming another depend largely upon winning this fight and rebuilding his place among the contenders.

In addition to Lewis' fight, World Boxing Association champion John Ruiz is set to defend March 1 in Las Vegas against undisputed light-heavyweight king Roy Jones. The vacant International Boxing Federation title goes to the winner of December's Holyfield-Chris Byrd showdown in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Referring to sanctions he said: "I should say there are no sporting sanctions in place on Zimbabwe."

If any country independently declines to play here, following the ICC visit, its match against the Zimbabwe side will be moved to neighbouring South Africa.

If the ICC report is adverse, Zimbabwe cricket will be severely damaged, both in status as a Test nation and financially as Zimbabwe would lose about four million US dollars in television and advertising revenues.

Blaming Bradman

AFP, Sydney

Donald Bradman's unwillingness to pay players better and improve conditions was a major factor behind the World Series Cricket rebellion in the 1970s, according to former Australian captain Ian Chappell.

Chappell said the late Bradman's tightness with the Australian Cricket Board's money led as much as anything else to starting the break-away series.

"Bradman to me has as much to do with the starting of World Series Cricket as anybody because I got the feeling Bradman treated the board money as though it was almost his own money," says Chappell on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's "Cricket in the 70s, The Chappell Era" television documentary shown on Wednesday.

Even though Bradman, considered the greatest batsman of all-time, was no longer chairman of the ACB, Chappell said he dominated two board meetings Chappell attended to lobby for better conditions for cricketers.

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Hockeyroos earn full points

AFP, Perth

Olympic champions Australia made it three wins out of three at the women's hockey World Cup here Wednesday with a hard-earned 2-1 win over plucky Ireland in Pool B.

A spectacular backstick shot from Katrina Powell proved decisive for the Hockeyroos, who had earlier opened the scoring with a Karen Smith strike from a penalty corner.

"We are satisfied with the three points. Three wins from three matches, but they gave us trouble," Australia coach David Bell said.

Bell had given his team a half-time dressing down after Ireland had pulled a goal back through Jenny Burke for a 2-1 scoreline at the break.

"I told them 'Be more aggressive and stop allowing intercepts through the midfield,'" Bell said.

Australia came out firing in the second half, getting quality passes into the circle but not scoring.

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In Wednesday's earlier matches, Japan battled back from a goal down to upset 11th-seeded USA 2-1 in another Pool B game.

A lucky Kristen McCann goal on 14 minutes put the Americans into the lead after veteran skipper Tracey Fuchs tried an ambitious long-range effort from outside the circle.

But Japan battled back and secured an impressive win courtesy of two goals from Kaori Chiba, pouncing on an error by USA goalkeeper Peggy Storrar to make it 1-1.

Chiba capitalised on indecision in the USA defence for the winner, connecting with a loose rebound from a Sachimi Iwao free-hit to deflect a flick into goal.

"We felt we had a good chance of winning as we beat USA 3-1 in our last encounter in the Six-Nations tournament in Japan," Japan coach Zenjiro Yasuda said.

"We also realised that USA has been playing captain Tracey Fuchs deeper in defence and it was hard for us to attack when she is in defence."

In the earlier match, Spain beat South Africa 3-1.

"We did not play a good match but we got the three points," said Spain's coach Jack Holtman. "The team felt pressure after the loss to Australia," he added.

Nuria Morena relieved that pressure, carving through the midfield unopposed, drawing Caroline Birt out from South Africa's goal to set up 17-year-old Maria Ramagosa to tap in Spain's first goal and her second of the tournament.

Spain took a two-goal lead into the break when Raquel Huertas latched onto a loose ball in the circle, flicking high into goal six minutes before the break.

South Africa pressured Spain's goal after the break. Spain weathered the pressure and replied with an individual goal by Nuria Canon, driving into the circle from the left, drawing Caroline Birt and flicking into the empty goal from in front.

Pietie Coetzee kept up her average of a goal in every international -- 128 goals, 127 caps -- scoring with a drag flick from South Africa's fourth penalty corner to give South Africa a face-saving goal.

Stage set for hero's farewell

Tennis

AFP, Moscow

The retirement of Russian tennis icon Yevgeny Kafelnikov, which may come this weekend should his side defeat France in the Davis Cup final, would lower the curtain on a brilliant career that helped put Russian tennis on the map.

A native of the Black Sea resort town of Sochi who turned pro in 1992, Kafelnikov spearheaded the game's post-Soviet revival, the first Russian player to top the ATP rankings in May 1999.

The 28-year-old was also the first Russian to win a Grand Slam title, claiming the French Open in 1996 and the 1999 Australian Open.

And he almost single-handedly led Russia to two Davis Cup finals, which to Kafelnikov's bitter disappointment his side lost at home -- 4-1 to Sweden in 1994, and 3-2 to the United States in 1995.

But the winner of 26 ATP singles titles and more than 23 million dollars in prize money has pointed to the 2000 Olympic gold medal which he won for Russia at the Sydney Games as his most significant achievement so far.

"I've had a pretty unrewarding six days and the bottom line is that it's been a pain in the neck, but now I'm here my tail is up and I'm ready for the Test," Hayden said.

"If worse comes to worst, I could have a local anaesthetic, but I'm hoping it won't come to that."

Hayden has slammed 346 runs off the England bowlers in just two matches

He went straight from Perth airport to the nets at the WACA Ground to bat for the first time since scoring 46 during Australia's victory by an innings and 51 runs in Adelaide last week.

"Sitting down on the flight was hard work, but I've come across here earlier than anticipated, so that's a good start," Hayden said.

"If I'm not 100 per cent, then I won't play and I've got some fitness tests to do. I've only just started walking, but I think I'll be alright."

"I love the Perth Test and playing in Perth. It's a great event and now it's massively important for the series."

Zimbabwe's

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Zimbabwe is going to act in this way then the ICC should consider whether it is a fit and proper place to run international cricket matches.

Speed responded that his group would attempt to speak to immigration authorities about it.

They will also have meetings with the Sports Minister, city mayors, police authorities, foreign diplomats and security organisations. There are, however, no plans to meet President Mugabe, who is patron of the Zimbabwe Cricket Union.

The visiting officials will also consider the possibility of severe food and fuel shortages which might prevail in the crisis-hit country.

Speed was adamant that none of the six nations' governments had made contact with him or their cricket chiefs prior to arrival in Zimbabwe, "so there has been no political pressure."

"Sport is a blunt political instrument and doesn't work," he emphasised, ignoring a comment on British minister (for Wales) Peter Hain's campaigning activities in helping to bring down the apartheid government of South Africa almost 20 years ago.

Referring to sanctions he said: "I should say there are no sporting sanctions in place on Zimbabwe."