

Razor sharp

Lee

AFP, Johannesburg

Australia's Brett Lee, one of the world's fastest bowlers, has struck a rich vein of form at the optimum moment.

Tall, blond and athletic, with an intimidating explosive approach to the wicket, the 26-year-old from New South Wales has always had speed to spare.

The one attribute missing until recently control.

That problem has been overcome in recent months after Lee received the biggest shock of his career in November - he was dropped from the Australian Test side for the first two Tests of the Ashes series against England.

Sent back to Sheffield Shield ranks to sharpen his game, Lee responded immediately, grabbing a welter of victims, which earned a recall for the third Test.

He has not looked back.

The lightning pace remains: deliveries of 150 kilometres-plus (93 mph) an hour are common but now accompanied by lethal accuracy.

His economy during the recent tri-nations series against England and Sri Lanka in Australia was a revelation. He was named Player of the Series.

In nine matches he snapped up 18 wickets at an average of 18.77 from 82.3 thundering overs costing an average of 4.1 runs.

When it really counted in two finals against England, Lee snatched eight wickets at an average of 7.37 and hurled down 19.3 overs costing an average of just three runs each.

Lee has had to overcome much adversity to become one of the game's best strike bowlers.

Stress fractures in his back sidelined him five years ago before elbow surgery later put him out of action. Also, he has had to withstand murmurings about the legitimacy of his action before International Cricket Council (ICC) experts cleared him.

Fast, furious and exciting, Lee looms as a potential tournament winner for his country.

Aus minister worried

AFP, Sydney

The Australian government has been told widespread protests during Australia's World Cup cricket match in Zimbabwe are likely to turn violent, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said Sunday.

He said Australia's High Commissioner to Zimbabwe, Jonathan Brown, had sent the government a "disturbing report" after a two-day reconnaissance mission in Bulawayo, where Australian cricketers are scheduled to play Zimbabwe on February 24.

Brown had reported to Canberra that the Zimbabwean police would not guarantee a controlled response to the planned protests, Downer told reporters in Adelaide.

Downer also called on the International Cricket Council (ICC) to reverse its decision to support matches going ahead as scheduled in Zimbabwe and Kenya.

"It is our view that the ICC should move the games from Zimbabwe to more appropriate locations in Africa," he said.

Several Australian players have admitted growing concerns about playing in Zimbabwe.

Matthew Hayden, the world's number one ranked batsman, said on the Australian team's departure here Thursday that he would refuse to shake the hand of Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe because of moral issues.

Zimbabwean golfer Tony Johnstone said in Melbourne on Sunday that Australia's cricketers risked being targeted by protest groups and would be used as a propaganda tool by the discredited Zimbabwean government.

McGrath's bold

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mount a strong challenge. McGrath thinks, however, that Australia will have a psychological edge when the two sides meet.

"Remember that last year we played well against them to record a convincing 5-1 scoreline in front of their home crowds. I'm confident we can beat them again when it matters."

"The Proteas play with a lot of confidence against every other team but us. I feel as though they don't believe they can beat us and that attitude has helped us score some big wins over them."

Pumped up

FROM PAGE 13

"We played nine international games in New Zealand, and the side batting last won eight of them," Wright told reporters.

"The wickets have been very good in the net practices we've had here."

India will play their first warm-up match against a Natal XI in Pietermaritzburg on Tuesday.

The opening match in the World Cup is between South Africa and West Indies in Cape Town on February 9.



PHOTO: COURTESY
David J H Griffiths, Chief Executive Officer of HSBC, hands over a cheque for Tk 2,06250 to Bilquis Dada of the Milon Akhbar Gyan School in Chittagong on January 25. The amount was raised from the HSBC Charity Golf Tournament held at the Bhatiary Golf and Country Club in December.

Younis stars for Pakistan

ICC Cricket World Cup
SOUTH AFRICA 2003

INTERNET, Johannesburg

Younis Khan smashed 30 runs off the last over on way to scoring an unbeaten 94 as Pakistan recorded a nine-run victory over Gauteng Invitation XI in a pre-World Cup 50-over-a-side friendly match at Alberton south of Johannesburg on Saturday.

Younis smashed four successive sixes, a four and a two in the last over of Adam Bacher to help Pakistan reach 265 for eight, including 66 off the last 30 deliveries of the innings. Younis, who was 41 after 45 overs in Pakistan's 199 for seven, clobbered five fours and six sixes in a thundering 65-ball innings.

The home team, whose victory target was revised to 255 in 47 overs because of rain in the afternoon, finished short at 245 for seven.

YOUNIS...94 n.o



African safari last year and finished as pick of the bowlers with three for 50 from eight overs. Younis, who notched up his half-

century from 52 balls with three fours and a six, scored his last 44 runs from a mere 13 deliveries that included four sixes and two fours.

Younis, adjudged man-of-the-match, dominated an unbroken 45-run unfinished ninth wicket stand with Saqain Mushtaq who chipped in with eight.

For Pakistan, who batted first in hot and humid conditions before something around 3,000 spectators, was also helped by decent contributions by stand-in captain Inzamamul Haq (44 off 80 balls), Younis Youhana (32 off 51 balls), Shahid Afridi (32 off 25 balls) and Abdul Razzaq (23 off 40 balls).

The only serious partnership was for the fourth wicket between Inzamam and Younis who added 76 runs off 117 balls after Pakistan were left struggling at 50 for three.

Pakistan left out skipper Waqar Younis, Wasim Akram, Shoaib Akhtar and Saleem Elahi for this match.

he sees his responsibility as "running the middle order" which can't be done if he gets out early. He is capable of explosive hitting, however, and smashed a half-century off 24 balls against Sri Lanka at Centurion.

His bowling, which fell away during the 2001/02 season, has become a major factor again, the result of which he says is a small technical change. He is able to generate genuine pace and can get late swing.

Kallis pushed his Test batting average above 50 during his recent run of successes and his one-day average is a healthy 44.04. He has hit eight centuries and 42 fifties in 162 innings.

With 164 wickets at an average of 29.73, he is a player on whom South Africa will rely during the most important six weeks in the country's cricket history.

Mr Reliable

ICC Cricket World Cup
SOUTH AFRICA 2003

AFP, Cape Town

Jacques Kallis has made a habit of collecting man-of-the-match and man-of-the-series awards but he would swap them all for a chance to put his hands on the World Cup.

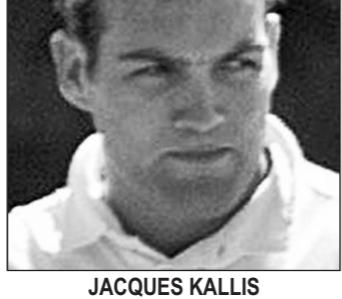
All-rounder Kallis has become one of the most consistent players in world cricket, a solid batsman, lively pace bowler and superb catcher in the slips or in the outfield.

This season alone he was man of the series in three successive series, the Tests against Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and the one-day series against Sri Lanka, having collected man of the match prizes in all three series as well.

The quietly-spoken Kallis makes no secret of his World Cup ambitions. He played in the 1996 and

1999 tournaments. South Africa were favourites in both but fell short.

JACQUES KALLIS



"We have had plenty of opportunities. It is about time we came right and produced the results," he said.

Kallis has sometimes been criticised for scoring too slowly but

One-man army!

AFP, Johannesburg

Adam Gilchrist Gilchrist the Great, one Australian newspaper christened him must rank as potentially the number one match-winner in the tournament.

Tall, lean and left-handed, the 31-year-old has the capacity to destroy any attack with his fearless, frenzied stroke-making against pace and spin.

He has become an explosive opener in the one-day arena, where he can take full toll of field restrictions.

Unconcerned about risks in lofting the ball, he has shots all round the wicket, but is especially devastating with his squarish offside strokes and those down the ground.

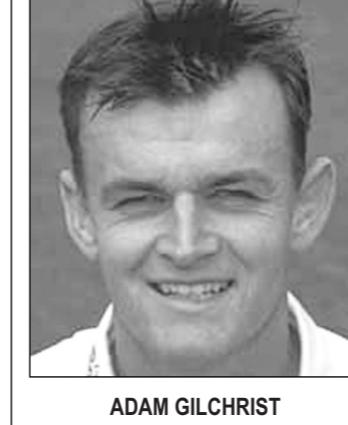
Gilchrist forms an outstanding opening liaison with fellow left-hander Matthew Hayden.

The pair demonstrated just how dangerous they can be when they slammed 118 off 12.2 overs in 57 minutes against England in the first tri-nations series final in Sydney in January.

Gilchrist smashed 69 not out all but nine in boundaries from 37 balls.

In the same match, he starred with the wicketkeeping gloves to snitch six victims.

Born in the New South Wales country, 500 kilometres (310 miles) north of Sydney, Gilchrist was obliged, because of the talent in his home state, to travel to faraway



ADAM GILCHRIST

Western Australia to make a mark in first-class cricket.

It was anything but a smooth transition. Some Perth fans even booed the youngster in his early games in the West eight seasons ago after State selectors had dropped former Test wicketkeeper Tim Seoher to make room for the import.

But it was not long before Gilchrist's electrifying displays with bat and gloves earned the respect and affection of WACA Ground spectators as he trotted the road towards international stardom.

He sees his responsibility as "running the middle order" which can't be done if he gets out early. He is capable of explosive hitting, however, and smashed a half-century off 24 balls against Sri Lanka at Centurion.

His bowling, which fell away during the 2001/02 season, has become a major factor again, the result of which he says is a small technical change. He is able to generate genuine pace and can get late swing.

Kallis pushed his Test batting average above 50 during his recent run of successes and his one-day average is a healthy 44.04. He has hit eight centuries and 42 fifties in 162 innings.

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Primera Liga

Barca so poor!

Football

AFP, Madrid

Radomir Antic, left at home by his new employers, was spared a baptism of fire as Barcelona's newly-appointed coach Saturday as the fallen Spanish giants went down 3-0 at Atletico Madrid.

The 34-year-old Yugoslav, a former coach at Atletico, Real Madrid and Oviedo, replaced Dutchman Louis van Gaal who left the post earlier this week after just eight months at the troubled Nou

Camp.

However club officials felt it was too soon to throw Antic into the fray - a decision he perhaps will have welcomed after watching the match on television at home.

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Garcia.

Ahead of Sunday's main match day Barcelona still sit in 12th place and, mathematically, could find themselves in the unlikely position of the relegation zone if certain results go against them.

Barcelona, who are going through one of their biggest crises in their history, went into the match deprived of star scorer Patrick Kluivert and his Dutch team-mate Phillippe Cocu, both suspended, and Argentine wonder boy Saviola, who is injured.

To compound matters, Barcelona's stand-in coach Antonio De La Cruz had to replace defender Philippe Christanval in the 22nd minute when the Frenchman hobbled off injured.

Atletico meanwhile are pushing closer towards a place in Europe next season and seemed to be extra motivated - perhaps by Barca's state of crisis and the fact they were recently dumped out of the Spanish Cup by bottom club Recreativo Huelva.

They now move up to seventh place, and going on Saturday's form may well achieve their objectives.

Brazilian midfielder Emerson first threatened in the 15th minute with a powerful shot that was saved, at the second attempt, by Barca's Argentine keeper Roberto Bonano.</p