

India may delay

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with Pakistan under pressure from the International Cricket Council (ICC), immediately agreed to play a Test series in March.

The Pakistan Cricket Board, which hopes to make 20 million dollars from the money-spinning series, was flooded with offers to sponsor what is regarded as one of the sport's greatest rivalries.

The Indian cricketers, who have just ended a gruelling 10-week tour of Australia, said they were willing to go to Pakistan provided adequate security was given to them.

"We are not worried about touring Pakistan but about the security," captain Saurav Ganguly said this week on his return from Australia.

Australia and the West Indies refused to play in Pakistan due to security fears after the US-led strikes in neighbouring Afghanistan in 2001.

New Zealand were forced to abandon their tour of Pakistan in 2002 after a bomb blast outside the team hotel in Karachi on the morning of a Test match.

But matches by Bangladesh, South Africa and New Zealand in Pakistan this season passed off peacefully.



Karachiites, holding posters urging India to undertake the tour of Pakistan, stand outside the National Stadium yesterday.

Warming up

Ricky best Aussie



AFP, Melbourne

New Australian Test cricket captain Ricky Ponting won the Allan Border Medal here on Thursday as the country's top international cricketer for the past 12 months.

Ponting finished well clear in the voting for his first Border Medal in the award's five-year history, polling 139 votes with opening batsman Matthew Hayden second on 91 and wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist third on 71.

Ponting also took out his second-successive Test player of the year award.

But Gilchrist denied Ponting the third leg of the sweep when he won the international one-day player of the year category announced at a gala dinner here.

Gilchrist led the one-day voting for the second-straight year with 28 votes, four ahead of Ponting and Brett Lee.

The 29-year-old Tasmanian run machine topped the Test voting with 13, three clear of Hayden.

Ponting played in 11 of Australia's 12 Tests for the voting period, starting with the West Indies tour last April.

He scored 1,557 runs at an average of 103.8, with a top score of 257.

Last year he became the first Test batsman since Sir Donald

Bradman to score three double centuries in a calendar year.

Ponting was the only Australian to play in all 37 one-dayers for the voting period, starting with last year's World Cup, and posted the



RICKY PONTING

second-highest run tally with 1,317 at 43.90 and a strike rate of 81.64.

Gilchrist led the Australian one-day run aggregate with 1,463 runs in 33 games at a strike rate of 105.63 and an average of 45.71. He scored two centuries, with a highest score of 172.

Former Test players Alan Davidson and Hugh Trumble were officially inducted into the Australian Cricket Hall of Fame.

The Australian team leave here on Friday for a one-day series in Sri Lanka.

Sumathipala trial begins

CRICINFO, undated

The trial of Thilanga Sumathipala, president of the Sri Lankan Cricket (SLC), began on February 10.

Sumathipala, held in police custody since January 19, has been charged under the Immigration and Emigration Act after allegations that he helped Amarasinghe, a known underworld gangster, travel to England to watch the 1999 World Cup on a false passport.

The opening day of the case centred on the medical state of Sumathipala. He missed two earlier court appointments before being taken into custody, and was then held at National Hospital Merchant's Ward rather than Welikada Prison because of kidney problems and a spinal condition.

Sumathipala appeared in court in a wheelchair.

Div I v'ball

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Three matches were decided in the First Division Volleyball League at Khulna Outer Stadium on Wednesday.

In the first match, Khulna Biddu Club beat Amvita Adarsa Club 3-0, while Young Abahani Krira Chakra defeated Junior Winners Club by the same margin.

Fair World Club defeated Prativa Sporting Club 5-2.

RICKY PONTING

caption: "Shane Warne is back".

Inside on page seven, the newspaper ran two more photographs, one of Australia's leading wicket-taker gazing skywards and another of wife Simone looking on from the stands at Melbourne's Junction Oval.

The newspaper's main back-page headline appeared to sum up the cricket-loving nation's hopes, GO SHANE, and added a kicker heading: "Ticket to Sri Lanka already booked", in a reference to Australia's Test tour next month.

Two more pages of Warne photographs in the sports section showed him batting, fielding in the slips and shaking hands with umpire Paul Reiffel, his former Test teammate.

National broadsheet The Australian showed Warne, 34, looking up at the drizzle in a large

front-page photograph below a heading: "Sky's the limit to Warne's comeback".

The Australian also showed Warne on its back page, walking proudly out to field in his designer sunglasses and blue Victoria cap.

Melbourne broadsheet The Age ran large photographs of Test cricket's second highest wicket-taker on its front and back pages, showing Warne giving a Churchillian two-fingered salute to applause from fans as he walked out to field.

The Age's back-page heading was "What's all this, a reign delay?"

Warne was banned last year after testing positive for a diuretic, which can be used to mask other drugs, in the biggest doping scandal to hit cricket.

And if Moles' idea was followed to the letter, then the top team in the second tier would play against the bottom-ranked Test nation in a series every three years, to assess their progress.

Foreman plans a comeback

AFP, Houston

Former world heavyweight champion George Foreman told a television station here he was training for a return to the ring, American press reported on Tuesday.

The 1968 Olympic champion, who as world champion lost to Muhammad Ali in the famous Rumble in the Jungle fight in 1974, has been training since his 55th birthday on January 10 and said if he can get down to 100kg he will return.

Foreman surprised everyone at the age of 45 and a 10-year absence from the ring to beat 26-year-old Michael Moorer to win the WBA and IBF heavyweight titles in November 1994. He has not fought however since losing to fellow American Shannon Briggs in 1997.

Foreman was one of the most powerful punchers in boxing history and became the undisputed heavyweight champion on January 22, 1973 with a devastating second-round technical knockout of Joe Frazier.

He made two successful defenses before getting knocked out by Ali.

Foreman had a career record of 76-5 with 68 knockouts.

McGrath runs

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proving his fitness and equally unlikely the selectors will rely on a hunch he is ready to add to his 95 Tests and 430 wickets with no cricket behind him.

NSW will name its Shield side on Monday, but a team spokesman said on Thursday McGrath would not be considered for a four-day match without having played either a club match or a one-day match.

McGrath has not played a Test for Australia since last July's second Test against Bangladesh in Cairns.

Australian chairman of selectors Trevor Hohns this week admitted McGrath might be too ambitious in aiming to return in the Sri Lanka series.

Kenya eyes

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For many of the Kenyans, the Caribbean tour is their first stab at four-day cricket, and Moles admitted that the transition was proving tricky.

"In the one-day game the batsmen can concentrate for an hour-and-a-half," he said, "but to stay in for three or four sessions is more difficult for them. Surprisingly, the wickets have been slow and low, all the batsmen are eventually getting out caught in the covers and things. But the more cricket we are playing the better we get."

Most of the Kenyan World Cup squad were over 30, but now they have bloodied four or five players under the age of 22. It is a sign of definite progress, according to Moles, but he has greater ambitions for his charges.

"We should play with Zimbabwe, Bangladesh and another new Test nation," he admitted. "It wouldn't be full Test status, but when you see how Bangladesh and Zimbabwe have struggled recently you cannot imagine the sponsors rushing to support some of these matches."

"But the four countries in the second tier would be strengthened by playing more competitive cricket," he added, "rather than being on the wrong end of a good hiding every time."

And if Moles' idea was followed to the letter, then the top team in the second tier would play against the bottom-ranked Test nation in a series every three years, to assess their progress.

Kiwis look

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centuries, but their team still failed to set a stiff target for the hosts.

The tourists lost their last seven wickets for 69 runs after Smith and Newman had added 99 for the third wicket.

The English team will now take part in the Dunedin Trophy first-class tournament.

BRIEF SCORES

ENGLAND A: 210 in 42.1 overs (Ed Smith 76 not out, Scott Newman 68; Sairaj Bahutule 33, Jai Prakash Yadav 35-2, Siddarth Trivedi 2-44)
INDIA A: 213-5 in 45.1 overs (Sridharan Siriram 105 not out, Venugopal Rao 66; Sajid Mahmood 3-38)

Result: India A win by five wickets.

Gibbs gets

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wide grin as he brandished the trophy which has only been won by New Zealand and Australian teams since the inception of the Super 12 competition in 1996.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals X

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.



France's Mary Pierce makes returns during her match against Arantxa Parra of Spain at the Paris Indoor Open on February 11.

Pierce progresses



AFP, Paris

Russian second seed Elena Dementieva survived a scare against French wildcard Stephanie Cohen-Aloro before advancing to the quarterfinals of the 585,000-dollar Paris Indoor Open on Wednesday.

Dementieva gave an error-strewn performance before scraping past 80th world-ranked Cohen-Aloro 7-5, 1-6, 6-4 in their second round battle which lasted 2hr 11min at the Pierre de Coubertin stadium.

The 22-year-old Muscovite had the crowd gasping in surprise as she double faulted 15 times and committed a string of unforced errors.

"It wasn't my best match that's for sure," said world number eight Dementieva.

"I was a bit nervous because it was my first match and Stephanie played at a very high level. But I'm happy to be through to the quarterfinals and hope to do better later this week."

Dementieva was struggling from the outset with her serve letting her down from the opening game and

she was 1-4 down before fighting back and sealing the first set in 45 minutes.

The mistakes continued in the second set as the Russian lost her serve to love in the first game and won just one game before her 21-year-old opponent forced a third set.

Back on court after a ten-minute break Dementieva showed more focus and determination and despite dropping her serve again in the fourth game came back and broke her opponent in the ninth and served out for victory with Cohen-Aloro hitting long.

France's Mary Pierce overcame a rusty start in her first match of the season before dispatching Spanish lucky loser Arantxa Parra, who was 21 months ago, retired with stomach pains while training 5-3.

Hantuchova meets French teenager Tatiana Golovin in the second round.

Earlier Italy's Silvia Farina Elia, the seventh seed, coasted past Slovenia's Tina Pisnik 6-0, 6-4 in their second round tie.

Farina Elia next meets either Belgian top seed Kim Clijsters or Spaniard Maria Sanchez Lorenz, who play Thursday, for a place in the final four.

Elena Bovina won her first round tie against Spanish qualifier Anabel Medina Garrigues 4-6, 6-2, 6-4, and next meets fourth seed Jelena Dokic of Serbia-Montenegro for a place in the quarterfinals.

tense and made a lot of faults. Then I calmed down and it went better," said 29-year-old Pierce, who next meets Spanish eighth seed Magui Serna for a place in the quarterfinals.

Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia advanced after France's Sandrine Testud, who was making her comeback after giving birth 12 months ago, retired with stomach pains while training 5-3.

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Rusedski made to wait



BBC ONLINE, London

Greg Rusedski may have to wait until next week for the outcome of Monday's hearing into his positive drugs test.

Yves Fortier, the QC who chaired the Montreal tribunal, is away on business for the rest of the week and will give his conclusions to the ATP next week.

His secretary told The Independent newspaper: "Mr Fortier's back next week and will speak again to his colleagues before the tribunal can be concluded."

Rusedski may therefore be free to play in next week's ATP event in Rotterdam. But the British number two has yet to confirm his participation in the tournament.

On his return to London on Tuesday, he told reporters he was

"cautiously optimistic" that he would avoid a ban.

"I'm confident and we'll just have to wait and see," Rusedski said.

"I have no idea when I'm going to hear the verdict."

"It's anywhere between three to nine days, so all I can do is sit tight at the moment."

If the tribunal finds Rusedski guilty, the ATP will announce the verdict and the Briton will have 21 days to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

If Rusedski is exonerated, it will be up to him to make the findings known and the ATP will have the option of appealing to CAS.