

An Englishman's delight

AFP, Karachi

Renowned pitch curator Andy Atkinson Monday said he felt honoured to develop pitches for the Pakistan-India cricket series and promised they would excite fans.

"An Englishman developing pitches for a high-profile series like an India-Pakistan series is a great honour although there will be pressure. But I promise the pitches will help create the excitement the fans seek from this series," said Atkinson.

India and Pakistan are set to renew their cricketing rivalry after their bilateral ties were stalled for three years, with the Indian team touring Pakistan for the first time in 15 years.

The 15-man Indian squad led by Sourav Ganguly is due in Lahore on Wednesday to open the tour with a warm up one-day game there the following day. The first of five one-day games is scheduled in Karachi on Saturday.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) sought Atkinson's help after criticism of slow pitches by former captain Rashid Latif, coach Javed Miandad and PCB chairman Tauqir Zia last year.

The bespectacled curator, who worked in South Africa from 1993 to 2001, said he is keenly looking forward to the series and agreed it would be high class battle between Pakistani bowlers and Indian batsmen.

"I am sure it would be an exciting series and since India has a strong batting line-up and Pakistan boasts good bowlers it will be a tussle between bowlers and batsmen," he said.

Magura soccer

OUR CORRESPONDENT

The only match of the Econo First Division Football League between Zia Smriti Sangsad and Sreerampur Friends Club ended in a goalless draw at the Magura Stadium yesterday.

Hamilton

FROM PAGE 13

bowler Daniel Vettori, who hails from Hamilton, is likely to make the side, while South Africa may include left-arm duo Paul Adams and Nicky Boje.

"Even the South Africans are talking about playing two spinners so it must be a burner," said Vettori.

"It's something to look forward to."

"It's something that comes around once in a while, and that's probably the biggest test for me in that I'll be expected to perform and hopefully play a major part in winning."

Giles waiting for Lara

Cricket

BBC ONLINE

England spinner Ashley Giles is looking forward to a reunion with West Indies captain Brian Lara when the Test series begins in Jamaica on Thursday.

The two played together at Warwickshire in 1998 but the spinner was not selected for the West Indies' last tour to England in 2000.

"Brian is the type of guy who likes to devastate spinners as soon as they come on," said Giles.

"I do know a bit about him, but it was 1998 the last time I played with him."

The slow left-armed added: "It's a long time ago and he's obviously playing very well now."

"It's going to be important to mix it up and mix my pace and variations up as much as I can to try

and keep him guessing."

Giles still has vivid memories of how aggressive the Trinidadian left-hander could be from his time



ASHLEY GILES

in Birmingham.

"The only time I've ever bowled at

Brian was in the nets and the sort of nets we used to have at Warwickshire were steel cages," he recalled.

"They became very dangerous if someone hit the ball hard, it became like pinball."

"There were times when you used to bowl at Brian and run backwards to get out of the net because he would come at you and try and take you apart."

After a successful series in Sri Lanka last year, when he returned to form with 18 scalps in three Tests, he is now just 17 short of the magical 100 Test-wicket milestone.

"I don't think I'm going to get there (in this series) but I'm nearing the 100-wicket mark in Test cricket and that's one of the goals I've set myself," he added.

"On the back of Sri Lanka I want to carry on the work I've done."

"I feel I've made progress and I want to carry on moving in the right direction rather than go back mentally and physically to where I was in Bangladesh."

A second chance

Cricket

REUTERS, Hamilton

Craig McMillan has good reason to be focusing with renewed confidence on the Test series against South Africa starting on Wednesday.

Having just become a father, McMillan expressed relief at being able to concentrate on the three-Test series and attempt to pass the 3,000-run mark.

"You look at things in a different perspective when you become a parent and I had my wife and the imminent birth on my mind a lot during the one-day series," McMillan said on Monday.

The 27-year-old 48-Test veteran's test tally stands at 2,909 at an average of 41.55, with a highest score of 142. He has scored six centuries and 18 half-centuries.

"My dream is to score a century against South Africa," McMillan said.

"That's how you're gauged as a batsman, by how many runs you make."

"I haven't got a bad ratio of centuries to 50s, but I want to improve it."

McMillan had one good innings in the one-day series against South Africa, won 5-1 by New Zealand, scoring 70 not out in the second match when New Zealand squared the series 1-1.

That day the Canterbury batsman had been strongly criticised in a column in one of the country's biggest newspapers, although he said he had not heard about it until after his innings.

"I got told about it after the match," McMillan said.

"I'm afraid it had no bearing on how I played that night, but it was strong stuff."

"You've got to take criticism on the chin and somehow prove you can play a bit."

McMillan has perhaps been lucky to be in both one-day squads against Pakistan and South Africa this year as he opted out of the five-match series in Pakistan in November for personal reasons.

After a poor World Cup in South Africa a year ago, McMillan was dropped from the subsequent tour of



CRAIG McMILLAN

Sri Lanka, although he was reinstated for the next tour, to India, with a triangular one-day series tacked on involving Australia.

"It may sound funny, but being dropped can be a good thing," McMillan said.

"Sometimes you need a small break and re-evaluate yourself."

Now he is firmly back in the frame, McMillan believes South Africa are going to be a totally different team in the Tests from the one-day games.

"We've obviously got a bit of confidence, but it's a whole new ball game now. They are going to be smarting a bit and really keen for some revenge."

"We're determined to do well because we lost our third place in the ICC Test rankings when we lost to Pakistan (1-0 in December). We've managed to move up in the ODI stats, so a nice double would be a Test series win."

Spadea's maiden crown

AFP, Scottsdale

Fourth-seeded American Vincent Spadea outlasted seventh seed Nicolas Kiefer of Germany, 7-5, 6-7, 6-3 to claim his first career title on Sunday at the 380,000 dollar ATP tournament here.

"I'm quite excited" Spadea said.

"I'm 29-years-old, I guess you can teach an old dog new tricks."

Spadea was runner-up in his only two finals appearances, most recently at Indianapolis in 1999.

Top players to form

FROM PAGE 13

The selectors rewarded left-handed batsman Faisal Hossain with a call-up. Faisal has been a consistent performer in the National League which finished two days ago. The Chittagonian was the highest run-getter in the four-day competition with 730 in 18 innings.

Faruque admitted that they couldn't watch all the National League games and that's why had to rely on the statistics in some cases to choose a player.

The national players who have been called up will miss the first four-day fixture starting on March 17 at Rajshahi because they will only return home on March 16.

BANGLADESH A TEAM

Shahriar Hossain, Hannan Sarker, Alok Kapali, Rajin Saleh, Tareq Aziz Khan, Mohammed Ashraf, Manzarul Islam Rana, Enamul Haque Junior, Al Shahriar, Anwar Hossain Munir, Alamgir Kabir, Nafees Iqbal, Nasiruddin Faruque, Dhiman Gosh, Shahadat Hossain, Abdur Razzak, Rashedul Haq, Mazharul Haq, Tushar Imran,

USA book Champs Trophy place

AFP, Dubai

The United States hope that their stunning victory in the Six Nations Challenge here will boost their chances of hosting matches in the 2007 World Cup.

The Americans pulled off a five-wicket win against Scotland on Saturday, a win which has given them a place in the ICC Champions Trophy in England in September when they will play their first ever official one-day internationals.

Federer retains Dubai title

AFP, Dubai

World number one Roger Federer became the first man to successfully defend the Dubai Open title when he defeated unseeded Spaniard Feliciano Lopez 4-6, 6-1, 6-2 in Sunday's final.

The top seeded Swiss player claimed his second title of the year, after the Australian Open, and the 13th title of his career.

It also ensured that Federer would maintain a cushion of at least 400 points at the top of the world rankings over Juan Carlos Ferrero, and edge further ahead of the third-placed Andy Roddick, who lost in the semi-finals in Scottsdale.

But Federer was given a tough time for a set and a half by the 22-year-old left-hander who was playing in the first ATP final of his career and could not reach the top 20 for the first time.

M'singh cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mysensingh

Mohammedan Sporting Club beat Abahani Krira Chakra by four wickets in the Navana Premier Division Cricket League held at local Circuit House ground today.

Batting first, Abahani scored 65 all out in 22.5 overs. In reply, Mohammedan lost six wickets before reaching the required total in 22.4 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ABAHANI: 65/10, Arman, 25, Lipon, 10, Arafat, 5/11, Hiris, 3/32, Rasel, 2/15.

MOHAMMEDAN: 68/6, Moni, 29, Roni, 2/14, Iqbal, 1/5, Hira, 1/14.

Result: Mohammedan won by four wickets.



PHOTO: AFP

Maria Mutola of Mozambique celebrates after winning her historic sixth 800-metre gold in the 10th IAAF World indoor Athletics Championships in Budapest on March 7.

Mutola makes history

AFP, Budapest

Maria Mutola of Mozambique became the first athlete in history to win six titles at the World Indoor Championships here on Sunday.

The 31-year-old Olympic champion held off a determined challenge in the 800 metres from Jolanda Ceplak of Slovenia to take the gold medal 11 years after collecting her first World Indoor crown in Toronto.

There was disappointment though for Gail Devers, who saw her bid to win a unique sprint and sprint hurdles double crushed by Perdita Felicien of Canada who beat her to the 60m hurdles title.

Russia's Tatyana Lebedeva made history as she added the long jump title to the triple jump gold, a feat never achieved in the 19-year history of the championships.

Christian Olsson of Sweden equalled the world indoor record in the triple jump with a leap of 17.83 metres, meaning both the men's and women's record were beaten or equalled over the three days of competition.

Mutola's victory was tarnished by accusations from Ceplak that the Mozambican had jostled her as she overtook 100m from the line and made her charge for home to win in 1min 58.50sec to Ceplak's 1:58.72.

"I have run against Maria many times but I don't think she has ever come so close to me as she did today," said Ceplak.

Mutola reacted angrily. "I think that is pathetic, I ran a clean race. I did not push her, it was just accidental contact."

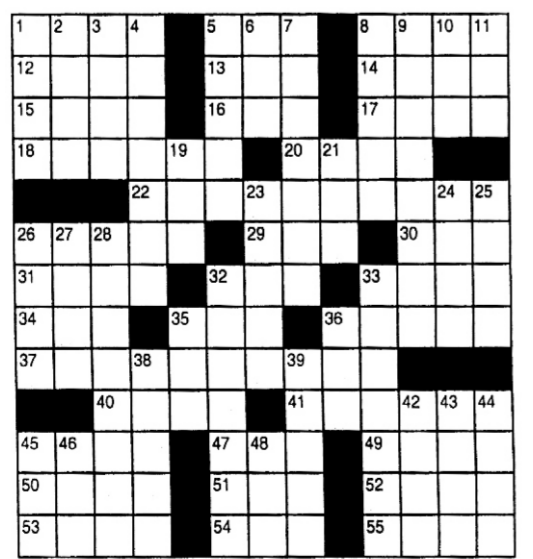


PHOTO: COURTESY

Syed Anisul Huq, president and managing director of Bank Asia Limited and Shah Md Nurul Alam, managing director of Prime Bank are seen with the players of both banks in a friendly cricket match held recently.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Stylish 5 Baby dog 8 Blame-bearer 12 Entice 13 Ostrich's cousin 14 Puerto 15 Rob 16 Game-show prize 17 Bread spread 18 Om, e.g. 20 Aerobic maneuver 22 Patrick 23 Dennis 24 Rainbow or speckled 29 That girl 30 Charged bit 31 Session with a shrink 32 Utah campus letters 33 Aware of 34 Feedbag morsel 35 Tramp 36 Data units



CRYPTOQUIP

H J P Z S X Q F Z C Y R Z X Q M L Q Y L D Q R D Y N L O Z S N T P Z S A Y N N O Q M Y J Z M Q H F R A Z M M Q L D Z R T Q R C ?

Yesterday's Crypticquip: IF ANY MIME HAD A FAVORITE SONG, I BET IT'D REALLY HAVE TO BE "SILENT NIGHT". Today's Crypticquip Clue: D equals P

The Crypticquip 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.

day of the first Test between Australia and Sri Lanka at the Galle International Stadium on Monday:

AUSTRALIA: First innings Langer c Sangakkara b Dharmasena 12 Hayden c Chandana b Muralitharan 41 Ponting st Sangakkara b Chandana 21 Martyn c Jayawardene b Dharmasena 42 Lehmann b Muralitharan 63 Symonds c Jayawardene b Muralitharan 0 Gilchrist c Dharmasena b Muralitharan 4 Warne c Sangakkara b Vaas 23 Gillespie not out 4 Kasprovicz b Muralitharan 1 MacGill lbw b Muralitharan 0 Extras: (b-3, lb-6) 9 Total: (All out in 68.3 overs) 220 Fall of wkts: 1-31, 2-62, 3-76, 4-148, 5-153, 6-163, 7-215, 8-219, 9-220.

Bowler O M R W Vaas 12 2 39 1 Dharmasena 20 4 52 2 Muralitharan 21.3 5 59 6 Chandana 14 1 59 1 Jayasuriya 1 0 2 0

SRI LANKA: First innings Atapattu not out 29 Jayasuriya lbw b Warne 35 Sangakkara not out 16 Extras: (b-1) 1 Total: (For one wkt in 22 overs) 81 Fall of wkt: 1-53.

Bowler O M R W Gillespie 6 1 15 0 Kasprovicz 6 1 18 0 Warne 5 0 17 1 Symonds 3 0 20 0 MacGill 2 0 10 0

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the first