

Thieves steal Botham gems

AFP, London

Thieves escaped with jewellery worth 70,000 pounds (127,500 dollars) from the luxury home of English cricket legend Ian Botham.

The retired cricketer was hosting a party at his village mansion in northern England late last month, when the valuables were taken, according to British tabloid newspaper The Sun on Thursday.

His wife Kathy, 49, discovered the theft after guests had departed, it said.

North Yorkshire Police confirmed they were investigating a "high-value" theft from a property in the area, but refused to confirm whether it was from the home of the England crickethero.

Two people were arrested earlier this week but were released on bail pending further inquiries, a police spokesman said.

Botham, 49, now a television sports presenter, is considered one of the greatest all-rounders ever to play cricket. In 102 Tests for England, he scored 5,200 and took 383 wickets.

Bangladesh 3rd in SAARC Golf

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh finished second runner up in the Sixth SAARC Golf Championship held in Lahore, Pakistan recently.

Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka in stroke play to secure the third position. India clinched the title while hosts Pakistan become the bridesmaid.

Nepal became fifth while Bhutan finished last in the six team meet. Maldives was the only absentee among the seven SAARC member nations.

Sri Lanka however lifted the ladies' event title and Pakistan finished runnerup.

The next SAARC Golf Championship will be held in Sri Lanka in 2005.

Tuffey doubtful for Champs Trophy

CRICINFO, undated

Daryl Tuffey, the New Zealand fast bowler, will find out in the next few days whether he will be fit to play in the ICC Champions Trophy in England next month.

Tuffey, 26, had a difficult Test and one-day tour of England, struggling with thigh and knee injuries, and he now faces an anxious wait to see if he will be fit to make the one-day tournament.

BCCI

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take part in a match to mark the opening of the Zayed Stadium. The Indian players then told the organisers that they should speak directly to the BCCI, which the Abu Dhabi Board did.

Jagmohan Dalmiya, president of the BCCI, raised this matter in the working committee meeting.

"The BCCI rejected the proposal outright not only because the Aby Dhabi Board did not bother to approach BCCI first, but also because it felt that the importance of resumption of the bilateral cricket ties between India and Pakistan would be diluted if the two teams were made to play exhibition matches -- and that, too, in other countries. The ADCBC formally apologised to the BCCI for the fiasco." From all reports, it's clear that the BCCI has no inclination to play matches, or allow its players to take part in matches, that are not sanctioned by the International Cricket Council.

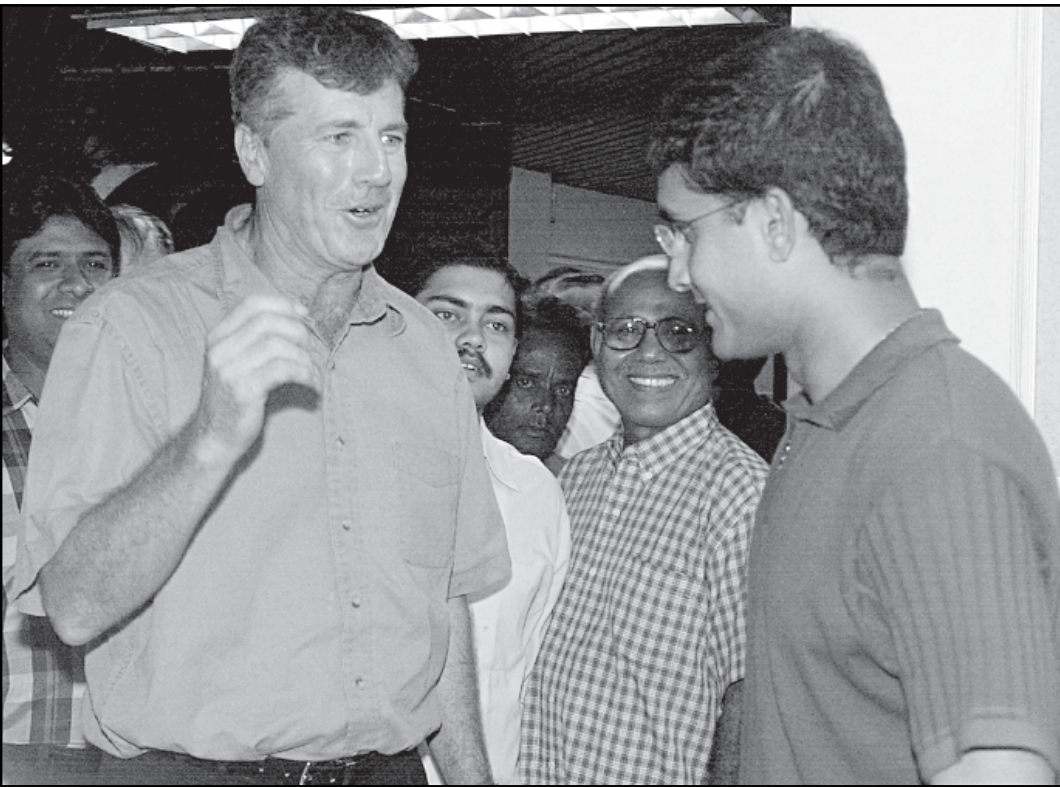


PHOTO: AFP

India cricket coach John Wright (L) chats with captain Sourav Ganguly at Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday.

England name side today



BBC ONLINE, undated

Champions Trophy hosts England will on Friday announce their 14-man squad for the September one-day tournament.

A provisional list of 30 will be trimmed, and up to four places could be up for grabs after England's dismal showing in the NatWest Series.

England failed to make the final of the triangular event, with all-rounders Rikki Clarke, Anthony McGrath and Ian Blackwell failing to impress.

Ian Bell, Mike Powell and Alex Wharf are queuing up for their spots.

The disappointment of making way for New Zealand and West Indies -- both of whom England have dominated in Test cricket -- prompted calls for a shake-up.

The skeleton of England's one-day

side looks solid, and as many as 10 players can be seen as banker selections.

But impressive county form has thrust the likes of Warwickshire's Bell, Glamorgan duo Powell and Wharf and Lancashire's Sajid Mahmood into the picture.

Bell has been in intimidating touch for the Bears this county championship campaign, averaging 85 with the bat and gaining some unprecedented success with the ball. His National League exploits have not been so remarkable, but he could benefit from England's stated policy of easing talent into the international cricket via the one-day side.

It worked for Andrew Strauss, and Rob Key was given a spin in the NatWest Series before resuming his Test career in explosive fashion with a double-century at Edgbaston.

A figure no less than Alec Stewart plugged bowling all-rounder Wharf's claims last month, while Powell has already publicly aired his aim to break

into the England fold.

Powell, 27, was called into the NatWest Series squad after injury threatened Marcus Trescothick's involvement, and his time could be nigh.

The impression is that McGrath, Clarke and Blackwell have not grasped their chances, and if any of that trio make the final cut they could be on borrowed time to make an impact.

Of the seamers, Simon Jones returned to form for Glamorgan this week but can be expensive and is uncapped at one-day level.

Mahmood is interesting -- despite misfiring on debut against New Zealand in the NatWest Series -- as he can swing the bat.

Selectors could be tempted to take a chance on the raw 22-year-old fast bowler, with surefire selection Steve Harmison's form of slight concern and Matthew Hoggard incongruously out of favour in the shorter game.

Lara gets tour manager's backing

AFP, London

Under-fire West Indies skipper Brian Lara was given a vote of confidence Thursday by tour manager Tony Howard following calls for him to quit the captaincy.

Lara's positon has been called into question following two defeats by over 200 runs in the first two Tests on the team's ongoing tour of England.

These came on the back of a 3-0 series defeats away to South Africa and in the Caribbean against England earlier this year.

Former Windies skipper Viv Richards, up until recently also head of the selection panel, has been among those calling for Lara to step down.

But Howard, speaking during the team's tour match against Derbyshire, said: "Although the results in the Test series thus far have not been satisfactory, this has not diminished the commitment and support that the team has expressed in the captain and in his ability to bring out the best in them."

"Brian remains committed as ever to the endeavour of raising the standard and quality of West Indies cricket and is as disappointed as our many fans in the end result achieved in the Tests."

Lara, captaining the team for a second time, told reporters after Sunday's 256-run second Test defeat at Edgbaston: "I am committed to West Indies cricket. I was asked back to do this job and I am doing the best I can."

Mahela makes

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Extras: (b-4, lb-2) 6
Total: (For no loss in 34 overs) 82
To bat: Smith, Kallis, Rudolph, Boucher, Pollock, Boje, Klusener, Ntini, Hayward

Bowler
Vaas 8 3 20 0
Maharoof 7 4 9 0
M'tharan 12 1 36 0
Chandana 6 0 10 0
Jayasuriya 1 0 1 0

Ajit replaces

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But all-rounder Gavaskar will drop out of the squad for the Champions Trophy that runs from September 10 to 25.

SQUAD

Sourav Ganguly (captain), Rahul Dravid (vice-captain), Virender Sehwag, Sachin Tendulkar, Venkatsai Laxman, Yuvraj Singh, Mohammad Kaif, Dinesh Karthik (wicket-keeper), Ajit Agarkar, Irfan Pathan, Laxmipathy Balaji, Ashish Nehra, Anil Kumble, Harbhajan Singh.

Winning return for Sharapova



REUTERS, Toronto

Wimbledon champion Maria Sharapova had little difficulty in her first match at the 1.3-million-dollar Montreal Cup on Wednesday, downing Kristina Brandi of Puerto Rico 6-1, 6-4.

However, fourth-seeded Russian Elena Dementieva and eight-seeded compatriot Nadia Petrova were second-round upset victims on the third full day of competition at the event.

The 17-year-old Sharapova, the first Russian player to win Wimbledon, was challenged briefly in the second set but was able to quickly recover and put the match away with her dominating backhand and solid groundstrokes.

"She definitely picked up her game in the second set," the sixth-seeded Sharapova said.

"I never expect to play my best tennis in my first match, but I did everything I had to do to win."

Dementieva became the first major upset victim of the week, losing to Argentina's Gisela Dulko 6-1, 6-4.

Dulko, 19, is a WTA rookie who already has pulled off several upsets.

"I played well from the baseline and served pretty well," Dulko said.

"So that was the key to the match. She's the highest ranked player I've ever beat."

Petrova was also knocked out of the tournament, dropping a 6-4, 6-7, 7-5 decision to fellow Russian Elena Likhovtseva.

Third-seeded Anastasia Myskina, the French Open champion, moved on with an easy 6-0, 6-4 win over Arantxa Parra Santonja of Spain.

Other winners included ninth-seeded Paola Suarez of Argentina, number 10 seed Vera Zvonareva and Francesca Schiavone of Italy, the 11th-seed, who all recorded straight set victories.

In other matches involving seeded players, 13th-seeded Magdalena Maleeva of Bulgaria defeated Martina Sucha of Slovakia 6-3, 6-7, 6-4, 14th-seeded Elena Bovina of Russia stopped Lilia Osterloh 7-6, 6-4 and 15th-seed Chanda Rubin of the US was a 6-4, 6-3 winner over compatriot Mashona Washington.



PHOTO: AFP

Newest Wimbledon queen Maria Sharapova of Russia blows a kiss to the crowd after defeating Kristina Brandi of Puerto Rico at Montreal Cup tennis tournament on August 4.

A women's tennis crisis?

REUTERS, Athens



The Athens Olympics grappled with its first sporting controversy on Thursday when women tennis players threatened to boycott next week's Games if two German players were not cleared to play.

But with only eight days to go before the opening of the August 13-29 Games, the boycott was the only serious cloud on the horizon for the Greek capital, which has staged a remarkable turnaround in preparing for the world's biggest sporting event.

Public Order Minister George Voulgarakis, who is in charge of the massive operation to protect the first summer Games since the September 11, 2001, attacks, said security forces had not detected any threatening "chatter" concerning a possible terrorist attack.

Ambulance workers called off planned strikes during the Games to support their demands for an Olympic bonus, an issue that other unions, including hotel workers, have taken up.

The tennis row involved a threat by WTA Tour players to stay away if Germany's Anca Barna and Marlene Weingartner were not included in the Olympic team after meeting International Tennis Federation qualifying standards.

With the top 56 ranked players earning automatic entry into the Olympics, Barna and Weingartner, ranked 46th and 52nd respectively, qualify for Athens based on the ITF's criteria.

The German Olympic Committee, however, had its own criteria of reaching a semifinal of a Grand Slam or the final of a tier-one event, which neither player has met.

"We discussed the matter at a players' meeting on Monday and I think there is a real chance of a boycott," Nathalie Dechy of France told the Toronto Globe and Mail.

Athens Games organisers (ATHOC) said they were expecting a decision by the WTA on Thursday but said the final decision rested with the German Olympic Committee.

"We hope the boycott will not happen and we will see all players up close," said ATHOC spokesman Michael Zaharatos.

But Elena Danilidou, ranked 34th in

the world, and Greece's hope for a tennis medal, was not considering such a move.

"There is no issue of a boycott involving Danilidou," said Greek Olympic Committee spokesman George Gakis. "She is in America and will be returning in the next few days."

Among the players expected in Athens are world No 1 Justine Henin-Hardenne, sisters Venus and Serena Williams, French Open champion Anastasia Myskina and tennis legend Martina Navratilova.

Organisers said their Olympic security plan offered athletes "total" safety without spoiling the Games' festive atmosphere.

"We have prepared for the worst-case scenarios, total security. We did whatever we had to do," Voulgarakis said of the Games' record 1.0 billion euro (1.21 billion dollars) safety plan, four times the amount spent for the Games in Sydney in 2000.

He said international police and security organisations had heard nothing of a threat to the Games from home or abroad.

"There is no talk of a threat and this makes us very optimistic that we did well to put these measures in place but hopefully we don't need to use them. The Games are a celebration and we want to safeguard this atmosphere," he said.

Rehhagel given torch honour

BBC ONLINE, Athens

Euro 2004-winning coach Otto Rehhagel will be a torch-bearer when the Olympic flame is carried across the Rio-Antirio bridge on Sunday.

The German will be joined by the rest of his victorious squad and will hand the torch on to Greek national Olympic football coach Efstratios Apostolakis.

Agassi proves critics wrong

REUTERS, Cincinnati

Andre Agassi continued to confound those who believe his 18-year career is almost over, by beating former Australian Open champion Thomas Johansson to reach the last 16 of the Masters Series on Wednesday.

The American showed a fair deal of patience to register a 6-1, 3-6, 6-1 success in a match completed close to midnight after an hour-long rain delay during the knock-up and two further interruptions once the contest was underway.

It was only the second time that Agassi had won two successive matches since March and it earned him a third round match against Juan Ignacio Chela, the 17th seed from Argentina.

In the same half of the draw, defending champion Andy Roddick beat Germany's Nicolas Kiefer for the third time in ten days.

Halfway through the second set of his 6-4, 6-4 defeat, Kiefer launched a vicious slash at the net with his racket that gave Roddick a psychological boost.

The second-seeded American next plays Paradorn Srichaphan, the 15th seed from Thailand, a 6-3, 6-4 winner over Sjeng Schalken.

Earlier, Lleyton Hewitt signalled his belief that he is building up for his most convincing grand slam challenge for a couple of years when he enjoyed an emphatic win in a battle of former world number ones against Gustavo Kuerten.

The battling Australian's 6-3, 6-4 victory over the popular Brazilian carried him into the last 16.

In other matches, Britain's Greg Rusedski rallied to defeat French Open champion Gaston Gaudio 4-6, 7-6, 6-4, Marat Safin eased past Jeff Morrison 6-4, 6-4, and Spaniard Tommy Robredo upset his seventh seeded compatriot Juan Carlos Ferrero 7-6, 4-6, 6-4.

In the final match of the day, fifth-seeded Briton Tim Henman rallied past Moroccan Hicham Arazi 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 to advance in a contest that ended in the early hours of the morning.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	44 New Year's noise-maker	46 Work in postproduction	50 Labored	52 Female urchin	54 Absolutely	55 Baffler (anagram of 52-Across)	17 Whodunit pooch	19 Prized possession	20 Actress Moore	22 Existed	24 Ovine comment	27 Streamlet	29 Old woman's home?	32 Intimates	35 Row	36 Magnitude	37 Cribbage piece	38 Varnish ingredient	40 Slippery ones	42 "Caught ya!"
1 Dieter's entree	26 V-shaped fissures	12 Platitude	13 Loaf of bread?	14 Erose	15 High-ph chemical	16 Existence (Lat.)	17 Whodunit pooch	19 Prized possession	20 Actress Moore	22 Existed	24 Ovine comment	27 Streamlet	29 Old woman's home?	32 Intimates	35 Row	36 Magnitude	37 Cribbage piece	38 Varnish ingredient	40 Slippery ones	42 "Caught ya!"
4 Milwaukee product	5 Cause of change	6 Confab	7 Harry	8 Hamlin series	9 Wapiti	9 Santa Maria, e.g.	10 Yarn	11 Doorstop,	12 Perhaps	13 Vietnam city	18 Less sensible	21 Blunder	23 Tray contents	24 On the other hand	Solution time: 27 mins.					
25 Singer DiFranco	26 "Guys and Dolls" role	28 Sore-throat aids	30 Counter's start	31 Early bird?	33 Geologic period	34 Avian incubator	39 Precursor sound	41 Tourney round	42 Persisting	43 Hagar the Horrible's daughter	45 Teetotal tally	47 Accommodation	48 Beach Boys' "Room"	49 Mid-afternoon social	51 Romanian money	53 Japanese airline				
<div>AND STAG KNOT TOO VEDA NORA ODDS ENDS ITEM PEOPLE OFF BRACE CAT HUGERY LADE MOL DIVA AUNT SEX WOOLER HIT RUN EON LMA SMOOTH HORN CUT DRIED ADOS EPER TAIT METE DARN OT</div>																				