

Vaughan makes no excuses

BBC ONLINE, Cape Town

Captain Michael Vaughan admitted England were under-par in all facets of their game as they slipped to a 108-run defeat to South Africa in Cape Town on Saturday.

"We weren't quite on our game in all three departments and South Africa fully deserved their victory," he said.

England have played four matches in what Vaughan called a "hectic week".

But he added: "There's no excuses -- we must come back on Wednesday and try and play a little bit better and put them under some pressure."

Kevin Pietersen, who hit a defiant 75, pointed the finger at England's bowling at the death, and the inability of team-mates to stay with him.

"They scored 60-odd in the last five overs and I don't think we got our yorkers quite as we discussed."

"And we didn't get any partnerships going, which you need chasing a big total," he said.

"We've got three games to go so we just have to keep the momentum going and we could still nip the series."

Ahmedabad

FROM PAGE 13 reports that the decision was politically motivated.

"We decided to request the change only after receiving a report from our venue assessment committee, which recently toured India," said PCB spokesman Abbas Zaidi.

Pakistan are due to play three Tests and five one-day games as well as two side matches on their first full tour of India in six years. They played a commemorative one-day match in India last year.

"In making the request the PCB wishes to preserve and strengthen the bilateral relations that have been enhanced at the public and government level after the resumption of ties between the two countries," said Zaidi.

The governments of nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan are engaged in a tentative, year-long peace process that has seen increased political, social and cultural contacts.

"The PCB contradicts reports suggesting any motive other than security -- such as people saying it may be political or anything -- in making this request for change and maintains that the venue issue should be amicably resolved," said Zaidi.

Mohali, in north India, and the southern metropolises of Bangalore are the other two proposed Test venues.

Pakistan was expected to reject Ahmedabad after Pakistan's foreign ministry and ministry of sports and culture also raised concerns. Madras is the likely replacement if the Indian cricket authorities accept the request.



PHOTO: COURTESY

District Commissioner of Narayanganj SM Harun-ar Rashid (C) seen here with participants of the Narayanganj Rifle Club Annual Badminton Competition 2005 yesterday.

Lee targets Tests



CRICINFO, Sydney

Australian fast bowler Brett Lee, the player of the VB Series, hopes his brilliant one-day form and a strong start to the New Zealand tour will earn a Test recall.

Lee's opening spells and 16 series wickets were major reasons for Australia's trophy-winning success and his speed worried top-order batsmen throughout the tournament.

"My long-term goal is definitely to get back into the Test team," Lee

said after taking 1 for 31 in the second final against Pakistan.

"I do want to play Test match cricket. Hopefully I can use these one-day matches to try and push for that selection."

Michael Kasprovicz has kept Lee out of the side for nine matches since his return from ankle surgery and will need to continue his superb 2004 form to hold his place.

"It's probably the best I've ever felt," Lee said. "I've finally got my left ankle right, there's no pain there and to bowl without any pain or discomfort is the most amazing feeling."

Glenn McGrath, Lee's opening partner in the two finals, also said he

was in tip-top shape and considered extending his career.

"I can't remember feeling this good for years," he said.

"Maybe I set my goals a bit low when I said the 2007 World Cup, I think I've got plenty of years in me yet."

Lee, who was also warned for a full toss above waist height, talked down the two similar deliveries he received from Abdul Razzaq in the first innings. "He's the type of guy that never means to bowl beamers," Lee said. "It was quite slippery out there. I looked at the footmarks and he was sliding two or three inches." Lee said the pair chatted after the game and "that's the end of it".

Simmons slams critics



CRICINFO, Harare

Zimbabwe coach Phil Simmons has dismissed criticism aimed at him following the 3-2 one-day series defeat by Bangladesh and said that the loss was a result of complacency on the part of the players and the technical team.

Simmons was lambasted by Richie Kaschula, a member of the national selection panel and a former national player, in the aftermath of the defeat.

"Phil must be held responsible for what has been happening in Bangladesh," Kaschula said.

"Phil was left in charge and we, as selectors, are not happy with

what has been happening. Phil was in charge of the team and he was doing his own things in selecting the teams that played, ignoring some of the things we told him."

But Simmons mounted a spirited defence on his return to Harare.

"We played beyond expectations in the first two games and I think when we took the 2-0 lead in the one day series against the hosts the guys were surprised by the results and that led to the guys being excited," he said.

"I think I was also excited by the result that the guys had posted and we seemed to have lost direction. Because of that and I believe that is where we got it all wrong."

"The batsmen let us down in the third game and that was the major

reason we lost but we could have done better. The batsmen failed to reach 240 runs in the last three games."

Kaschula had slammed Simmons for his team selections, especially picking the out-of-sorts Dion Ebrahim. "Dion had not performed well in the third game and I thought of dropping him from the team for the fourth game but there is more than I as the coach saw in the young man than just playing on the field," Simmons argued.

"I didn't drop him in the fourth game as he had impressed me during the practise sessions as he showed a lot of confidence in batting and seemed as if he had finally settled and I thought of including him in the team."

Gaibandha cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Munshipara Krira Sangstha defeated Gaibandha Cricket Coaching Centre by 21 runs in the First Division Cricket League at the Gaibandha Stadium yesterday.

Munshipara were all out for 110 in 39.3 overs after deciding to bat first.

In reply, Cricket Coaching Centre were bundled out for 89 in 31.2 overs.

Gibbs loving

FROM PAGE 13 at Newlands next month], but it is a serious possibility."

SCOREBOARD

Final scoreboard of the fourth limited overs international between South Africa and England at Newlands on Sunday.

SOUTH AFRICA: 291/5 (Gibbs 100, Kallis 71, Kemp 57; Gough 1/53, Ali 1/58)

ENGLAND

Trescottick b Ntini 13
Jones c Boucher b Ntini 19
Vaughan c Kallis b Pollock 0

Strauss c Prince b Nel 17
Pietersen c De Villiers b Boje 75
Bell c Boucher b Kallis 2

Collingwood c Boucher b Pollock 11
Giles c Pollock b Ntini 20
Ali run out (Gibbs) 1

Gough not out 9
Harmison c Nel b Boje 4
Extras (b3, lb3, w6) 12

Total (All out in 41.2 overs) 183
Fall of wickets: 1-32, 2-33, 3-35, 4-73, 5-92, 6-127, 7-148, 8-163, 9-175

Bowler O M R W
Pollock 10 0 35 2
Ntini 9 1 29 3

Nel 6 0 27 1
Kallis 6 0 36 1
Kemp 2 0 9 0
Boje 8.2 0 41 2

Result: South Africa won by 108 runs.

Man of match: Herschelle Gibbs (RSA).

Series: South Africa lead 2-1.

REMAINING MATCHES
Feb 9, East London.
Feb 11, Durban.
Feb 13, Centurion.

Hayden vows to return

CRICINFO, Queensland

Matthew Hayden will play his first game for Queensland in more than a year when he returns with Michael Kasprovicz for the ING Cup match against South Australia at the Gabba on Friday.

After being replaced by Michael Clarke and Brett Lee for the VB Series finals, the pair asked Cricket Australia for permission to play in the lead-up to Australia's tour of New Zealand.

Hayden was dropped as Australia's one-day opener after managing 42 runs in four VB Series innings and vowed to return to the side with a "platter" of domestic runs if required. Graham Dixon, the Queensland Cricket chief executive, said Hayden and Kasprovicz were due to be rested under Cricket Australia's player management plan.

"Players who are involved in both forms of the game had been penciled in to have a break this week ahead of the New Zealand tour," he said.

"I will be great to welcome them back." However, Hayden and Kasprovicz were expected at the Gabba on Friday as part of the 10th anniversary celebrations of the state's first Sheffield Shield winning team in 1994-95. The Bulls have already booked their place in the ING Cup final and will play either Victoria or Tasmania on February 20.

Queensland will finalise their squad after Australia's touring party is announced on Wednesday, but expect to miss the injured trio of Andrew Symonds (Achilles tendon), Shane Watson (side strain) and Martin Love (hand). Symonds was hurt while making 91 in the first final against Pakistan. Watson left the field after bowling 3.5 overs in the second match and Love split the webbing between his left index finger and thumb while fielding during yesterday's 138-run loss to Victoria.

Soderling's 2nd success

AFP, Milan

Sweden's Robin Soderling won the 323,250-euro Milan Indoor tournament on Sunday with a 6-3, 6-7, 7-6 final victory over Czech Radek Stepanek.

The 20-year-old fifth seed Soderling, who is ranked 37th in the world, lifted his second success on the circuit after Lyon last year.

After a hesitant start, Soderling began to find his rhythm against fourth seed Stepanek to win the first set 6-3 on his first set point.

The Czech changed tactics in the second set by denying the Swede angled balls to avoid strong, cross-court replies and it worked as he won the second set on a tiebreak.

However Soderling was the stronger player in the final set and the power of his shots proved decisive.

"I'm delighted to have won against such a good opponent in a tournament of this importance," Soderling said afterwards. "I was really on form, my service was good and I really liked playing on the synthetic surface."

Green-tops

FROM PAGE 13 league has not been up to the mark because of a lack of competitiveness. We might not have been hundred percent successful in picking the best possible sides but I have to say that the difference in strength of the teams will be less because of our involvement," said the former Bangladesh captain.

"It was not easy to select 120 players for six divisional squads and it is possible that some good players might have missed out. That is why we are flexible on the matter and there is a technical committee to handle the issue," added Faruque.

BCB advisor and chairman of the marketing company Aziz Al Kaiser Tito informed that the Board has outlined an ambitious plan for the next NCL with a new format in October-November.

"We are close to preparing a plan to increase the image of the league. Players will be highly benefited by the new format," said Kaiser.

The Board has estimated a budget of Tk 1.17 crore to run the 6th NCL. Title sponsors Ipsahani are providing Tk 30 lakhs.

Tokyo close to her heart



AFP, Tokyo

Wimbledon champion Maria Sharapova can't wait to be back in Tokyo, where she won her first professional title, first WTA titles and this weekend triumphed at the Pan Pacific Open.

But success has caught up with her and it will be at least one year before the skyrocketing Russian starlet is eligible to play again in her favourite city.

"I just seem to bring up my level when I play here, I don't know what it is, but I'm always determined," said Sharapova after winning the Pan Pacific Open by beating world number one Lindsay Davenport 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 Sunday.

"I've such great memories here. When I'm coming back, I feel inspired to win and fans are so amazing to me. They definitely raise my game as well."

"I remember winning my first title when I was 14 years old in Gunma, and here I won a Tier I on the professional tour, so without you (the

fans), I wouldn't have been here. I can't wait to be back."

Fresh from her victory in Tokyo, Sharapova was due to make her first appearance at the 585,000-dollar Paris Indoor Open starting Monday.

Sharapova captured her first career WTA singles and doubles titles at the Japan Open in October 2003 and defended the singles last year. She also won her first professional title in the ITF Circuit series in Gunma, north of Tokyo, in 2002.

However, the 17-year-old's surge to the top of the world has forced her out of this October's Japan Open because her ranking is too high.

The WTA rules prohibit the top 20 "Gold Exempt Players," who can attract major crowds to a tournament, from taking part in a smaller event when a higher-paying contest is going on the same week.

Sharapova has to put priority on a Tier II event in Germany (650,000 dollars) over the Tier III (170,000 dollars) Japan Open the same week in October.

To say nothing about the 140,000-dollar Tier IV Korea Open a

week earlier, where Sharapova as the inaugural champion pulled in an unusually large audience for tennis in South Korea. This year, a 585,000-dollar Tier II event is going on at the same time in Luxembourg.

The Japan Open organisers have already abandoned the idea of inviting Sharapova to Tokyo in October, while Sharapova has already set her sights higher.

"I always wanted to achieve being number one in the world and I always wanted to win Wimbledon, but it takes hard work," said Sharapova.

"It's always tougher to maintain being in the top five in the world than getting into them, just because everybody else is very hungry to be at the same position."

"After winning Wimbledon. I expected everyone to know that I was a top player, that a lot of people wanted to beat me."

"But I love these kinds of challenges in which people really, really want to beat you, and I love beating them, so it's a nice game," added Sharapova.



PHOTO: AFP

Xavier Malisse of Begium returns the ball to Jiri Novak of the Czech Republic in the final of the Millennium International Tennis Championships at the Delray Beach Tennis Centre on February 6.

Malisse makes his mark

AFP, Delray Beach

Belgian Xavier Malisse finally captured his first ATP singles title Sunday, defeating Czech Jiri Novak in the final of the 380,000-dollar Millennium International tennis tournament.

Malisse, the third seed, downed the second-seeded Czech 7-6, 6-2, earning his first career singles title in his seventh career final.

"It was a feeling of disbelief because you can't believe it happened," Malisse said. "It's been a long time in coming."

Malisse is the first player since France's Cedric Pioline to go winless in as many as six finals before winning his first ATP title. Pioline lost his first nine finals before winning at Copenhagen in 1996.

"When I went on the court today it didn't matter if I had 15 titles, it's what I do today that counts," Malisse said. "Fortunately, today was the day."

It was the 24-year-old's third appearance in the final at this event, after runner-up finishes in 1999 and 2001.

Novak, 29, had won 17 of his last 20 matches, a stretch that included tournament victories in Basel and Tokyo last year.

Novak broke Malisse in the fourth game of the match, but Malisse broke back in the ninth game before prevailing in the tie-breaker.

Paris stands out so far



REUTERS, London

Belying its reputation as the city of sophistication and romance, Paris is favourite to host the 2012 Summer Olympics through its pragmatic, low-key strategy.

Paris heads the shortlist of five cities ahead of the July 6 vote in Singapore mainly because it already has a stadium in place and, as demonstrated at the 1998 FIFA World Cup, France has successfully hosted major events.

In addition the city started its campaign early after losing out in the 1992 and 2008 campaigns.

London is currently second in the betting, partly because of its new, high-profile bid head Sebastian Coe, twice the Olympic 1,500 metres champion and now a council member of the world governing athletics body.

Madrid, which received a favourable report from the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) initial evaluation, is third followed by New York with Moscow trailing in fifth.

Since Barcelona was awarded the 1992 summer Games 20 years ago, the favourites have

finished first only once in the final round of voting by IOC members.

Atlanta won the right ahead of Athens to host the 1996 Olympics and Sydney edged out Beijing for the 2000 Games.

Rome were favourites to host last year's Games but lost in the final round to Athens. In 2001 Beijing, by this time the clear favourites, gave some relief to the bookmakers by winning decisively.

This year's race to win the hearts and minds of the 117 IOC members eligible to vote looks too close to call, with a possibility that president Jacques Rogge might have to cast the deciding vote.

Paris has one clear advantage over London.

The International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) awarded their 2005 World Championships to London and Picketts Lock in north London was designated as the venue for a new stadium.

After a disagreement over funding the project was scrapped and the championships taken away from Britain.

The 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester showed Britain could stage a successful multi-national event but to the sceptics, who recall the Pickett

Lock fiasco, the London bid still seems longer on promises than performance.

Madrid, the first venue on the IOC evaluation team's six-week tour of the five candidate cities which began on Thursday, has presented an excellent technical bid and enjoys enthusiastic public and government support.

Its problem may be that while the summer Olympics have not been held in France since 1924 or in Britain since 1948, Barcelona hosted the 1992 Games.

New York organisers have stressed the city's ethnic diversity which they say will ensure all venues will be filled.

"New York is a magnet for dreamers, it is the most competitive place in the world," said bid leader Dan Doctoroff, the city's deputy mayor, in London last week.

Last in the betting by some distance is Moscow, host of the 1980 Games which were weakened by a U.S.-led boycott after the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in the previous year.

If successful, Moscow bid officials plan to revive the 1980 venues to provide sports facilities for a new generation.

Moscow will probably be eliminated in the first round. Then the complications begin.

If Moscow plans to bid again for the 2016 Olympics, its supporters could switch to New York to try to prevent a European city winning the 2012 Games.

Madrid is the likeliest candidate to fall out next, leaving a three-way race between Paris, London and New York.

"Paris seems very safe," said Ed Hula, editor of the independent Olympic website AroundTheRings.com.

"They staged the 2003 world track and field championships and they've got great venues like Roland Garros."

"London provides the best legacy and Coe is really engaged and passionate."

"Madrid has a great technical bid and transport system while Moscow is very low down and security will be an issue."

"I think it will come down to Paris and New York in the last round but it's really hard to call."

Zim drop Ebrahim



CRICINFO, Harare

Dion Ebrahim has paid the price for his poor show with the bat in Bangladesh and has been left out of the 14-member squad to tour South Africa next week.

Ebrahim will now be drafted into the Zimbabwe A squad to take on Bangladesh A in a four-day match at Queens Sports Club, which gets underway on Sunday. If he impresses, he will then be posted to South Africa for the two-Test series. He struggled with the bat in the one-day series in Bangladesh, scoring only 28 runs in four innings with a top score of 26 in the second

match.

Also out of favour are the top-order batsman Vusumuzi Sibanda, and the medium-pace bowler Muleki Nkala, whose fitness in Bangladesh was a cause of concern.

The selectors have called up the off-spinner Gavin Ewing who made his ODI debut against England in November last year, but was left out of the Bangladesh tour. Ewing was part of the Zimbabwe A side which recently toured Namibia.

A surprise inclusion is 18-year old left-handed batsman Sean Williams. He represented Zimbabwe at the Under-19 World Cup in Bangladesh last year and was one of the most consistent

batsmen for Zimbabwe. He is also an effective left-arm spinner. He was touted as being a likely call-up at the time of the players' strike last April but his father Colin, a former first-class player and national hockey coach, refused to release him and insisted his son should concentrate more on his studies.

SQUAD

Tatenda Taibu (capt/wkt), Douglas Hondo, Tawanda Mupariwa, Sean Williams, Gavin Ewing, Christopher Mpfu, Tinashe Panyangara, Elton Chigumbura, Prosper Utseya, Barney Rogers, Stuart Matsikenyeri, Hamilton Masakadza, Graeme Cremer and Brendan Taylor.

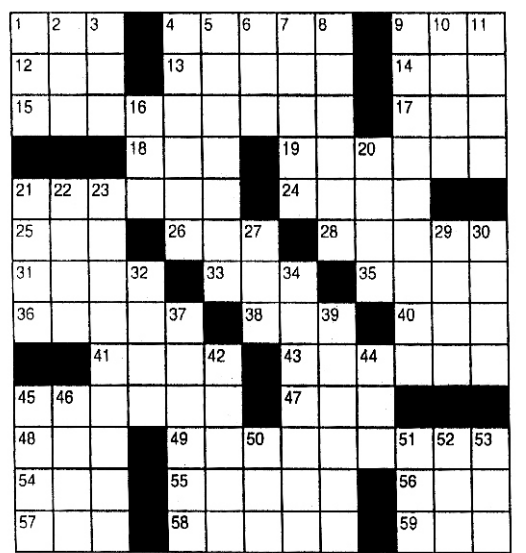
CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 "Great Expectations" hero
4 Bridge positions
9 Perched
12 Big fuss
13 Soda-shop item
14 Besides (Pref.)
15 Bluesy instrument
17 Deleted
18 Chum
19 Milky
21 "Bonanza" star
24 End
25 Mid-afternoon, on a sundial
26 Cash dispenser (Abbr.)
28 Juniors-to-be
31 Cabin components
33 Greek vowel
35 Vegan's no-no
36 A Musketeer
38 Dine

DOWN
1 — de deux
2 Tennyson princess
3 Plague
4 Iberian
5 City
6 "No Jock
7 "Sharp sign
8 "Victors
9 "It"
10 Pin-nacle
11 Neat
12 Fear big-time
13 Rectangular
14 Arizona river
15 Laugh-a-minute type
16 Unclose, in verse
17 Appear ominously
18 "My Boo" singer
19 Young fellow
20 Repast
21 Kourmi
22 Before
23 Enervate
24 "A Chorus Line" song
25 End of a "Sesame Street" lesson

Solution time: 24 mins.

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