

Mark may become national selector

CRICINFO, undated

Mark Waugh will be pushed as a possible national selector as New South Wales attempt to end 12 years without representation on the panel.

The Sydney Morning Herald reported Allan Border was expected to stand down in April and David Gilbert, the New South Wales chief executive, would ask Waugh to nominate for the vacancy.

"Mark is a very good judge of a cricketer, and his ability to read cricket very well is well known," Gilbert said. "Australian cricket can't let blokes like him disappear from the game."

Australia's current panel has no representation from NSW or Victoria, and includes Trevor Hohns and Border from Queensland, David Boon, the former Tasmania batsman, and Andrew Hilditch, the hook-happy South Australia player.

The positions of Border and Boon will be reviewed in April and the newspaper said Border was considering standing down to focus on media and other interests.

"I wouldn't completely rule out nominating if a spot became available," Waugh said. "There could be good sides to it, like identifying talent, but it would be a big commitment, with a lot of time away. I can't say watching cricket all day appeals to me."

Vaas Worcs' for 2 months

BBC ONLINE, undated

Worcestershire have agreed a two-month deal with Sri Lanka paceman Chaminda Vaas for the start of next season.

Vaas, whose move is subject to clearance from the Sri Lanka Cricket, will cover for Shoaib Akhtar, who will arrive at New Road on July 1.

"His style of bowling will ideally suit the playing conditions during the early part of the season," Worcestershire director of cricket Tom Moody said.

"As a left-arm swing bowler, he will complement the rest of our attack."

The 31-year-old has taken 269 Test wickets and claimed 323 one-day international victims, helping his country to the World Cup in 1996.

He said: "I know how ambitious the county is and I look forward to playing with so many quality players."

Vaas has already had a brief taste of county cricket, having played three championship matches for Hampshire in 2003.

Hayden fit to tour

AFP, Sydney

Australian opener Matthew Hayden said Tuesday he had been cleared to tour New Zealand after a medical examination found he was over the worst of a debilitating lung infection.

Hayden, who has been battling both illness and poor form, said doctors had found he was suffering from pleurisy and waited until the last minute before deciding he could join his teammates on the plane to Auckland early Wednesday.

Hayden said he had endured a tough week, much of it bedridden, wondering if he would recover in time to make the tour.

"I felt very sick," he told reporters after successfully completing a net session. "My lung capacity was way below 50 per cent, there was genuine reason to be really concerned."

"I felt not dissimilar to having pre-flu symptoms but as the week went on the pleurisy symptoms really started to hurt to the point where you just couldn't breathe in air."



PHOTO: AFP

Former Australia cricket captain Steve Waugh (R) presents a cricket bat crafted by Aborigines to the Chief Minister of West Bengal Buddhadev Bhattacharya in Kolkata yesterday.

Zimbabwe arrive in SA



Cricket

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Zimbabwe face a grilling during their tour to South Africa but coach Phil Simmons believes his side must be exposed to such challenges if they are to improve.

Simmons, speaking as the Zimbabwe squad arrived in South Africa on Tuesday after losing both Test and one-day series in Bangladesh, said: "The ability to produce big innings is the main problem. There's talent there, but the batsmen need to understand how to score big hundreds."

"That only comes from playing over and over again, which is why I believe having a two-tier Test set-up would be a backward move."

The former West Indies all rounder has considerable experience of playing in South Africa, having turned out for the Easterns and Border teams in the 1990s.

"I will use my experiences, I'm just sorry I can't help them on the actual field," Simmons said. "But

what I've learnt here I will definitely pass on because it's going to be a hard tour."

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is considering revising its long-term fixture schedule. Under one option, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, the two weakest Test-playing nations, could play less away games in an attempt to reduce the number of mis-matches.

Zimbabwe and South Africa have played five Tests and 18 one-day internationals. Zimbabwe have never beaten South Africa in a Test while winning two of their one-dayers.

Zimbabwe lost their Test status temporarily last year because the ICC felt the team was no longer competitive after a rebellion by 15 white players over selection policy. The dispute is still going on.

The side's problems were reflected in Bangladesh. The home team had never won a Test before, let alone a Test series, and had never won a one-day series either.

Zimbabwe captain Tatenda Taibu told reporters at Johannesburg International Airport

that at least the conditions in South Africa would make a welcome change.

"There should be a bit of swing and seam and pitches here will at least be similar to those in Zimbabwe. On the tour to Bangladesh, the pitches only favoured spin," he said.

Zimbabwe open their tour on Wednesday with a day-night match against a Gauteng/North-West XI in Potchefstroom. The first one-day international is on February 25 in Johannesburg.

The 15-man squad includes four white players. The side will play three one-day internationals and two Tests.

SQUAD
Tatenda Taibu (captain), Hamilton Masakadza, Stuart Matsikenyeri, Barney Rogers, Elton Chigumbura, Alestar Maragwede, Douglas Hondo, Tinashe Panyangara, Bobby Mpofo, Tawanda Mpiwa, Prosper Utseya, Sean Williams, Gavin Ewing, Dion Ebrahim, Alex Cremer.

England return home



Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

England's cricketers returned home from South Africa on Tuesday after a marathon winter away from home.

The party made a low-key arrival into Heathrow after a trip that for some started in late November.

They came out of five Tests in South Africa on top but lost the one-day series 4-1, with a loss on Sunday.

"The Test matches were the main event. Beating a team as good as South Africa was a major achievement," said opening batsman Marcus Trescothick.

"The one-dayers were very disappointing because we didn't do what we wanted to do. But overall we're pretty pleased."

For skipper Michael Vaughan, Ashley Giles, Andrew Strauss,

Geraint Jones, Paul Collingwood, James Anderson and Gareth Batty, the tour began in Namibia on 21 November, where they won two tour matches.

The party then flew to Harare on November 26 for the controversial one-day series in Zimbabwe, which resulted in a 4-0 clean sweep for England.

Trescothick, Stephen Harmison, Andrew Flintoff and Matthew Hoggard joined up with the squad for the South Africa section of the tour, which began on December 8.

Officials from the England and Wales Cricket Board were forced to defend the punishing schedule in South Africa, which saw the side handed just five days off in between the first three Tests.

The team had a week off before the victorious fourth Test, but just three days later they were competing in the final match, with the one-day series following five days later.

The players will now take a much-needed rest before the county championship season begins on April 13. They will return to international action against Bangladesh in May, but the Ashes series against Australia will be the main business of the summer.

"We need to get all our players fit and healthy and ready to go -- and just take the confidence we've gained over the last 12 months or so (into the series)."

"We mustn't put ourselves under too much pressure, just go out and enjoy it, and hopefully we'll put on a good show," said Strauss.

"We can take a lot from the fact that we didn't play at our best and still won the series (in South Africa). That's what good sides do and we're going to be pretty confident going into the summer on the back of that series result."

Azam ton not enough

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three more wickets in hand.

But left-arm paceman Ashrafal Haq, bowling the final over, turned the game on its head claiming the final three wickets off the first four

deliveries without conceding a run.

Ashrafal, who was the hero of Dhaka's nine-wicket victory in the first game against Sylhet with a four-wicket haul, first had Ishraq

Sonnet caught at mid-on by Neeyamur Rashid with his first delivery before clean bowling Salahuddin with the third ball. Number eleven Tariqul Islam swung the fourth ball but only managed to spoon it to short mid-wicket, where Halim Shah took the catch.

Ashrafal's late act earned him back-to-back man-of-the-match awards.

Earlier, Mahmud and Mehrab Hossain Jr. steadied the Dhaka innings with an 88-run stand for the fourth wicket after they were reduced to 44-3.

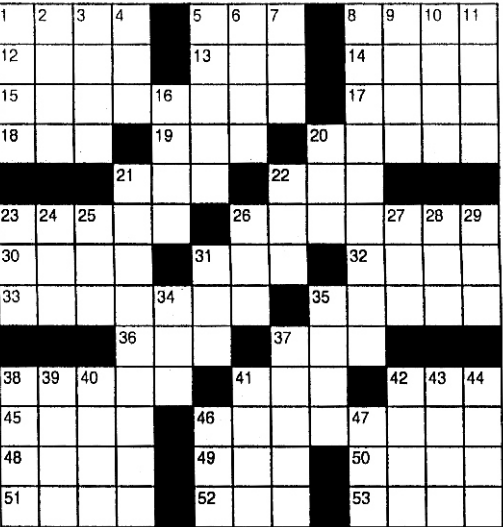
Mahmud struck eight fours in his 98-ball knock while left-handed Mehrab hit seven boundaries in his 92-ball 58. Neeyamur provided the late fireworks with a 27-ball 33.

KHULNA V RAJSHAH

Rajshahi also put up the same total as Dhaka did but Khulna were no Barisal as they successfully chased the target with two balls to spare and with three wickets in hand.

The hosts rode on a 102-run second wicket stand between Nazmus Sadat (50 off 93 balls) and Shafail Alam (44 off 78 balls) for their second successive victory despite a middle-order hiccup, which saw them tumble to 106 for six. But wicketkeeper Salim (40) and Asadullah (44) then produced 84 runs for the sixth wicket to bail them out.

Bangladesh and Khulna skipper Habibul Bashar, making his first National League appearance, scored a three-ball duck.



CRYPTOQUIP

X O G Q W G N Q O X G N Q W H Q Q

N D L M Q Q B D Y L N X E Q

L Q E Q W X H O Q H G G D C C Q T L L

N Q M X L X S X W B Q Y S X T

Yesterday's Cryptiquip: I NOTICED A SHEEPDOG PUPPY EATING CANTALOUPE, SO I CALLED HIM MY MELON COLLIE BABY.

Today's Cryptiquip Clue: G equals T

The Cryptiquip 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.

PREMIERSHIP

'Foreign' Gunners blaze



Football

AFP, London

Arsenal celebrated fielding their first ever all-foreign squad by thrashing relegation-threatened Crystal Palace 5-1 here on Monday.

Thierry Henry scored twice to record a memorable 200th Premiership appearance for the Gunners while the Frenchman was joined on the scoresheet by Dutchman Dennis Bergkamp, Spaniard Jose-Antonio Reyes and another Frenchman Patrick Vieira.

Palace's leading scorer Andy Johnson scored a penalty for the visitors.

Victory still leaves the Premiership champions a distant 11 points adrift of leaders Chelsea in third place while Palace stay two points above the relegation zone.

The thrashing will have done nothing to boost their confidence ahead of playing both Chelsea and second-placed Manchester United in the coming weeks.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger said that his side had been fortunate Palace had not taken some early chances.

"We had a difficult start but the turning point of the game was they had a good start and didn't take advantage, but once we found our fluency we were in control," said

Wenger.

Wenger refused to rule out catching Chelsea, who they still have to play, but indicated that even if they did not retain the title he was happy.

"We have a lot of good young players and for me the future is still bright."

Henry said that he should have had a hat-trick having one ruled out for offside.

"I am convinced it should have been a hat-trick," said Henry, who has bounced back with three goals in two matches having previously gone seven matches without a goal.

"However the match tonight was to see if we could be consistent and I think after taking 10 minutes to settle we played well, had great movement and scored some great goals," added Henry, who moved to 174 career goals for Arsenal and within 11 of Ian Wright's all-time club record.

Wenger paid handsome praise to his marksman.

"He is back to his best."

"It is linked with confidence and his game is getting better and better."

Bergkamp beat Gabor Kiraly in the 32nd minute - just after the toughtackling Finnish midfielder Aki Riihihti had gone off injured with a calf muscle ailment - as Reyes slipped across a pass and Bergkamp was on hand to slide it

home for his third goal in successive Premiership home matches.

Palace striker Dougie Freedman missed a sitter two minutes later as seizing on a backheader by Johnson and totally unmarked the former Scotland international sliced his shot badly wide.

His miss was laid bare as a minute later Reyes shot past Kiraly into the far corner - for his first goal in 14 matches and a few days after he was tricked into revealing he would like to move to Real Madrid - after a Palace defender had only been able to clear it to him outside the area.

"It's the best place to do your talking...on the pitch," commented Wenger acidly.

Kiraly saved Palace from going even further behind in the 38th minute as visiting defender Gonzalo Sorondo's header from Bergkamp's cross was tipped over the bar and seconds later the Hungarian saved them again as his legs turned away a Henry cross range effort for another corner.

However from the ensuing corner Henry fired in a thunderbolt of an effort from the edge of the penalty area which Kiraly could do nothing about as it flashed into the top left hand corner for his 22nd goal of the season.

Freedman had another golden chance three minutes into the second-half to at least atone for his earlier miss but one on one with Jens Lehmann he shot wide.

However the Gunners showed no mercy as a beautiful move involving Bergkamp and Henry saw the Frenchman find Vieira in the box and with Kiraly sliding in desperately thinking his defender would get it back to him, the Arsenal captain sidestepped him and tapped it into the net.

Johnson reduced the deficit after he was brought down in the box by Vieira and calmly sent Lehmann the wrong way for his 16th of the season making him Palace's record scoring Premiership player in a single season breaking Chris Armstrong's tally of 15 in the 1992/93 campaign.

However normal service was resumed when Henry added his second in the 77th minute with a curling effort from inside the box after being found by Bergkamp.

TOP SIX

English Premiership table after Mondays match (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Chelsea	27	21	5	1	50	8	68
Man Utd	27	17	8	2	45	16	59
Arsenal	27	17	6	4	63	31	57
Everton	27	14	6	7	31	28	48
Liverpool	27	13	4	10	41	29	43
Boro	27	11	8	8	41	35	41

Greek affair that never began



Football

AFP, Piraeus

Brazilian superstar Rivaldo has helped put money in the Olympiakos coffers since his arrival last summer.

The team has sold out all its home matches so far this season and the 16 team shops around the country have sold thousands of team jerseys with his name on them.

But there is also a dark side to the Rivaldo story here.

There are some team officials and many fans that believe the 2002 World Cup winner has not done enough on the pitch and his negative attitude towards coach Dusan Bajevic is not appreciated.

Rivaldo walked out on the team late in January after Bajevic substituted him in a Greek league match. He missed one practice session, citing personal reasons.

The Olympiakos board

downplayed the incident and gave its full confidence to Bajevic and his decisions.

The Brazilian attacking midfielder later himself downplayed the incident, saying it was blown out of proportion by the local media, although he told one interviewer that come this summer he may leave.

"Olympiakos comes above all. The team is above me, above Rivaldo, above each one of us. If I can't make the changes that I want to make, then I cannot be the coach for Olympiakos," said Bajevic in an interview with Athens sports daily newspaper Protathitis.

The row between Rivaldo and Bajevic surfaced last November when the Brazilian ace was first substituted by his coach, and then Rivaldo complained, saying indirectly the team was not playing well due to mistakes in tactics.

Rivaldo has completed only a quarter of his two-year contract that reportedly brings him an annual salary of 1.8 million euros.

The Athens daily newspaper Ethnos said on Sunday that an Olympiakos top official told one of their journalists the team would not be too concerned about letting Rivaldo go.

"It is a very large contract, two years long, with a lot of money and no president of a club would pay that kind of money to a player who does not provide the appropriate services," wrote the newspaper.

Rivaldo has scored seven league goals so far, placing him among the top 10 scorers in the championship, but has not shown the form which led him to be voted the World Player of the Year in 1999.

There were even reports within Olympiakos that Rivaldo's teammates also have been annoyed by him.

"At times just the names are not enough, something that is also evident in Real Madrid. Olympiakos has a lot more potential," team captain Predrag Djordjevic said in an interview with the club's official

magazine referring to Rivaldo's arrival.

But not all teammates have negative feelings for Rivaldo.

"This is the Rivaldo we want, the dynamic professional," said Olympiakos defender Grigorios Georgatos who had praise for the Brazilian's play in the Greek Cup competition where Olympiakos has advanced to the final eight.

When Rivaldo arrived last summer, he said two of the reasons he had chosen to play for Olympiakos was due to his personal friendship with fellow Brazilian striker Giovanni who was playing in his fourth season for the Greek club and that Olympiakos would be playing in the Champions League.

But even Giovanni has expressed his desire to quit the team after this season and Olympiakos did not make it through the initial round of the Champions League, thus leaving 32-year-old Rivaldo with fewer incentives.

Star-struck

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But the wait doubtless gave more time to Ronaldo and Daniela, by now warm and snug inside the castle, to gaze on the the 44 16th century, stained glass windows representing the love story of Psyche and Cupid.

Outside another barrage of flash lights lit up the night sky, and cameras whirled as yet more Audis glided into view, shepherded by a stern group of gendarmes.

Of the other stars expected at the party, including England star David Beckham and local hero Zinedine Zidane, there was no sign. The Spanish press reported they had remained in Spain to attend a charity football match on Tuesday.

During their stay, guests will be able to visit the Conde Museum inside the chateau, with its fine collection of old masters among its 6,000 works.

It is the only collection in France apart from the Louvre in Paris to boast three paintings by the Italian master Raphael.

Ronaldo's friends and family will also be able to visit the magnificent library, with wooden walkways around the different levels which houses some 30,000 manuscripts, many of them rare editions.

It is not known exactly how much the evening was costing Ronaldo, but hiring out the whole castle is said to cost 20,000 euros (26,000 dollars), without food and drink included.

Gerrard missing Owen

AFP, London

Steven Gerrard would be keen to play with former Liverpool striker Michael Owen again in the Premiership although he did not say whether it would be at Anfield or Chelsea.

Gerrard is unfailingly linked with a summer move to Chelsea as Liverpool struggle while Owen has admitted he would have to consider a move from Spain if he does not get more first-team football at Real Madrid.

Despite being the Spanish club's highest scorer with 11 goals, coach Wanderly Luxemburgo has insisted on persevering with Brazil star Ronaldo, rather than reward the England striker.

But Gerrard had no doubts about Owen.

"Michael is world class," Gerrard told BBC Radio.



PHOTO: AFP

YOU WON'T SEE THIS AGAIN: A combo picture of the Galle International Cricket Stadium.

Galle gone with tsunami

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"We will not be able to have the international safety standards that are required because of the restrictions on new constructions," said Thilanga Sumathipala, a special envoy of Sri Lanka Cricket.

"We also have to take into account what goes on in the minds of players when they are in the middle and hear the sea lashing in the background... It is not going to be the same again."

The stadium here had 10-metres of water when the tsunamis struck the 10,000-capacity grounds. At least one man was killed.

Warnaweera said it could take up to a year to remove six inches to a foot of the top soil and replant.

"The reconstruction is going to cost about 300 to 400 million rupees (three to four million dollars)," Warnaweera said.

Sri Lanka's national team drove to the grounds Sunday to play softball cricket with some 300 local

children and 300 from the neighbouring district of Matara who survived the tsunami.

"We cannot say we have been hit and just wait," Sumathipala said. "The message we are trying to get across is that we have to get on with our lives. We are helping the children to get over their trauma."

Warnaweera, who is also a former Sri Lankan Test player, says the grounds had been his life and the tsunamis had taken a part of himself.

"This is my first love.... This means I have lost a part of my life," he said pointing to the destruction of the venue.

Cricknet authorities maintain that they are not taking away a Test venue from the southern province of cricket-crazy Sri Lanka, but only trying to find an alternate venue.

They say they can't risk the world's most picturesque venue becoming the deadlied.

Two other pace bowlers, Shabbir Ahmed (knee) and Umar Gul (back) have already been ruled out.

Natwar to meet

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day visit, will meet Shaharyar over breakfast for an informal chat on February 17, official sources told PTI here.

Ahmedabad, which experienced communal riots in 2002, is one of the proposed venues for the three-match Test series during the tour which begins on February 25. But PCB has conveyed to the Board of Control for Cricket in India that they were not willing to play in the Gujarat city due to "security reasons."

Shaharyar, a former Pakistan foreign secretary, had earlier said that he would seek Singh's help in resolving the tangle over Ahmedabad.

The issue has already been discussed by senior officials of both the countries at the instance of Shaharyar but the decision was left to both the Boards rather than governments.

The PCB chief was also on record saying that he was hopeful that Natwar Singh would help in resolving the issue amicably.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	35 Slither slowly	2 Vicinity	21 "White Album" song
1 Cacophony from the kennel	36 Crafty	3 Fringe benefit	22 Thanks-giving veggie
5 Turf	37 Accomplished	4 Turn on the water-works	23 Mule of song
8 Tops	41 URL part	5 Prep for finals	24 "Lazy River"
12 Hydrox rival	42 Moose's cousin	6 Hasn't paid yet	25 Basilica bench
13 Seesaw quorum	45 Peruse	7 Spanish 13	26 Part of UCLA
14 Hum-dinger	46 "White Album" song	8 "White Album" song	27 Fawn's mom
15 "White Album" song	48 Oppositionist	9 Mark replacement	28 Idolator's emotion
17 Speedy steed	49 Big bother	10 Hit a puck	29 Easy mark
18 Maryland emblem	50 Green acres	11 Howl cylinder	30 Massacre symbol
19 Dog tags	51 Con-temptible	12 Story teller	31 Give as an example
20 Listerine alternative	52 Anderson's "High —"	13 Muppet eagle	32 Blood bank VI
21 Opinion	53 Look for keywords	Solution time: 21 mins.	33 Snatch
22 Tie up the phone	DOWN		34 Actress Olin
23 Tremendous	1 Vacillate		35 Villes
24 Greek consonants			36 Old fogey
25 Pinnacle			37 DeMille movie, usually
26 Dr. DeLuise			38 Mattheson money
27 Mississippi River fader			39 Acute
28 Mason and Matlock			40 Chapeau
			41 "Of course"