

'Glue yourselves to the pitches'

AFP, Karachi

Former master batsman Zaheer Abbas Tuesday advised Pakistani players to stick to the crease at all costs if they want to put rival India under pressure in the opening Test at Mohali.

"Glue yourselves to the Indian pitches to the extent that they have to call police to budge you from there and score big in the first Test to gain a psychological advantage," he said.

Resolute batting would be vital in the outcome of the series, Pakistan's first on Indian soil for six years, said Abbas, whose 78 Tests for Pakistan yielded 5,062 runs.

"My advice is to use your skill and don't give away wickets. The team which wins the first Test in Mohali will gain the advantage," said Abbas, known locally as the Asian Don Bradman, after the legendary Australian batsman.

He said batsman Sachin Tendulkar was the key man for India.

"For me Tendulkar's appearance will be vital as he is the binding force of the Indian batting and we saw how disorganised they were when Tendulkar did not play last year" on India's tour of Pakistan, Abbas said.

India take on Pakistan in three Tests and six one-day internationals in March-April with Tendulkar on a comeback trail after being troubled by a tennis elbow injury last season.

"Tendulkar's loss would be bigger than Pakistan's loss of Shoaib Akhtar," said Abbas, referring to the Pakistani fast bowler's decision to pull out from the Test series due to a hamstring injury.

He said Pakistan's batsmen faced a huge challenge from Indian spinners Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh and advised them to practise hard.

India start the series as favourites but Pakistan must exploit the home pressure on Sourav Ganguly's team, Abbas said.

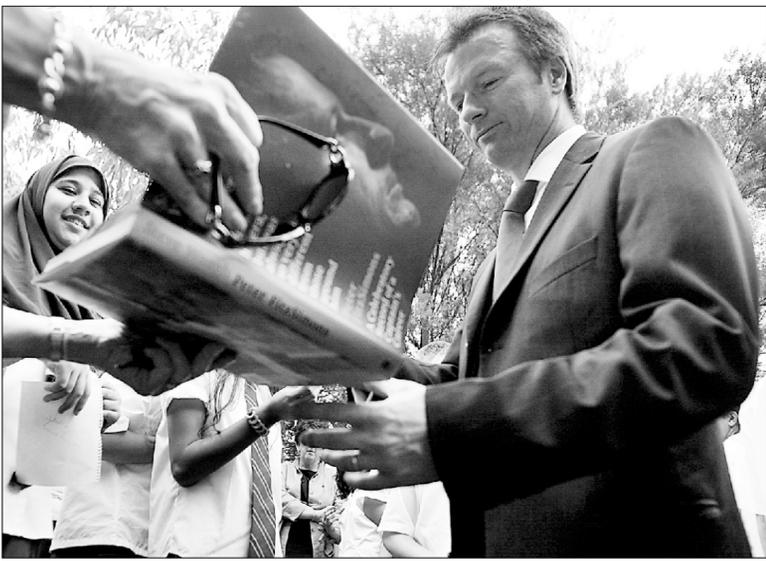


PHOTO: AFP

DREAM LIKE STEVE! Former Australia captain Steve Waugh signs an autograph during the launch of the 'Steve Waugh Presents' resource kit for teachers of 10-15 year olds, at the Marsden High School in Sydney yesterday.

Hayden in doubt

New Zealand soup up squad



AFP/CRICINFO, undated

Australia's opening batsman Matthew Hayden's long-awaited return to form has taken a blow with a shoulder injury putting him in doubt for Saturday's third one-day international in New Zealand, the team said Wednesday.

Hayden hurt his shoulder making a diving catch to dismiss New Zealand's Chris Cairns during Australia's 106-run drubbing of the Blackcaps Tuesday night.

Earlier Hayden lashed an impressive 114 from 124 balls to signal a return to form after a string of miserable batting performances which led to his being briefly dropped from the one-day squad.

Australia's team physiotherapist, Alex Kountouri, said Hayden had a "grade one" strain to his right shoulder joint and that his arm was in a sling to take pressure off the joint.

"At this stage there is a fair amount of swelling around the joint, so we will have a clearer picture as to how Matthew is progressing,

once that swelling subsides," Kountouri said.

"Whilst there is some doubt over his chances to play in the third game, he certainly hasn't been ruled out at this stage," he said.

"We will just have to monitor his progress over the next 48 hours before making any decisions about his availability."

Australia captain Ricky Ponting said the whole team was pleased with Hayden's return to form and hoped he could continue on Saturday.

"Everybody's been hoping that big score was just around the corner for him, and to get a hundred today the way that he did was an outstanding effort," he said.

"So the big fella's gone off with a bit of pain in his right shoulder, we'll have a look at him over the next 24 hours and hopefully he comes up for Saturday."

Australia has a 2-0 lead in the five-match one-day series.

On the other hand, New Zealand named Michael Pappas, Andre Adams and James Marshall in a 13-man squad for the next two matches against Australia.

They replace all-rounder Scott Styris, who has a bruised knee, and out-of-form batsman Mathew Sinclair.

Coach John Bracewell said Sinclair needed to regain confidence by playing domestic cricket.

Uncapped Marshall was 12th man for the second match and will now hope for an opportunity to join his twin brother Hamish in the side.

Pappas, meanwhile, has been in excellent one-day form for Canterbury, scoring 423 runs in nine matches this season at an average of 52.87.

He has not played international cricket since the Test series in England last June.

The 25-year-old was selected for a tour to Bangladesh which followed but did not make it onto the plane after dislocating a shoulder.

NEW ZEALAND SQUAD

Stephen Fleming (captain), Andre Adams, Nathan Astle, Chris Cairns, Brendon McCullum, Craig McMillan, Hamish Marshall, James Marshall, Kyle Mills, Michael Pappas, Daryl Tuffey, Daniel Vettori, Jeff Wilson.

Pak tour not

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to find a solution to the crisis after the International Cricket Council (ICC) said on Tuesday the series was unlikely to be played if the TV issue was not solved.

"I have received the letter from Zee, but we can't do anything till the court decides on the case," said Mahendra.

The Madras High Court is expected to deliver a judgement this week.

India bans

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"We as sportsmen are only doing the country proud by performing well. I have the tricolour on my helmet, but I can probably sell that space to sponsors and make a lot of money."

"I love India and I am proud to be an Indian and that's what I want to portray. But if I can't carry the tricolour on my helmet, it is the government's loss."

Former Indian cricket captain Bishan Bedi, however, jumped to the government's defence.

"The national flag is most important and should be duly respected," said Bedi. "You can't put the helmet with the India flag alongside your shoes."

"I don't see it as a motivation tool, national pride or patriotism. It's all in the heart."

The decree is seen as a move by the government to hit back at the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) which takes pride in its autonomous nature.

In recent Supreme Court hearings to decide if the BCCI came under the purview of the government, the board's lawyer said the players play for Team BCCI and not Team India.

"The BCCI should be happy not to use the flag on the helmet," the Times of India quoted an unnamed top government official as saying.

"After all, they gave an affidavit in the court that they have nothing to do with the government."

BCB boys a-Pauled

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Table with 4 columns: Name, O, M, R, W. Rows include Razzak, Sabbir, Manjarul, Ashraf.

BCB XI: First innings

Table with 4 columns: Name, O, M, R, W. Rows include Al Shahrar, Sahagir, Aftab, Kapali, Ashraf, Manjarul, Sabbar, Razzak, Shahjada, Anwar, Jubair, Extras, Total, Fall of wickets.

Table with 4 columns: Name, O, M, R, W. Rows include Paul, Bose, Mangaraj, Sanyal.

BCB XI: Second innings

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Bowler

Table with 4 columns: Name, O, M, R, W. Rows include Paul, Bose, Mangaraj, Shahid.

Toss: BCB XI

Umpires: S Bandekar and R Deshmukh. Match referee: S Chaturvedi.

It's on Imran's advice



CRICINFO, undated

Imran Khan has admitted that he talked Shoaib Akhtar out of making himself available for the Indian tour.

Shoaib on Friday pulled out with a hamstring injury, and Imran said that he had been consulted before the decision was taken.

Speaking to Times News Network, Imran said, "Shoaib was willing to make himself available for the selection but I advised him against doing so. He was confused whether to tour or not."

"He was in two minds when he came to me for advice. He didn't know how to respond to the hamstring niggle. I told him if it's a hamstring rupture then he shouldn't tour at all. As it turned out, Shoaib had a big rupture."

Shoaib performed exceptionally in the first Test against Australia at Perth, and also bowled with real zeal in the first innings of the second Test before losing his zip and fitness. Thereafter, he was a convenient whipping-boy for Pakistan's poor displays on tour -- but Imran suggested that others were just as

much to blame.

"Shoaib is slightly difficult to handle and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) likes to pass the buck," he said. "They all need soul-searching."



SHOAIB AKHTAR

Imran added: "It's sad that in Pakistan everyone, even President Pervez Musharraf, is unwilling to accept his mistakes. I say that because it is President Musharraf

who formed the PCB which in turn appointed Inzamamul Haq as captain. None of them realise that our poor performance is due to them also."

According to Imran, there was little point in Shoaib rushing back into the fray.

"Realistically, I don't see him playing the Test series, but if he stretches himself too far then maybe he can play the third Test," he said.

"But for me, he shouldn't play before the third or the fourth one-day game and then think of international cricket. Shoaib also realises that if he plays and fails then he'll again be made a scapegoat."

Shoaib himself ruled out any half-baked comeback bid. "I don't want to rush back," he said, perhaps aware of how poorly he had performed under the weight of expectation against India last year.

"I want to be away from media attention. It's a question of my career and I don't want to compromise on it. But yes, I don't rule myself out from coming back for the one-day series."

Tennis girl in cricket land

AFP, New Delhi

For long cricketers were the only sportspeople to get mobbed in India, but a petite teenager now enjoys similar star status.

In less than a month, 18-year-old tennis player Sania Mirza has built up such a maniac fan following that security guards have been hired to keep them at bay outside her home.

Reaching the third round of a Grand Slam or winning a low-profile WTA event may not mean much the world over, but it has helped Mirza live a dream in a country starved of top-class sports stars.

"The success that I have got is unbelievable," Mirza said after getting past two rounds at the recent Australian Open and clinching her maiden WTA title in her hometown last week.

Both achievements were firsts by an Indian woman tennis player, as was her breaking into the top 100.

"I was aiming to crack the top

100 by the year-end but now I hope to make it to the top 50," said Mirza, who shot up to 99 in world rankings after her recent good run.

As much as her powerful strokes and positive attitude, Mirza's good looks and charm have floored Indians and attracted sponsors in hordes.

At least 18 major companies approached her managers - doubles specialist Mahesh Bhupathi's sports management Globosport company - but only three have been given the green signal to endorse her.

"We have numerous offers but we are being selective," said her father Imran Mirza. "We don't want commercial interests to affect her game."

The youngster, who sports a glittering nose-stud, is reportedly as much in demand as many frontline cricketers and only below superstars Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid.

But Mirza has promised more

than just glamour.

"I don't go on to the court to look glamorous but to win matches," she reacted after being voted the second most popular woman in the Australian Open after Russian Maria Sharapova.

"I have always idolised Steffi Graf and my aim is to have a long and memorable career," said Mirza, who has won 12 ITF titles, five of them in 2004.

"I really need to work hard on my fitness for that," added Mirza, who made the final of the Asian Championship in Tashkent last year to gain a wild card for the Australian Open.

"She has tremendous potential and it is great to see an Indian woman tennis player show such promise," Bhupathi said after Mirza won her maiden WTA title.

Mirza, who had a stint with celebrated Australian coach Bob Brett last year, has raised hopes for the Federation Cup since another promising player Shikha Uberoi has been allowed to represent India.

Uberoi, who has played all her tennis in the United States, has been partnering Mirza in doubles and the duo are the brightest prospects since Nirupama Vaidyanathan won a round at the Australian Open in 1998.

India has produced fine men's tennis players like twice Wimbledon semifinalist Ramanathan Krishnan, the charismatic Vijay Amritraj and Leander Paes and Bhupathi, but few women made the grade till Mirza came along.

Cricketers beware. The likes of Mirza, Olympic silver-winning shooter Rajyavardhan Rathore, long-jumper Anju Bobby George and the country's first F1 driver Narain Karthikeyan are there to share the limelight - and sponsors.



SANIA MIRZA



Did U Know?

The idea of an Olympic Flame burning from the start of the games to the closing was first introduced in 1928 Amsterdam Olympics.



Andy Blignaut

(Zimbabwe's rebel cricketer) "I am coming back unconditionally to play. I would like to play the game for Zimbabwe at international level and prove to myself that I can move up the rankings." While rejoining the national team on Monday.

Fed Cup from tomorrow

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teams from other divisions because we have a very limited number of quality footballers in the country at the moment," said Helal.

The BFF general secretary said that 13 Dhaka clubs along with four services teams would feature in the knockout first phase in three groups from where only the group champions will advance into the final round. Each team will be allowed to register three foreign players but can field only two of them in a match.

Tournament committee secretary Anwar Hossain Uzzal hoped that the tournament would be a big financial boost for the cash-starved BFF.

"We are hoping for a huge turnout in the second round and unlike the previous editions we have decided to distribute profits from gate receipts among the participating teams apart from cash awards for winners," said Ujjal.

He said that the price of a gallery ticket for the final round have been fixed at Tk 20 while for the VIP it will be Tk 50.

FIRST DIV HOCKEY

Wanderers blank Bachelor

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka Wanderers Club blanked Bachelor Sporting Club 4-0 in the Green Delta First Division Hockey League at the Maulana Bhashani National Stadium yesterday.

The winners led the first half 2-0. Nabi Sheikh, Imran Haider, Omar Faruque and Sheikh Sumon Ali scored for Wanderers.

In the day's other match, Mohammad Javed struck twice as Bangladesh Sporting Club defeated Farashganj Sporting Club 2-0 at the same venue after leading the first half 1-0.

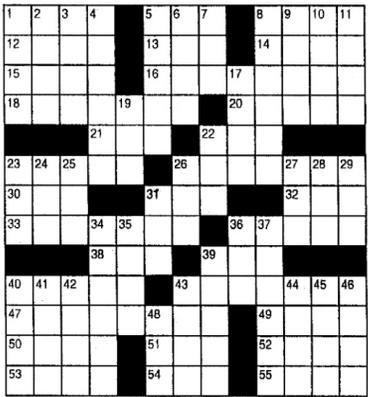
Dhoni eyes

FROM PAGE 13 the team for long." Dhoni believes that he can establish himself in the Test team in the future.

He plays for the same zone team as skipper Sourav Ganguly, and has been helped by both him and national coach John Wright.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.



CRYPTOQUIP

JTIB D RWICIGQB VDEGDWIR

QP SMBBIE, JQLCS MG OI

D RLEI OIG GTDG TI

VEIPIER EMOR?

Yesterday's Cryptogram: IF YOU PUT A SOFT COVER OVER A SALAD VEGETABLE, I GUESS IT COULD BE A CELERY CAP.

Today's Cryptogram Clue: G equals T

The Cryptogram 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.

Nahid blows Khulna

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however, went to Niaz who finished with 4-24 from ten overs.

Dhaka now have six points after three rounds while Khulna share the second place with Rajshahi on four points.

CHITTAGONG v BARISAL Chittagong, who had lost two close matches in the previous rounds, once again spent anxious moments at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium after a century from Imran Ahmed and Hannan Sarkar's fifty had kept Barisal well on course for the 252 required.

But Hannan's departure for 51 triggered a dramatic middle-order collapse which saw the visitors lose five wickets in the space of 42 runs and Chittagong eventually prevailed by 17 runs.

Barisal began brightly with opener Imran sharing two significant stands. The right-hander put on 59 with Humayun Kabir (26) for the opening partnership and a further 83 for the second partnership with Hannan to take the score to 142-1. But while Imran, who hit 10 fours and two sixes in a breezy 132-ball 115, kept his cool, the others apart from Hannan could not provide him with the support necessary as Barisal slumped to their third successive defeat. Imran was bowled by left-arm spinner Ilias Sunny in the penultimate over.

Earlier, Chittagong reached 251-5 in 50 overs after being sent to bat.

Opener Ehsanul Haque topscored with 81 (126 balls) while in-form Nazimuddin made a rapid 49 off 51.

Faisal Hossain then gave the innings the thrust with a 29-ball 42 that included a six and five fours.

Barisal's left-arm spinner Mosharraf Hossain finished with 4-42 from ten overs.

RAJSHAH v SYLHET

Rajshahi pulled off an exciting victory against Sylhet with man-of-the-match Forhad making 96 under pressure.

The home side were tottering at 87-6 after being sent in but Forhad, who came to bat at number three, and the ever-reliable captain Mahsud (70 off 68) shared a decisive 144-run stand for the seventh wicket as Rajshahi ended their 50 overs on a decent 238-8.

Forhad hit 11 fours in 133 balls while Mashud struck five fours.

Sylhet also found themselves in trouble early on and were almost dead and buried at 89-5. But Ezaz Ahmed led a fight-back making cracking 67 from just 62 balls with five fours and three sixes. The number seven batsman received good support from the tail as Sylhet inched closer to an unlikely victory. But they lost their last wicket on 232 with nine balls still remaining and Rajshahi heaved a sigh of relief.