

'Cricket is not an age or a height thing'

DAVID HOPPS, *The Guardian*

Bangladesh have spent the entire England tour so far hoping for a little miracle, and it appears they have finally found one. Mushfiqur Rahim is not quite 5ft tall and will not be 17 until September 1, but put a cricket bat in his hands and the player who might be mistaken for a mascot becomes an inspiration instead.

The Test series which many have dismissed as a mismatch is now assured of at least one uplifting story. Mushfiqur's century against Northamptonshire yesterday (Sunday), hot on the heels of a half-century against Sussex in Hove, again revealed a cricketer of unbounded spirit and definite promise. Lord's will rise to him.

He is the height of about six spans of Steve Harmison's right hand; he could duck a Harmison length ball with ease - and probably will. But he grinned confidently last night at the thought of a Test debut on Thursday.

"Cricket is not an age or a height thing," he said. "I will just watch the ball and play. A debut at Lord's would be really exciting - but I am sleeping OK."

When Mushfiqur was in the 90s, and signalled to the dressing room for a drink, he resembled a schoolboy politely raising his hand to ask to go to the toilet. But his unbeaten 115, from 167 balls, admittedly against a Northants 2nd XI attack, possessed a control throughout that marked him down as a batsman of definite promise.

Bangladesh's top five, who all perished yesterday to a series of terrible misjudgements, could already learn from him.

Admittedly, Mushfiqur's second first-class century in his fifth match came against an attack possessing some of the most benign spin bowling imaginable, in the shape of Andrew White's off-breaks and Rob White's leg-spin. Mushfiqur knew as much and rated his first interview, with the BBC World Service, as far more daunting.

Cricket provides endless examples of good things coming in small packages. Sachin Tendulkar, Gundappa Viswanath and Sir Don Bradman were all great Test bats-

men who would struggle to see over the top of a bar - which, come to think of it, might have been an excuse for The Don not standing his round. Mushfiqur, even allowing for a little more growing time, may prove to be the most diminutive of them all.

Dav Whatmore, Bangladesh's coach, has offered the young man wise counsel, and has wanted to pick him since that Hove innings. He can now be sure of the support of his captain, Habibul Bashar, and the chairman of selectors, Faruque

Ahmed.

"The lad is showing that he wants to play and that means a lot," said Whatmore. "He looks an older head on young shoulders."

Mushfiqur's most ambitious shot brought up his fifty when he hit Andrew White over the top, clearing John Wolstenholme, at mid-on, who is about two feet taller than him. He glanced Rob White to reach his hundred, was dropped at gully on 109 but survived until the 5.30 close.



PHOTO: COURTESY CENTRE OF ATTENTION! Youngster Mushfiqur Rahim (C) at the breakfast table with Bangladesh mates Aftab Ahmed (R) and Kazi Shahadat Hossain in London on Monday.

Premier Bank to sponsor Senior Division League

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has at last managed to lure a sponsor for the Senior Division Football League.

The league is already on with the First Division games but the main attraction, the Premier League, is scheduled to kick off on May 28 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Premier Bank will sponsor the most coveted domestic competition after finalising a one-year contract with the federation yesterday.

"We have made a one year deal with the Premier Bank and we will get Tk 20 lakh for the league," said BFF general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal.

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

Getting joins Tigers' curry challenge

CRICINFO

Mike Gatting, the former England captain whose fondness for food was the subject of a thousand anecdotes during his 23-year career, has been charged with the tricky task of finding a curry chef to cater for the Bangladeshi cricket team during their tour of England.

Gatting, 47, has been named on a panel of judges that includes one of Newcastle's finest Bangladesh restaurateurs, Daraz Aziz, plus - importantly - a member of the Bangladesh squad itself, for the inaugural "npower Red Hot Curry Challenge".

All curry restaurants in the North East of England have been invited to enter by the Test-series sponsors, npower, with the chance to prepare a feast for the team later this summer. A tasting session will take place at Chester-le-Street on Thursday, June 2, the eve of the second Test.

"I'm a big curry fan and am looking forward to tasting the region's best curries," said an enthusiastic Gatting.

"I fancy myself as a bit of a chef but I am sure my talents will be put to shame by the local experts here in the North East. I can't wait to savour the winning curry."

Nejmeh in city for AFC Cup match

SPORTS REPORTER

Nejmeh FC arrived in Dhaka yesterday morning to play their last group match in the AFC Cup against Bangladesh giants Brothers Union.

Tomorrow's Group C match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium has only an academic interest for both sides.

The Lebanese league champions have won their all three previous encounters to make the second round as the first team while Brothers, who lost their away game to Nejmeh 4-1, have been eliminated from the race.

But the tourists were not ready to take the match lightly although they have come here without four key players.

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

Indians abused Wright?

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

India's outgoing cricket coach John Wright may not have renewed his contract because he was humiliated by players under his command, Indian legend Sunil Gavaskar claimed on Monday.

"One of the things that may have made up John's mind not to renew his contract could have been the way some players treated him in the last year," Gavaskar wrote in his widely syndicated column.

"He was told off and sworn at by some players." Wright, a former New Zealand captain, stepped down as India's first foreign coach in April after a five-year tenure, having declined an offer by the Indian cricket board to remain coach till the 2007 World Cup in the West Indies.

Australian batting great Greg Chappell was appointed Wright's successor last week by a six-man

selection panel that included Gavaskar, two other former captains Ravi Shastri and Srinivas Venkatraghavan and three administrators.

Media reports suggested that Gavaskar wanted an Indian to coach the national team, although cricket board president Ranbir Singh Mahendra said the decision to appoint Chappell was "unanimous."

Gavaskar's startling claim without naming any player was made in the context of a debate whether the team needed an Indian or a foreign coach. He said the column, printed across India over the last two days, was written before the panel met on Thursday to pick a new coach.

"One thing is sure -- however inefficient an Indian coach would be, there is little chance that he could be abused to his face by any player, however big the players may be," Gavaskar wrote.

The Indian cricket board played down Gavaskar's claim.

"We never received any complaints from Wright about players' behaviour," said Mahendra.

"I don't think he would have taken such a thing lightly."

Senior Indian players like Sourav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar are holidaying abroad and were not available for comment.

Wright has returned home to New Zealand.



JOHN WRIGHT

Seeds sail smoothly

French Open

AP, Paris

Rafael Nadal's promising French Open career is off to a good start.

The 18-year-old Spaniard won his Roland Garros debut Monday, beating qualifier Meilen Tu 6-1, 6-0. Clijsters, out much of last year because of a wrist injury, played with her recently strained right knee wrapped but still advanced in 48 minutes.

No. 4 Elena Dementieva, who last year's final to Anastasia Myskina, beat Barbora Strycova 6-3, 6-3.

Nadal is trying to become the first

seeking the only Grand Slam title she has never won, overcame a slow start in the opening match on Centre Court and beat Katarina Srebotnik 3-6, 6-2, 6-2.

Two-time French Open runner-up Kim Clijsters won in her first Grand Slam match since January 2004, beating qualifier Meilen Tu 6-1, 6-0. Clijsters, out much of last year because of a wrist injury, played with her recently strained right knee wrapped but still advanced in 48 minutes.

No. 19 Shinobu Asagoe and No. 20 Daniela Hantuchova were also among the early winners. Asagoe beat Julia Schurr 7-5, 6-2, and

man since Mats Wilander in 1982 to win at Roland Garros on the first try. He turns 19 on the day of the semifinals, when his opponent could be Federer.

Federer, seeking the only Grand Slam title he has yet to win, advanced easily despite losing serve twice in the second set to Sela, ranked 264th.

Other winners included No. 14 Carlos Moya, No. 16 Radek Stepanek, No. 18 Mario Ancic and No. 23 Sebastian Grosjean.

No. 19 Shinobu Asagoe and No. 20 Daniela Hantuchova were also among the early winners. Asagoe beat Julia Schurr 7-5, 6-2, and

SEE PAGE 13 COL 7



PHOTO: AFP GOOD OLD GRAF: Former German tennis queen Steffi Graf executing a forehand in her exhibition doubles match in Paris, a day before the French Open.

Piece of history for Pakistan too

Cricket

AFP, Gros Islet (St Lucia)

Pakistan became the second team to complete a clean sweep of an international cricket series in the Caribbean when they won the third and final one-day international against West Indies by 22 runs on Sunday.

Having set West Indies a record 304 to win from 50 overs, the Pakistanis dismissed their hosts for 281 in 49.3 overs, despite Chris Gayle hitting his 11th one-day hundred.

Abdul Razzaq was the pick of the Pakistan bowlers with four wickets for 45 runs from 6.3 overs, and gained good support from Rana Navedul Hasan with three for 48 from nine overs, and Shoaib Malik, who took two for 41 from eight overs.

Pakistan won the first ODI last Wednesday at Arnos Vale by 59 runs and the second by 40 runs on Saturday here.

Consistent batting from their top-order batsmen had helped the visitors post a record 303 for six from their allocation of 50 overs after being sent in to bat.

Bazid Khan, a replacement for injured regular Pakistan captain

Inzamamul Haq, and one of three changes to the visitors' line-up for the match, hit four boundaries in the top score of 66 from 97 balls.

Shahid Afridi got things going for the visitors with half-dozen fours and a couple of sixes in 56 from 30 balls, and Yousof Youhana kept them going with five fours in 50 from 63 balls.

Corey Collymore and Ian Bradshaw each collected two wickets to be the most successful West Indies bowlers, who conceded the highest one-day innings total in six matches at the Beausejour Stadium.

Gayle, who hit 13 boundaries in 124 from 137 balls, gave West Indies a circumstantial start along with fellow left-hander Wavell Hinds.

They shared 90 for the first wicket before Hinds was caught behind when he under-edged a cross-batted stroke at a delivery from Shabbir Ahmed in the 16th over.

Two overs later, West Indies suffered a major setback, when Ramnaresh Sarwan was caught at short extra cover off Razzaq for four to leave West Indies 96 for two.

West Indies captain Shivnarine Chanderepaul added 75 for the third wicket with Gayle to put his side back on track, but he was caught at wide long-off for 33 off Malik at a crucial stage in the 32nd over.

Runako Morton played more

confidently and added 49 for the fourth wicket with Gayle, who drove Afridi through cover for a single to reach his landmark.

Once Gayle remained however, West Indies still had a chance, but he gave it away, when he scooped a delivery from Shabbir to extra cover and was out-caught for 124.

He hit 13 fours from 137 balls, and with his departure, West Indies' chances went down the chute.

Earlier, Pakistan benefitted from an opening stand of 87 between Afridi and Yasir Hameed.

Afridi was caught at deep mid wicket off Collymore, but with him out of the way, West Indies were able to apply the brakes, and slow Pakistan's scoring down.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: 303 for 6 in 50 overs (Afridi 56, Hameed 41, Bazid 66, Youhana 50, Younis 40; Collymore 2-51).

WEST INDIES: 281 all out in 49.3 overs (Gayle 124, Hinds 35, Chanderepaul 33, Morton 27; Navedul 3-48, Abdul Razzaq 4-45).

Result: Pakistan won by 22 runs.

Series: Pakistan win the three-match series 3-0.

Man-of-the-match and man-of-the-series: Shahid Afridi.

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1



Did U Know? Ferenc Szisz from Romania, driving a Renault, won the first Formula One Grand Prix held at Le Mans, France in 1906.



Younis Khan

(Pakistan cricket vice-captain) "It is a dream come true to get the chance to lead Pakistan in a Test match. But my main ambition is to lead Pakistan to a win in Barbados as we have never won a Test series in West Indies." After being named skipper in absence of suspended Inzamamul Haq.

What to WATCH

TEN Sports

French Open First Round, Day 2 Live at 3:30 pm

ESPN

Football Focus Live at 6:30 pm Sportscentre Live at 8:30 pm

STAR Sports

Sportsline Live at 8:00 pm

Manzarul shines on dull day

SPORTS REPORTER

A decent all-round performance by Manzarul Islam on a rather dull day of cricket helped the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) Reds snatch a 38-run win over BCB Greens in a low-scoring limited-overs match at the BKSP ground yesterday.

The all-rounder, who has lost his place in the national team's ongoing tour of England, top-scored 23 for his side and grabbed four wickets in four overs with his left-arm spin to bowl out the Greens for 117 in just 28 overs. Southpaw Abdur Razzak made highest 24 coming in at number eight.

The match was played on the hockey turf with a softball due to poor ground condition.

However, the off-season game which is a part of the selection trial for Bangladesh A team's tour of England in July, failed to bring the best out of the out-of-touch cricketers.

Apart from Manzarul who captured the last four wickets in the space of 15 runs, the only man to

SEE PAGE 13 COL 6



PHOTO: AP Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi receives a cheque after being named man-of-the-match and man-of-the-series at the end of the third one-day international against West Indies on Sunday.