

'No point in feeling comfortable after one or two good knocks'

Cricket
SPORTS REPORTER

The inaugural Afro-Asia Cup one-day series might have lost some glamour even before a ball had been bowled due to the last moment withdrawal of a number of top names but Bangladesh's star batsman Mohammad Ashraful sees no reason not to enthuse with the tournament.

"As a team, we are going through a crucial phase in international cricket and that's why it is always nice for our players to play as many matches as possible. We should take it as an opportunity to prove ourselves. There are still a lot of quality players on both sides," said the 21-year-old who will fly for South Africa tomorrow with teammate and the country's ace pacesman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza to join the Asian squad.

Ashraful however was disappointed that India's Rahul Dravid will not be there.

"I will definitely miss Dravid as I wanted to discuss some technical

things with him because he is an absolute class player." Ashraful thought the three one-dayers against the African XI could



MOHAMMAD ASHRAFUL

act as a confidence booster for him ahead of the upcoming series against Sri Lanka.

"My main target is to perform well in Sri Lanka and I believe this tournament will help me a lot as we kick off our tour with the one-day series in Sri Lanka."

The young batsman refused to take too much comfort from his splendid showing in the NatWest one-day series in England where he also made that epic match-winning hundred against Australia. He was also self-critical of his time in international cricket so far.

"Considering my age you might brand me as a young player but I have already enough experience after appearing in 27 Tests and 54 one-day matches. I also realise that there is no point in feeling comfortable after one or two good knocks."

"I played my best Test innings (158 not out) against India but what have I done afterwards? I failed against Zimbabwe and in the Test series against England. So, there is no scope for me to think that I am going to Sri Lanka with huge confidence."

Ashraful was also not dwelling too much on the history from his last trip to Sri Lanka when he became Test cricket's youngest centurion.

"Believe me I never think about past successes. My coach Wahidul Gani often reminds me that I only have two Test hundreds and not ten, which is a shame. I also think I should have scored a ODI hundred

long ago."

Touching on the prospects in Sri Lanka, the dashing strokemaker thought that giving too much attention on what champion off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan and left-arm pacesman Chaminda Vaas had in store was not ideal mental preparation.

"I don't think there is any need to be scared of the two because we have already faced them. I am really excited with the challenge."

After experiencing many ups and downs in his four-year career, the prodigal batsman has come to the conclusion that the best way for him is to never curb his natural style.

"People often suggest that I adopt a more cautious game but I feel disturbed hearing such things and it has hampered my batting in the past. I now place more importance on playing on the merit of the ball. I had success in England once I played my own game."

For Ashraful and Mashrafe, the Afro-Asian tour is part of a hectic schedule as they will get only one day's rest at home after returning from South Africa.

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BITTER RIVALS UNITE FOR A CAUSE: A section of Abahani supporters stand inside the Mohammedan stands as both camps protest against alleged fixed matches in the ongoing Premier Division football league during the game between Youngmens Fakirerpool and Dipali Juba Sangha on Friday.

PHOTO: STAR

What to WATCH

ESPN
English Premier League
Everton v Man United
Live at 5.40 pm
Aston Villa v Bolton Wanderers
Live at 7.55 pm
Middlesbrough v Liverpool
Live at 10.10pm
Final score
Live at 12.30 am (Sunday)
STAR Sports
England v Australia
Third Test, Day Three
Live at 3.30pm

DAY'S EVENT
Premier Football League
Mohammedan v Farashganj (5pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Ganguly back as captain

Cricket

AFP, Mumbai

India's cricket selectors on Friday re-appointed Sourav Ganguly as captain, keeping faith in the country's most successful skipper despite his poor form as a batsman.

The five-man committee headed by former Test wicket-keeper Kiran More, named Ganguly captain for the tour of Zimbabwe later this month that includes a tri-series with New Zealand and two Tests against the hosts.

"It was an unanimous decision by the selectors to bring back Ganguly," Indian cricket board secretary Karunakaran Nair told reporters here.

Ganguly, 33, was preferred to his long-time deputy Rahul Dravid, India's most consistent batsmen in recent times and the reigning International Cricket Council (ICC) player of the year.

Dravid, 32, led India in the recent tri-series in Sri Lanka as Ganguly served out his ICC-imposed ban for slow over-rates during the home

series against Pakistan in April. Dravid's team defeated the second-string West Indies twice but lost three straight matches to the hosts, including Tuesday's day-night final by 18 runs at the Premadasa stadium in Colombo.

Ganguly's poor form with the bat, which has fetched the left-hander just 927 runs in his last 20 Test matches, had raised speculation that Dravid would get a longer term under new coach Greg Chappell.

Dravid scored 2,082 runs in the

same period at an average of 74.35 to help lift India to number three in the Test rankings behind Australia and England.

The Indians, however, slipped to seventh in the one-day rankings despite reaching the World Cup final in South Africa in 2003.

Ganguly, who took over as captain in 2000, has led India to a record 19 wins in 47 Tests. He lost 13 matches while 15 were drawn.

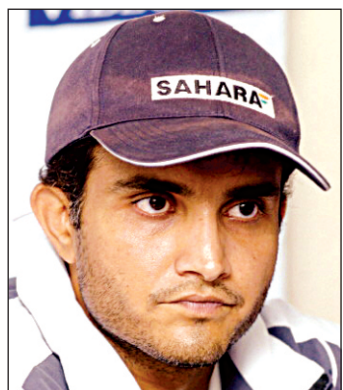
In 142 one-dayers as captain, Ganguly has posted 73 victories, lost 64 while five ended in no-results.

A tough and uncompromising leader, Ganguly provided Indian cricket with some of its finest moments like the come-from-behind 2-1 series win at home over world champions Australia in 2001, a place in the World Cup final in 2003 and maiden Test and one-day series wins in Pakistan in 2004.

His 144 against Australia in the first Test in Brisbane inspired India to a creditable 1-1 draw in the away series against Steve Waugh's champions in 2003-04.

That brilliant century, however,

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SOURAV GANGULY

No music but Blues

Premiership kicks off today

Football

LENIN GANI

Let's get one thing perfectly clear Chelsea FC will be celebrating back-to-back Premiership titles come next May. Love them or loath them the facts all point to the beginning of something much worse than the duopoly -- referring of course to the Man United-Arsenal rivalry that has seen English football bragging rights ding-dong between the two clubs. Yes, I'm afraid to say the Premier League 2005-06 season, which kicks off today, will invariably be 'singing the blues' after Jose Mourinho firmly established his credentials at the first time of asking.

Combining the Portuguese's self-assuming approach and bankrolled by a certain Mr Roman Abramovich, Stamford Bridge faithful prayers were answered as they watched captain John Terry hold the trophy aloft.

The success was completed with a Premiership record of 95 points (29 wins, 8 draws and 1 defeat) and a unique defensive record of just 15 league goals conceded.

That one defeat against Manchester City in way tells a lot about the determination of a club that last won the top division honour back in 1955.

Though there are no high profile signings this time -- Chelsea failed to lure names like Ronaldinho, Andriy Shevchenko, David Trezeguet and Steven Gerrard (for the second time) -- nonetheless they are the team to beat. Exciting 21-million-pound winger Shaun Wright-Phillips and Athletic Bilbao defender Asier del Horno for eight million pounds are the only additions to Mourinho's vast pool of talent.

If there was anything to criticise Chelsea about was their spate of four 1-0 victories. But hopefully the

return of Hernan Crespo from an invigorating loan spell with AC Milan will fire up his Ivorian strike partner Didier Drogba and let's not forget Lyon's Michael Essien, who is rated among the five best combative liberos in world football at the moment. If the Ghanaian's long-running saga results in a switch from the French Ligue One side, he would complement an already formidable group of players in a vital area of the pitch.

Enough about Chelsea what about the rest?

VIEIRA'S ITALIAN JOB

Well, runners-up Arsenal begin life without the influential figure of Patrick Vieira who perhaps realised that there was no point hanging around Highbury if he could not get a UEFA Champions League winners medal. So, after spending nine years in England the Arsenal captain decided to move to Juventus in the summer. Worse was to follow for manager Arsene Wenger hoping to

spend the cash on his big summer target 23-year-old Julio Baptista. But the versatile Brazilian opted to stay in Spain and more precisely join Real Madrid. At least they managed to retain England left-back Ashley Cole after the much-publicised 'tapping-up' affair.

Arsenal may have enough in the cupboard to ensure a runners-up spot as they bid farewell to their North London home however their European escapade will end in

subject failure.

Alexander Hleb of Stuttgart, who cost 10 million pounds is going to be a key player.

MAN UNITED HIT A GLAZER

The hostile takeover of Old Trafford by American Malcolm Glazer diverted much of the attention away from a side that is clearly showing signs of decline. Make no mistake about it that Manchester United finished a distant third in the table was primarily because the Red Devils struggled to put away the lesser sides.

By their standards they spent very little in the transfer market. Dutchman goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar from Fulham and PSV Eindhoven's tireless South Korean midfielder Park Ji-sung being the new faces. At the same time the club said goodbye to another veteran Phil Neville who joined Everton.

Lack of goals was a fundamental

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PREDICTION	
1 Chelsea	11 Man City
2 Arsenal	12 Blackburn
3 Liverpool	13 Newcastle
4 Man Utd	14 Charlton
5 Tottenham	15 Portsmouth
6 M'brough	16 Sunderland
7 Aston Villa	17 West Ham
8 Bolton	18 Fulham
9 Everton	19 West Brom
10 Birmingham	20 Wigan



HERE WE GO AGAIN? Victorious Chelsea players after last Sunday's FA Community Shield final.

PHOTO: REUTERS

BD A draw Surrey match

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh A team finally ended their worrying trend of collapsing in the second innings as their three-day match against Surrey ended as a draw at The Oval on Friday.

The second-string national side had lost their previous two 3-dayers against Gloucestershire and Yorkshire due to poor batting in the second essay but this time captain Shahriar Nafees and Mehrab Hossain scripted a good result.

Nafees, who hit exactly fifty in the first innings, scored 63 and Mehrab 30 not out as the tourists reached 113-1in 24 overs on the final day.

Earlier Surrey declared their second innings on 332-6 after the tea session. The home team resumed the day on 88-3. Mark Butcher, the England Test batsman who was returned to action after a long gap due to injury, hit a 115-ball 90.

Right-arm pacer Talha Jubair was the most successful bowler picking up four wickets for 99 runs in 19 overs while Syed Russel took two for 101 in 20 overs.

Bangladesh will play their final three-day match against Kent that begin from August 16 at Canterbury.

Australia 156-5

SPORTS REPORTER

Australia were struggling at 156 for five on the second day of the third Ashes Test yesterday. Left-arm spinner Ashley Giles took three wickets while Simon Jones and Andrew Flintoff captured one each.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Fakirerpool-3, Dipali-2

SPORTS REPORTER

Youngmens Club Fakirerpool registered their third victory in the Premier Division Football League when they beat bottom-side Dipali Juba Sangha 3-2 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Friday.

Youngmen's raised their tally to 11 points from 14 matches while promotes Dipali remained on two points in the ten-team fray.

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Brothers demand an apology

SPORTS REPORTER

Brothers Union club officials yesterday blasted Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president SA Sultan for being unable to exert control over the federation.

"We never seen such a weak president on the chair. He has failed to properly run the show," said Mobbasser Hossain at a press conference yesterday.

The Gopibaghat outfit arranged the briefing to protest remarks against it by three clubs -- Mohammedan, Abahani and Sheikh Russel.

Brothers Union's general secretary Mizanuddin Ahmed refuted charges that they were involved in 'match-fixing'.

"We reached top position playing

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Australia lose Langer

England all out for 444

Cricket

AFP, Manchester

Australia lost opener Justin Langer on their way to reaching 73 for one, a deficit of 371, in reply to England's first innings 444 at tea on the second day of the third Ashes Test at Old Trafford here Friday.

Matthew Hayden, given a reprieve on 14, was 33 not out and Australia captain Ricky Ponting unbeaten on seven.

Langer (31), going down the pitch to Ashley Giles, was sharply caught one-handed at short-leg by the Warwickshire left-arm spinner's county colleague Ian Bell, off bat and pad, as he looked to drive the ball outside.

His dismissal left Australia 58 for one after their best opening stand of the series.

Australia, who themselves dropped several catches on Thursday, saw Hayden missed when Matthew Hoggard failed to hold a low, one-handed, caught and bowled chance off the batsman's checked drive with the tourists 30 without loss.

After England made 341 for five on the first day with captain Michael Vaughan scoring 166, the first hundred of the series, they would have hoped to set Australia a total in excess of 500.

But instead leg-spinner Shane Warne, who on Thursday became the first bowler to take 600 Test wickets, sparked a tailend collapse that saw England lose their last four wickets for 11 runs in 25 balls either side of lunch.

Warne, who led the attack with four for 99, first removed the dangerous Andrew Flintoff for 46 before the interval to end a stand of 87 in 105 balls with Geraint Jones.

And when keeper Jones was

bowled by Jason Gillespie for 42, off the last ball of the session, England were 434 for eight.

After the break Warne dismissed both Ashley Giles (caught by Hayden at first slip) and Simon Jones (bowled) for nought.

Fast bowler Brett Lee was the pick of Australia's quicks with four for 100 off 27 overs.

England resumed with Bell 59 not out, his Test-best against Australia, and Flintoff yet to face after nightwatchman Hoggard was bowled by Brett Lee off Thursday's last ball.

As Flintoff walked onto the field he was given a huge ovation by his

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CAPTAIN ENGLAND: Michael Vaughan raises his bat after reaching his century on the opening day of the third Ashes Test on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Fatherly Warne

Cricket

REUTERS, Manchester

When Shane Warne made history with an unprecedented 600th test wicket at Old Trafford on Thursday his first thought was for his daughter back home in Melbourne.

An emotional Warne celebrated the wicket in the third Test against England by throwing his arms in the air and kissing a white band on his right wrist -- a present from his eight-

year-old daughter Brooke. "It was an emotional one for me," said the game's greatest leg spinner.

"When (estranged wife) Simone and my three children went home, my daughter Brooke said: 'You have to be strong, daddy' and gave me the wrist band."

"It just says 'strength' on it. She wears one and the other kids wear them. I spoke to them today and I said if it happens today, it's for you and Jackson and Summer."

Warne had England opener Marcus Trescothick caught behind on Thursday to end with one for 75

from 27 hard-working overs as England closed on 341 for five on a good batting wicket.

The Australian's three children went home last month with their mother after newspaper claims of infidelity contributed to the end of Warne's 10-year marriage.

The leg-spinner, who turns 36 on September 13, the day after the last scheduled day of the current Ashes series, said his cricketing future depended in part on what happened

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LEADING TEST WICKET-TAKERS

AFP, Manchester

Leading Test wicket-takers (name, country, matches, balls bowled, runs conceded, wickets, average, best bowling, five wickets in an innings, 10 wickets in a match):									
Shane Warne (AUS)	126	35093	15222	603	25.24	8-71	30	9	
Muttiah Muralitharan (SRI)	93	31577	12340	549	22.47	9-51	46	14	
Courtney Walsh (WIS)	132	30019	12688	519	24.44	7-37	22	3	
Glenn McGrath (AUS)	111	25874	10760	508	21.18	8-24	27	3	
Anil Kumble (IND)	95	30324	13015	461	28.23	10-74	29	7	
Kapil Dev (IND)	131	27740	12867	434	29.64	9-83	23	q2	
Richard Hadlee (NZL)	86	21918	9611	431	22.29	9-52	36	9	
Wasim Akram (PAK)	104	22627	9779	414	23.62	7-119	25	5	
Curtly Ambrose (WIS)	98	22103	8501	405	20.99	8-45	22	3	
Ian Botham (ENG)	102	21815	10878	383	28.40	8-34	27	4	

Note: Warne and McGrath's figures as of end of England first innings at Old Trafford on Friday.