



WELCOME ON BOARD: Bangladesh cricket captain Habibur Bashar (2nd from L) meets newcomer Syed Rasel while Tusher Imran (L) and Shahrir Nafees look on at the airport prior to their departure for Colombo on Wednesday.



Did U Know?

Volleyball is the second most played sport in the world next to soccer.



Diego Maradona
(Argentine football legend)
"The truth is that I don't for a second regret scoring that goal with my hand."
About his 'Hand of God' goal against England in the 1986 World

What to WATCH

ESPN
Football Crazy
Live at 5:00 pm
Sportscentric
Live at 8:30 pm pm
STAR Sports
England vs Australia
4th Test, Day One
Live at 3:30 pm

Nat'l booters can play in NFL finals

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) will allow the national footballers to play in the final stage of the National Football League.

The six-team finals will be held in January -- after end of the SAFF Football Championship in Pakistan -- to accommodate the top footballers who will miss the early stages.

It was decided at a meeting of the NFL organising committee yesterday.

Six venues -- Rangamati, Feni, Faridpur, Natore, Jamalpur and Khulna -- have already got the nod as hosts of the September 15-26 qualifying rounds. Either Khulna or Jessore would be the sixth and final hosts.

The second phase will begin on November 13 after a big break for

An exciting departure



SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh cricket team left for Sri Lanka yesterday to play two Tests and three one-dayers against the islanders.

The Tigers, who departed by a Thai Airways flight in the afternoon, will launch their second trip to Sri Lanka with three one-day internationals, the first one to be staged at the Sinhalese Sport Club (SSC) ground in Colombo on August 31. Habibur Bashar's men will also play two practice matches in the month-long trip.

The first match at the SSC is all set to be a landmark appearance for inseparable Bangladeshi wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud. The Rajshahi stumper, who is also the vice-captain of the team, will be the first Bangladeshi cricketer to make 100 ODI appearances in that match.

Mashud was excited with the feat and announced that he wanted to make his hundredth appearance a memorable one.

"I would love to play a big innings in that match. But the success of the team is more important for me," said the 30-year-old prior to the departure at the Zia International airport. Mashud has hardly missed a match since his ODI debut against India in Sahjiah in 1995.

While a milestone beckoned Mashud, another seasoned campaigner Mohammad Rafique would be playing his first Test on Lankan soil. The wily left-arm spinner and the leading wicket-taker of the country was not part of the team during the Asian Test Championship match as well as Bangladesh's series in Sri Lanka in 2002.

Rafique however considered the opportunity was just another match. "I never plan anything beforehand. I only start thinking once I get a ball in my hand," said Rafique in his usual direct manner.

There was however lot of emotion expressed by young paceman Syed Rasel. The left-arm seamer, picked in the senior team for the first time, was excited to make his first trip with the national team.

"The call-up was a timely one because I have been performing for a long time. I have been waiting for this for long and I want to make an impression if given a chance to play," said Rasel, who has the ability to swing the ball both ways.

Coach Dav Whatmore and captain Habibur Bashar also spoke highly of the newcomer, commenting that his inclusion would give more variation to the attack.

Like Rasel, Tusher Imran had really impressed in the A team's tour of England. The middle-order batsman showed signs of picking up the form during the national team's England tour and continued with his good touch with the second string side, scoring two centuries and a few more important knocks, to claim a stake for a Test recall after three years.

"I am confident because of my good run in England. When I was given my Test debut in South Africa in 2002, I was a lot inexperienced. But I have learned a lot over the years and really looking to push for a Test cap."

Non-inclusion irks Inzy



AFP, Karachi

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq said Wednesday he was hurt by the "unjust" decision to leave him out of the World XI Test and one-day Super Series teams to face Australia in October.

But his Pakistan teammate, fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar, was toasting his own inclusion in both of the sides announced by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday, saying it was a "lifetime chance to beat Australia".

Inzamam joined England skipper Michael Vaughan and Indian leg-spinner Anil Kumble on the sidelines of the Test squad, while Sri Lanka's Sanath Jayasuriya, India's Rahul Dravid and West Indian Chris Gayle

missed out in the ODIs.

"I am surprised. It's unjust," Inzamam told AFP. He missed out after featuring in both the preliminary squads of 20 and had been considered a front-runner to captain the World XI.

The series will feature a six-day Test against the Australians at the Sydney Cricket Ground from October 14-19 and three one-dayers at Melbourne's Docklands Stadium on October 5, 7 and 9.

South African Graeme Smith will lead the World Test team, while his compatriot Shaun Pollock has been named captain of the one-day side.

But the 35-year-old Inzamam, who has 7,620 runs in 101 Tests and 10,971 runs in 347 one-dayers -- second only to India's Sachin Tendulkar's 13,642 -- said on current form he merits a place among the world's best.

"My current form and my overall record are both very good. Normally I don't take such things to heart but I feel hurt at being deprived of a lifetime chance," said Inzamam.

Former Pakistan captain Zaheer Abbas called for a review of the decision, while Javed Miandad, another ex-skipper, said Inzamam's omission was wrong as he was among the world's current top five batsmen.

One-time Pakistani fast bowler Sarfraz Nawaz said the decision was "shocking". "Spent forces like Shaun Pollock and novices like Graeme Smith are rewarded and Inzamam is deprived," he added.

Meanwhile Shoaib Akhtar was raring to go after missing Pakistan's last two series this year due to injury. "I am very excited and honoured at being included in both the squads and it's a lifetime chance for me to beat Australia in their den," Akhtar told AFP from London.

"Of course, Australia are beatable. England have shown the way to the world and the world's

Fourth Test from today

England have to win, Australia afford to draw



REUTERS, Nottingham

Expect a sharp drop in industrial productivity in England and Australia this week, in boardrooms as well as on the shop floor.

Expect a rise in English absenteeism and a dozy workforce down under, with all ears glued to radios and eyes fixed on television screens.

The fourth Ashes Test at Trent Bridge starting on Thursday could be the most important cricketing confrontation between the two nations since 1989.

England have surprised the pundits, their opponents and themselves in making all the running in the last two Tests and levelling the series at 1-1. Despite that, they cannot afford to lose in Nottingham.

Defeat would mean a drawn series at best and allow Australia to retain what they have hogged for 16 years.

England's pugnacious brand of cricket has suggested a long-awaited topping of the world order yet Australia remain in the contest, however punch drunk.

"I think in the back of their (Eng-

land's) minds they will think they have played very well but we have held on for the draw and only lost by two runs when we were outplayed," said Australia leg-spinner Shane Warne.

"I think they will be disappointed they are not 2-1 up. I think the pressure is on England and not Australia. At the end of the day, they have to win. We only have to win one (of the last two Tests)."

Home captain Michael Vaughan must demand a knock-out blow from his battery of fast bowlers at Trent Bridge.

Barring unforeseen mishaps, he will be accompanied by the same players who stole victory from defeat at Edgbaston to level the series before Australia, equally thrillingly, turned a losing position into a gritty draw at Old Trafford.

Australia will certainly make one change, axing fast bowler Jason Gillespie and ushering young tear-away Shaun Tait to his dressing-room peg. The 22-year-old is expected to pose more problems in swinging conditions.

Gillespie's lack of zip has been shocking. For years, he has been the unsung hero of the Australian attack.

During the last five weeks, how-

ever, he has been treated dismissively by English batsmen, his three wickets costing 300 runs and buckets of self-esteem.

By this time during the 2002-3 Ashes, the contest was already over. It took barely 11 days for Australia to go 3-0 up in that five-match series.

Everything was different then, not least the press coverage.

England, beset by one injury after another (Andrew Flintoff did not get on the pitch and Simon Jones lasted one session), were lamponed in Australia as the most physically and mentally brittle bunch of losers ever to show their red faces Down Under.

Mockery, of course, is the preserve of undisputed world champions.

In 2005, however, the Australians have spent more time anxiously studying their navels. Adam Gilchrist's lack of dazzle has been as perplexing as Matthew Hayden's shortage of runs.

Former captain Ian Chappell has suggested the side may not be quite as good as they imagined, having spent so many years subsidised by the twin genius of Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath. Dennis Lillee has talked of an ageing team in decline.

There have also been injury worries, with McGrath missing the second Test and playing in Manchester only half fit, while Michael Clarke spent more time in bed than on the pitch during the third Test.

England have stayed fit and with the same 11 that began the series. In their last home series, they used 19 players.

Trent Bridge, though, is not one of England's favourite Ashes haunts with only three wins there in 19 Tests. In 1997 and 2001, Australia wrapped up the series in Robin Hood country. The last English champagne was uncorked in 1977.

But Vaughan's side, inspired by Flintoff and Steve Harrison's pace bowling, have been ripping up history books for 18 months. And, for all Warne's verbal spin, Ricky Ponting may be feeling the pressure as well.

His leadership has come under criticism and it must have crossed his mind that he could go down in history as 'The Captain Who Relinquished The Ashes'.

Vaughan, for his part, has certainly not betrayed much angst during the campaign, concentrating

Abahani-MSC now on Friday

SPORTS REPORTER

The much awaited Premier Football League match between Abahani and league leaders Mohammedan Sporting Club has been delayed for another day due to inclement weather.

The crucial 16th round clash between the two archrivals had already been deferred once due to unplayable condition at the Bangabandhu National Stadium but the two days' break did not do much to the ground.

After an emergency meeting yesterday, the Metropolitan Football League Committee decided to hold today's match on Friday.

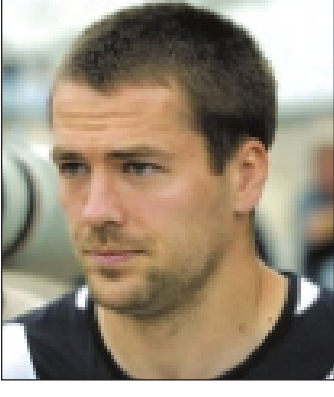
Magpies all set for Owen

LONDON

Newcastle have agreed a club record transfer fee with Real Madrid for England striker Michael Owen.

The club's current record fee stands at the £15million paid for Alan Shearer in 1996.

"Newcastle United have met Real Madrid's asking price and conditions," said a Newcastle state-



MICHAEL OWEN

ment on the club's official website.

"The agreed fee will be a record transfer fee for Newcastle United.

"It is now up to the player and his advisor."

Earlier, Owen, 25, only declared himself willing to spend a season on loan at St James' Park, if his preferred option of a return to Liverpool failed to materialise.

He said: "I said that my ideal situation was to start the season in the Real Madrid team and if not I would prefer to return to Liverpool."

"The president understood and said he would try to help me achieve this. If the transfer cannot be finalised in time I have agreed to go to Newcastle United but only on a one-year loan. I need to be playing regularly in World Cup year."

Real Madrid director of communications Antonio Garcia Ferreras confirmed his club had agreed a fee with Newcastle for Owen and also reported there was still no offer from Liverpool for their former player.

He told PA Sport: "This morning Real Madrid and Newcastle United have reached the principles of an agreement on the conditions of Michael Owen's transfer to the English club."

"There is still no agreement between Michael Owen and Newcastle. At the moment we have not received any offer from Liverpool."

--Internet Source

Vincent slaughters Zim



REUTERS, Bulawayo

Opener Lou Vincent smashed the highest one-day score by a New Zealander as the Black Caps flirted with a world record total before thrashing Zimbabwe by 192 runs in a triangular series match on Wednesday.

Vincent top-scored with 172 in a New Zealand total of 397 for five in 44 overs before Zimbabwe were dismissed for 205 in 43 overs.

The match, the first in the Videcon triangular series also involving India, was reduced to 44 overs per side after the start was delayed by a damp pitch.

Had New Zealand faced their full quota of 50 overs, Sri Lanka's world record total of 398 for five against Kenya at Kandy in 1996 would surely have fallen.

New Zealand hit 39 fours and 16 sixes, a total of 252 runs in boundaries, while Zimbabwe fast bowler Andy Blignaut's return of two for 96 in nine overs was the third most expensive in one-day history.

The 349 for nine New Zealand made against India in Rajkot in 1999-00 was their previous highest innings.

Vincent attacked the bowling from the outset and his maiden century, which included 16 fours and nine sixes in 119 balls, surpassed Glenn Turner's 171 not out against East Africa in a 60-over match at the 1975 World Cup.

Vincent and captain Stephen Fleming, who scored 93, shared in an opening stand of 204 -- the biggest partnership by New Zealand for any wicket.

Fleming had also held the previous record of 193 with Nathan Astle against Pakistan in 2001.

Zimbabwe squandered a chance to dismiss Fleming for eight in the sixth over when debutant Anthony Ireland, fielding at mid-off, dived forward but dropped a catch which would have earned a wicket for medium pacer Blessing Mahwire.

Vincent set the tone early when he hit the last three balls of the second over, bowled by Mahwire, over long-off for six, through extra cover for four and to fine leg for four.

In the 27th over, he smashed medium pacer Ireland high over mid-wicket for six to reach three figures and break New Zealand's one-day partnership record.

Two balls later, Fleming drove a head-high catch to Heath Streak at extra cover, ending an aggressive 87-ball knock which included eight fours and four sixes.

Vincent and Craig McMillan (47) brought up their century stand for the



'VIOLENT' VINCENT: New Zealand opener Lou Vincent, who scored a stormy 172 off 120 balls, is all set to have a go at a Heath Streak delivery (not in picture) at Bulawayo on Wednesday.

Ashes captivates Asia



AFP, Islamabad

The titanic Ashes battle has not only fired the imagination in England and Australia but has also re-ignited cricket passions across Asia, where millions will be glued to the fourth Test this week.

From Islamabad to Auckland, cricket fans have been gripped by the unexpectedly close encounter as England challenge Australia's long dominance of the sport and 16-year Ashes monopoly.

The series has raised expectations in Pakistan, where officials hope England's tour from October will revive flagging interest in the country's traditional favourite sport.

Match-fixing, stringent stadium security after September 11 and a string of dull draws have led to falling attendances for Test matches

here.

"I am following the Ashes more than any series I have ever followed. England's comeback has impressed me a lot and raised expectations that we too will have a very exciting series against England," said Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq.

"The interest in the Ashes is overwhelming," said former Pakistan captain Zaheer Abbas. "People are now glued to television

sets more than before."

Top hotels have responded to customer demand by showing the series, which resumes on Thursday at Trent Bridge at 1-1, on giant screens.

"We have a 16-by-20 feet (4.8-by-six metres) screen for entertainment but the demand is huge for Ashes Tests," said Azeem Qureshi, general manager.



CAN I SCORE HEAVILY AGAIN? India cricket captain Sourav Ganguly, who is going through a lean patch, is engrossed in deep thinking while sitting in a bus with his teammates after their arrival in Harare on Tuesday. They will feature in a tri-series and the play two Tests against Zimbabwe.

