

Nel fractures foot, Ntini may return

AFP, Brisbane

South African strike bowler Makhaya Ntini could make a surprise return for the triangular one-day series here after Andre Nel was found to have a severe stress fracture in his left foot Friday.

Nel, South Africa's leading wicket-taker in the 2-0 Test series loss to Australia, will fly home early on Saturday, missing the upcoming series which also includes Sri Lanka.

The firebrand seamer had failed to finish the third Test in Sydney and blamed the injury on a heavy workload and Australia's hard pitches.

Ntini went home 10 days ago after suffering a hamstring injury but the South Africans will not decide on Nel's replacement until Monday.

Ntini's hamstring tendon damage was assessed this week in Cape Town but officials here said a cortisone injection was likely to help him prove his fitness on Monday.

The severity of Nel's injury, first thought to be just bruising, became clearer after a bone scan taken on Thursday night.

Nel is considered a certainty to return in time for Australia's eight-week tour of South Africa starting in late February, needing three to four weeks' rest.

The Proteas warmed up for their opening tri-series clash against Australia here on Sunday with a 46-run victory over the Queensland Academy of Sport here on Friday.

All-rounder Jacques Kallis starred with 80 off 106 balls for the tourists, including a massive six, helping his team to recover from a bad start to make 234-7 in the match at Brisbane's Allan Border Field.

Skippers Graeme Smith's disappointing form with the bat continued when he fell for 24 at 59-3 in the 17th over but Kallis and Ashwell Prince, who hit 50 off 72 balls, turned the game around with a vital century stand.

All-rounder Chris Simpson backed up his impressive off-spin spell of 3-40 to scare the tourists with 55 off 48 balls before the Academy side wilted to be all out for 188.

Aussies did

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Australian crowds have been in the spotlight recently after South Africa complained of racist taunts during their Test matches here and for Perth and Sydney.

Sri Lanka are scheduled to tour Australia in the 2007-08 southern hemisphere summer, although it is unclear if Muralitharan, who would then be 35, will still be playing.

"I will play until 2007, then keep and open mind about whether to play or not," he told Melbourne's Herald-Sun newspaper on Friday.

Muralitharan may leave the sport at the same time as his nemesis Warne makes a comeback to international one-day cricket.

Warne has indicated he may return for the 2007 World Cup in the West Indies, although his captain Ricky Ponting believes any comeback by the brilliant leg-spinner would have to begin quickly.

"Even Shane would agree he can't just put his hand up and say: 'I want to play in the World Cup', and just turn up at the World Cup for the first game and play there," Ponting said.

"If he's eventually going to declare himself available again, I think we'll all like to see it sooner rather than later."

Sri Lanka's next tri-series match in Australia is against South Africa, in Brisbane next Tuesday.

Champions Trophy

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be made available free to state broadcaster Doordarshan.

"It has been very helpful to draw together all of our members and many of the major TV rights holders in international cricket to discuss this important issue," Mani said in the statement.

"We now have a much better understanding of the potential implications of the recent government directive regarding sports television rights in India."

"It was very important to open a wide-reaching dialogue on this issue and we will continue to monitor the issue along with all of these important stakeholders."

Among the TV channels invited for the meeting were CSI Octagon, Doordarshan, ESPN Star Sports, Sony, TEN Sports, Trans World International (TWI) and Zee network.

Pakistan seam bowler Shabbir Ahmed, who was banned for 12 months for an illegal action last month, will appear before an ICC review committee in Dubai on January 21, ICC media officer Jon Long said.

PREMIERSHIP

United set for City clash



AFP, London

Manchester United will cap a busy week with a trip to Eastlands for the Manchester derby on Saturday as the Red Devils try to cut Chelsea's 13-point lead at the top of the English Premiership.

In the other top games, the leaders travel to The Stadium of Light to take on rock bottom Sunderland on Sunday while Liverpool and Tottenham will do battle at Anfield on Saturday with the winners claiming third place.

Arsenal will hope to bounce back from their League Cup semifinal first leg reverse at Wigan on Tuesday with a victory against struggling Middlesbrough at Highbury on Saturday.

United can cut Chelsea's lead to 10 points if they win but the leaders will have the chance to re-open the 13-point gap just 24 hours later.

City boss Stuart Pearce will not be able to call on Matt Jansen for the derby despite offering the former Blackburn forward the chance to train with his squad.

Champions Chelsea are well on their way to setting a string of new records in the Premiership this season and look certain to dismiss Sunderland who themselves look set to earn new marks for all the wrong reasons.

Chelsea have 58 points from 21 games and if they continue that ratio through to May they will be the first top flight side ever to pass the 100-point barrier for a season.

Sunderland, for their part, are on course to win fewer points than the previous record, which they set the last time they were in the top flight, in 2002-03 when they won just 19 points.

Aston Villa host West Ham, Birmingham, boosted by new striker Chris Sutton, travel to Charlton and Ehiogu could make his debut for West Brom at Wigan on Sunday.

Liverpool and Tottenham have both been busy in the transfer market this month, although in different ways.

While the Merseysiders have brought in defenders Jan Kromkamp and Daniel Agger, Spurs have been shipping players out with three squad members joining Portsmouth.

Middlesbrough travel to Arsenal without centre-back Ugo Ehiogu who they have allowed to leave for West Brom, despite an injury to captain Gareth Southgate that

should only keep him out for two weeks.

Arsenal will welcome back big guns such as captain Thierry Henry, Robert Pires, Sol Campbell and Jens Lehmann for the visit of the north east strugglers.

However a German newspaper said it was called off because of rising costs and sluggish ticket sales.

In the weekend's other games, under-fire Newcastle boss Graeme Souness has his charges to Craven Cottage to play Fulham who may give a debut to new keeper Antti Niemi.

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FIXTURES

(1500 GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday

Arsenal v Middlesbrough, Aston Villa v West Ham, Blackburn v Bolton (1715), Charlton v Birmingham, Fulham v Newcastle, Liverpool v Tottenham, Man City v Man Utd (1245), Portsmouth v Everton

Sunday

Sunderland v Chelsea (1600), Wigan v West Brom (1330)

Del Piero's English desire



INTERNET, undated

Alessandro Del Piero made the remarkable revelation on Friday that he could be leaving Juventus for English football.

The striker, who became the Bianconeri's highest ever scorer with 185 goals this week, made the intriguing revelation in an interview in Friday's *La Gazzetta dello Sport*.

"I don't want to stop here," said Del Piero. "My objectives go far beyond the goals I have scored even though they have made me very happy."

With six Italian titles, a Champions League winner's medal and a place in the pantheon of Italian greats assured, Pinturicchio has every reason to be happy.

But the 31-year-old is in no mood to sit still and in fact may not even be staying in Turin for much longer.

Del Piero is not an automatic first choice starter in Fabio Capello's star-studded side and, as he approaches the last few years of his career, it seems that Juve's No 10 would like to try a foreign adventure in the Premiership.

"One thing I would never do is play for another Italian side," he added. "I would rather go to England - that is somewhere that really appeals to me."

It is bit too soon to decide about that yet, though, he continued. "I'll be here definitely until June and then I'll make a decision, but in the United Kingdom football is tastier."

Del Piero, who was signed from Padova as a youngster in 1993, is currently tied to the Stadio Delle Alpi team until June 2008.



ALESSANDRO DEL PIERO

Australia abase Lanka

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who have slipped from second in the world rankings to sixth, have now won just two of their last 12 one-day matches.

They were no match for the big-hitting Australians with Martyn and Symonds bringing up their 106-run fourth-wicket partnership off just 88 balls.

Martyn, left out of the Test side after indifferent form in England, smacked 70 off 64 balls with Symonds hitting 66 from 61.

Both batsmen hit five boundaries while Symonds also hoisted four sixes and Martyn two before the partnership came to a close when the latter was worked by medium-pacer Dilhara Fernando with the Australians then 238 for 21 in the 39th over.

Just six balls later fate dealt Symonds a cruel hand with a freakish dismissal after he smashed a straight drive off Jemah Mubarak straight at Michael Clarke at the non-striker's end.

The ball hit Clarke on his boot, looping for a simple catch at mid-wicket.

Left-arm spinner Ruchira Perera had given Sri Lanka an early breakthrough, claiming the prize wickets of both big-hitting opener Adam Gilchrist and Ponting.

At the end of the 50 overs Clarke remained unbeaten on 45 from just 39 balls with the in-form Michael Hussey on 34 from 29.

Perera was the only one of the Sri Lankan bowlers to keep the Australians in check finishing with 245 off 10 overs.

The experienced bowling duo of Muttiah Muralitharan and

Chaminda Vaas proved powerless against the onslaught, finishing with 0-67 and 0-73 respectively.

Sri Lanka's less experienced batting line-up also failed to withstand a full-strength Australian attack led by speedster Brett Lee who took 2-29 while newcomer Nathan Bracken was even better at 2-11.

Lee hit the Sri Lankans in his first two overs, bowling opener Upul Tharanga for two runs off the second delivery of the innings.

Fellow opener Mubarak also capitulated to Lee's pace, caught in slips by Ponting for one, leaving the tourists struggling at 11-2 in the third over.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard in the tri-series one-day international between Australia and Sri Lanka at Melbourne's Telstra Dome on Friday:

AUSTRALIA

Gilchrist lbw b Perera 13
Katich run out 60
Ponting b Perera 13
Martyn b Fernando 70
Symonds c Dilshan b Mubarak 66
Clarke not out 45
Hussey not out 34
Extras: (lb-8, w-6, nb-3) 17
Total: (For 5 wkt in 50 overs) 318
Fall of wickets: 1-25, 2-28, 3-132, 4-238, 5-238

Result: Australia won by 116 runs

Toss: Sri Lanka.

Man-of-the-match: Andrew Symonds.

Umpires: Mark Benson And Simon Taufel.

End of road for Gough?

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the dropped Vikram Solanki.

Liam Plunkett has made a promising start to his international career and is an emerging player with great potential. Ian Bell has also been named in both squads as we believe his ability to bat in the top order will give us another option as we continue to plan for the World Cup in 2007," Graveney said.

Jones, who has not played since injuring his ankle during the fourth Ashes Test victory at Trent Bridge, will fly out on January 26 to spend 10 days at the Fast Bowling Academy in Chennai set up by Australia great Dennis Lillee.

Left-arm spinner Ashley Giles, whose tour of Pakistan was cut short by a hip injury, and off-

spinner Shaun Udal -- who struggled during the 2-0 Test series defeat -- have both retained their places.

TEST SQUAD

Michael Vaughan (captain), Ian Bell, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff, Ashley Giles, Stephen Harmison, Matthew Hoggard, Geraint Jones, Simon Jones, Kevin Pietersen, Liam Plunkett, Matthew Prior, Andrew Strauss, Marcus Trescothick, Shaun Udal.

ONE-DAY SQUAD

Michael Vaughan (captain), Kabir Ali, James Anderson, Ian Bell, Ian Blackwell, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff, Ashley Giles, Stephen Harmison, Geraint Jones, Simon Jones, Kevin Pietersen, Matthew Prior, Liam Plunkett, Andrew Strauss, Marcus Trescothick.

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