

Iqbal to cover for Inzamam

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan Monday called up middle-order batsman Faisal Iqbal as cover for injured captain Inzamam-ul-Haq for the fourth day-night international against the West Indies.

Inzamam injured the little finger of his left hand while attempting to catch West Indian batsman Marlon Samuels in the third match played here on Sunday, chief selector Wasim Bari told AFP.

Inzamam, who had three stitches on his finger, was not required to bat after Pakistan successfully chased a revised target of 191 for the loss of three wickets.

Pakistan lead the five-match series 2-0 after the first match was washed out due to rain at Rawalpindi. The fourth match will be played at Multan on Wednesday.

"Inzamam is recovering from his injury and as a precaution we have included Iqbal in the 15-man squad in case we need him in batting," Bari said.

Pakistan vice-captain Younis Khan will miss second match in a row after the death of his brother last week and might feature in the fifth match to be played in Karachi on December 16, said Bari.

SQUAD

Inzamamul Haq (captain), Mohammad Hafeez, Imran Farhat, Yasir Hameed, Shoaib Malik, Mohammad Yousuf, Faisal Iqbal, Kamran Akmal, Abdul Razaq, Rao Iftikhar, Umar Gul, Mohammad Sami, Navedul Hasan, Danish Kaneria, Abdul Rehman.

Spin-friendly

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Sutherland, who took over as groundsman at the WACA last year, says the low levels of clay in the surface prevent him from preparing a hard and bouncy track.

But he is confident a result can be achieved.

"We've got some issues with the clay content but in the meantime we've got to make a viable surface, which we'll be trying to do," he explained.

"We've struggled in domestic cricket to get a bit of life in it and give something for the players to get a result out of," Sutherland explained.

"But I certainly think you can bowl out teams twice on it."

The wicket which will be used has not hosted first-class cricket for two years.

West Indies famously beat Australia inside three days in 1993 but, despite extremely warm conditions, the curator does not expect problems this time.

"The WACA never really breaks up now. In the '90s it used to really open up on day three, four and five," he added.

"When (former West Indies paceman) Curtly Ambrose used to land the ball on the cracks it would go sideways.

"But we haven't had that in the last four or five years. Teams have been able to chase down a lot of runs in domestic cricket because it's been such a good batting surface.

"The one for the Test has been used in grade finals and held up well."

Zidane comes

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stampede, and Labour and Solidarity Minister Djamel Ould Abbas was heard shouting out "Let him through, let him through."

Security services finally managed to hustle Zidane through the melee and into the lounge, not giving him time to make any comment, while the official welcoming ceremony was cancelled.

Zidane, who last visited Algeria when he was 15, is due to inaugurate several charitable projects, notably in the Boumerdes region, which was hit by a huge earthquake in May 2003.

On Wednesday he is to spend the day with the Algerian president, before kicking-off Thursday's match.

On Friday he will visit Bejaia, east of the capital, the birthplace of his parents, which is to host a lunch in his honour.

Lazio dent

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Milan's disappointing form. The Serie A giants lie 15th in the 20-team division with 13 points.

After watching his players lose 2-0 to Lille in the Champions League in midweek, coach Carlo Ancelotti had asked for an "immediate reaction" against Torino.

Instead, it was another listless performance by Milan, who appeared to have saved themselves in the 77th minute when visiting defender Gabriele Ciuffi tripped Gilardino to give away a penalty.

The Italy striker's spot kick struck the post, however, and Milan were lucky to come away with a point after Torino striker Roberto Muzzi twice hit the woodwork in the closing stages.

Sania, Li in last four

AFP, Doha



Chinese top seed Li Na downed the Asian Games defending champion to setup a semifinal showdown against Indian darling Sania Mirza who easily won her match on Monday.

The Chinese world number 21, the highest ranked player here, fought back from a set down against Uzbekistan's Iroda Tulyaganova to sneak through in the second and power her way to victory in the third, winning 3-6, 7-5, 6-2.

Fourth seed Mirza had an easier time against Suchanun Viratprasert in her quarterfinal, outclassing the



PHOTO: AFP

Indian tennis star Sania Mirza plays a backhand return against Thailand's Suchanun Viratprasert during their women's singles quarterfinal match at the 15th Asian Games in Doha yesterday.

Kiwis say it's correct



AFP, Christchurch

The New Zealand cricket team rallied behind wicketkeeper Brendon McCullum Monday, defending him from ongoing criticism over the dismissal of Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralidaran in the first Test.

McCullum has been pilloried in the media for running out Muralidaran when the careless tailender left his crease while the ball was in play to congratulate Kumar Sangakkara on scoring a century.

The dismissal sparked an ethical debate, with the Sri Lankans and several commentators saying it breached the spirit of the game.

The authoritative Cricinfo website called it "unsporting". McCullum said he was shocked by the widespread adverse reaction to what was a legitimate dismissal that ended Sri Lanka's second

Freddie was in tears



AFP, Sydney

England captain Andrew Flintoff has revealed he was moved to tears after his team's painful loss to Australia in the second Ashes Test in Adelaide last week.

Flintoff hit back at critics who have accused England of lacking passion in their campaign to retain the Ashes, revealing he was devastated at the shock late loss in Adelaide in a match that had appeared set to end in a draw.

"I was so upset," Flintoff said in an interview with News Limited. "I wasn't boo-hoing or anything like that but the tears were there.

"We've taken huge stick and I can't argue with that but don't

Honours even at the Bridge

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In such a fiercely fought contest genuine chances were always likely to be at a premium and Essien squandered one of the few opportunities of the opening 45 minutes.

Geremi surged into the penalty area and, when his cross was only half-cleared by Senderos, Essien could only scuff his shot over the bar from no more than 12 yards out.

Lehmann almost gifted Chelsea a goal just before the break when he fumbled Lampard's corner and Essien fired in a shot that forced Fabregas to clear off the line.

Thai ranked just 340 in the world.

Mirza, the world number 66, broke twice in the first set and three times in the second to win 6-3, 6-2 and bring the adoring Indian crowd to their feet.

"I'm going to do everything in my power to win on Tuesday although I know it won't be easy," she said of her showdown with Li.

"But I'm playing well and my fitness is good," she added.

Li, who lost in the team event to 2002 champion Tulyaganova, said the Uzbek's lack of concentration and her own determination had given her the edge.

"I played okay. I was a bit tired after playing too much tennis on Sunday," said the 24-year-old.

"Iroda was using top spin a lot, and she was serving well. So after

losing the first set, I told myself I can do it, and I hung on.

"She came back into the match three times in the second set. But she was losing concentration quite often."

Tuesday's semifinal should a thrilling encounter with Mirza drawing large crowds of Indian fans who charge her for autographs when she steps off court.

In contrast, Li has attracted just a sprinkle of spectators for her matches despite being hot favourite to take the title.

Li made history at Wimbledon earlier this year when she became the first Chinese woman to reach the quarterfinals of a Grand Slam.

The player she has nominated as her biggest challenge here, teammate Zheng Jie, prevailed over Taiwan's Chan Yung Jan 3-6, 6-4, 6-2 and now faces Aiko Nakamura for a place in the final.

The Japanese third seed advanced after 2002 Asian Games silver medallist Tamarine Tanasugarn of Thailand twisted her ankle and retired 1-4 down in the third set of their match.

On the men's side, South Korea's Lee Hyung Taik, favourite for gold, cruised into the semis, downing Uzbekistan's Denis Istomin 6-1, 7-5.

"I've played Istomin a few times in the past, and in this match the second set was difficult because his serves and ground strokes were very good," the top seed said.

The world number 49 next faces Cecil Mamiit from the Philippines who defeated Taiwan's Wang Yeu Tzuoo 2-6, 6-2, 6-2.

Thailand's Danai Udumchoke had to fight hard against South Korea's Jun Woong Sun before prevailing 7-6, 3-6, 6-3 in their match.

He and Japan's Go Soeda will battle it out for place in the finals after the fifth seed upset second seed, Taiwan's Lu Yen Hsun, 4-6, 6-2, 6-1.

In doubles action, hot favourites and feuding pair Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi walked into the semis over Pakistan's Alsam Ul Haq Qureshi and Aqeel Khan 6-2, 6-4.

innings and left New Zealand a 119-run target to win which they achieved for the loss of five wickets.

"I didn't expect the repercussions from it, it's been pretty hard to swallow," McCullum said.

"I never thought it the wrong thing to do, the rules are there and you can't reward stupidity," McCullum said.

New Zealand Cricket chief executive Martin Snedden said South African umpire Brian Jerling could have approached captain Stephen Fleming and asked if they wanted to proceed with the dismissal but he did not.

"The umpires take the same view as us," he told Radio Sport.

"It was a lapse of concentration on Murali's part, it wasn't a marginal situation and it was out."

New Zealand batsman Nathan Astle was also adamant McCullum was beyond reproach.

"We're fully behind Baz, he was definitely out. I've been surprised by the reaction -- it's totally unjustified."

A stunned Sangakkara was

quick to point out that he had declined to run out Astle in similar circumstances when the two teams met in the recent Champions Trophy tournament.

"I could have broken the stumps but I knew there wasn't a run being attempted," Sangakkara said.

"I said jokingly 'you should know better than that.' It was all in fun, it would have been pretty absurd of me to break the stumps."

However, the Test here was no laughing matter and Sangakkara, while acknowledging Muralidaran was at fault, was still disappointed at the Black Caps reaction.

"Players take it for granted, once the ball's gone you're allowed a certain leeway when it comes to courtesies extended between sides," he said.

"Murali was out but it's a case of how you want to interpret the rules. A lot is said about match referees and umpires being the guardians of the game but the players have a lot of responsibility as well."

ESPN-Star to pay \$1.1b!

AFP, Dubai

The Singapore-based ESPN-Star television network was awarded cricket's global media rights for the next eight years for a staggering 1.1 billion dollars, the sport's leading website reported.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) had announced the deal with ESPN-Star, a joint venture between Disney and Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, on Saturday without disclosing the amount involved.

But the respected Cricinfo website quoted independent sources present at the ICC's executive board meeting here that ESPN-Star won the deal for 1.1 billion dollars, double of the existing agreement.

The current seven-year deal with marketing agents Global Cricket Corporation (GCC), which ends after the World Cup in the Caribbean in March-April, was worth 550 million dollars.

"While the final figure on the agreement will not be disclosed, it is significantly in excess of the ICC's previous commercial deal," the ICC said in a statement.

The ESPN-Star deal for 2007-2015 covers 18 ICC tournaments including the 2011 World Cup in South Asia and the subsequent edition in Australia and New Zealand in 2015.

WC tickets sale right on target

REUTERS, Lahore

The chairman of the West Indies Cricket Board is confident of meeting a target of 40 million dollars in overall ticket sales for the 2007 World Cup, which begins next March in Jamaica.

Ken Gordon, who also heads the nine local organising committees preparing for the event, said on Monday that over 50 per cent of the overall target had already been met in the first two phases of sales.

"The first phase was about packages and went very well as there is a great deal of interest in the world for the tournament," he told this news agency.

"The second phase which is meant for sales in the Caribbean is underway. The overall sales have been going reasonably well," he stated.

Gordon said the third phase, when tickets would be on general sale, would start in January and the organising committee was confident it would help meet revenue targets.

"We have projected earning of 40 million dollars keeping in mind the overall capacity of the stadiums to be used in the World Cup," Gordon said.

Gordon, in Pakistan on a private visit on the invitation of the Pakistan Cricket Board, conceded that the weakness was from the Caribbean sales.

"In the second phase the Caribbean people had the opportunity to buy tickets and with their deadline this month we are hopeful the demand will increase as the team has also been performing well in one-day cricket this year," he said.

Sakib, Brothers

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Bashar and wicketkeeper Mohammad Kalim.

Victoria, Young Pegasus and Indira Road KC were also busy while Abahani, who strengthen their fort on Sunday, roped in spinner all-rounder Sohrawari Shuvo.

A total of 111 cricketers have taken part in the process so far. The transfer will close today.

Rana takes aim

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when it comes to other sports in the country, there are only expectations but little support."

The cash-rich Board of Control for Cricket in India generates its own funds for running the game, unlike other sporting federations which are wholly dependent on government grants.

Rana equalled the world record to win the Asian Games Centre Fire pistol individual title after helping India win the team event in the same competition.

A day earlier, Rana had won the gold medal in the Standard Pistol event.

The 30-year-old said the government had enough funds to host the Commonwealth Games in 2010 but hesitated to spend money on the development of sports in the country.

"India can win a few medals at the Olympics too but that does not seem to be anyone's concern," said Rana.

"It is the personal effort and talent of shooters that is winning us medals," he said, referring to India's haul of 14 medals at the Lusail ranges in Doha.

"If the shooting federation was not dependent on the government for funds and could run the ranges on its own, we would be producing several more world class shooters," Rana added.

Symonds being carefree



AFP, Perth

Australian all-rounder Andrew Symonds knows he has just about run out of chances at Test level, but he won't be putting undue pressure on himself to perform should he get the nod for the third Ashes Test against England at the WACA Ground, starting Thursday.

Symonds and uncapped Western Australian batsman Adam Voges are vying for the last place in the Australian side that is looking to regain the Ashes with a win in Perth.

Damien Martyn's shock retirement opened up a spot in the Australian middle order and Symonds' all-round talents are expected to see him get the nod ahead of Voges for his 11th Test.

However, there is also widespread expectation that whoever plays will just be warming the spot for fellow Queenslander Shane Watson, who is expected to be fit for the fourth Test, starting December 26 at the MCG.

Speaking here Monday after the Australian team's first training session for the Test, the established one-day star said worrying about

his performance was counter-productive and that he was determined to take a carefree approach into the match if he was selected.

Symonds said he had received some timely advice from Australian coach John Buchanan, who also coached Queensland and knows the big-hitting all-rounder better than most.

"Just this morning I was in the bathroom putting sunscreen on and the coach came to me and said 'I just want you to play freely and with your free spirit attitude, don't worry about results, results will look after themselves if you just go out there and enjoy yourself,'" Symonds said.

"I am determined not to have that mindset, I've probably got to be a little bit more carefree with my intensity.

"Last year I tried too hard at times and ended up clamping up for the wrong reasons, so I have to be careful on how I approach it."

However, Symonds admitted that keeping his mind off the bigger picture wasn't necessarily easy at Test level.

"You're so keen to do well, sometimes it is very hard to say 'bugger it, I'll just go out there and play', because you're not playing backyard cricket, you're playing for

Australia," he said.

"It's not necessarily that simple, but that's what you have to learn to do.

"You have to learn your game and learn your psyche on how you play your game."

With an average of just 19 with the bat and 45 with the ball, Symonds admitted to wondering whether his 10th Test, against South Africa in Johannesburg in April, was his last.

"The last few weeks I have probably been trying too hard and things haven't been going well and then I got the call-up.

"I was really shocked. I had my baggy green out a few days ago and smelt it and wondered if I would ever wear it again.

"I'm pretty excited."

Symonds, one of the best fielders in the world, showed his versatility with the ball in a recent first-class match against Western Australia at the WACA Ground.

He bowled seamers in the first innings and spin in the second, claiming 3-18 and 2-96.

However, his batting form for Queensland has been largely indifferent, with just 73 runs at 24.33.

England look forward



AFP, Perth

England opener Alastair Cook says the tourists have shed the baggage of their horror second Test loss in Adelaide and are ready to bounce back strongly when the third Ashes Test starts here on Thursday.

Speaking here Monday, Cook dismissed suggestions of a splintered English camp after the first two Test defeats and said the they had derived great benefit from the two-day tour match against Western Australia on Saturday and Sunday at the WACA ground.

England captain Andrew Flintoff was rested from the game, but a number of other English players impressed including Cook, who made a century before retiring.

They are just one match away from handing the Ashes back, but the tall left-hander said the English still had plenty of fight in them.

"Obviously after Adelaide it was very disappointing and a devastating loss, but it's gone now," he said.

"We have got over it and we'll go in as confident as we can be.

"The two-day practice game was very good and a lot of people got a lot out of it.

"We can't sit around sulking anymore and we've got to come out again in Perth and fight again.

"Hopefully this time the result can be different. Cricket's a strange game and it can change very quickly, that's what we've got to believe."

A mere pup in his international cricket career but thrown in at the deep end at the top of the order following the departure of Marcus Trescothick, Cook admitted playing the Australians was another step up from his previous Tests against India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

"They do pose a challenge because they're the No. 1 side in the world," he said.

"They've got some very good players and that is the challenge of beating Australia ... they keep coming at you.

"You notice it physically at the end of the day, you feel like you've been in a battle all day.

"They keep coming at you from the first ball to the last ball, it is more intense."

Cook has looked in good touch in the first two Ashes Tests, but has managed just 90 runs at 22.50.

He admitted the Australian tactic of coming around the wicket to him had caught him by surprise, but Cook said he had been working extensively on combating the

approach in the nets.

"It has been slightly different, but I've reacted to that and done a lot of practice on technique and studied it as well," he said.

"It's just a bit of practice on that and hopefully I should be okay.

"I have to make sure the alignment of the body and feet is the same for over and around the wicket.

"We get the net bowlers coming around the wicket and make sure the throw-downs are all from around the wicket for that extra bit of practice."

Cook made a double century for Essex against the Australians in 2005 and said he was certain he would make runs before the series was over.

"It was a practice game, but I know I can score runs against these guys and I know that I will score runs against them," he said.

"It was nice to score that 200 and hopefully I can take a little bit from that and take a hundred this week."

Cook said the English were sticking together, with the entire squad to attend an Elton John concert on Tuesday night.

"Despite what everyone seems to be seeing, there is good team spirit," he said.

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