

Asia Cup may be deferred once again

INTERNET, undated

The 2008 Asia Cup cricket tournament is likely to be postponed again as India has still not confirmed its participation for the continental event.

The Asia Cup is scheduled from April 17 next year but could be pushed back for another two weeks because the dates are clashing with India's proposed tour of Australia.

India had requested during an Asian Cricket Council meeting in Singapore to wait for their confirmation due to the team's tour of Australia before any final decision over staging the event was taken, Pakistan Cricket Board's director of cricket operations, Salim Altaf said.

"If India confirmed their participation, the regional event could be held in the first week of May, 2008," Altaf said.

India, most probably, would visit Australia in January-February next year after which the Aussies would come to Pakistan in the first week of March.

"Australia's tour of Pakistan could last till April 25, hence, there was no chance for Pakistan to hold the Asia Cup on the scheduled date," Altaf added.

The event was proposed to be held in Pakistan in early 2006 but it could not be possible due to crisis in the Indian Cricket Board. Later, India showed their consent to participate in 2008, the report added.

Vaughan 'ready'

BBC ONLINE, undated

Michael Vaughan is convinced he can make a contribution in England's one-day series against Australia and New Zealand later this month.

The 32-year-old, who captained England to Ashes glory in 2005, has not played for his country since December that year following a serious knee injury.

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Did U Know?

The Montreal Canadiens of the mid-1950s are the only team to win five straight Stanley Cup championships.



Ricky Ponting

(Australia cricket captain)

"Despite my reputation as a bit of a cricket anorak, I'm not a huge one for history."

When asked about the possibility of the first Ashes whitewash since 1921.

What to WATCH

ESPN

Australia v England
Fifth Ashes Test, Day 4
Live from 5:30 am
Indian Premier Hockey League
Chandigarh Dynamos v Sher E
Jalandhar
Live at 2:30 pm
Maratha Warriors v Bangalore Lions
Live at 7:00 pm
Sportscenter India
Sport News
Live at 9:30 pm

STAR Sports

India v South Africa
Third Test, Day 4
Live at 2:30 pm



India leg-spinner Anil Kumble appeals against South Africa batsman Mark Boucher on the third day of the final Test at Newlands in Cape Town on Thursday.

Spinners rock Proteas

AFP, Cape Town

India's persistence with the old ball paid off when three key South African wickets fell before tea on the third day of the third and final Test at Newlands Thursday.

South Africa were 283 for six at tea, still 131 behind India's first innings total of 414.

Sachin Tendulkar made a key breakthrough when he had Jacques Kallis caught on the midwicket boundary in the 93rd over -- 13 overs after India could have opted for a new ball.

Anil Kumble bowled Ashwell Prince in the next over and part-time off-spinner Virender Sehwag struck a third blow to South Africa's hopes when Herschelle Gibbs was given out caught at short leg four balls before the interval.

Kallis (54) and Prince (26) had put on 83 for the fourth wicket and were slowly regaining the ascendancy for the host nation when India struck.

It was India's second double strike of the day. South African

captain Graeme Smith was out for 94 in the morning and was soon followed by Hashim Amla, who made 63. The pair put on 159 for the second wicket.

India had already managed to slow down South Africa's scoring after dismissing the aggressive Smith, who made his runs off 141 balls, but it seemed surprising they did not call for a new ball as Kallis and Prince dug in.

But continuing with the old ball, with slow bowlers in action, made scoring difficult and Kallis was out in uncharacteristic fashion when he lost patience against Tendulkar, who was bowling leg breaks.

Kallis had made a careful 54 off 128 balls. Prince was even more watchful, making 26 off 112 deliveries before he tried to play a forcing shot off the back foot against veteran leg-spinner Kumble and edged the ball into his stumps.

Gibbs was unlucky to be given out by umpire Daryl Harper as it seemed the ball had missed his bat and gone to short leg fielder Wasim Jaffer off his thigh pad.

South Africa, seeking a win to break a series deadlock, started the

day confidently after resuming on 144 for one with Smith and Amla pushing the score along steadily before Kumble had Smith caught by a diving Sehwag at short midwicket.

Smith went into the nineties with successive on-drives for four off Zaheer Khan and seemed set to score his first Test century since April 2005.

But with Kumble bowling from around the wicket into rough outside the left-hander's off stump, Smith tried to whip a ball through midwicket and did not get fully to the pitch of the delivery, hitting a low catch to Sehwag.

Shanthakumaran Sreesanth came on to bowl of his first spell of the day and immediately found an immaculate line and length.

Amla tried to square cut a delivery wide of his off stump but edged a catch to wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik. He made 63 in 212 minutes off 174 balls with seven fours.

It was Sreesanth's 18th wicket in three matches, equalling the record for an Indian bowler in a series against South Africa. The

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Where's Martyn?

INTERNET, undated

Were it not for the mass exodus of Australia's veteran heroes, the mysterious and fascinating exit of Damien Martyn would have been a strong contender for story of the Ashes.

Martyn's was not your normal retirement, taking place as it did mid-series with Australia 2-0 up and on the verge of setting the record straight against England.

Amid the usual remarks about "the right time" and "nothing left to prove", Martyn gave a convincing impression of a man who had had enough of it all. He said as much -- the focus, the pressure, the stress had finally overwhelmed him.

His teammates and supposed best friends knew nothing of it. Martyn had been assured his spot was safe, but before the hysteria over Australia's astounding win in Adelaide had died down, he was gone.

He took off to a locale later revealed as the United States, probably the most cricket-ignorant

nation in the English-speaking world. He really did slip away, virtually unnoticed.

In many ways, it was in keeping with a player whose reticence and emotional fragility had always sat awkwardly within a cricket team

which prided itself on audacity and resilience.

Now, Martyn has all but vanished from the face of the earth. He was spotted publicly for the first time since his retirement at the

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Former Australia batsman Damien Martyn (R) is seen watching a Hopman Cup match with his wife Annika Martyn in his hometown Perth recently.

Faulty scheduling!

Clubs to suffer as Premier League begins on Jan 10

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Lack of coordination between Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) will cost the Premiership clubs dear as they are going to miss the services of country's top cricketers for most part of this season's Premier Cricket League.

The decision to start the league with the Twenty20 version means that the national stars will hardly be available for six matches in the league's second part -- the 50-overs league which starts on January 10 -- due to their tour of Zimbabwe.

The Tigers leave for a four-match one-day series in the southern African nation on January 31, a

tour which the CCDM had no knowledge about although the BCB general secretary was quoted recently that the board had got the offer nearly six months earlier.

According to the fixture released by the CCDM yesterday, the 11-round first leg will end on February 13. The national team are due to return from Zimbabwe on February 12 and start preparation for the World Cup in the West Indies immediately. It is expected that the cricketers would not be allowed to play in the league during the camp.

On top of that, if the political situation worsens, the Tigers who can play till the sixth round (January 29) before setting off for Africa, could be restricted to less than six matches.

The fixture itself seemed cal-

lously done and it does not follow the conventional method in all respects. While two-time defending champions Old DOHS, who play bottom-team Young Pegasus in the opening round and reverse the order according to tradition, it was not the same for other teams.

Last year's eight-placed Abahani were due to face fourth-placed Pegasus and this year's Twenty20 champions Mohammedan in the second round but the archivals are pitted against each other in the seventh round, on January 31, without their key players.

Ironically, all of Mohammedan's big matches barring last year's runners-up Victoria -- not a force this time -- will be played in the latter half of the first leg.

Abahani could consider themselves lucky as they will draw three

big names, Biman, Victoria and DOHS inside the first five rounds. The Abahani-DOHS match is slated for January 25.

Three matches will be played each day with a day's gap after one full round while the league will see a four-day gap after the fourth round due to the general elections. The CCDM will use four venues, Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur (SBNS), Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium (DCS), BKSP and Fatullah Cricket Stadium (FCS) in the first four rounds.

FIRST ROUND FIXTURES

JANUARY 10: Old DOHS v Young Pegasus (SBNS), Sonargaon v Partex (FCS), Victoria v Indira Road (BKSP)

JANUARY 11: Mohammedan v Kalabagan (FCS), Biman v Abahani (BKSP), Brothers v City Club (DCS)

Warne bats out England

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

England were just 12 runs in front of Australia with five wickets left in their second innings as the spectre of an Ashes whitewash loomed large in the fifth Test at Sydney on Thursday.

Shane Warne was the man again, top-scoring with the bat and then grabbing the big wicket of skipper Andrew Flintoff just before stumps.

The tourists let slip another opportunity as the Australians surged to a 102-run first innings lead and then bowled themselves into a winning position by the end of the third day.

At the close, England were 114 for five and facing likely defeat on Friday's fourth day with remaining batting hope Kevin Pietersen not out on 29 and nightwatchman Monty Panesar yet to score.

England were sickened minutes before stumps when Flintoff was out stumped off Warne for seven after adjudication by the video umpire in a tight decision.

"If we can win tomorrow and go

five-nil up and whitewash this series that is a fantastic achievement by a wonderful cricket team," Warne said.

"This is as good cricket as Australia has played since I've been playing and as a group we've bowled exceptionally well through the summer.

"We've played exceptional cricket and when the big moments have been there someone has put their hand up. We haven't made those mistakes when we've been in trouble and that's all credit to the Australian team more than England playing poorly."

England are holding out for a miracle to prevent what appears to be an inevitable Australian victory and series clean sweep.

"Obviously, we need to put up a good fight tomorrow. We need to battle hard and have our tail wag," fast bowler James Anderson said.

"If Kevin (Pietersen) stays there for a while then hopefully we can get a reasonable total and have something to bowl at. There's always hope."

Warne earlier blasted 71 off 65 balls as Australia scored 205 runs on the third day after resuming on an overnight 188 for four to finish on

393 and again frustrate England's efforts.

England were under pressure from the third over of their second innings with Alastair Cook out for four, top-edging a pull shot off Brett Lee to Adam Gilchrist.

Two balls later Andrew Strauss was struck a thudding blow on the side of his helmet from a short-pitched Lee delivery, but continued batting. He was later cleared by hospital scans.

Strauss completed a poor series when he fell leg before wicket to Stuart Clark for 24 to finish with 247 runs and a series average of 24.7.

Ian Bell's concentration lapsed after 85 minutes when he flashed at a Lee delivery well outside off-stump to be caught behind for 28.

Paul Collingwood was caught by a diving Matthew Hayden in the gully off Clark for 17 and Flintoff continued the tourists' woes with his late dismissal.

Earlier, Warne thrilled the crowd in his farewell Test with an exhilarating knock, which only ended when he was stumped off spinner Panesar.

Warne was rapturously acclaimed after he crashed nine fours and two sixes to lift Australia

into a powerful position to complete the first Ashes series whitewash in 86 years.

Warne had immediately declared his intentions, with a four and a six over mid-wicket off Panesar, and looked at one stage as though he might achieve his elusive Test century, only to go down with all guns blazing.

Two umpiring decisions marred the opening session, with Adam Gilchrist, in full cry, given out by umpire Billy Bowden for 62.

Bowden's howler was roundly booed by the Australian supporters in the capacity SCG crowd after television replays showed that Gilchrist's bat had missed a wide delivery from Anderson before wicketkeeper Read appealed for a catch.

England may have felt the Bowden blunder partly made up for the other umpire, Aleem Dar, not giving Warne out on 10, caught behind off Panesar.

Panesar whooped down the pitch to celebrate but umpire Dar was unmoved. Replays appeared to show that Warne had gloved the ball to Read.

Yet again Australia's tail wagged

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England captain Andrew Flintoff fails to get behind the crease and is stumped by Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist (L) off Shane Warne (not in picture) on the third day of the final Ashes Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday.

'No match to Glenn'

CRICINFO, undated

Australia will struggle to fill the gaping hole left by Glenn McGrath's departure, according to Shane Warne.

While Stuart Clark has been mentioned as a "McGrath clone", Warne believes it is in part McGrath's attitude and persistence that will be difficult to replicate.

"I don't think Glenn can be replaced," Warne wrote in his column in the Herald Sun.

"In pure bowling terms, Australia might find another like him, but there is still a big question mark over that. It's everything else that he has brought to the table that has set McGrath apart.

"His attitude and ability to get the best players out consistently in all conditions has been unbelievable. The way he has stopped the momentum of opposition sides doesn't show up in stats. His whole attitude through his career has been to keep it simple, and that's been shown in the way he bowls.

Warne said opposition teams would enjoy the fact they no longer had to face him and McGrath. "That will give them a bit of a lift," he said. "We've seen that before when McGrath and I haven't played. But

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Raina at ease with drop

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

It's a mark of his self-confidence -- and the belief in his coach and captain -- that Suresh Raina refuses to be downcast over recent events.

Other youngsters -- Raina is fresh out of his teens -- would have cracked after having failed on an overseas tour and been dropped from the Test squad. Yet Raina prefers to accentuate the positive.

"This is not a failure", he told Cricinfo on the sidelines of the Ranji Trophy match at Vadodra. "I have come back to the domestic game, have scored a century in the last game, and have gained a lot of confidence. The more time I spend in first-class cricket the better."

A member of the squad during the home Tests against England and then in the West Indies, Raina has been burdened with the "prodigy" tag -- and it's fair to say he is yet to fully deliver on that.

His numbers -- an average of 26.77 after 34 ODIs with a best of 81 -- do not square with his reputation as a bully in domestic cricket.

He was impressive with his thirties and forties in India and

Pakistan, always giving the impression there was more to come. Yet the more never came and, as he started playing outside the subcontinent, the talent was harder to spot.

Soon every failure took him closer to being "protected" rather than "being persisted with". And then he was finally dropped, after failing in a side game and a one-dayer in South Africa, falling twice to what had fast become his shortcoming -- the short-pitched stuff.

Out of sight is not really out of mind, though: Raina revealed that Greg Chappell, still in South Africa, had sent him a message following his century against Tamil Nadu.

For Chappell, Raina knows, quality matters more than statistics. "He (Chappell) is quite a reader of the game. Even if you make 20 or 30 runs, he knows how you have made those."

Yet statistics do tell a story, and Raina knows there'd be good reasons for being dropped. "The drop is a positive thing for me. If I am not doing well, I will obviously get dropped.

"But I only got one game there. I knew I will get more chances in the future. I think I was dropped because they must have thought I wouldn't get chances there and they

wanted me to come back and build some confidence."

"He (Chappell) is quite a reader of the game. Even if you make 20 or 30 runs, he knows how you have made those."

It wasn't a glorious return to Ranji; he scored a duck in the first match, against Karnataka (and another against Baroda today). But time spent with his Uttar Pradesh teammates, playing under Mohammed Kaif has helped. "I have worked hard in first-class. Kaif has supported me throughout; he is a superb captain. We came back, we got together, we spoke about the last season when we were champions. Reliving those days felt very good."

Ironically, Raina may again end up competing with Kaif for a place in the Indian side. "I am not thinking about that. I just think, let me do well," says Raina.

"He is a good player, and a good friend. We always have fun, especially while fielding. We plan our dives, the direct hits, and pulling them off is real fun. Even chasing a ball together is enjoyable. He only inspires me... I think if he can do well why not me."

Raina has been part of a structure that focuses on youngsters and

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