

Lee 'ready to lead' attack

CRICINFO, undated

Brett Lee believes he is prepared to take Glenn McGrath's place as the leader of Australia's fast-bowling attack and he said Stuart Clark was the perfect man to help him fill the hole left by McGrath.

"From my point of view it is time to take over with the leadership role," Lee told the Herald Sun. "I am never going to be the same type of bowler Glenn is. It is very hard to replace Glenn, period."

Lee, who took 3 for 75 in England's first innings at Sydney and was on a hat-trick at one stage, said his form had improved markedly since the start of the series. "I have felt good the last couple of games," Lee said. "I felt my rhythm and run-up were not great in the first three Tests, but it feels better now."

He said he had been working on his run-up with the Australia bowling coach Troy Cooley and had developed a shorter approach to the crease. Lee said with McGrath and Shane Warne bowling out at the same time, Clark's emergence as a consistent wicket-taker would help his own bowling.

"I am enjoying working in a partnership with Stuey because I feel when we bowl together from different ends we have fed off each other," Lee said. "We played junior cricket together so we have been playing together for more than a decade and I'm hoping we can fill the void."

Ravindu return boosts Kenya

CRICINFO, undated

Kenya's preparation for the World Cup have been boosted by the return of 34-year-old Ravindu Shah, considered by many to be, along with teammate Steve Tikolo, among the best batsmen outside Test cricket.

The last of Shah's 44 ODIs was in the 2004 Champions Trophy, more than 28 months ago, since when he has been sidelined by a serious knee injury as well as his increasing business commitments.

Vaughan 'ready'

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He was named in the one-day squad and said: "I feel ready. Mentally I am very fresh, which is important at our level."

"I believe I am a better person and I hope I will be a better player."

Even before his injury problems, Vaughan's form in the one-day arena was a cause for concern.

In 74 matches he has yet to score a century, averaging 28 with a top score of 90, which was against Zimbabwe in December 2004.

Having relinquished the Ashes without Vaughan, England will hope to restore some pride and improve upon a dismal one-day record when the triangular series begins against the Australians on 12 January.

Vaughan has yet to be confirmed as skipper for the campaign and said: "No-one has a given right to be England captain. I'd love to carry on where I left off -- but it was a long time ago."

Raina at ease

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the future, and managed to keep experienced players like Sourav Ganguly out of the side. Does it now make him feel insecure that the old hands were brought back? "I don't know about that. I know only about me and my processes."

Ah, the P word that is so beloved of his coach and captain. What does "process" mean to him?

"Preparation before a game. Staying sincere and focussed. Looking at the circumstances, conditions, the kind of bowling, and planning accordingly. Talking to people like Sachin (Tendulkar) and Rahul (Dravid) helps; they remember their good innings. If I can slowly get towards that, not in one go, but slowly, it will be very good for me and my cricket."

Raina isn't losing sleep over his average, aware that he's played 19 of his innings at No. 6 and below. He has not scored a fifty outside the subcontinent, his average after the DLF Cup in Malaysia was 16. His brief spell in South Africa revealed yet again a weakness against the short, rising ball. "I've been working on that at the nets," he says. "I have a good backfoot play, and I am learning to adjust."

It could be argued that Raina has been given a long rope, that he has let those down who showed faith in his ability for so long. But he says he is looking at what he is doing right now, and his immediate goals.

"I have improved over these Ranji matches. I have got a hundred, an eighty, and another hundred would be perfect."

Is World Cup too far a thought? "Right now I am thinking of this game and the next but if I play well, I will go to the West Indies."

Ferguson

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at Old Trafford and Ferguson added: "This is a guy that has been at the top end of striking for over a decade."

"He virtually won the European Cup (last season) for Barcelona against Arsenal by coming on and making two goals."



PHOTO: INTERNET

Australia's Brett Lee attends to England opener Andrew Strauss after the speedster struck him on the head with a vicious bouncer late on the third day of the final Ashes Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday.

Chirp fires up Warne



Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Shane Warne probably has only one more day of Test cricket but when he arrives at the SCG on Friday he won't be sad. "Not at all, I'll be happy," he said.

And he hopes his mood improves with Australia's second Ashes clean-sweep in the history of the rivalry.

Only when the game is finished and he's sitting with his teammates will he get reflective. "I might be a bit sad in the dressing room over a beer," he said. "I don't think I'll be crying or anything. My body is telling me it's time to go, my body is telling me that for sure."

There are only five England batsmen left for Warne to target and with the visitors owning a lead of 12 his final bow is imminent. He sits on 708 wickets and the fast bowlers have been so impressive in this game there will be few opportunities for Warne to add to his tally.

Warne collected Andrew Flintoff two overs before stumps when he was stumped by a fine piece of work from Adam Gilchrist, who removed the balls milliseconds before Flintoff's back foot pushed down over the crease. "It was a pretty big moment so to get him was handy," Warne said. "It was a pretty good ball too."

Despite his lack of bowling opportunities, Warne's supporters at the SCG had a long time to wave at him when he made a bright and crucial 71, which included two sixes and nine fours from 65 balls. He started with a four and a six from his first two deliveries from Monty Panesar, survived a caught behind appeal later in the over and quickly began a sledging session with Paul Collingwood.

Warne was heard on radio to tell Collingwood, who was fielding at first slip to Panesar, to give back the MBE he earned for being part of the 2005 Ashes success. When asked whether he thought Collingwood would take the advice Warne smiled. "I probably told him enough

times he might think about it," he said. "It's up to him."

The advice he received from slip fired his concentration -- he had told Collingwood the barbs inspired him as early as the second Test in Adelaide -- and he was also fuelled by a couple of Red Bulls to avoid a sleepy start.

"I was pretty pumped up," he said. "It's my last game, I didn't have much to lose. Every run was crucial and I actually started to think about batting and tried to concentrate."

He picked up his 12th Test half-century and when Glenn McGrath arrived he gave up hope of reaching his first hundred. It is the only thing missing from a wonderful career.

"I couldn't have asked for it to go better," he said. "I'd like to think I've repaid everyone for what I've bought to cricket. I'd like to think I've made it entertaining, I'd like to think I made it pretty cool. People have enjoyed watching the team play and me play. I'd like to think it's been enjoyable." It has.

grounds that both players did not take the substances knowingly.

WADA has challenged that decision in the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

The 24-year-old Asif is with Pakistan's team currently touring South Africa while Akhtar was not selected for the tour.

WADA said it cannot stop the players from featuring in the international events, as playing rights are with the ICC.

The PCB had played down WADA's appeal, saying any reservations by the WADA or the ICC would not affect the players.

No match

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we have some wonderful players who can do the job for Australia."

He mentioned Shaun Tait and Mitchell Johnson as two young fast bowlers who could benefit from some time in the side while Australia's remaining veterans were still playing. "It's a great time for young players to come in because the team is still successful and on a roll," Warne wrote.

"These players can develop before a few of the other guys retire."

Classy Hingis through

AFP, Gold Coast

Former world number one Martina Hingis showed she would be a major player at this year's Australian Open as she cruised into the semi-finals of the Australian Women's Hardcourt championships here Thursday.

Hingis, who made her comeback at this tournament last year, was clinical as she dispatched Colombia's Catalina Castano 6-3, 6-1 in 68 minutes.

She now faces unseeded Italian Tathiana Garbin in Friday's semifinals following Garbin's 7-5, 6-2 win over Russia's Elena Vesnina.

The other semi-final will be between second seed Dinara Safina and fifth seeded Israeli Shahar Peer.

Safina knocked out a gallant Samantha Stosur of Australia 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, while Peer caused an upset by knocking out Serbian third seed Ana Ivanovic in three sets 5-7, 6-4, 6-4.

Hingis played down suggestions she was an overwhelming favourite for the tournament and said the other three semi-finalists were all in with a chance.

"It's just great semi-finals," Hingis said.

"The girls are great to watch -- young and willing to work hard. It's some kind of future out there (for women's tennis)."

Hingis will play the WTA tournament in Sydney next week in her final warm up for the Australian Open, the first Grand Slam of the year.

Henry hails

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seven in 13 Premiership games. If you look at the ratio, that is not bad."

Both van Persie and midfielder Cesc Fabregas must serve suspensions for the FA Cup tie at Liverpool on Saturday.

But Henry, 29, said he felt ready to lead the attack again. "When you are well within your body, you enjoy your game."

Montella takes

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with the Giallorossi lasts until June 2010. He was, along with Francesco Totti, the only man remaining from the 2001 Scudetto winning team.

A group of fans waited outside the gates with a large banner that read: 'We are with you, nine metres above the sky.'

The former Empoli and Sampdoria hitman scored 102 goals for Roma -- 83 in Serie A, eight for the Coppa Italia, another eight in the UEFA Cup, two Champions League and one Italian Super Cup strike.

'No Chelsea crisis'

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"At one stage last season I think at one stage we were 15 points clear of the Manchester Uniteds and Liverpools and then all of a sudden we had a little blip and it was down to six or seven points at one point."

"You have to look at the big picture rather than just a few games. I think Sir Alex Ferguson (United manager) as well as Jose Mourinho is wise enough to know there is a long way to go."

"The pair of them talk after games which gives out some headlines -- but at the end of the day the football will do the talking."

Henin, Henman

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sustaining a right knee injury.

Henman, 32, now requires a minimum of 10 days' rest and so will not be fit in time for the first Grand Slam of the year which gets under way in Melbourne on January 15.

"Although my back is absolutely fine, there are other parts that can be vulnerable if I don't move right," Henman told Thursday's edition of The Times.

"I just tweaked the lower part of the hamstring tendon behind the knee and it needs rest," added Henman, now Britain's number two player behind rising star Andy Murray.

"I would have loved to have played in Australia, getting a bit of sun on my back, but it gives me a few more weeks to prepare for the year and I intend to hit the ground running in February."

Shaky win

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second set, was unable to match her powerful ground strokes.

"It was my first game of the year and it's always weird coming back after training for so long," Sharapova said of her below-par performance.

She wouldn't be drawn on how she rated her chances in the Australia Open later this month following the surprise withdrawal of world number one Justine Henin-Hardenne from the first Grand Slam of the year.

"It doesn't matter who you play you just have to concentrate on your own game," she said. Eight of the world's top women's tennis players are in Hong Kong, including number five Kim Clijsters who won her first-round match here on Wednesday.

The final will be played on Saturday.

HOPMAN CUP

Russia in final



Tennis

AFP, Perth

Top seed Russia snuck into the mixed teams Hopman Cup final with a win over France in their final Group A tie here Thursday.

Beaten by Australia in their first tie, the Russians needed to win 3-0 to reach the final at the expense of the French, and managed to do so despite an injury scare for Nadia Petrova.

Petrova and Dmitry Tursunov both won their singles matches in straight sets to secure the tie, and then beat the French pairing of Tatiana Golovin and Jerome Haehnel in straight sets in the mixed doubles to win their way through to Friday's final.

Whichever team won the mixed doubles would play in the final, but the Russians were always in control and won 6-4 6-2 in just over an hour.

It is the first time the Russians have reached the final and they will play either India, Spain or the Czech Republic.

The French won their first two ties and had been the only unbeaten team in Group A, but their decision to forfeit the mixed doubles on the opening night ultimately hurt their chances of reaching the final.

Although both the French and Russians won two ties, the Russians advanced as they had

won more matches.

The Russian-born Golovin was philosophical about the loss, with the French a late inclusion in the event following the withdrawal of Germany.

"I am just happy that we had a chance to compete for the final," she said.

"Coming in here, we didn't really expect to be playing at this level and we had some good matches."

Petrova, who was troubled by an abdominal strain in her singles clash with Golovin, said the Russians thought they had no chance in the tournament after losing their first tie.

Petrova said she would receive treatment and was confident of being fit for the final.

Tursunov said it was good to maintain Russia's dominance over France in international teams tennis.

"We've been beating them in the Fed Cup, Davis Cup, Hopman Cup -- this is not even a contest anymore," he said with a grin.

In the women's singles, Petrova overcame her injury setback to beat a disappointing Golovin in straight sets.

The world No.6 has had her share of injury woes and received treatment during, and at the end of, an hour-long first set, but still steamrolled the Frenchwoman in the second set to win 7-6 (7-2) 6-0.

Golovin suffered the injury during the mixed doubles match on

Tuesday, but said it wasn't a major concern.

As expected, Tursunov then levelled the tie with an easy straight sets win over Haehnel, 6-1 6-4.

The confident Tursunov, ranked 22nd in the world, had struggled when beaten in both his previous singles matches here, but was too good for the 213th-ranked Haehnel.

In the other Group A tie, Australia beat the United States 2-1, courtesy of a 6-4 7-5 win in the mixed doubles, although it counted for little as neither team could reach the final.

In the women's singles, Molik recovered from a set down to beat Ashley Harkleroad, 3-6 6-4 6-4.

It was Molik's second win in three matches in Perth as she comes back from the middle-ear infection that sidelined her for almost two years, while Harkleroad went winless from her three singles games.

Molik said she was feeling much more confident about her comeback after her form here, which included a win over Petrova.

"I'm raising the bar now," she said.

"I have quite high expectations for myself in the next few weeks."

Fish then levelled the tie with a 7-5 7-5 win over Nathan Healey, who had been a late replacement for the injured Mark Philippoussis in the tournament.



PHOTO: AFP

Marcos Baghdatis of Cyprus smacks a return towards Spain's Ruben Ramirez Hidalgo on the third day of the Qatar Open in Doha on Wednesday.

Hewitt dealt early blow



Tennis

AFP, Adelaide

Lleyton Hewitt's preparations for this month's Australian Open were dealt a major blow when he was bundled out of the Adelaide International by unheralded Russian Igor Kunitsyn on Thursday.

Hewitt grew up in Adelaide and has long used this tournament to get valuable match practice ahead of the year's first Grand Slam, but he played poorly against the world number 94 and Kunitsyn took the match 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

Hewitt joined defending Adelaide International champion Florent Serra on the sidelines after Serra was forced to retire during the third set of his match against fellow

Frenchman Gilles Simon due to a heat-related illness.

Serra had just broken back to level the match at 5-7, 6-2, 1-1 in the third set when he withdrew.

Sweden's Joachim Johansson goes through to the quarterfinals as a result, having beaten Simon in their meeting Wednesday in the ATP's new round robin format.

The withdrawal highlighted the heatwave conditions endured by the players here this week, with temperatures reaching 37 degrees Celsius (almost 99 degrees Fahrenheit) in the city during the afternoon.

Unseeded Australian Chris Guccione used local conditions to his advantage when he beat Frenchman Arnaud Clement 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5) to reach his first ATP tour quarter-final.

Guccione said his win over

Clement was one of his best.

"It's definitely up there. I've beaten Juan Carlos Ferrero a couple of times and a couple of guys in Davis Cup who are quite high, but other than that I've beaten three top 100 players in a row now, so I've never done that before," he said.

Vince Spadea of the US, who defeated Russia's Evgeny Korolev 6-1, 7-6 (8/6), also progressed Thursday to the quarterfinals.

So did Argentina's Juan Martin del Potro after he upset eighth seed Paul-Henri Mathieu 7-6 (7/3), 0-6, 6-3.

French second seed Richard Gasquet also made the grade, following his 7-5, 5-7, 6-3 win over Canada's Frank Dancevic.

Top seed Novak Djokovic of Serbia qualified for the quarterfinals on Wednesday.

Warne bats out England

Langer c Read b Anderson	26
Hayden c Collingwood b Harmison	33
Ponting run out (Anderson)	45
Hussey c Read b Anderson	37
Clarke c Read b Harmison	11
Symonds b Panesar	48
Gilchrist c Read b Anderson	62
Warne st Read b Panesar	71
Lee c Read b Flintoff	5
Clark c Pietersen b Mahmood	35
McGrath not out	0
Extras: (lb-10, w-4, nb-6)	20
Total: (All out in 96.3 overs)	393
Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-100, 3-118, 4-155, 5-190, 6-260, 7-318, 8-325, 9-393	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Flintoff	17	2	56	1
Anderson	26	8	98	3
Harmison	23	5	80	2
Mahmood	11	1	59	1
Panesar	19.3	0	90	2

ENGLAND: Second innings

Strauss lbw b Clark	24
Cook c Gilchrist b Lee	4
Bell c Gilchrist b Lee	28
Pietersen not out	29
Collingwood c Hayden b Clark	17
Flintoff st Gilchrist b Warne	7

Panesar not out	0
Extras: (lb-2, w-1, nb-2)	5
Total: (For 5 wkts in 43 overs)	114
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-55, 3-64, 4-98, 5-113	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Lee	10	3	34	2
McGrath	13	7	22	0
Clark	12	4	29	2

Warne	3	0	14	1
Symonds	5	2	13	0

Spinners rock

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record was set by Kumble in 1992-93 and equaled by Javagal Srinath in 1996-97.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the third day of the third and final Test between South Africa and India at Newlands on Thursday:

INDIA: First innings 414 (Jaffer 116, Ganguly 66, Tendulkar 64, Karthik 63, Sehwaag 40; Pollock 4-75, Harris 4-129)

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings (overnight 144-1)

Smith c Sehwaag b Kumble 94
De Villiers c Karthik b Sreesanth 1
Amia c Karthik b Sreesanth 63
Kallis c Patel b Tendulkar 54

Prince b Kumble 26
Gibbs c Jaffer b Sehwaag 7
Boucher not out 13
Pollock not out 2

Extras: (b-3, lb-9, nb-11) 23
Total: (For 6 wkts in 102 overs) 283
Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2-173, 3-177, 4-260, 5-260, 6-281

To bat: Ntini, Steyn, Harris

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Zaheer	15	2	55	0
Sreesanth	17	8	39	2
Kumble	36	6	95	2
Patel	16	5	38	0
Sehwaag	10	0	21	1
Tendulkar	8	2	23	1