

## 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 bowing 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 focused. 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 bats milliseconds before Flintoff's back foot pushed down 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 bars 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.

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.

## 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 Tatiana Garbin in Friday's semi-finals 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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## '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.

But, of course, he didn't want that. He wants to be the forgotten man. It's sad that his frustration with professional sport and his desire for solitude should have compelled him to end his career in a manner not befitting its splendour.

However, when Australia fell to 33-2 chasing 168 to win, it was Mike Hussey, not Martyn, who strolled the centre. It was an incredible show of faith in Hussey, and a slight on Martyn. You are not our man Damien, the subtext read.

When he finally did come out to

bat, Martyn played like a man with a point to prove, swinging indiscriminately and walking off with head bowed after a failed cameo contribution. He was said to be muted afterwards, despite Australia pulling off a win that Shane Warne described as the greatest with which he'd been associated.

Despite Martyn's often-fractious relationship with the media and the Australian cricket fraternity in general, he was a fine batsman and deserved to join Warne, McGrath and Langer in the back-slapping revelry taking place at the SCG this week. Nobody would have denied him that honour.

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But that's Martyn: introverted, impulsive and individual to the very end. An enigma during his career, he remains a mystery after it.

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, 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 the Frenchwoman 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

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."

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Petrova recovered from a set down to beat Ashley Harkleroad, 6-4 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."