

SOS to Warne!

AFP, Sydney

England coach Duncan Fletcher said Saturday he would like Shane Warne to cross the great cricket divide and work as a spin doctor for Australia's old Ashes enemy.

The champion leg-spinner played his 145th and final Test in Australia's 10-wicket victory over England in the fifth Sydney Test Friday to claim an 86-year-old 5-0 Ashes clean sweep.

Fletcher, who faces fall-out over England's performance in the series, is keen for Test cricket's leading wicket-taker to impart his skill: knowledge and experience to England spin bowlers.

"I'd be happy with him to speak to anyone, there's no doubt about it," Fletcher told reporters here Saturday.

"Someone of that calibre would be very useful for England to use his experience, at any stage during the (northern) summer or at any stage of a player's career.

"Not only of a young spinner. Imagine the help he could give to a very, very experienced spinner in the side."

Although finished with Test cricket, Warne is committed to playing out the remaining two years of his contract with English county Hampshire, providing England potential access to his wealth of cricket knowledge.

Fletcher said it would not only be spinners who would benefit from Warne's insight.

"Not only a spinner. He's got the capabilities of helping anyone in international cricket on how to play the game," he said.

In a sign England had already begun tapping into Warne's thinking, he and opposing spinner Monty Panesar were seen chatting at length after the fifth Ashes Test at the SCG.

Of Warne's 708 Test wickets, 195 were against England.

Australian Troy Cooley, who was instrumental as bowling coach under Fletcher in England's 2005 Ashes victory, was coaxed back home to help Ricky Ponting's team regain the urn.

Cooley was said to be influential in turning around the bowling fortunes of speedster Brett Lee in the Ashes series.

'Eng refused practice'

CRICINFO, undated

England refused the chance to play 16 days of warm-up matches before their ill-fated Ashes defence, according to Bob Merriman, the former Cricket Australia chairman.

Merriman, who remains a director of Cricket Australia, said England had been offered the opportunity to play four four-day games before the first Test.

Instead, they played three matches -- none of whom had first-class status -- totalling only seven days and suggestions they were under-prepared plagued the tourists all series.

Merriman was quoted in The Times as saying the England players opted for a shorter build-up after completing the Champions Trophy in India, even though Australia were prepared to push back the start date of the first Test to accommodate the extra fixtures.

"We thought they would come straight from India rather than go home," Merriman said.

"Apparently, though, their players didn't want to. We offered them four four-day matches before the first Test, beginning in Sydney, then Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane."

John Carr, the ECB's director of operations, said Merriman's claims were incorrect. "The truth is that Cricket Australia actually made us pay for our first day in Australia (which is against the usual protocol) on the basis that we were having a longer lead-in period to the first Test than they received on the 2005 tour of England," Carr told the paper.

"Their proposed arrival date for us was actually a day later than we got there so we could not physically have fitted in four four-day matches in the period that they were prepared to host us, which was for 18 days before the first Test.

Scolari itching

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The February 6 match will be the second between Portugal and Brazil since Scolari took the helm of the Portuguese national team in December 2002.

Portugal beat five-times world champions Brazil 2-1 when the two sides last met in a friendly in March 2003 in the northern Portuguese city of Oporto.

Henry speaks

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"My brain was like that. When people asked if I was okay I would say 'Yes' even though I knew I wasn't."

"You have to read the right signals in your body. One thing I have found difficult to do is to listen to my body. I need to do that.

"I hope all my problems are over but when you average over 60 games a season you pay the price."



PHOTO: INTERNET

THERE HE IS: Retired Australian cricketer Damien Martyn (L) joins the party of Justin Langer, Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne (R) after the final Ashes Test victory against England at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday.

Hayden ogles at WC

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Matthew Hayden has bid farewell to his Test opening partner Justin Langer and now wants to partner Adam Gilchrist in the Australian team all the way to this year's one-day World Cup final.

Hayden and Justin Langer opened for the last time in Australia's 10-wicket final Ashes Test win over England on Friday in Sydney.

He said he wanted to reignite his opening stand with Gilchrist, starting with this month's one-day triangular series against England and New Zealand.

Hayden's limited overs career appeared over when he lost his spot after the 2005 tour of England, but he is now intent on staying put throughout 2007.

Shane Watson opened with Gilchrist during last year's Champions Trophy win in India, but his hamstring injury has given Hayden passage into Tuesday's Twenty20 clash against England in Sydney and Friday's opening tri-series clash against England in Melbourne.

Hayden wants to take that chance all the way to the World Cup in the Caribbean, having opened with Gilchrist through the 2003 triumph in South Africa.

"Safe to say I'm pretty happy," Hayden told reporters here Saturday.

"It's a great opportunity for me and I just feel really lucky to be a part of the next six months of cricket."

Hayden and Gilchrist averaged stands of 52 throughout the 2003 World Cup, and put on 105 in the win over India in the final.

The pair is the third-most prolific

opening stand in the shortened game, having put on over 3,800 runs in 80 matches together.

"Our partnership has got an opportunity to blossom over the next few months," Hayden said.

"Adam is a big player in tournaments and our partnership was very strong right through the last World Cup.

"It's great to get that opportunity again and deep down we've got a lot of hunger to play for Australia and play well, and if that takes us to the World Cup -- hopefully it will do -- it will be a tremendous honour and achievement."

Hayden lost his spot to Simon Katich after the 2005 tour of England, who in turn lost it to Watson in India.

Hayden's last one-day internationals were the two matches he played in the warm-up tri-series in Malaysia last September.

played in lots of winning teams, but this one has been special.

"To be able to walk up to your bowlers, tell them what you want, set a few field positions and then see it all come off, from a captain's point of view, it doesn't get any better. The execution was perfect."

Larsson set

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"If we are to go through we have to do what no other Premiership team has done this season and stop Ronaldo from playing."

Villa's hopes will be boosted by the return of captain Gareth Barry after a one-match ban although the midfielder's comeback will be offset by the loss of centre-back Olaf Mellberg to suspension.

On-loan keeper Gabor Kiraly is available after Villa were given permission by Crystal Palace to play the Hungarian in the continuing absence of the injured Thomas Sorensen.

Bellamy set

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Lassana Diarra, Mikel Jon Obi and Wayne Bridge could come in if Mourinho decides to give Frank Lampard, Claude Makelele and Ashley Cole a match off.

Chelsea's lengthy injury list includes John Terry (back), Khalid Boulahrouz (ligaments), Joe Cole (foot), Arjen Robben (hamstring), Petr Cech (skull) and Carlo Cudicini (thigh).

Luis Boa Morte should go straight into West Ham's starting XI for the match against League One Brighton after completing his move from Fulham on Friday.

Bolton manager Sam Allardyce is without suspended midfielder Ivan Campo for the trip to League One Doncaster.

Henrik Pedersen is also ruled out with a calf injury, while Stelios Giannakopoulos (groin) and Quinton Fortune (Achilles) remain doubtful.

Safina springs

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"Coming here I couldn't even imagine that I could win it, I had a pretty tough draw," Safina said.

Safina said it was an excellent feeling to win another title after she was forced out of the game late last year with fatigue.

"I was a little bit disappointed at the end of the year," she said.

"I had two months off practising hard and I'm really happy that the hard work paid off."

Hingsis said she had her chances to win but just couldn't convert them.

"There were just too many opportunities I wasn't able to take," she said. "Those are the things you have to be able to do against players like her."

"I had my chances -- it's not like she blew me away."

Beware of WC touts

BBC ONLINE, undated

World Cup organisers in the Caribbean (CWC) have warned fans not to buy travel packages except from official agents.

It follows reports from India of unauthorised companies offering trips and match tickets.

"Fans are advised to deal with CWC's official agents. They are the only ones who have the authority to sell packages for this event -- nobody else.

"There are five of these in India to cater for the large fan base there," said commercial manager Stephen Price.

People who buy from unofficial sources are taking a "huge risk" and Price added: "There will be no recourse from CWC if someone falls victim to any of the unauthorised travel agents."

The individual Caribbean nations involved in the tournament have, meanwhile, been reminded to re-double their efforts to ensure everything is ready on time.

The 16 competing teams are due to arrive on 2 March, with the opening warm-up games three days later.

"The opening ceremony has been CWC's traditional landmark for counting down -- but we all know we must be ready long before that," said venue development director Donald Lockerbie.

"Two months from today (Saturday) we want to be saying 'well done to Barbados, Jamaica, St. Vincent & the Grenadines and Trinidad & Tobago' as they will be the first to represent Cricket World Cup and the Caribbean on the international stage. They will set the tone.

"Even before that though, players and fans will be in our midst and we must do everything we can to ensure they receive an excellent welcome and a positive start to their World Cup experience.

"The media too are extremely important and we want them to be raving about the quality of our stadia and the detailed planning," he added.

"We are almost there but we cannot afford to get sidetracked or complacent or be patting ourselves on the back at this stage. CWC has set a standard of excellence throughout and we must keep pace with that high level of operation and output? leave nothing to chance."

Buck joins search mission

CRICINFO, undated

The Ashes series has been a tale of two coaches with John Buchanan improving his record and Duncan Fletcher losing ground by the game.

Both men may have been involved in their last Tests at the SCG, but Buchanan leaves with the greater reputation after being a key backroom member of Australia's 5-0 victory and a 12th win in a row.

Buchanan's stock is currently so high that Mark Taylor, a Cricket Australia director, said he will be a main figure in the search for the country's next coach. The World Cup in the West Indies is Buchanan's final task in his current role, but Taylor, who is on a committee to choose the replacement, has added to his duties.

"Quite a bit will depend on (Buchanan's) thoughts," Taylor said in the Sydney Morning Herald.

"Depending on who we go for, it might be possible for them to travel to the World Cup with John, if they are not already coaching an international team. If that is possible, that would be our preference.

"We have had some informal chats already as a committee. I'm not at liberty to say much more than that, but certainly the one-day series will give us an opportunity to get together in the next couple of weeks to discuss matters further."

Tom Moody, the Sri Lanka coach, and Tim Nielsen, who is in charge of Australia's Centre of Excellence, are the front-runners while Greg Chappell and Dav

Whatmore have also been spoken of as contenders.

Whoever gets the job faces a huge task to match Buchanan's record of 70 wins from 91 matches.

Ricky Ponting praised Buchanan after his side sealed the Ashes whitewash and waved goodbye to a huge chunk of the side.

Proteas clinch

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Total: (For 5 wkts in 64.1 overs)211 To bat: Boucher, Steyn, Harris, Ntini

Fall of wickets: 1-36, 2-55, 3-127, 4-132, 5-209.

Bowling	O	M	R	W
Zaheer	21	2	62	4
Sreesanth	13	2	50	0
Kumble	25	4	74	1
Patel	1	0	2	0
Sehwah	1	0	8	0
Tendulkar	3.1	2	3	0

Result: South Africa won by five wickets and clinched the series 2-1.

Man-of-the-match: Graeme Smith.

Man-of-the-series: Shaun Pollock.

Un-British alacrity

Cricket

AFP, London

There was something very British about the response of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) to their side suffering the first 5-0 Ashes drubbing for 86 years -- they announced the creation of a new committee.

After Australia had wrapped up a 10-wicket win with more than a day to spare in the final Test in Sydney on Friday, the ECB issued a statement whose civil service tone did not exactly convey a sense of urgency.

"The Board unanimously supported the establishment of a comprehensive review and will now meet formally to agree the process and composition of the review team," the statement said.

In fairness to the ECB, they said that cricket director John Carr's separate tour report would be completed by February so action could be taken in time for England's World Cup campaign in the Caribbean starting in March.

However, as the World Cup is a tournament made up of one-day matches, it is hard to see how lessons from Australia, where England were up against undeniably impressive opponents, will be applied in the West Indies.

A review might well have been ordered after England lost the first Test in Brisbane by the huge margin of 277 runs.

The opening ball of that match from fast bowler Stephen Harmison was so off-target it carried to captain Andrew Flintoff at second slip, a delivery symbolic of England's form throughout the series.

And certainly any lingering euphoria from England's 2005 Ashes triumph had disappeared by the time the second Test in Adelaide had been lost in spectacular fashion.

ion.

England scored a seemingly impregnable 551 for six declared in their first innings before snatching defeat from the jaws of what seemed a draw by being bowled out for 129 second time around in a fearful display which even the brilliance of Shane Warne could not explain fully.

From then on the massive defeats kept coming.

England scored just three hundreds in the whole series but Australia posted nine centuries, captain Ricky Ponting scoring two of them in fine style.

As for the bowling, Matthew Hoggard led the averages at an expensive 37.38 per wicket, the wayward Harmison going for more than 61.

By contrast Australia's Stuart Clark, the "new Glenn McGrath", took an impressive 26 wickets at just over 17 apiece in the style of what many old pros would say was that of a "typical" English seamer.

Several former players also noted how little cricket -- seven days in all -- England had played before the first Test.

"They're good players, but they weren't ready," said Mike Gatting, who 20 years ago became the last England captain to win a Test series in Australia.

England were weakened by being without Ashes-winning captain Michael Vaughan and reverse-swing specialist Simon Jones, two key members of the 2005 team, both missing with knee injuries.

Then, at the beginning of the tour, opening batsman Marcus Trescothick withdrew because of a stress-related illness.

That would have done little for a side with a lengthy tail where wicket-keepers Geraint Jones and Chris Read were unable to provide the runs expected of a No 7.

But recalling Ashley Giles -- out for a year with a hip injury -- instead

tactical ability questioned after setting defensive fields against Australia's batsmen.

Fletcher said he wondered before the series whether appointing Flintoff to replace Vaughan over opener Andrew Strauss was the right call, given the Lancastrian had only captained England in six Tests beforehand and did not lead his county.

"I do believe there is a lot to ask of him, especially with a young, inexperienced side where you've got to do a lot of captaining," Fletcher told reporters here Saturday.

"You're not really getting the help from these young guys that, say, Ponting gets from the experienced guys around him. So it is a very difficult job for him.

"He found it difficult. With a lot of young bowlers out there he's got to (decide whether to) protect them, or does he go and attack a side of attacking batters?"

"He's come up with a policy that he believes is right and it's been a very, very difficult job for him."

Flintoff's difficulties even extended to managing his friend and strike bowler Steve Harmison, who failed to reproduce his form of England's 2005 Ashes victory in England.

Harmison took 10 wickets at 61.40 and only bowled his best when the Ashes were lost.

of fellow left-arm spinner and England's rising star of 2006 Monty Panesar -- never looked like being the answer to the lower order problem.

Panesar, who went from No 11 to England's nightwatchman at Sydney, took a creditable 10 wickets at a shade under 38.

His self-reliance was not in question but there was a sense that some England players had become too cosseted by the squad's vast support group.

Former England captain Nasser Hussain couldn't hide his anger after Harmison said he didn't know what he would be doing when he returned to England.

"You see England with big buses, security guards, 45 back-room staff, all pampered. Warney (Shane Warne) is carrying his bag on his back with his shirt hanging out -- they do it themselves."

Flintoff was optimistic his young side would be better for their humiliation come the next Ashes series in 2009 where Australia will be without the retired quartet of Warne, McGrath and batsmen Justin Langer and Damien Martyn.

Even so, British bookmaker William Hill felt able to offer odds, albeit of 500/1, on England not regaining the Ashes this century.

Such was Australia's haste in completing their Sydney rout; some editions of Friday's British papers carried the news despite the 11-hour time difference.

Christopher Martin-Jenkins, cricket correspondent of The Times, wrote: "There has been an almost religious zeal in the way Ricky Ponting and his men have hunted down only the ninth 5-0 whitewash in Test history."

Come the finish, England had indeed been left without a prayer.

'Overload on Flintoff'

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

England coach Duncan Fletcher says a lot was asked of Andrew Flintoff as England captain in the failed Ashes campaign against Australia.

They crashed to a 5-0 Ashes series whitewash to the Australians, the first such defeat in 86 years.

Fletcher, also under fire for his part in the tour debacle, conceded he was concerned before the series that Flintoff would be overburdened by the captaincy on top of batting at No.6 and opening the bowling.

Fletcher also said Flintoff had difficulties deciding when to attack or defend in the field, and had lacked the equivalent support that Australian skipper Ricky Ponting could so often call upon.

England are expected to replace Flintoff with Michael Vaughan on Sunday for next week's triangular one-day series against Australia and New Zealand.

Vaughan's knee problems prevented him from playing in the Ashes series, but he is available for the tri-series.

Flintoff struggled with bat, averaging 28.22, and ball (43.72) through the series, and had his

Rules are simple: Harper

Cricket

AFP, Cape Town

Umpire Daryl Harper said Friday that Sachin Tendulkar and the Indian team management should have been aware that the star Indian batsman was not allowed to bat early on the fourth day of the third Test against South Africa at Newlands.

There was a six-minute delay between the fall of India's second wicket and the arrival on the field of Sourav Ganguly after Tendulkar was informed he could not bat in his usual position because he had been off the field for 18 minutes at the end of South Africa's first innings the previous day.

Harper said the playing condition was clear. If a player was off the field for longer than eight minutes he had to stay away from the action for the equivalent time before he could bat or bowl.

"That's been in the conditions for as long as I have been around," said Harper, who has been a Test umpire since 1998.

Harper said that after the first Indian wicket fell nine minutes into the day he asked third umpire Marais Erasmus to send a reminder to the Indian dressing room that Tendulkar could not bat until 18 minutes had elapsed. Three minutes later a second wicket fell.

"It's pretty straightforward really," said Harper.

"If a player leaves the field he's got to be responsible for his own actions. I thought I should send a reminder

"There were a couple of occasions during this (fifth) and other Tests when Andrew has taken him (Harmison) off and he has been pretty angry about it," Fletcher said.

The review of England's dire tour will include its limited preparation before the first Test, its bad selections, and Fletcher's role as a selector, Flintoff's captaincy and even the size of the team's entourage.

"We can go away and there's areas we can work on. We've said it on numerous occasions, cricket's not an easy game, you have your ups and downs," Fletcher said.

"If it was just that simple to get players to play well. There was a lot of pressure. You've got to give credit to the Australians, the way they played, and they're a quality side.

"Last (time, in 2005) they had their downs with the same side. They've come back, turned it around and beat us convincingly. We hope to do the same."

England have won just five of 18 Tests since regaining the Ashes in 2005, but Fletcher said there were enough positives to warrant a No.2 Test ranking.

Fletcher also maintained he was the right man to coach England and said he would discuss his recommendations for the future in the review.

Ancelotti

FROM PAGE 20

February 20 before the Italians entertain the Scottish champions at the San Siro on March 7.

Were it not for their points handicap for their role in the Italian match-fixing scandal, Milan would now be fourth in Serie A.

Old boys

FROM PAGE 17

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mason	10	1	62	0
Bond	10	2	47	2
Gillespie	10	1	39	3
Adams	9	2	53	1
Patel	9	0	41	0
McMillan	2	0	9	0

NEW ZEALAND

McCallum c Sangakkara b Maharoof 17
Fleming lbw b Vaas 0
Taylor lbw b Vaas 0
Fulton lbw b Malinga 9
Marshall lbw b Vaas 3
McMillan not out 29
Adams lbw b Malinga 1
Bond c b Malinga 2
Gillespie c Sangakkara b Fernando 0
Patel b Muralidaran 6
Mason lbw b Muralidaran 1
Extras: (lb-2, w-1, nb-2) 5

Total: (All out in 26.3 overs) 73
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-17, 3-17, 4-25, 5-37, 6-39, 7-49, 8-54, 9-71, 10-73.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Vaas	8	3	10	3
Malinga	8	3	14	3
Maharoof	4	0	27	2
Fernando	4	1	13	1
Muralidaran	2.3	0	7	2

Result: Sri Lan a won by 189 runs and level five-match series 2-2.