

Flintoff was no 'mistake'

AFP, Sydney

Andrew Flintoff was the right man to lead England in the failed Ashes series against Australia, chief selector David Graveney said here Sunday.

England were thrashed 5-0 by the Australians in the first Ashes whitewash in 86 years in the final Sydney Test last Friday.

Graveney said he had no regrets about making Flintoff captain as he confirmed Michael Vaughan would take over the captaincy for this month's triangular one-day series against Australia and New Zealand.

Coach Duncan Fletcher conceded Saturday that he had concerns before the series about the extra workload on England's star all-rounder.

"There's nothing that has happened in the last six weeks that would make me personally change my mind," Graveney told a press conference here Sunday.

"We've made a lot of mistakes, a lot of errors, but the appointment of the captain is not one of them.

"I take my hat off to him because it was a very difficult job for him to do, and he's done it as well as he possibly can."

Flintoff appeared burdened by the added responsibility, averaging 28 with the bat and taking 11 wickets at almost 44 runs apiece.

Flintoff was also criticised for his over-defensive field settings during the five-match series.

Although he said he wanted to carry on as captain, he has now been replaced by Vaughan, who returns to international cricket after a gap of more than a year following knee surgery.

Graveney said Flintoff had not been sacked and understood that he had merely "been keeping the seat warm" until Vaughan returned.

"He was fine because he understood that he was doing the job in Michael's absence. It was not a question of being sacked," Graveney said.

"He will be the same as everybody else, supporting the team. He's hurting the same way as everybody else is.

"Now we're looking forward to a fresh start."

England play Australia in a Twenty20 match here on Tuesday ahead of the opening match in the tri-series against the Australians in Melbourne next Friday.

Lloyd supports WC organisers

CRICINFO, undated

West Indies legend Clive Lloyd believes the Caribbean can host a successful World Cup given the organisers execute their plans effectively. Currently chairman of the West Indies Cricket Board's cricket committee and an ICC match referee, Lloyd summarised a six-part list of activities for the World Cup's think-tank.

"It was quite a proud moment for me when the International Cricket Council awarded the 2007 World Cup to the West Indies," Lloyd, 62, wrote in a guest article for the Economist.

"It is undoubtedly the biggest single event ever hosted in the Caribbean and, in my view, it is the best thing to have happened to the Caribbean community in general, and to West Indies cricket in particular.

"We (West Indies) will never get a second chance to make a first impression," he added.

"The journey to 2007 is well under way. It is extremely challenging, but it must be pursued purposefully and with all the creative energy. Failure is not an option for the West Indies in this exciting venture."

Among Lloyd's six-part agenda were high-tech stadiums, enough fully equipped hotel rooms, sufficient modes of transportation for tourists, top-class security, good medical facilities and a smooth customs and immigration process.

"The stakes are high," Lloyd said. "The short-term gain for a successful 2007 Cricket World Cup will be a massive financial windfall for the Caribbean. The long-term benefits for the region and for West Indies cricket are even greater."

The organisers have already faced flak over a visa row regarding the introduction of special visa requirements between January and May. The World Cup kicks off on March 13 at Kingston.

Lampard treble

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they allowed Lampard to gallop forward and crack a skidding shot into the bottom corner.

That restored order, and just after half-time Macclesfield's fading hopes were blown apart. Wright-Phillips set clear Shevchenko with a cute pass but the Ukrainian's run was checked by the sprawling Lee, who was shown the inevitable red card by referee Lee Mason.

Paul Ince, the Macclesfield manager, had dangerously opted against naming a reserve goal-keeper among his substitutes, so it was left to Dave Morley, the captain, to don the green jersey. He was powerless to prevent Lampard completing his hat-trick from the penalty spot and Chelsea duly turned the screw.

Wright-Phillips clipped in Lampard's precise cross in the 66th minute, John Obi Mikel crunched in his first Chelsea goal with a glorious half-volley from the edge of the penalty area and finally Carvalho drilled in a deflected shot to leave Macclesfield beaten but not bowed.

Greg praises Sourav

Graeme glad at meaningful win



AFP/BBC ONLINE, Cape Town

India coach Greg Chappell said some senior players could be under pressure following the team's defeat in the series-deciding third and final Test against South Africa at Newlands.

South Africa completed a come-from-behind 2-1 series victory on Saturday with a five-wicket win despite rain causing a delay of three hours 45 minutes before they reached their target of 211.

Chappell said India's batting had been disappointing.

He singled out the second innings collapse to 169 all out but also said the team had failed to capitalise fully on winning the toss when they made 414 in the first innings.

The Australian said some hard choices would have to be made.

"Looking at the tour as a whole there are more questions than answers," he said.

"In the next week or so when we get to India and have a chance to digest what happened and discuss it, we'll have to make some decisions about which way to go in the future. There will be some guys under pressure without a doubt."

Asked by an Indian journalist whether he thought a key aspect of the turnaround in the series had been that South Africa's senior players performed better than India's, he said: "It's hard to escape that there are things that will have to be discussed. "The positive side is that some of the young boys performed very well. They showed guts and skill and good temperament for international cricket."

Chappell also said the pitch had not deteriorated as much as expected.

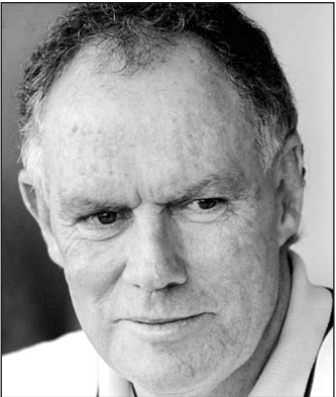
"I offered some targets for the spin bowlers but it really wasn't a mine-field," he said.

"The major landing areas of the wicket were pretty good which made our batting effort on Friday that much more disappointing."

Despite the defeat, Chappell had praise for former captain Sourav Ganguly.

"He's done what he was chosen to do, which is to get in there and get runs. His performance on Friday in difficult circumstances, having to be rushed in at the last minute, was exceptional. He's done a good job."

South African captain Graeme Smith, who was named man-of-the-match after scoring 94 and 55, said the win was a massive event for all the



GREG CHAPPELL

players in his side.

"To come back from 1-0 down in a three-Test series, realistically we knew how difficult it would be and I think we played superb cricket throughout. We never gave up and we showed character at key moments.

"With all the rubbish after the first Test it makes it even more meaningful."

He said the series-levelling win in Durban was a breakthrough but rated the Newlands triumph higher.

"To win at Newlands, considering the conditions and that they were 260 for three at the end of day one, the way we stuck to our game plans and

our beliefs and the way we worked in the field and with the bat, was incredible."

Smith and man-of-the-series Shaun Pollock set South Africa on the way to their win with aggressive batting early in the day before rain interrupted the chase.

Smith admitted he was worried that the ever-present threat of rain could undo all South Africa's hard work after drawing the second Test in Durban.

"It was a little bit frustrating," said Smith.

Left-arm opening bowler Zaheer Khan struck twice when played resumed, dismissing both Smith and Pollock, but Jacques Kallis and Ashwell Prince crafted a 77-run partnership to consign India to their third series defeat in as many tours of South Africa.

Smith was also delighted on a personal level after bouncing back from scores of just five and 10 in Johannesburg with a second-innings 59 in Durban.

"I went through a tough period at the beginning of the season so it's always fantastic to come back in the way that I have and contribute to a special series win," he said.

"Things started to come right in Durban and I felt a lot better here in Cape Town and hopefully I can build on that in the Pakistan series and then on to the World Cup.

"I realise I'm an important cog with the bat and I've got to be working."

The skipper however was magnanimous in his praise for the Indian team under the captaincy of Rahul Dravid.

"They were superb," he said. "To Rahul and his team -- all the congratulations for the way they performed throughout this series. They were an outstanding team and great assets and I wish them all the best for their future games.

"Hopefully at the World Cup we'll run into each other again and we can have a good drink."

Selectors turn to Mac



AFP, Sydney

Stuart MacGill is the standout choice to succeed Shane Warne in the Australian Test team, chairman of selectors Andrew Hilditch indicated Sunday.

MacGill's international future looked uncertain when he was overlooked for the fifth Ashes Test at the spin-friendly Sydney Cricket Ground, with suggestions he could be overtaken by the young generation of Australian spinners.

The leg-spinner's volatile temperament, including the suspension served at the start of this season for a clash with an umpire in a club match, also appeared to have harmed his chances of adding to his 40 Tests.

MacGill will be nearly 37 and won't have played a Test for 19 months when Australia plays their next Test, against Sri Lanka in November. But Hilditch said

Warne's long-time understudy deserved his shot.

"There is no doubt that it's going to be a difficult hole to fill because (Warne's) been so great over such a long time and has won so many Test matches for us," Hilditch said Sunday.

"We've been really lucky to have had MacGill. He has been a really good Test leg-spinner and he's going to come into contention at the start of the next series.

"If he's fit and bowling well, he is obviously the person to look for."

Hilditch said MacGill had been considered for all five Ashes Tests, but had missed out because the selectors wanted three fast bowlers plus Warne.

He said MacGill's disciplinary record had no impact on him being overlooked.

"We regard Stuart very highly and to suggest his behaviour prevented him playing, there is no substance to that whatsoever," he said.

"The reason Stuart didn't play

was because we wanted to go with the three-pronged pace attack (Glenn McGrath, Brett Lee and Stuart Clark), which was really instrumental in us regaining the Ashes.

"England has a far better batting side than they showed and that's because of our bowling."

MacGill's cause is also likely to be aided by Hilditch's view that Australia's next group of spinners -- including Dan Cullen, Cullen Bailey and Cameron White -- all need time to develop.

MacGill has taken 198 Test wickets at an average of 27.21, but has struggled to string together regular appearances because his career coincided with Test cricket's leading wicket-taker Warne.

Hilditch said Australia was likely to stick with a frontline attack of three quicks and a spinner in the future, and would call on either Andrew Symonds or Shane Watson to bowl relief and bat in the top seven.

Openers make merry



CRICINFO, undated

Entering a tour of South Africa a solid opening partnership is a key requirement, but that has been Pakistan's major Achilles heel since the days of Saeed Anwar and Aamir Sohail.

However, the 2007 vintage of Mohammad Hafeez and Imran Farhat started in the best possible style as their centuries led a day of Pakistani batting dominance against Rest of South Africa in the mining town of Kimberley.

To give Hafeez and Farhat their due they have been more successful as opening batsmen than many Pakistan have tried in recent years. Against West Indies they each enjoyed a reasonable series -- averaging 39 and 46 respectively -- although rarely fired as a combination.

Back at The Oval in September, which will always be remembered for other events, Hafeez hit 95 and Farhat 91 after they'd been brought together following the failings of Taufeeq Umar and Salman Butt.

The conditions they faced on their first competitive day in South Africa will not have borne many direct comparisons to what awaits in the Test matches.

The three seamers employed -- Garnett Kruger, Yusuf Abdullah and Albie Morkel -- are not necessarily South Africa's second best as the likes of Morne Morkel have been allowed to play provincial matches this week. However, with just one match before the first Test at Centurion Park the opportunity couldn't be wasted.

Hafeez and Farhat certainly cashed in, racing along at more than four-an-over once Inzamamul Haq had won an important toss.

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had not been sacked as captain.

"A number of occasions over the past few months, even before we came to Australia, Andrew has stated as seeing his role as basically keeping the seat warm for Michael Vaughan and I think that has to be understood," Graveney said.

"So it's not a question of being sacked, it's just a question now that Michael is now fit enough to resume his appointed role."

Vaughan said Flintoff, who was outstanding in England's 2005 Ashes victory but struggled with the burden of the captaincy in the recent series, was an integral part of the England team.

"Andrew Flintoff can play a huge leadership role as a player as he did when I was captain before," he said.

"I just want to see him contributing with both bat and ball, in the field and in the dressing room, because that's where he leads from the best."

Vaughan feared his cricket career was over after a fourth operation on his right knee last July.

"Six months ago I was told I

would probably not play again, so to be sitting here again knowing that I'm going to be playing a game for England on Tuesday is a great thing for me," he said.

"It's been a hard road but since I've been in Australia I've tested it on a daily basis.

"I would have liked to have played a few more games, if I'm honest, but I haven't been able to organise those games.

"But the games I have played, the twisting and the turning, the running between the wickets, the overs I have had in the field, I've had no reaction (to the knee).

"The big test now is international cricket, of going out there and just playing games, trying to react to the situation.

"I'm very confident that I will be able to get through them. I think the more games I play the stronger the knee and the stronger I will become."

Vaughan has a huge task to resurrect the fragile England team and to improve England's wretched recent one-day international record of only five wins in 19 games last year.

Adding insult to injury!

PTI, Cape Town

After the disappointing 2-1 Test series defeat to South Africa, more embarrassment seems to be in store for India as Cricket South Africa (CSA) is planning to send a bill claiming recovery for the damages done by the tourists during celebrations of the Wanderers win in the dressing room.

It is learnt that Gauteng Cricket Association (GCA), the host body, is moving their parent body CSA to seek compensation from the BCCI for the damages done by the players in the dressing room while celebrating their first Test win.

As champagne was sprayed and cakes were thrown around with gay abandon, the visitors' dressing room at the Wanderers bore little resemblance to the tidy place that had been handed over to the team for the first Test from December 15-19.

The "most damaged" part of the dressing room was the ceiling and the carpet which had "permanent stains" and could not be removed. Gauteng board first tried to get things in order, but after the dry-cleaners and chemical experts threw their hands up in desperation they moved the CSA.

Indian dressing room was a sight to behold after the team had secured their first-ever win in South Africa by defeating the home side by 123 runs.

Malisse clinches Chennai Open

AFP, Chennai

Third seed Xavier Malisse of Belgium defeated Stefan Koubek of Austria in just an hour to win the 416,000-dollar ATP Chennai Open here on Sunday.

The 37th-ranked Malisse won 6-1, 6-3 in a disappointing final before some 5,000 Indian fans at the Nungambakkam tennis stadium to pick up the winner's purse of 65,850 dollars and 35 ATP Race Points.

It was the Belgian's first title in two years. He won his only other tournament in Delrey Beach, Florida, in January 2005.

The 28-year-old, who stunned world number two Rafael Nadal of Spain in the semi-finals, began his 2007 campaign in rousing fashion after finishing among the top 50 five times in the last six years.

Koubek paid for erratic serving, failing to hold any of his four service games in the first set before being broken again in the fourth game of the second set.

Malisse, playing a superior allround game, lost his serve only once, in the fourth game of the first set, and then wasted one match point before Koubek hit wide to lose the final.

The 30-year-old Koubek, ranked 80th, beat seventh seed Paradorn Srichaphan of Thailand, fourth seed Julien Benneteau of France and Spanish veteran Carlos Moya in his previous three matches, losing just 10 games.

Waqar quits

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Younis said he made a difference to Pakistan's bowling through his knowledge.

"The improvement in Pakistan bowlers is there to be seen. I took time out from my family commitments to help youngsters, but it is better to quit when you don't get the respect," said Younis, whose family is now based in Australia.

Younis took 373 Test and 416 one-day wickets. He is also tipped to take over as New South Wales coach.

The PCB's director of communication, Ahsan Malik, confirmed Younis had left the post.

Malik said the decision to send Younis for the Tests only and not for the one-day series was taken by the team management.

Younis' resignation is the latest controversy to hit Pakistan cricket, which was plagued by a series of scandals last year.

Pakistan forfeited a Test against England at The Oval -- the first in Test cricket's history -- on charges of ball tampering.

PCB chairman Khan resigned from his post after Younis Khan refused to captain the team, while two Pakistani pacemen -- Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif -- were tested positive for banned steroids.

SA remain

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Farhat and Hafeez both retired, on 108 and 106 respectively and the only wicket that fell to a bowler was that of Yasir Hameed, who was caught off left-arm seamer Yusuf Abdullah for 79. Younis Khan was unbeaten on 74.

South African selection convenor Haroon Lorgat said the squad had been picked for all three Tests.

"We remain confident with our plans to build a successful Test squad and have therefore retained the same squad," he said.

The Test will be followed by matches in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town.

SQUAD

Graeme Smith (captain), Jacques Kallis, Paul Adams, Hashim Amla, Mark Boucher, AB de Villiers, Herschelle Gibbs, Andrew Hall, Paul Harris, Morne Morkel, Andre Nel, Makhaya Ntini, Shaun Pollock, Ashwell Prince, Jacques Rudolph, Dale Steyn.

Vaughan steps into fire



AFP, Sydney

Australia will attempt to exploit Michael Vaughan's lack of match fitness as the reinstated England captain during this month's triangular one-day cricket series, coach John Buchanan said Sunday.

Vaughan was Sunday confirmed as England's captain in the tri-series, taking over from Ashes skipper Andrew Flintoff.

It has been 18 months since Vaughan last played a one-day international and 13 months since he played a Test. Although he has recovered from knee surgery, he is yet to show how effective he is in the field and running between wickets.

Buchanan wants his team to keep the heat on England after its psychologically damaging 5-0

Ashes series win, and defeat the tourists during the one-day series, which starts next Friday at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

"We try to exploit any deficiency, whether it's technical, physical, mental or tactical," Buchanan told reporters here.

"If we understand that Michael's struggling physically, then that will be one area we will like to target.

"That will be the same with anybody. If we can detect weaknesses in their armoury, that will be an area we'll try to exploit."

Australia will use the tri-series as a chance to create a buffer between themselves and England and New Zealand ahead of the World Cup.

"Once we get to the West Indies (for the World Cup) we would have liked to have set a gap between us and two of the teams we'll face over there," Buchanan said.

"We'd like to have them in some form of disarray before they got there."

Vaughan averages only 28 in one-day cricket and has not scored a century despite playing most of his 74 matches in the top order -- but his leadership could at least release the pressure on Flintoff.

Flintoff struggled with the responsibilities of the captaincy during the Ashes series, but Buchanan said the abbreviated game meant his powerful hitting and bowling made him a dangerous opponent, especially without the burden of the captaincy.

"The one-day game is a different format," he said.

"It shortens everything down so it brings both sides much closer together and one player can have an impact on the game rather quickly, of which he is definitely one."

White's second coming



CRICINFO, undated

Cameron White is set to make his one-day international return this month but after a disappointing 2006, the nature of his place in the side does not worry him.

White, who played all five of his ODIs in 2005, has developed his batting so much that he is likely to fill an Andrew Symonds-type role as a hard-hitting middle-order striker and handy slow bowler.

Like Matthew Hayden, who has also been recalled for the Commonwealth Bank Series against England and New Zealand, White will be keen to impress ahead of the World Cup. After losing his Cricket Australia contract and being overlooked for the Australia A Top End games last year, the Victoria captain worked hard on his batting in county cricket for Somerset and this season averages 52.33 in the Ford Ranger Cup.

"I don't really care if I get picked as a batting all-rounder or a bowling all-rounder, or just as a bat or bowler, as long as I get picked," White told The Age.

"It doesn't really matter what label you put on it as long as you are playing."

"If anyone asks me what I am I just say I am happy to do whatever anyone asks. Batting or bowling -- it doesn't really matter what you call someone. But I think I have bowled fairly well in the last month, so I wouldn't say I am a batsman who bowls yet."

Although he has been useful with the ball, his figures are not as attractive as his run-scoring in 2006-07. In eight domestic limited-overs games he has eight wickets at 32 and has conceded nearly five runs an over. His Pura Cup statistics -- seven dismissals at 49.42 -- are less convincing.

"I bowl no differently in the one-day game to four-day," White said. "I just think the conditions tend to suit me more in one-day cricket. The wickets can be a bit slower and that probably suits my game more, and I have to learn to bowl better on

faster wickets. I try to change my pace around a lot."

White said the disappointment of missing the Top End tour was eased by the fantastic experience he had at Somerset. Batting mostly at No. 5, White made five centuries and averaged 59.50 in his 12 first-class matches. He was even more impressive in the Twenty20 competition, where his 67.16 was the highest average from all counties and his two centuries included one in 55 balls, breaking the record for the fastest Twenty20 hundred.

"I had a good summer over there and my batting improved, so I am not overly disappointed by it," White said. "One of the things I wanted to work on in county cricket was my batting, and my one-day batting in particular. I batted up the order at Somerset and that seemed to work. It was a really good experience."

With the departure of Damien Martyn from Australia's one-day middle-order and the World Cup just two months away, the timing of White's return to form could not be better.

Clark climbs to riches



AFP, Sydney

Stuart Clark is set to be a major financial winner out of Australia's thumping Ashes series win as Cricket Australia prepares for its biggest contractual shake-up in a decade.

Clark took the most wickets in the series with 26 at 17.04, pushing his career tally to 47 wickets in nine Test matches.

Press reports Sunday said that as many as seven Cricket Australia (CA) contracts are up for grabs this year following the retirements of Glenn McGrath, Shane Warne, Justin Langer and Damien Martyn.

The Sunday Telegraph said

former international stars Jason Gillespie, Simon Katich and Michael Kasprovicz are also in danger of slipping off the 25-man contract list.

They were axed from the Test and one-day sides in the past year.

The seven contracts are worth an estimated 2.3 million Australian dollars (1.8 million US) in total earnings, the newspaper said.

Clark's CA contract is set to be improved substantially. He was named man-of-the-match in Australia's 10-wicket win in Friday's final Test, which clinched a 5-0 Ashes clean sweep over England for the first time in 86 years.

A year ago he was on a contract with New South Wales worth around 70,000 dollars, but is likely to rocket into Australia's top-five earners if he can play in the World Cup, starting in March, the newspaper said.

The Sunday Telegraph said the 31-year-old paceman is likely to receive a base CA contract of 500,000 dollars. With match payments, endorsements and bonuses factored in, Clark could pocket as much as 800,000 dollars.

Should Clark play a role in Australia winning the World Cup, he stands to earn an individual bonus of at least 250,000 dollars, taking his earnings potential to one million dollars and beyond.

Australian Cricketers Association chief executive Paul Marsh said Clark was headed for a significant pay rise.

"It depends on how the selec-

tors rank him but he has gone from a fringe player to one of our best bowlers in the past year,"