

## Younis exudes confidence

PTI, New Delhi

Pakistan vice-captain Younis Khan is confident his team will fare better on their South African tour than India, who lost the Test series 2-1.

The team gave a good account of themselves in the practice match against Rest of South Africa and Younis, who scored 76, said the team was in a positive frame of mind going into the three-Test series against the Proteas starting in Centurion on January 11.

"It is just as well we started on the front foot because we have only a few days before the first Test. I am confident we can do better than India, who narrowly lost the series here," he wrote in a website.

"We have a strong and well balanced squad and the bowlers in particular are looking good," he said.

India lost the recent series against Graeme Smith's men after winning the first Test in Johannesburg before going down in Durban and Cape Town.

Younis, one of the mainstays of Pakistan batting, has returned to cricket after the death of his brother Farman Ali Khan in a car accident in Germany last month.

The Pakistan vice-captain had also lost his father and another brother not too long ago.

"It has been a very sad time for me and my family after my brother passed away but I am hoping cricket will help me to get through this difficult time in my life," Younis wrote.

Younis said he was trying to keep his mind off the personal bereavement by focussing on the South African tour.

## BCB

FROM PAGE 17

Although Faruque denied that there had been any significant discussions in the selection meeting on the squad for the four-match series against Zimbabwe, it was learnt that Mashud's recent comments came to talk besides Sharif and some other players.

"We have had no significant discussion on the squad for Zimbabwe. We will finalise the squad on January 25 but we will meet again before the final sitting," he informed.

## Smith to take

FROM PAGE 20

Also covered any suggestion that Smith would go part-time with Scotland whilst taking charge of Rangers.

The Glasgow giants have been in contact with the SFA over Smith taking over from Le Guen who left Ibrox by mutual consent late last month.

"First and foremost there has been some contact and we need to sit down with Walter and discuss his reaction," SFA chief executive David Taylor said Monday before the statement was released.

Asked if he expected Smith to resign, Taylor said: "No, but we have to discuss with him the contact and whether that has to be taken any further.

"He is under contract and that is where it rests at the moment. There are some significant issues. We are having a discussion today about the situation."

Smith, the 58-year-old former coach at Rangers, had been tipped to return to the club along with former Ibrox striker McCoist.

Smith, who led Rangers to seven league titles in a row in the 1990s, took over as Scotland boss in December 2004 after the ill-fated reign of former Germany boss Berti Vogts.

## Serious cricket

FROM PAGE 17

The Super League will take place after the national cricketers return home from the World Cup.

The clubs will miss the services of country's top cricketers in the most part of this season's league because of the coming Zimbabwe tour as the Tigers are scheduled to fly for Harare on January 31. According to the fixture released by the CCGM, the 11-round first leg will end on February 13, which that means the national cricketers will only able to play six matches, provided the political situation allow it.

Two archivals Mohammedan and Abahani, who came alive after mediocre seasons in the recent past, will be real sufferers in the absence of the national stars.

The Motihheel outfit have already made a bright start to the season when they clinched the first-ever Twenty20 League title but no doubt the absence of players like Habibul Bashar, Aftab Ahmed and Sakib Al Hasan will make it difficult for them.

On the other hand, their Dhanmondi foes will miss national stars like Khaled Mashud and Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza.

It has been time and again told about bringing quality foreign recruits but so far, it seems that old faces would return to Dhaka this season as most of the teams have yet to confirm big names.

A club can register three foreign players with only one permitted to play.

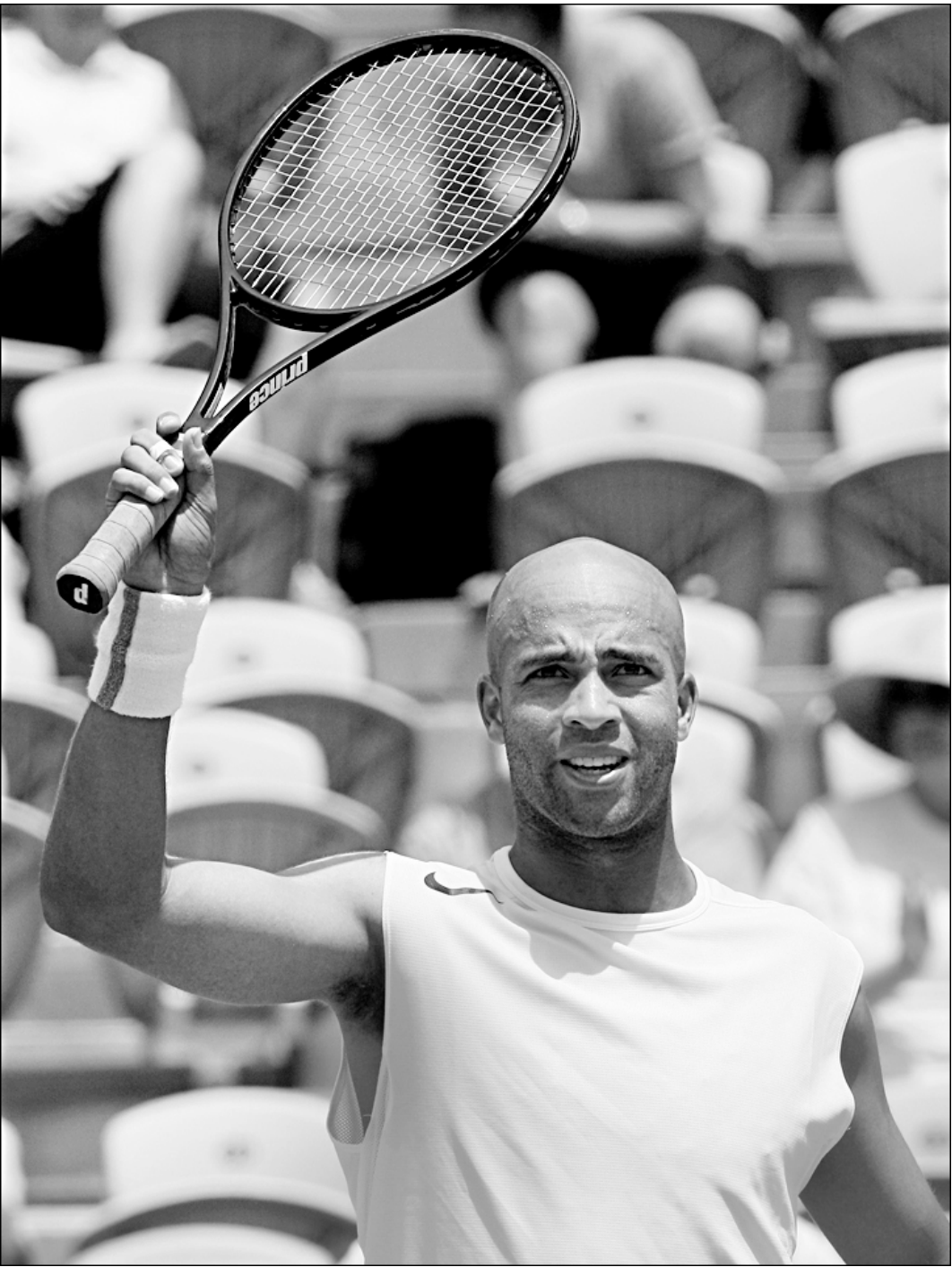


PHOTO: AFP

American tennis player James Blake waves to spectators after beating compatriot Kevin Kim at the Sydney International tournament on Tuesday. He won in straight sets 6-3, 6-4.

# Nadal exit boosts Blake



AFP, Sydney

James Blake strengthened his title claims with an opening victory amid the demise of top seed Rafael Nadal on a day of withdrawals at the Sydney International here Tuesday.

American third seed Blake accounted for compatriot Kevin Kim, 6-3, 6-4 in the opening match on Centre Court.

Second seed Russian Nikolay Davydenko reached the last eight with a 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 win over American Vincent Spadea in the night match.

Defending champion Blake, who beat Russians Davydenko and Igor Andreev on the way to winning here last year, said he was looking for back-to-back Sydney wins to carry into next week's Australian Open.

"I came into last year with no real expectations. It's a very difficult draw, a lot of the top players, everyone looking to peak around this time and get ready for Australia,"

Blake said.

"It's not going to be easy, but I would love to have as much success as I had here last year and then maybe take it to Melbourne with even more confidence and hopefully go a little further."

Blake will take on Australian Nathan Healey in the quarterfinals after Healey downed Austrian Stefan Koubek 6-3, 7-5.

World No.2 Nadal withdrew with a right thigh injury in the first set of his opening match, throwing his Australian Open challenge into doubt.

The two-time French Open champion had treatment just above the knee when trailing Australian Chris Guccione 4-3 and called it quits 5-6 behind on serve.

Nadal had lengthy treatment from a trainer before resuming, but decided not to complete the match due to concern over the injury ahead of the season's first Grand Slam, which starts on Monday in Melbourne.

The 20-year-old Spaniard missed last year's Australian Open with a left foot injury but said he hoped to be fit within two days.

Guccione, who reached the final of the Australian Hardcourts in Adelaide last Sunday, will play Austrian Jurgen Melzer, who eliminated veteran Frenchman Fabrice Santoro, 6-2, 2-6, 6-4.

Thailand's Paradorn Srichaphan became the second men's retirement of the day when he pulled out of his match with Czech Ivo Minar, trailing 6-2, 3-0, complaining of pain from a right wrist injury.

Former world No.1 and French Open champion Carlos Moya needed two tiebreak sets to down Australian Luke Bourgeois, 7-6 (7/4), 4-6, 7-6 (8/6) and will contest an all-Spanish quarter-final with eighth-seed Fernando Verdasco.

Two Frenchmen, sixth seed Richard Gasquet, and Paul-Henri Mathieu, had victories, Gasquet knocking over compatriot Julien Benneteau 6-1, 6-4 and Mathieu winning another all-French contest over Arnaud Clement, 7-6, 6-4.

Mathieu will play Davydenko next on Wednesday, while Gasquet takes on German Benjamin Becker.

## Little practice for WI, India

AFP, London

West Indies will play just a solitary three-day match before their Test series in England starts with back-to-back clashes in May, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced Monday when they confirmed the tourist match schedules for the 2007 season.

During their recent 5-0 Ashes campaign drubbing in Australia, England were severely criticised for playing just seven days' cricket before the Test series got underway.

But with the international programme increasingly congested, all of the world's leading sides are having to cope with playing far fewer matches on tour outside of the major fixtures than in years gone by.

Since 2000, England have routinely played seven Tests in a home season, having previously made do with a usual maximum of six.

The West Indies' situation for this tour of England is complicated by the fact that there are only two weeks between the end of the Cricket World Cup in the Caribbean and their tour opener, against Somerset, on May 12.

The first match of a four Test series is due to start on May 17 at Lord's with the second encounter of the series at Headingley following fast on May 25 at Headingley.

After those games, the West Indies do have a three-day match against an as yet unnamed opponent.

India, who will be touring later in the English season, will have more practice before their three-Test series starts at Lord's on July 17.

They have two first-class matches, against Sussex and England A while, after the first two Tests, they play Sri Lanka A in a three-day game in Leicester.

### WINDIES SCHEDULE

May 12-14: v Somerset, Taunton  
May 17-21: v England, 1st Test, Lord's  
May 25-29: v England, 2nd Test, Headingley  
Jun 01-03: v TBC

Jun 07-11: v England, 3rd Test, Old Trafford  
Jun 15-19: v England, 4th Test, Riverside  
Jun 21: v England A, New Road  
Jun 24: v Derbyshire, Twenty20, Derby  
Jun 26: v PCAMasters, Twenty20, Arundel  
Jun 28: v England, 1st Twenty20, The Oval  
Jun 29: v England, 2nd Twenty20, The Oval  
Jul 01: v England, 1st ODI, Lord's  
Jul 04: v England, 2nd ODI, Edgbaston  
Jul 07: v England, 3rd ODI, Trent Bridge

### INDIASCHEDULE

Jul 07-10: v Sussex, Hove  
Jul 13-15: v England A, Chelmsford  
Jul 19-23: v England, 1st Test, Lord's  
Jul 27-31: v England A, Trent Bridge  
Aug 03-05: v Sri Lanka A, Leicester  
Aug 09-13: v England, 2nd Test, The Oval  
Aug 16: v Scotland, ODI, Glasgow  
Aug 18: v England A, Northampton  
Aug 21: v England, 1st ODI, Rose Bowl (D/N)  
Aug 24: v England, 2nd ODI, Bristol (D/N)  
Aug 27: v England, 3rd ODI, Edgbaston  
Aug 30: v England, 4th ODI, Old Trafford (D/N)  
Sep 02: v England, 5th ODI, Headingley  
Sep 05: v England, 6th ODI, The Oval  
Sep 08: v England, 7th ODI, Lord's

## Platini slams

FROM PAGE 20

and had the advantage of being the incumbent.

"To start with Johansson dubbed me as a revolutionary and after that he said that there was nothing of interest in my programme," Platini said.

"I am for continuity but on my own terms, which means involving all sectors of the game in deciding which way to go in the future."

"If we don't take action for ourselves, the politicians or businessmen will do it for us."

## Galacticos near

FROM PAGE 20

But Perez's successor Calderon apparently does not feel the same way.

It is not just Ronaldo under pressure, though. Capello has been criticised for his signings and their lack of success.

Of his summer recruits, only Ruud van Nistelrooy has been a success. Fifteen goals in 21 games in all competitions has seen to that.

But even Italian World Cup winning captain and new world and European player of the year Fabio Cannavaro has not overly impressed and defensive midfielders Emerson and Mahamadou Diarra have become deeply unpopular with Real's attack-hungry support. Capello's signing of three South American youngsters (Marcelo, Fernando Gago and Gonzalo Higuain) for a combined 35 million euros in the transfer window does not seem likely to solve their issues either.

But the question is, are Real really in crisis. Capello insisted after the Deportivo defeat that they were still enjoying a good season and Mijatovic said after Monday's meeting that the club had faith in Capello and knew how to solve it's problems.

They are third in the league, only five points off top spot despite their recent troubles, and still in both the Copa del Rey and the Champions League.

Some might be glad to suffer such a crisis, but tellingly Capello decided Tuesday to bar the press and public from Real's training sessions.

Real, it seems, have their backs to the wall.

# Ganguly ready to open



CRICINFO, undated

Sourav Ganguly is eyeing a recall into the one-day team and has reiterated his willingness to open the batting.

"I know people have been talking about that (opening the batting in ODIs)," he told reporters in Kolkata. "And many people have asked me about it. I have opened the batting in one-dayers in the past many times, so I have no problems. If I am asked to open, then I will do so."

India play eight matches against the West Indies and Sri Lanka at home, which will decide the team composition for the World Cup.

Asked whether he is looking forward to the World Cup, Ganguly said, "Let's not think about that now. I want to approach these home one-dayers first, and one at a time. Obviously playing in conditions like Australia and South Africa always help your game. If I get an

opportunity in one-day cricket, I think that will help."

Ganguly also voiced his support for Sachin Tendulkar, who's come under criticism for his slow batting in the third Test. "Don't forget that Sachin has got 70 international hundreds to his credit, nobody has such a record in the world. The decline in form is part of the game, it happens to every cricketer. He is a genius."

Meanwhile, former cricketers have pressed for Ganguly's recall into the ODI team. "Ganguly must be chosen for the one-day team, especially since Sehwag is short of confidence," Ajit Wadekar told Times of India. "An experienced player like Ganguly knows how to pace his innings, which can be invaluable for a big tournament like the World Cup," Wadekar added.

Madan Lal, the former Indian all-rounder, also concurred. "With Sehwag out of form, Ganguly should be given a chance to open," he says. That would mean reviving the old Sachin-Sourav partnership. Both are past their prime. But even

if only for old times sake, most Indians would look forward to that."

Looking back on the series against South Africa, Ganguly said he was satisfied with his batting in what was his "toughest tour" yet. "I am feeling good. Of course, I wanted to score more runs. But I batted lower down and with the tail sometimes. But that's okay though." But he rues the missed opportunity to win the series. "We should have won the third Test. Playing in South Africa, you don't get chances like this to win the series. We scored 414 runs in the first innings. It's really sad that we had to lose the match and series despite putting up such a good score in the first innings."

Ganguly averaged 42.80 and was the only Indian batsman to score more than 200 in the series. "I have never worried about my criticism and I hope that I keep scoring runs in future." Ganguly made it clear that this comeback (after a ten-month lay-off) was more difficult and, therefore, more satisfying than the one in 1996.

# BCCI smells a rat



CRICINFO, undated

Munaf Patel, the Indian fast bowler, has far more serious concerns than a sore ankle with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) openly questioning his integrity.

Munaf, who was injured after the second one-dayer in South Africa took no further part in the series until the final Test, where he was obviously well below peak fitness, and bowled at less than full capacity.

Niranjan Shah, the BCCI secretary, said that he had summoned John Gloster, the physiotherapist of the Indian team, to the offices of the board in Mumbai on Monday for a full debriefing on what exactly happened with Munaf, but backed the team management and the physio to the hilt.

"I had yesterday summoned John Gloster to get a report from him on Munaf Patel. According to his report Gloster said they had taken all the fitness tests necessary and felt that he was totally fit. I think Rahul (Dravid) and the other members of the team management must also have been convinced of Munaf's fitness before taking him in the eleven. Certain injuries are such that the physio may believe that the player will recover any time. Whether the player has that same confidence or not is something else. The players should be honest with themselves, there's no point blaming the physio."

In a more damning statement, Shah, speaking for the BCCI, laid the blame squarely at Munaf. "Then we were surprised, when Dr Anant

Joshi conducted tests, and Munaf complained about pain. Joshi then advised a couple of weeks' rest," he said. "Here I am a little concerned about the player himself. The player himself should be honest enough about his own fitness. The last 5% has to come from the player. The doctor cannot say how much pain you are experiencing. Many players can play even with a big injury but some players cannot play even with a small injury. The honesty of the player -- at least in the case of Munaf Patel -- is in question."

"During the series Munaf's fitness was being monitored and there was the hope from Gloster that Munaf would recover any day," revealed Shah, who is believed to have been in favour of a move to send Munaf home along with Irfan Pathan. "That prolonged his stay and the board went with it. But after seeing his performance in the third Test the board is worried."

When asked if there were larger concerns, as Sachin Tendulkar too looked off colour in the third Test, and has subsequently pulled out of Mumbai's final Ranji Trophy match against Maharashtra, Shah was more careful. "That's a small thing, the hamstring problem," Shah said. "He will be fit soon. Tendulkar is a responsible player."

Shah did not think it was fair to blame Munaf for the loss in the final Test and consequently the series. "You can't say that any one player cost the match or the series," he said, while adding, "even one player not putting in full effort will hamper the team's chances of winning."

At the same time, Shah dismissed the suggestion that this situation had arisen as a result of

friction between himself and Dilip Vengsarkar, the chairman of selectors. "It was not friction. I said what the board feels, but we don't interfere in the matter of team selection," said Shah, who had earlier said that it was the board's prerogative to send a player back from a tour whenever they felt it appropriate. Vengsarkar had publicly disagreed, saying a player would only be sent back in case of injury. "That is for Vengsarkar and the team management to decide. Whether to send someone home or not is for the selection committee to decide. (Virender) Sehwag's failure was such that maybe he should have been replaced by somebody else."

Interestingly, Dr Joshi, the board's consulting orthopaedic doctor, has not spared Munaf either after examining him. "Clinically he has full range of ankle motion, good joint stability, and no appreciable swelling. His ankle seems to be normal as compared to the non-injured side," wrote Dr. Joshi in his report to the board. "The X-ray did not reveal any significant pathology. Going through his medical record in South Africa I find that the treatment given to him has been top class. It appears that Munaf continues to be apprehensive about the injury, more psychological than physical. He needs to overcome this problem himself. I have suggested rest and continued physiotherapy over the next 2-3 weeks before he can be re-evaluated and start playing domestic cricket."

Munaf has been ruled out of the first two one-day internationals against West Indies at home starting January 21.

# Aussies keep winning

FROM PAGE 17

were over almost as soon as they began their reply, Irish opener Ed Joyce dismissed for one and Andrew Flintoff for a duck three days after he lost the captaincy to Vaughan.

Vaughan erased major concerns about his fitness with 27 off 21 balls but England's comparatively slow scoring left them well behind the run-rate.

Paul Nixon struck the only six of the innings in the last over while James Dalrymple top-scored with 32 off 27.

Australia and England will be joined by New Zealand in a month-long triangular one-day series starting in Melbourne on Friday.

### SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard in the Twenty20 match between Australia and England at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Tuesday:

AUSTRALIA				
Gilchrist b Panesar	48			
Hayden c Dalrymple b Anderson	20			
Pointing c Lewis b Collingwood	47			
Hussey st Nixon b Panesar	18			
Symonds not out	39			
Clarke run out	5			
White not out	40			
Extras: (lb-2, w-2)	4			
Total: (For 5 wkts in 20 overs)	221			
Fall of wickets: 1-28, 2-97, 3-123, 4-149, 5-155				
Did not bat: Hogg, Bracken, Hilfenhaus, Harwood,				
Bowler				
Flintoff	4	0	36	0
Anderson	4	0	64	1
Panesar	4	0	40	2
Lewis	3	0	31	0
Dalrymple	1	0	12	0
Collingwood	4	0	36	1

ENGLAND				
Joyce c Hussey b Bracken	1			
Flintoff c White b Harwood	0			
Vaughan lbw b Symonds	27			
Pietersen run out	11			
Bell b Hilfenhaus	22			
Collingwood c White b Hilfenhaus	5			
Nixon not out	31			
Dalrymple lbw b Symonds	32			
Lewis st Gilchrist b White	1			
Panesar run out	1			
Anderson not out	1			
Extras: (b-4, lb-1, w-6, nb-1)	12			
Total: (For 9 wkts in 20 overs)	144			
Fall of wickets: 1-3, 2-5, 3-32, 4-54, 5-68, 6-78, 7-127, 8-129, 9-138.				
Bowler				
Bracken	3	0	20	1

Harwood	4	0	44	1
Hilfenhaus	4	0	16	2
Symonds	4	0	24	2
Hogg	3	0	24	0
White	2	0	11	1

**Result: Australia won by 77 runs.**  
**Man-of-the-match: Cameron White**  
**Toss: Australia**  
**Umpires: Peter Parker (AUS) Bob Parry (AUS)**  
**Match referee: Ranjan Madugalle (SRI)**

## ICC to block Asif's return

CRICINFO, undated

The International Cricket Council (ICC) continues to block former Pakistan captain Asif Iqbal's return to cricket officialdom.

The News has learnt through reliable sources that the ICC has told the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officials that it would not allow them to appoint Asif on any key position because of his alleged role in match-fixing scandals.

The PCB chairman Dr Nasim Ashraf had written to the ICC to clarify its stand on Asif, who was in the past black-listed by the Council for his alleged involvement in match-fixing. Dr Ashraf sent the letter to ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed on Asif's request, who wanted to be a part of the mainstream cricket world after spending several years on the sidelines.

The PCB chief had asked Speed to explain ICC's stance on Asif and also about reports that the ICC had declared the former Test cricketer a persona non grata in 2003. Nasim's letter triggered speculations in national cricket circles last month that the PCB is planning to appoint Asif Iqbal as the board's COO. However, even if such reports are true, Speed's negative response makes Asif an unlikely candidate for the important post that is likely to be filled within the next couple of weeks.

## Good news

FROM PAGE 17

over the phone from Mumbai. "From the beginning it was never a question of pain. It was bone bruising because of the ligament tear. Obviously there is discomfort in using crutches, wearing a brace but it was not about pain."

"It's hard to come back so quickly without surgery. I have really worked very hard over the last 40 days," said Yuvraj. "The problem is that it plays on you mentally, especially when fielding. You're wondering whether you might get a recurrence of the injury and that could put you out for a long time."

Assessing his own fitness, Yuvraj concurred strongly with the doctors' judgement. "Actually in plain terms I'm about 90-95 per cent fit at the moment," he said. "But it's always difficult being in a match situation. It's just about getting some match practice under the belt. Hopefully I can play three or four practice matches, and then if all goes well declare myself fit and eligible for national selection."

## Chelsea deny

FROM PAGE 20

"When he fights hard and chases a better moment he can arrive there. In some other matches I couldn't accept that. Maybe in other matches he has just accepted without a fight the moment he is living in."

Chelsea defender Ricardo Carvalho and striker Didier Drogba are both suspended for Wednesday. Influential midfielder Frank Lampard is set to be rested after scoring his first Chelsea hatrick against Macclesfield.

With Chelsea still without several injured defenders, including club captain John Terry, Mourinho could pair Paulo Ferreira and Michael Essien at the heart of his side's defence.

Up front Shaun Wright-Phillips and John Obi Mikel, who both scored on Saturday, are set to start.

Wycombe have already caused one major upset in the competition this season by knocking out Premiership strugglers Charlton in the quarterfinals.