

Pietersen fractures rib

AFP, Melbourne

England's Kevin Pietersen will return home to focus on getting fit for the World Cup after a cracked right rib brought a premature end to his Australian tour.

The 26-year-old suffered the injury when struck on the ribcage by a Glenn McGrath delivery as he top-scored with 82 in England's defeat in the opening match of the triangular series at the MCG here Friday.

He was adopting the tactic of advancing at McGrath, a ploy he also used during the Test series, when he was hit.

Although he continued to bat after the blow, he didn't look comfortable and was dismissed a short time later.

Pietersen is returning to England and his recovery time is expected to be at least 3-5 weeks.

With the World Cup just eight weeks away, it is an untimely injury for Pietersen, but he expects to be fit for the Caribbean tournament.

"I'll be getting myself as fit as I can," he said after Friday's game.

"I've never played in the World Cup before so I'll be in the Caribbean if selected.

"I'll just have to bide my time but I'm a pretty quick healer, so I'll get myself as fit as I can as quick as I can and I'll be champing at the bit to get out to the Caribbean."

Pietersen, who averages more than 50 with the bat in one-day internationals in the struggling English limited-overs side, said he knew he was in trouble as soon as the delivery struck him.

"I've never been hit so hard," he said. "I've been hit a few times and I've gone 'Oh yeah, that will be all right with a bit of ice', but when this one hit me I couldn't breathe for a few minutes and I knew it was a little bit more serious than the other ones. It did restrict my breathing and my strokeplay."

Pietersen was dismayed at having to leave his teammates without having enjoyed a win since arriving in Australia in early November.

"Distraught. Absolutely distraught," he said. "It's not how I planned it out. I planned it out to give it a real good go and to draw a line after what happened after the Ashes.

SL recall

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four uncapped players.

PRELIMINARY SQUAD

Mahela Jayawardena, Marvan Atapattu, Sanath Jayasuriya, Upul Tharanga, Avishka Gunawardena, Mahela Udawatta, Kumar Sangakkara, Tilleykaratne Dilshan, Chamara Kapugedera, Malinda Warnapura, Russel Arnold, Prasanna Jayawardena, Chamara Silva, Farveez Maharoof, Chaminda Vaas, Ruchira Perera, Dilhara Fernando, Ishara Amarasinghe, Lasith Malinga, Nuwan Kulasekera, Nuwan Zoysa, Akalanka Gangegama, Dilhara Lokuhettige, Muttiah Muralidaran, Rangana Herath, Malinga Bandara, Kaushal Lokuarachchi, Gayan Wijekoon, Upul Chandana and Dhammika Prasad.

"I was surprised to see Sachin (Tendulkar) so low on passion and he was negative in his batting. In fact India looked afraid in the last Test and Pakistan should avoid such an

Inter eye more

FROM PAGE 20
Torino's chances of halting Inter have been hampered by the suspensions of their Italian international midfielder Simone Barone and defender Gianluca Comotto.

Zaccheroni said he hopes the support of a vociferous home crowd will make up for the two absentees.

"We have some players missing, but the match is a sell-out and we have passionate fans," said the 53-year-old who took AC Milan to the league title in the 1998-99 season.

"That passion gets to the players on the pitch, and if we play at our best we are capable of causing an upset."

Torino took just two points from their first five matches and seemed destined for a swift return to Serie

Manchester United defender Gary Neville, Beckham's closest friend in football, predicted that his pal would be determined to go out of Madrid on a high.

"I wish him all the best in everything he does," said Neville, who grew up alongside Beckham at Old Trafford and went on to partner him on England's right flank.

"He is a great friend and this is another challenge for him. He has another six months left at Real Madrid and I am sure he will want to try and win something with them.

"After that he will head for America and having spoken to him I know he is looking forward to it. You need challenges in your life and he has a new one.

"David has always wanted to do things differently and in his own way. He has done it again."

From football

FROM PAGE 20
Major League Soccer grounded in salary caps and lower-priced talent since its 1996 debut, allowing the league to grow and build solid support but with fan interest levels far below that of other US sports.

But MLS officials made a rule change after last season allowing clubs to bypass the salary cap for one player, opening the door to a big-money Beckham signing and possibly the floodgates for other global talent, especially big names in their waning years.



England batsman Kevin Pietersen (C) cries out in pain after fracturing his ribs as team physiotherapist Dean Conway (2nd R) attends during the opening one-day international of the Commonwealth Bank tri-series at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday.

Akram asks for passion

AFP, Karachi

Former cricket great Wasim Akram said Friday that if Pakistan play with passion and aggression they can outdo rivals India and beat South Africa on their tough tour.

"I was surprised to see India low on passion and aggression after winning the first Test," Akram told AFP in an exclusive interview.

"Pakistan can fare better than India because they have more passion and aggression in their cricket."

The 40-year-old former allrounder, who retired in 2003, was in the commentary team in the series which South Africa won 2-1 against India earlier this month.

His comments came at the start of the first Test between Pakistan and South Africa.

Akram said India relied heavily on star batsman Sachin Tendulkar and skipper Rahul Dravid who failed to shine with the bat.

"I was surprised to see Sachin (Tendulkar) so low on passion and he was negative in his batting. In fact India looked afraid in the last Test and Pakistan should avoid such an

approach," he said. Akram, who took 414 Test and a world record of 502 one-day wickets during an illustrious career, said fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar could be the key for Pakistan.

Akhtar, who was not selected in the original squad over fitness problem, has now been sent to join the team in South Africa and should be available for the second Test. "He can be crucial factor in helping Pakistan win," he said.

Pakistan skipper Inzamamul Haq should have pushed for Akhtar's inclusion, Akram said.

"Inzamam had led the team well but I think he should know where his priorities lie and he should have fought for Akhtar because Akhtar is a proven match winner," Akram said.

He also praised Indian paceman Shanthakumaran Sreesanth. "Sreesanth showed how much aggression you need to be successful in South Africa and proved a successful bowler for India and in the same way Akhtar can be successful."

Akram lashed out at Pakistan selectors for not naming allrounder Azhar Mahmood in the initial 30-man squad for the World Cup, which begins in the West Indies in March.

Moody most wanted

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

Tom Moody has emerged as favourite to succeed John Buchanan as national cricket coach, with Australia appearing to have gained a jump on England for the former international all-rounder's services.

A Cricket Australia panel headed by Mark Taylor, set up to find a coach to replace Buchanan when he steps down after the World Cup, is believed to have narrowed the search down to a short-list of two -- Moody and Buchanan's former assistant Tim Nielsen.

Nielsen, now head coach at CA's Centre of Excellence in Brisbane, is popular with most Australian players after serving under Buchanan. But after preliminary interviews, it is believed Moody has become the

leading candidate owing to the fact he has greater top-level coaching experience than Nielsen, a former wicketkeeper-batsman for South Australia.

Moody, who is also well liked by current Australian squad members who played with him at the tail end of his career, is already an international coach, having been appointed to the Sri Lanka job two years ago after narrowly missing out to Greg Chappell in the battle to coach India.

Before that, Moody had several years as coach of Worcestershire in English county cricket.

Moody has also been linked to the England coaching job, with Duncan Fletcher not expected to retain the post after the World Cup. Moody is known to have a fondness for England, after the West Australian's years there as a county player and coach, and due to the fact his wife is English. On top of that, England would likely be able to

Kim clinches Sydney title

AFP, Sydney

Kim Clijsters fought back from match point down to end Jelena Jankovic's unbeaten start to the year in the Sydney International final here on Friday.

The Belgian world No.5 looked down the barrel as the intense Serb youngster twice served for the match only to be broken and taken into a second set tiebreaker.

Clijsters, 23, playing in her farewell season, claimed her second Sydney title, following her 2003 success, to beat the 12th-ranked Jankovic 4-6, 7-6, 6-4 in almost two and a half hours and boost her confidence for next week's Australian Open in Melbourne.

Anna wins all-Russian final

AFP, Hobart

Top seed Anna Chakvetadze tuned up for next week's Australian Open by winning her third WTA tour title in an all-Russian final at the Hobart International here Friday.

World No. 13 Chakvetadze downed teenaged qualifier Vasilisa Bardina, 6-3, 7-6.

The 19-year-old Russian added the Hobart title to her 2006 titles from Guangzhou and her hometown of Moscow.

offer more money for its national coach than Australia.

However, Australia may have stolen a march on their potential rivals for Moody's signature. England are yet to confirm they are after a new coach, and are not believed to have begun the interview process for candidates. Moody would also face stiff competition if he pursued the England job from Peter Moores, who beat him to the post of England's Academy Director when Rod Marsh stood down.

Meanwhile, NSW has hailed the Andrew Johns Twenty20 experiment a success, with a combined attendance of nearly 30,000 watching his two games for the Blues in Newcastle and Telstra Stadium.

Despite rumours Johns was paid some \$40,000 for his two matches, the real payment is believed to be around half that figure.

Robert Thompson, a professor of pop culture at the University of Syracuse, questioned whether Beckham's celebrity was great enough to make US soccer a mainstream sport.

"Before Beckham can convince America to fall in love with soccer, he's going to have to convince America to fall in love with David Beckham," Thompson told AFP. "And I'm not sure his degree of celebrity is as great here as it is in other parts of the world."

"If you were to go out and survey 100 people in the United States, they would be able to tell you that Britney Spears has recently gone out to nightclubs without wearing underwear -- but I'm not sure they'd be able to tell you which soccer team David Beckham plays for."

"People know the image of Beckham. But he's not in the big league of celebrities here."

Aussies pile on agony

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and a six from the 61 balls he faced.

Hayden and Gilchrist put on 101 and brought up the Australian century in the 15th over, a milestone that the English took 24 overs to reach.

Although the introduction of spinners Monty Panesar and Jamie Dalrymple claimed the two openers and temporarily slowed the onslaught, England were never really back in the contest.

Australian captain Ricky Ponting (82 not out), who took a freak catch late in the England innings, and Michael Clarke (57 not out), then put on 133 for the third wicket to easily reach the victory target.

"I think we were tested tonight," Clarke said. "But the way we started tonight, Gilly and Haydos set the tone."

"With those two at the top of the order and Ricky at No.3, you can nearly chase any total."

Pietersen was the mainstay of England's total and his innings was highlighted by three sixes from the spin bowling of rookie all-rounder Cameron White.

His injury came as he advanced at McGrath, a tactic he used regularly to counter the length of the Australian bowlers, but failed to make contact with the bat.

He batted on in obvious discomfort, but didn't field and subsequent scans revealed he had a fracture to one of his right ribs, bringing a premature end to his tour.

Pietersen will be out of action for

3-5 weeks and will return home to England to recuperate, while England will nominate a replacement in their limited-overs squad.

His absence severely weakens an already struggling side and will also rob him of valuable match practice ahead of the upcoming World Cup in the West Indies.

Pietersen, who eventually holed out to Andrew Symonds on the mid-on boundary from the bowling of Stuart Clark, was offered useful support by Paul Collingwood (43) and Flintoff, who faced only 38 balls.

Left-armers Mitchell Johnson, 12th man for all five Ashes Tests, was impressive with 2-34 from his 10 overs.

Nathan Bracken (3-44) put the home side on top early, claiming the wickets of Andrew Strauss, whose lean run on tour continued when he was brilliantly caught by Hayden, and Vaughan.

Vaughan, in his first one-day international since the 2005 Ashes campaign as he comes back from knee surgery, looked in good touch in making 26 before being caught in slips.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the triangular one-day series match between Australia and England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday:
ENGLAND
Strauss c Hayden b Bracken 12
Vaughan c Hayden b Bracken 26
Bell c Hussey b Johnson 15

Pietersen c Symonds b Clark 82
Collingwood c Johnson b McGrath 43
Flintoff not out 47
Nixon lbw b Johnson 0
Dalrymple c Gilchrist b McGrath 2
Lewis c Ponting b Bracken 9
Panesar not out 0
Extras: (nb-1, w-3, b-1, lb-1) 6
Total: (For eight wkts in 50 overs) 242

Fall of wickets: 1-20, 2-47, 3-73, 4-168, 5-206, 6-207, 7-211, 8-232.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
McGrath	10	0	42	2
Bracken	9	0	44	3
Clark	10	0	58	1
Johnson	10	2	34	2
Clarke	8	0	35	0
White	3	0	27	0

AUSTRALIA
Gilchrist c Nixon b Dalrymple 60
Hayden c Nixon b Panesar 28
Ponting not out 82
Clarke not out 57
Extras: (b-1, lb-2, nb-1, w-15) 19
Total: (For two wkts in 45.2 overs) 246

Fall of wkts: 1-101, 2-113.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Flintoff	6	0	48	0
Lewis	8.2	1	43	0
Anderson	7	0	47	0
Panesar	10	1	46	1
Dalrymple	10	1	38	1
Collingwood	4	0	21	0

Result: Australia won by 210 wickets.
Man-of-the-match: Adam Gilchrist
Toss: England
Umpires: Ian Howell (RSA) and Simon Taufel (AUS)

Tough draw for top

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Grand Slam ranked 26. Spanish second seed Rafael Nadal has Australian Lleyton Hewitt, American world No.5 James Blake and rising British star Andy Murray in his quarter.

Nadal, who withdrew from the lead-up Sydney tournament with a right thigh injury, starts off with a match against American Robert Kendrick, while Blake has a tough opener against former Australian Open finalist Carlos Moya.

Both Blake and Moya are in opposing semi-finals at the Sydney International later Friday.

Australia's main hope, 19th-ranked Hewitt, who lost to Safin in the 2005 Australian Open final, has a qualifier first up.

Women's top seed Maria Sharapova and Belgian Kim Clijsters have been drawn in the same half along with three-time Australian Open champion Martina Hingis.

Sharapova opens against France's Camille Pin, and is drawn to meet Swiss eighth seed Patty Schnyder in the quarters.

Clijsters, who reached the 2004 Australian Open final and is seeded four this year, opens against Hobart International finalist, Vasilisa Bardina of Russia and could face sixth-seed Hingis in the quarters.

Hingis, who lost in the first round to eventual finalist Jelena Jankovic at the Sydney International, plays

France's Nathalie Dechy in her opening match.

Italian 27th seed Mara Santangelo has drawn the dangerous unseeded "floater" and two-time Australian Open winner Serena Williams in the first round.

Williams, whose 2006 season was blighted by injury, goes into the tournament with a 94th ranking and is in the third quarter of the women's draw occupied by third-seeded Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova, fifth seeded Russian Nadia Petrova and Serbia's Jankovic.

Second seed and defending champion Amelie Mauresmo is drawn in the bottom quarter of the draw with Russian seventh seed Elena Dementieva and 10th seeded Czech Nicole Pietrangola.

Mauresmo, who won her first Grand Slam in last year's Australian final, plays American Shenay Perry in the first round.

Chelsea ignore

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tion at not being able to sign new players after the 1-1 Carling Cup semi-final draw with Wycombe on Wednesday.

He said: 'I have asked for players and it's not my choice that no one is coming. It's not my club, I am just a manager.'

'I expect my squad to be the same at the end of the transfer window as it was at the start.'

Glamour lights

FROM PAGE 17
time to explain general people what 'hurdles' actually is.

Two other gold medalists in the 10th SA Games, swimmer Shahjahan Ali Roni (50m breast-stroke) and martial artist Mizanur Rahman (taekwondo), were also in contention like the national kabaddi team which won the Asian Games bronze medal last December in Doha. The two athletes and the whole kabaddi team were given big hands and flowers as token of their credit.

Last year's Sportsperson of the Year Habibul Bashar was not at all disappointed to miss the spotlight this time while giving the crown to his deputy Nafees.

"He not only battled brilliantly but also solved the seemingly everlasting problem of the brittle top-order batting of the national team," Bashar was all-praise of the youngster. "For his performance, I was spared from a familiar question like why the top order can't score runs."

Nafees, who swept the best cricketer and the best batsman awards at the Cricket Awards Night, rated his latest accolade highly.

"It is a very important award because more people are involved in the procedures. I am honoured and hope to continue with my form," said the left-handed opening bats-

man who scored 1033 runs including three centuries in ODIs in the last calendar year and 330 runs in four Tests including one hundred against mighty Australia.

"Prothom Alo thinks that sports needs basic changes in the country and it will fight to create public opinion for a corruption free and lively sporting arena," said Prothom Alo Editor Matiar Rahman. "We also want that besides cricket, which is now in the limelight, other sports should be widely spread and get more coverage."

Grameenphone MD Eric Aas said that the two organisations believe truly in the enthusiasm of sports.

"Sports is more about than just moving and it is the development of the whole country. I am also happy because these awards have credibility and people believe that it's neutral," he said.

The jury board comprised of Bashir Ahmed (chairman), Golam Sarwar Tipu, Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury, Salma Rafique and Aminul Islam Bulbul.

The winners of Lifetime Achievement and Sportsperson of the Years each received Tk one lakh and the other winners Tk 50,000 each.

Press hails Beckham

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money, but rather to raise the profile of football in the US.

Most papers featured the deal on their front pages as well as in the sports section, reflecting the huge interest in the ex-Manchester United star.

"Posh and Bucks," ran the same headline in top tabloids the Sun and Daily Mirror, like many highlighting the financial aspects of the deal, which will reportedly see Beckham earning about one million US dollars a week.

"End it like Beckham," said the broadsheet Guardian, in a play on the famous ball-bending phrase which describes some of the former England captain's most famous goals during his glittering career.

Few were convinced by Beckham's dismissal of critics saying he was "only going there to get the money," noting he will become the second top-paid US sports star despite playing in a relatively minor sport across the Atlantic.

Some were dismayed by Beckham's desire to make money.

"The manner of David Beckham's departure from top-class football is in keeping with the latter part of his career: an air of

disappointment and money-grabbing hangs over the affair," wrote a Daily Mail editorialist.

The Daily Telegraph saw both sides of the story, with one of its commentators lamenting that "Posh is dragging Beckham Stateside in a last-ditch attempt to maintain their mega-celebrity status," while another said: "The Beckhams are coming: everyone's going to make a mint."

Former British football star turned BBC presenter Gary Lineker -- who ended his own playing career with a stint in Japan -- was also doubtful about Beckham's wider aims.

"It's tantamount to a semi-retirement isn't it?" he told BBC Five Live.

"I did a similar thing when going to Japan at the end of my career: it was an interesting experience introducing football to the Japanese and earning a few quid in the process."

And he added: "It's a step down wherever you go, so you might as well experience something different, something new and you can understand why Los Angeles might appeal to the Beckhams."

Ganguly in, Sehwa

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the West Indies will be played in Nagpur on January 21 and Cuttack on Jan 24.

The teams for the last two matches in Chennai on Jan 27 and Vadodara on Jan 31, four further home games against Sri Lanka from February 8-17 and the World Cup will be picked later.

India must name their final World Cup squad of 15 by February 13.

SQUAD FOR ONE-DAY SERIES

Rahul Dravid (capt), Robin Uthappa, Gautam Gambhir, Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Mahendra Dhoni, Dinesh Karthick, Suresh Raina, Zaheer Khan, Shanthakumaran Sreesanth, Ajit

Agarkar, Joginder Sharma, Rudra Pratap Singh, Ramesh Powar, Harbhajan Singh.

PRELIMINARY SQUAD

Rahul Dravid, Virender Sehwa, Sachin Tendulkar, Yuvraj Singh, Mohammad Kaif, Gautam Gambhir, Sourav Ganguly, Robin Uthappa, Joginder Sharma, Ajit Agarkar, Mahendra Dhoni, Rudra Pratap Singh, Dinesh Karthick, Suresh Raina, Zaheer Khan, Shanthakumaran Sreesanth, Ramesh Powar, Harbhajan Singh, Irfan Pathan, Munaf Patel, Anil Kumble, Dinesh Mongia, Vikram Rajvir Singh, Parthiv Patel, Venkatsai Laxman, Rohit Sharma, Ishant Sharma, Cheteswar Pujara, Subramaniam Badrinath, Rajesh Powar.