

Graveney comforts Fletcher

AFP, London

Duncan Fletcher's job as England coach after the latest demoralising one-day hammering by Australia is not under threat, according to England chairman of selectors David Graveney.

Fletcher's one-day record against the top eight Test-playing nations is poor but, with the World Cup in the West Indies looming, Graveney is convinced Fletcher retains the full confidence of the ailing England dressing room.

And Graveney insists the players are desperate to claim a much-needed victory over New Zealand on Tuesday to ease the pressure on their coach.

Graveney told BBC Radio Five Live's Sportweek: "Duncan is hurting the same as everyone else -- and when I say everyone else I mean the players, the management and every England cricket fan.

"He is trying to do the job on a day-to-day basis with the same intensity and I am sure the players know if there is one thing they want to do on Tuesday it is to win for Duncan Fletcher.

"Duncan Fletcher is still the England coach and he retains the support of everyone close to the team and the team in particular. Our main objective is to start winning some games on this tour."

Rather than using Fletcher as a convenient scapegoat for an Ashes tour rated by many experts as the worst in England cricket history, Graveney insists the players much shoulder much of the blame for the sorry displays.

"They have to assess their performances each day by looking at themselves and saying, 'have I done everything I possible can for this team?'"

"The two performances in Adelaide were way off the standards we expect from this national team. I don't want to make excuses because I don't think that is particularly appropriate at this stage."

Javed lifts

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Mushtaqur 1, Elahi 48, Reza 24, Sanwar 4, Kadir 13*, Murad 0*, extras 11, Tareq 1-39, Kamrul 2-13, Wasim 2-42).

Result: Biman won by three wickets.

BROTHERS: 146 all out in 45.4 overs (Shahriar 14, Hannan 10, Imran 40, Lablur 11, Bashar 10, Anisur 9, Nasir 15, Haq 4, Ghosh 5, Rashedur 0, Shaiful 0*, extras 30, Shahadat 1-23, Dollar 2-28, Razzaq 1-32, Mehrab 3-16).

DOHS: 152-4 in 30.1 overs (Tamim 22, Mehrab 23, Shamsur 7, Ehsanul 45*, Nadif 9, Akram 22*, extras 24, Nasir 2-29, Rashedur 2-39).

Result: Old DOHS won by six wickets.

History

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86 times, a 46 percent success rate. The official website www.australianopen.com had 21 million hits from 4.4 million visitors unable to attend the tournament Down Under in person.

More than 30 percent of Internet visitors were from Europe, 22 percent from the United States, 15 percent from Australia and 11.5 percent from Asia.

The most viewed profiles belonged to women's finalists Maria Sharapova and Serena Williams and men's finalists Federer and Gonzalez, with American Andy Roddick also attracting interest.

RMFS, Khulna

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Licence holder. He added that they have already contacted Ugandan striker Dolly.

Meanwhile, old-Dhaka outfit Rahmatganj have secured conytracts of 18 local players and will soon register them with the Bangladesh Football Federation.

"Our budget is Tk one crore and our highest paid player is getting Tk five lakh," informed Rahmatganj general secretary Tipu Sultan without naming the top paid footballer.

Rahmatganj, who began their journey with the slogan -- Sports, Peace and Unity -- in 1933, were promoted to first division in 1964 as unbeaten second division champions and were in tremendous form in the early years of the new millennium, finishing fourth and third in 2000 and 2001 seasons in the Premier League.

"We won the first division league title in 2005 and have a fighting team. We will recruit about three foreign players to strengthen the squad," said former national goal-keeper and coach Motaleb Hossain, who holds AFC's 'B' Licence.

Star player and captain Shoyeb Hossain Sony, however, was a bit optimistic. "We will fight for good results and want to finish in the top half," said the central defender, who had talks with Mohammedan but decided to stay at his old team.



PHOTO: AFP

New Zealand all-rounder Jacob Oram gives it a good crack on way to his blazing hundred during the Commonwealth Bank series game against Australia at the WACA in Perth on Sunday.

Aussies run Kiwis out

Cricket

AFP, Perth

Centuries to Ricky Ponting and Matthew Hayden helped Australia maintain their winning streak with an unexpectedly narrow eight-run victory over a plucky New Zealand in their triangular series one-day international at the WACA Ground here on Sunday.

Ponting won the toss and elected to bat in extremely hot conditions. His decision was vindicated as Australia capitalised on New Zealand fielding errors to post the highest score ever in a one-day international at the ground, making 343 for five.

The previous best was the West Indies' 309-6 in 1985, with Hayden and Ponting scoring the first two centuries of the series.

In reply, the Kiwis produced a valiant attempt at an unlikely victory, also eclipsing the old record in making 335 for five.

Recalled Black Caps opener Lou Vincent led the resistance with 66, before falling to a bad-umpiring decision by Asad Rauf even though the ball struck bat rather than pad.

Jacob Oram, who made 86 against England on Friday, then continued his fine form by weighing in with a magnificent 101 not out that was his first one-day international century and included six massive sixes.

Oram faced just 71 balls in reaching his hundred and put on 137 for sixth-wicket with Brendon McCullum (46 not out) as the pair

threatened an incredible victory.

However, Australia held on to make it six wins from as many matches in the tri-series and extend their winning streak this summer to 12 games, including Tests, one-dayers and Twenty20.

In the Australian innings, Hayden made the most of some extraordinary good luck to make 117 -- his first one-day international hundred in 23 months -- and Ponting's 111 was typically assured.

The pair added 200 for the second wicket, also a record for the venue.

Their eyes firmly on Tuesday's crucial game against England, the Black Caps rested opening bowlers Shane Bond and James Franklin at the venue where they would have been most suited, but again didn't help themselves with some shoddy fielding.

Hayden was dropped three times in making his sixth one-day international century, before finally being clean bowled by Daniel Vettori as he attempted another hefty swipe.

Vettori had dropped a sitter off Hayden from the second ball the left-hander faced and before he had scored.

When Hayden was just four, Ross Taylor horribly misjudged a skied pull shot at mid-on and muffed the catch.

The left-hander was also dropped on 79, when substitute fielder Hamish Marshall couldn't hang on to a chance at mid-on.

With his place at the upcoming World Cup in the balance after his previous indifferent form, Hayden

made the most of his good fortune, reaching his century from 104 balls with 111 fours.

Ponting, on the other hand, didn't give a chance in notching his 21st one-day international century in 113 balls, with seven fours and one six. He was named man of the match.

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming tried seven bowlers with little impact.

Vettori was the only New Zealand bowler spared in the onslaught, with 1-34 from 10 overs. Oram went for 50 from five overs, Mark Gillespie returned 1-76 from 10 overs and Jeetan Patel finished with 1-67 from his 10 overs.

The Australians put on 101 in the last 10 overs as they hit a string of sixes to gallop past the old record for the ground.

Andrew Symonds made 24 from 13 balls, with two sixes, while local favourite Mike Hussey again finished not out in making 29 from 16 balls.

Hussey cleared the fence three times in his brief stay.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard in the triangular one-day series match between Australia and New Zealand at the WACA Ground on Sunday:

AUSTRALIA	
Gilchrist c Patel b Mills	13
Hayden b Vettori	117
Ponting c Fulton b McMillan	111
Clarke c Marshall (sub) b Gillespie	7
Symonds b Gillespie	24
Hussey not out	29
White not out	20
Extras: (lb-2, w-18, nb-2)	22

Total: (For five wkts in 50 overs)343
Fall of wickets: 1-28, 2-228, 3-254, 4-275, 5-292.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mills	10	1	72	1
Gillespie	10	1	76	1
Oram	5	0	50	0
Vettori	10	0	34	1
Patel	10	0	67	1
McMillan	3	0	26	1
Taylor	2	0	16	0

NEW ZEALAND

Vincent lbw b Clarke	66
Fleming c Gilchrist b McGrath	28
Fulton c Hayden b Johnson	23
Taylor b Clarke	39
McMillan run out (Johnson)	5
Oram not out	101
McCullum not out	46
Extras: (b-2, lb-5, w-18, nb-2)	27
Total: (For five wkts in 50 overs)335	
Fall of wickets: 1-47, 2-107, 3-142, 4-150, 5-198.	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Lee	10	0	53	0
Bracken	10	1	75	0
McGrath	10	0	72	1
Johnson	6	0	48	1
Clarke	9	0	48	2
Symonds	5	0	32	0

Result: Australia won by eight runs.

Man-of-the-match: Ricky Ponting.

Toss: Australia
Umpires: Simon Taufel (AUS)
Asad Rauf (PAK)

STANDINGS

Standings in the triangular one-day series after Australia beat New Zealand on Sunday (played, won, lost, bonus points, points):

Australia	6	6	0	3	27
New Zealand	5	1	3	1	5
England	5	1	4	0	4

Federer's

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The first set lasted 65 minutes, two minutes longer than Serena Williams needed to win the women's final 6-1, 6-2 over Maria Sharapova on Saturday afternoon.

Just as in last year's victory over Marcos Baghdatis, Federer had to beat an opponent who had become a crowd darling.

Amid chants of "Vamos Fernando!" and "Come on, Speedy!" one particularly fervent fan clutched the corners of a Chilean flag and kissed the corners on key points.

Federer had plenty of backers, too, with a number of faces painted like the Swiss flag. One fan waved a sign that proclaimed "Federer is betterer," and the Swiss star backed it up.

Gonzalez was trying to run around his backhand to whip powerful forehands and Federer sought to keep him from doing it, leading to a number of backhand-to-backhand rallies.

But while Gonzalez has improved his backhand, the most glaring weakness in his game, Federer showed he can rip winners from either side.

Gonzalez was grunting, not on his shots but with effort while tracking down Federer's groundstrokes to the corners. He stumbled and fell once and nearly a second time, and frequently tied his shoes to buy time.

Serena coming

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happy to go there.

"I'm going to India, then Dubai, a couple tournaments after that."

Williams came into the Australian Open ranked 81 in the world but her success in Melbourne has sent her rocketing to 14.

Mara Santangelo of Italy is the defending Bangalore champion.

Local hope Sania Mirza will also play in the hardcourt tournament.

WI keep series alive

Cricket

AFP, Chennai

Marlon Samuels hit 98 off 95 balls and captain Brian Lara made 83 as the West Indies came back strongly to defeat India by three wickets in the third one-dayer here on Saturday.

The tourists overcame a rollicking start by the hosts to bowl India out for 268 and then surpassed the challenging target in the 44th over under lights at the Chidambaram stadium.

Samuels and Lara put on a match-winning stand of 127 for the fourth wicket after opener Chris Gayle had fallen leg-before to Ajit Agarkar off the first ball of the innings.

Agarkar, who had Samuels caught behind two runs short of his third one-day century, finished with 3-45 and the West Indies lost three wickets for eight runs at the end before recording their first win in the four-match series.

Lara's men now travel to Vadodara for Wednesday's final match, hoping to draw their last series 2-2 before the Caribbean nations host the World Cup in March-April.

"That will be a big game for us, our last before the World Cup, and we will go out there fighting," said Lara.

"We have lost badly in the past but today (Saturday) we showed we can win well too. It was a commanding win, especially while bowling."

India's total revolved around a robust 70 off 42 balls from young opener Robin Uthappa and half-centuries from captain Rahul

Dravid (57) and senior pro Sachin Tendulkar (60).

India, sent in to bat by Lara, were cruising at 232-3 in the 35th over when the tourists bounced back with seven wickets for 36 runs.

Seamer Dwayne Bravo, hampered for 19 runs by Uthappa in his first over, grabbed four wickets for 20 runs in his next eight to lead the West Indian revival.

Uthappa, a 21-year-old playing only his fourth one-dayer, enhanced his World Cup claims by smashing 11 boundaries and two sixes in his first appearance in the series.

When Uthappa fell in the 11th over, holing out in the deep off Gayle, he had contributed 70 runs in India's total of 95-2.

Tendulkar, one-day cricket's most successful batsman with 14,568 runs and 40 hundreds before this match, finally hit form after making just 202 runs in his last 10 innings.

Both Tendulkar and Dravid hit their 75th one-day half-centuries in a fourth-wicket stand of 106 before falling in the space of five runs to trigger the collapse.

"We should have got 330-340 on this very good wicket," said Dravid. "We were just not good enough today (Saturday) although Uthappa showed how well he can take the opportunities that come his way."

"Vadodara will be an important game and I hope we can wrap up that one."

India's selectors, not hesitating to change and chop in a bid to arrive at the perfect World Cup combination, rested Sourav Ganguly, Harbhajan Singh, Mahendra Dhoni and Zaheer Khan

for the match.

Yuvraj, fit again after suffering a knee ligament injury in November, returned to the team along with veteran spinner Anil Kumble.

Lara was back for the West Indies after missing the previous match in Cuttack on Wednesday with a sore knee.

The tourists rested in-form batsman Shivnarine Chanderpaul and brought in Lendl Simmons and Emrit for the first time in the series.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the third one-day international between India and the West Indies at the Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Saturday: **INDIA:** 268 all out in 48 overs.

WEST INDIES

Gayle lbw b Agarkar	0
Smith c Dravid b Kumble	33
Morton c Karthick b Agarkar	1
Samuels c Karthick b Agarkar	98
Lara c Uthappa b Powar	83
Simmons c Uthappa b Powar	17
Bravo c Raina b Sreesanth	4
Ramdin not out	4
Emrit not out	0
Extras: (b-4, lb-1, w-25)	30
Total: (For seven wkts in 43.4 overs)	270
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-27, 3-92, 4-219, 5-257, 6-261, 7-265.	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Agarkar	10	1	45	3
Sreesanth	8.4	0	67	1
Kumble	10	0	67	1
Powar	10	0	53	2
Tendulkar	5	0	33	0

Result: West Indies won by three wickets.

Man-of-the-match: Marlon Samuels.

Final match in Vadodara on Wednesday.

Toss: West Indies

Umpires: Billy Bowden (NZL) and Suresh Shastri (IND)

More than a ringtone!

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

In times of mobile phones, ringtones tell you a lot about a person or his moods. Laxmipathy Balaji's cell rings to the late 1970s Kishore Kumar classic 'Aanewala pal, jaanewala hai'.

And it isn't tough to guess the frame of mind of the pacer who, just three years back, had the packed stands in Pakistan sing that peppsy item-song: 'Balaji jara dheere chalo' in his praise.

Bollywood's philosophical look at living the moment and the temporary high of this unpredictable world have provided a perfect background score at a Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) function on the match eve where Balaji -- nursing a career-threatening stress fracture of the back -- sat just behind India physio John Gloster and the new kid on the block Shanthakumaran Sreesanth.

Watching the just healed pacers Zaheer Khan and Ajit Agarkar sitting in the front row and remembering the missing faces of Irfan Pathan, Munaf Patel and Ashish Nehra, it seemed Balaji's ring tone was more like the signature tune of the fitness-fragile India pace department.

Balaji's famous toothy smile is

there, his thick mop of hair still needs to be regimented regularly but a stress fracture of the back means he has to be in casuals and sit behind the men in blue.

While Sreesanth was busy obliging the autograph hunters, the local boy was more keen to talk to Gloster. Despite playing his last international match in 2005 and missing the entire domestic season this year, the local boy still attracts attention but Balaji refuses to entertain requests.

"Just like that I have stopped signing autographs these days," he says as he gives a faint glimpse of that famous toothpaste-add grin. These days he is more pre-occupied with the latest injury problem. After his osteitis pubis -- a part of the abdomen that connects four muscles -- was healed, the latest scare has made Balaji sceptic. "Actually I myself have no idea about the extent of my injury. It is all very confusing and certainly frustrating," he says.

But there are some around who are ready to give a time frame. Dr H Natarajan, the joint secretary of TNCA, says, "Balaji would need at least six months to take a ball in his hand and bowl. The stress fracture of the back has been detected and he will go for surgery soon. He is in constant touch with Gloster and we will decide if he needs to go abroad

or get it done here," he says.

Tamil Nadu selector and the former member of the national selection committee VB Chandrashekhkar rounds the fingers of both his hands and with click-sound talks about the slit spine. "It is really sad and right now no one has any idea when he can return. A bright career hindered by injury is truly tragic," he says.

Many in Tamil Nadu even question the way Balaji has been handled but since it is a touchy issue the anonymity factor creeps in. "The problem with him is the action. Maybe, he will be healed but if he sticks to the same action he will be injured again. A proper rehabilitation is what he needs. But this is a scare certainly and chances are we might never ever see the Balaji of the old," says someone who is in the know of things.

Making the issue more complex is a comment by Natarajan. "At times the lure of stardom and the amount of money involved in the game makes the cricketers neglect their injuries. His stress fracture could have been the result of that," he says taking an unsympathetic view of the entire issue. And that in some ways gives an entire different meaning to the Kishore classic.

Early exit a blessing?

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

On Tuesday in Perth the agony could be over. England play New Zealand again and if they lose their chances of qualifying for the finals of the triangular series would become minuscule. England would probably have to win their final game against Australia to leapfrog New Zealand in the table and, such is the desolation within their touring party, there is no way that we can imagine them doing that.

England's humiliation on this expedition to the Antipodes is just about complete.

It may be better that they are spared another thrashing at the hands of the Australians in the best-of-three finals. Get out of the most beguiling of torture chambers that is Australia and try to rehabilitate the 15 lost souls that constitute the one-day squad in time for the World Cup.

It comes to something when, before the solitary one-day competition that really matters, we can seriously advocate the benefits of avoiding further fixtures to spare the England players further mental disintegration.

Currently, so many of the team are shot to pieces. Their minds are dead. It is most evident among the batsmen. Bowlers can just about function mechanically, batsmen need a spark of life to react to the ball and the situation. No spark is visible.

Even worse, it is the old dependables who have disintegrated the most. Andrew Strauss and Paul Collingwood are walking

wickets; Andrew Flintoff, who must recognise that at present if he fails the match is lost, is heading that way, while the desperate selections, the old men of county cricket, Paul Nixon and Mal Loye, are reminding us why they hadn't been chosen before. The call-up of Nixon, in particular, still grates. Choosing players primarily because they have a combative tongue reflects the disarray in the camp.

Who knows who will keep wicket for England in the World Cup? Probably not David Graveney or Duncan Fletcher. Who knows who will bat or bowl? Who knows who will lead the side? Almost a year ago, Fletcher said that he had a good idea who 10 of his World Cup XI would be. He might be able to name four or five now.

In the interim, out of Fletcher's likely 10, Marcus Trescothick, Simon Jones and Steve Harmison have been ruled out through illness, injury or retirement from this form of the game. Geraint Jones has been jettisoned; Ashley Giles has yet to prove that he is properly recovered.

We knew that Kevin Pietersen was fundamental to the team's success, but his lofty reputation as a one-day player has spiralled even higher while he's been injured. So too has Michael Vaughan's, even though the chances of him being properly fit for the World Cup are remote and he's never been an effective one-day player anyway.

It is a mess. Apart from the odd encouraging spell from James Anderson, I can think of no redeeming features in England's one-day campaign in Australia, except that they have cunningly thwarted John Buchanan's aspira-

tions. Buchanan had wanted his team to be put under pressure in preparation for the World Cup. England, with some connivance from the Kiwis, are denying him that luxury by playing so abysmally.

The expectations of what England might achieve in the World Cup have never been great, but they are now at an all-time low. The temptation is to check out the form of Canada and Kenya, the teams they must beat to progress to the second round in the Caribbean.

Assuming England can manage that -- and, cheer up, I think they will -- then they can only redeem a calamitous winter by reaching the semifinals. Which might be enough for Fletcher to remain in his job.

Real down

FROM PAGE 20

Barca. Racing move up to 11th.

Despite the absence of out-of-favour playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme, who was looking on from the stands, Villarreal dominated against Real as they clipped the ball around the midfield and hit the visitors on the break.

They would have taken the lead on the half hour had it not been for some superb goalkeeping from Iker Casillas, who got a hand to a Diego Forlan shot, blocked a follow-up effort and closed down Matias Fernandez as he tried to blast the ball into the net. But they finally broke the deadlock midway through the second half, when Marcos fired home with a first-time shot after Fernandez had slipped the ball past the Real back four.