



A file photo shows Clijsters talking with her boyfriend, US basketball player Brian Lynch at the Roland-Garros in Paris in 2006.

Clijsters sets wedding date

AFP, Brussels

Belgian tennis star Kim Clijsters announced Wednesday that she will marry US basketball player Brian Lynch on July 14.

"We'll marry just after Wimbledon on July 14. I'll also be focusing my attention on this in the coming weeks," said the former world number one.

Lynch plays for Belgian club Bree, the town where Clijsters lives. The couple have been engaged since April last year.

Clijsters, who retires at the end of this year, will skip the French Open to concentrate her efforts on Wimbledon where she reached the semi-finals in 2003.

The 23-year-old has only won one Grand Slam, at the US Open in 2005, but lifted 34 singles titles in a career spanning 10 years that has earned her almost 15 million dollars. She is currently ranked number four in the world.

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Gone also are Andy Flower and Henry Olonga who fled their country after the 2003 World Cup in fear of their lives after staging their high-profile "death of democracy" protest aimed at exposing the brutality of the Mugabe regime.

Zimbabwe has lost roughly the equivalent of an entire team in the years since the last World Cup. They have also lost their Test status after a series of disputes between Cricket Zimbabwe and senior players.

Key players have all been purged from the squad.

This impoverished country, with its 1,600 per cent inflation, has been left

with mostly raw youngsters to represent the team.

Very few of its 15-man squad have proper experience. Only captain Prosper Utseya and Gary Brent have played more than 50 ODIs.

Sometimes one has an outstanding performance, such as opening batsman Vus Sibanda who averaged over 100 in the first three matches against Bangladesh, boosted by a 93 not out; Elton Chigumbura smashed them for seven sixes in one innings.

But they are rare bright spots. Despite the gloom, coach Kevin Curran has faith in his rookies.

"We have a lot of youngsters playing good cricket," said the former Test player.

"We have a pretty sharp front line attack in Anthony Ireland, Chris Mpofu and Edward Rainsford. And there has been some fine batting performances lately, notably by Sibanda, Chigumbura and Terrence Duffin. I believe we can be very competitive all round."

But lurking in the background are the memories of the embarrassing 35 and 38 run totals, both against Sri Lanka only a couple of years ago, and their 85 against West Indies and 94 against Pakistan.

Only three Zimbabwe batsmen have scored more than 1,000 runs;

the best average is a meagre 28 by Brendan Taylor. Only two bowlers have taken more than 30 wickets.

In an effort to keep the better Zimbabwe players in the country after the World Cup, Zimbabwe Cricket is believed to be offering attractive four-year contracts.

But the players will have to earn them with some tough assignments on the horizon.

"Our warm-up games against Bermuda and Australia are ideal for us because they are so different," added Curran.

"I expect our lads to beat Bermuda and to be competitive against Australia."

"I believe that if we had Andy Flower, Heath Streak and just a couple of others from those earlier days, we would be better overall today than the Zimbabwe team of that time."

"There's no reason at all why we shouldn't beat Ireland (in their first Group D match). They are on a level with Scotland and Canada. As for West Indies and Pakistan, these are greatsides."

"But they can both be unpredictable and we might just catch one of them on a bad day."

"Whether we get through to the Super Eight has to be doubtful, but I think we will leave the World Cup with honour."

Zimbabwe: Trouble is the name of the game

AFP, Harare



In early February, Zimbabwe broke a 13-match losing sequence by beating Bangladesh, leaving their record going into the World Cup standing at 15 defeats in 16 matches.

All of those defeats were against Kenya, Bangladesh and South Africa's second string and included a 5-0 whitewash in Bangladesh at the end of 2006.

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Ireland have big-hitters

AFP, Dublin



per Trent Johnston believes that kind of performance will stand the team in good stead in the World Cup where they have been grouped with the West Indies, Pakistan and Zimbabwe in the opening round.

"In Kenya, we weren't disciplined enough," he said. "But Eoin thoroughly deserves to be the record holder. The World Cup should be a great stage for him."

Morgan is one of three players who make their living in the English county championship. He's at Middlesex while fiery wicket-keeper Niall O'Brien is on Kent's books but is likely to feature for Northants next season alongside right-hand batsman Andrew White.

Ireland can also boast experience in its senior ranks.

As well as 33-year-old former New South Wales seamer Johnston, Ireland have two other Australians in left-hand batsman Jeremy Bray as well as fast bowler Dave Langford-Smith, both also from NSW.

For good measure, there is a South African in the shape of Botha.

Ireland also have a South African coach Adrien Birrell, formerly handler of Eastern Province.

Despite losing Ed Joyce, who was instrumental in them getting to the World Cup, to England, Ireland have great hope for another home-grown talent in the shape of

William Porterfield.

The 22-year-old found his feet in Kenya, making two hundreds and an eighty to finish with an average of 110.00.

"I was delighted with how the players responded after Kenya," said Birrell, looking back on the win over the UAE.

"The tournament in Kenya wasn't all bad. We lost by the narrowest of margins and in cruel circumstances."

Ireland play two warm up games in Trinidad versus South Africa and Canada, before moving on to Jamaica, where they will play Zimbabwe on March 15, Pakistan on March 17, and the hosts West Indies on March 23.

Sheva gains

FROM PAGE 24 emerged from their defensive shell to generate three clear chances to claim a winner in the final quarter of an hour.

Shevchenko, put into space by Didier Drogba's clever pass, fired the first over the bar from the 18-yard line.

Drogba himself struck the outside of the post from an acute angle before heading a Shevchenko cross

1975: The Beginning

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on a disappointing exhibition. The culprit was one Sunil Gavaskar, who played out a mind-boggling 174 balls for his 36 not out. India ended up playing out 60 overs for a score of 132 for 3. In his defence, he claimed that the match could not be won, so he just gave himself a little batting practise. One doubts if Lord's had ever seen such a farce.

On the same day at Leeds, Australia beat Pakistan by 73 runs. For the first time since 1966 gates were closed and for the 22,000 crowd there was an excellent day of cricket. Allen Turner and Richard McCosker opened the innings with a partnership of 63 scored at four runs an over. Ross Edwards, came to the crease when the game required big hits and did so effortlessly. Australia's score of 278 seemed a winning one but it was soon obvious that the Pakistan batsmen intended to fight. At one point it seemed that Pakistan, chasing a score of 278 might win. At the end of their 40th over they had scored 172 for four wickets whereas Australia at the same stage had only scored 148 for four wickets. Majid Khan and Asif Iqbal both made half centuries. The fifth Pakistan wicket fell at 181, the tenth at 205. Lillee, showing all his speed took five for 34. Jeff Thomson, however, disappointed. He was in trouble with his run-up and delivery stride. His form was real worry to the team.

At Birmingham, the same day New Zealand trounced East Africa by 181 runs. Their Captain Glen Turner scored 171 not out as the game was a complete mismatch. At Manchester, a crowd of 5000 watched as the West Indies ambled past Sri Lanka by nine wickets. Put in on a pitch that did little to help the bowlers, Sri Lanka were utterly out of their depth and folded for 87. Fredericks and Murray treated the Sri Lanka bowlers with scant respect and put together a partnership of 52 before the persevering De Silva dismissed Fredericks.

The second so-called match

day was on the 11th of June and another four matches took place. At Nottingham, June 11 England took on New Zealand. New Zealand took a gamble and put England in to bat under heavy atmosphere. Collinge, bowled well and disposed of the openers, Amiss and Jameson, by the time the total had reached 28. That was the end of New Zealand's early progress as the sun blazed down, for Fletcher and Hayes mastered the bowling with a stand of 83. The longer he batted the more audacious Fletcher became and his century came in the 55th over.

After useful stands with Deneen and Old, Fletcher was run out off the last ball of the innings for 131. New Zealand made England work hard for success without ever looking likely to create a surprise. They were jolted by the early departure of Turner and despite a brave 55 by Morrison the innings ended in the 60th over with England the complete masters.

Greig, with his medium pacers, was the most successful bowler, with four for 45.

At Leeds, India won by ten wickets as they effortlessly overcame East Africa. Their batsmen were without the technique necessary to score runs off accurate Test class bowling and were bowled out for 120 in the 56th over. The India openers, Gavaskar and Engineer, had no difficulty in overhauling the East Africa score as they both notched up half centuries. At The Oval, Australia beat Sri Lanka by 52 runs. Facing a total of 328, the Sri Lanka batsmen, most of them short in stature, put up a brave show against the hostile Australian bowlers. They cut and hooked the short balls with marked skill and accuracy. Earlier Turner hit one gigantic 6 over long on and nine 4's in reaching 100 out of 178 off the penultimate ball before lunch.

The fourth and final game of the day was at Birmingham, where West Indies won thriller by one wicket, off the fourth ball of the last over. An outstanding match hung in the balance until the end and the

West Indies could not have been confident when their eighth wicket fell at 166 and their ninth at 203. The last pair, Murray and Roberts, who came together in the 46th over, scored the necessary 64 runs for victory. The Pakistan batsmen followed Majid's example, punishing anything not on a length and going audaciously for their strokes, but Mushtaq and Wasim Raja were unlucky to play

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Aussies think of change

AFP, Sydney



Yuvraj Singh has only just returned after he tore his knee ligaments in October while Ajit Agarkar, the most capped seamer in the side, has a history of breaking down.

The team management could also face a dilemma over Kumble -- who has rarely played one-dayers since 2003 -- with off-spinner Harbhajan Singh holding the edge if only one specialist spinner is fielded for key games.

The visitors faced only one over without any loss before the stumps were drawn for the day.

There was nothing wrong on the surface, rather wrong shot selections caused the early debacle for the locals which started with the departure of Jafar Iqbal who chased Stuart Broad delivery going outside the off-stump in the very first over only to be caught at point by Michael Carberry.

Then out-of-favour left-handed opener Mehra Hossain (4), was snared at first slip, and Nasiruddin Faruque (12), caught and bowled, fell to another new ball bowler Graham Onions but the way Marshal Ayub and Nadiq Chowdhury, considered future Bangladesh batsmen, got out left no explanation.

Mohammad Sharif (28 off 76 balls) shared a very good partnership with Sahagir but the 68-run seventh wicket partnership was broken following his stupid run out as he ran from the non-striking end after his partner pushed the ball to guilty.

Broad was most successful England bowler with 35.

"We batted very badly in the first few overs," Tushar expressed his disappointment adding that he was banking on his spinners to bounce back in the game.

Millions of fickle Indian fans will hope their sporting idols will finally end their 24-year wait for success.

Rajshahi cruise

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told a business luncheon here. "I think other teams around the world will be thinking Australia are beatable now, only a few weeks ago everybody was wondering how any other team in the world was going to compete with us."

Ponting later told reporters: "I don't think the team's in any dire straits at the moment."

"We've had a few injuries and lost a few guys, but I'm pretty confident that we'll be ultra competitive in every game we play."

B.League draw held

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Hadlee Trophy series to carry off a 3-0 sweep over Australia.

Skipper Ricky Ponting said Thursday Australia may consider batting second in one-day cricket and opt to chase

scores at next month's World Cup to ease the pressure on their under-fire bowlers.

The defending world champions have for some time preferred to bat first and set the pace after winning the toss in one-day international cricket.

However, Ponting admits there are several areas of concern Australia must address before their tournament opener against Scotland on March 14, he denies the team is in crisis.

He does concede much of the aura surrounding Australian cricket has diminished ahead of the World Cup.

"I think it will have an effect on the other teams, they'll say, 'hang on England just beat Australia in the tri-series' finals. New Zealand just beat Australia 3-0, why can't we beat them?," Ponting

told the audience. "We have crossed hundreds of hurdles to start the league as per the guidelines of Asian Football Confederation (AFC)," he added.

According to fixture archivists Abahani and Mohammedan will lock horns in the competition on March 24.

Hasanuzzaman Bablu picked up the coupons to decide about the team's order.

"We are all set to make our dream come true with the launching of the Professional Football League," BFF president SA Sultan told the audience. "We have

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