

'Picking me would be stupid'

BBC ONLINE, *undated*

Darren Gough, England's leading one-day wicket-taker, accepts his international career has probably come to an end.

"If I don't play in the World Cup, which I'm not at this moment in time unless something silly happens, I'm not going to play," he told Sportsweek.

"There's no need for me to retire because they're not going to pick me again after the World Cup full stop.

"Realistically, if they pick me again after this World Cup, I think it would be stupid anyway."

Gough said he was as enthusiastic as ever about the game but insisted he was not angry he was not going to the West Indies for the World Cup.

"I'm not bitter at all. It's definitely a huge disappointment but I'm over it," he said.

"There's been a lack of communication this winter with myself and whoever it may be, whether it be Duncan Fletcher and David Graveney, but I wish the lads well.

"I want England to win the World Cup. I'm an England supporter in all sports."

England go into the tournament on the back of winning the CB Series in Australia and Gough believes they can have a successful campaign.

"There are a lot of ifs and buts in there but we've got some good players," he said.

"Our batting line-up is one of the best three in the world.

"We bat all the way down to [Paul] Nixon coming in at eight, who's enthusiastic. He can be useful down that order.

"The bowlers are all inexperienced but there are some very good bowlers.

"They all bowl at a good pace and if they get it right on the day they will bowl out teams.

"England could upset quite a few teams and you never know, we could sneak into the semi-finals."

Gough has just agreed to move back to Yorkshire from Essex and he is relishing the chance to captain the county where he started his career.

"Yorkshire kept chasing me and everywhere I seemed to go in the world I bumped into Geoffrey Boycott and he kept pestering me – I couldn't turn it down in the end," he said.

An open tourney: Moody

AFP, Bridgetown

Sri Lanka coach Tom Moody believes the 2007 World Cup will be the most open yet.

"This World Cup is really open. I know that's kind of a cliché that has been thrown around for a while now, but actually it's quite true," said Moody, who was in the winning Australian team under Steve Waugh in 1999.

"I believe Sri Lanka has as good a chance as any other team to win this World Cup. We just have to knuckle down and take our chances and prove our worth. We have to adjust to the conditions here as quick as possible and bring our 'A' game every time we play."

Sri Lanka play two warm-up matches here against Scotland and New Zealand on March 5 and 9 before heading to Trinidad for their first round matches against India, Bangladesh and Bermuda.

Moody told www.westindiescricket.com that the tournament will also lead to the emergence of new stars.

"In situations like these some players tend to come to the fore in a big way and I expect a few guys to announce themselves during the upcoming weeks," the 41-year-old said.

"We have prepared very well for this World Cup and we have a strong group of 15 players with us and they are confident that they can deliver over the next seven weeks."

Sri Lanka are chasing their second World Cup having won the title in 1996.

McGrath wants

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"The advice I have been giving to the other guys is as long as you are bowling where you want to bowl the ball, at least you can change if the plans are wrong," he said.

"If the ball is not going where you want it, then you have got no hope. We will just focus on that, hopefully hit our yorkers a bit better than we have done and mix it up with a slower ball or a short ball.

"You don't want to get too predictable on these grounds."

McGrath admitted to mixed emotions when he packed his cricketing kit and left his family behind at home in Sydney.

"Part of me is happy, part of me is sad," he said.

"It's what I have done for the last 14 years. I love it. This is my last official first-class, international matches that I'll play. In that respect it's sad."



PHOTO: COURTESY

Former foreign secretary Farooq Sobhan (L) and his partner Shamsuzzaman Kamal pose with the Khondkar Fazle Sobhan Trophy after the duo clinched the Bangladesh National Pairs Bridge Championship at a local hotel on Saturday.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Bengal Wares, a plastic manufacturing industry, has become sports gear sponsors of the metropolis club Sheikh Russel KC for the ongoing B League.

Sheikh Russel KC president Nurul Alam Chowdhury disclosed this at a press conference at the National Sports Council (NSC) conference room yesterday.

He said the sponsors have provided the club with necessary sports gears that included 30 balls, jerseys, tracksuits, gloves and kit bags. As sponsors, Bengal Wares have been given the right to use the company name and logo in the team jersey, the club president said.

The officials informed that the club authorities are now trying to arrange a playground to meet a longstanding need.

Meanwhile, the club has registered five Moroccan players for the ongoing league. They are Tawati Yunus, Saad Abdullah, Khubashi, Ighir Mohammad and Boordeep Mohammad.

Russel will play their inaugural match against Chittagong Mohammedan SC on Tuesday at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

SCHOOL HANDBALL

The 16th Bata School Handball Tournament (Boys & Girls) begins today with a match between Residential Model School and Narinda Government High School at the Outer Stadium handball court.

A total of 29 schools of Dhaka Metropolis, split into four groups each, are taking part in the meet.

"We feel proud of being associated with such kind of sports activities," Bata marketing manager MA Quader said during a press conference at the National Sports Council (NSC) conference room yesterday.

Bata, as sponsor of the tournament, would bear the entire expenses estimated at Tk 266,000 (Tk 133,000 each for boys and girls sections), said tournament committee (boys section) secretary Khalequzzaman Swapan.

Handball Federation general secretary Asaduzzaman Kohinor, tournament committee chairperson Hamida Begum and tournament committee secretary (girls section) Selim Mia were present at the press conference.

JFACUP

The final phase of the 3rd JFA Cup

Under-15 Football Championship-2007 begins Monday at the Banani Army Stadium.

Eight zonal champions – DhakaA, Chuadanga, Natore, Khulna, Chittagong, Kishoreganj, Sirajganj DSAs and BKSP – will compete in the final phase to be held on round robin league system.

Two matches will be held everyday, the first from 2 pm and the 2nd from 4 pm.

The final match of the competition will be held on March 14.

MANIKGANJ SCHOOL CRICKET

Sohel and Mamun starred as Kusherchar Ismail Hossain High School defeat Motto High School by five wickets in the school cricket tournament at the Manikganj Government High School playground yesterday.

Batting first, Motto were skittled out for 88 runs to which Kusherchar replied with 89 in only 8.2 overs, losing five wickets.

GAIBANDHA SCHOOL CRICKET

Gaibandha Government High School beat Shahebulah Sarkar High School by three wickets in the school cricket tournament at the local stadium yesterday.

Gobindaganj take on Haringisa High School in today's match.

BFF'S NOBLE GESTURE

Bangladesh Football Federation offered a cheque worth Tk 50,000 yesterday to the bereaved family of young footballer Omar Sharif who died while playing in the JFA Cup football competition.

Barisal Sports Association also donated the same amount of money to the family of the deceased. Sharif played the tournament for Barisal division.

JAHRUL HAQ HALL SPORTS

Accounting student Mohammad Majedur Rahman and Islamic History student Abdullah Sadi were crowned joint champions in the annual sports meet of Jahurul Haq Hall of Dhaka University at the Jagannath Hall ground yesterday.

MUNSHIGANJ SPORTS

The annual sports competition of Sir JC Bose Institution ended yesterday at its premises.

A cultural programme and a

prize-giving ceremony, which was attended by joint secretary of Ministry of Education Nazrul Islam Khan and Deputy Commissioner of Munshiganj Moniruddin, followed the two-day long competition.

NAZRUL SHIKKHALOY SPORTS

The prize-giving ceremony of the annual sports competition of Nazrul Shikhaloy was held at the BIAM auditorium yesterday.

Justice Habibur Rahman Khan spoke on the occasion as chief guest.

COLLEGE HANDBALL

Dhaka Estate College crushed BAF Shaheen College 12-5 in the Exim Bank Inter-College Handball competition at the Handball court yesterday.

In other matches, Birshreshtha Munshi Abdur Rauf Rifles College defeated Mirpur Government Bangla College 20-15 while Notre Dame College outplayed Dhaka Residential Model College 12-9.

No need

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but injuries happen at any time and you can't worry about it too much."

"The players are not really worried about injuries in the team and they will go out there with the goal of winning the cup."

Pakistan will play two warm-up matches here against Canada and South Africa on March 6 and 9 respectively before heading to Jamaica for their first round matches with West Indies, Zimbabwe and Ireland.

Howard

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Kenya's coach and remains cautiously optimistic over their chances.

"Kenya is supposed to be the top associate country as far as cricket is concerned," he said. "But it doesn't mean anything unless you show it on the field and we have demonstrated this. I think winning the World Cricket League (WCL) meant a lot to this team, for Kenya as a whole, and we hope to do the same in the World Cup."

Kenya, buoyant after their impressive win in Nairobi three weeks ago, are also very familiar with Caribbean conditions. Three years ago, they were the invited overseas team for the West Indies domestic first-class championship, though they failed to win any of their seven matches.

Faisal takes

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bowl out Dr Shahidullah Adarsha for only 139 in 33.2 overs to which Faisal's school lost seven wickets but won in 27.1 overs.

In other matches, BLS beat Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Government Boys High School by seven wickets, Badda High School defeated Government Laboratory High School by 41 runs while Alhaj Abbasuddin High School handed a three-wicket defeat to Ahmedabag Adarsha High School.

Lewis boost for England

REUTERS, *Stubbs*

Pace bowler Jon Lewis was fit enough to bowl several overs on Saturday in England's first practice session in the West Indies ahead of the World Cup.

Lewis, 31, injured his ankle in Australia and has not had any real bowling practice since a tri-series match with New Zealand two months ago. His selection in the World Cup squad was subject to fitness.

The team flew in on Friday, changing flights at Barbados and travelling on a small propeller plane to land at St. Vincent's tiny airport. On Saturday, a light aircraft crashed not far from the runway. All four occupants escaped shaken but unscathed.

James Anderson, who also missed the back end of England's victorious tri-series campaign, bowled some overs from a shortened run-up after shaking off a back problem.

Kevin Pietersen was the first to bat in the nets after fully recovering from a fractured rib sustained in the first tri-series match in Australia in January.

Captain Michael Vaughan, working his way back to fitness after long-standing knee and hamstring problems, also batted early on and looked comfortable against some local St. Vincent bowlers.

"We just cleared some cobwebs from the flight. It was nice to have a little net," Vaughan told reporters back at the team hotel on the beach.

"You are always quite sceptical about how (Caribbean wickets) they will play. The first two weeks are crucial for me but also the team."

"Kevin will certainly come back in and over the next two warm-up games it is up to the players to hold their hand up and stake a claim."

But England coach Duncan Fletcher, who confirmed the two warm-ups would be 13 players-a-side, said they were almost sure of their best starting line-up.

"We are pretty close. It is the bowling area where we have got some decisions to make," he said.

England trained in intense heat on a playing field in the small village of Stubbs, with the team minibus going along an unmade road past stray goats to approach the venue.

Form a neutral

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"What we honestly believe is that it might not be possible to bring a real change in the board even if we were in office. We think that an opportunity has come for the present caretaker government to clean not only the cricket board but also the whole sports arena," said Dewan Shafile Arefin Tutul, who himself is the sports secretary of the Awami League Central Committee.

"The time has come to reform election system also," he added.

Saju brings

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Shafuil Alam and Imrul Kayes was dominated by the latter with Imrul slamming fourteen boundaries and a couple of sixes in his slambang knock of 85. He reached his half-century in only 57 balls.

His much subdued partner Shafuil collected 35 runs with five fours in 80 balls. Shafuil and Imrul shared a 101-run stand but fell in quick succession. After their dismissals, Monirul Islam made amends as he held the innings together scoring 55, but left-arm spinner Saju's spell left Khulna at 289 for nine at the end of the day.

The young left-arm spinner took four for 36 in 21 tight overs for Chittagong.

Off-spinner Sabbir Khan took three for 109 while occasional medium-pacer Ehsanul Haque took the prized wicket of Imrul Kayes.

RAJSHAHI-BARISAL

Matured batting from Farhad Hossain and Hasanuzzaman Rosel gave Rajshahi the platform for a big score after they were in early pressure on the first day at their home ground.

The openers, Rabiul Karim and Rafiqul Islam, started off fine but when both fell, Farhad saw Naem Islam, Anisur Rahman and Mushfiqur Rahman falling in quick succession. This left the northerners at 113 for 5 during the second session of play.

Rosel and Farhad saw off the rest of the day's play with some cool-headed batting. Coming in at number three, Farhad struck nine boundaries in his 221-ball essay that gave him 74 runs. Rosel was the aggressor of the two, hitting eight fours in his 52 off 117 balls. The two right-handers shared an unbeaten 112-run stand for the sixth wicket.

For the visitors, left-armed Tariqul Islam bowled a tight long spell in which he took three wickets while Ali Arman picked up one.

BRIEF SCORES

KHULNA: 289-9 (Shafuil 35, Imrul 85, Nahidul 6, Sajjadul 16, Monirul 55, Jamaluddin 27, Fahim 16, Salim 31*, Murad 1, Humayun 8, Mahmud 0*, extras 9, Saju 4-36, Sabbir 3-109, Ehsanul 1-59).

RAJSHAHI: 225-5 (Rabiul 23, Rafiqul 27, Farhad 74*, Naem 17, Anisur 8, Mushfiqur 1, Rosel 52*, extras 23, Tariqul 3-61, Arman 1-21).

Dilip under fire

CRICINFO, *undated*



The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has taken strong exception to a remark by Dilip Vengsarkar, the chairman of selectors, regarding Virender Sehwag's inclusion in India's World Cup squad. Vengsarkar was quoted by a news channel on Saturday as saying that the out-of-form Sehwag was selected only because of the insistence Rahul Dravid, the Indian captain.

"When I was leading India, I never got the team I wanted and I didn't want Rahul to go through the same. He insisted on having Sehwag and that made the difference." The board said it wasn't proper for the chief selector to make such statements and that such remarks could only lead to fresh controversies ahead of India's World Cup campaign in the

Caribbean.

"It is not right to comment on team selection now," said Ratnakar Shetty, the chief administrative officer of the board. "I wish Vengsarkar had refrained from making such comments at a time when the team had already left for the showpiece event. The Code of Conduct applies to everybody, players and selectors."

Rajiv Shukla, the vice-president of the board, echoed the same sentiment: "The chairman of the selection committee should not make such a remark. It creates unnecessary controversy before the Cup. He should refrain from making such statements. The team is selected by the five selectors in consultation with the captain and coach. Selection issues should not come out in the open."

Vengsarkar admitted Sehwag did not feature in the initial scheme of things due to his prolonged run-drought but enjoyed backing from some quarters in the team. "It was a bit of gamble (to have him in the

bowling and panther-like fielding, rather justified this. 'Colly' was the man to speak to.

Why waste time? The banal question had to be asked some time. Are England serious contenders at the World Cup?

"If you'd asked us that four or five weeks ago before we won any games I'd have said we'd have struggled to beat Bermuda, to be honest with you," he smiled, "but there is a massive confidence in this side now.

"It's been an unbelievable turnaround. To beat Australia in Australia is one of the hardest things to do.

"They were some of the best performances I've ever been involved with. If we can keep that intensity we can go a long way."

OK, good breast-beating stuff, but what happened? What caused this change? This was more difficult. "Well, it was one win [in Sydney against Australia]," he replied, "whether it was Ed Joyce's hundred but something took the pressure off our shoulders and we went out and played like we knew we could.

"There was obviously a lack of confidence in the early part of the one-dayers but the only place to get rid of it is out in the middle. Once we got that first win, we thought 'here we go'."

But the truth is nobody really knows what exactly turned things around for England.

Joyce has received much of the credit, but it is also interesting to recall that Collingwood didn't actually play

Thierry Henry.

A late own goal by Cesc Fabregas got Reading on the score-sheet but the Royals were never really in the contest.

At the bottom, Charlton provided another demonstration of their determination to beat the drop by coming back from two goals down to secure a 2-2 draw at bottom side Watford, whose own chances of survival now look virtually non-existent.

With Wigan winning 1-0 at Manchester City, the point means Charlton remained six points adrift of safety with nine games left to secure their top flight status.

Caleb Folan's winner for Wigan means they are now eight points clear of the drop zone with City the team now closest to the relegation quagmire.

1996: Dogged by controversy

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Tillakeratne. At a time when 50 or 60 runs in the first 15 overs was considered adequate, Sri Lanka scored 117 runs in those overs against India, 123 against Kenya, 121 against England in the quarterfinal and 86 against India in the semi-final. Against Kenya, Sri Lanka made 398 for 5, a new record for the highest team score in a one-day international that stood until April 2006.

But the biggest surprise of the World Cup took place in Pune on Leap Years day as Kenya managed to consign West Indies to a 73-run defeat. Steve Tikolo, Kenya's only professional, top-scored with 29 out of 166, then Maurice Odumbé and Rajab Ali took three wickets apiece as West Indies crumbled for 93. The prize wicket of Brian Lara fell to a catch by portly, bespectacled keeper Tariq Iqbal; some thought it was the only ball he had held onto all day.

The islanders still managed to qualify though as they took advantage of the friendly group format to squeeze through in fourth place in Group A behind Australia and India.

Over in Group B, South Africa emerged as clear favourites after five hyper-efficient victories. Gary Kirsten's 188 not out against UAE was a Cup record. England, meanwhile, lost all three of their games against Test nations, wobbled against Holland, and lost their lunch against UAE (at least Neil

Smith did). Pakistan looked quite capable as well and despite a hiccup against South Africa made light work of their other opponents to finish second in the group followed by New Zealand, while England still managed to sneak through, courtesy of winning against the two underdogs.

The quarters threw up some enthralling ties, none more so than Pakistan against India at Bangalore on March 9 the second quarterfinal. Before that game though, England ran into a savage Jayasuria assault in the first quarterfinal.

At the docile pitch in Faisalabad, the Lankan opener smashed 82 off 44 balls with 13 fours and three sixes. The English had no answer as the co-hosts ran out winners with a good ten overs to spare. It was England's tenth successive defeat against a Test nation and Mike Atherton was spared no press.

But that too was less than what Wasim Akram got, the legendary paceman deciding to drop out of the traditional clash against the Indians with a side strain. There were whispers of controversy but quicker than anyone could say bookies we were caught up in a quite fantastic tie.

Riding on Navojat Singh Sidhu's 93, India posted a high target of 287. The Pakistanis were also fined one over for slow bowling rate but

side) ... but I think he has done extremely well in the past. Besides, he has won a lot of matches for India. We are hoping that he would do well in the World Cup."

He backed Irfan Pathan, another player selected despite being out of form, and hoped he would come good in the next few weeks. "Both Irfan and Sehwag have fantastic records and they have done extremely well in the past. Again, form is important as well. But they have experience, which makes a lot of difference. If there are tight games, experience can win you matches."

Vengsarkar also justified the decision to appoint Sachin Tendulkar as the vice-captain of the side. "Rahul is an experienced player, so is Sachin. If something happens to Dravid, God forbid, Sachin can lead." He added that Greg Chappell had done a "reasonable" job as coach and felt he should continue with the team even after the World Cup.

In Sydney. He was ill. He made such a speedy recovery that he later fielded as a substitute, but members of the England management team have mentioned that they saw a marked difference in him that day. Suddenly a weight appeared to be lifted from his shoulders. Suddenly he had got the rest he craved; the respite from the stresses of batting his mind so badly needed. Sadly Andrew Strauss never got that. His form never recovered; Collingwood's did in spectacular style. Or should that really be unspectacular?

"Yes, I'm tagged as a nudger and nudger -- a scamperer," concedes Collingwood -- as questions inevitably lead to the smaller grounds in the Caribbean and the suitability of England's old-fashioned game plan -- long on keeping wickets in hand, short on the importance of power plays. "What's big hitting anyway?" he asks, "Clearing the boundary by 20 yards maybe. I can hit fours. If needs be, I can hit sixes, but generally in one-day cricket if you score at a run a ball you're doing well. I like to get myself in whether it takes 20 or 30 balls and then try to make that up at the back end of the innings.

"I'm not too worried if people are whacking it all over the place, I just get on with my job."

Everton leapfrogged Reading into sixth place in the table after a 1-1 draw at Sheffield Utd, Mikel Arteta's penalty a quarter of an hour from the end cancelling out Rob Hulse's first-half strike for the Blades.

Fulham also had to come from behind to secure a 1-1 draw at home to Aston Villa. Norwegian striker John Carew put the visitors ahead in the 21st minute only to see his effort cancelled out within two minutes by Fulham's American defender Carlos Bocanegra.

The north-east derby between Newcastle and Middlesbrough ended in a goalless stalemate that did little to boost either club's hopes of challenging for a place in Europe next season.

their chase was spirited to say the least. Aamir Sohail and Saeed Anwar made a breezy start and it looked like Pakistan may yet run away with it. But when Srinath snared Anwar with the score on 84 it always looked a difficult ask. It was made even more so after the driven Sohail had his off-stump upended by the deceptive movement of Venkatesh Prasad, just one ball after he had consigned the Indian to the fence and asked him to fetch it. It will always be the enduring image of the match that incidentally was the last ever for Javed Miandad.

And after Pakistan's 39 run loss, Wasim Akram's house was promptly stoned by fans who believed he had let his country down.

In the other quarterfinals a spectacular 130 from New Zealand's unheralded Chris Harris left Australia in need of their highest total batting second to win an ODI: Mark Waugh's record third hundred of the tournament (he had already become the first man to make successive Cup tons) made sure they got it.

But the surprise was West Indies as Brian Lara's 111 inspired them to a 19 run victory over the much fancied South Africans. The match showed two things the unpredictability of the so-far sluggish West Indies and South Africa's ability to capitulate under pressure.