

Brett bats for Sachin

PTI, New Delhi

Even as the debate over Sachin Tendulkar's retirement continued, Australian speedster Brett Lee on Tuesday jumped to the Indian batsman's defence, saying he should not come under any pressure while making the decision.

"A lot has been said about this but no, Sachin should not retire. He should play till 50. On a more serious note, I think that this is something which only he can decide," Lee told reporters here.

"I can only say, I love watching him play and want him to continue as long as possible," said Lee who was in the capital to promote 'Timex' watches.

Ever since India's World Cup debacle, Tendulkar has come under criticism for his poor form and some former players like Ian Chappell have advised him to call it quits.

The express bowler, who is currently recuperating from an ankle injury, is frustrated at missing out on the World Cup action but promised a comeback within the next two months.

"Its very frustrating to sit out...I feel like jumping into the TV when I see the matches. But my rehabilitation is going very well. I have a minor operation this week, which will take care of whatever healing that is left," he said.

"Comeback should be very soon, in a couple of months to be precise," he added.

Speaking about Australia's unbeaten run in the showpiece event, Lee said he was confident of the defending champions retaining the title but felt trans-Tasmanian rivals New Zealand could prove to be a tough nut to crack.

"Aussies are playing some fantastic cricket in the World Cup and I am hoping that they continue to do so. But New Zealand are a potential threat as they have been in awesome form," he said.

SLC unsure of Moody plans

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan cricket authorities said on Tuesday they had not been informed of a reported decision by coach Tom Moody to quit after the World Cup and return to Australia.

"He told us that his focus was only on the World Cup and he will be talking to us after the World Cup," Sri Lanka Cricket official K Mathivanan told AFP.

The Cricinfo website quoted Justin Langer, the recently retired Australian opening batsman, as saying that Moody would return home after the World Cup to coach the Western Australia state side.

Moody has been with the Sri Lankans since June 2005 and the national team are on the verge of qualifying for the semifinals of the World Cup in the Caribbean.

Sri Lanka's cricket chief Jayantha Dharmadasa and captain Mahela Jayawardene have both said they wanted Moody to continue with the national team.

Another Australian, Greg Chappell, ended his two-year tenure with India last week, citing family and personal reasons, following the team's first-round exit from the World Cup.

Boys ready

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to the middle to add to his ten wickets.

SQUAD

England (from): Michael Vaughan (captain), Ed Joyce, Andrew Strauss, Ian Bell, Kevin Pietersen, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff, Jamie Dalrymple, Paul Nixon, Ravi Bopara, Sajid Mahmood, Liam Plunkett, James Anderson, Monty Panesar, Stuart Broad

Bangladesh (from): Habibul Bashar (captain), Shahriar Nafees, Tamim Iqbal, Aftab Ahmed, Shakib Al Hasan, Mohammad Ashraful, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammad Rafique, Abdur Razzak, Mashrafe Mortaza, Shahadat Hossain, Syed Rasel, Rajin Saleh, Javed Omar, Forhad Reza. Umpires: Simon Taufel (AUS) and Steve Bucknor (WIS).

Moni, Brahim

FROM PAGE 20
and Brahim drove an angular shot into the net seven minutes after the break when Arman found the Moroccan with a cheeky backheel in a goalmouth melee.

Moni then levelled the score in the 63rd minute with his third league goal when the Muktijoddha captain beat Mamun at the rival goal with a first-time volley on an Alfaz cross from the right.

Muktijoddha could have had left with full three points but Alfaz and Munna both fired their efforts over the bar.

TEAMS
Farashganj: Mamun, Khaled, Jamal (Liton), Riyad, Arup, Rajib, Rony, Kabir, Amirul, Robin (Tarik) and Khokon.

Muktijoddha: Titumir, Hassan Al Mamun, Rajani (Saiful), Ghansah, Titu, Arman Aziz (Enamul), Arman, Munna, Brahim, Moni and Alfaz (Kanchan).

Referee: Tayeb Hasan.



PHOTO: STAR

IM Abdullah Al Rakib (R) ponders his next move against FM Abu Sufian during their eighth round encounter in the 33rd National Chess Championship at the NSC hall-room yesterday.

Local academy hit back



SPORTS REPORTER

Mosharraf Hossain's four-wicket haul helped Bangladesh Cricket Academy (BCA) bounce back against the visiting Pakistan Academy on the second day of their four-day match yesterday.

The left-arm spinner bagged four for 79 from 24 overs as the home side bowled out the Pakistanis for 225 in their first innings at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The local boys, who conceded a slim two-run first-innings lead, then recovered from early blows to reach 70-2 in their second innings at stumps.

Resuming on 13-1, Pakistan Academy lost wickets at regular intervals with their innings halved for 85. The salvation, however, came from the sixth wicket stand between Adnan Raza (35) and Sohail Tanveer (58) who put on 57 runs to inspire a rearguard resistance.

Tanveer, who topscored 58 off 88 balls with nine boundaries, added

further 60 runs before offering a return catch to local captain Mehrab Hossain.

Touring paceman Najaf Shah, who captured four wickets in the first innings, once again proved effective with the new ball when he sent back the opening duo -- Jahurul Islam and Mehrab Hossain -- cheaply. However, Nazimuddin (29 batting) and Rokibul Hasan (35 batting) made up for their first-innings failure adding 60 runs for the unbroken third wicket.

SCORES IN BRIEF
BANGLADESH ACADEMY: 223 and 70-2 in 15 overs (Jahurul 0, Mehrab 4, Nazimuddin 29 batting, Rokibul 35 batting, extras 2, Najaf 2-23).

PAKISTAN ACADEMY FIRST INNINGS: 225 all out in 75.1 overs (Rauf 3, Latif 29, Zhoab 8, Yousuf 4, Alam 12, Raza 35, Tanveer 58, Sharfaraz 27, Rauf 11, Maqbool 2, Najaf 7 n.o., extras 29, Zia 2-56, Sajidul 1-33, Mosharraf 4-79, Mehrab 2-18).

Inzy lashes out at organisers

CRICINFO, undated

Former Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq feels that the World Cup would have been halted anywhere else in the world after the suspected murder of Bob Woolmer, Pakistan's coach at the time, last month in Jamaica.

In an interview with Geo Super, a local sports channel, Inzamam also suggested the death of Woolmer was due to a security lapse.

"If this terrible tragedy had occurred in any other country; if such a security lapse had taken place anywhere else they would have stopped the World Cup," Inzamam said. Woolmer, 58, was found unconscious in his hotel room in Kingston on March 18, one day after Pakistan were knocked out of the World Cup at the hands of Ireland.

The Pakistan coach was pronounced dead later in hospital and Jamaican police are investigating his death as a murder. Inzamam, who stepped down as captain after the loss and also retired from ODIs, also criticised the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for not doing enough to support the players after Woolmer's death.

"The seven days we spent after Woolmer's death were the most tense of our lives. And we were surprised that the board didn't rush someone out immediately to assist us," Inzamam added.

LTTE backs AI measure

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels Tuesday backed an Amnesty International campaign to shame Sri Lanka's government during the cricket World Cup and said it should be extended to a full sporting boycott of the island.

The London-based rights watchdog has been asking Sri Lanka to improve its rights record and has urged thousands of fans in the Caribbean to sign special white cricket balls marked "play by the rules."

Amnesty says the Colombo government, the Tamil Tiger guerrillas and other armed groups must commit themselves to allowing independent human rights monitors to oversee the island's long-running ethnic conflict.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) said the Amnesty campaign would raise international awareness among the majority Sinhalese population about "the brutality of their government against the Tamil population."

The Tigers have been fighting for a separate state for the Tamil minority in a bloody war that has claimed more than 60,000 lives since 1972.

"The apartheid South African regime was brought to its knees by using sports to raise political awareness among the white South Africans," Tiger spokeswoman Selvy Navaruban told AFP.

"I hope in a similar fashion the campaign started by Amnesty International will evolve into an international sports boycott against the Sri Lankan cricket team," she said.

However, Amnesty said the campaign was not aimed at the Sri Lankan cricket team, though the government and Sri Lanka Cricket, the sport's governing body, have already lodged a protest with the International Cricket Council.

Last week, the influential Free Media Movement (FMM), which consists of journalists and rights activists, said Amnesty's use of the tournament could anger moderates and help the government take a more headline stance.

"To mix sports in general, and cricket in particular, with human rights advocacy, is a gross error and strategic blunder in a Sri Lankan context," the FMM said.

Cricket is hugely popular in Sri Lanka and cuts through political and ethnic lines.

"Amnesty International's actions at the Cricket World Cup, for the best of intent, may well result in the worst of outcomes for human rights activists in Sri Lanka," the FMM said.

Vaughan new NZC CEO

AFP, Wellington

Former Test player Justin Vaughan was named Tuesday as the new chief executive of New Zealand Cricket.

Vaughan is a board member of New Zealand Cricket and chairman Sir John Anderson said he had all the attributes needed to lead the organisation.

He takes over in June from another former Test player Martin Snedden, who has been appointed as chief executive of the organisation staging the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand.

Vaughan played in six Tests and 18 one-day internationals between 1992 and 1997. He qualified as a doctor and currently heads a medical technology company.

"I have had a long association with cricket and hope to build on the hard work which has taken cricket in New Zealand from a largely amateur structure in the early 1990s to the professional sport that it is today," Vaughan said.

Too easy for Clarke

AFP, Bridgetown



Michael Clarke is happy that Caribbean pitches are slow and flat as he closes in on a dream World Cup average of 100.

Clarke, who recently celebrated his 26th birthday, hit an unbeaten 55 on Sunday as defending champions Australia defeated old rivals England by seven wickets to virtually wrap-up a semifinal place.

The batsman, nicknamed 'Pup' by his teammates, is having a World Cup to remember making 296 runs from five innings with a high score of 93 not out and an average of 98.66.

"There's not much seam, not much swing by the time I get out there so if I can't make runs on wickets like that, I'll never make them," said the New South Wales

player.

Despite his success, Clarke insists that it's Australian openers Matthew Hayden and Adam Gilchrist as well as skipper Ricky Ponting, at number three, who are proving crucial to his efforts at the crease.

On Sunday, the Australian reply to England's 247 had already reached 89 by the time he got to the wicket.

He and Ponting then took the total to 201 before the captain departed to a run-out.

Big-hitting Andrew Symonds then smashed a quickfire cameo of 28 as Australia cruised home with 16 balls to spare.

"With the starts we've had from the openers and Ricky, it has certainly made my life easier."

"And Andrew Symonds will have enjoyed spending a bit of time in the middle. It's great to see him in a bit of form."

Clarke's approach to his innings

on Sunday, on an Antiguan pitch which became slower as the match wore on, drew praise from England coach Duncan Fletcher who used him as an example in pacing his time in the middle.

Clarke took 42 balls to hit his first boundary.

"If you look at Michael Clarke he showed a lot of patience and that's the key -- show some patience and don't panic, it's important slowly to build momentum," said Fletcher.

"Sometimes you go in there and you can find the gaps but other times you have to work out which angles you can hit and which angles you can't hit."

"But the longer you stay out there the easier it gets and Clarke showed it -- when Ricky Ponting was batting freely he was just occupying one end and slowly got himself into nick."

'Finish on a high'

AFP, Georgetown



Ireland captain Trent Johnston urged his team to learn fast and finish their first-ever World Cup campaign on a high, saying improvement will be the key and help them in future.

"It's disappointing to lose the first three matches, but a lot of positives have come out and we can use them for the game against Australia and in the next two to finish on a high," said Johnston after his team's 129-run defeat by New Zealand here on Monday.

"Australia are potentially the best team in the world, so we need to have motivation for that game and be competitive," said Johnston, whose team lost to England by 48 runs and by seven wickets against South Africa in Super Eights.

Ireland, who had upset Pakistan to enter the next round, bowled well upfront in all three matches before being blown away in the middle and end overs.

"You can say that it's inexperience but we must learn with each opportunity and do better and better."

Ireland's best chance to score two points in the Super Eights is against Bangladesh whom they

meet in Barbados on April 15. They meet Australia on April 13 -- also in Barbados -- before playing their last match against Sri Lanka on April 18 in Grenada.

However, Bangladesh's win over South Africa and their determination to qualify for the semifinals makes the Irish task difficult.

"We have certain areas to improve, like we need to bowl death overs better than we have done and play spinners well," said Johnston, whose batsmen will face a tough test against Australian pace and Bangladesh's spinners.

They failed to cope against New Zealand spinners Daniel Vettori (4-23) and Jeetan Patel (2-32) and were dismissed for 134, chasing a challenging 264.

Ireland had put pressure on New Zealand through spinners Kyle McCallan and Andrew White who shared four wickets between them, but opener Peter Fulton's 83 and a late flurry from Brendon McCullum (47) and James Franklin (34 not out) allowed New Zealand a escape.

"We bowled some half dozen overs bad and those were in the end. Our spinners bowled outstandingly well, but we let the game slip in the last half dozen overs and chasing 260 was going to be very tough against two spinners."

Johnston said all-rounder Andre Botha was missed in the New

Zealand match.

"He (Botha) is one of our best players. We missed him in bowling and his absence left us with little options in the death overs. Kevin (O'Brien), myself and Boyd (Rankin) bowled death overs. It didn't come off and it's something we need to work hard for the next games."

Coach Adrian Birrell said New Zealand were tough opponents.

"We did well in the middle section and spinners did really well, contained them and got wickets, but McCullum and Franklin put it beyond us. The target of 260 plus was a formidable target and we were always going to struggle," said Birrell.

The Irish coach was full of praise for McCullum and Franklin who added 71 for the eighth wicket.

"McCullum has got a double hundred in first class cricket and one hundred in Tests and he batted very well and took the game away from us."

Birrell said New Zealand can win the World Cup.

"New Zealand's chances are very good. I backed South Africa and they lost to Bangladesh. New Zealand's two spinners are hand-ful, (Shane) Bond upfront is a real hand-ful and they have good all rounders and their batting goes down deep, they have a good chance."

Work cut out for Kiwis

AFP, Georgetown



New Zealand skipper Stephen Fleming has said his team are capable of winning the World Cup for the first time if they maintain their momentum.

New Zealand kept their unbeaten record intact when they whipped debutants Ireland by 129 runs here on Monday to post their sixth successive victory in the tournament, including three in the group.

Defending champions Australia and New Zealand are the only unbeaten sides with eight points from four matches. One more win

will assure them of a place in the semifinals.

"We know we are capable of winning it. I think we are better prepared this time. We are in the semifinals or close to it by winning one more game. We've got three tough games," said Fleming.

New Zealand are now just one short of equalling their 10-match winning run of 2004, having already beaten Australia three times at home before the World Cup.

Fleming said his team were close to solving their fitness problems ahead of a heavy schedule.

New Zealand are sweating over batsman Ross Taylor who has missed the last four games due to a hamstring injury, sustained during his half-century against Kenya in a

group match.

"The fitness of the side is quite good. We are getting guys who are quite close. I think Taylor is close (to regaining fitness)," said Fleming.

"We are getting back to full fitness at the right time. We have a heavy schedule now, with three games against three top sides. We have our work cut out for us, but it has been a good run so far," said Fleming.

New Zealand will now meet Sri Lanka, South Africa and Australia in the last three games in Grenada.

Fleming said he was pleased with his team's power-hitting on a slow track at a crucial stage against Ireland.

A startling revelation



KRIS SRIKANTH

I have kept quiet for 18 years but given the tumultuous events of the past few days, it is time I broke my silence. Because, like all of you the fans who support the game, the media who act as watchdogs, the players anxiously wondering what lies ahead and the Indian cricket board I care deeply about Indian cricket.

Indian cricket is in an eerily similar position to what it was on the eve of the Pakistan tour in 1989. For long, the issue of graded payments had been uneasily hanging in the air. Senior cricketers were insisting that this be implemented. In fact, just like now, the senior players and the BCCI appeared ranged on separate sides of a monetary divide. One that involved a lot of ego clashes and was threatening to affect the morale of the team.

Most senior cricketers had threatened not to go to Pakistan unless the board accepted their terms and conditions. Interestingly, I would not have been particularly affected by the graded system as despite being captain, I was neither very senior nor very junior, and would not have benefited too much or lost too much.

And then, Raj Singh Dungarpur, the then powerful chairman of selectors, who was staying in the same hotel (Taj Palace in Delhi), called me to his room. He told me in

no uncertain terms that if I abandoned my senior colleagues, he would give me a brand-new team, a second XI of sorts made up totally of youngsters, for the Pakistan tour. He said I would have the BCCI's complete backing.

I refused. I was the representative of my players. At that moment, I wanted to do my best by them. I could not betray the people who I might have had differences with from time to time, but who were also the people I considered my mates.

Incidentally, the junior most cricketer at that time was Sachin Tendulkar. I remember telling him and another junior, Vivek Razdan, to relax. I told them not to worry, that they would not be involved in what-ever happened, their careers would not be jeopardised.

Since I refused, Dungarpur was extremely upset but eventually the regular players went to Pakistan under protest, after announcing we would forfeit the tour fees. There, while I did not make many runs myself, we did very well as a team, not losing a series in Pakistan for the first time ever a great achievement for India.

On my return, even as I was preparing to go to New Zealand in a week's time, came the news of my being dropped, not just from the captaincy but also the team. I realised that Raj Singh was very unhappy with me. That was literally the beginning of the end of my career.

I accept there were huge expect-

tations from this World Cup thanks to the media (of which I am now a part), and fans do feel let down. Unfortunately, reality and expectations do not match in this case.

Still, I always believed that Indian cricket is what it is because of the public. We -- cricketers past, present and future -- are what we are only because of you, the public. But at the same time, I don't want any cricketer to suffer my fate.

This is now a time for all of us to get together, accept ground realities, make necessary cricketing solutions instead of pointing fingers at each other.

Quotes and suggestions get misunderstood and misquoted, adding to the confusion. And because of the competition in the media, things get blown out of proportion and the truth sometimes disappears. I am no saint and have been part of the middle.

Just one thing here: players have a small shelf life. They sacrifice a lot to play cricket and need to earn as much as they can in that period of playing for life after the game.

But it's time we bury our differences, if any, sit across the table and reach a solution that can be win-win for everyone -- the players, the BCCI and the fans.

Indian cricket is bigger than anything else and we are what we are because of this game.

(Former India captain Kris Srikkanth wrote this article for Hindustantimes.com)