

3 fight to fill Marvan void

AFP, Colombo

Three Sri Lankan batsmen are competing for the void created by the self-imposed absence of former captain and opening batsman Marvan Atapattu for the series against Bangladesh.

Thilan Samaraweera, Jehan Mubarak and Michael Vandort were all picked to represent the Sri Lanka A team here Tuesday in the three-day tour match with the visitors starting on Wednesday.

The 31-year-old Samaraweera who captains the A team averages 41 in Tests with five centuries. Mubarak, a 26-year-old left-hander opener, has been named vice captain and fellow left-hander Vandort has averaged 51 in six Tests.

All three were discarded after last summer's tour of England and a good showing in the three-day game should open up the chance for one of them to complete the squad of 15 named for the three Tests starting next week.

Sri Lanka skipper Mahela Jayawardene said he was disappointed by Atapattu's decision to opt out of the series. But it would open up a chance for a younger player to make an impression.

The first of the three Tests starts on June 25. Sri Lanka have so far made a clean sweep winning all seven Tests played between the two countries previously.

Butt named vice-captain

Panesar enchants Kartik

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

He loves the recognition he gets in a foreign land. Yet, Murali Kartik longs for adulation back home, coming as he does from the land of spinners. His foray with Middlesex county -- he bagged 25 wickets in eight matches under cold, seaming conditions -- has been successful this season. But more than Kartik, it's someone else who has kept the English audience spellbound: Monty Panes.

And Kartik, too, is in awe of the recent phenomenon in English cricket. "Oh, he's the crowd's darling. They simply love him here. Monty is a cute, fidgety, happy character. He's got big eyes, wears the turban in a different way; he's got his own style and, of course, Monty's theatrics and antics on the field are very popular," he tells The Indian Express over phone.

Panesar was almost charged under ICC Code of Conduct for excessive appealing in the third Test, but has received vehement support from England coach Peter Moores who attributed his appealing to the pressure situation and his enthusiasm while bowling.

And even Panesar himself later

admitted he gets "a little too carried away when I'm out there."

Kartik says: "Everybody knows he's a big bunny with the bat and is no great fielder either. So whenever he dives to make a save or smash a few runs, they love him even more. With the ball, he's been great. Monty

glued to negotiate it; last time around Ashley Giles tied them down with a outside the leg-stump line; Monty is the new threat as the West Indies team at present, and previously Australia, would vouch.

"Monty has got a classical action and he spins the ball well," observes Kartik. "But he needs to vary his pace a little bit to bring in more variation."

Monty has, on previous occasions, tried to get in touch with the 30-year-old Indian to clarify certain technical aspects. And he's kept the interactions even now.

"Yes we have been talking a lot, during the last Test match (at Old Trafford). Monty had come and spoken and a lot of those talks obviously centered around spin bowling. John Embrey, Director Cricket at Middlesex, also helped."

And did Embrey speak to Kartik prior to leaving for interview as coach to the Indian team? "No, nothing in particular. He was called in suddenly and he left in a hurry."

Asked whether Panesar would be a real threat to the Indians, Kartik evaded a direct answer. He, however, said that Panesar was a much-improved bowler now.

is picking wickets and winning Test matches for them. England haven't seen a spinner who's won them matches in recent times and more over he's a great entertainer."

India's ban in recent times has been left-arm spinners. Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar and the middle-order in general have strug-

gle a first-class county with a bunch of ageing imports in 1992, but were backed to the hilt by the local populace, they steeped in the cricket played on club ground and village green and reclaimed slagheap.

They turned up in their droves and even thanked us all for that first year despite the team finishing bottom of the county championship.

The new ground, once just an expanse of park football pitches, began to take shape in 1994 and is now a venue of high standard with a team to match. Currently third in division one of the championship, Durham has only to overcome Essex in the Friends Provident on Wednesday to reach their first-ever Lord's final. It would be no more than the enterprising, loyal people who run the club deserve.

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It was sods law, too, that this test -- the most prestigious match Durham has ever staged (previous Tests have hosted Zimbabwe and Bangladesh) -- was preceded by local flooding. "It's been hossin' down for four blimin' days," said one man in the local vernacular. Undaunted, the club have pushed the boat out to spectators. Neither the oldest nor the biggest Test ground, they set their stall out to be the friendliest.

The fare on the field has also been in keeping with the surroundings. The sight of Matthew Hoggard nipping away on a length, nipping the ball a bit this way, a bit that, with the keeper standing up to the stumps, and fielders scattered in odd catching positions, would have been replicated on Monday at Boldon, Shotley Bridge, Spennymoor or Stockton. And some pipsqueak like Shivnarine Chanderpaul would have driven the bowlers to distraction, endlessly squeezing and squinting spells. At such times you need someone with the talent, conviction, and sheer bravado of Sri Beefy. But there is of course only one Ian Botham.

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