

'Freddie the difference'

PTI, London

Sourav Ganguly feels England cricket team was vulnerable against India in the upcoming Test series in the absence of its star all-rounder Andrew Flintoff, who makes a "huge difference" to the home side.

"England are a good side. But we're lucky that Flintoff is not fit. I think he makes a huge difference to the English team. It's a beatable side. But Flintoff will really be missed," Ganguly said.

"I've seen Michael Vaughan captaining the team differently without Flintoff," he was quoted as saying by 'The Guardian' on Thursday.

Flintoff is recuperating after an ankle surgery and is doubtful to take part in the three-match Test series between Indian and England, beginning at the Lord's from July 19.

The former captain, who led India to its famous NatWest series win five years ago, praised new comers such as Kevin Pietersen and Monty Panesar under Vaughan's captaincy.

"His (Vaughan's) record is fabulous. I think he's reaping the benefits of what Nasser did. Pietersen is brilliant, going to be a great think. Monty, he's from my county, Northants, he'll walk into any side in the world," he said.

On personal front, Ganguly, who survived the test of time during his time away from Team India last year, admitted he was under tremendous pressure to make a comeback and perform.

"It's possible, that can happen (to be out of team). But when I came back into the side, I had huge pressure on me. I survived that. Then I survived the pressure of coming back into the one-day team. I don't think any pressure can be more than that."

Gayle pulls WI thru'

AFP, Dublin

West Indies captain Chris Gayle scored an unbeaten 85 as his side just did enough to beat Scotland in the last over of their quadrangular one-day international here Thursday.

Gayle's men survived a mid-inning slump to reach their Duckworth-Lewis adjusted target of 165 in 30 overs for the loss of six wickets.

All-rounder Majid Haq gave Scotland hope of an upset with a career-best return of four for 28. But Gayle, together with Darren Sammy, saw West Indies to victory with just a ball to spare.

Scotland had earlier made 152 for seven in 30 overs amidst the rain.

Daren Powell, set to join English county Hampshire after impressing for West Indies during their one-day series victory in England, took two early wickets to get rid of Fraser Watt and Haq before Scotland fought back.

In reply Gayle raced to 50 in 52 balls but Haq turned the tide after coming on in the 14th over.

He had Devon Smith caught sweeping for 32 before striking twice in two balls. Runako Morton was bowled by a beauty and Lendl Simmons then played on.

Dwayne Smith survived the hick with six but fell soon afterwards before wicketkeeper Denesh Ramdin became another wicket for Haq and with four overs to go West Indies still needed 33 more to win.

But Gayle and Sammy held their nerve and paceman Dewald Nel couldn't prevent the duo scoring the nine runs they required off the last over.

Malik eyes Twenty20 crown

CRICINFO, undated

Shoaib Malik wants his Pakistan side to go through the Twenty20 World Championship unbeaten and lift the trophy. The inaugural tournament of this kind will take place in South Africa during September.

Malik, who is with 22 probables at a training and fitness camp in Lahore, told reporters that the team is working hard to ensure they achieve that goal in South Africa after poor shows in the last two ICC tournaments, the Champions Trophy and the World Cup.

"We have to improve our fielding because I believe this department will play a vital role in winning the Twenty20 Championship. We can save 20 to 25 runs as a result of good fielding and that is very important," he insisted, echoing the views of Talat Ali, team manager, who is placing special emphasis on fielding.

Commenting on India's decision to rest several senior players for the Championship, Malik assured reporters that it will not be the case with his side. "We will select only those who deserve to feature in Twenty20 cricket and the factor of senior or junior will not be significant."



PHOTO: COURTESY

Quarter Master General of Army Headquarters Lt. Gen. Md Jahangir Alam Chowdhury (5th from R) is seen with the participants of the Techno-Foki Monsoon Golf Tournament during the inaugural ceremony at the Kurmitola Golf Club (KGC) on Thursday. Chief of General Staff and vice-president of KGC Major Gen. Iqbal Karim Bhuiyan (4th from R) and managing director of Techno-Foki SM Abdul Mannan (6th from L) were present.

Mastering Monty

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

The England-India Test series comes replete with its many sub-plots and battles within battles but the one that looks most intriguing will be between Monty Panesar and the Indian batsmen.

One school of thought has it that the Indians, masterly players of spin, will dance down the track and put him in place. The other points to Indian batsmen's vulnerability to left-arm spin -- think Ashley Giles, Ray Price, even Nicky Boje and Michael Clarke -- and believes Panesar will be a handful.

Certainly, he's already been there, done that. Remember that dismissal of Mohammad Kaif at Nagpur last year? Kaif was cruising on 91 when Panesar stunned him with a YouTube moment: The ball drifted in from wide round the stumps, landed on the middle and spun past the defence to peg back the off stump.

That was Panesar's debut series and, as has been well chronicled, he's gone from strength to strength. The flipside is that the element of surprise has gone; India's batsmen will (presumably) be more wary of him and would have seen more of what he does. Yet they will be without Virender Sehwag, the one batsman who could have taken Panesar to task. So how will the contest shape up?

So should the batsmen defend and risk giving the bowler too much respect? Bedi is wary of that too. "Playing from the crease is one way of accepting that this bowler is perhaps too good to jump out to. That's a defensive ploy. No bowler likes to be attacked. If you attack, you don't do that by staying at home."

So neither over-attacking approach nor a defensive one is prescribed. What Bedi advocates is a simple return to the basics: play on merit. "Indians are good players of spin. You have to maintain a fine balance between attack and defence. It is going to be a psychological battle."

There, too, Panesar has the patience to graft it out, nagging the

everybody earn their runs. It won't be an easy outing, as many people seem to believe."

VV Kumar, a former legspinner and a contemporary of Bedi, believes that the Indian batsmen will go for their shots and, far from deterring Panesar, feels that will help him. "He is a bowler who will make the batsmen drive and produce mistakes. The Indians like to play their shots and if he can continue to loop, flight, and spin well, they might spoon catches while driving. Any good spinner will trouble any batsman. The current lot of Indian batsmen have not played high quality left-arm spin. So I feel Monty is certainly going to be among wickets. But I hope he gets the right support from the other end. That will be the key."

"My greatest fear is that they will try to attack him in desperation," Bedi says. "To score freely of him may not be that simple. It won't be too easy to hit him out of the attack." Ask Andrew Symonds; the big-hitting Australian had attempted an all-out attack as a course of action during the Ashes, lofting Panesar over the ropes a few times, but the bowler held his nerve to prise out his wicket.

Kumar believes Panesar doesn't yet have the drift that Bedi possessed. "And it's very difficult. It will take time and lots of hard work. Bedi used to spin it much more too and Monty doesn't have a nasty arm-ball yet. But I am very impressed with the boy; he rips it well and gets it to loop nicely. He has the flight and the variation. He has improved mightily on his flight, his release and ability to pivot. He has long fingers and he can and should develop the arm-ball more."

The story goes that after he dismissed Sachin Tendulkar for his first Test wicket last year, Panesar went to get the ball autographed. Tendulkar is supposed to have told him, "It won't happen again."

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