

'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 I 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 Watts 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 hattrick 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 probabilities 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



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?

Bishen Singh Bedi, one of the greatest exponents of left-arm spin, believes he poses a real threat to India. "Previously, the Indians have tried to see of the seamers and had a crack at average spinners. England have a pretty decent seam attack so they will keep up the pressure from one end. The batsmen could then make the mistake of trying to go hard at Monty. But he is almost a complete spinner. He can block and attack. He will make

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's, 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 batsman 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 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 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.

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 play. 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 graff it out, nagging the

batsmen with the mundane before suddenly surprising them with a work of art. It's a quality that has impressed Bedi. "As a spinner, it is tempting to go after all these fashionable variations too soon and forget the importance of the stock ball. Monty doesn't do that. Ball after ball, session after session, day after day, he can rip the ball across and land in the area he wants. He has his variations: the arm-ball, the floater, change in pace, and the variations in flight but he knows the importance of the orthodox delivery. He can bowl it at will and now you will see him bring in all the other variations. He is improving every game."

Unlike Bedi, he bowls slightly quickly through the air. "It suits the sluggish conditions in England", says Bedi. "In England, you have to bowl a little quick. Not that he bowls at Derek Underwood's pace -- and he shouldn't. The two are quite different bowlers. Monty has got his basics right; a balanced run-up, a nice side-on position prior to the release, and he gives it a good tweak."

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." We don't have to wait too long to find out if that prophecy comes true.

ZC insists on Taibu return

CRICINFO, undated

Sources close to Zimbabwe Cricket have confirmed that former captain Tatenda Taibu is on the verge of signing a new contract with the board.

Taibu quit international cricket in November 2005 after threats against him and his family at a time the players were locked in a bitter dispute with senior board members. Since then he has tried to forge a career in Bangladesh, England and Namibia with limited success.

"He wants to play for Zimbabwe, he has been training with the squad for weeks now to keep himself fit," Kevin Curran, the national coach, said. "I know he is finalising his contract but that is not my department. Hopefully he will be in action against India A."

Taibu, who has remained tight-lipped throughout his time away from Zimbabwe cricket, was less certain when he spoke to the Sunday Mail. "I have seen some media reports saying that I am going to make a comeback," he said. "I only asked Kevin Curran if I could train with the team and that is all. I still have to make a decision and there are a lot of things that I have to consider. My lawyer is in talks with Zimbabwe Cricket and I will only make a decision when those talks end."

A stumbling block could well be the money that Taibu has been owed by the board for almost two years. Along with several other leading players who have walked away from Zimbabwe, most notably Heath Streak, Taibu was not paid what could total hundreds of thousands of dollars. Some of them, including Taibu, have refused to hand back sponsored cars while the dispute rumbles on.

England face Scotland next year

BBC ONLINE, undated

England will face Scotland in a one-day international for the first time in 2008, as part of a deal securing the Scots' participation in county cricket.

The match has been provisionally scheduled for 18 August with a second meeting pencilled in for 2012. England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive David Morgan said: "We are delighted to reach this agreement."

"The ODI against Scotland will be the latest chapter in the friendly sporting rivalry between the two countries?"

Cricket Scotland chief executive Roddy Smith echoed his delight about the deal.

"The ECB have been strong supporters of ours for a number of years and it was a logical step to make a formal agreement moving forward," he said.

"Having the full England side in Scotland for an ODI next year will give the game a huge boost and I am sure our cricketing public will be looking forward to welcoming the England team."

Tigers

FROM PAGE 17

Fall of wickets: 1-47, 2-74, 3-385, 4-445

To bat: P.Jayawardene, Malinga, De Silva, Muralidaran, Maharoof

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mashrafe	24	2	125	0
Rasel	31	1	104	3
Shahadat	16	1	71	0
Rafique	14	1	72	0
Ashraful	12	0	74	0
Imran	10	0	48	0

Women ease

FROM PAGE 17

winners. I am sure people back home will now start to take notice of us as we are not only competing in the tournament but also winning matches," she said.

Akhtar said the team's success was mainly because of the excellent back-room atmosphere.

"We are a very closely knit team where players care for each other. There is team spirit and, most importantly, everyone wants to play and perform for the country," she said.

LOCAL SNIPPES

FROM PAGE 17

SCHOOLS CHESS

Twenty-three players won their second round matches in the StanChart 9th School Chess Tournament at the NSC conference room.

In the class VI to X Group, Babu, Prantik, Sharif, Sayantan, Asim, Saif, Akshat, Shibli, Aniruddah, Abhirup, Sayed, Shubam, Siam, Debot, Abir, Jumrat, Rafi, Alvi, Wahid, Arif, Salman, Hemel and Mahbub were in the lead while Shaati, Pritika, Arna, Aeon, Reshma, Tahmina and Nishat have earned two points each in the girls group.

DRU CRICKET

Daily Janakantha moved to today's final of the Pepsi-Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU) six-a-side cricket tournament when they beat Amar Desh by five wickets in the semifinal at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.

Inspired by man-of-the-match Asif Iqbal, Janakantha (34-0) easily chased down Amar Desh's score of 32 for 2.

They will face Channel i in the final after the popular television channel crushed CSB by five wickets. Partha Tanvir Noved was adjudged man-of-the-match.

Khan, Powar

FROM PAGE 17

cranked up his pace and troubled the batsmen outside off. He mixed up his length well, occasionally slipping in a well-directed bouncer, and didn't flag at any point. Trott, who reached 40 without much problem, was suddenly rattled and fell to a half-hearted drive away from his body. Ambrose followed soon, undone by a fuller ball that ricochet off the edge to the wicketkeeper. Bopara and Bresnen added 40 in quick time but Sachin Tendulkar, bringing himself on just before tea, lured Bopara into an airy flick, only for Dinesh Karthik to pull off a smart reflex catch at short leg.

Gayle

FROM PAGE 17

us. I knew it was going to be slow and it wouldn't suit the seamers. losing the toss and having to bat first was almost a blessing on that wicket, and we had three spinners picked in the side and we had the conditions in our favour. Even when they were going great guns against the seamers I knew in the back of my mind that if we could just pick up a couple of wickets, and had a bit of luck go our way, we could run them close.

"I always knew there'd be a bit of fragility in the middle for the order, even though they're slightly inexperienced."

With a large crowd expected here on Saturday for West Indies' match against Ireland, and West Indies' brittle bones exposing themselves again, it is a mouth-watering prospect.

'Gunners better without Henry'



Football

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson believes Arsenal will be a better side next season even though they will be without star striker Thierry Henry.

Even with the gifted Frenchman, who has now moved to Barcelona, in their side Arsenal still finished a huge 21 points behind English champions United last term although still in fourth place.

Henry's Highbury exit has sparked predictions the north London club could fall further behind after the new season gets underway next month.

But Arsenal have never finished outside the top four since Arsene Wenger's appointment as manager in 1996 and Ferguson doesn't expect his French rival to lose that record any time soon.

"They'll be in the top four," Ferguson told Sky Sports on Friday. "I'm more convinced they will be in the top four without Thierry Henry. I just thought it was time for him to go," the Scot added.

"Arsene Wenger knew that, and I think they'll do better."

Wenger hopes to field a side full of first-team players for this week-end's frientl against fellow north London club Barnet.

"It could be a very strong team at Barnet," Wenger told www.Arsenal.com.

"Basically the players that are

back in training are available, so you could see Kolo Toure, Manuel Almunia, Gael Clichy, Mathieu Flamini, Denilson, Theo Walcott, Robin van Persie and Emmanuel Adebayor.

"They are all likely to be included so it should be a very familiar side

Wenger has just completed the signing of France Under-21 defender Bacary Sagna from French club Auxerre, his fourth pre-season capture.

"We've been very impressed by him," said club scout Gilles Grimand, the former Arsenal player.

"We've watched him both playing for Auxerre and the under-21 team and scouted him over more than 40 games."

Gullit questions youth development



Football

AFP, London

Former Dutch international and Chelsea manager Ruud Gullit called Thursday on top clubs to concentrate on developing their youth academies rather than buying in star players on big money transfers.

Gullit believes making the most of youth development is the key to a club's success.

"There are so many clubs that

have youth development, but not many players come through, they are all buying players. Is it a waste of time if you are buying players all the time and nothing comes through? That's a concern," he said in an interview with Feel Football.

The former Netherlands captain also has concerns with the development programmes set up to unearth new talent in clubs across Europe.

Gullit believes the programmes

are too intense and are causing potentially career-threatening injuries before the players even have the chance to prove their skills at the top level.

"There are so many injuries in youth at the moment - cruciates, meniscus, ankles and so on. I think when I was 14 years old I didn't even know what a cruciate was, but nowadays the kids have so many problems, so what is the reason for it? Do we train them too hard? Is the pressure too much on these kids? Are they doing sports when they are younger? What changed?"

"When I was younger, there was no pressure. You just enjoyed your football. You wanted to be a good player so you would train hard to become better and there was no pressure on you. There must be more pressure now - otherwise I don't understand why these kids have all these injuries."

Gullit hoped that clubs and the game's youth would take inspiration from Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo, who was voted both

Player of the Year and Young Player of the Year last season after an impressive performance for Manchester United.

"Ronaldo came out of a tough time and then all of a sudden he became the best player. I think it is great and it is certainly a good example for the youngsters."

"He had a lot of pressure but I think he looks like a serious boy and he has played well, no doubt about it."

"I have to say, I think clubs prepare people well for coping with the pressures of the game. They have mental coaches and coaches to help them with the press, so I think they have more help than they did in the old days. And that helps."

"Off-pitch it has changed a lot. You have to be serious in what you do because you only have until you are 34 to do all that is possible. And if you mess it up with going out and drinking and doing stupid things, it is a waste of time. It is a case of are you strong enough to resist the temptation?"

Boateng set for Spurs



Football

THE INDEPENDENT

Tottenham Hotspur have had a bid accepted for the midfielder Kevin-Prince Boateng by Hertha Berlin.

Sevilla were the first club to register an interest in the promising 20-year-old when they lodged a 2.7m pounds bid last week, however, Tottenham weighed in with a reported 5.4m pound offer to put the approach of the Uefa Cup champions in the shade.

Sevilla have since upped their offer, but Hertha's general manager, Dieter Hoeness, favours the deal put together by the London club.

"The offer from Sevilla never interested us," Hoeness said yesterday. "It was not enough. We have accepted the offer from England and now they must

reach an agreement."

Boateng said he was preparing himself for a move to Spain, but concedes that Sevilla's signing of the Lens midfielder Seydou Keita, coupled with Tottenham's interest, has prompted a rethink. "The Premier League is actually my dream league and now I am thinking about Tottenham," he said.

Boateng has made 43 appearances in two years at Hertha, scoring four goals, and earned his first cap for Germany's Under-21s against England last October.

Fulham have completed the transfer of Chris Baird in a 3m pound deal from Southampton, beating Sunderland to the signature of the Northern Ireland defender. A fee had been agreed with manager Roy Keane but Baird chose to link up with Lawrie Sanchez, who coached him at international level. He has signed

a four-year deal.

The 25-year-old becomes Sanchez's fourth signing since he took over towards the end of the last campaign following the arrivals of Aaron Hughes, Steven Davis and Diomansy Kamara.

Baird, Hughes and Davis all played in the famous Northern Ireland win over England in 2005 and David Healy, who scored the winner in Belfast, has also been linked with Fulham.

"His qualities and versatility will be a major asset for the club next season," said Sanchez of Baird.

Burnley have dismissed reports they are in takeover negotiations. It was claimed a consortium headed by former England midfielder Peter Reid was set to bid but the club said they were not "seeking any interest from outside parties".

Murali stands by Whatmore

CRICINFO, undated

Muttiah Muralidaran came in support of former coach Dav Whatmore when he rated him 'as a great coach' and said that any country could hire him and test his capabilities.

Murali's views on the former coach was totally opposite to that of his former captain Arjuna Ranatunga who advised Pakistan to avoid hiring Whatmore as coach. "I think Whatmore is a very good coach. He has done good service for Sri Lanka cricket for 6-7 years. In that period we reached the semi-finals of the World Cup, we won a World Cup and we also won 10 Tests in a row. So he has to be good. Otherwise how can we achieve all this?" said Murali.

"We had a run a great run from 2001-2003 in Sri Lanka cricket under Sanath Jayasuriya's captaincy. I don't doubt Whatmore's coaching ability. I think he is a great coach. If any other country wants to test him they can. He will give his 100 percent to them," he stated.

"Mentally Whatmore looked after the players and his management was perfect. He was not a bowling coach but a batting coach and helped the batsmen a lot," Murali further said.

He said Ranatunga was entitled to his own opinion about Whatmore. Ranatunga had reportedly told the Pakistan manager Talal Ali in Scotland to avoid hiring Whatmore as coach. Whatmore was coach of Sri Lanka from 1995 to 1997 and again from 1999 to 2003



PHOTO: INTERNET

Argentine striker Javier Saviola joyfully holds up a Real Madrid shirt with his name on it during his official presentation at the Santiago Bernabeu on Friday. Saviola turned down a contract extension with Barcelona after falling down the pecking order under coach Frank Rijkaard.