



Did U Know?

The oldest Wimbledon champion was Martina Navratilova at 46 years, 8 months when she won the mixed doubles title in 2003 with Leander Paes.



Sharad Pawar
(India cricket chief)
"I can't see any threat from the ICL. Not many people are interested in watching retired players in action. Everyone wants to see official cricket, not the oldies."

BFF plans plain B. League prize giving

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has decided to cut expenditures of the planned gala prize giving ceremony of the recently concluded B. League in wake of country's flood situation.

The BFF will donate the saved amount now to the Chief Adviser's relief fund.

The inaugural professional football league champions Abahani will be crowned in the programme, which will now be held at the NSC Tower instead of Hotel Sheraton.

Army Chief and NSC chairman General Moeen U Ahmed will distribute prizes as chief guest.

Prasad's faith in Sreesanth

CRICINFO, undated

Venkatesh Prasad, India's bowling coach, expressed confidence in the ability of Sreesanth, following the bowler's woeful performance in the second Test against England at Trent Bridge.

"He's not exactly struggling, it's probably a phase," Prasad said on the eve of India's match against Sri Lanka A at Grace Road.

Prasad admitted Sreesanth's performance was a worry but showed faith in the youngster's talent. "We've seen him bowl well, and win games in South Africa. I would say it's a bit of a concern but he's got all the talent to succeed at this level. He has a fantastic body language, his aggression is great -- we've been talking about not crossing the line --, the approach to the crease is fantastic, and these are positions of great."

He also defended Sreesanth's two deliveries -- a beamer to Kevin Pietersen and a massive front-foot no-ball -- that generated controversy during the Trent Bridge Test. "I'm sure that the full toss just slipped out of his hands -- he apologised right there. Probably with the no-ball he could not get the right jump."

Prasad, who had performed well during India's tour of England in 1996, agreed that Sreesanth needed to focus more on his bowling rather than on-field banter. "I think that's one area that is of concern. I've been talking to him as a bowling coach, one-on-one, but he's young. We need to respect the game, respect the rules. I as a bowling coach wouldn't advise anyone to cross the line." Sreesanth had been fined half his match fee for shoulder-barging Michael Vaughan during England's second innings at Trent Bridge.

However, Prasad was thrilled at the progress made by India's left-armers, Zaheer Khan and RP Singh. "It was very satisfying at Trent Bridge, in terms of bowlers sticking to the lengths we've been talking about. Of course, we did bat extremely well but the bowlers did a tremendous job. There was Zaheer but we shouldn't be forgetting RP Singh here, he took the crucial wickets of (Kevin) Pietersen and (Matt) Prior which were crucial for the team's victory."

PCB mulls shift



AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket officials said Thursday they might move two matches against South Africa from Peshawar and Rawalpindi, but denied any action would be linked to security concerns.

"There may be changes in two venues of one-day internationals in the home series against South Africa but it's an internal decision and has nothing to do with security," Pakistan Cricket Board director of operations Zakir Khan told AFP.

South Africa is due to tour Pakistan in September-October to play two Tests and five one-day internationals.

They were scheduled to take part in a one-day match at Peshawar, where they refused to play in 2003 because of security fears due to its close proximity to Afghanistan.

They are also due to play a match in Rawalpindi, twin city to capital Islamabad, where violence has erupted in the aftermath of a raid on a radical mosque last month that left more than 100 people dead.

Recent reports from South Africa suggested the team had concerns over playing in Pakistan because of the deteriorating security situation.

Cricket South Africa general manager Brian Basson told a news-

paper earlier this month that cricket bosses were worried about the situation in Pakistan but their tour was still on.

South Africa have confirmed a tour itinerary in which they play a Test in the southwestern city of Karachi, where they also refused to play on security concerns four years ago.

More than 40 people were killed in Karachi two months ago in some of Pakistan's worst political violence.

Khan said the possible venue change was an internal matter.

Meanwhile, a Cricket Australia delegation was in Pakistan to assess security and venue arrangements for next month's A team tour and an under-19 team tour in October.

Pakistan had to play their home series against Australia and the West Indies at neutral venues in 2001 and 2002 as both teams refused to tour the country for security reasons.

New Zealand agreed to tour in 2002 but were forced to cut it short after a bomb blast near their hotel killed 14 people, including French naval staff. South Africa then refused to play any match in Karachi on their tour in 2003.

The Proteas are due to arrive in the last week of September and open the Test series with the first Test in Karachi from October 1.



Monirul Islam of Alamgir Swimming Club on way to win the 100m butterfly gold in the 23rd National Age Group Swimming Competition at the National Swimming Complex yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Sharapova leads Russian charge



AFP, Carlsbad

Maria Sharapova put aside worries over an aching shoulder on Thursday to spark a Russian charge into the quarterfinals of the San Diego Classic.

Russians claimed five of the eight spots in Friday's quarterfinals of the concluding edition of this event, which will fall victim to a WTA calendar shakeup for 2008.

The top seed and defending champion swept the first nine games in a 6-0, 6-3 win over French 13th seed Tatiana Golovin.

"It was not as easy as it looked," said the two-time grand slam winner. "About half of those first games went to deuce. I gave back two breaks in the second set and was lucky to get the win

in straight sets."

Sharapova is dealing with a long-running shoulder problem that will not get worse and will slowly heal, doctors tell her.

Unseeded Maria Kirilenko followed the winning example, defeating ailing second seed Jelena Jankovic 6-2, 3-6, 7-5.

Jankovic, who qualified along with Justine Henin into the year-end WTA Championships field this week, said she was suffering from a cold during the 2hr 44min defeat.

The world number three Serb had a dozen break point chances against Kirilenko, with the Russian saving nine of them.

"Maria really played well, it was one of her best matches," said Jankovic. "I was struggling the whole time. I didn't do the right things and she took her

opportunities.

"It's difficult when you're not feeling so well. I tried, but it was just not good enough.

"This was my first match after my holiday. I still need to get back to work on my physical training and be ready for more matches."

The pair of Russian winners were joined in the last eight by compatriots Anna Chakvetadze, Nadia Petrova and Elena Dementieva.

Number three Chakvetadze won her 11th straight match, beating Ai Sugiyama 6-4, 6-4 while fourth seed Petrova eliminated Slovenian Katarina Srebotnik 6-3, 7-6 (12/10).

Dementieva, the ninth seed, dealt fifth-seeded Wimbledon finalist Marion Bartoli a 6-4, 7-5 loss.

Bartoli said she is not overly

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PHOTO: AFP

Maria Sharapova of Russia hits a backhand shot against Tatiana Golovin of France during her match at the La Costa Resort and Spa in Carlsbad, California on Thursday.

Ansars rule the pool

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Ansar swimmers dominated the pool on the second day of the Keya Cosmetics 23rd National Age Group Swimming Competition with BKSP closely following after yesterday's events at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur.

Ansars were leading the table with 14 gold, eight silver and eight bronze medals while BKSP hauled 11 gold, 12 silver and 6 bronze.

The impressive Alamgir Swimming Club from Rajshahi were third with eight gold, four silver and three bronze.

Although three new national age-group records were set on the opening day, the second day's 34 events ended without any new marks. Shikha Khatun of BKSP emerged as the fastest swimmer in the girls' 15-17 group when she won the 50 metre freestyle gold in 35.10s.

Star performer Babita Khatun of Bangladesh Ansar, however, had to remain satisfied with silver. Nawabganj Swimming Club's Maskura Khatun settled for bronze.

Babita, however, grabbed four individual gold medals to keep Ansars ahead with success in 100m backstroke, 400m individual medley, 200m butterfly and 200m freestyle.

Rafia Hasan of Niklee Swimming Club of Kishoreganj bagged the 50m freestyle gold to become fastest swimmer in the boys' 15-17 group. BKSP Ariful Islam and Towhid Mollah of Ansars won silver and bronze respectively.

BKSP's Mohammad Al Amin was in the spotlight winning four gold medals in the boys' 15-17 group. He finished ahead in 100m backstroke, 400m IM, 200m freestyle and 200m butterfly.

Monirul Islam of Alamgir Swimming Club won gold in 1500m freestyle, 200m breaststroke and 200m backstroke in the boys' 18-20 group.

BCCI claims ICC to look into prank

PTI, Bangalore

The BCCI on Friday added a new twist to the jellybean prank during the second cricket Test between India and England by claiming that the International Cricket Council had set up a committee to look into the issue.

The BCCI President Sharad Pawar told reporters here that the ICC had formed a two-member committee to look into the matter.

But when contacted, ICC Media Manager Brian Murgatroyd denied that the game's apex body had taken any such initiative.

"The ICC has taken the initiative and appointed a two-member committee, and the issue is expected to figure at an ICC meeting at Dubai on August six," Pawar said.

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A genius clown?



CRICINFO, undated

A small Indian contingent waited outside the dressing room for several hours after India had sealed the second Test at Trent Bridge. As the cricketers celebrated with beer and bhangra indoors, the fans frolicked with drums, flags and posters outside. Glances of their heroes were met with loud cheers; anyone within earshot was mobbed.

Amid the frenzy, Sreesanth emerged. Almost no one took the initial step of greeting him; one young man even sniggered, "Don't approach that fellow, he might hit you." It took a pleasant smile from Sreesanth to break the ice, following which he obliged with autographs and photos. He was so charming that one young girl asked, "Sreesanth, are you nice only when you wear your glasses?"

And therein lies the single biggest paradox in the Indian team at the moment -- Sreesanth's normalcy off the field compared to his maniacal instincts on it. Nobody, not even the bowler himself, knows which Sreesanth is going to take the field on any given day. Very rarely has India seen match-winning potential and extreme buffoonery combine so explosively. When it comes off, like at the Wanderers last year, it makes for gripping theatre; other times, like at Trent Bridge, it's slapstick.

Virtual Murali



INTERNET, undated

Australia's cricketers may soon be able to go into a virtual reality studio during a Test match and "shadow bat" against the bowlers they are about to face in the middle.

Cameras will be set up to capture as nearly as possible a batsman's-eye view of the opposition bowlers, and relay the feed to a studio near the Australian dressing room.

Players padded up and waiting to bat will be able to rehearse their innings using images gathered from the middle, and projected life-size back into the pavilion.

If the system works as hoped, it will mean that a player like Mike Hussey can go out to face Muttiah Muralidaran having already got his eye in against him in real time, with the ability to replay deliveries he found difficult.

He could, for instance, use the cameras to polish his technique against Murali's deadly "doosra", the apparent off-spinner that turns the other way.

"A batsman could pick up the cues in Murali's bowling action on that particular day so they know when it's coming," said Marc Portus, manager of the sports science unit at Cricket Australia's Centre of Excellence, which is this weekend marking its 20th anniversary.

"We're not quite at that stage yet, but it's where we're aiming to go -- possibly as early as next summer.

Sreesanth baffles. Before the start of the fourth day of this second Test, he spent 15 minutes asking the groundsman to clear up the footholds at the Pavilion end. When play began, he was running in from the Radcliffe Road end. A high-velocity beamer, a huge front-foot no-ball and a shoulder-barge capped a wretchedly erratic spell. But he still conjured up gems amid the rubbish. When least expected, a perfectly pitched away-swing would beat the bat; another would hustle the batsman. Like some random number generator, one ball in ten would surprise.

What Sreesanth could have done with was some introspection. Here was an ideal chance to play second fiddle, an opportunity to sustain the pressure at one end while Zaheer Khan got aggressive at the other. Had Sreesanth made the batsmen play more often, it was he who had the better chance of taking wickets, what with them trying to see out Zaheer at the other end. Instead he turned showman, waiting for the cameras to focus on him, and responding to a few sledges from the crowd. "I think he has a great example in Zaheer," said Rahul Dravid at the end of the match. "Zaheer has been as aggressive as anyone, without going over the top -- just performing and getting wickets."

Coming from a state that's a cricketing backwater, Sreesanth was bound to be overawed by all the attention. Three years back he was a first-change bowler for Kerala in the

second division of the Ranji Trophy; now he's expected to win Test matches. It's a gigantic leap and one that few 24-year-olds can achieve seamlessly. There's a lesson for Sreesanth to learn from Tinu Yohannan, his predecessor from Kerala who managed just three Tests, unable to cope with the expectations. India cannot afford to lose another talented youngster as they did the likes of Laxman Sivaramakrishnan, Sadanand Viswanath, Maninder Singh and Vinod Kambli.

So how does the team get the best out of him? A rap on the knuckles is an easy short-term solution but here is a young lad who needs careful handling. Greg Chappell, it is learned, knew how to deal with him -- coaxing and admonishing in equal measure.

Teammates have in the past been exasperated with Sreesanth's naatak (theatrics) but acknowledge that he is a vital member of the side. The good thing is, he has been talking to India's bowling coach Venkatesh Prasad, who rarely bowled a ball in anger during his playing days -- except once, when taunted by Aamer Sohail in a high-pressure World Cup quarterfinal. "It's a concern," said Prasad when asked about Sreesanth's on-field antics, "but we're trying to tell him not to cross the line. We need to respect the game and the rules. He needs to focus on his cricket rather than the other stuff."

Dinesh Karthik, one of

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"We've done it with footage in a training environment and simulated game scenarios, but we'd really love to start doing it in matches. You can't beat the real thing."

The virtual batting studio is unlikely to be functional in time for Australia's two Tests against Sri Lanka this summer, in which Murali requires nine wickets to beat Shane Warne's world record of 708 Test wickets.

Virtual batting is one of the startling technological developments aimed at maintaining Australia's position as the No.1 cricket nation in the world.

No longer do players rely solely on traditional net sessions and fielding practice to reach peak performance.

Work is underway on a number of projects including GPS satellite tracking of players through matches (to help tailor specific training programs), computer analysis of career patterns to aid selectors, data mining of opposition teams, special goggles to help pinpoint how top batsmen use cues from the bowler's arm to assess line and length before the ball is delivered, and so-called neural network software programs to predict performance and injury.

A GPS tracking device worn by fast bowler Nathan Bracken in a one-day international in Sydney last season showed he covered 18km during the course of the game.

According to Portus, information like that can help physical conditioners devise specific fitness programs for individual players.

Research is now showing that the numerous sudden accelerations required in cricket are part of what makes it such a physically demanding game, even if to the casual observer, players appear to spend much of a day's play doing not very much.

Data mining can give insights into the strengths and weaknesses of opposition players, and identify patterns which can be exploited.

Cricket officials are reluctant to give details, but it is known that the Australian team used information gained from data mining to help wrest the Ashes back off England last summer. Neural networks are another branch of data crunching about to have a big impact on professionals sport.

Adapted from manufacturing programs, they use performance-predicting software which has the ability to learn from its own mistakes.

"You feed information into it and get it to predict outcomes like when players might be injured, or averages, or results," Portus said.

"If it predicts the right outcomes -- fantastic. But if it doesn't, the sophistication in the software allows it to start to learn why it didn't. It will make the necessary adjustment, so next time the information goes in it will learn from its past mistakes.

"It's quite sophisticated. We haven't dived in to neural networks yet, but it's only a matter of time."