

Raina considers English stint

CRICINFO, undated

Passed over for selection to India's squad for the Twenty20 World Championship squad, middle-order batsman Suresh Raina is eyeing a stint in the English leagues to work his way back into the team. Raina said he had recovered from a knee ligament injury and needed more match practice to convince the selection committee about his form and fitness.

"I am in talks with some clubs and a final decision will be made in a couple of days," Raina told the Indian Express. "I am fit now but I need more match practice before I finally get back to the international arena."

Dropped after a poor one-day series in South Africa last year, Raina's comeback bid was hampered when he suffered the knee injury, during a Deodhar Trophy match in February. He played his first competitive match, scoring 40, for Air India against the Hyderabad Cricket Association in the KSCA Invitational Tournament on August 6.

John Gloster, the Indian team physio who saw Raina through his rehabilitation process, said that he needed another 4-6 weeks to get his form back.

"It was a tough time for me but my family supported me," Raina said. "For the past five months, I have been practicing hard. As a result, my fielding has improved."

Raina is expected to leave for England on August 16. His next target would be the home series against Pakistan in November.

Harbhajan spins Surrey to win

AFP, London

India Test reject Harbhajan Singh claimed an eleven-wicket match haul to help Surrey beat Kent by four wickets in the English county championship on Thursday.

Harbhajan, who missed out on the ongoing Test series against England, took 6-57 to follow his first innings haul of 5-34 at Canterbury as Kent failed to make 200 for the second time in the match -- 171.

That left Surrey needing just 107 to win which they reached in 24 overs.

County Championship leaders Sussex and Yorkshire were both under pressure as the title race looked set to take an interesting twist.

Top side Sussex, the champions, faced a huge task to salvage anything from their clash with Warwickshire at Hove.

Warwickshire were 77 for two in their second innings at the close, 342 ahead having earlier bowled out the hosts for 168 to take a first-innings lead of 265.

Adam Shanthy and James Anyon both ripped through the Sussex order with four wickets apiece, only Luke Wright offering resistance with 61.

Glen Chapple took four wickets and England all-rounder Andrew Flintoff, continuing his recovery from ankle surgery, three as Lancashire skittled Roses rivals Yorkshire for 144 at Headingley.

The hosts were 22 for five at one point before Tim Bresnan (39) and Adil Rashid (34) at least offered some resistance.

At stumps Lancashire were two ahead on 146 for two with Paul Horton unbeaten on 82.

Nayeem

FROM PAGE 17

Two players including senior centre-back Nazrul Islam picked minor injury and the Indian coach wanted to avoid such risks.

The camp is being run with 47 players and mostly, they did power and physical training in the initial period before going to game practice just a couple of days earlier.

"The footballers have been very sincere in training and I feel they have the urge to do something good. I am satisfied with the fitness," added Nayeem, who has yet to decide which side he will accompany.

"Both the tournaments are tough. So the decision will be taken after discussion with the federation officials."

Acting general secretary of Bangladesh Football Federation and chairman of National Team Management Committee Manzoor Hossain Malu, who spent the entire day at BKSP yesterday, said Nayeemuddin should stay with the team that will be the base of the SAFF Football Championship.

"Our main target is SAFF Championship. The stronger teams are coming to the Nehru Cup and I feel it would be more helpful for us if we send the team with Nayeemuddin to India," opined Malu.

Hosts India, Cambodia, Syria, Kyrgyzstan and another team will play in the Nehru Cup (August 18-29) along with Bangladesh.

The organisers, meanwhile, rescheduled the Merdeka Cup (August 18-29) grouping and Bangladesh will be pitted against Indonesia, Singapore and Zimbabwe on August 21, 23 and 25 respectively in Group B.

Myanmar, Lesotho, Laos and hosts Malaysia will play in Group A.



Aminul Islam Khan (C), National Sports Council secretary, inaugurates the Meril Media Cup football tournament at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Seeds fall on opening day

SPORTS REPORTER

Seeded teams tumbled on the opening day of the Meril Media Cup football tournament with UNB pulling off the biggest upset when they beat Channel I 2-0 yesterday.

A total of eight group matches of the popular seven-a-side tournament, organised by Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA) and sponsored by Square Toiletries, were held at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Among other seeded sides, Samakal drew 1-1 with New Nation, BTV were held 0-0 by Financial Express while Bangla Vision shared points with Jai Jai Din in a goalless draw.

Sangbad recorded the biggest win of the day with Kallol scoring a

brace in their 3-0 defeat of Inqilab.

CSB News edged Ittefaq 1-0, Ekush Television defeated Manabzamin by a solitary goal while Ajker Kagaj also won by an identical margin against Sangram.

Daily Star will open their account today when they face Ittefaq.

Aminul Islam Khan, secretary of the National Sports Council, declared the 24-team event for journalist open. Bangladesh Olympic Association's COO Col (ret'd) Wali Ullah and Square Toiletries head of marketing Mohammed Sayeed were present as special guests.

Former national footballer turned coach Shafiqul Islam Manik and country's number one goalkeeper Aminul Haque were match adjudicators.

A minutes' silence was observed before the start of play to pay tribute to the dead victims of the country-wide flood.

Bowlers practice survival techniques

CRICINFO, undated

Australia have altered their focus from swing to Twenty20 as they try to find a way for their bowlers to cope at the World Championship in South Africa.

Troy Cooley is hosting a camp for the fast men at the Centre of Excellence in Brisbane this week to prepare for the two-week tournament in South Africa.

This time last year the bowlers were working on traditional and reverse-swing in a bid to tackle England, but the unforgiving nature of Twenty20 has forced some experimenting. "We are really trying to develop plans to help the bowlers survive in the game," Cooley said in the Courier-Mail. "It's a pretty tough one for bowlers to survive in."

"We have been doing a lot of talking about that and we are working on some technical things as well. Last year we worked on swing bowling, this year we are working on Twenty20." Bruce Reid, the former Australia bowler who was a part-time coach with India, is also at the camp where Brett Lee is continuing his return from ankle surgery.

Flintoff happy with action

CRICINFO, undated

Andrew Flintoff has dismissed England bowling consultant Allan Donald's claim he needs to modify his action to avoid suffering another ankle injury.

Flintoff has just resumed bowling after surgery and Donald said the position of his front foot is a concern.

"I'm happy with the way I bowl. Three years ago my foot was probably a lot more closed (in the delivery stride) than it is now," said Flintoff.

"I'm 29 and it would take a lot to change things now."

Flintoff's on Thursday declared himself fit to bowl unrestricted after claiming three wickets for Lancashire against Yorkshire.

After missing the entire international summer he is in England's one-day squad for the one-day series against India, starting on 21 August.

But this is the third time he has had to undergo surgery on his troublesome ankle and he has admitted in the past the problem will affect him throughout his career.

Donald, who took 330 Test wickets, said last week that the way Flintoff's front foot points inwards and twists on delivery could make him susceptible to injury.

"It's a major issue that could creep up again," he said.

Flintoff said of his surgery: "The specialist and the surgeon are pleased with how it went and it needed to be done."

"One thing we have looked at is footwear to allow my feet to move in the way they do. I need boots that work with that rather than fight it."

'Aus prepared to cover for greats'

CRICINFO, undated

Stuart Clark says Australia are well prepared to cover the losses of Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath, but admits it will be strange not having them around to "save the day". The two retirements have elevated Clark to major weapon instead of support bowler for the start of a packed schedule over the next 18 months.

However, Clark is confident Australia won't suffer in the same way as West Indies when they lost a series of great players. "You would be lying if you said that Australia will for sure continue to be as dominant without those guys," Clark said in the Sydney Morning Herald. "They're irreplaceable, like Viv Richards was. But I think we're in a much better position to deal with those losses than the Windies were."

Clark, who has taken 47 wickets in nine Tests, is likely to form a bowling attack with Brett Lee and Shaun Tait - if they recover from ankle and elbow injuries - and he knows the new combination faces extra obstacles. "The thing we're all going to have to get used to is not having the safety blanket of Glenn and Shane around," he said. "With them, you always knew that if things weren't quite going your way, they'd be there to save the day."

Changes to the Australia team haven't been the only thing affecting Clark during the off-season. Geoff Lawson, who has helped Clark with his bowling, and Trevor Bayliss, the former New South Wales coach, have moved to Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

"It will be strange not having 'Henry' (Lawson) around," Clark said. "He's been helping me since I was 17, and in many ways is for me what Terry Jenner is for Shane Warne. (Bayliss) has been really good for my cricket since he came on board at New South Wales."

Sri Lanka arrive for two Tests in November and Clark and Bayliss have already swapped text messages to "rev each other up". "He's told me that he knows my game inside out and that the Lankans will smash me around the park," Clark said. "I've told him that they're no chance if he's basing that on his useless coaching tips. It should be fun."

Unseeded Russian Maria Kirilenko also advanced with a 6-3, 6-4 triumph over Gisela Dulko or Argentina.

Kirilenko, 20, set up a quarter-final clash with third-seeded Serbian Ana Ivanovic, a 6-2, 6-2 winner over Czech Lucie Safarova.

Second-seeded Serbian Jelena Jankovic also booked her quarter-final berth, defeating Austrian Sybille Bammer 6-2, 6-1.

She'll face Victoria Azarenko of Belarus, a 6-1, 6-2 winner over Ukrainian Kateryna Bondarenko.

SLC's tough

FROM PAGE 17

Brian Lara, Test cricket's highest run-getter, is the only top player to have confirmed his participation in the competition, which carries a winner's purse of one million dollars.

Ex-Australian stars Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath have dismissed claims by the ICL that they have already signed up but the duo continue to be linked to the series.

Dinesh doesn't

FROM PAGE 17

A welcome surprise to all those who believed that he too may have been 'done in' by the umpire's dreaded finger.

Having scored a half-century in each of the previous six Tests that he has played as opener, Karthick did a brilliant job at the top of the order and was a satisfied man at the end of the day.

"We have got off to a very good start. We are happy with the way we have battled," he said before looking ahead to the second day's play.

'King worst coach'

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

West Indies captain Ramnaresh Sarwan has called Bennett King, the former national team coach, "one of the worst coaches" he has ever had and alleged that he was abusive to players. This disclosure, reported in the Jamaica Observer, comes a day after his criticism, in another paper, of the West Indies' team management during the side's tour of Pakistan last year.

"The coach was not as open as I would have liked and he was definitely not firm enough," Sarwan was quoted as saying in the Observer. "He was also very aggressive and vocally abusive to certain players to the point where he even threatened them. Obviously, this made those players very uncomfortable."

King resigned as the West Indies coach in April following their exit from the World Cup.

The Observer, quoting the Caribbean Media Corporation, said Sarwan had called Julian Hunte, the new board president, to congratulate him on his appointment. "We

had a very good conversation and he's looking forward to us getting together," Sarwan said. "It's vital that the board and the players get on the same page and I am very encouraged that Mr Hunte has asked West Indies Players' Association (WIPA) president Dinanath Ramnarine to become a



BENNETT KING

non-member director. That's a step in the right direction and it shows a commitment on the part of the board to work closely with the WIPA." Sarwan also said West Indies'

preparation ahead of the World Cup had been poor and felt it was important the squad got together before an international tour for a 10-12 day camp in Trinidad & Tobago or Barbados, which, in his opinion, had the best practice facilities in the region.

He said it was also important for the team to get a coach, manager and trainer in place for the long term. David Moore, the current coach, is expected to coach the side till the Twenty20 World Championship, after which the board must decide if they want to retain him or pick a new coach.

Regarding his form as a batsman, Sarwan felt he had robbed himself of close to 1500 runs in the past three years. "I recently spoke to Australian captain Ricky Ponting, who told me that I should concentrate on my batting when I am at the crease," Sarwan said. "He said he does not think about his role as captain when he's batting. That made sense to me because if you make runs, everything else will fall into place and make your job as captain that much easier."

Fury over fake site

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

The Australian Cricketers Association is furious that some of Australia's leading players are being lampooned and misrepresented on the MySpace website.

A clearly fake entry of all-rounder Shane Watson with a background of near-naked photos is the worst example of what the ACA is calling a "plague".

Under Shane's Blurbs on the site, it says: "I'm Shane Watson, but you probably recognise me cause I'm hot. I like to model, especially nude. I like hot chicks. I like to play cricket, but I'm usually injured." Under the subject title: "Who I'd Like To Meet", it simply states "Blonde chicks".

The website was listed as unavailable this morning.

ACA chief executive Paul Marsh claimed the false entries on MySpace were a "pathetic exploitation by people who have nothing better to do with their time".

"These sites misrepresent

players in a very personal way," Marsh said.

The ACA is working with MySpace and Cricket Australia to shut down the sites as they are identified.

Watson's site has 132 friends' sites listed, including some claiming to be from teammates, two sites claiming to be Richie Benaud, along with sites listed as the Baggy Green Cap, The Australian Team and Vegemite.

The all-rounder's manager Neil Maxwell said it was hard to take such entries seriously.

"Obviously it's a flaw in the system that needs to be addressed before there are legal ramifications," Maxwell said. "It's not in the best interests of high-profile people to be misrepresented in that way."

Former Test batsman, now a national selector, David Boon is also listed with the identifying tag: "Shit, did I putice in my Esky."

An amused Boon said his son Jack, 16, had recently pointed out the site.

"If someone wants to have a bit of fun, good luck to them, but it's

definitely not me," Boon told The Australian last night.

"It's been going on with the internet for years. What's the difference with MySpace?"

A Cricket Australia spokesman said the governing body had been working constructively with MySpace.

"They've closed at least half a dozen dozen in recent months," the spokesman said. "Unfortunately it's the nature of the digital world we live in."

In its latest magazine, due to be published this month, the ACA makes a plea to all past and present players to search MySpace to see if they are being misrepresented.

"If you become aware of your identity being falsely used by MySpace or would like to check if your identity is being infringed, go to www.myspace.com, type your name in the search section and proceed by clicking on the search button. Please contact the ACA if you require assistance in having these pages removed," the magazine article says.

Dhoni blasts England

FROM PAGE 17

By wicket-keeper Matt Prior, 48 not out and VVS Laxman 20 not out following an impressive 91 from opener Dinesh Karthik.

Laxman, on 41, was relieved by Prior, slow to set off before dropping a one-handed diving chance when the ball was heading straight to Strauss with Sidebottom again the unlucky bowler.

But tall pace bowler Chris Tremlett ensured Laxman didn't make the most of his let-off when the batsman, on 51, was drawn forward by a good length ball and Prior, who has conceded 29 byes this innings, held a simple catch.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the second day of the third and final Test between England and India at The Oval on Friday:

INDIA: Firstinnings (overnight 316-4) Karthik c Prior b Sidebottom 91 Jaffer c Pietersen b Anderson 35

Dravid b Anderson 55

Tendulkar c Strauss b Anderson 82 Ganguly lbw b Collingwood 37 Laxman c Prior b Tremlett 51 Dhoni c Cook b Pietersen 92

Kumble not out 60 Zaheer Khan not out 49 Extras: (b-29, lb-12, w-2, nb-6) 7 Total: (For 7 wickets in 148 overs) 559

Fall of wickets: 1-62, 2-189, 3-199, 4-276, 5-354, 6-417, 7-508.

To bat: RP Singh, Sreesanth.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Sidebottom	32	8	93	1
Anderson	37	5	156	3
Tremlett	36	5	123	1
Panesar	34	5	120	0
Collingwood	7	1	11	1
Pietersen	2	0	15	1

ENGLAND: Andrew Strauss, Alastair Cook, Michael Vaughan, Kevin Pietersen, Paul Collingwood, Ian Bell, Matt Prior, Chris Tremlett, Ryan Sidebottom, Monty Panesar, James Anderson
Toss: India

Yousuf set

FROM PAGE 17

"In light of his comments on a TV show recently and his refusal to get in touch, despite repeated attempts from our side, it could be a tough situation. You can draw your own conclusions about his future from that."

Razzaq, unavailable for comment, was said to be one of seven Pakistan players approached by the ICL; if he doesn't sign up with Pakistan, it will only increase speculation that he may sign up with the ICL.

Younis Khan and Danish Kaneria are the only others who haven't officially signed the contracts but they have informed the board that they have accepted the terms and conditions. Both are currently playing county cricket in England and are expected to sign the contracts soon.

Mission: Crack Big Four

FROM PAGE 17

who can break this rapidly tiring dominance?

With some 500 million Euros invested into new players across the Premiership, Tottenham Hotspur still look the best bet.

Dimitar Berbatov made a huge impact in his first season in England and even if his goals aren't enough, there is 16 million pound man Darren Bent for backup. A speedy Aaron Lennon and sturdy defence might yet propel Spurs to break the dominance.

Manchester City and Newcastle are new starters. Sven Goran Eriksson and Big Sam Allardyce will look to mould the squad into their own image. Sven has done a major rebuilding and has attracted talent of the like of Valerie Bojinov and Roland Bianchi to the City of Manchester. Allardyce has managed to hold on to both Michael Owen and Oba Martins and if those

two click then the Magpies can also put false dawns behind them.

Without being too harsh, the rest save perhaps Everton and Aston Villa make up the numbers and may provide a few surprises.

Hopefully this could be the

season were the dominance of the Big Four ends but it still looks unlikely.

Come May don't be surprised if either of the two Reds or the Blues from London are the ones hoisting aloft the famous trophy.

Maria survives a scare

Tennis

AFP, Los Angeles

Top-seeded Maria Sharapova struggled past Michaela Krajicek here Thursday to become one of four Russians to book quarterfinal berths at this 600,000-dollar US Open tune up.

Sharapova, winner of the tier one title in San Diego on Sunday, clawed her way to a 7-6 (7/4), 6-7 (3/7), 6-4 third-round victory over her unseeded Dutch opponent.

After they split the first two sets, Krajicek gained the upper hand with a break to lead 4-3 in the third.

Sharapova battled back to break in the next game to put the set back on serve.

Sharapova faced a break point again in the next game, but the defending US Open champion rallied to hold.

After fending off two match points, Krajicek finally was broken to

close the match, which lasted 2 hours, 48 minutes.

Krajicek fell to 0-3 lifetime against Sharapova, who will face compatriot Elena Dementieva in the quarter-finals.

Dementieva, the ninth seed and defending champion advanced Thursday when No. 5 Daniela Hantuchova retired in the second set of their third-round match due to an upper-respiratory illness.

Dementieva held a commanding 6-3, 4-1 advantage when her Slovakian opponent conceded. The 25-year-old Russian, who improved to 8-3 against Hantuchova, has yet to lose a set in three matches at this tournament and owns an eight-match winning streak here dating back to last year.

While Sharapova leads the all-time series with Dementieva, 6-2, she lost their semi-final meeting here a year ago.

Fourth-seeded Russian Nadia Petrova won the day's first match with a 6-1, 6-2 victory against

Slovakian Katarina Srebotnik. Petrova won 33-of-42 first-serve points and blasted 10 aces en route to her fifth consecutive win against the 26-year-old.

France's Virginie Razzano is Petrova's quarterfinal foe after defeating Sania Mirza of India, 6-1, 7-6 (10/8).

Petrova won her only previous meeting with Razzano, who is ranked 52nd in the world and seeking her first WTA singles title.

Unseeded Russian Maria Kirilenko also advanced with a 6-3, 6-4 triumph over Gisela Dulko or Argentina.

Kirilenko, 20, set up a quarter-final clash with third-seeded Serbian Ana Ivanovic, a 6-2, 6-2 winner over Czech Lucie Safarova.

Second-seeded Serbian Jelena Jankovic also booked her quarterfinal berth, defeating Austrian Sybille Bammer 6-2, 6-1.

She'll face Victoria Azarenko of Belarus, a 6-1, 6-2 winner over Ukrainian Kateryna Bondarenko.

Federer sets the pace

Tennis

AFP, Montreal

The top five seeds swept into the quarterfinals of the Montreal Masters on Thursday with Roger Federer setting the blistering pace.

The Swiss number one played to perfection a day after celebrating a birthday on court, blowing out the candles on Italian qualifier Fabio Fognini 6-1, 6-1 in just 44 minutes.

"People like to say, 'I couldn't get into the rhythm and stuff.' It's not true," he said. "I had a perfect rhythm out there today."