

Abuse could aid Murali

AFP, Sydney
Muttiah Muralidaran has warned any abuse from Australian bowlers will only spur him to break Shane Warne's world record in Sri Lanka's cricket tour here later this year.

The heavily-scrutinised Sri Lankan spinner has dared Australian fans to heckle him as he chases the nine wickets he needs to pass Warne's world record tally of 708 in the Australian great's own backyard.

Sri Lanka take on the world champion Australians in Tests in Brisbane and Hobart in November and a one-day tri-series with India and Australia early next year.

"He is comfortable with what Australia is like," Muralidaran's manager Kushil Gunasekera told Melbourne's Herald-Sun newspaper Thursday.

"He understands the harassment given by spectators will only make him more inspired and motivated. It will help him bowl better.

"Murali is happy to be taking on that challenge because Australia is a real test. He will come to Australia."

Merdeka Cup

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they will fight. Our boys now have the ability to fight back even against teams like Qatar and Korea after conceding goals," Babloo added.

Hassan Al Mamun also sounded confident.

"The responsibility is on us. The motivation is to win a place in the SAFF Championship team. So, the players will try their best," said the top fullback for over a decade.

"When we trained with the ball, our Nehru Cup colleagues had edge in the first two days but we dominated the latter part of the camp. The difference is that they have more experienced players than us," said Hassan.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: MN Shakil, Mazharul Islam Himel; defenders: Hassan Al Mamun, Parvez Babu, Amit Khan Shuva, Arafat Rony, Mahmudul Hassan, Akram Hossain, Jahurul Islam; midfielders: Matur Rahman Munna, Jumarul Islam Mithu, Arup Baidya, Manunul Islam, Enamul Haque Sharif, Rony Islam; forwards: Saifur Rahman Moni, Mohammed Rony and GM Mamun. Officials: Asaduzzaman Khasru (coach), Amirul Islam Babu (manager), Hasanuzzaman Babloo (coach), Ujjal Chakrabarty Shibu (assistant coach) and Monirul Amin Shammi (physician).

Bedi isn't

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match career has been marred by controversy over his bowling action since Australian umpire Darrell Hair no-balled him for throwing in 1995.

He was no-balled again in Australia in 1998 even though his action was cleared by an Australian bio-mechanics expert. The ICC has also absolved him of any wrongdoing.

Muralidaran has taken 700 Test and 455 one-day wickets.

Boucher in hot

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champions. Second prize is to be 50-over world champions. Twenty20 only comes after those, really," he said.

Cricket SA announced Boucher would be charged under clauses relating to "unbecoming or detrimental conduct", making comments detrimental to the game, to a particular tournament or match, and critical of the selection of a team.

Malik cool

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The pacer has appealed against the fine.

Reports said after the row, some six players told the board on Wednesday they would not play in the Twenty20 World Cup if no action was taken against Zakir, a former Test player.

Gerrard breaks

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game, it would be a risk to push him again and again, because it could become more serious," the Spaniard said.

"I still need to talk to (England manager) Steve McClaren but I think he will understand it would be a big risk."

McClaren has already lost one high-profile player to a hairline fracture: Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney suffered such a break in his left foot in Sunday's 0-0 draw at home to Reading and will be out for two months.

Night of few

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Steauna Bucharest conceded in the last minute to draw 2-2 at BATE Borisov of Belarus but the Romanians have a good chance of progressing to the group stage alongside Dinamo Bucharest, who drew 1-1 at nine-man Lazio on Tuesday.

In Tuesday's other first leg matches, Celtic's Glasgow rivals Rangers won 1-0 at home to Red Star Belgrade, Valencia beat Elfsborg 3-0 and Rui Costa grabbed both goals as Benfica took a 2-1 advantage over FC Copenhagen.

The second legs take place in two weeks' time.



Players of Meril Cup champions Ajker Kagoj receive the winners' trophy from secretary general of Bangladesh Olympic Association Kutubuddin Ahmed (2nd R) at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Federer rebounds with solid win



AFP, Cincinnati

World number one Roger Federer rebounded from a loss in the Montreal final by taking out his frustrations on France's Julien Benneteau 6-3, 6-3 at the ATP Cincinnati Masters on Wednesday.

The Swiss star, denied his 50th career title on Sunday when he went down to surging Serb Novak Djokovic, pounded into the third round with a good-standard performance.

Federer won the title two years ago but went down in a shock upset 12 months ago to Britain's Andy Murray, one of only five defeats last season for the Swiss, who will play Thursday against Marcos Baghdatis of Cyprus.

Baghdatis defeated Juan Chela 6-7 (6/8), 6-4, 6-2 in another late match. It was a day of devastation for favourites, with Spanish ace Rafael Nadal joining Djokovic on the sidelines as leading seeds crashed to upset defeats in the second round.

"I put extra pressure on mem" said the Swiss after the upsets of his leading rivals. "I'm happy I'm the guy who got through. The court here is much quicker than Montreal.

"I find this court always a struggle from the baseline. I tried to come in to the net more than usual. It was a good game plan."

Argentinean Juan Monaco benefited from Nadal's misfortune, winning 7-6 (7/5), 4-1 after 98 minutes after Nadal's second injury retirement this year. He withdrew in the first round at

BCB names

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Ahmed Sajjadul Alam Bobby, however, took a break from the meeting last night to inform reporters that the board expected to reach a concrete decision about a coach by early September.

"Whether we are to add more candidates to the short-list of three or not would be settled next month," told Bobby.

"We have also decided to stick to the plans of the last executive committee about domestic cricket but a committee will be formed with ex-players, coaches and organisers to look after the pros and cons of the programmes. They will also try to give a long term strategic formula to improve the standard of domestic cricket," he added.

It was learnt that although no tender was submitted to sponsor the clothing of the Tigers, three different companies bade to become the

Chelsea edge ahead

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Eriksson was thrilled after City beat visitors Derby at Eastlands thanks to a 43rd-minute goal from home-grown midfielder Michael Johnson, 19, in only his 12th match.

"It's a long way to go yet so we have to keep our feet on the ground. It's a good start we've had - six points after two games, two clean sheets - very good and it couldn't be better," Eriksson said.

"I'm quite sure in the future we will play better football as well because some of the new boys lack fitness.

"Everything looks very positive." Sunderland scored a crucial injury time goal for the second game running as they claimed a 2-2 draw in an exciting clash with Birmingham City at St Andrews.

Former Birmingham striker Stern John scored the key goal in a dramatic finish.

"I knew he'd score, because in the corridor here I saw a picture of him scoring as a Birmingham player," Keane said.

"There weren't too many chances, and I think scrappy would describe

Sydney in January against Chris Gucione.

Djokovic, playing his first match since becoming the first man to beat Federer and Nadal in the same event, lost all of his momentum as he fell 6-4, 6-1 to Spain's Carlos Moya.

"He was playing well, I didn't find myself in the whole match," said Djokovic. "I didn't get any returns in and he was really making a lot of pressure.

"He was very consistent and I made a lot of unforced errors."

World number two Nadal had taken treatment for his left arm cramps at the start of the second set after losing the first. He had admitted this week he was tired after last week's exertions.

"It was stupid to continue playing because I felt I couldn't do anything. I was feeling worse and getting dizzy. It's stupid suffering on court for nothing."

"I couldn't grasp the racket very well. I didn't feel anything when I touched the racket," said the disheartened Spaniard.

"I didn't feel very well when I went to the court. It was a tough day."

Nadal had little to say about his immediate plans but is sure to recover morale in time for the US Open starting a week from Monday.

Nadal's ouster was the tip of the iceberg for seeds with number six Fernando Gonzalez and eighth seed Richard Gasquet falling as well as Ivan Ljubicic and Mikhail Youzhny.

Juan Carlos Ferrero, a 2006 finalist, stunned Chilean Gonzalez 6-2, 7-6 (9/7) as the South American lost for the third time during this hard court summer season without yet to post a

victory. Nicolas Almagro ousted Ljubicic 6-4, 6-4. American youngster Sam Querrey defeated Youzhny 5-7, 6-3, 6-4.

Lleyton Hewitt won his fifth match on the hard courts as Gasquet retired with hand blisters to give the combative-Australian a 6-1, 3-2 triumph.

Hewitt, who lost a Montreal quarterfinal last week to Federer, spent just 51 minutes on court, as his eighth seeded opponent could not go on.

The 20th-ranked Australian is trying to rebuild his ranking after signing on with Sydney-based coaching guru Tony Roche.

The former number one and two-time grand slam champion will play Austrian Jurgen Melzer, who beat Croatian Mario Ancic 6-3, 2-6, 7-6 (11/9).

"I played a lot better, and came out of the blocks well," said the Australian. "At the start he was hitting the ball like he always does."

"He's very fluent from the back of the court and he's got all the shots and hits a lot angles as well off both sides."

Hewitt played 2002 and 2004 finals in Cincinnati but has never lifted the title. The win was his 27th of the season against a dozen defeats for last spring's Las Vegas champion.

Seven to join ICL

PTI, Hyderabad

Undeterred by the Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI) threat of imposing bans and withdrawing financial benefits, seven Hyderabad Ranji Trophy players on Thursday announced their intention to join the Indian Cricket League, giving a further boost to the rebel series.

The 21-year-old Ambatti Rayudu, who is seen to be a promising prospect, was among the seven players who have decided to align with the Subhash Chandra-owned Essel Group's parallel venture.

After signing several retired players in the past few weeks, this is the first time that current Ranji Trophy players have been decided to sign for the proposed Twenty20 tournament to be held in October.

President of Hyderabad Cricket Association G Vinod described the development as "very embarrassing" and said it would no doubt weaken the Hyderabad Ranji team.

Apart from Rayudu, Vinay Kumar, Ibrahim Khalil, I S Reddy, Anirudh Singh, Kaushik Reddy and Shashank Nag were the other players to walk out of the team.

Tykes stint for Inzy

AFP, Karachi

Former Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq said Thursday he will fly to England next week to spend a short stint with Yorkshire, replacing his countryman Younis Khan.

"I was approached by Yorkshire county for a short stint and I have accepted it, as I see it as a great opportunity to keep my fitness for a hectic international season," said Inzamam.

The 37-year-old will play three four-day matches and as many one-day matches, after Younis - the county side's regular overseas player - is released for Pakistan national duty in next month's Twenty20 World Cup.

Ajker Kagoj clinch Meril Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Ajker Kagoj lifted the Meril Media Cup football tournament for journalists yesterday with a 2-0 win over Bangla Vision in the final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The Bengali daily, who had won all their matches of the 24-team event convincingly, maintained the flowing game although Bangla Vision had a bright start.

The early domination of the private TV channel, however, fizzled out as man of the final and tournament top scorer Barik Anjam scored his fifth goal after a superb combined move minutes before the short whistle.

Belal Hossain sealed the victory for Ajker Kagoj from a counter attack in the very first minute of the second half.

Bangla Vision captain Shawkat Hossain Bahar was adjudged the player of the tournament.

New Nation clinched third-place after the other losing semifinalists UNB gave walkover in the play-off earlier on the day.

Daily Star, who showed true sporting spirit before and after being eliminated from the quarterfinals, received the Fair Play trophy.

Bangladesh Olympic Association's acting secretary general Kutubuddin Ahmed distributed prizes as chief guest.

BOA's chief operating officer Col (ret'd) Waliullah, NSC director (admin) Akbar Hossain, Bangladesh Archery Association president Rajibuddin Ahmed Chapal and sponsor Square Toiletries' head of marketing Maik Mohammed Sayeed were present as special guests.

The winners received Tk 5,000, the runners-up Tk 2,500 and the third-placed team Tk 1,500 as prize money from US-based Kids Vision Channel.

It was fifth time Bangladesh Sports Journalists Organisation (BSJA) organised the popular football meet successfully.

India hold

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Dravid elected to field. With the second delivery of the fifth over, delivered from wide of the crease, Ajit Agarkar pitched one on a good length and the lack of swing caught Navdeep Poonia plumb in front as he tried to work it fine. RP Singh gave Fraser Watts a few full deliveries to work with before holding one back on a length, moving it away, and drawing the finest of nicks off the face of the bat for a comfortable catch to Dhoni.

Bhulia talks

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beyond that match. "We need to concentrate on the Cambodia match now. If we win that, we can go forward from there. It all depends on how we play tomorrow," the Englishman said.

Australian Scott O'Donnell coaches Cambodia and Houghton said the Southeast Asian team would be hardworking and tough to beat.

"The teams from that region play a certain style of football and we cannot take them lightly," he said.

The five-nation tournament would be a good preparation for the World Cup qualifiers coming up next.

Jose can't wait

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"We knew the changes would ask different questions of us. They played with a lot more depth in the second half and that allowed Frank Lampard to push on for the first goal which was a bad one from our point of view in lots of ways.

"But their second goal from Drogba was great finish.

"When you go down 2-1 so quickly in the second half all the energy at half-time evaporates. It was hard for us to get into the game and the sending off made it very, very difficult."

Injury blow

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Spurs, with Ledley King, Michael Dawson, Aaron Lennon and Gareth Bale missing through injury, have slumped to the bottom of the Premiership after losing their first two matches against Sunderland and Everton.

Joi should at least have Wales left-back Bale and South Korean Lee Young-Pyo back soon.

"Gareth Bale is looking better," he said. "Our medical team have also told me that Young-Pyo Lee is up to 85 per cent fitness and that will soon be 100 per cent."

Germany

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Germany beat San Marino 6-0 and Slovakia 2-1 in June's Euro 2008 qualifying matches and face away games with Wales and the Republic of Ireland in the next two months in their bid to reach next summer's European Championships.

Back to speed



CRICINFO, undated

"If people call my home and get the answer 'He is at his second home,'" Munaf Patel says, "they know I am in Chennai, at MRF." Indeed, the pace academy seems to have become something of a home away from home for Munaf - much like a boarding-school kid who does not want to go home during vacations because he won't be able to play there. Whenever he finds the time, Munaf comes to Chennai. He has been doing so for five years now.

It is easy to see that Munaf is at home at MRF. In Chennai he is a relaxed man. If he has much on his mind, he doesn't show it. He has bonded with the students at the school; he has picked up some Tamil; he knows the names of the kids who come for autographs. ("They come every year," he says.) After a period of play with the children, who are clearly having a ball after a day at school, he gets to the nets.

The nets are housed in the premises of the Madras Christian College High School. The ground is quite nondescript, and even the immediate neighbours would likely not be able to provide directions if one asked for the MRF Pace Academy. It is just the kind of place for an international fast bowler in rehabilitation.

In a career of just over a year, Munaf has broken down twice - in fact, since November last he has largely been a passenger with the team. He did not play a single full Test on the South Africa tour. He then missed the four-ODI series against West Indies but returned in time for the World Cup, which for India lasted just three matches. He then broke down with a back injury in Bangladesh. The selectors, this time, decided to be stern and sent him back home. Before the England tour Munaf was declared fit at the bowlers' conditioning camp in Mysore. And then he was found to be less than match-fit just before the team was picked.

Munaf cannot not know that he has got himself a reputation for dubious fitness. The comments made by Sandeep Patil in 2004, when he coached the India A team that Munaf was a part of, began to ring true last year. "Munaf was a big disappointment," Patil had said. "He developed a shoulder injury. The physio checked him and said everything was okay. But he could not bowl and finish his spells. I see it as more of a mental problem than physical. He played one-and-a-half matches in a one-and-a-half-month tour."

"He has let us down," a national selector was quoted as saying by The Times of India recently. "We cannot

keep picking him again and again just on promise. He has to back it up with fitness and play out a full series."

At the academy, head coach TA Sekhar is happy with what he sees. He does not believe Munaf is a walking magnet for injuries. "He does have a fast twitch to his muscles, which gets him the pace, but he is not a special case."

At the nets Munaf works up a good pace; he is visibly faster than any of the others there, Irfan Pathan included. The mind goes back to a recent article written by Mike Selvey in The Guardian, bemoaning the lack of fast bowlers in world cricket. "Where are the genuine pace aces?" Selvey wrote. "There is (Brett) Lee certainly, (Steve) Harmison when he can be roused and Shane Bond when fit. The three slingers - (Fidel) Edwards, Shaun Tait and Lasith Malinga - are rapid, but that is about it really, isn't it?"

A little over a year ago Munaf would perhaps have been part of that roster. Back then he was hitting about 140kph consistently, impressing all who saw him. During the Champions Trophy last year, though, a new Munaf was on display - running in from wide of the stumps and moving towards them in the final leap; more accurate, economical, but down on pace. Although he had developed into India's best one-day bowler, the change surprised everyone - not least Sekhar.

"To me, he was asked to bowl like (Glenn) McGrath, that's where the problem started," Sekhar says. But that doesn't explain Munaf's brittleness, does it? It does, according to Sekhar - at least the latest back injury.

"The idea behind fast bowling is to have all your movements towards the batsman," Sekhar says. "He ran in straight, but he jumped towards fine leg, just before the stride. The batsman suddenly was at a different angle."

"Naturally and biomechanically, if your force doesn't go in the right direction, problems are bound to happen. McGrath can do it because he is bloody strong. Munaf is strong but not that strong. When you are bowling that way, you have to rotate to bowl. Naturally there is a twist. Initially it would have been stiffness, then pain; then he is not able to bowl." Munaf has now eliminated that final sideways movement, but just why did he do it in the first place?

"I thought line and length was more important in one-day cricket," he says. "I was feeling good with that action; the team was getting good support too. I was feeling good because that inward jump made the away-going delivery more effective." One wonders if the presence of a specialist bowling coach then would have helped, if the tinkering with the action was what caused the injury.

"But now," says Munaf, "as Sekhar sir has advised, I am running in straight

and going for full pace. I enjoy it, people watching also enjoy it. That pace is natural; and I won't lose. I can raise it whenever I want to."

"I feel bad that I have got injured twice in a short career," he says. "It's worse to see the team do well from outside. The worst feeling was getting injured in South Africa. I played next to nothing. The wickets were such that I felt we could have won the series had I played."

"Rustic" is a tag that gets naturally attached to Munaf. There is a somewhat patronising school of thought that says he is the sort that needs to be guided constantly, that his brittleness lies in his mind and not his body. One of the reasons for coaches and selectors to have developed such an opinion could be that Munaf has frustrated by showing promise and not being able to live up to it. Munaf thinks otherwise, though. "They must have seen something to say that. But only I know what's happening in my back or my shoulder. That they can't see. If I am talking to you right now, how will you know if I have an internal injury?"

"It has not helped that I have got injured twice in a year and a half. But before that, I have only got injured once in domestic cricket."

Munaf seems to know his game better than people give him credit for. At MRF he can be seen correcting other bowlers, advising them. Pathan, who is also at MRF, looks for Munaf's approval of the way he is loading, going into his delivery stride. In fact, Munaf is referred to as "coach" at the academy. "When he talks to them, he is also looking to learn something," Sekhar says. "He is looking to improve himself whenever he sees other bowlers."

Munaf has fulfilled his first short-term goal: to get fit and selected for the one-dayers in England. He is also reportedly close to signing for Worcestershire, where Zaheer Khan spent the last season and came back an improved bowler.

The time of agony is over, and his first chance comes against the team who were at the receiving end when he made his debut at Mohali last year. With the other fast bowlers doing well in England and a few more looking to make comebacks, Munaf will hate to create vacancies again - through injury most of all.

Love T20, says Cooley



INTERNET, undated

Treasured by Australia's bowlers for his spiritual support as well as his technical expertise, Troy Cooley's latest advice to the country's leather-fingers is simple: Twenty20 can be your friend.

When Cricket Australia's 25 contracted players gather on Queensland's Sunshine Coast ahead of next month's first Twenty20 world championship, the renowned bowling coach will encourage his bowlers not to think of themselves as cannon-fodder, which must be tempting when a game is geared entirely around hard-hitting batsmen, but to embrace it.

"Otherwise it will gobble you up," Cooley said.

Critics of Twenty20 have said bowlers may as well be replaced with bowling machines, and that it can be particularly damaging to the mental health of young spinners.

Former Australian paceman Michael Kasprovicz once joked, having played the game when it was first introduced by the English counties, that bowlers should leave their egos in the dressing room.

Cooley, the former Tasmanian paceman recruited from England to guide Australia's quicks, promotes a different point of view.

"The attitude has got to be that you can have an impact on this game. Nowadays Twenty20, just like one-day cricket in the past, is an avenue that you will see people making their debuts in," he said.

"It's really going to highlight all the little deficiencies and you are going to have to be ready to go in Twenty20 cricket, because otherwise it will gobble you up.

"As a bowler, you know the promotion of the game is all about bash and runs. I see it as another challenge and another way to improve."

Cricket Australia will send its triumphant World Cup squad, with the exception of retired Glenn McGrath, replaced by the previously injured Brett Lee, to South Africa.

Australia, which has won three of the five Twenty20 internationals it has played, wants to add the trophy to its cabinet.

"Nobody wants to be embarrassed. I know you can leave your ego at the door, but that's pretty hard when you are on centre stage. You have got to have an ego that will accept the game and you've got to survive in it," Cooley said.

"It means you have to be more precise in the way you train because your execution is going to be under the spotlight, so be it. There's nothing better than practising perfectly."

While the South African tournament is the immediate focus, Australia is also preparing for a limited-overs tour of India and the Australian Test summer against Sri Lanka and India.

Cooley recently accompanied left-arm paceman Mitchell Johnson to the pace foundation in Chennai to work with Test legend Dennis Lillee in order to acclimatise to conditions in India.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution time of 25 mins.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers. Includes the clue: Today's Cryptoquip Clue: N equals F

CRYPTOQUIP
AN R FYLBJ LN JVPBBOALD
A O G T V D G R Y L B D W
O T A J A D F G M A D F O, O M L B E W
A G I V P R E E V W R O G V R E I R D W?
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: CAN YOU BELIEVE THAT ACTOR JACK JUST EMPLOYED A LIVE-IN HOUSEKEEPER TO BE HIS LEMMON AIDE?
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: N equals F