

Best days are lying ahead for Flintoff

AFP, London

Andrew Flintoff reckoned the best years of his career could still be ahead of him as he prepared for his England return during the upcoming one-day series against India.

Injury problems have beset the all-rounder since he played a leading role in England's 2005 Ashes success but, following a fresh bout of surgery on his troublesome left ankle in May, he is due to face India in Southampton on Tuesday in the first of seven one-day internationals.

Flintoff told Saturday's edition of Britain's Sun newspaper: "I believe the injury could actually help extend my career because I feel mentally very fresh. I won't be playing when I'm 50 but I'm only 29 and there's a lot left in me. I hope my best years are ahead of me."

For all his Ashes triumphs in England, it was a different story for Flintoff come the return series in Australia during the 2006-07 season.

The Lancashire star, leading England in the absence of injured captain Michael Vaughan, saw Australia win back the Ashes 5-0.

Then at the World Cup, which followed England's tour of Australia, he was stripped of the vice-captaincy after a drinking session ended with him going out on a pedalo in the early hours of the morning in St Lucia.

"For two or three years, most things went the way I wanted," said Flintoff. "But I've had some setbacks with injury, losing the Ashes, struggling in the World Cup -- and even the pedalo business."

He added: "But I really feel I can get better. My bowling is improving and I've been working hard on my batting."

"The ankle feels great. The op was something I needed and every-one is pleased with what I've been able to do since."



PHOTO: INTERNET

England A captain Vikram Solanki swivels as he works the ball towards square-leg during his 60 against India in a warm-up game at the Northampton Cricket Club ground yesterday.

Drizzle ends

FROM PAGE 17 was slipping from their grasp.

A sedate stand put the Lions back on the rails. Nixon and Bopara added 73 in 14.4 overs, steadying a boat rocked by spin. Bopara recently said he wanted to emulate Sachin Tendulkar and some of his delicate touches would have won his hero's approval. Tendulkar wasn't playing today but created excitement in the stands nevertheless - an autographed bat of his was at stake in the day's lottery. Nixon, meanwhile, was following in the footsteps of Andy Flower, reverse-sweeping at every given opportunity. It was that very shot, though, which led to his downfall: overbalancing to a faster one by Yuvraj Singh down the leg side and watching Mahendra Singh Dhoni whip the balls off in a flash.

Dhoni, leading the Indians after Rahul Dravid decided to rest, chose to field this morning. Two factors could have prompted the decision: the overcast conditions at the time and the forecast for afternoon showers, in which case the team batting second knows the exact requirements. India's fielders were sprightly for most part, barring two tough chances going down - Uthappa running from mid-on and grassing a lob from Nixon, Munaf failing to hold on to a one-handed caught and bowled off Bopara. Munaf was the most disappointing of the seamers, struggling with his length and timid with pace. With the first one-day just three days away, India's seam attack is still well short of hitting their straps, though their batsmen, for what little there was on show today, appear to be in decent nick.

Result: Match abandoned due to rain.

Comeback win

FROM PAGE 20 between Balitsch and Hanke.

Balitsch made a surging run from midfield and passed inside to Hanke who guided the ball back into his path as he continued his run into the box and coolly slotted the finish between Miller's legs.

Result: Match abandoned due to rain.

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No 'Fantastic Four'

FROM PAGE 20 Barcelona have won all of their pre-season games and are already being tipped as the favourites for the league title this season but Eto' urged caution.

"Until now we have played games in pre-season where the objective is to find our best form. We have done well up until now, but playing in the league is not the same. There is something extra there," he said.

Pippo hands

FROM PAGE 20 Gilardino went round him, the Milan striker lost his footing as well in a shoulder-to-shoulder battle with Nocerino.

Juve's best opportunity came in the final minutes, as Tiago unleashed a fierce strike that Dida fingertipped over the crossbar. The Brazilian goalkeeper also plucked a Nedved attempt out of the air.

"They gave the impression that

Henin on course



AFP, Toronto

Top-seeded Belgian Justin Henin defeated sixth seed Nadia Petrova, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 to advance to the semi-finals of the 1.34 million dollar hard court tournament on Friday.

Chinese qualifier Yan Zi also advanced to the semi-finals of the US Open tune-up as ailing Wimbledon finalist Marion Bartoli retired while trailing in their quarterfinal clash.

The world's top-ranked player, Henin captured one of her 34 career titles here in 2003 before falling to the retired Kim Clijsters in the 2005 final.

Playing in her first tournament since a surprising collapse in the semi-finals at Wimbledon, Henin has been sharp in her first three matches, including a 7-5, 6-2 victory over China's Peng Shuai.

Henin has now won 11 of her 13 career meetings with Petrova, including seven of eight on a hard court.

The two also squared off here in 2003, with the 2003 US Open cham-

panion recording a straight-sets victory in the third round.

Petrova, who dropped just five games in dumping No. 10 Patty Schnyder on Thursday, last beat Henin in 2006 in the final of the clay court Berlin Open.

In the semi-finals, Henin will face Yan, was leading the seventh-seeded Frenchwoman 6-2, 3-0 when Bartoli decided she couldn't continue.

The 22-year-old from China was coming off a 6-3, 5-7, 7-6 (7/5) victory over Greece's Eleni Daniilidou on Thursday. She also upset No. 4 Ana Ivanovic in the second round.

On the other side of the draw, second seed Jelena Jankovic moved into the semi-finals by defeating Virginia Razzano of France, 7-5, 6-2.

The Serbian, who posted a 6-2, 6-3 victory over No. 13 Sybille Bammer on Thursday, is looking for her fifth title of the year.

Jankovic said the blustery winds made playing difficult. "We were, you know, both struggling a little bit because with this kind of windy conditions, the balls

are not going quite where you want them to go. And especially in the serve, when you toss the ball, you have a little bit of difficulties," she said.

"My main focus was on the movement, to really move my feet and try to get behind the ball the best as possible, and really be focused out there. Watch the ball carefully because it's moving everywhere, so you really have to be focused. And you cannot let your concentration go down."

Jankovic had battled a stomach ailment on Thursday, but said she was feeling better.

"I took some medicine before I went on court, just for precaution, I didn't want to have the same like yesterday," she said. "It's not the best thing, but I felt fine during my match."

Jankovic will meet No. 12 Tatiana Golovin, who upset third seed Svetlana Kuznetsova of Russia, 2-6, 7-5, 6-1.

It was the second win for the Frenchwoman in three career meetings with Kuznetsova.

Bhuttia promises attacking game

PTI, New Delhi

Indian football team captain Baichung Bhuttia on Saturday sounded a warning to the rivals, saying his team would continue to play with the same aggression that saw them steamroll Cambodia 6-0 in the opener of the ONGC Nehru Cup.

Baichung said the team played an out-and-out attacking game which kept up the opponent under pressure throughout the entire 90 minutes and he promised there would be no let up for the rest of the tournament.

"This will be our style of play throughout out the tournament, make no mistake about it. Our coach wants us to play like this and we are going to play attacking football throughout the tournament," Baichung said after his team's practice session at the Janaki Devi Memorial College here.

Playing with a 4-4-2 combination, India started aggressively and were down to the throat of Cambodian defence right from the word go. In fact, India's biggest ever scoreline in the Nehru Cup could have swelled further had not some of the chances in the first half gone a begging.

The delighted skipper said the win had given enough confidence to his teammates.

"As a captain I would love to see that sort of score after every match but I know it is not possible to get a 6-0 or 7-0 scoreline everytime. What is important for me is that the whole team came together and played well," he said.

"Our passing was good and the moves that we made were well executed. We were right in front from the start and though we missed some chances in the first half, there was a flurry of goals in the end," he said.

India will next take on Bangladesh on Monday.

Issa to lead

FROM PAGE 17

September 1, the 3rd against Sri Lanka on Sept 3, the 4th against India on Sept 4 and, the 5th and last group match against Korea on Sept 6.

The final match of the competition will be held on Sept 9.

SQUAD

Issa Miah (captain), Zahid Hossain (vice-captain), Mahbubullah Shakil, Mamunur Rahman, Yamin Hossain, Shamsuddin, Mustafizur Rahman, Imran Hossain, Tabib A Noor, Khandaker Hasan Ahmed, Shahidullah, Qamruzzaman, Rahul Kanti Roy, Mosharrar Hossain, Russell Mahmud, Zahidul Islam, Zahid Bin Talib and Iqbal Nader.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

FROM PAGE 17

Meanwhile, Abdur Rashid informed that the Federation has so far received Tk 432,000 for the Asia Cup camp of the national team and expects another Tk 1,000,000 on Sunday from the National Sports Council (NSC).

DIV 3 FOOTBALL

Nurul Afsar of Euro Famous scored the all-important winner in their opening Third Division Football League game against Jurain Janata Club at the Bir Shreshtha Shaheed Sepoy Mostafa Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Striker Afsar scored the winner in the 68th minute.

In the day's other match, PWD beat Gazirchat by the same margin 1-0, scored by Jewel Ahmed in the 5th minute.

Earlier, CEO of Bangladesh Olympic Association Col. (ret'd) Mohammad Wali Ullah inaugurated the league.

BFF vice-presidents Abdur Rahim and Sirajul Islam, acting general secretary Manjur Hossain Malu, assistant general secretary Anwar Hossain Ujjal, and League Committee chairman Abdur Razzak and secretary Asfaruzzaman Sohrab were also present.

SERVICES KABADDI Bangladesh Police crushed Prisons Directorate 82-20 with six creditable lonas in the Services Kabaddi League at the Mirpur Shaheed Sohrawardy Indoor Stadium yesterday.

In the day's other two matches, Bangladesh Rifles beat Bangladesh Air Force 86-26 while Bangladesh Army demolished Civil Defence & Fire Service 62-16.

War of words

FROM PAGE 20 win at the Madjeski Stadium. "Did they see the game?" Pizarro said. "Of course he kicked me and if I hadn't pulled my leg away, I'd have broken my leg. I was lucky that I did pull my leg away, but I still have a mark there. Yes, he cut me. You could see that my sock was cut as well."

ICL entices Asif



PTI, Karachi

Stepping up their player signing up drive, the Indian Cricket League (ICL) has wooed Mohammad Asif with a more lucrative second offer of 10 crore rupees, local media reported yesterday.

"The ICL has offered Asif 100 million rupees for a three-year contract and the pacer is carefully assessing the various aspects of the offer before taking a decision next week," the Dawn reported on Saturday quoting Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) sources.

The ICL had last month offered 9 crore rupees each to Asif and fellow fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar which they had refused.

The sources also said the PCB was concerned about the congregation of several Pakistan players in London and were wary of their

intentions to join the rebel League.

Younis Khan, Inzamam-ul-Haq, Abdul Razaq, Saqlain Mushtaq, Mushtaq Ahmed and Shahid Afridi are all in England these days where a former Test captain and wicketkeeper is intensely lobbying for the ICL, said the sources.

Meanwhile, ICL has announced plans to expand it from the initial six to a 12-team format within the next three years and the league would feature teams like Bombay Jets and Madras Heat.

The ICL's official website informed that initially the teams would each comprise six internationals and nine Indian players while saying that retired Australian batsmen Justin Langer and Damien Martyn had both declined its offers.

The ICL website also indicated that retired New Zealand all rounder Chris Cairns was more likely to join it while denying that captain Stephen Fleming has been approached.

It has also indicated that negotia-

tions were on with retired Australian greats Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath.

Already the ICL has roped in former West Indies great Brian Lara as the first high-profile signing for its inaugural six-team Twenty20 tournament later this year.

It got a shot in the arm yesterday with the decision of seven current Hyderabad players, including former India under 19 captain Ambati Rayudu, joining the rebel league and thereby effectively checking their chances of representing the country in official Tests and ODIs.

The BCCI has already issued a statement that any one was free to join the league but they cannot expect to get benefits from the Cricket Board or be connected with its activities, effectively meaning they would be barred from playing in any form of cricket that the board conducts.

Durham rise at Lord's



BBC ONLINE, undated

Opener Michael Lumb and one-drop Sean Ervine edged veteran Otis Gibson's first two balls to slip as Hampshire's chase for 313 in the Friends Provident Trophy final at Lord's began disastrously yesterday.

Durham posted 312-5 after being put in by Hants skipper Shane Warne on their first appearance in a Lord's final.

Phil Mustard, who made an aggressive 49, was unluckily being adjudged lbw before Kyle Coetzler (61) and Shivnarine Chanderpaul (78) put on 111.

The scoring slowed for a while but Dale Benkenstein crashed 61 off 43.

Hampshire skipper Shane Warne won the toss but his seamers struggled early on with Phil Mustard making an aggressive 49 before unluckily being adjudged lbw.

Kyle Coetzler (61) and Shiv Chanderpaul put on 111 and the latter looked set for a century until run out for 78.

The scoring slowed for a while but Dale Benkenstein crashed 61 off 43 and Otis Gibson a rapid 15 to boost the total.

Their county were making their debut in a Lord's showpiece but they showed no sign of nerves even though Daren Powell bowled regularly in excess of 90mph on a quick and bouncy surface.

Mustard was strong on both sides of the wicket and motored on despite the departure of Michael Di Venuto, who was brilliantly caught by Michael Carberry at mid-wicket.

The wicket-keeper batsman lifted Dimitri Mascarenhas over wide long-on for six and was on the

brink of a deserved half century when James Bruce won an lbw verdict with a ball which pitched outside leg-stump.

Mustard questioned umpire Ian Gould's decision as he approached the pavilion - but the rules demand an immediate appeal.

Coetzler and Chanderpaul shrugged off that blow quickly to take on the seamers and Warne's leg-spin.

Chanderpaul could have gone for 18 when Chris Tremlett - who was strangely brought on in only the 19th over - had a confident leg-before shout rejected by Gould.

The left-hander, who was virtually immovable against England, made the most of that escape by pulling Tremlett majestically for four and dispatching him over mid-wicket for a six.

Warne's problems were increasing as Coetzler hammered Mascarenhas through cover-point and pulled the skipper to reach 50 off 64 balls, before producing a peach of a cover drive off Mascarenhas.

The century stand came up in 109 balls and when Coetzler thrashed Sean Ervine, a match-winner at Lord's in the 2005 final, into the top tier of the grandstand, it looked grim for Hampshire.

But Coetzler prodded the next ball tamely to Warne at short extra-cover.

Chanderpaul powered on after reaching his fifty off 60 balls, sweeping Ervine for a maximum and stroking three fours off one over from Caribbean colleague Powell.

With the 200 coming up in the 35th over the scene was set for carnage but Collingwood rejected an unrealistic second run and Carbery threw accurately for Warne to do the rest.

Durham slowed up just when they needed to accelerate but Benkenstein heaved Ervine and Powell for sixes to get his team going

again.

Collingwood was expertly snafled by Mascarenhas at backward point but Gibson smote Tremlett over mid-wicket for a mighty six and through extra-cover before the tall paceman hurled a wild beamer at him.

Benkenstein hit the last three balls of the innings for six, four and four to provide a real flourish and went off with Gibson knowing they held the upper hand.

It was the highest score in a 50-over Lord's final and only Warwickshire, who hit 322 to beat Sussex in 1993, have scored more to win one - but that was off 60 overs.

BRIEF SCORES

DURHAM: 312 for 5 in 50 overs (Chanderpaul 78, Coetzler 61, Powell 2-80). HAMPSHIRE: 10 for 2 in 5 overs (Gibson 2-4).

Pompey bury

FROM PAGE 20

Sol Campbell missing with a groin injury that could rule him out of Wednesday's friendly against Germany, Anelka caused Portsmouth plenty of problems and headed just wide before half-time.

Gary Speed had a chance to equalise on the hour when he timed his run perfectly to meet a Nolan cross, but his header was well saved by James.

That was as close as Bolton came and Matt Taylor scored the hosts' third goal in the 88th minute.

Referee Steve Tanner ruled Cid's challenge on Kanu was worthy of a spot-kick, even though the French defender appeared to take the ball.

Taylor gleefully took advantage as he stroked home the penalty to seal the points.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Participants and organisers of a 22-day Coaches Workshop pose for photographs during its inaugural function at the National Tennis Complex at Ramna in the capital yesterday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

CROSS 1 Advice morsel 6 Moel of baseball lore 12 1960s jacket style 13 Rangers' play area 14 Spoon-bender Guller 15 Ermine Eerie figure 18 Censors, in a way 20 Chills and fever 21 Robert Mueller's org. 23 Prior night 24 Dalmatian pattern 25 Outer garment 27 He's nowhere man 29 Redemmed a check 31 Hebrew letters 35 Saxon-phonic supply 37 "Scall" 38 Biz bigwig 41 Insurrectionist, for short 43 Toss into the mix 44 Dogfight participant-pants 45 Nab 47 PR event 49 Lassen 52 Starred 53 Blackbird 54 Calcats? figure 55 Before 56 Under-standing paper 57 Group character 19 Duck 21 Govt. agncy. 22 Trawler equipment 3 Fears 4 Caspian feeder 5 Private student 6 Ladle 7 Pultizer contemporary 8 Darjeeling, e.g. 9 Expenditure 10 Angler's prize 11 7-Down's paper 17 Campania's capital 19 Duck 21 Govt. agncy. 22 Feathery accessory 24 Frivolous one in an old song 26 Fencing move 28 Museum supporter 30 Conger 32 Old Egyptian ruler 33 Scuttle 34 Turf 36 Visit briefly 38 Syrup flavor 39 Earth tone 40 Crystal-lined rock 42 Point a finger at 45 Traffic pylon 46 Encourage evildoers 48 Saurter's home 50 Teeter-totter quorum 51 Curvaceous character?

Solution time: 25 mins. 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