

Gilchrist only for Tests?

CRICINFO, undated
Adam Gilchrist is contemplating something he never thought he would do -- leaving one-day cricket to focus on Tests.

"I had never thought I would ever do that," Gilchrist said in the Courier-Mail about becoming a Test specialist.

"It is not something I am looking at now. But where before I would have dismissed it, saying 'I'll play I would want to play both forms'...

Australia's schedule over the next 12 months is hectic with Test series against Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, West Indies and Bangladesh.

Olympics could see Twenty20

CRICKET'S world governing body is seeking membership of the International Olympic Committee so Twenty20 matches can be part of future Games.

"The long-term objective is to have cricket in the Olympics," International Cricket Council chief executive Malcolm Speed told reporters in India.

Cricket was last part of the Olympics in Paris in 1900 when Great Britain beat France to take the gold medal.

But it is due to be played at the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou, China.

Three years ago, the England and Wales Cricket Board began a campaign to have Twenty20 cricket included in future Olympics.

But although archery will be staged at Lord's when the British capital hosts the Olympics, there is no possibility of cricket being added to the list of sports to be contested.

A total of 26 sports have been approved for London after baseball and softball were dropped from the list and squash, karate, rugby union sevens, golf and roller skating failed to poll enough votes among IOC members to replace them.

Murali blow

FROM PAGE 21
complained of muscle pain between his right elbow and shoulder after bowling 30 overs in the English county match for Lancashire against Kent on Wednesday.

Muralidaran later consulted Sri Lankan team doctors in Colombo over the telephone and was advised to rest, sources said.

The off-spinner is also in danger of missing the home one-day series against England in early October.

But he should be fit for the two Tests against Australia in November where he needs nine wickets to overtake the retired Shane Warne's world record tally of 708 wickets.

Sri Lanka opens their Twenty20 campaign against Kenya in Johannesburg on September 14.

Big guns progress

FROM PAGE 24
Copenhagen 1-0 on Kostas Katsouranis's 18th-minute goal to advance on a 3-1 aggregate.

Defending champion AC Milan, Internazionale, AS Roma, Real Madrid, Barcelona and Stuttgart were among the teams that qualified automatically for the 32-team first round.

Anelka signs

FROM PAGE 24
"I am very happy with my form, the club and the manager so signing a new contract was not a difficult decision.

"Hopefully we will prosper together because I would not have remained at Bolton if I had thought we could not win trophies."

Bolton manager Sammy Lee admitted he was relieved to have kept Anelka.

"We have worked tirelessly behind the scenes to get him to commit his long-term future to us," he said.

"Nicolas is one of the most sought after strikers in the world and I am delighted that he will continue to wear the Bolton shirt."

"It is also a boost for the dressing room because a team never wants to lose anybody of Nicolas's stature and presence."

Sehwag relishes chance

CRICKET

CRICINFO, undated

Virender Sehwag, ignored for India's ongoing tour of England, says the Twenty20 format will suit his aggressive batting style and hopes a good performance in the World Championship will pave his comeback into the Indian team.

"It's a new format and my kind of batsmen, who loath to leave or defend a ball, would definitely love it. I'm waiting for it as it would allow me to just walk in and start playing my shots without bothering much," Sehwag told reporters on Wednesday after he and ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed unveiled the 12 kg silver-rhodium trophy in New Delhi for the event, to begin from September 11.

The importance of the event is not lost on Sehwag either. "Personally, this is important for me to get

back to the Indian side. I've been working hard on my batting skills and I hope to do well in South Africa to get back to the squad."

He also hailed Mahendra Singh Dhoni's appointment as captain for the tournament. "It's wonderful to have Dhoni as the captain. Everyone knows he is a matchwinner and has a great knowledge of the game. He has done a brilliant job behind the captain also and my wishes are with him."

Purists may sneer at the format but Sehwag said the event would be competitive enough and taken seriously by cricketers. "Last time I played it, it was more of a fun thing. Now you have 12 teams vying for top honours and so it would be competitive. Whether it's an ODI or Test or Twenty20, you are always going to be criticised when you don't get the runs. So the players will definitely take it seriously."

And he also had a word of sympathy for the bowlers, who would be in for some harsh treatment. "I know it's a sort of punishment for the bowlers and every team would probably like to go into the tournament with 11 batsmen, who can bowl a bit."

Pondering on strategy, Sehwag said allrounders would play a key role in the tournament. "It depends on how good you are on that particular day, but the key would be to score 200-210 runs and defend it. For that, you need allrounders, who can bowl and then bat down the order."

Sehwag also dismissed the notion that Twenty20 has no place for the ageing players like Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid and Sourav Ganguly, who have opted out of the event. "If Tendulkar bats for 20 overs, he would get a century and that would definitely help the side. I don't think Twenty20 is necessarily a youngster's game."

Something new

CRICKET

AFP, New Delhi

Asia's big guns will need a slice of beginners' luck and good fortune to propel them forward at the inaugural Twenty20 World Championships.

Cricket's shortest version may have become an instant hit in England and South Africa, but Asian teams and officials are struggling to adapt to what they still consider a hit-and-giggle outing.

Asia has organised more one-dayers than any other region, but India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have been so reluctant to embrace Twenty20 cricket that they have yet to host an international match.

Domestic Twenty20 cricket was introduced in England in 2003 to boost dwindling viewership. Indian officials say cricket-mad Asian nations have never faced such a problem.

Cynics, however, blame the lack of interest on commercial reasons. After all, a full-scale one-day international allows 100 overs of advertising breaks as opposed to just 40 overs for a Twenty20 game.

Asia's big four are clearly short of experience as they head into the World Championships to be played in three South African cities of Johannesburg, Durban and Cape

Town from September 11-24.

Sri Lanka, the top limited-overs team in Asia who were World Cup finalists in April, have played just three Twenty20 internationals so far. Pakistan has played two and India and Bangladesh one each.

India will be the least prepared of the four, their new-look team under Mahendra Singh Dhoni flying direct to South Africa from England where they finish a grueling three-month tour on September 8.

India have rested one-day cricket's most successful batsman Sachin Tendulkar, regular captain Rahul Dravid, senior pro Sourav Ganguly and pace spearhead Zaheer Khan for the tournament.

Vice-captain Yuvraj Singh, who is among nine players in the 15-man squad still to play a Twenty20 international, was however upbeat about returning to South Africa where India reached the World Cup final in 2003.

"South Africa is a lucky place for us because we made the World Cup final and we always get great support there," said Yuvraj.

Sri Lanka will miss prolific off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran who was ruled out at the last minute due to an elbow injury sustained while playing for English county Lancashire.

"If we play to our strengths and work hard, there is no reason why

we should not succeed in a game which is largely a new one to us," said captain Mahela Jayawardene.

"If all happens so quickly that any team could suddenly find itself with the advantage, it is very hard to get back into the game."

Pakistan, who are bunched with archrivals India in group D of the preliminary league, will miss star batsman Mohammad Yousuf who has signed up with the breakaway Indian Cricket League.

But fiery fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar, who missed the World Cup due to injury, returns to bolster the team led by Shoaib Malik and coached by the newly appointed Geoff Lawson of Australia.

"Pakistani cricketers are popular for their aggressive style and we have some real potential match-winners that could make the tournament memorable for the country," said Lawson, a former Test fast bowler.

Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful also fancied his team's chances.

"No one gave us the chance at the World Cup, but we beat both India and South Africa to make the second round for the first time," the 23-year-old said.

"As the game becomes shorter, I think we have a better chance of doing well."

Afghans gaining ground

CRICKET

BBC ONLINE, undated

In the shadow of Kabul's Gazi stadium, where the Taliban used to execute people, young Afghan cricketers play on an unkempt dusty patch.

Here they are practising on concrete pitches for a shot at participating in the next World Cup tournament in South Asia in four years time.

Six years after the fall of the Taliban and after the International Cricket Council (ICC) admitted Afghanistan as an affiliate member, the war-torn country's plucky cricketers continue to play against many odds.

An international bank and a local mobile telephone company have put some money into the game. There is a 50,000-dollar contribution from the Asian Cricket Council every year.

But national players have to make do with a monthly "salary" of 800 Afghans (16 dollars) from the government. And they get a paltry 25 dollars per day when they are on international tours.

No wonder many boys begin playing only to discover that it is difficult to make a living from the game.

"We have lost a lot of boys because of lack of money. Still there is no let-up in enthusiasm," says Taj Malik, the coach of the national team.

Cricket is now being played in 28 of the country's 34 provinces, up from four provinces during Taliban rule. There are some 12,000 registered cricketers playing at various levels.

At this rate, cricket, say experts, is on its way to overtaking football and basketball -- a sport in which competitors on horseback drag a dead calf over a scoreline -- as the most popular sport in the country.

The national team have participated and fared well in a clutch of international tournaments.

They were runners-up in the Middle East Cup and beat six English second division sides during their first tour to England last year; and the under-15 team emerged runners-up in the Asia Cup in Dubai in 2005.

In June, 20-year-old fast bowler Hamid Hassan became the first Afghan cricketer to turn out for the MCC at Lord's.

Former captain Raees Ahmadzai reels off achievements breathlessly and says the time is

not far when they can take on the game's big teams.

"We have great fast bowlers. They are faster than Indian pace bowlers and on a par with the Pakistanis," he says.

Hamid Hasan has clocked bowling speeds of 145kmph. Shahpur Zadran, another pacer, has clocked 140kmph.

Don't underestimate Afghan batting as well, warns Ahmadzai.

"We are scoring 230 to 240 runs in 20 overs. Mohammed Nabi hit 14 sixes in an innings against the MCC. I and Nabi scored 164 runs in the last seven overs against MCC," he says.

"In one match we bowled out Brunei for nine runs after scoring 375. We won by 364 runs. If we last out 50 overs we can easily score over 300 runs on any pitch."

Such chutzpah can only serve Afghan cricket well considering its lack of financial support.

Things are looking up slowly though -- the country's first proper cricket academy is nearing completion in Kabul, and should be ready with grass pitches and bowling machines by the end of the year.

Afghan cricket's long, strange journey began in the refugee camps of Peshawar where millions of Afghans had fled in the wake of the Soviet invasion and the civil war.

Young refugee boys began watching cricket on television in cricket-mad Pakistan, and began playing the game with soft balls in the sprawling camps of Kachagari and Shamhatoo.

After graduating to playing proper games, the refugees formed their own clubs, and participated in the thriving club cricket scene in Peshawar.

One of them, simply called the Afghan Club, which included present coach Malik, went on to win a local championship.

Even today, at least three players in the national team continue to live in the Peshawar camps and take the four-hour, 178m-long road journey to Kabul to turn out in national colours.

"In a strange way, the war helped in the birth of Afghan cricket," says Malik.

In another curious twist, some leaders of the sports-unfriendly Taliban ended up loving the game. So much so that Mullah Rabbani, one of its leaders, actually lobbied for the game's recognition by the Asian Council.

The only caveat, according to Allah Dad Noori, who captained

the team during the Taliban regime, was that games should halt during prayer time.

When the Kandahar and Nangarhar provincial teams forgot the condition during a closely fought match in Kabul in 1997, the Taliban's vice and virtue squad turned up, stopped the match, thrashed the players and arrested a dozen of them.

"The other players just ran for their lives down Kabul streets. It was quite a sight," remembers Noori.

"All that is the thing of the past. Now we look ahead to more glories."

T20 trophy

FROM PAGE 21
The tournament is the first of its kind at international Twenty20 level and will see 27 matches take place at three venues -- Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg -- between September 11 and 24.

The tournament begins with hosts South Africa playing the West Indies at the Wanderers Stadium, Johannesburg and culminates with the final at the same venue.

India clinch

FROM PAGE 21
and this win is really amazing given the fact that the last time we played the Nehru Cup was in 1997," he added.

India's best performance in the Nehru Cup so far was a semifinal finish in the last edition in Kochi in 1997. The last time India reached the final of a major international tournament was in 2002 when they beat Vietnam to lift the LG Cup. In 2005, India beat Bangladesh to win the SAFF Cup in Pakistan.

On Wednesday, India looked like a determined lot as they defeated tournament favourites Syria, who are ranked 112 by FIFA against 151 for the hosts.

India coach Bob Houghton was elated by his team's performance and said that the momentum must be maintained.

"The boys played well all through the tournament. The health of a nation's football is identified by the success of its national team. I think if we keep this momentum, we can really do well in the future," Houghton maintained.

NZC's no to ICL-bound cricketers

BBC ONLINE, undated

New Zealand will not give permission for any of its contracted players to take part in the Indian Cricket League.

"We depend upon the value of media rights associated with official international events to provide a majority of our income.

"It is therefore in the best interests of New Zealand Cricket not to support unofficial events, such as the ICL," said chief executive Justin Vaughan.

The inaugural ICL tournament is due to be played in October and November.

And the organisers, who are bankrolled by media baron Subhash Chandra, have already signed up a number of big names like Brian Lara and Inzamamul Haq, the former captains of West Indies and Pakistan.

But India's official governing body, the BCCI, will not sanction the competition and the Pakistan Cricket Board and Sri Lanka Cricket have urged their players not to get involved.

New Zealand Cricket regard the ICL as an "unofficial rebel tournament".

Vaughan said: "Events such as the ICL could have the potential to compete with official international events and erode their value."

Ponting fears player grab

CRICINFO, undated

Ricky Ponting is worried by the "danger" of private Twenty20 tournaments taking away players from international cricket. The Indian Cricket League (ICL) deals with four Pakistani players who have signed up with the breakaway Indian Cricket League.

"I am a bit more concerned this week with the new signings," he said in the Australian. "It looks as though the Pakistanis and a few of the New Zealanders have signed as well. The danger is that it attracts the guys who are playing international cricket at the moment. If it is only attracting guys who are retired then it won't affect us whatsoever."

The ICL is due to start next month and Ponting fears events in the future could run in competition to the World Cup. "We have seen that there is more money in these Twenty20 comps than there is in the whole World Cup," Ponting said. "What will the players do: play in the World Cup or in the Twenty20 tournaments? They are going to have to make a decision and pretty quickly." However, Adam Gilchrist believes the competition is healthy.

There are rumours a group of New Zealanders may sign up to the ICL with permission from New Zealand Cricket, which is due to make a decision next week. Reports suggest the players' earnings could be double what they are paid on their national contracts.

"The concern I have is how lenient the boards are with the players," Ponting said. "I heard a whisper the other day that the New Zealanders might be going with the board's blessing because they have no cricket at that time of the year."

Eng keep India

FROM PAGE 21
To bat: Powar, Chawla, Agarkar, RP Singh, Zaheer

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Rows: Broad, Anderson, Flintoff, Panesar, Collingwood, Pietersen, ENGLAND: Cook, Prior, Bell, Pietersen, Collingwood, Flintoff, Bopara, Shah, Broad, Anderson, Panesar.

Toss: India. Umpires: Aleem Dar and Mark Benson.

Indians stay

FROM PAGE 21
Rajiv upstayed Indian GM Deepan Chakravarty, GM Reefat Bin Sattar defeated Shreshtha Keshav of Nepal, FM Khondokar Aminul Islam beat Pakistan's Tunyev Gillani and IM Abdullah Al Rakib beat Sri Lankan player MKA Russell.

Reefat, Rakib and Rajiv all had 5.5 points.

Meanwhile, Indian WGM D Harika clinched the title in the women's competition with seven points while her compatriot GM Swathi Ghatte finished runner-up with six points.

The third place also went to India with WGM Tania Sachdev bagging 5.5 points. Rani Hamid was the best finisher for the hosts, the Bangladeshi IWM claiming fourth place with three points.

In the tenth and last round of women's competition on Wednesday, Harika beat Swathi and Tania defeated Rani Hamid.

Sports Adviser Tapan Chowdhury will distribute prizes as chief guest after the final round.

Life without McGrath

CRICKET

CRICINFO, undated

Stuart Clark has been unable to escape Glenn McGrath-like descriptions over the past couple of years, but this season the tag will be even harder to lose as he steps into the retired bowler's position. Clark has had a full off-season to prepare for the daunting promotion and he will work with Brett Lee to cover the loss of the world's most successful fast man.

At 31, Clark is mature enough to deal with the extra exposure and responsibilities that have come with his hard-earned but dramatic rise. His debut came in South Africa in 2006 and nine Tests later he is the country's second-most important bowler behind Lee, who has appeared in 50 more matches. Twenty-six Ashes wickets at 17.03 confirmed his capabilities and he is confident the gaps in experience will not show during the Test series against Sri Lanka and India.

"For me and Brett that won't be a big problem," he said. "The big issue is that Glenn won't be there. He's gone, it's me and Brett and

whoever else is in the team and we have to go out and do a job. How many games we've played is irrelevant, as long as we do our job well and create opportunities."

Ricky Ponting also expects the New South Wales duo to form a productive combination as the spearhead and support. "Brett and Stuart work really well together," he said. "Stuart has been a really steady bowler over the last couple of years and Brett will hopefully be back at 100%."

Lee has recovered from ankle surgery that ruled him out of the World Cup and will make his return at the Twenty20 World Championship. With a fit Lee onboard, Ponting is confident his new-look collection can create problems despite the retirements of Shane Warne and McGrath. "Throw someone in like Mitchell Johnson and Shaun Tait," he said, "and you've got a pretty menacing attack even with Warney and McGrath out."

Johnson's pre-season has already involved a ten-day trip to India where he worked with the bowling coaches Dennis Lillee and Troy Cooley. The 2006-07 campaign was testing for the left-arm

Johnson, who started strongly on one-day tours before being 12th man throughout the Ashes and left out of the World Cup starting sides.

"I worked pretty hard in the Caribbean -- not playing games, I had to do something," he said. "It was a tough time, but it was an encouraging time as well as I was part of the squad and part of the World Cup. It's like the Ashes, it's something I'm always going to remember, but I'll always have the disappointment at not playing."

During his stints as a drinks runner he spoke with Andy Bichel and Michael Kasprovicz, his Queensland teammates who endured regular stints as 12th men in national teams. "They just said keep your head up, train hard, do the right things," he said. "Someone could pull out before the match, anything might happen, just be ready."

With Australia facing a crammed schedule over the next 18 months, Johnson is preparing for an opening and hoping to make his Test debut. His speed remains high, he has grown as a sportsman, and he can be a useful ally for Lee and Clark.

Williams to assist Moore

CRICKET

INTERNET, undated

Former West Indian wicketkeeper and current coach of Trinidad and Tobago David Williams has been appointed assistant coach to the West Indies team that will travel to South Africa for the Twenty20 World Championship in September.

Williams, in charge of the Trinidad and Tobago senior team since 2003, will work under David Moore, the interim head coach, as part of the team management for the series. Williams has been coach of the T&T team during a purple patch of regional success which has included two one-day titles and three four-day titles in four years.

Last year, Williams was rewarded by the West Indies authorities with the coach's post for the West Indies A team that played a series in the Caribbean against the Sri Lankan counterparts.

Williams said he was honoured by the appointment. "It is an honour," said Williams. "It is one of the

highlights of my coaching career. It is all part of a process of graduation. I am quite happy with the appointment and it is something that all coaches look forward to."

Also at their meeting over the weekend in Barbados, the board ratified the selection of Ramnaresh Sarwan as captain and Chris Gayle as vice-captain of the team for the ICC tournament which starts in South Africa on September 11. The other members of the team management for this tour are Michael Findlay (manager), Richard Smith (fitness and conditioning coach), Jacqueline King-Mowatt (physiotherapist) and Imran Khan (media liaison officer).

Julian Hunte, the newly-installed president of the WICB, will also be in South Africa on ICC-related business, and will meet with the players and management before the series starts. While there, Hunte is expected to meet with Sir Allen Stanford, invited by the ICC to the final of the tournament, and other representatives of the Stanford 20/20 organisation.

According to the WICB release: "It is hoped that a meeting will be

held among Sir Allen, ICC representatives and the WICB President, Hon. Dr. Julian R. Hunte on September 23, 2007 in Johannesburg. Regarding the proposed Stanford 20/20 regional tournament to be held in January-February 2008, a formal agreement has not yet been signed but the board has included the event in its 2007-2008 cricket calendar."

On the security front, Hunte is expected to collaborate with the West Indies Players Association (WIPA) to have an ICC-recommended security consultant visit Zimbabwe to review arrangements for the safety and security of the West Indies team who are scheduled, as part of the ICC's Future Tours Programme (FTP), to tour Zimbabwe in November.

The WICB also agreed to advertise for a new CEO in the light of the acceptance of Bruce Anansen's resignation even though the management and staff audit, approved at their meeting on July 29, 2007, is currently taking place. The board has also agreed to work in conjunction with WIPA on a Benevolent Fund for past players.

SUPER CUP Win for comrade

FOOTBALL

INTERNET, undated

Sevilla are determined to honour the memory of Antonio Puerta when they meet Champions League winners AC Milan in Friday's UEFA Super Cup in Monaco.

The Andalusian club and reigning UEFA Cup title-holders are still trying to come to terms with the death of the Spanish wing-back.

Puerta, 22, suffered a cardiac arrest during Saturday's Primera Liga game against Getafe and, after three days fighting for his life in a Seville hospital, died on Tuesday.

"From now on we will play with 12 players on the pitch," said an emotional Sevilla president Jose Maria Del Nido.

"We begin the competition with the will to win the Super Cup to dedicate it to his memory."

"We will beat AC Milan and we will dedicate this win to him."

Tuesday's Champions League clash between Sevilla and AEK Athens, which was to take place on

Greek soil, was postponed after the news of Puerta's death.

"We are shattered," admitted Del Nido. "But Antonio has left and life must go on."

"This game could have been postponed but we thought it was best to play it. Sevilla are now invincible because we will play with Antonio's spirit."

Sevilla have shown no signs of slowing down after clinching their fifth title in 15 months when they beat Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup earlier this month.

The Spanish outfit will be looking to continue what is their most successful spell in the club's 102-year history.

However, the two-time defending UEFA Cup champions will face a tough challenge from Milan at Monaco's Stade Louis II.

The Italians showed they are in fine form after beating Genoa 3-0 in their opening Serie A game last weekend.

"Before the start of the campaign I wasn't sure about the team's condition," admitted coach Carlo Ancelotti.

"But after this weekend, I am

satisfied. This result has given us the necessary calmness to prepare for the European Super Cup."