

Derbyshire's Mahela coup

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene will play English county cricket for Derbyshire next year, the county's official website said on Wednesday.

Jayawardene, 30, will turn out for the county from the end of April to mid-July before returning home for Sri Lanka's Test commitments, the website said.

"Signing such a world-class player and current international captain is a massive boost for the club ahead of the 2008 season," Derbyshire chairman Don Amott said.

"I can't wait to see Mahela -- as well as the likes of Rikki Clarke, Nayan Doshi, John Sadler and Wavell Hinds -- in action in a Derbyshire shirt and I am sure the members and supporters share my excitement."

Jayawardene, who leads Sri Lanka in a two-Test series in Australia next month, was voted the International Cricket Council's captain of the year in 2006.

The 88-Test veteran has scored 6,630 runs at an average of 49.84 with 18 centuries, including a best of 374 against South Africa in Colombo last year.

He has also played 261 one-day internationals with 7,232 runs and led Sri Lanka to the World Cup final in the Caribbean earlier this year.

Derbyshire's head of cricket John Morris said he was delighted that Jayawardene had signed.

"I knew that he was the right player after I had spoken to him and I could tell that he has the desire to play county cricket and contribute both experience and flair to Derbyshire's batting line-up," said Morris.

Hayden opposes zero tolerance on drugs issue

CRICINFO, undated

Matthew Hayden has urged Cricket Australia not to adopt a zero-tolerance approach on drugs because he believes the issue needs flexibility. The board is set to announce a new policy and Hayden, who is strongly opposed to drugs in sport, would welcome a "two strikes" rule that would give players one chance at rehabilitation.

"I don't think you can have a zero-tolerance policy on drugs because it's not as black and white as that," Hayden told the Daily Telegraph. "For example, what sort of drugs? Shane Warne was hit with a drugs charge but it was nothing more than a diuretic. Is that the same as Shaohab Akhtar getting caught out with steroids in his system?"

"There has to be flexibility. When drugs stuff goes public, like Shane went public, he is considered a drug cheat. It is a debate on a human life. I don't think zero tolerance is the way to go."

"The No. 1 aim is to eliminate drugs within any sporting code. As a part of that you have to look at the individual and help them become rehabilitated the most effective and the quickest possible way."

Martins staying

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"That is how much I enjoy playing for him. I don't think I'll be going anywhere while Sam is here."

"I'm scoring goals and I'm playing games, that's all you can ask for as a striker."

Martins, who joined Newcastle in August 2006, admits he did struggle to adjust to the English game initially.

He explained: "It wasn't that easy when I first came to Newcastle and it took me a few months to learn about the Premier League, about England and living in Newcastle."

"I had to adapt to the style of football and it took me some time, but I'm very happy here."

Injury crisis

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only one win in 10 games. Dutch coach Martin Jol's will desperately be seeking a European win on Thursday to hang on as coach after a 3-1 loss at Newcastle on Monday night.

"I'm already used to it (pressure), even before the season started. The only thing that counts is results. We're still in a good position in the cups and hopefully, on Thursday (in the UEFA Cup) we can get a result," said the defiant Jol.

Messi glory

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occasions Papac was not busy snuffing out the danger from Messi.

Papac said: "I thought I was doing well to keep him quiet and then the next minute I have Carlos Puyol flying down the wing as well!"

"But it was a tremendous result for the team. We are really satisfied to have taken a point and now I believe we have a good chance to go through."



Members of the Bangladesh national golf team pose with the guests during a reception accorded by the Kurmitola Golf Club on Monday. The team participated in the 47th Pakistan National Amateur Championship in Lahore over October 19-21 and Shahid Khan of Bangladesh clinched the individual winner's trophy while his teammate Shakhawat Hossain became runner-up.

Murali after 12 years

AFP, Sydney

Sri Lankan spinner Muttiah Muralidaran arrived on Wednesday for his first full Australia Test tour in 12 years braced for a chilly reception from fans as he bids to break Shane Warne's wickets record.

Muralidaran, who has refused to tour Australia in the past because of crowds taunting his unusual bowling action, wants to show why he is one of the best bowlers in the world, skipper Mahela Jayawardene said.

"He hasn't played here for 10 years in a Test match and he's pretty geared up I think. He feels Australia is one of the places that he has to challenge himself," Jayawardene said.

"This is probably a place where he has to prove he's one of the top bowlers in the world, so I think he's looking forward to the challenge."

"Murali" needs just nine wickets to overhaul Warne's 708 Test scalps in the Test matches in Brisbane and Hobart starting on November 8 and 16.

The Sri Lanka tour follows

Afridi takes charge

CRICINFO, undated

On some days it just isn't worth your while running into Shahid Afridi. He'll hustle you when he bowls, he'll bully you when he bats and he'll jeer and taunt you when he fields. He'll pop up wherever and whenever the opposition don't want him to, etiquette be damned.

South Africa huffed and puffed on Tuesday, as they have through the series, but they haven't been able to blow him away. A certain mood has gripped the Pathan and he's been fairly straining at an imaginary leash to have a go. In Lahore, he scared them with the bat first, then flummoxed them with his legspin; in Faisalabad he did both and in between added a stunning catch for good measure. The Man-of-the-Match award was a shoe-in.

He was nonchalant about it later, even arguing that Mohammad Yousuf's fine fifty deserved it. "I wasn't special. I need to keep performing in my bowling, batting and fielding so I can do a little bit in everything."

Modest it may be, but as a bowler it is difficult to recall him being a more difficult proposition to face, especially on surfaces such as this one, comprehending 'which was beyond the grasp of most. No runs are given easily and there's never enough time to settle, to gather thoughts about the opportunities to score that have just passed by. This brings the game to his pace, of

cricket, of thinking, of life; everything he does, he readily admits, is in a hurry.

He's also got more tricks than a truckload of monkeys; slow, quick, wrong'un, offbreak and if the pitch is giving it, then appreciable turn for the leggie. Little wonder he says it is his primary function, and any bowler who dismisses Jacques Kallis twice in successive innings has a right to say that.

His batting, it must now be accepted, will not pass out of puberty. Best just to accept that and wait for days like this, when he is so good with the ball and in the field that two things are inevitable: he opens the batting and he succeeds. If his bowling used the surface as sweetly as a trickster uses his confidence, then his batting defied it as stubbornly as a petulant child might his parents. An 18-ball 32 on what turned out to be a real sluggard of a surface is not to be taken lightly, especially in light of how the others struggled.

He had, he admitted, wanted to open for some time. "There was a little pressure as I hadn't done it for so long. I wanted to just give a good start but Yousuf really batted superbly. Malik thinks I am more relaxed in the lower order but I just said that if the openers aren't working out, give me a chance."

Malik said before this match that Afridi had a vital role to play for Pakistan. "He's a senior player, bowling, batting and fielding well and really lifts the players in the field." He is actually the most senior now in this ODI team, in terms of the years he

has been playing international cricket.

Afridi is aware of it too. His desire to captain Pakistan when Yousuf Khan turned it down was no secret and he even had some backing, if only for the shorter game. He was eventually overlooked even for the vice-captaincy, and before scoffing at the thought of Afridi and a leadership role, note that the official vice-captain is currently 12th man. In any case, he's been easily Pakistan's most vibrant figure -- as he was through 2005 -- and a proxy leader of sorts.

It is difficult to reconcile to the idea that Afridi may eventually mature as man and player. If he does, it might actually be the undoing of him. But if this is his own way of responding to a position of quasi-responsibility, then all power to him.

Australia's return home after a bitter series against India marred by the racial taunting of the team's only black player, Andrew Symonds, who was subjected to monkey noises and gestures.

There are fears that Muralidaran could receive unsportsmanlike treatment in Australia, where he has been called for 'throwing' on two previous tours and subjected to constant crowd calls of "no ball."

Sri Lanka coach Trevor Bayliss said there were "always idiots in every crowd" and it was near impossible to control the behaviour of fans.

"I don't know whether you're going to stop that 100 per cent," he said.

"But I think the majority of people realise it's the wrong thing to do and don't get involved, there's just one or two idiots in every crowd."

Jayawardene said his team would challenge Australia but not get so carried away as to be involved in the antics seen in India.

"We have to be very aggressive with Australia, but to a certain extent sometimes if you go overboard you lose your own concentration as well, and we certainly

don't want that to happen," he told a press conference.

"We will be aggressive, but not to the extent that we would get involved with silly incidents."

Australia captain Ricky Ponting said a little heckling from the crowd was to be expected.

"But when it gets a bit out of control like it did in the series just gone in India it becomes pretty disappointing and I think pretty embarrassing for the home team," he said.

Muralidaran's ultra-flexible bowling action has come under its heaviest scrutiny in Australia, where he has been called for throwing on two tours and has not played a full Test match since late 1995.

He boycotted Sri Lanka's 2004 visit after Australian Prime Minister John Howard labelled him a "chucker."

However, he returned for a one-off Test for the Rest of the World in 2005 and a one-day series in 2006, when he was unofficially reprimanded for making a one-fingered gesture to taunting spectators in Perth.

Sri Lanka will play a warm-up match in Adelaide starting Saturday.

Chappell swipes at Botham

AFP, Sydney

Ian Chappell has come out swinging over England legend Ian Botham's claim that he decked the former Australian captain in a bar room brawl 30 years ago.

Chappell disputed an anecdote in Botham's autobiography "Head On" in which the former England all-rounder says he "flattened" the Australian in a Melbourne bar in 1977 because he was ridiculing English cricket.

Chappell, 64, accused Botham of "peddling his lies" in the new book and questioned the merits of his recently acquired title, saying "someone is going to regret awarding him a knighthood."

According to Botham, nicknamed "Beefy," he was in the bar when Chappell started rubbishing English cricket.

"I gave him three official warnings, all of which he ignored, so the next time he started, I just flattened him," Botham wrote.

"He went flying over a table and crash-landed on a group of Aussie Rules footballers, spilling their drinks in the process."

Botham said Chappell then ran out of the door, with him in pursuit. Chappell's version, recounted in the Bulletin magazine published Wednesday, is radically different from what he labelled Botham's "fairytale."

He claims that after a verbal exchange, Botham held an empty glass to his throat and said "I'll cut you from ear to ear."

Chappell said he told Botham that such an attack would prove he was a coward, prompting the Englishman to shove him in the chest, pushing him over in his chair.

He said his rival then suggested they settle the matter outside but the Australian replied that he didn't fight and Botham was not worth ending up in a hospital or jail cell over.

Chappell said he taunted Botham as he left and Australian fast bowler Ian Cullen had to restrain the Englishman by clutching him in a bear hug.

Lacking only

FROM PAGE 17

think about quality and competitive cricket in the country's first-class competition.

"You can't expect good cricket on them. We have to think about it seriously. Proper maintenance is a big factor and BCB is ready to spend more money in this area but definitely in the right way. If we are ready to spend money for a high-profile foreign coach then why not for a same level curator," questioned Lipu.

"If black-clay is a problem, then we should replace it with better ones. These days you can even use drop-in pitches," he added.

The man in charge Shafiqur Rahman Munna, chairman of the grounds committee, however was quite happy with the pitches behaviour in the three venues.

"As far as I know, the Rajshahi wicket was fantastic while there were also no complaints from Chittagong and Bogra. Yes, the wickets are low in the four-day game in Mirpur but it was quite okay in the one-day game," explained the seasoned organiser.

"The season has just started and I think it would be much better as the tournament progresses. I don't think black-clay is a problem and I also have faith in my local curators because they have passed the level 3 course," he said.

Munna also said that they have no plan to appoint a foreign curator to raise the standard of the pitches at the moment.

Lanka aiming

FROM PAGE 17

good series. We just couldn't turn it around."

They won't be underestimating Australia, even though they have lost Shane Warne, Glenn McGrath and Justin Langer. "They probably lack a bit of experience and that's an area we can look forward to," Jayawardene said. "But we can't take them lightly at all. They've got a very good batting side as well."

"We have to be very aggressive against Australia. We want to concentrate on our strengths. We will be aggressive but not to the extent that we will get involved with any silly incidents."

Sri Lanka have been criticised for being unable to deal with the faster surfaces in Australia, but Jayawardene insisted this was in the past and they had shown they could compete here, in the one-dayers at least. "We've proved we can handle pace and bounce against quality opposition and it's a good testing ground for us to see how far we've come."

He also warned that teams should not underestimate Sri Lanka as a Test side. "We've competed well in the last 18 months -- beating New Zealand in New Zealand and England in England. This is another place for us to challenge ourselves and see how far we've come as a Test team. That's a goal we set ourselves three years ago. We're pretty strong at home but for us to compete away from home we have to be very strong."

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"We just have to remind everybody that two months ago I was crazy not to buy players and we were not even rated to be in the top seven," Wenger said.

"I know how football is. We have no reason to be carried because exactly the same people will say now we will win the European Cup."

This was their 12th consecutive win and they are closing in on a club record of 14 in a row set 20 years ago.

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Lacking only

INTERNET, undated

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"It's not for me to say whether Martyn's decision to retire was right or wrong. I was disappointed because we had lost an excellent player, someone who'd bailed us out of difficult situations many times in the past," said Ponting.

"I was frustrated because I was left answering questions about something I knew nothing about, when one media appearance by him would have cleared the air. Any number of theories were circulating, and I knew some people just didn't believe me when I said I didn't have any idea what was going on..."

In his new book, Captain's Diary 2007, which hits bookshelves across Australia on Wednesday, Ponting reveals he learned of Martyn's decision -- it came three days after the second Test in Adelaide -- when he was playing golf with fast bowler Stuart Clark in Sydney.

Writes Ponting: "After nine holes I decided to check my phone, which is where it all got a bit bizarre. I saw I had a missed call from Michael Brown, Cricket Australia's general manager, cricket operations, and immediately turned to 'Sarf' and said, 'I reckon Martyn's retired.' I have no idea why I reacted to the message in that way, but sure enough that's what I was told when I returned Michael's call. Cricket

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Smith rues little errors

CRICINFO, undated

Spin me once, shame on you. Spin me twice, shame on me. South Africa went through the Test series calmly picking apart the myth that they wilt in the face of spin. On turning wickets, they rarely looked in any kind of trouble. But suddenly, twice in succession, an inability to prosper against spin has cost them matches.

Spin over five days and spin over 50 overs are different prospects entirely. Against Danish Kaneria and Abdul Rehman in the Tests, the objective was to not get out to them, one they achieved so well they eventually scored runs comfortably against them. Against Shahid Afridi and Rehman in the ODIs, where swift runs are a must, South Africa have stuttered.

The pair have seven wickets between them and have gone for under 4.5 an over; in these numbers have the games essentially been lost by South Africa. Pakistan's plan has been simple: prepare a slow pitch and choke the middle overs.

"We have seen the conditions after the first game," said Graeme Smith. "They believe they can beat us on these wickets and their spinners have bowled well. Afridi and Rehman in the middle overs made it difficult for us and that is something we have to look at now and plan against that."

Spin at both ends began from the 30th over onwards, when South Africa were a not unreasonable 111 for 3. But in the subsequent, vital 16

overs, until pace offered relief at one end, they squeezed out only 71 runs and lost four key wickets doing so. Each time, it seemed, they started, they immediately stopped and no real partnerships were forged.