



Coach Jamie Siddons (2nd from R) briefs the Tigers ahead of their morning practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Sree not afraid of Aus crowds

AFP, Sydney

India pace bowler Shanthakumar Sreesanth Tuesday said he would not be intimidated by Australian crowds during this summer's series down under and was confident of taking wickets.

Sreesanth, who was involved in an on-field verbal clash with Australian all-rounder Andrew Symonds during the ill-tempered India tour which ended in October, said he was undaunted by playing to local crowds.

"I am not scared," he told Inside Cricket magazine.

"In fact, I will take it as a challenge."

The Indian bowler, who was dropped for three of the seven one-day games against Australia in the last series, also said he was unfazed by the side which has dominated international cricket for years.

"I am Sreesanth and I'm not scared of any batsman in the world," he said.

"What's the worst that can happen -- six sixes? Well, I'm not really worried about that."

"Whatever I do on the field I do from the core of my heart; I don't act. This is the way I have played cricket all my life."

Sreesanth said while the verbal clashes between players during the India series were overplayed, Ricky Ponting's men were more than capable of defending themselves against taunts.

"I think all of that was overplayed because it was not the first time in the history of the game that it has happened," he said.

"I didn't do anything close to what the Australians did."

"I don't want to name any cricketer. But it is just not me, everyone knows who does what on the field."

Australia's tour of India was marred by crowds' racial taunts against Symonds, Australia's only black player, which included monkey gestures.

India will play a four-Test series against Australia starting December 26.

Inter, Roma set

FROM PAGE 20
starting line-up following three brief substitute cameos.

"Either tomorrow or Sunday Marco will come back in, I'll decide tomorrow," added Mancini.

With Materazzi out of the side, Inter have been fielding a first 11 made up entirely of foreign players.

Lazio will hardly want to do their bitter city rivals a favour by knocking Inter out of their stride, but the Romans are battling for their Serie A survival after a dismal season that also sees them on the brink of elimination from the Champions League at the group stage.

Lazio coach Delio Rossi knows his side will have to fight for their lives at the San Siro.

"We've got to fight for every scrap," he said. "We have to play with balance and take our chances when they come."

Rossi believes his team's Champions League participation has actually hurt their league form.

"We made it to the Champions League last year because we played the right way. Now we have to stop making the mistake of treating the championship like training and the Champions League like the main event."

"On paper Mancini's squad is superior but we need to just go out and play in Milan and have no fear."

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti must decide whether or not to reinstate club captain and talisman Francesco Totti to the starting line-up following three weeks on the sidelines.

In his place, Macedonia forward Mirko Vucinic has been in stunning form as the lone striker but Spalletti insists he can find place for both players in the side.

"They can coexist; Vucinic can also play on the left. I have no doubts about their ability (to play together)."

FIXTURES
Inter Milan v Lazio, Roma v Cagliari

'WC win was more special'

AFP, Kandy

Test cricket's leading wicket-taker Muttiah Muralidaran said on Tuesday he rated Sri Lanka's World Cup triumph in 1996 as more memorable than his own individual world record.

The 35-year-old became the most successful bowler in Test history on Monday when he surpassed fellow spin great Shane Warne's record tally of 708 wickets during the first Test against England here.

Even as the entire nation celebrated his feat, Muralidaran said his feat did not rate as high as the win over Australia in the World Cup final in the Pakistani city of Lahore under former captain Arjuna Ranatunga.

"The record is nothing much compared to the World Cup win," the off-spinner told local reporters. "The win in 1996 is something unique and I will remember that forever."

Sri Lanka regarded that lone World Cup title as the ideal way to avenge Australia's refusal to travel to Colombo for that tournament opener due to security concerns following a deadly bomb blast.

Australia forfeited that match, but were pitted against Sri Lanka in the final where Ranatunga's men won by seven wickets.

"It was very special," Muralidaran said. "You have to give a lot of credit to Arjuna for helping us achieve that. He is my favourite captain and he was my first captain too."

The off-spinner said he will always be grateful to Ranatunga for standing by him when he was no-balled for throwing by Australian umpires in 1995 and 1997.

"Arjuna did a lot of things for me and for the whole team," said Muralidaran. "I will never forget that he protected me during difficult times."

Murali, as he is affectionately called, had previously held the world record briefly in 2004 when he overtook West Indian fast bowler Courtney Walsh's 519-wicket mark before Warne surpassed him.

The Sri Lankan bowler agreed with Warne that the record could stay with him for a long time -- especially since the next man in line, 37-year-old Indian Anil Kumble -- has 576 wickets.

AFP, Kandy

Asia's number-one side Korea have taken over from the Netherlands as favourites to win the Champions Trophy, as teams struggle to cope with hot and humid conditions midway through the tournament.

"They are playing so very well and it would be excellent to see an Asian team win this tournament again," said Pakistan coach Manzoor Ul-Hassan.

"But Pakistan ourselves have not lost any kind of hope of playing in the final and we must fight to the end."

Pakistan were the last Asian team to win this tournament back in 1994 and after Korea's impressive 6-2 drubbing against the Dutch on Monday, look the best bet to achieve that feat again.

"Looking at the situation, Korea has the best path. Korea has quite a chance of making the final as they have done well against the stronger team," said Dutch coach Roelant Oltmans.

The top three teams in the world -- the Netherlands, Australia and

Germany -- have dominated world hockey over the last decade and during this period, seven of the Champions Trophy finals featured two of these three teams.

This time around, the three nations' coaches say they are finding it hard to play in the heat of Kuala Lumpur.

Australian coach Barry Dancer said the next few days are crucial to the three top teams who cannot afford to make any mistakes in attack or defence if they want to earn a spot at Sunday's finals.

"The next three rounds will be tough for everybody but we look forward to the challenge. Even lesser-ranked teams can pull off surprises," he said.

After four rounds, Korea are the only team to have played the three giants and managed to beat two of them, including a 1-0 victory over Olympic champions Australia.

"They were unlucky to lose 2-1 to world champions Germany, missing several chances to earn at least a point."

Now they are on track to win their remaining three matches against host Malaysia, Pakistan and Britain -- and seven points

forced to lie on the ground for two minutes as a swarm of bees wafted across the ground in the final session.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard at stumps on the fourth day of the first Test between England and Sri Lanka at the Asgiriya Stadium on Tuesday:

SRI LANKA: First innings 188 (Sangakkara 92, P Jayawardene 51; Hoggard 4-29, Panesar 3-46)

ENGLAND: First innings 281 (Bell 83, Collingwood 45; Muralidaran 6-55)

SRI LANKA: Second innings (over-
nights 167-2)
Jayawardene c Bell b Anderson 49
Vandort c Bell b Hoggard 78
Sangakkara c Vaughan b Collingwood 152
Silva lbw b Panesar 67
Mubarak c sub (Swann) b Panesar 9
Jayawardene b Collingwood 20
Vaas not out 6
Malinga b Panesar 2
Fernando not out 9
Extras: (b-5, lb-10) 15

ENGLAND: Second innings
Cook c Silva b Vaas 4
Vaughan not out 1
Anderson not out 4
Extras: 4
Total: (For one wk in 5 overs) 9
Fall of wicket: 1-4.
To bat: Bell, Pietersen, Collingwood, Bopara, Prior, Sidebottom, Hoggard, Panesar.

Bowler O M R W
Vaas 2 0 7 1
Malinga 1 1 0 0
Muralidaran 1 0 2 0
Jayasuriya 1 1 0 0

"The record will stay with me for a while unless someone like Anil continues to play for a long time," he said.

"If he plays long enough he will probably get the record. Otherwise it will be there for a while."

Muralidaran rated West Indian Brian Lara, Andy Flower of Zimbabwe and Graham Thorpe of England as the most difficult batsmen to bowl to.

"I rate Brian Lara pretty high," he said. "We had a battle going on and I thought Brian played me really well. Flower was another who was difficult to bowl to and so was Thorpe."

Murali would not commit to setting himself a 1,000-Test wicket target, saying a lot would depend on how far he was willing to stretch himself.

"I am going to be 36 next year and I am bowling a lot of overs," he said. "I want to play both forms of the game. We only play seven to eight Tests a year and if we don't play you can lose interest."

"So I'll play one more season and reassess things. I can't say I will take 1,000 wickets or whatever. If you don't enjoy the game it will be difficult."

Vengsarkar had also set a deadline of today for a reply from the BCCI on his demands and the Board had earlier said he was free to quit.

Vengsarkar had claimed Rs 40 lakh as compensation from the Board, which BCCI had initially rejected. Pawar, however, admitted that the amount was quite a big one and he also conceded that the selectors need to be paid.

"We don't have paid selectors, like some other countries have. But selectors need to travel a lot and watch number of matches. And Vengsarkar said he would incur a loss of 40 lakh rupees, which is not a small amount. So we have to decide how to compensate the loss."

Leg-spinner Kumble, who shared the new ball with Zaheer Khan, raised visions of an Indian victory when he dismissed makeshift opener Kamran Akmal (14) and Salman Butt (11) before his side ran into a gutsy Younis.

"It was a pretty flat pitch and tough for bowlers. I think they did a fantastic job to help us dominate in this match," said India captain Kumble.

"We were in a good position on the third day and had there been more pace and bounce in this pitch, it'd have helped us more."

There was no stopping Younis, who applied himself remarkably well on a last-day pitch to pull his team out of trouble after Misbah and Yasir Hameed had fallen cheaply.

Misbah, who helped his side

avoid a follow-on with an unbeaten 161, offered a sharp chance off the first ball off Kumble, but Dinesh Karthik failed to latch on to it at short-leg.

Misbah (six) did not last long as he was bowled by paceman Munaf Patel off a delivery which came in after pitching into the roughs.

India struck in the seventh over when left-arm seamer Zaheer held a return catch to dismiss opener Hameed, who drove a fuller-length delivery after making 14 runs.

Resuming at 141-2, India earlier batted 6.4 overs before declaring their second innings closed at 184-4.

Former captain Sourav Ganguly, playing on his home ground, completed 6,000 runs in Test cricket during his 46 years before being bowled by fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard at stumps on the fifth and final day of the second Test between India and Pakistan on Tuesday:

INDIA: First innings 616-5 decl (Jaffer 202, Laxman 112 not out, Ganguly 102; Tanvir 2-166, Kaneria 2-194)

PAKISTAN: First innings 456 (Misbahul 161 not out, Akmal 118; Harbhajan 5-122, Kumble 3-122)

INDIA: Second innings (overnight 141-2)
Jaffer b Kaneria 56
Karthik c Misbah b Kaneria 28

PAKISTAN: Second innings
Hameed c b Zaheer 14
Akmal b Kumble 11
Butt lbw b Kumble 1
Younis Khan not out 107
Misbahul b Patel 6
Yousuf not out 44
Extras: (b-8, lb-6, nb-4) 18
Total: (For four wks in 77 overs) 214
Did not bat: Iqbal, Akhtar, Sami, Tanvir, Kaneria.

Fall of wickets: 1-22, 2-37, 3-65, 4-78.
Bowler O M R W
Zaheer 8 0 32 1
Kumble 25 4 73 2
Patel 10 3 21 1
Harbhajan 31 5 67 0
Tendulkar 3 0 7 0

Result: Match drawn.
Man-of-the-match: Wasim Jaffer.
Third Test: Bangalore (December 8)

CRYPTOQUIP
K V Z X Q P M R E M R E D P L S Z
F X Q S Z M E Z D T Q X A H N A V
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Today's Cryptquip Clue: V equals Y

Hard work his secret

AGENCIES, undated

Sri Lanka batsman Kumar Sangakkara said on Tuesday hard work was the secret to his record-breaking run of scores.

The left-hander became the first Test player to score more than 150 in four consecutive matches after hitting a superb 152 against England.

His incredible form started nine Tests ago when he gave up wicketkeeping.

"I haven't changed anything at all -- I just practise a lot better now because I am probably more aware of my game and what works for me," he said.

"I know when I go out there I am ready to play. Sticking to the basics is always what I do."

Sangakkara, who missed a century by eight runs in the first innings, was dropped on 98 by Ian Bell at first slip off Ryan Sidebottom.

He made his former Warwickshire county colleague suffer by completing his 16th Test century -- and his first against England -- as the hosts amassed a commanding 422-8 to set an unlikely victory target of 350.

Sangakkara has now compiled 1,529 runs in 14 innings, including three double hundreds and four hundreds, since concentrating on batting from July 2006.

"It's been a lot of hard work and training," the 30-year-old said of his recent success.

"In the last few years I have come to understand my game better and have better knowledge on how to prepare for a match."

"I just try and do the basics right. Everything seems to be falling in place, but I still have to work on my game."

Sangakkara, however, refused to count himself among the greats.

"My theory is that a batsman should get 20 hundreds in a career to be regarded as good," he said. "Get 30 and you are a bit better than good."

BCCI backs

FROM PAGE 17
adequate compensation for the ban, to continue in the post.

In an unscheduled press conference, Pawar announced that a Working Committee meeting has been convened on December 16 in Mumbai to look into the chief selector's "legitimate" demands for compensation.

Expressing hopes that the miffed chief selector -- sulking after asked to comply with the Board's seven-point guideline and stop writing columns -- would continue in the post, Pawar said Vengsarkar's demand for compensation was a "legitimate" one.

Vengsarkar had also set a deadline of today for a reply from the BCCI on his demands and the Board had earlier said he was free to quit.

Vengsarkar had claimed Rs 40 lakh as compensation from the Board, which BCCI had initially rejected. Pawar, however, admitted that the amount was quite a big one and he also conceded that the selectors need to be paid.

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Today's Cryptquip Clue: V equals Y

Gary appointment delayed

AFP, New Delhi

The appointment of former South Africa batsman Gary Kirsten as the new India coach has been delayed, with the cricket board citing minor last-minute glitches Tuesday.

The board, however, denied reports that Kirsten had delayed accepting the job because of resentment among senior players.

"We have received an e-mail from Kirsten. There are some minor issues relating to working arrangements, which will be sorted out in a couple of days," the cricket board's vice-president Rajiv Shukla told AFP.

"He has sought clarification over some issues but these do not relate to the so-called reservation among senior players over his appointment," he said.

Kirsten, 40, was to sign a contract with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Monday after impressing a selection panel in an interview last week.

But he delayed signing amid media reports that quoted him as saying he wanted to clarify about "unhappiness" among some senior Indian players over his

appointment.

"I have heard the rumours about some senior players expressing their concern about my possible appointment and I would prefer to have clarity on that before I commit myself to the job," Kirsten was quoted as saying on the website cricinfo.com.

"I'm not sure whether the players do have concerns or not. I only met (skipper) Anil Kumble on my recent trip to Delhi and he was very supportive."

"If there are concerns then I would like to find out whether they are about me as an individual or the process by which I was interviewed and then offered the job," the website quoted him as saying on Monday.

India's daily Mumbai Mirror also quoted unnamed senior India players as saying the current management structure was working well and that Kirsten's appointment was unnecessary. "There is absolutely no need for a coach at this moment," one was quoted as saying.

Kirsten, who quit international cricket in 2004 after scoring 7,289 runs in 101 Tests, said he did not want to rush into signing the deal as it was a very important position in world cricket.

"The decision needs to be made carefully and in conjunction with all the right people, but mostly the players," he said. "You can't coach any team if you don't have the players 'buy in'. I've written to the board to explain my feelings."

India have been without a regular coach since April, when former Australian captain Greg Chappell resigned following nation's shock first-round exit from the World Cup in the Caribbean.

Three men have been in temporary charge since then, after South Africa's Graham Ford, who coaches English county team Kent, turned down an offer from the BCCI.

Former all-rounder Ravi Shastri managed the team for the tour of Bangladesh in May and veteran Chandu Borde, 73, took over during the visit to Ireland and England from July to September.

Former Mumbai first-class cricketer Lalchand Rajput then took charge for the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa in September, which India won, and continued for the home one-dayers against Australia and Pakistan.

India are to leave for Australia later this month to play four Tests and a limited-overs tri-series also featuring Sri Lanka.

Misbah and Akmal."

The India captain said it was not easy getting wickets on a slow turning track at Eden Gardens after his bowlers could manage just four on the fifth and final day.

"It was tough to bowl on this pitch. It got slower and slower and even when it spun, it spun very slowly. Considering the pitch and the conditions, I thought our bowlers put in a fantastic effort," said Kumble.

"It's been really tiring for the bowlers to try and ensure that 20 wickets are taken. We did really well to get at least 14."

Kumble also said opener Dinesh Karthik's form was not a worry, despite the batsman's contributing 39 runs in four innings.

"It's not a concern. It happens to the best of players. Knowing Dinesh, he's a fantastic trier and does all the right things at practice, I'm sure he'll come good," said Kumble.

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