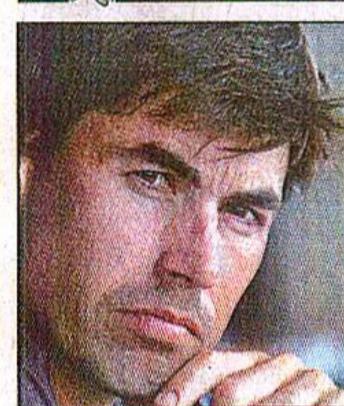




Did U Know?

Arthur Ashe, the African-American tennis player, won the men's final of the US Open in 1968.



Stephen Fleming
 (Former New Zealand cricket captain)

"I felt like a fish out of water. It was all a bit foreign. I was pretty nervous after six weeks without playing so things are pretty green at the moment."

After the Twenty20 charity match against Bangladesh in Hamilton on Sunday.



Sultan right or wrong?

SPORTS REPORTER

Nine days after SA Sultan's reported resignation as Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president, football's governing body in the country remained in total darkness about the incident.

Questions have already been raised whether Sultan had done the right thing by tendering his resignation to FIFA president Sepp Blatter or not.

Sultan sent his resignation to Blatter on December 15 and copies to National Sports Council chairman General Moeen U Ahmed and AFC president Mohammad bin Hammam on the same day.

Although the BFF officials have kept mum on the issue, stating they have yet to know the 'truth', a vice-president yesterday asked about its legitimacy.

"If it has been done, it was the right way. Any member of the BFF let alone the president should tender resignations to the BFF executive committee only," said senior vice-president Monir Ahmed.

"In fact we have no document

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Slow over-rate costs England

REUTERS, London

England captain Michael Vaughan has been fined 40 percent of his match fee for his side's slow over rate in the drawn third Test against Sri Lanka, the International Cricket Council said on Monday.

The ICC's code of conduct states that players are fined five percent of their match fees for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time with the captain's punishment double.

Vaughan's side were ruled to be four overs short of its target by match referee Jeff Crowe when time allowances were taken into consideration during the rain-hit match in Galle.

The rest of the squad were fined 20 percent of their match fee.

England lost the three-match series 1-0.

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Julio Baptista gave Real Madrid coach Bernd Schuster the Christmas present he wanted by getting the only goal in a hard-fought 1-0 win over their bitter rivals Barcelona on Sunday.

The rugged Brazilian striker - nicknamed The Beast - found the net after 36 minutes to bring an end to Barcelona's 100 per cent home record in their Nou Camp stadium this season, both in La Liga and the Champions League.

"I thought we could have got a second goal. We had two or three good attacks in the second half, but overall, it's a fair result," said Schuster.

Real's triumph puts them firmly in lead of the Spanish championship race and they are now the overwhelming favourites to retain their title.

Neither side had many opportunities in a scrappy first 35 minutes in which the biggest scoring threats came from the free kicks of Real

great off -- we've seen that in some of the upsets they've caused at World Cups."

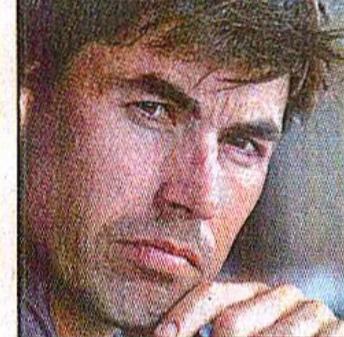
Fleming also contrasted the approach of the Bangladesh batsmen with that of New Zealand. "Their batting is probably almost the opposite of where our batting unit is," Fleming admitted. "They seem full of confidence, and they don't really have a lot of fear. The consequence of them playing a bad shot and getting out doesn't seem to be there."

New Zealand's batsmen haven't had a great run of late; Dale Steyn had the line-up with 20 wickets in the two Tests in South Africa, and barring one ODI in Port Elizabeth, their batsmen have generally failed to cope. "It feels very tentative with the batting unit -- there's been a lot of focus on it, the performances haven't been

great and with that comes a certain amount of tension."

"Coming into the side, you could feel that, the ways the guys played. We have to get away from that and try and stamp some authority with the willow in hand." The match on Sunday was Fleming's first competitive game after the Tests in South Africa, during which he had dislocated his thumb. Fleming, who made 17, but was not his fluent self, said, "I felt like a fish out of water. It was all a bit foreign. I was pretty nervous over six weeks without playing so things are pretty green at the moment."

Bangladesh, who haven't won an ODI or Test against New Zealand, play the first of the three-match ODI series on Boxing Day in Auckland. The two-Test series, in which Fleming is to play, begins in Dunedin on January 4.



Stephen Fleming
 (Former New Zealand cricket captain)

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After the Twenty20 charity match against Bangladesh in Hamilton on Sunday.

What to WATCH

SAB tv
 New Zealand v Bangladesh
 First ODI
 Live from 5:00am (Wednesday)
STAR Cricket
 Australia v India
 First Test, Day One
 Live from 5:30am (Wednesday)
ESPN
 Sportscentre India
 Sport News
 Live at 8:30pm

'The Beast' devours Barca

AFP, Madrid

The 30-time Spanish league winners have 41 points from the 17 games and have extended their lead to seven points over second-placed Barcelona.

"It's good to get the points but nothing's decided yet. Let's wait until the end of the season until we start talking about trophies," said the ever-prudent Schuster.

His opposite number Frank Rijkaard was visibly disappointed at the outcome but tried to look on the bright side after the game.

"We were in the game right until the whistle, in fact, until the very last moment I thought we could get a point but they were very well organised at the back."

"However, I have the feeling that we played well, especially in the midfield and also at the back. We didn't give them many chances and we also lost too many balls at important moments," reflected the Dutch coach.

Van Nistelrooy saw Baptista darting down the left wing and chipped the ball across, leaving the speedy Brazilian to out pace his markers Carles Puyol and Rafael Marquez before half-volleying the

winger Wesley Sneijder.

Real's Portuguese international defender Pepe made Barcelona goalkeeper Victor Valdes work hard to deny him after he connected with one of the Dutchman's dead ball efforts after 11 minutes. Valdes then flapped badly at a Sneijder free kick on 32 minutes but Ruud van Nistelrooy couldn't get his head cleanly to the ball.

At the other end, Real's Iker Casillas once again proved his credentials as one of the best goal keepers in Europe when he produced two wonderful reactions in rapid succession to thwart Ronaldinho and Xavi Hernandez.

Baptista then got the goal which changed the face of a game which generally lived up to its billing as El Clasico in terms of emotion and effort but not technical excellence on this occasion.

Van Nistelrooy saw Baptista darting down the left wing and chipped the ball across, leaving the speedy Brazilian to out pace his markers Carles Puyol and Rafael Marquez before half-volleying the

Rasel to return home

SPORTS REPORTER

Injured pace bowler Syed Rasel will return home tomorrow from New Zealand, ending his tour after just half-a-match, as he would not be able to bowl within one month.

The left-arm seamer, who picked an injury during Bangladesh's first warm-up match against State Northern Knights at Seddon Park on December 16, is being sent home to undergo a rehabilitation programme designed by Bangladeshi team physio Darryn Liffon.

It was revealed that Rasel suffered a Grade 3 dislocation of the left collarbone and has been suggested to take conservative treatment, which is the best management of the condition.

For further specialist opinion all x-rays and reports were sent to Dr Trevor James in Melbourne, Australia and his advice is awaited.

Uncapped left-arm seamer Sajidul Islam has already joined the party in New Zealand as replacement.

Meanwhile, middle order batsman Rahul Dravid could also be promoted to open to allow Yuvraj Singh to slot into the middle order.

India have a fantastic batting lineup, all of whom have a lot of experience and a lot of knowledge," Clarke told reporters.

"They're coming off a fantastic win and I think it will set up a great Test series."

Australia's biggest selection worry will be the balance of their bowling attack with Mitchell Johnson or Shaun Tait competing for the third pace bowler position if selectors include left-arm wrist spinner Brad Hogg.

"They (Tait and Johnson) have been bowling very well and it will be a tough decision on either one of them," said Clarke.

"The pitch looks a bit damp ... and has a bit of grass at one end and is a bit bare at the other ... but hopefully we will get some sun on it on Christmas Day that will dry it out."

"I think with some sunshine it might make a difference."

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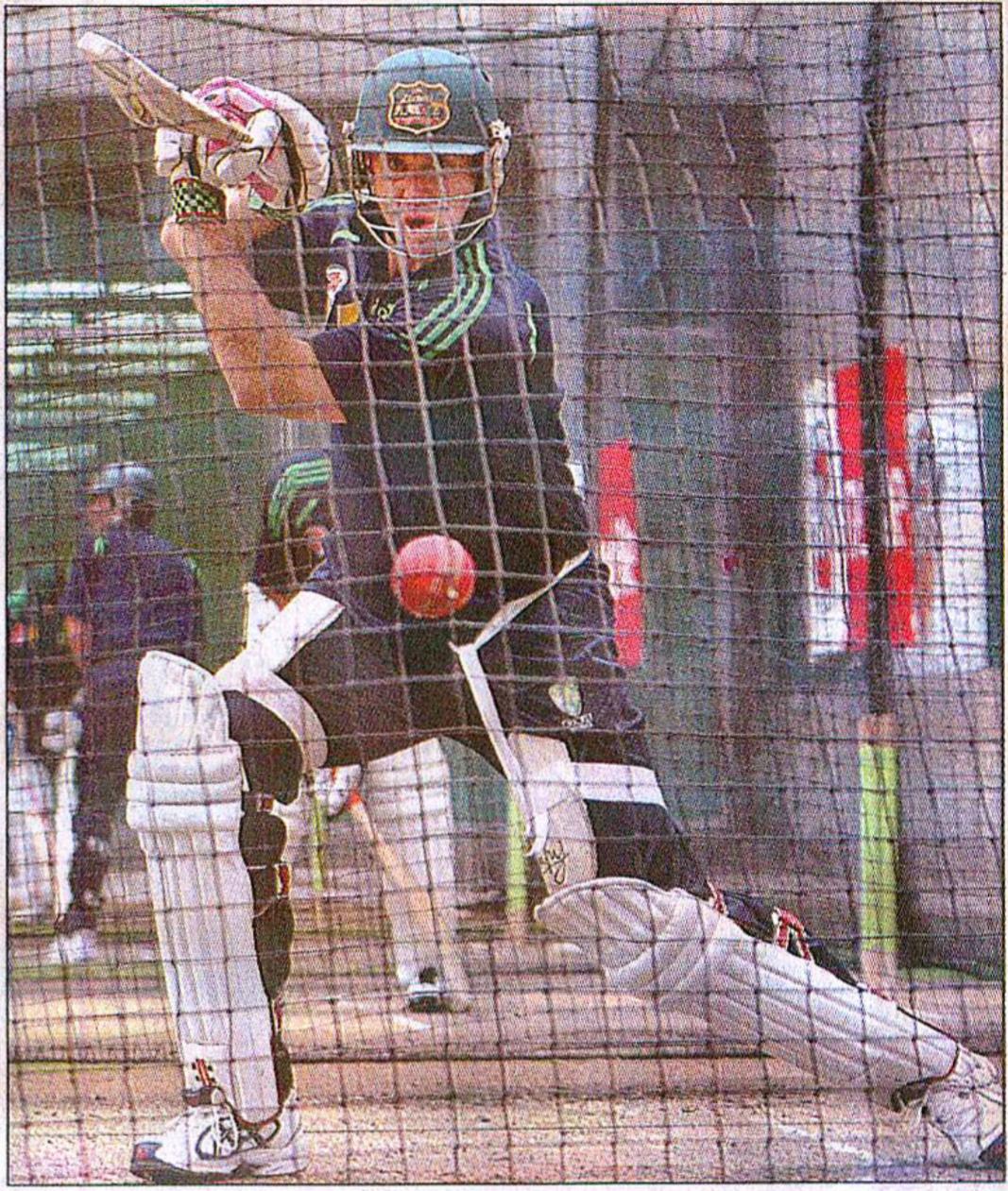


PHOTO: AFP

Australian star batsman Matthew Hayden drives a ball during a practice session at the MCG in Melbourne yesterday.

Records beckon Aussies

Indo-Aussie Test series starts tomorrow



AFP, Sydney

under by 184 runs in the 2005 MCG match and Australia conquered India by nine wickets in the corresponding Boxing Day Test four years ago.

Australia were last beaten at the MCG by England by 12 runs in a thriller nine years ago. Australia rarely lose at their home of cricket.

Ricky Ponting's team are in the midst of another triumphant run with 14 consecutive victories stretching back two years to their win over South Africa at the MCG.

Cricket does not get a grander stage than the 100,000-capacity Melbourne Cricket Ground on Boxing Day on one of the biggest days of the Australian sporting calendar.

India go into the MCG showcase on the back of just 48 overs' batting practice in the rained-out lead-up match against Victoria and will run into an Australian side determined to set the tone for the four-Test series from the first ball.

England were smashed by an innings and 99 runs in last year's Boxing Day Test, South Africa went

India have won just four Tests in

eight Australian tours, but pushed Steve Waugh's Australians all the way in the drawn 1-1 last series tour here in 2003-04.

Yet the tourists are upbeat about their chances on the strength of their impressive recent away record - Test series victories in the West Indies in 2006 after 35 years and then in England in 2007 after 21 years, under Rahul Dravid.

They have the most experienced middle-order quartet in world cricket with Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly and VVS Laxman, weighing in with 32,610 runs gleaned from a total of 442 Tests and with 87 centuries between them.

Ganguly, top-scorer in this month's series against Pakistan with 534 runs in three matches, will make his 100th Test appearance in Melbourne.

The most important thing is you have to play aggressive cricket

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

Gilly for clean series



BBC ONLINE, undated

Australia's Adam Gilchrist does not want the Test series against India to feature the verbal clashes that marred recent one-day games in India.

The four-Test series gets underway with the traditional Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Australia's one-day series in India in October was marred by on-field spats.

"Hopefully ... the players are not going to go down the route again of

getting too carried away with it," said wicketkeeper Gilchrist.

"It will be hard-fought. They're a team that has said they want to take the challenge up to us in an aggressive manner.

"It all got a bit out of control in the one-day series in India. We want to play hard, aggressive cricket and not go too far with it."

Australia won the seven-match one-day series 4-2 on a tour organised without Test matches.

The two sides last played in Tests in 2004, Australia winning their first series in India for 35 years.

India battled to a 1-1 Test series draw in Australia in 2003/04, against a side missing the injured

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



PHOTO: STAR
 Bangladesh Under-19 cricket team members pose for a photograph at the Zia International Airport in Bangladesh yesterday before their departure for South Africa to play a three-day match and a triangular limited-overs series involving the hosts and India.