

'Indians won't enjoy Tait'

PTI, Melbourne

Considering that the Indian batsmen don't really relish fast bowling, Australia should pick Shaun Tait ahead of Brad Hogg and unleash a four-pronged pace attack to knock down the visitors, advocates Michael Kasprovic.

"I'd go with four quicks. When you are looking for the bowlers who are going to get you 20 wickets ... On a drop-in wicket it doesn't really offer a lot of turn," he said.

"Nothing against Brad Hogg or anything, he's a fantastic bowler. I just think the Indian batsmen are seasoned campaigners against spin bowling and what they don't particularly like is fast bowling," Kasprovic was quoted as saying by the Australian Associated Press (AAP), a news agency.

"Shaun Tait bowling yorkers at 160kmph, if you ask most batsmen around, they don't particularly enjoy it.

"Certainly if it's swinging in at your toes, it's not at all that comfortable to play," he reasoned.

Hogg, however, enjoys the backing of skipper Ricky Ponting and vice captain Adam Gilchrist, both of whom believe having a spinner would add variety to the attack.

But Kasprovic believes part-time spinners like Michael Clarke would be more than enough.

"The mix of Brett Lee and Stuart Clark with left-arm Mitchell Johnson's variation and Shaun Tait as well, you have an arsenal there to go hard at them," he said.

"You've always got (part-time spinners) Andrew Symonds and Michael Clarke if you did want to change things around." And having four pacers would not make the attack one-dimensional, he asserted.

"Each of those quick bowlers are different in their own way and I think there is enough variation there."

PCB bans Inzy and ICL stars

BBC ONLINE, undated

Pakistan have banned six players from domestic cricket, including former captain Inzamam-ul-Haq, for playing in an unauthorised Twenty20 tournament.

The six were all involved in the Indian Cricket League, which took place earlier this month.

And they could now take legal action to try and force the Pakistan Cricket Board to reverse its decision.

"Cricket is our bread and butter. This is a violation of our fundamental rights," said batsman Imran Farhat.

Abdul Razaq, Shabbir Ahmed, Taufeeq Umar and Azhar Mahmood were the other Pakistan players involved in the ICL, which featured six teams and was bankrolled by broadcaster Zee Telefilms.

But the league was not recognised by the International Cricket Council or the boards of its full member countries, including Pakistan.

"It is a policy decision that players who play in unauthorised leagues cannot be allowed to play in any domestic competition organised by the PCB.

"We cannot allow violation of our rules and regulations by anyone. We don't think it is a harsh decision," said PCB domestic general manager Shafiq Ahmed.

Osim goes

FROM PAGE 20

university hospital near his home before moving to a rehabilitation centre on Monday, Tajima said.

Tajima informed Osim for the first time that he had been replaced as national coach by homegrown tactician Takeshi Okada, who led Japan to their World Cup finals debut in 1998.

Osim, who led the former Yugoslavia to the 1990 World Cup quarter-finals, collapsed at home in the early morning on November 16 after watching an English Premiership match, according to the association.

About Osim's future, Tajima said his association might offer him a post when he fully recovers.

Osim arrived in Japan in 2003 to steer strugglers JEF United into serious J-League contention.

He took over from Brazilian great Zico as national coach after Japan crashed out without a win in the World Cup first round in Germany last year.

Japan won 13 matches, lost five and drew two under Osim but failed to win a third straight Asian Cup in July.

100 Tests

FROM PAGE 17

100th Test, be sure there won't be a single Indian not wishing him well. At the twilight of an eventful career he finally seems to have won over even those who harboured a strong dislike for him.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Fazlur Rahman Babul (C), football organiser and coordinator of the youth football development programme under the assistance of Canary Wharf, welcomes British Aviation Minister Jim Fitzpatrick (3rd from right) at the Zia International Airport yesterday.

'It depends on the pitch'

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

India are considering playing two spinners to capitalise on their batting depth to pressure Australia in Wednesday's opening match of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, skipper Anil Kumble said Tuesday.

Kumble, fresh from leading India to a home series triumph over Pakistan, said the team would be playing to their strengths and are contemplating using both spinners, himself and Harbhajan Singh, to go after the 20 Australian wickets and victory.

"Yes, there is a case for playing two spinners, but it all depends on how the pitch looks the morning of the match ... we will take a final call Wednesday morning," Kumble told his match-eve press conference here Tuesday.

The Indians have been talking up their chances of inflicting their first series win in Australia and Australia's first home series defeat in 14 years.

To do that, Kumble said India would focus on their own strengths to bring off their pinnacle achievement against the world Test champions in the four-Test series.

"I think the key to winning any Test match is to score runs and, if you have runs on the board, then any team can get under pressure," he said. "That will be the thing, try and get runs on the board so you can put pressure on the opposition and get 20 wickets."

"If we play to our strength, our batting is definitely our strength, (and) I know our batters can fire," he added. "We have the potential to do that (and) it's important for us to stick with our strengths and do the job."

The Melbourne Cricket Ground wicket is expected to favour the fast bowlers early, before it starts taking turn later in the Boxing Day Test match.

"It is important to get the momentum early on," Kumble said. "But, having said that, in Test cricket you still have time to catch up."

Kumble, the third all-time leading wicket-taker in Tests with 584 wickets, said he was looking forward to the challenge of humbling Australia on their home pitches.

"It's a very important tour for all of us," Kumble said. "Personally, at least for me, this definitely will be my last tour of Australia with the Indian team so it will be very special to go back with a victory."

"Everyone is aware of this, it's not just the senior players, but even the younger players who are coming here for the first time are really excited to do well."

"It's a challenge, but I think we've all really done well to accept that challenge and we're ready for it," he said. "I think we have a good chance to do well and get the right result."

Batsman Sourav Ganguly, who was skipper when India won the famous 2001 series on the subcontinent 2-1 and then when the tourists retained the Border-Gavaskar Trophy with a 1-1 series draw here in 2003/04, said India were the best test Australia would get.

"If you look at the record for the last five or six years, in Test cricket we have competed with them, beaten them, so it's going to be a good series," Ganguly said. "We know they're a tough side whether it's home or away, but we also have the side to play well."

"The Australians realise, and I've been friends with a few of them, that we are the only team which competes with them better than any other team in the world," he added. "That makes this series very interesting, but verbals are part and parcel of sport."

Vettori must prove: Crowe

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Martin Crowe, the former New Zealand captain, has launched a stinging attack on the current leadership of New Zealand cricket. Unimpressed by Daniel Vettori's captaincy, Crowe, arguably his country's greatest batsman ever, says it's high time the left-arm spinner showed why he was selected to lead in place of Stephen Fleming.

"Daniel Vettori, Jacob Oram, Brendon McCullum and Scott Styris have all got to put their big money where their busy mouths are - Vettori in particular," Crowe told stuff.co.nz. "He [Vettori] has to get up to speed ASAP and remind us every day why the selectors felt he's a better option than Fleming."

After inspiring New Zealand to the semi-finals of the ICC World Twenty20, Vettori has had a torrid time at the helm, his side losing

both the Test and ODI series away in South Africa, and relinquishing the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy after a 2-0 loss to Australia.

Crowe also targeted coach John Bracewell, though he suggested that criticism needs to focus on the players as Bracewell, with renewed backing from the New Zealand board, is not going anywhere.

Crowe had called for Bracewell to step down right after the World Cup in April, following New Zealand's exit at the semi-final stage. He now says that he is tired of Bracewell's astounding interviews and selections during the short tour to Australia. "Braces this, Braces that - I'm sick of the talk and the headlines about the coach which have dominated for weeks and weeks," he said. "When I was asked what I thought after we lost the World Cup semi, I said 'it's time for a change to keep evolving' but now we need to forget it."

(NZ Cricket CEO) Justin Vaughan has made his call - his first big one. So have the players. Braces

is very lucky to have two years to show NZ he can coach. Not be a smart arse, but be a very good coach.

"During the winter all but one player wanted Braces to continue, so the onus is now on them."

"They are the ones under pressure. They have what they wanted so now it's all their heads on the line, series in-series out. Braces isn't going anywhere I promise you."

Bracewell was handed a two-year extension in July this year, and has been in charge of the side since 2003. And despite the recent losses against South Africa and Australia, Vaughan believes the right man is in charge.

"He's under no more pressure than when he started (four years ago)," Vaughan told the Dominion Post. "But we've just played two difficult sides. The results were disappointing but we expect that to improve now. He's got two home series against Bangladesh and England now, which we should win."

Anderson chasing MU dream

Football

AFP, London

Brazilian midfielder Anderson says he is happy to spend the chilly festive period playing football - and not relaxing on Copacabana beach - as he pursues his dream of making history with Manchester United.

Until last year the 19-year-old former Gremio and FC Porto player would spend the Christmas period relaxing on one of Brazil's most famous beaches.

But since his 17 million pound to Old Trafford from Porto last year the twice-capped Brazilian international has had to quickly accept the reality of English football moving up a gear during the festive period.

United begin their post-Christmas campaign Wednesday in the chilly north east at Sunderland's Stadium of Light, where they will hope to secure the points and leapfrog, provisionally at least, Premier League leaders Arsenal.

And while the idea takes a bit of getting used to, the samba star is happy to make the necessary sacrifices.

"I think I know what to expect because my team-mates have kept telling me how tough it is to play so many games at one time," he said.

"It's a completely new experience for me. I would usually be on the beach by now. But for once, I will have to leave my turkey on the plate and get ready to play football instead."

After a delayed start to his United career, caused by his appearance at Copa America and a minor hamstring injury picked up during pre-season, Anderson's time at Old Trafford almost stalled before it had got off the starting grid.

The teenager was part of the side stunned by Coventry in the League Cup, with suggestions arising immediately after the game that the player might be making a quick exit from the Theatre of Dreams.

Those rumours were quickly dispelled by Sir Alex Ferguson, while Anderson admitted he was never seriously concerned for his future.

"That match was very difficult," he said.

"But I was well aware the club knew what they were buying when they brought me here."

"A player doesn't show what he is worth in one match. It happens over

a period of time and I am sure eventually, the fans will see what I can do."

If recent performances are any guide, Ferguson has unearthed a gem.

Anderson has been excelling in the most demanding midfield arena of all and came out just on top in his personal duel with Stephen Gerrard in United's victory over Liverpool at Anfield a week ago.

Rather than shy away from the physical nature of the English game, Anderson appears to be relishing it.

And, if he can add goalscoring to his repertoire, he could easily emulate the memorable feats of United's former midfield greats Bryan Robson, Paul Ince and Roy Keane.

"If you can do well in the Premier League you can do well anywhere because it is so hard here," he said.

"But I was well prepared for both the mental and physical challenge."

"I have become more confident with every game I play. Hopefully, that will continue because by the time I have finished here I want to be part of Manchester United's history."

Marcus won't compromise

BBC ONLINE, undated

Marcus Trescothick still has aspirations to play for England but says he will not risk his long-term health to do so.

The former opener has not played for England since August 2006 as a stress-related illness has twice forced him to return home from overseas tours.

Trescothick told BBC Radio 5 Live: "One thing I will not do is sacrifice my health to make it happen again."

"My life is more important after cricket," he added.

The 32-year-old Somerset star has recently undergone surgery on his left foot but is set to resume training after Christmas.

He admitted the longer he was away from the international scene, the more difficult it would be to resume his England career.

"I still have aspirations to do it," said Trescothick, speaking just days after an out-of-sorts England lost their latest Test series in Sri Lanka.

"I understand the older I get and longer I have been away it will be harder to do it."

England name their squads on 4 January for the one-day and Test series in New Zealand.

Fulham caretaker keen on job

AFP, London

Fulham caretaker boss Ray Lewington has insisted the club's search for a new manager will not hinder his bid to steer the Cottagers through the notoriously busy Christmas period.

After a string of poor results which has left them in danger of relegation Fulham sacked Lawrie Sanchez last week, leaving Lewington to step into the breach on a temporary basis.

And although he has refused to rule himself out of the running for the top job he is at ease with the board's recruitment process and insists he will continue to keep his mind on the task in hand.

Maradona

FROM PAGE 20

diplomat in Argentina Mohsen Baharvand in a video broadcast by local media on Monday.

"I'm there with the people of Iran, really with all my heart," he added after the game in Buenos Aires.

In his heyday, Maradona led Argentina to its 1986 World Cup victory and he is revered in his own country and around the world. But he has struggled with drug abuse and obesity since he retired from the game.

Tale of two

FROM PAGE 17

Warne's dictum for the MCG -- "If it seams, it spins" -- but knows he possesses the ammunition of work around it. "Mitchell Johnson impressed everybody against Sri Lanka. Stuart Clark's Test record at the moment is as good as any going around. I'm very confident we're going to take 20 wickets in every Test we play this summer."

Occasionally they both echo the same sentiment. India will first try and plot a means to get 20 wickets but Kumble is well aware of the need to keep the batsmen quiet in case they hit a roadblock. ("We have plans and bowlers to hit the right areas"). Ponting also knows, from past experience, that Australia will have to refrain from over-attacking. "Last time (in 2003-04) we did over-attack some of our players just the little bit ... If you look to the way we played against India last time (2004), we bowled a bit differently." He knows the dangers of a bouncer barrage. "It's not how many you bowl, but when you use them."

And just once in a while they drop their guard. Ponting, for all his aggression, knows the importance of a tempered approach. He feels they over-attacked in Adelaide last time around and "probably let them score a few too many runs". Kumble, for all his guarded responses, bursts through forcefully towards the end: "I am positive that we will be able to do well here on this tour. I don't see any reason why we can't win." No Indian team has managed to do so in the last 60 years, and this one is up against it, but Kumble will know a thing or two about scaling barriers.

Rest of the Test

FROM PAGE 17

seasoned Mohammad Rafique and Enamul Haque Jr for the crucial left-arm spinner's spot.

On the other hand, the performance of Nafees in the last few matches of the national league has impressed the selectors, who will have to bring one opener back to make way for the left-hander.

The panel, however, might take a surprising decision by bringing back Javed Omar if Tamim Iqbal and newcomer Zunaed Siddique both make some impact in the one-day series.

Chasing Australia

Cricket

AFP, London

By the end of a year where Australia continued to remain supreme as the leading Test and one-day side it was easy to think little had changed in world cricket.

They won a third straight World Cup and, after a run of 14 consecutive Test wins, they were closing in on their own world record of 18 ahead of the start of their series with India.

In January, Australia completed only the second 5-0 Ashes whitewash, more than avenging their narrow 2-1 reverse of two years earlier.

After the end of the latest Ashes, in Sydney, Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne, who between them took 1,271 Test wickets, retired from the five-day game along with opening batsman Justin Langer.

Warne had single-handedly revived the fading art of leg-spin and in so doing showed how slow bowlers could be an attacking force. His haul of 708 Test wickets was a then world record and few disputed his right to be regarded as the greatest wrist-spinner the game had known.

If the success of McGrath, who carried on to the World Cup, was achieved by more conventional means, it was no less important to Australia.

As reserved away from the pitch as Warne was colourful, McGrath elevated the traditional virtues of line and length into something approaching an art form and his tally of 563 Test wickets was the most by any pace bowler.

Warne's record though was surpassed by extraordinary Sri Lanka off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran whose unorthodox action continues to divide opinion.

Whether Murali reaches his goal of 1,000 Test wickets remains to be seen but he may have already have

an unbeatable total.

The death of Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer, found unconscious in his Jamaica hotel room on March 18, the day after his side's shock World Cup defeat against Ireland, led to a raft of conspiracy theories involving illegal betting syndicates in Asia after police launched a murder inquiry, saying the 58-year-old former England player had been strangled.

However, Woolmer was known to have suffered with diabetes and high blood pressure and last month an inquest jury returned an open verdict on his death.

On the field, the first World Cup to be staged in the Caribbean suffered from being too long and from having too many lopsided contests.

India and Pakistan's first round exits were a blow to organisers hoping fans of those two well-supported teams would help fill out the several brand new stadiums built specially for the World Cup.

The decision to price many local fans out of the market for World Cup tickets was belatedly acknowledged as an error.

So too was barring them, if they didn't have written permission, from bringing the musical instruments which helped distinguish cricket in the Caribbean from anywhere else.

The combined effect was to ensure that even big games were played out in front of meagre crowds in a soulless atmosphere.

It was in such an environment that colourful Pakistan skipper Inzamam-ul-Haq made a tearful exit from one-day cricket.

Amidst repeated examples of ruthless Australian professionalism, captain Ricky Ponting leading the way, others also shone briefly with Lasith Malinga taking four wickets in as many balls for Sri Lanka against South Africa and Bangladesh beating India.

Adam Gilchrist's century, a commanding display of clean-hitting, should have been the

abiding memory of the World Cup final.

But it was overshadowed by the ridiculous sight of the showpiece being completed in the Bridgetown darkness.

By contrast the far more concise inaugural World Twenty20 in South Africa, where India beat rivals Pakistan in a tense final, was hailed as a success.

However, India batsman Yuvraj Singh's six sixes in an over off England's Stuart Broad were symptomatic of how heavily biased the fledgling format was in favour of batsmen.

The Twenty20 era pretty much passed Brian Lara by, to the relief of bowlers everywhere.

He retired after the World Cup as Test cricket's leading run-scorer -- an achievement all the more impressive by his playing in a largely weak side.

Whatever his leadership skills, there was no denying the majesty of Lara's batting which, at its height, saw him make match-winning hundreds full of thrilling strokeplay against even Australia's attack.

India enjoyed its first Test series win in England for 21 years with a maiden hundred from spinner Anil Kumble their lone century.

Generally, batsmen remained on top in 2007.

Jacques Kallis scored five hundreds in seven innings as South Africa enjoyed series triumphs over Pakistan and New Zealand to set alongside their earlier success against India.

Sri Lanka's Kumar Sangakkara became the first batsman in history to score more than 150 in four successive Tests with the best of his quartet an innings of 192 against Australia.

England had a poor year which ended with them bowled out for 81 in the drawn final Test against Sri Lanka in Galle.

Tigers raring

FROM PAGE 17

and traditionally used for both rugby union during winter, and cricket in summer. To accommodate both sports, the cricket pitch is a drop-in one. It is nurtured at the outer over and then put on a massive mobile tray with gigantic wheels and towed to the centre.

"We have played on drop-in pitches in Cairns and Darwin during the tour of Australia and the bounce was a bit inconsistent. I hope tomorrow's one is a good wicket because you can never tell for sure as these pitches can not develop a character like normal wickets which are in place for years," said Tigers captain Mohammad Ashraful who nevertheless believed that the team was heading in the right direction.

"In every practice game we showed improvement. The bowlers have found the right length more consistently and the batsmen have showed that they are in good touch. It is just that we have to be careful in not losing wickets in the middle order when someone is set. The players are all fit and we are really looking forward to the series," said Ashraful.

Coach Jamie Siddons wanted the team to continue doing more right things than wrong.

"We should not expect us to go and win the series. We have to play the best we can and if results come our way then that'd be fantastic. We are playing against a much better ranked side and the goal for us is to be competitive. People who have seen us play in New Zealand are saying how good we look in the field and we need to keep doing that. I don't expect overnight

improvements."

One concern for tomorrow could be the weather that according to forecasts will be cloudy. It rained a lot in Auckland today and if there is one unpredictable feature in this land of order and stability it should be the elements.

TEAMS

BANGLADESH (likely): Mohammad Ashraful (captain), Zunaed Siddique, Tamim Iqbal, Aftab Ahmed, Shakib Al Hasan, Mehrob Hossain, Forhad Reza, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Abdur Razzak, Shahadat Hossain.

NEW ZEALAND (from): Daniel Vettori (captain), Brendon McCullum (wicketkeeper), Jamie How, Peter Fulton, Scott Styris, Ross Taylor, Mathew Sinclair, Jacob Oram, Kyle Mills, Mark Gillespie, Chris Martin, Jeetan Patel.

Cloud over

FROM PAGE 17

batsmen managed just one half-century between them.

SQUADS

SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme Smith (captain), Herschelle Gibbs, Hashim Amla, Jacques Kallis, Ashwell Prince, AB de Villiers, Mark Boucher, Andre Nel, Paul Harris, Dale Steyn, Makhaya Ntini, Shaun Pollock.

WEST INDIES (from): Chris Gayle or Dwayne Bravo (captain), Devon Smith, Daren Ganga, Runako Morton, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Marlon Samuels, Brenton Parchment, Denesh Ramdin, Darren Sammy, Rawl Lewis, Fidel Edwards, Jerome Taylor, Daren Powell, Pedro Collins.

Bowlers ready

FROM PAGE 17

looked impressive this southern summer, but Tait (5 wickets in two Tests), Clark (54 wickets in 11 Tests), Johnson (8 wickets in two Tests) and Hogg (9 wickets in four Tests) have only played 19 Tests between them.

Ponting said it was important that Australia learned from prior mistakes to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, and not bowl too short and over-attack India's experienced batsmen.

"There's a terrific feel around the group," he said. "It's Boxing Day, we're going to have a big crowd. It's a great place to play Test cricket and India are a great opponent."

"So put all that together and you can pretty much assure that Australia are going to be on song when we take the field on Wednesday."

"Looking back at last year's Ashes series against England, that was as well prepared as I've ever seen any cricket team for any series that I've been a part of and, right at the moment, we've got a really similar sort of feel around the group."

Melbourne Cricket Club officials expect a first-day crowd of about 75,000, which would be better than the start of the 2005 Test against South Africa, although would not match last year's 89,155 Ashes sell-out against England.

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA (likely): Phil Jaques, Matthew Hayden, Ricky Ponting (captain), Mike Hussey, Michael Clarke, Andrew Symonds, Adam Gilchrist (wicketkeeper), Brett Lee, Mitchell Johnson, Stuart Clark, Brad Hogg.

INDIA (likely): Wasim Jaffer, Rahul Dravid, VVS Laxman, Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Yuvraj Singh, MS Dhoni (wicketkeeper), Anil Kumble (captain), Zaheer Khan, Rudra Pratap Singh, Harbhajan Singh.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	35 Skin opening of the	54 One side of the agent	10 Double of the
1 Dressed (in)	37 9-to-5'ers	55 Tear	11 Back talk
5 Fresh	await	56 Chances, for short	17 Acct.
8 Intentions	It	57 Swag	19 100 percent
12 Music lover's hookup			