

'Soft' England off to NZ

AFP, London

Paul Collingwood believes former England captain Nasser Hussain has missed the point in labelling the current squad as 'soft' ahead of the tour of New Zealand. Hussain has been worried by the dip in England's Test form since they won the Ashes in 2005 and reckons the side needs to be mentally more resilient if they are to defeat Australia in next year's edition.

But England, after a lacklustre World Cup where they failed to reach the semi-finals, have recently enjoyed series wins under skipper Collingwood away to India and Sri Lanka in the shorter form of the game. The Test match picture is less encouraging.

England have won just two of their eight Test series since their Ashes triumph two years ago, a run that includes a 5-0 thrashing in Australia, a defeat at home to India last year and the 1-0 reverse in Sri Lanka during the first half of their current (northern hemisphere) winter tour programme.

Nevertheless Durham all-rounder Collingwood, speaking ahead of the limited overs' squad departure for two Twenty20 and five one-day internationals in New Zealand can answer Hussain's criticisms.

"We don't believe we are soft," said Collingwood.

"We were disappointed with how we played in Sri Lanka this winter but it wasn't because we are soft. Hopefully we can go out to New Zealand and prove it."

Meanwhile Collingwood, an outstanding fielder in the key one-day position of backward point, is taking heart from England's improved displays in the white-ball game.

"We've been a dangerous side in the past but it comes down to consistency. That's what we're looking for now -- to get a consistent side together and know our games, roles and go out and perform with the right approach."

"Hopefully we're starting to get the right formula."

England's new chief selector Geoff Miller, the former international off-spinner, has made it clear he would prefer one captain to lead the country in all forms of the game rather than have duties shared between Collingwood and Test leader Michael Vaughan.

"He said in an 'ideal world' and it's not an ideal world at the moment," said Collingwood.

"From the start I've always said that 'Vaughany' and I have a good relationship. We realise that this can work well and as long as we are trying to take both teams and English cricket in the right direction, it can work. It's as simple as that."

"Of course I've developed, it comes down to experience. Obviously I didn't have much experience coming into the captaincy and the more you play and captain, you get better ideas of how to go about things."

"The last two (one-day) series have been a nice feeling but we realise we have so far to go -- our real aim is to win a trophy which we haven't done before," added Collingwood, a veteran of 136 one-dayers and 30 Tests.

The likes of former selection chief David Graveney have identified the Test series in New Zealand, which follows the limited overs series in March, as the time for England to start regaining form in the five-day format.

SQUAD
Paul Collingwood (captain), Alastair Cook, Ian Bell, Kevin Pietersen, Luke Wright, Owais Shah, Ravi Bopara, Tim Ambrose (wicketkeeper), Phil Mustard (wicketkeeper), James Anderson, Stuart Broad, Dimitri Mascarenhas, Ryan Sidebottom, Graeme Swann, James Tredwell, Chris Tremlett.

Hansen to rule

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Test matches on the India spinner. "Under the provisions of the ICC Code of Conduct, Justice Hansen has the power to increase, decrease, amend or otherwise substitute his own decision from that made at the previous hearing, and his decision is final and binding," the ICC statement read.

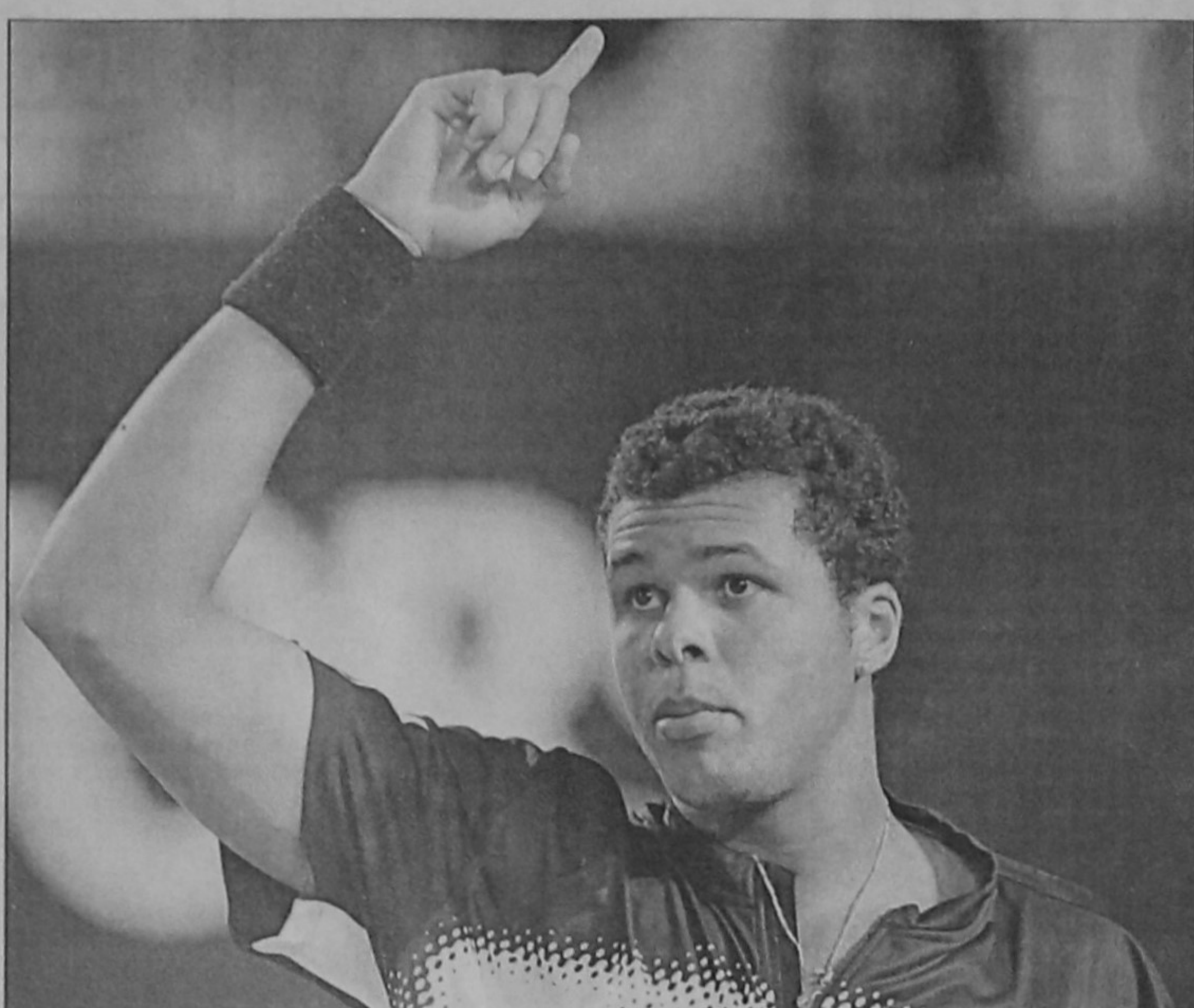
Once Justice Hansen has reached his decision, he must provide it in writing to Senior Counsel and Company Secretary Urvashi Naidoo, who will then forward it to Harbhajan, Procter and ICC Chief Executive Officer Malcolm Speed ahead of any public announcement.

Spurs close

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Cup victory at Mansfield on Saturday, hinted that the former Real Madrid defender was still debating his future.

"The latest is that we have given him permission to speak to Newcastle and to Tottenham," Southgate said. "I think a fee is agreed with Newcastle, but I don't know if a fee is agreed with Tottenham."



Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga points to umpire Carlos Ramos during his men's singles final against Serbian Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Sunday.

Tsonga a proud man



AFP, Melbourne

Jo-Wilfried Tsonga might have lost the Australian Open final to Novak Djokovic, but he has taken giant strides over the past fortnight and said Sunday he was a proud man.

The unseeded Frenchman went down in four sets but his ranking will climb to 18 from 38 courtesy of his giantkilling run in Melbourne where he claimed four seeded scalps.

"I'm very proud of myself. I'm also happy for Novak, because he played unbelievable today. I don't know if I have to be sad or happy of this final, but I feel great," said the 22-year-old.

Afridi propels Pakistan

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Pakistan won the first two matches in Karachi and Hyderabad with ease.

The remaining matches are scheduled for Faisalabad (January 30) and Sheikhupura (February 2).

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard of the third one-day international between Pakistan and Zimbabwe at Multan Stadium on Sunday:

PAKISTAN
Butt c Taylor b Chigumbura 23
Jamshed c Chibhabha b Mupariwa 32
Younis Khan lbw b Mupariwa 10
Yousuf c & b Mupariwa 5
Malik run out 3
Misbah c Chigumbura b Williams 44
Afridi c Masakadza b Mupariwa 85
Akmal c Chibhabha b Brent 28
Kamran not out 28
Tanveer c Brent b Chibhabha 2
Arafat not out 0
Extras: (w-12) 12
Total: (For nine wkts in 50 overs) 272
Fall of wickets: 1-47, 2-66, 3-70, 4-76, 5-78, 6-194, 7-219, 8-259, 9-267.

ZIMBABWE
Sibanda c Akmal b Tanveer 6
Masakadza c Younis b Tanveer 10
Williams c Malik b Afridi 71
Taibu run out 10
Taylor st Akmal b Malik 55
Chigumbura not out 42
Chibhabha c Misbah b Malik 10
Dabengwa lbw b Kamran 0
Brent not out 13
Extras: (b-2, lb-4, w-12) 18
Total: (For seven wkts in 50 overs) 235
Did not bat: Price, Mupariwa.

Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-26, 3-50, 4-155, 5-166, 6-187, 7-189.

Bowler O M R W
Tanveer 10 1 41 2
Kamran 10 0 35 1
Arafat 10 0 41 0
Afridi 10 0 60 1
Malik 10 0 52 2
Result: Pakistan won by 37 runs and lead the 5-match series 3-0.

Man-of-the-match: Shahid Afridi.
Toss: Pakistan.
Umpires: Asoka de Silva (SRI), Nadeem Ghouri (PAK)
TV umpire: Zameer Haider (PAK)
Match referee: Chris Broad (ENG)

Draw looms large

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wanting more, Ponting bounced back to form with 140. He equalled Gavaskar and West Indian Brian Lara's mark of Test centuries, but still has a way to go to catch Sachin Tendulkar, who has 39 centuries.

It ended something of a drought for the Australian skipper, who went into the match with just 122 runs at 20.33 in the series and question marks over his ability to counter Indian spinner Harbhajan Singh.

Ponting, who batted with a runner towards the end of his innings because of a sore back and did not take to the field in India's second innings, was extremely watchful early on and struggled for touch, but he was back to his best on Sunday.

He batted for 392 minutes, faced 266 deliveries and hit 10 fours, eventually playing on from the bowling of Sehwa.

Clarke, who added 210 with Ponting for the fourth wicket, scored his sixth century before being caught in slips by VVS Laxman from the bowling of exciting teenager Sharma (3-115), who was again impressive.

teams resurfacing after Saturday's play.

Sehwa suggested on Saturday evening that the cautious nature of Australia's batting showed they were "scared" of losing the match.

However, Australian opener Matthew Hayden then fired back by saying India were bowling negatively to slow scoring and that the home side were happy to oblige, as a draw would ensure they won the series.

Tensions surfaced just before lunch on Sunday, when India's substitute fielder Dinesh Karthik and Clarke exchanged words after umpire Bowden turned down an appeal for a catch at the wicket off Harbhajan.

Straight after the unsuccessful appeal, Clarke infuriated the Indians by twice pulling away as Harbhajan was about to bowl.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard at stumps on the fourth day of the fourth and final Test between Australia and India at the Adelaide Oval on Sunday:
INDIA: First innings 526
(Tendulkar 153, Kumble 87, Johnson 4-126, Lee 3-101)
AUSTRALIA: First innings (overnight 322 for 3)
Jaques b Kumble 60
Hayden b Sharma 103
Ponting b Sehwa 140

Bowler O M R W
Lee 6 1 8 0
Johnson 5 0 6 1
Symonds 3 0 20 0
Clarke 3 0 10 0

in Melbourne and said he hoped to continue his form through the year.

"Not everybody can beat the way I beat. So I know Richard (Gasquet) or (Mikhail) Youzhny or Rafael (Nadal), they are very good players. And to beat them, it's very difficult, and I did it, so I'm confident."

While accepting Djokovic was the better player on the night, he also criticised the Serb for the amount of time he took bouncing balls between serves, which Tsonga said was offputting.

"Sometimes when you have to return, you are like ready. When your opponent takes a lot of time, you are like this (back and forth)," he said.

"It's very difficult. Between points you have like 25 seconds to play. When it's 40 seconds, the umpire has to say something."

Sharma produced a stunning second innings spell to claim the prized scalp of Australian skipper Ricky Ponting.

Again here, Sharma has been lionhearted at the bowler's crease and was the most impressive of the Indian bowlers in Australia's first innings.

On a docile pitch that offered almost no assistance, he was almost unplayable at times and was willing to keep working in long spells.

"Wonderful, I can't say more than that," was how Pathan assessed Sharma's efforts.

"The way he has put in, he's just 19. When I see him I look back to myself, we are very different bowlers, he is quicker than me and more tall, but I started my cricket career here in Australia."

Clarke waits on deputy job

CRICINFO, undated

Michael Clarke will wait for news from the selectors on whether he is elevated to the vice-captaincy following Adam Gilchrist's retirement. Clarke was Australia's captain during the Twenty20 international against New Zealand last month, when he expressed his leadership aspirations, but after posting his sixth Test century he said there was only a light-hearted application being made for the position.

"One came from Haydos," Clarke said. "I said to him: 'Are you retiring as well?' He said: 'Not now, I'm a chance of getting a stripe.' We had a joke about it but other than that it hasn't been spoken about."

Clarke and Michael Hussey are the main contenders for the spot and the pair was involved in an on-field exercise on the fourth day when Hussey was operating as Ricky Ponting's runner. Ponting, who scored 140 and combined for a 210-run stand with Clarke, suffered a lower back injury and did not field as India reached 1 for 45 at stumps. However, he is expected to return to guide the team on the final day.

The Clarke-Ponting partnership allowed Australia to dream of a lead, which eventually stopped at 37, and they retain hope of repeating the miracle last-day win against England in 2006. Clarke raised a century in that match as well and his hard-working 118 on Sunday was a mixture of attacking bursts and considered play.

"The easiest time to score was when the ball was new and hard, so it was our intention to come out and be positive with the new ball," he said. "Once it got softer and started to give reverse -- they also bowled a lot of spin -- we knew it was going to be hard to bat. With guys on the boundary it was hard to keep the runs flowing."

Australia were eventually dismissed for 563 and their chase for quick wickets would have been more successful if Clarke had held a regulation chance at second slip when Virender Sehwa was two. It was the fifth attempt Clarke has missed in the past three games and Australia's reshuffled cordon is having trouble matching the success of its predecessors.

Bowler O M R W
RP Singh 4 0 14 0
Pathan 36 2 112 3
Sharma 40 6 115 3
Harbhajan 48 5 128 1
Kumble 30 4 109 1
Sehwa 19 2 51 2
Tendulkar 1 0 6 0
Ganguly 3 1 6 0
INDIA: Second innings
Sehwa not out 31
Pathan lbw Johnson 0
Dravid not out 11
Extras: (lb-1, w-1) 3
Total: (For one wkts in 17 overs) 45
To bat: Laxman, Tendulkar, Ganguly, Dhoni, Kumble, Harbhajan, RP Singh, Sharma.
Fall of wickets: 1-2.

Bowler O M R W
Lee 6 1 8 0
Johnson 5 0 6 1
Symonds 3 0 20 0
Clark 3 0 10 0

Ishant excites Irfan

AFP, Adelaide

Comeback seamer Irfan Pathan said Sunday he believed India had uncovered a new star in teenage paceman Ishant Sharma.

Like Pathan when he debuted just over four years ago, the teenager has burst onto the Test scene in Australia and is proving an inspired selection for the tour.

The 19-year-old from Delhi arrived in Australia as a long-term prospect with just two Tests under his belt, but has shown maturity beyond his years to lead an injury-stricken Indian attack.

His career figures of 12 wickets in 45.58 in five Tests don't do justice to the huge impression Sharma has made and he has again stood out in the Australian first innings here, claiming the big wickets of Matthew Hayden, Michael Clarke and Andrew Symonds in finishing with 3-115.

Pathan said Sharma would only continue to improve as a bowler and he expects him to benefit greatly from the Australian tour.

"He is going to grow as a cricketer here and learn a lot of things here," Pathan said.

"Especially the way he bowled in Sydney, the way he bowled in the practice game and the way he bowled in Perth and here."

"We have found a really, really good fast bowler for our team," he said.

"He is going to be good for world cricket too."

"I am really looking forward to seeing him progress in coming years."

Although he failed to take a wicket when called up in Sydney, Sharma should have had Andrew Symonds out caught behind, umpire Steve Bucknor's howler sparking an outcry and seeing him stood down from umpiring duties for the rest of the series.

Sharma then impressed with a superb spell in a practice match in Canberra to ensure he retained his place for the third Test in Perth.

He was a key player in Perth in India's shock win, snaring three wickets.

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Eto'o roars with Lions

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His Zambian counterpart Patrick Phiri said he was disappointed with his defence for gifting their opponents the goals.

"We prepared well for this tournament in Spain, Tunisia and Morocco and the defence is our strongest department but for the first time since I took charge of the team a year and half ago, they let us down," said Phiri.

"Cameroon were lucky because we created all the goals for them. Probably my players were scared of the big names of Cameroon."

In the later game, Egypt's two-goal hero against Cameroon Hosny Abd Rabou continued where he left off when he converted a 27th minute penalty after he was brought down by goalkeeper Mahgoub Elmueez.

Al Ahly star Mohamed Aboutika grabbed the second goal on 77 minutes before he added a third five minutes later when he ran

into the box off another counter-attack and beat goalkeeper Elmuez by the near post.

"Sudan came out to win so that they could still be in with a chance in this competition. We did not control the game at the start but gradually dominated the midfield and this was what gave us our victory," said Rabou.

Sudan forward Faisat Agab said: "We have learnt a lot from our two matches but will want to get something when we play against Cameroon in our last game."

Eto'o wasn't the only record equalled on Saturday as the introduction of Ahmed Hassan, back from serving a two-match ban, in the second half marked his seventh appearance in the competition.

On Sunday, the focus is on Group D in Tamale where Senegal face Angola and Carlos Alberto Parreira's South Africa tackle 2004 champions Tunisia.

IPL adds heat

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

Come April and May, when the smothering heat of the sub-continent becomes unbearable, the world's top cricketers will flock to India for a billion-dollar extravaganza billed as the future of the game.

The gentleman's sport has never seen anything like the Twenty20 Indian Premier League (IPL).

Corporate czars and cinestars have poured millions of dollars into the venture to entice the world's best to take to the field at the height of the Indian summer.

The IPL starts on April 18 with a brief to transform into pure spectacle a game often mocked for taking five days without necessarily producing a result.

The Twenty20 format, however, is fast, as each team has a single innings and bats for a maximum of 20 overs.

The IPL, brainchild of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and backed by the sport's world governing body, has already raised a whopping 1.7 billion dollars, including television rights.

India's growing financial clout has for the first time attracted the best to turn out not for their countries, but as individuals for franchised teams bought by private owners.

Eight teams playing in 12 Indian cities will contest the 44-day floodlit event, featuring Test captains Ricky Ponting of Australia, Graeme Smith of South Africa and Daniel Vettori of New Zealand.

Franchisees include billionaire industrialists Mukesh Ambani and Vijay Mallya, and Bollywood actors Shah Rukh Khan and Preity Zinta.

Legendary former all-rounder Kapil Dev, India's only World Cup-winning captain and also the force behind the rival Indian Cricket League (ICL), believes it is too early

to say whether mass commercialisation of the game will improve domestic cricket. "This is business and I don't know what the end result will be," Dev told AFP.

"I only hope the traditional cricket does not die. I hope the standards improve in domestic tournaments," he added.

India's legendary trio of batsmen -- Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid -- as well as new boy Yuvraj Singh have been given the status of "icon players", meaning they will not be auctioned to the highest bidder. They will represent and most likely captain their home teams.

The players' auction will be held in February.

India's unexpected success at the inaugural World Cup Championships in South Africa last September has transformed attitudes about Twenty20 matches. Even the dancing girls and booming music have been accepted in what was long considered an archconservative audience.

The Indian officials were reluctant to touch the Twenty20 game just a year ago, but the national team's triumph in South Africa and the emergence of the ICL changed everything.

The IPL was set up to counter the ICL which recently took place in northern India starring many ageing international greats, including former captain Brian Lara of the West Indies and Imamul Haq of Pakistan.

Reliance's Ambani made the highest bid of 111.9 million dollars to bag the Mumbai team, liquor baron Mallya secured Bangalore for 111.6 million dollars, while Khan took Kolkata for 75.09 million dollars.

The top two sides in the tournament, which boasts prize money of five million dollars, will qualify for an international Champions Twenty20 League to be held at an undecided venue in October.

Khan said it was not just about making money in a country where

advertisers are eager to exploit a market of 1.1 billion people.

"The idea is to nurture youngsters and give them more platforms for playing cricket. I have a huge passion for the game and I want to be part of every sport," he said.

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Kallis keeps

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international between South Africa and the West Indies at St George's Park on Sunday:

WEST INDIES
Parchment c Langeveldt b Pollock 5
Chattergoon b Botha 52
Browne lbw b Botha 35
Samuels c Duminy b Morkel 98
Morton b Kallis 13
Bravo run out (Morkel) 7
Sammy c Smith b Langeveldt 12
Ramdin not out 12
Extras: (lb-5, nb-2, w-11) 18
Total: (For 7 wkts in 50 overs) 252
Did not bat: Taylor, Powell, Edwards.

Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-99, 3-110, 4-157, 5-174, 6-197, 7-252.

Bowler O M R W
Pollock 10 2 28 1
Steyn 10 0 62 0
Langeveldt 9 1 68 1
Morkel 9 0 49 1
Botha 7 0 29 2
Kallis 5 0 11 1

SOUTH AFRICA
Gibbs c Taylor b Powell 15
Smith c Sammy b Samuels 56
Kallis not out 121
De Villiers c Taylor b Edwards 18
Duminy not out 36
Extras: (lb-3, w-7) 10
Total: (For 3 wkts in 48.4 overs) 256
Did not bat: Boucher, Pollock, Botha, Morkel, Steyn, Langeveldt.
Fall of wickets: 1-40, 2-122, 3-168.

Bowler O M R W
Taylor 9.4 0 51 0
Powell 10 1 43 1
Edwards 9 0 59 1
Sammy 10 0 62 0
Samuels 10 1 38 1

Result: South Africa won by 7 wickets and lead the 5-match series 3-0.

Man-of-the-match: Jacques Kallis.
Toss: West Indies

BCB floats

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besides a three-day and one limited-over warm-up games during their month-long stay.

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