

Smith not SA's best skipper, says Jennings

CRICINFO, undated

Outspoken former South Africa coach Ray Jennings believes there are better candidates to captain the national side than Graeme Smith.

Jennings has no issue with Smith the batsman, who recently posted a new world Test opening partnership with Neil McKenzie, but does have reservations when it comes to him leading the side. "Graeme Smith is a superb cricketer. He has presence and mental toughness," he told The Wisden Cricketer. "From a captaincy point of view I believe there are one or two other guys who are able to lead the team better than he does."

When pressed to name his preferred candidates, Jennings replied: "Names aren't really important to me. I believe there are better guys to do the job but that's my opinion. As a batsman there's no doubt I'll have Graeme in my side. He's a solid cricketer and a fighter."

When asked to comment on the recent high profile fall out between senior administrators about racial quotas, Jennings said: "South African cricket has to understand that they don't need to put issues like this in the media. They could have had the fight behind closed doors and iron it out there. It has put me and a lot of cricketers in an awkward position."

"I'm sad that coloured players in the team could have a stigma attached, where they feel they are underprivileged when that's not the case. It's not about having a 50-50 or 60-40 split between white and coloured players. In our country the sides are picked on their cricketing ability because the players of colour are good enough to play."

Jennings, who served a six-month stint as national coach, also said he would take up the post if it came around again, but only under his own terms. "I would definitely take it up again but there would be a few conditions. I would look at the combination of the side: how it gets picked. I would also look at my management staff and how I put that together."

In a terse media release, Cricket South Africa said Jennings claimed to have been "misquoted" in the article.

Taslim Arif no more

AFP, Karachi

Former Pakistan wicketkeeper-batsman Taslim Arif has died after a brief illness, family sources said Friday.

The 54-year-old, who was the junior squad selector, played six Tests for Pakistan, scoring 501 runs at an impressive average of 62.62 and took nine victims. He also played two one-day internationals.

Arif complained of chest pains in the afternoon and was later diagnosed with a lung infection. He died in hospital late on Thursday," said a family source.

Arif hit 90 and 46 on his Test debut against India at Calcutta in 1979 but was more famous for his 210 not out against Greg Chappell's Australia in Faisalabad the following year.

The double hundred stood as the highest score by a wicketkeeper-batsman until Zimbabwe's Andy Flower surpassed it with 232 not out in 2001.

Arif also briefly played for Kerry Packer in the World Series in Australia in late 1970s and early 80s.

He later became a popular television and radio commentator and also ran a cricket academy.

Former colleague Javed Miandad said Arif's death was a tragedy.

"We all loved him, he endeared himself to everyone he played with. It is a great loss because he was there for all whenever needed," said Miandad, who was Arif's captain when he made the double century.

Another colleague, Iqbal Qasim, said: "Arif was a very kind, happy-go-lucky sort of character and we enjoyed each other's company. His death has saddened us all."

The Pakistan Cricket Board offered its condolences to Arif's family.

"With Arif's death we have lost a good cricketer and a great cricketing mind. We console Arif's family and share their grief," it said in a statement.

China top seeds for Thomas & Uber Cups

AFP, Jakarta

Defending champions China have been seeded one for both the Thomas Cup and Uber Cup badminton team world championships here in May.

Hosts Indonesia are seed two for the Thomas Cup while their women are seeded five behind arch-rivals Malaysia for the Uber Cup.

A total of 12 nations will compete in each of the tournaments, being held from May 11-18 at the Senayan Sports Center Complex in Jakarta.

Hosts Indonesia and title holders China qualified automatically, with the rest of the teams coming through continental qualifying events.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Sajjad Hossain (R) addressing a press briefing at the Kalabagan Krira Chakra tent on Thursday while revealing facts about the Boost Power Cup cricket tournament.

Biman, MSC, DOHS win

FROM PAGE 17
Delwar took four for 34 and leg-spinner Nasim took two.

Naeem Islam (58) and Shamsur Rahman (62) added 89 for the fourth wicket after former national captain Habibul Bashar fell to Monir Hossain for 9 in the 16th over.

But when both batsmen fell, Old DOHS got back to the match and it was left to Mashud and Nazmul Hossain to take nine off the final over. They were stopped by Hong Kong international Monir Ahmed who gave away just five and took two wickets.

BIMAN SONARGAON

Nafis Iqbal hit only two boundaries in his sedate 53 as he let Alok Kapali smash the Sonargaon bowlers. But Kapali fell nine runs short of a century, after having struck four sixes and six boundaries in his 82-ball whirlwind knock. Then it was Mahbubul Alam Robin who smashed three sixes in his 17-ball 35.

Mohammad Azim of Sonargaon took three for 53.

Despite Mehrab Hossain's fine run-a-ball 78 and Sharifullah's 74 off 87 balls, Sonargaon failed to earn points for the fourth time in a row as they fell short by 5 runs. Ahsanullah Hasan took three while man-of-the-match Kapali and Nabil Samad took two each.

BRIEF SCORES

VICTORIA: 140 all out in 44.3 overs (Riyad 31; Shuvo 4-21).

MSC: 142-0 in 28.5 overs (Imtiaz 61*, Imrul 79*).

Result: MSC won by 10 wickets.

OLD DOHS: 202-9 in 50 overs (Rajin 86, Mehrab 36; Delwar 4-34).

SURJO TARUN: 199-7 in 50 overs (Shamsur 62, Nayeem 58; Monir 2-35).

Result: Old DOHS won by three runs.

BIMAN: 247-8 in 50 overs (Kapali 91, Iqbal 53; Azim 3-53).

SONARGAON: 232 all out in 48.1 overs (Mehrab 78, Sharifullah 74; Hasan 3-36).

Result: Biman won by 15 runs.

November

FROM PAGE 17
Probably the best preparation they can get to put their bodies through those sorts of workloads."

Michael Clarke and Stuart Clark joined Matthew Hayden and Brett Lee in welcoming the decision to pull out of the tour. "I don't think 'disappointed' is the right word -- I'm rapt Cricket Australia and the Australian Cricketers' Association made the decision and it didn't have to come down to individual players," Clarke told AAP. "I'm very relieved and happy they've done that for the playing group."

Clark said the squad was worried about the situation in Pakistan. "I don't think anyone likes it when a cricket tour gets called off because that's our job, but there were obviously concerns from everyone involved," he said. "We were getting third-hand information, reading the papers and listening to the news on the TV and we were obviously getting the sensational news about bombings and stuff like that."

LOCAL SNIPPETS

FROM PAGE 17

Issa Khan spiker Anisur Rahman was adjudged the player of the eight-team meet.

Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Operations) Rear Admiral Mustafizur Rahman distributed trophies as chief guest.

INDEPENDENCE DAY

FOOTBALL

Khagrachhari Correspondent: Muslimpara Ekadash trounced T& T Area Ekadash 4-1 in the opening match of the Independence Day Cup football tournament at the Matiranga Pilot High School ground in Matiranga here.

Matiranga Army Zone organised the tournament to mark the Independence Day.

Matiranga Army Zone Commander Lt Col Abdullah Al Yusuf inaugurated the 11-team meet.

Rangpur correspondent: Dinajpur defeated Rangpur Area 6-5 in sudden-death tiebreakers to reach the semifinals of the 2nd Sena Moitri Independence Day Gold Cup football tournament. The registration period of the opening match of the 9-team meet at the Rangpur Stadium ended in a goalless draw.

The other participating teams are: Rangpur district, Nilphamari, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Panthor, Lalmonirhat and Joypurhat.

Rajshahi divisional commissioner Hafizur Rahman Bhuiyan declared the tournament open. The final will be held on March 26.

Boost Power Cup starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Boost Power Cup 2008 will begin today at the Kalabagan Club ground with 16 teams including schools and cricket academies taking part in the under-13 cricket tournament.

The competitors will be split into four groups with the top two qualifying for the quarterfinals.

This will be the second year in succession that food energy drink Boost will sponsor the event with a view to create an association of the brand and to popularise the juvenile cricket, announced organisers at a press conference at the Kalabagan Krira Chakra on Thursday.

Country manager of GlaxoSmithKline -- makers of Boost -- Debashis Mukherjee and officials of Grey Dhaka, Mutual Food Products and Kalabagan Krira Chakra were present.

Boost will also give many trophies including man-of-the-match awards in every match.

Editor of Prothom Alo Matur Rahman will declare the meet open. The final is scheduled for April 4.

The teams are: Paramount, Shourav Smriti, Radiant, ESS, Maple Leaf, Udayan Bidyalaya, St Judes, Prothom Alo KG and High School, Kalabagan CA, Kalabagan CA-A, CCS, CCS-A, Keraniganj CA, Dhanmondi Club CK, Dhaka CA and Indira Road CA.

PCB plans tri-series involving Sri Lanka

PTI, Karachi

After managing to convince Bangladesh to play a one-day series next month in Pakistan, the country's cricket board is now trying to rope in Sri Lanka also for a one-day rubber in April.

Sources in the Pakistan Cricket Board said they were trying to convince Sri Lanka to either play in a tri-series involving Bangladesh or a bilateral one-day rubber.

"Bangladesh have already accepted Pakistan's invitation. The Board is hurriedly organising these series after Australia this week postponed its long awaited Test tour of Pakistan because of security concerns for its players," they said.

A Pakistan board official said that they were more keen on having a tri-series to push up its revenues and attract crowds but a final decision from Sri Lanka would only be known next week during the Asian Cricket Council meeting in Lahore on March 20.

Pakistan's cricket authorities are concerned with the lack of international cricket exposure for its team as their next assignment is not until last week of June when the Asia Cup is held in Pakistan.

In between the Asia Cup and the Champions trophy in September also Pakistan is struggling to fill in the voids by asking the West Indies and New Zealand to tour in November for a tri-series.

The Board official also said that Pakistan saw a window to play against Australia sometime in November perhaps even a seven match one-day series.

Shoaib asks for BCCI help

PTI, Karachi

Amid strong indications that the Pakistan Cricket Board may severely discipline Shoaib Akhtar this time, the fast bowler is making all possible efforts, including approaching a top Indian cricket official to speak to the PCB Chief to bail him out of the current situation.

Having already been banned for 13 matches last year and fined 3.4 million rupees for having a brawl with teammate Mohammad Asif before the Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa, Shoaib is facing a situation where he could be banned for a long period and fined heavily again.

The governing body of the Board will meet on March 22 in Lahore to discuss recommendations of the disciplinary committee, currently hearing charges of misconduct and violation of the players Code of Conduct against Shoaib.

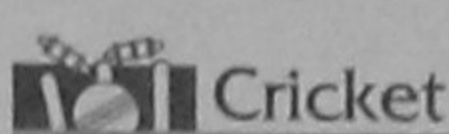
Sources said that besides charges of speaking publicly against the policies of the Board, Shoaib has also been charged with misconduct and spoiling team spirit in the Federal Areas dressing room when he captained them in the first match of the Pentangular Cup last month in Lahore.

Shoaib was dropped from the Federal Areas team after going wicketless in the first match.

A Federal Areas official said the manager and coach had submitted a strong report on Shoaib's conduct to the Board and asked for action to be taken against him.

"Shoaib knows he is in a tight situation and even got a top Indian official who closely involved in the Indian Premier League to try to get a pardon for him from the PCB," one source confirmed.

'ECB will have to pay'



CRICINFO, undated

Tony Greig, a member of the Indian Cricket League (ICL) executive board, believes court action will become inevitable if the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) decides to ban players appearing in the unofficial Twenty20 tournament.

"I don't see how the ECB will get away with what they're planning," he said. "It'll end up back where we were in 1977 -- back in court. It will be tested -- you can be assured of that."

Greig's statements came in the wake of the ECB's tough stance against 'unofficial events' and players involved with the ICL. "If you read the ECB statement, they say they're going to be robust on this issue. I'm trying to work out why," said Greig. "If players aren't required to play for their county for six months of the year, then why not play somewhere else? I thought it had been established 30 years ago

that you can't stop players playing their trade. Players' rights have to be upheld. Governing bodies do not have the right to restrict players from playing their trade."

Chris Read, the Nottinghamshire wicketkeeper, said last week that he would take the ECB to court if his involvement in the ICL proves to bring an end to his England career. As confusions grow over ICL players, several English counties are concerned that certain players -- Shane Bond, Jason Gillespie, Navedul Hasan and Mushtaq Ahmed, to name a few -- may be unavailable to them if regulations outlined by the ECB last week prevent them from honouring their county contracts.

"The money is big here and [English players] know they're on good ground [legally]," Greig said. "I can't see how this is hurting English cricket. They're just pandering to India. How can guys like Paul Nixon do harm? They aren't needed by their county in the off season -- they're not going to miss any county cricket by playing in the

ICL. It's just pressure from India on the ECB."

Greig, a former England captain who sued the English cricket authorities for restraint of trade during the revolutionary Packer revolution, also warned that the manner in which the ICL and Indian Premier League (IPL) are being handled by the Indian board will make the other boards stand up against it.

"Top players from all over the world will quit international cricket to play in the IPL and the ICL, the boards will bleed, and the finger will be pointed at the BCCI," he said. "The Asian boards are in the BCCI's pocket. But what happens to New Zealand, South Africa, England, who are sure to feel the pinch."

"The BCCI is asking for a window from the ICC to host the matches. They may as well get it for now, but the schedules of the other countries will go for a toss. The way the BCCI is functioning right now, it doesn't seem that they are in the mood to compromise."

McCullum still positive



REUTERS, Wellington

New Zealand were still confident of winning the second Test against England, despite a first innings deficit of 144 runs, wicketkeeper Brendon McCullum said on Friday.

The hosts, who lead the three-match series 1-0, were bowled out for just 198 in their first innings on the second day on Friday, before England extended their lead to 148 when they reached four without loss at the close of the day's play.

England had been bowled out earlier in the day for 342, with wicketkeeper-batsman Tim Ambrose scoring his first Test century.

"If we didn't genuinely believe we were capable of winning this game we may as well not turn up tomorrow," McCullum told reporters. "The boys are hurting. It's never nice to have a deficit of 140 on the first innings."

"Hopefully by the time we get to bat second time around, the wicket would have flattened out a bit."

"If we can bowl well tomorrow (Saturday) and restrict them to 150-200 and set about chasing 350 on the final two days then we have every opportunity."

James Anderson, who ripped through New Zealand's top order before finishing with 5-73, and the rest of the England attack had settled very quickly on a wicket-taking length, which his bowlers would

need to find, McCullum said.

"They (England) seemed to find the length that you need to bowl on that wicket that actually brought the edges into play," he added.

"I think the previous day we went past the bat a lot but we were never in play. We probably bowled a touch short and they bowled that little bit fuller which brought the nicks into play."

"We have to bowl well and have to adjust our lengths and bowl that touch fuller (to) bring the slips and stumps into play."

"If we can do that then we can put them under pressure."

"The game has still got a long distance to travel and it's about us maintaining the belief that we can get a result out of the game."

Auckland stint worked



REUTERS, Wellington

Spending four days playing for New Zealand first class side Auckland helped James Anderson discover his rhythm straight away on the second day of the second Test against New Zealand, the recalled bowlers said.

Anderson, who was not picked for the first Test in Hamilton and released from the England squad to play for Auckland against Wellington in New Zealand's domestic competition, took five for 73 to help bowl New Zealand out for 198 on Friday.

England were four without loss in their second innings, an overall lead of 148 with three days remaining. Anderson's haul almost fulfilled a prophecy made by Cricket Wellington chief executive Gavin Larsen, who suggested the Auckland match would bowl Anderson back into form and he

would then take seven wickets at the Basin Reserve.

"(It was) a chance to show them how I'm bowling in a game situation," Anderson told reporters of the game last week, in which he took 2-95 and bowled 38 overs.

"Often it's difficult because you can bowl well in nets but it's never the same. I saw it as an opportunity. (I) thought I bowled well, swung the ball nicely and got a fair few overs under my belt."

"I felt good in the spells I bowled, it was a flat pitch and hard work. I enjoyed it... (it was) quite refreshing."

"I definitely think it helps."

"I've been on quite a few tours now and spent them bringing drinks on and bowling in the middle at a stump."

"You can't beat match practice."

Anderson added the grass-tinged Basin Reserve pitch had also played into his hands, allowing him to get the ball to seam, while the overcast conditions also allowed it to swing.

"Obviously (to) come to a wicket like this that's helping you, your eyes light up a bit."

"I found my rhythm from ball one which helps, and we saw from their innings, if you put the ball in the right areas often enough the pitch was going to help."

"I think we pretty much all did that." New Zealand wicketkeeper Brendon McCullum said his side were not concerned about Anderson being allowed to play for a domestic side while on an international tour.

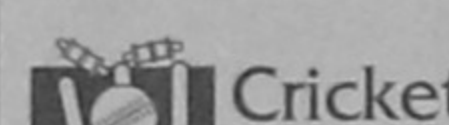
"We weren't too worried," McCullum said.

"There's nothing you can do about it. I don't think he got too many wickets. He saved them up for this Test," he added laughing.

"He is a quality bowler and when he has a wicket that is conducive to where he likes to land a ball, he was always going to be tough to play."

"I thought he was brilliant. We didn't play him as well as we could have but in saying that I'll take nothing away from the way he bowled."

Strong NSW for final



AFP, Melbourne

New South Wales will be boosted by seven Australian Test players in Saturday's Pura Cup cricket final against Victoria in Sydney.

This year's interstate final will feature Australian cricket's two traditional rivals, with the teams winning the competition 66 times (NSW 35-31) between them in 105 seasons.

Both sides finished level on 39 points after the regular 10-match season, with NSW hosting the final due to a greater runs quotient.

NSW, known as the Blues, will field a near-Test strength attack of Brett Lee, Stuart Clark, Nathan Bracken and leg-spinner Stuart MacGill, against the Victorians, who feature only one player with Test cricket experience, batsman Brad Hodge.

The Blues' batting is headed by Test stars Michael Clarke and Phil Jaques, while skipper Simon Katich is the season's leading run-scorer.

Player-of-the-year Katich has amassed 1,328 runs, just 136 runs behind Michael Bevan's all-time record of 1,464 set in the 2004-05 season.

NSW coach Matthew Mott denied the disparity of international standards made the Blues favourites, but said home ground advantage would favour his team.

"They have been the form side all year, they've contested (the finals) of all three (domestic) competitions, so we're certainly not underestimating them and we're expecting a very tough match," Mott said Friday.

He added that the returning one-day international players -- Clarke, Clark, Lee and Bracken --

had fitted in well and would not have an unsettling effect on the team.

"It's just a buzz for the other guys to get a chance to play with these great players," Mott said.

Victorian batsman David Hussey, brother of Test star Mike Hussey, enjoys an extraordinary record against the Blues, averaging 73 over 17 innings, including four centuries and six 50s.

"The Victoria-NSW rivalry is massive and you really get yourself up, because it is a huge time every time you play against each other," David Hussey said.

"The whole focus has been on them, their star-studded attack and their Test players back in the fray. For our team to do well, we just have to focus on what we can control and execute our skills to perfection."

Leg-spinner Bryce McGain is pushing MacGill for a place on Australia's May tour to the West Indies following the retirement of Brad Hogg.

"The winners of the Arsenal versus Liverpool fixture will then face Chelsea or Fenerbahce in the semifinals, with Manchester United or Roma taking on either Barcelona or Schalke 04."

If Chelsea beat the Turkish side there will definitely be an English presence in the final which is being held this year in Moscow's Luzhniki stadium on May 21.

And the possibility of an all-English final intrigued Liverpool's Parry who said: "The prospect of two English teams in the final in Moscow remains very much alive and that would be interesting to say the least."

Asked about repeating last season's quarterfinal thrashing of Roma he suggested: "It would be nice." We have a good record against them so there's no reason why we should be afraid."

He added: "We're playing well but every team in the quarterfinals says the same thing."

Chelsea open at Fenerbahce while German Bundesliga side Schalke 04 host Barcelona.

Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon, who expressed relief at avoiding another English side, remarked: "It's the first time we've ever played Fenerbahce so there's no history between the two clubs and I think everyone will be looking forward to a good quarterfinal."

"You've got to give them a lot of respect."

"There's no such thing as an

easy team or an easy game at this level."

The winners of the Arsenal versus Liverpool fixture will then face Chelsea or Fenerbahce in the semifinals, with Manchester United or Roma taking on either Barcelona or Schalke 04.

If Chelsea beat the Turkish side there will definitely be an English presence in the final which is being held this year in Moscow's Luzhniki stadium on May 21.

And the possibility of an all-English final intrigued Liverpool's Parry who said: "The prospect of two English teams in the final in Moscow remains very much alive and that would be interesting to say the least."

Asked about repeating last season's quarterfinal thrashing of Roma he suggested: "It would be nice." We have a good record against them so there's no reason why we should be afraid."

He added: "We're playing well but every team in the quarterfinals says the same thing."

Chelsea open at Fenerbahce while German Bundesliga side Schalke 04 host Barcelona.

Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon, who expressed relief at avoiding another English side, remarked: "It's the first time we've ever played Fenerbahce so there's no history between the two clubs and I think everyone will be looking forward to a good quarterfinal."

"You've got to give them a lot of respect."

"There's no such thing as an