



WELCOME BACK: England all-rounder Andrew Flintoff (L) follows through on a delivery during his comeback match for Lancashire against Surrey in their County Championship game at The Brit Oval in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national women's handball team will leave for India tomorrow to participate in the third SAF women's handball championship to be held in Lucknow from April 23.

India, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan and Bangladesh will take part in the four-day meet.

In the second SAF Handball Championship in 2000 in Dhaka, India emerged champions and host Bangladesh finished runners-up in both men's and women's groups.

NATIONAL CHESS

The final phase of the 34th National Chess Championship will begin from April 20.

Fourteen players will participate in the competition, to be played in round robin league format. The event is a Grand Master tournament where GM norm and International Master norm is possible.

Defending champions GM Abdullah Al Rakib, GM Ziaur Rahman, GM Reefat Bin Sattar, GM Niaz Murshed, IM Enamul Hossain Rajib, FIDE Master Mohammad Javed, FM Syed Mahfuzur Rahman, GM Mohammad Abdul Malek, FM Nasir Ahmed, FM Minhajuddin Ahmed Sagar, Monir Hossain and Sohail Chowdhury will take part in the meet.

GAIBANDHAVOLLEYBALL. Our Correspondent: Sunrise Sporting Club moved into the semifinals of the Nazia Fashion Volleyball league when they beat Nabarun Kriha Chakra 3-1 at the local stadium yesterday.

They will meet Uttaran Kriha Chakra in the final on April 20 at the same venue.

Uttaran edged past Jubo Sangsad 3-2 in the second semifinal.

DIVII CRICKET

Ekaton Sabuj Sangha registered a four-wicket win over Udayachal Club in the Second Division Cricket League at the Jagannath Hall ground yesterday.

Batting first after winning the toss, Udayachal were all out for only 130 in 37.5 overs with Rana scoring 29 runs. Tutul grabbed four wickets for 43 runs.

In reply, Ekaton reached their target in 26.1 overs with Aslam contributing 31 runs. Imran claimed three wickets for 25 runs.

In the day's other match, Green Leaf (182-9) defeated Rayer Bazar by (121-10) by 61 runs at the City Club ground.

AIRGUN CHAMPIONSHIP

The first-ever National Airgun Championship will be held in Sylhet from April 24 to April 26.

A total of four events -- men's and women's air rifle and match air pistol -- will take place during the three-day competition which is sponsored by Golden Harvest.

Maximum three players will be able to compete for one team in the one event and two shooters will be eligible to take part in the team's event.

Lehmann to cover for Smith

AFP, Sydney

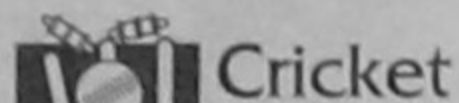
Australian veteran Darren Lehmann will stage a shock comeback in the Indian Premier League (IPL) after answering a call from former teammate Shane Warne, a report said Wednesday.

Lehmann, 38, will fill in for South African skipper Graeme Smith in Jaipur-based IPL franchise the Rajasthan Royals' opening matches, the Adelaide Advertiser said on its website.

The batsman, who retired from first-class cricket last November, said he was surprised to receive a call from Warne asking him play until Smith is available.

"It's all happened so quickly," he said. "They needed someone as cover for Graeme Smith so I didn't hesitate to put my hand up. It will be good playing in the same side as Warne."

Vaughan wants Flintoff



AFP, London

England captain Michael Vaughan has made it clear he wants star all-rounder Andrew Flintoff back in international cricket as soon as possible, ideally during the upcoming series against New Zealand.

He also said dropped new-ball duo Stephen Harmison and Matthew Hoggard could force their way back into the Test side while he himself was contemplating a return to number three in the batting order.

Flintoff, who is due to play for Lancashire in their County Championship opener against Surrey at The Oval on Wednesday, missed England's pre-Christmas tour of Sri Lanka and their recent campaign in New Zealand as he recovered from a fourth operation on his left ankle.

Whether Flintoff's troublesome joint can stand up to the rigours of the 30-year-old's hard-charging approach to pace bowling remains to be seen.

Flintoff hasn't played a Test since captaining England, in Vaughan's injury-induced absence, in the climax of their 5-0 Ashes series thrashing by Australia in Sydney in January last year while

his last one-day international was in September against India. His return, and the attempts by Harmison and Hoggard to re-establish themselves at Test level, promise to help sustain interests in the early weeks of a Championship season in danger of being overshadowed completely by events in the inaugural Indian Premier League (IPL), which starts on Friday.

Vaughan will be a keen follower of all-rounder Flintoff's fortunes, having himself struggled with a potentially career-ending knee injury.

"He has got three or four four-day games for Lancashire, so hopefully he will come through those with overs under his belt, runs by his name and give himself a good chance because we want him back," Vaughan said of Flintoff.

"An England side with Freddie is a better team."

"He wants to be there," added Vaughan. "He is the only one who knows what his ankle feels like."

"He hasn't bowled 18 to 20 overs in a day yet and had to go out and bowl five or six the next day yet, so hopefully he will get through that."

"We just want him right, whether that means he misses the first game, second game and comes back for the third."

"I just want him back fit and ready; whether it's first or third,

that will do me," Vaughan added ahead of the first Test against New Zealand, which starts at Lord's in a month's time.

"It is so important you listen to your body and know yourself."

Turning to Yorkshire teammate Hoggard, Vaughan said: "With him you know he is going to try to take wickets over the next month to make it hard for the selectors."

"Harmy has been given a harder time and I wouldn't want to be a county batsman over the next month having to face him because I think he has got a bit of a bee in his bonnet and a point to prove."

"That is exactly what I want -- I certainly don't think it is the end of their careers yet."

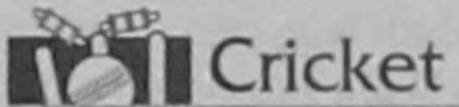
Vaughan had a mediocre tour of New Zealand with the bat, averaging under 21 in the three Tests, although England won the series 2-1.

But he now expects to swap places with Andrew Strauss, the Middlesex left-hander reverting to the opening berth where he made his name as a Test match batsman.

"I wouldn't say I would carry on opening for England, no."

"We will have to sit down with Peter Moores and the selectors. Strauss is at three at the minute -- he likes opening and I am at two and like batting at three -- so maybe that will be a little bit of a change."

IPL keeps Cricinfo out



CRICINFO, undated

Editorial operations of cricket websites, including Cricinfo, in covering the Indian Premier League (IPL) will be severely restricted despite a considerable climbdown by the league on its accreditation guidelines for the print media and news agencies. A revised set of guidelines issued by the IPL on Tuesday offered major concessions to the print media and agencies but barred cricket websites from covering matches from the ground and using pictures that would normally be sold to them by photo agencies.

Instead, Cricinfo, the world's largest cricket website with nearly ten million regular users, will have to buy images from a syndication service that will be provided by the "American company" that has bought the portal rights for the IPL, said Lalit Modi, the IPL commissioner. No conditions have been specified yet for this service.

Sambit Bal, the editor of Cricinfo, described the restrictions as discriminatory and unjust. "We are a legitimate cricket media organisation with unmatched global credibility and we are asking no special favours," he said. "We cover cricket with journalistic rigour and integrity. We are being denied our basic rights to cover a cricket event in a professional manner."

However, Bal said Cricinfo's editorial commitment to the tournament would not be affected. "Boycotting the IPL is not an option for us. Our commitment to cover cricket is absolute, as is our obligation to the reader. We are not blind to the significance of the IPL, which could be a seminal event in cricket. We will try to cover every game with the same rigour and depth expected of us."

The News Media Coalition (NMC), the umbrella body that has under its wings global news and photograph agencies Reuters, Associated Press, Agence France Presse and Getty Images, slammed the IPL over its restrictions on cricket websites.

"Loyal and genuine cricket fans will be the victims of the decision by the Indian Premier League to restrict editorial coverage of the tournament on certain websites in an attempt to commercialise news coverage," an NMC release said. "It

is an attack on freedom of choice and on press freedom to force controls on the media which mean news pictures of the tournament will not be seen on cricket fans' favourite websites."

"It is ironic and gravely worrying to the media and fans alike that websites which have provided general cricket news to a worldwide fan-base should no longer be able to provide full coverage. Devoted cricket fans should be the full beneficiaries of the same freedom and plurality of the media as anyone else interested in the news and should not be forced away from their choice of websites devoted to cricket. It is a sad day when a sporting body attacks its fans and media partners in this way."

Modi told Cricinfo: "We are not blacking out cricket-specific portals. The American company to which we have sold the portal rights will offer photographs at a reasonable price. I can't reveal the name of the company but everything will be clear in the next 24 hours." Modi said that the IPL was continuing with the BCCI's policy of not giving match-specific accreditation to journalists of cricket websites to protect the official portal's rights.

However, most other grievances of newspapers and news agencies were removed in the final set of guidelines issued on Tuesday evening. The IPL claimed that a "constructive dialogue" with a representative of the Indian Newspaper Society (INS) "saw all contentious issues concerning the media accreditation terms and conditions settled amicably." The 44-day Twenty20 tournament starts in Bangalore on April 18.

The Press Trust of India, the country's leading news agency, said they would cover the event "under protest". PTI had previously decided to ignore the tournament if the media guidelines were not modified.

"We have decided to cover the event but under protest," VS Chandrasekar, an executive editor with PTI, told Cricinfo. "We are happy that the IPL has agreed to climb down on some terms and conditions. But we do not want our subscribers to be affected. So we are urging the IPL to remove the ban on supplying photographs to cricket-specific websites."

The Editors Guild of India expressed "an element of unhappiness" over the IPL's ban on news agencies from selling photographs

to all subscribers and said they would finalise their stand on the guidelines on Wednesday. "We had specifically made it clear that news agencies should be allowed to sell photographs to all their subscribers, including cricket-related websites," KS Sachidananda Murthy, the secretary of the Guild, told Cricinfo.

The IPL issued the fresh set of guidelines after discussions with representatives of the Indian media over the last 10 days and revised the clause that gives the league the right to demand and use, free of charge, all photographs taken by all those accredited to cover the tournament -- the IPL can now use the images only for the "promotion of cricket" and not "commercial purposes". The IPL also offered to revise the limit of photographs that can be used by websites linked to newspapers from six to a "reasonable number". Besides, in case of any breach of rules, the IPL will now "make all reasonable efforts to resolve the dispute" with the "accredited party" before initiating proceedings to withdraw accreditation.

NCA suffer

FROM PAGE 17
49.4 overs (Johurul 4, Nasiruddin 17, Shuvo 0, Mushfiqur 10, Mehra 4, Nasir 36, Sohravardi 26, Dollar 0, Delwar 26, Nazmul 28, Robin 0 not out; Aamer 4-21, Azharullah 2-34, Anwar 2-40, Imad 1-32, Azhar 1-21)

PAKISTAN ACADEMY: 180-1 in 38.4 overs (Shehzad 18, Khurram 68 not out, Khalid 84 not out; Robin 1-35)
Result: Pakistan Academy won by nine wickets.
Man-of-the-match: Mohammad Aamer.

Rain keeps

FROM PAGE 17
Samuels not out 3
Extras: (w-l, nb-l) 2
Total: (For 2 wks in 18.2 overs) 81
Did not bat: Gayle, Bravo, Pollard, Ramdin, Sammy, Taylor, Powell.
Fall of wickets: 1-54, 2-77.

Bowler O M R W
Kulasekera 6 1 33 0
Vaas 7 0 36 1
Thushara 5.2 1 12 1
Result: No result.
West Indies won three-match series 2-0.
Toss: West Indies.

Sachin out of torch relay

AFP, New Delhi

Indian cricket star Sachin Tendulkar on Wednesday pulled out of the Olympic torch relay to avoid aggravating a groin injury, a source close to him said.

Tendulkar, 35, was expected to be one of the star runners during the Indian leg of the relay here on Thursday, but opted out on the advice of his doctors.

"Sachin has been advised not to take part in the relay as a precautionary measure," the source said. "He has not fully recovered from the groin injury."

Indian Olympic Association chief Suresh Kalmadi said he was unaware the cricketer had pulled out.

"I have just heard these reports, I have not received any communication from him," said Kalmadi.

India's football captain Baichung Bhutia had earlier this month withdrawn from the relay in support of Tibetan groups protesting against China's crackdown on their homeland.

Tendulkar did not play in the second and third Tests of the recent home series against South Africa due to the same problem, but hoped to be fit for the Indian Premier League starting on Friday.

Tendulkar needs 172 runs to overtake West Indian Brian Lara as Test cricket's leading run-scorer, a feat he could achieve on the tour of Sri Lanka in July-August.

Tendulkar has 11,782 runs from 147 Tests, second behind Lara's record tally of 11,953 runs.

The prolific Indian is already the top one-day batsman with 16,361 runs and holds the world record of 39 Test and 42 one-day centuries.

ICC to examine Kanpur pitch

AFP, Mumbai

Cricket's governing body is investigating the awkward wicket prepared for the final Test between India and South Africa in Kanpur, a top official said on Wednesday.

India won the match in three days on Sunday to draw the series 1-1 on a dry, dusty pitch at Green Park, described by the South African coach as "a poor cricket wicket."

Match referee Roshan Mahanama described the wicket as sub-standard in his post-match report, forcing the International Cricket Council (ICC) to demand an explanation from the Indian cricket board.

"I can confirm the Kanpur wicket was reported by the match referee," ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed told reporters during a brief visit to Mumbai.

The ICC could, as a last resort, ban Kanpur as a Test venue if it does not receive a convincing reply from the Board of Control for Cricket in India.

"There was always something happening on the wicket," said South African coach Mickey Arthur after the match. "It was behaving like a fifth-day pitch on the second day. It was a poor cricket wicket."

India won the match by eight wickets after the tourists were shot out for just 121 in 55.5 overs in their second innings.

Arthur also slammed the poor cricketing and hotel facilities in Kanpur, but stressed South Africa did not lodge a complaint.

"We are a major cricketing power, so we should get good venues and facilities," Arthur said. "But Kanpur, to our disappointment, was way below par in everything."

Manikganj cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Victoria Club ran away with a 13-run victory against Provat Sangha in the last first round game of the Colonel Malek Smriti First Division Cricket League at the Shaheed Miraj-Tapan Stadium here yesterday.

Atik claimed five wickets as Provat were bundled out for 123 runs in 34.4 overs in reply to Victoria's 136 runs in 23 overs.

Meanwhile, Dasheda Polli Mangal Samy and Sewta Uday Sena confirmed semifinal berths from Group A while Victoria and Provat Sangha moved to the last four from Group B.

Kirsten supports home advantage

PTI, Mumbai

The Kanpur pitch may have kicked up a storm for being too favourable for spin-reliant India against South Africa, but coach Gary Kirsten on Wednesday said there nothing wrong in taking the home advantage as long as the tracks are not dangerous for the visiting sides.

Kirsten, who received a cash prize of 75,000 dollars and a shield from ICC CEO Malcolm Speed on behalf of captain Anil Kumble for the Indian team finishing second on the ICC rankings behind Australia, said different countries offer different conditions and no one should complain.

Olympic torch relay starts in Pakistan

Jahangir set to light cauldron

AFP, Islamabad



Squash legend Jahangir Khan Wednesday said he hoped the Olympic torch relay would spark greater interest in sports among Pakistan's youth and help raise falling standards.

Jahangir, regarded as the greatest sportsman in Pakistani history, is set to light the cauldron at the end of the relay later Wednesday at a ceremony attended by President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani.

Pakistan, who simultaneously held the world titles in cricket, squash, hockey and snooker in 1994, have suffered a serious slide in sporting achievement as not even the hockey team have any hopes of winning a medal at the Beijing Olympics.

It will also be the first time no boxer will represent Pakistan as all failed in the qualifying competitions. Jahangir, who won a world

record 10 British Open titles between 1982 to 1991, said Olympic torch should serve as an inspiration to Pakistani sportsmen.

"Olympic torch coming to Pakistan is a historic occasion and I hope youth of our country and government officials take inspiration from this prestigious honour and raise our falling standards," Jahangir told AFP.

Jahangir said the new prime minister should help stop the rot.

"Gone are the days when sports and sportsmen were Pakistan's identity and my heart weeps on that. I will request the new prime minister to take strict measures to stop this slide."

"We have come to a point where hockey has no chance of winning a medal because we are losing to smaller nations and the blame goes to sports authorities and players who are unwilling to work hard," said Jahangir, also a six-time world champion.

Pakistan's last Olympic medal came in Los Angeles in 1984 when the hockey team struck gold. Pakistan also won gold medals

at the Rome Olympics in 1960 and at Mexico in 1968.

Besides hockey, Pakistan won a bronze medal in wrestling in Rome and another bronze when boxer Hussain Shah reached the semifinals in Seoul in 1988.

Jahangir said Pakistan must take a lead from neighbouring China.

"Look at China, they have progressed in sports by leaps and bounds and besides athletics they have also improved in hockey and various other sports and we are going back rather than moving forward," said Jahangir.

Jahangir, who will attend the Beijing Olympics as president of the World Squash Federation, said he would lobby for squash's inclusion in the Summer Games.

"We have been endeavouring for squash's inclusion in Olympics and I hope to see officials of International Olympic Committee and will lobby for squash's inclusion in the 2016 Games," said Jahangir.

London will host the 2012 Games while the host country for the 2016 Olympics is still to be decided.

Stanford talks delight KP



AFP, London

Kevin Pietersen is encouraged by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) meeting with Allen Stanford, the Texan billionaire behind the domestic Twenty20 competition in the West Indies.

The ECB are reported to be looking at adding some Stanford-backed Twenty20 matches to the schedule for the tour of the Caribbean next year.

Those matches could help fill the gap before an English Premier League comes into being.

England batsman Pietersen, speaking ahead of Hampshire's County Championship opener at home to title-holders Sussex on Wednesday, said: "Twenty20 looks like the way forward."

"It's a three-hour game with a winner, like football or rugby, and it is what spectators want to see."

"This is the way cricket seems to be going. I want to play more of it and get good at it. It requires different shots and a different way of playing."

"When it started it was all a bit slap-dash but it is turning into a game where it is being taken far more seriously."

"A lot of people have played more Twenty20 than me and it has a worldwide following now."

"Until I hear more about Stanford and his proposals I cannot comment, but it sounds great, very exciting for players and spectators."

All these potential changes to the cricket calendar have been sparked by the inaugural Indian Premier League (IPL), which starts on Friday.

Essentially an Indian domestic Twenty20 tournament, the IPL's newly-created franchises, have lured some of the world's top cricketers to the sub-continent following a series of auctions for the sport's leading players.

However, the IPL clashes with the start of the English cricket

season -- where Twenty20 was pioneered as a professional game -- and is likely to do so again next year.

Last week Giles Clarke, the chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), said he could not see how their centrally contracted players would be released for the IPL, which takes place in the run-up to the 2009 Ashes.

However, having confirmed on Tuesday their talks with Stanford, the ECB said it had "never stated that centrally contracted players are banned from IPL."

That will come as a relief to Pietersen who said it was "ridiculous" of Clarke to suggest England players couldn't feature in the IPL.

Pietersen's Hampshire captain Dimitri Mascarenhas is the only England player involved in this year's IPL.

But England captain Michael Vaughan said Tuesday it would be "naive" to think more England players wouldn't take part in future.



PHOTO: STAR

Action from yesterday's Brac Bank Club Cup hockey tournament match between Sonali Bank and Mariner Youngs at the Maulana Bhashani National Hockey Stadium.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	42 Spring mo.	2 Gratulities	26 Hard to comprehend
1 Attempts	3 Farewell	4 Morsel	28 Yukon trans-
6 Turn on a pivot	Make a	5 Victor over	portation
12 Low pH	Deaf host	6 Pop	30 Recede
13 Overly decorated	46 Despondent	7 Twisted	31 Moment
14 Elk	50 One of the kin	8 Hostel	33 Storm center
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16 Gaelic codes	54 Spa; e.g.	11 Monocle piece	English word
19 Donkey	55 Hum-dinger (SI)	12 Shock related	39 One of the bases
20 Cold War abbr.	56 Fixes a text	18 Skull-related	41 Monastery
22 Hood's weapon	57 Gratifies fully	21 -- mo	bigwig
24 Lawyers' org.	23 Likely villain	24 Chowd down	42 Farm measure
27 Burden	1 "Lion King"	25 Feathery neck-wear	43 Haiku or limerick
29 Slapstick arsenal	32 1942 Jack Benny movie	26 Hard to comprehend	45 Picnic invaders
35 Uncomplicated	36 Unuttered "alas"	37 Peacock network	47 Lounge around
38 Asian holiday	40 Bewildered	41 Monastery	48 Les Etats --
		42 Farm measure	49 Supplement, with "out"
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