

Big screen to Ponting's rescue

INTERNET, undated

Australia skipper Ricky Ponting has turned to high-tech plasma screen gadgetry in a private batting tutorial to help snap his form slump before Australia's tour of the West Indies this month.

In fascinating scenes at Brisbane's Allan Border Field, an enormous plasma screen television was hauled into the practice net next to Ponting as he was videotaped facing deliveries from a bowling machine.

The video footage was fed through the plasma screen, on a five-second delay, enabling Ponting to play a stroke and then watch it replayed immediately on TV.

"It's the first time I've used that, it is the best little coaching session you can have," Ponting declared.

"It's good to have a coach or someone standing by that knows your game. But to have it explained to you is one thing, to see it for yourself and be able to identify yourself what you are doing during a shot is fantastic."

Ponting claims he is not overly worried by his form slump -- most recently scoring just 39 runs in the IPL at 9.75 -- but feels the funky plasma session is a "priceless" tool which can help him back to his devastating best.

"Sometimes you know yourself what you are doing but to put your finger right on it is a little more difficult," Ponting said.

"With this setup, you hit one and you give yourself time to have a look at the replay and digest it."

Sehwag rues

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should bowl (the last over). I thought he would do a better job than me, so I gave it to him," Sehwag said. "Such things happen in Twenty20, sometimes you are hit and sometimes you are not." Delhi had posted a formidable 187, but Sehwag felt they lost the plot in the end stages of the match. "187 is not a small score. (Gautam) Gambhir and (Shikhar) Dhawan batted superbly and then (Vijaykumar) Yo Mahesh and Pradeep Sangwan did their job while bowling. Everything was going to our plan till the 15th over (of Chennai's innings). At the end we lost at the last over."

"If we had a specialist fifth bowler, we would have saved 30-40 runs, we missed a fifth bowler," Sehwag said. Together he and Malik gave away 58 runs off their four overs, and Sehwag suggested a change for the next game. "We are including a specialist spinner in the next match."

That means legspinner Amit Mishra might get a game, as Daniel Vettori is away on New Zealand duty. Following the match, Delhi were fourth in the points table, but Sehwag wasn't too perturbed. "We lost a match today (Thursday) but it happens in cricket we will bounce back," he said. "Our top order was batting beautifully and bowlers bowled well, it so happened that we lost in the last over."

Pakistan crush

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recover, Pakistan took the lead in the 14th minute, with Shakeel Abbasi scoring after receiving the ball from Butt.

Saqlain added another on 28 minutes and two minutes later it was 4-1 following a brilliant strike from Butt.

The Black Sticks narrowed the gap with a penalty corner goal from Hayden Shaw in the 33rd minute. Shaw struck again from another penalty corner on 47 minutes, making it 4-3 and putting Pakistan under pressure.

However, Butt claimed his hat-trick on the hour mark following a goalmouth scramble before putting the result beyond doubt nine minutes later with his fourth goal.

The first match of the day was delayed for more than one hour as torrential rain flooded the artificial pitch at the Azlan Shah Stadium.

When the game was finally played it was Canada's Matthew Guest who scored the winner in the 50th minute. The North Americans, in their first match of the tournament, came agonisingly close to increasing their lead but poor finishing was their bane.

It was Belgium's second defeat of the tournament, as they lost 2-1 to Argentina on Thursday. Argentina, who will take part in the Champions Trophy in the Netherlands in June, hammered India 5-1 to chalk up their second consecutive win in the tournament Friday.

Facundo Callioni scored two goals, while the remaining three were scored by Pedro Ibarra, Tomas Argento and Juan Martin Lopez. Sandeep Singh was India's only scorer.

The tournament will continue on Sunday when Canada play India, Malaysia take on New Zealand while Pakistan meet Argentina.



Kolkata captain Sourav Ganguly is stunned after he fell short of Cameron White's (not in picture) throw from mid-on in the Indian Premier League match against Bangalore at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Thursday.

Ganguly sparkles



CRICINFO, undated

Even at half past one, they were walking down the Esplanade in their hundreds, discussing ways to get home. Some were still laughing and cheering, while others clutched their black-and-gold flags and moved ahead like zombies. Some carried sleeping infants, while others were exhaling smoky fumes of relief into the cloudy Kolkata sky.

If that saying about fans getting the team that they deserve was really true, the Knight Riders would win the trophy every year. Not even a fervent Mumbai crowd on a good day can match the Eden Gardens for atmosphere. It is to cricket what Anfield is to European football nights, and even the most committed Bangalore supporter would have been awed by the volume that the crowd summoned up despite a couple of stands being largely empty.

Make no mistake, this was a battle for IPL survival. Bangalore's far-from-royal challenge is now surely over, while the slender victory gives Kolkata the chance to dream again. With four home matches to come, and 80,000 Electric Light Orchestra members in the back-ground to cheer every ball, who's to say what might happen?

Sourav Ganguly, the man of the match after a bowling display reminiscent of his Toronto heroics

from a decade ago, had no doubt that the crowd had played a massive part in the five-run victory. "You could see the intensity in the field," he said with a smile. He had played his part there too, with a stunning reflex stop after Mark Boucher had driven the ball straight back at him.

In the end, it all came down to one stroke, or the lack of it, and Bangalore will once again look back at a game where they were clearly second-best in the field. The Knight Riders threw themselves around, and according to Ganguly's reckoning, they saved "at least 15 to 20 runs". The highlight was of course Brad Hodge's magnificent stop-pick-up-and-thrown to run-out J Arunkumar, though Murali Kartik's ice-cool dismissal of Cameron White also rates a mention.

Given what was at stake in this game, it was almost inevitable that the main post-match question would be about that ball. Ganguly grinned like a Cheshire cat before composing himself. "Look, these are small things in a game," he said, when asked about the delivery that sent Rahul Dravid's leg stump for a stroll. "It was an important game for him as well."

There was no doubt though which captain had come out on top. Ganguly's spell was the much-needed tournament Arunkumar had briefly made Kolkata bleed, and it coincided with Dravid's 11-ball five, the last thing Bangalore needed in a high-pressure chase. And while Boucher may have finished with an unbeaten 50 from 40 balls, he

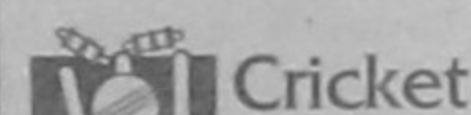
managed only four from the 11 deliveries that Ganguly bowled to him.

With Ganguly sending the crowd into raptures and Ishant Sharma holding his nerve in the final two overs of his spell, it was forgotten just how well a new face had set the tone for this team of international stars. "He's a young prospect who's always had something about him," Ganguly said, when asked about Ashok Dinda, who nearly matched Dale Steyn when it came to consistently clocking up around 140kph. "I picked him up from nowhere for a Duleep Trophy game (in 2005). I think he'd played only one Ranji match at the time. He has pace and he can swing the ball."

Dinda certainly doesn't have the conventional fast bowler's build, but a dramatic leap as he nears the crease and a whippy arm action help him generate plenty of pace. He's also fairly accurate, and an economy rate of 6.00 after seven games is something that some of the established international stars must be dreaming of.

For young men like Dinda and Wriddhiman Saha, who once again played a massive part with the bat, the IPL is about far more than the money. If Shoaib Akhtar is fit, Dinda may not even play the next game. But if Ganguly does trust his instincts and throw the ball his way, you can be sure he won't let the side down. The 80,000 faithful make him ten feet tall and give his deliveries wings of speed. More than anything else, that has been the greatest success of this tournament.

Johnson in front



CRICINFO, undated

In theory Mitchell Johnson and Ashley Noffke are competing for a fast-bowling place in the West Indies. The reality is different for the Queensland teammates.

Johnson would be devastated if he wasn't picked for the opening Test from May 22 after being a fixture over the summer. When thinking about the tour he is as relaxed as any bowler can be when there are persistent threats from further down the queue.

"It was a big summer, my first playing Tests, one-dayers and Twenty20," Johnson said as the pre-tour camp wound up in Brisbane. "I wouldn't say I'd nailed a spot there, but it's given me a bit more confidence playing out the summer. I feel pretty confident that I can keep continuing my form."

For Noffke, who is going on his third senior tour, the initial aim is to play a game. Any game. Johnson, Brett Lee and Stuart Clark, who is a menace on the wearing surfaces expected in the Caribbean, are ahead of Noffke and there is only one practice match before the

three Tests. Noffke is not in the one-day squad, so he may fill a sideline role like the one Johnson performed during the World Cup.

While Australia eased to a third consecutive global triumph last year, Johnson was camped in the nets throughout the Caribbean. Only occasionally in the West Indies do the practice facilities mirror those in the middle so when he lands he will start with a conversation with Brett Lee.

"Hopefully he can point me in the right direction because he's toured there before," Johnson said. "I'll just take it day by day." His main memory of the conditions was it was very hot.

His recollections of the past summer, when he made his debut against Sri Lanka and held his spot throughout the India series, are more cohesive. Ricky Ponting is impressed with Johnson's left-arm attributes and he gave him an average of 42 overs a game during his opening six Tests. He captured 24 wickets to finish behind Lee's 40 and ahead of Clark's more economical 21.

"It's pretty hard to get the ball out of my hand," Johnson said. "I probably don't want to do it (bowl long spells) all the time, but if Ricky needs me I'll bowl."

Ashraful back in runs

FROM PAGE 17 returned with a figure of 3-12 while Mahbubul claimed four wickets conceding 34 runs.

ABAHANIVBKSP

National wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim made 64 but it was not good enough for BKSP to stop Abahani's charge.

Despite the right-hander's patient 80-ball innings which saw only three boundaries and a 49-run opening stand between Mohammad Mithun (20) and Latiful Azam (26), BKSP could manage 174 runs after deciding to bat first.

None of Abahani's top-order batsmen could make a big contribution including national opener Shahrir Nafees (29) but their small effort was enough to achieve the target of 175 in 43 overs by losing seven wickets.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SURJO TORUN: 180 all out in 41.4 overs (Shakil 2, Shamsur 64, Bashar 7, Naeem 34, Mashud 15, Afzal 2, Nazmul 33, Sharif 2, Delwar 5, Younus 6, Al-Mamun 0 not out, extras 10; Dollar 3-40, Zunaed 2-21, Shuvo 1-23).

MSC: 181 for 8 in 42.3 overs (Imrul 0, Zunaed 20, Aftab 1, Rokibul 12, Ashraful 70 not out, Faisal 47, Arshad 10, Shuvo 1, Minto 3, Dollar 5 not out, extras 12; Sharif 4-39, Delwar 2-40, Younus 1-28, Naeem 1-24).
Result: Mohammedan won by two wickets.

BIMAN: 212 all out in 46.4 overs (Tamim 0, Nasir 92, Mosharrarf 0, Javed 12, Kapali 15, Sanwar 4, Lipon 33, Mashrafe 16, Mahbubul 15 not out, Nabil 3, Niaz 0, extras 22; Shafaq 2-44, Sumon 1-43, Arafat 2-

42, Bashar 1-36, Rashedul 3-24).
CITY: 139 all out in 44.2 overs (Mabud 8, Rasel 12, Rabiul 7, Imran 18, Bashar 27, Sumon 0, Arafat 18, Rashedul 9, Golam Hossain 8, Shafaq 5, Sumon 0 not out, extras 27; Mashrafe 1-24, Mahbubul 4-34, Mosharrarf 3-12, Nabil 2-17).
Result: Biman won by 73 runs.

BKSP: 174 all out in 44.1 overs (Mithun 20, Azam 26, Ashraful 9, Rahim 64, Nasir 7, Hasan 0, Raihan 0, Mominul 19, Tapash 11, Mosiur 2 not out, Riiaz 1, extras 15; Rajib 4-32, Sunny 2-22, Rafique 4-33).
ABAHANI: 175 for 7 in 43 overs (Jahurul 34, Mahbubul 23, Nafees 29, Tushar 17, Sahagir 26, Nadir 19, Sunny 8 not out, Rafique 11, Ziaur 6 not out, extras 8; Nasir 2-31, Azam 1-15, Tapash 1-27).
Result: Abahani won by three wickets.

Kanpur 'poor' in ICC books

REUTERS, New Delhi

The International Cricket Council (ICC) issued an official warning to the Indian board on Friday over the sub-standard pitch used for last month's final test against South Africa in Kanpur.

The home team, trailing 1-0 ahead of that third test, clinched a series-levelling win in three days on a dusty Green Park pitch where the ball spun and jumped from the start.

India romped to an eight-wicket win with 32 wickets tumbling.

The ICC sought an explanation from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) after match referee Roshan Mahanama reported that the pitch was not up to test-match standards.

"We have come to a decision that the pitch prepared for the match should be rated as 'poor,'" ICC general manager cricket Dave Richardson said in an official statement.

"We've taken into consideration the explanations offered by the BCCI as to the reasons for the dryness of the pitch and we have noted that there is no previous record of a sub-standard pitch being prepared in Kanpur."

The ICC has the power to impose a fine or even suspend the international status for the venue in case of repeated offences.

The Indian board promised to improve the pitch.

"I can assure everyone we will take all steps necessary to ensure this does not happen in the future," Indian board secretary Niranjan Shah said.

Bangladesh

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attack when Emily headed the ball past Vladislav Volkov at the opposition goal.

With huge chanting from the crowd, Kyrgyzstan came close to equalise in the 66th minute when substitute Roman Kornilov burst inside but failed to keep his effort under the bar.

With the final whistle approaching, Kyrgyzstan went all out and having almost all ten players near the Bangladesh penalty box paid dividend when Kornilov placed home through a forest of legs during a melee.

Four minutes later, an overlapping Sydykov met a high ball from Lutfullaev and nodded home the match winner.

Kyrgyz coach Nematjan Zakdrov said he still "felt devastated" despite the win.

"We had to progress to the final round. We had the best team. I am glad with today's win, though having tears in my eyes," said Zakdrov after the match.

"I had very high expectations before this tournament. I will continue working for the development of our football and the national team. We have to develop physically to play better in the tournaments," said Bangladesh coach Abu Yusuf.

Afghanistan coach Klaus Staerk, who was among the spectators, said he was "very happy".

"This is the first time Afghanistan won a group in any kind of tournament and this is a big step for the development of Afghan football," Staerk said after the game.

Yellow cards: Rajani, Mamun, Maruf, Aminul (Bangladesh) and Bokojev, Djamshidov, Cholponbek (Kyrgyzstan).

TEAMS
Bangladesh: Aminul, Hasan Al Mamun (Maruf 64th), Rajani, Ariful, Waly, Arup, Zahed Parvez (Robin, 46th), Arman Aziz, Mamun, Ujjal and Emily.

Kyrgyzstan: Volkov, Sydykov, Samsaliev (Cholponbek 43rd), Kniazev, Kudrenko, Bakytbek, Bokojev (Amirov 67th), Djamshidov (Kornilov), Berezovsky, Lufullaev and Bokojev.

Women end

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rudlessly. India will now play Sri Lanka in the final.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BAHGLADESH: 120 all out in 49.3 overs (Ayesha 30; Mala 3-9).
SRI LANKA: 123-1 in 25.5 overs (Silva 66; Rumanal 1-14).
Result: Sri Lanka won by nine wickets.

Kolkata reign

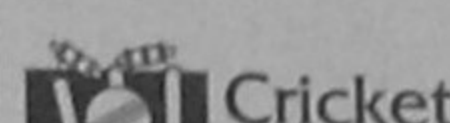
FROM PAGE 17 Bangalore, who have now lost six of eight matches.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS: 129 for 7 in 16 overs (Chopra 2, Hodge 10, Ganguly 20, Hussey 26, Taibu 15, Shukla 11, Saha 17 not out, Kartik 17, Gul 2 not out; Steyn 3-27, Zaheer 1-27, Kumar 1-36).
BANGALORE ROYAL CHALLENGERS: 124 for 4 in 16 overs (Arunkumar 22, Chanderpaul 7, Boucher 50 not out, David 5, White 30, Kumar 4 not out; Sharma 1-25, Ganguly 1-7).
Result: Kolkata Knight Riders won by 5 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Sourav Ganguly.
Umpires: Asad Rauf (Pakistan) and IL Howell (South Africa).
Toss: Kolkata Knight Riders.

Aussies sans Clarke



CRICINFO, undated

Michael Clarke has forced a change in Australia's West Indies tour plans after pulling out of the start of the trip due to the serious condition of his fiancée's father. Clarke was due to make his debut as Australia's Test vice-captain following the retirement of Adam Gilchrist, but the batsman will not leave with the team on Saturday after being granted compassionate leave by Cricket Australia.

Clarke's dad Les has Hodgkin's disease, but it is the condition of the father of Clarke's fiancée Lara Bingle that is the most concerning. Graham Bingle has had liver cancer for more than a year and Clarke left the team camp in Brisbane before its conclusion on Friday to fly to Sydney.

"I will not be travelling to the West Indies with the team due to family reasons," Clarke said in a short statement. "I am looking forward to getting over there as soon as possible."

The withdrawal of Clarke came as a surprise to some of his teammates and a Cricket Australia

spokesman said his arrival date in the West Indies was currently unclear. Michael Hussey has been handed the vice-captaincy and Brad Hodge has been named as a shadow player. "Despite the circumstances it is a huge honour to be given the role," Hussey said, "even if it may only be for a short period of time."

Hodge is currently in the Indian Premier League with the Kolkata Knight Riders, but will fly to the West Indies until Clarke arrives. He is expected to meet up with the team in either Dubai or London on their indirect journey to the Caribbean.

"Brad has had another strong domestic season with Victoria in all forms of the game," the chairman of selectors Andrew Hilditch said. "He is still very highly regarded by the panel and this provides him with another opportunity to be involved with the Australian squad."

Clarke and Bingle were engaged in March and they have been supporting each other through the illnesses of their parents. "My sister Leanne phoned to tell me my father had cancer," Clarke told the Sydney Morning Herald last year. "It showed me that it could all be over on Saturday. You don't choose."

At the start of the camp on Monday, Clarke was as enthusiastic as when he joined the squad and was nicknamed 'Pup' for his effervescent nature. He was quizzing Brad Haddin about whether he had received all his gear for the tour and was in a hurry to start playing after feeling refreshed from his time away from the game.

He had avoided joining the Indian Premier League to stay home and "go fishing with the old man", something he achieved. He also took Bingle, a model, to the United States, where he proposed in New York's Central Park. "I made the decision (not to go to India) for my body and to spend time with my dad," Clarke told the Herald this week. "It was really nice to be able to spend some time with my family and Lara."

Clarke has been destined for national leadership duties since he won his first Test cap, but achieving a position of responsibility has not been as smooth as the predictions. He was named vice-captain for the Chappell-Hadlee Series in New Zealand in 2007 before being ruled out with a hip injury, but led the Twenty20 team in Perth later that year when Ricky Ponting was rested.

Kiwis on top



AFP, London

New Zealand continued their impressive build-up to next week's opening Test by undermining the claims of a trio of England hopefuls in their final warm-up match at the Rose Bowl on Thursday.

Facing an England Lions side including eight internationals, the tourists looked set for the toughest test of their tour so far having boosted spirits with a convincing victory over Essex last week.

But after struggling through the morning session as the Lions survived unscathed until lunch, New Zealand bounced back strongly after losing the toss and dismissed England for 280 despite a defiant 120 from Luke Wright.

It was an impressive performance just a week before the start of the power Test series at Lord's, particularly with a line-up missing injured captain Daniel Vettori and rested seamer Kyle Mills.

Their display also damaged the hopes of leading trio Rob Key, Owais Shah and Ravi Bopara -- widely regarded as the next batsmen in line should England decide to change their misfiring top order -- in front of coach Peter Moores and National Selector Geoff Miller.

Kent batsman Key, who was leading the Lions, showed great application during a 49-run stand with Hampshire's Michael Carberry which appeared to have

laid the foundation for a major England total during a painstaking opening session.

Just four balls after lunch, however, Key's 123-minute knock was ended when he was given lbw for 23 to Chris Martin attempting to force through mid-wicket.

Key's innings was the most successful of the trio hoping to gain an England recall, with Middlesex batsman Shah falling in Martin's next over when he pushed forward defensively and edged behind for three.

Bopara fell just five overs later when he attempted to leave a ball outside off stump from young seamer Tim Southee but instead got an inside edge onto his stumps for seven.

The manner of their dismissals set the tone for the Lions innings with Matt Prior, another player with a point to prove after being discarded as England's wicketkeeper during the winter, driving Martin tamely to gully for 10 to earn him his third victim.

Carberry, one of the big successes during the Lions tour to India last winter, had played a determined innings, taking 65 balls before registering his first boundary and taking 44 overs to score 41. His resistance was broken when he mistimed an attempted drive off seamer Iain O'Brien and looped the ball to mid-off to become England's fifth wicket to fall in a 13-over spell, plunging them into trouble at 89 for five.

It took a determined partner-

ship between Sussex all-rounder Wright and Yorkshire's Adil Rashid to prevent complete capitulation after they defied New Zealand for 25 overs during their 81-run stand.

Just as England thought they were on course to recover and register a competitive total, all-rounder Jacob Oram reminded them of his quality with the ball with three wickets in six overs.

Oram, who delivered 31 maidens in 74 overs during the two Tests he played against England in the winter, began in similar fashion by bowling five successive maidens during the morning session.

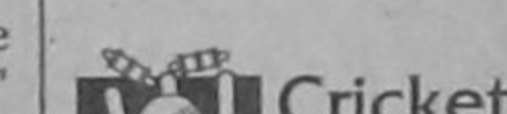
But he is also a capable wicket-taker and after tempting Rashid into driving straight to short extra cover, won an lbw shout against Graeme Swann and then had Chris Tremlett caught behind in quick succession.

Wright, who was dropped on 28 at short mid-wicket off Jeetan Patel shortly after tea, accelerated his strokeplay after that triple loss and hit Martin for a straight six down the ground as he sensed a quick conclusion to the innings.

Instead of wrapping up the innings quickly, however, Matthew Hoggard provided determined support against the second new ball with a defiant 28 to help add 78 for the ninth wicket before having his stumps re-arranged by Southee.

Wright was last man out having reached his century with a slog sweep for six over mid-wicket off Southee having dominated an under-par batting display.

'Don't rush Freddie'



BBC ONLINE, undated

England legend Sir Ian Botham says Andrew Flintoff should not be rushed back into the national side.

The squad for next Thursday's first Test against New Zealand is named on Sunday and the 30-year-old all-rounder has been tipped to return to the fold.

Flintoff has bowled well after a

fourth ankle operation last October but Botham has warned against a speedy comeback.

"I would just hold Fred back a bit. I'd like him to play a bit more county cricket," he told BBC Sport.

"I'd like him to have plenty of overs under his belt and plenty of runs as a batsman come the South Africans (later in the summer), because I think that will be a much sterner test."

"I'd just like him to be given that time to get his confidence back; full

confidence in his body and more importantly in that ankle."

"England do need him but they need a fit Fred."

"But he also knows this is really make-or-break time because he's 30 years old and he's had four operations on it, so it's got to be right."

Flintoff has not played a Test match since the Ashes whitewash in Australia in January 2007.

He has struggled with the bat on his return to action this season -- a pair in his latest game for Lancashire against Durham means he has managed only 68 runs in seven competitive innings.

But the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) have denied reports former England opener Geoffrey Boycott will be brought into the senior coaching set-up to help Flintoff with his batting.

Flintoff is a known admirer of the Yorkshire legend and has called on Boycott's expertise in the past.

But the ECB said any extension of that relationship would be in an unofficial capacity, and that informal talks with Boycott, 67, had actually been held with a view to him helping younger age groups.

"We use Nasser Hussain to talk to age-group teams and that is what we envisage other former players doing," said a spokesman.

While Flintoff is struggling with the bat, England teammate Paul Collingwood believes the Lancastrian, who dismissed him on Thursday in the current County Championship match with Durham, is "back to his