

Lord's Test starts today

NZ eye to capitalise on Eng distractions

Cricket

AFP, London

England captain Michael Vaughan has already started talking about next year's Ashes while Kevin Pietersen believes the greatest threat facing the team this season will come from South Africa.

At this rate, England are in danger of letting future challenges distract them from the immediate task of playing New Zealand in a three-Test series which starts at Lord's on Thursday.

Yet New Zealand's hopes of catching England could have been severely dented by an international fixture schedule which saw the two sides playing each other as recently as March.

In the first match of that series New Zealand beat England by 189 runs in Hamilton only for Vaughan's men to recover and take the series 2-1.

Since then, New Zealand have seen long-serving captain Stephen Fleming retire from international cricket. As much as they may miss his tactical acumen, they are equally likely to miss his runs.

Not once during the March series did New Zealand's openers manage a fifty partnership, putting immense pressure on the middle-order.

Their line-up at Lord's is set to feature two debutant batsmen in opener Aaron Redmond, son of one-cap wonder Rodney, and Daniel Flynn.

At least Otago batsman Redmond comes into this game in good form after a century and a fifty in New Zealand's tour match against the England Lions, the national 'A' side, last week.

Meanwhile New Zealand's cause hasn't been helped by the injury captain Daniel Vettori has sustained to his spinning finger.

Long regarded as one of the most effective left-arm slow bowlers in the world, Vettori is nevertheless still set to lead a youthful side, where pace bowler Tim Southee

will be appearing in only his second Test.

But the key for New Zealand is likely to be whether or not their batsmen can give their bowlers enough runs to play with.

New Zealand have dynamic middle-order batsmen in wicket-keeper Brendon McCullum and all-rounder Jacob Oram but they have not always been as effective in Test

cricket as they are in one-dayers.

England are likely to be unchanged from the team that won the third Test in Hamilton by 189 runs with James Anderson set to see off the challenge to his place from fellow seamer Matthew Hoggard, recalled to the squad after being dropped from the team that lost the first Test in Napier.

All-rounder Andrew Flintoff, who hasn't played Test cricket for over a year, has been ruled out with a side strain.

That will mean the burden of leading the attack will once again fall on left-arm seamer Ryan Sidebottom, whose 24 wickets in New Zealand were a pivotal difference between the two sides.

"Sidebottom bowled beautifully in New Zealand and we will have to combat him if we are to stand any chance of even being competitive in the series," said New Zealand great Sir Richard Hadlee, the first bowler to take 400 Test wickets.

But for all New Zealand's well-documented top-order problems, England's batting has often proved fallible too.

Vaughan averaged just over 20 in New Zealand and has dropped back down to No.3.

That has allowed Andrew Strauss, who revived his ailing Test career with a century in Napier, to return to the opening slot.

Back in 2004, England beat New Zealand 3-0. There wasn't much talk about the Ashes then -- the hype grew as a result of England's performances.

As Peter Moores approaches his first anniversary as England coach he knows the time is nearing where his team will have to move on from the accurate assessment of their current status by New Zealand seamer Chris Martin.

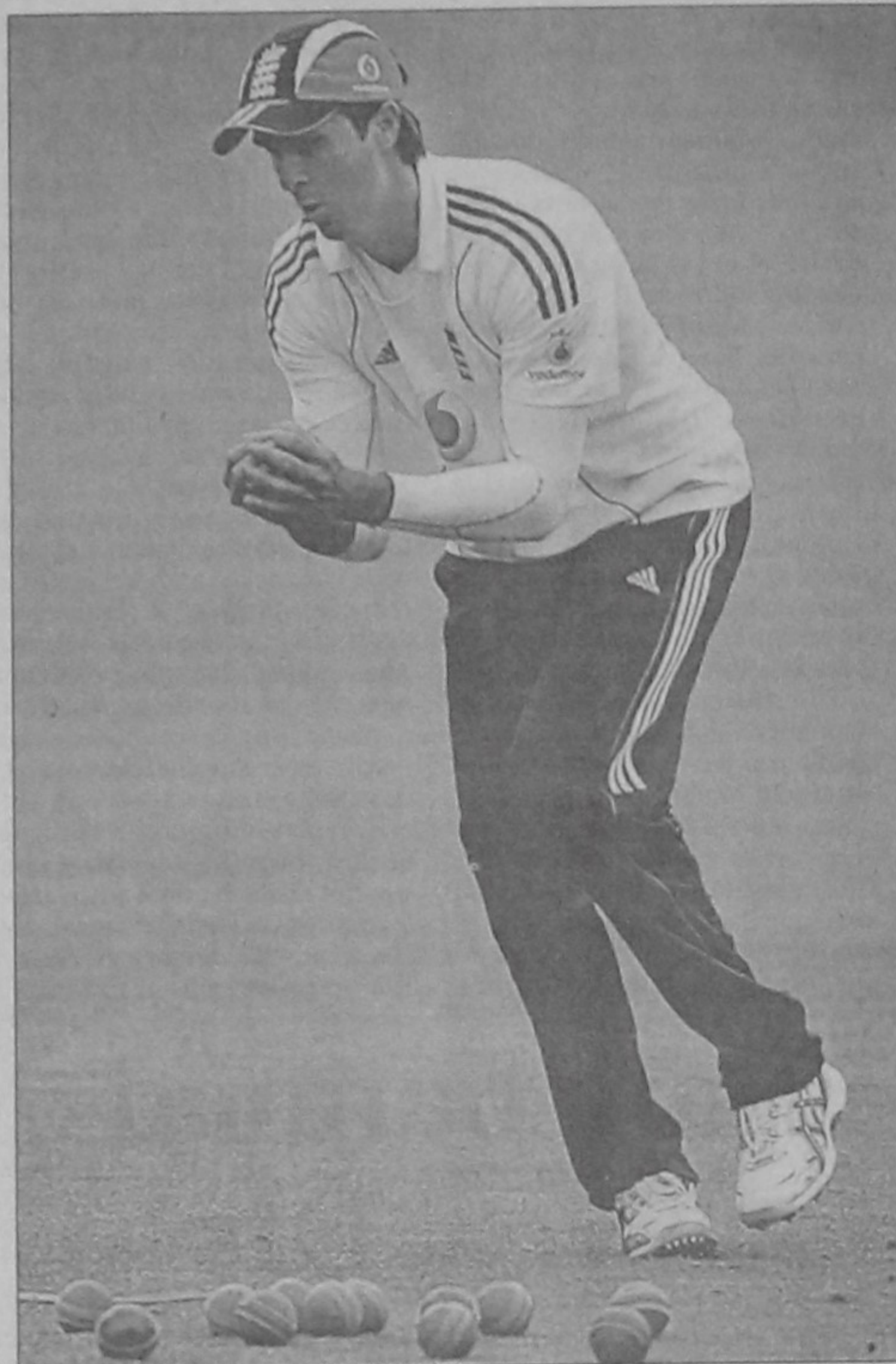
"They are just a steady side and on their day they can be a very good side," said Martin. "We are in a similar vein."

TEAMS

ENGLAND: Alastair Cook, Andrew Strauss, Michael Vaughan (captain), Kevin Pietersen, Ian Bell, Paul Collingwood, Tim Ambrose, Stuart Broad, Ryan Sidebottom, James Anderson, Monty Panesar.

NEW ZEALAND: Aaron Redmond, Jamie How, James Marshall, Ross Taylor, Brendon McCullum, Daniel Flynn, Jacob Oram, Daniel Vettori (captain), Kyle Mills, Tim Southee, Chris Martin.

Umpires: Simon Taufel and Steve Bucknor.



CAREFUL SKIPPER: Captain Michael Vaughan, in England's new Adidas strip, takes a catch during practice at Lord's in London yesterday.

Regional U-16 from today

SPORTS REPORTER

Sylhet take on Rajshahi (north) in one of two opening day matches of the Under-16 Young Tigers Elite National Divisional competition at the Bir Shrestha Shahid Motiur Rahman Stadium in Khulna from May 15.

Dhaka (north) and Dhaka Metro (green) face each other at the Khulna District Stadium in another Group A encounter. The other team in this group is Khulna.

Rajshahi (south), Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka Metro (blue) and Dhaka (south) are the five teams that make up Group B.

All group matches and the semifinals are two-day affairs while the final is a three-day match, scheduled to be held from June 2.

Easy win for Safin

AFP, Hamburg

Former world number one Marat Safin continued his comeback with a straight-sets win over ninth-seed Tomas Berdych in the second round of the Hamburg Masters Series here on Wednesday.

Safin has plummeted down the rankings to 89th after suffering a series of injuries and had to qualify for the main draw, but hit four aces on his way to knocking out Berdych, 11th in the world, 7-5, 6-4 in 90 minutes.

The 28-year-old Russian, who was runner-up here in 2000 and 2002, is now on course to meet Carlos Moya in the 3rd round if the Spaniard beats Germany's Oliver Rochus in his second round match.

Argentinian Juan Monaco is also in the third round after the 12th seed breezed past Italy's Simone Bolelli 6-2, 6-1.

Pakistan to host

FROM PAGE 17 - but have confirmed they will complete the postponed series in two halves with the Test tour in October 2010.

Ashraf said Australia's postponed tour had delayed projected earnings of 7.5 million dollars for the PCB.

Tuesday's PCB meeting also approved allowing regional domestic teams to sign overseas players for next season, Ashraf said. Teams would be allowed to field two guest players who can be from within the country or overseas.

"Our main priority is to raise the standards of domestic cricket and we feel overseas players can also increase interest in these tournaments," he said.

Ashraf said a security delegation from the International Cricket Council (ICC) will visit Pakistan next week to review security arrangements for the Asia Cup, which it is hosting in June-July, and the ICC Champions Trophy starting on September 11.

WICB to help Samuels

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Having brought Marlon Samuels' cricket career to a halt for two years, at least, effective from Friday, May 9, the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) is now offering the player support.

WICB chief executive Dr Donald Peters said: "I have written to Mr. Samuels and offered him all the help needed to get his life in order."

On Monday, the WICB announced that Samuels, the 27-year-old Jamaica and West Indies middle-order batsman, had been found guilty of violating the ICC Rules of Conduct 4 ix, which involves receiving money, benefit or other reward which could bring him or the game of cricket into disrepute. The charge does not refer to match-fixing, which carries a lifetime ban.

The judgement by the WICB's disciplinary committee, headed by Justice Adrian Saunders and including Dr Lloyd Barnett, Prof Aubrey Bishop and former West Indies captain Richie Richardson, came out of an incident on the West Indies tour of India in January 2007, when there were allegations Samuels had passed on match information ahead of the ODI in Nagpur on January 21 and then received payment for a hotel stay in Mumbai at the end of the tour.

In handing down their judgement, the disciplinary committee stated that "given the circumstances that attended Mr. Samuels' commission of the offence and in light of the unchallenged evidence we received as to Mr. Samuels' character, if we had the power so to recommend, we would have recommended that Mr. Samuels be bound over to be of good behaviour for a period not exceeding two years."

Responding to those comments yesterday, Dr Peters told the Express: "The players know what the penalties are. We are part of the ICC and we gave our word to uphold the code of ethics. Our hands were basically tied."

However, asked whether he felt Samuels had been naive in his actions, Peters replied: "Yes...we in the West Indies have no experience of match-fixing. Players are not exposed to that kind of behaviour. It's unfortunate that when they travel overseas, they are confronted with the spectre of match-fixing and one out of 15 will most likely get in trouble unless they are trained and counselled."

Peters indicated that he was going to speak last night to the players assembling in Antigua for a training camp ahead of the three-Test series against Australia starting next Thursday, "to remind them of how dangerous it is to be out there."

Commenting further on the banning of one of the region's most talented batsmen, who was the leading player on last year's tour of South Africa, Peters was emphatic. "I personally am very moved by it. He is a very young player. He came face to face with very bad people in the match fixing industry,

so it's unfortunate."

In a radio interview with Irie FM in Jamaica, Samuels reportedly said he would still be proceeding to the West Indies training camp. But Peters denied that would be happening. "I have no idea why he would say that," he said.

The ICC also confirmed that Samuels had been banned for two years from May 9. Acting CEO Dave Richardson said: "We are yet to see the whole judgement to put the matter of the punishment into its proper context but we note the WICB disciplinary committee found the player guilty and has imposed an immediate ban. In terms of the punishment handed down, minimum penalties were agreed by the ICC board, including all Full Members, and they reflect the seriousness of the issues at hand."

Abahani are currently two points behind Biman, who are leading the table with 23 points. Biman meet BKSP at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium while Surjo Torun take on City Club in the day's other two fixtures.

Transfer starts

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within a week to play warm-up matches before the SAFE, we will get into action before that. We want to relieve the players of any tension," said Rupu adding that Amalsh Sen will remain coach of the sky-blues.

Last year's runners-up Mohammedan want to make a stronger team but their general secretary Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan mentioned they will not chase any players from Abahani or Sheikh Russel.

"We want to keep our players as well as take a few successful footballers from other teams," Lokman told.

Muktijoddha are uncertain of the transfer as they do not have a proper committee due to legal battles and might lose a squad of veterans to other teams.

Brothers will take a decision about their team after one week.

"There is time and we will have a club meeting next week. We have to see what type of fund would be available and then go for the transfer," said manager Amer Khan.

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Will it be 3rd

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skipper Tushar Imran said that it would be an entertaining encounter.

"I am confident to win because we have consistent performers like Mohammad Rafique and Arafat Sunny in the team. I think it would be a good match," said the right-handed batsman.

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Bhajji banned

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"A copy of the report was given to him (Harbhajan), who was heard by the committee," the statement said.

"The player admitted his guilt in the concerned matter. He prayed for leniency and assured the committee that there would not be any misconduct on his part in the future."

The slapping incident occurred after the Mumbai team, captained by Harbhajan in the absence of the injured Sachin Tendulkar, lost to Sreesanth's Mohali.

Television pictures showed Sreesanth, an international teammate of Harbhajan's, in tears after the game.

Harbhajan's international ban comes four months after he was involved in a row on the controversial tour of Australia.

He was initially banned for three Tests after being found guilty of making alleged racist remarks towards Australia all-rounder Andrew Symonds.

But the spinner was subsequently let off with a fine following an appeal.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Matuall Cricket Academy celebrated their promotion to next season's Second Division with a resounding 94-run victory over Talent Hunt Cricket Academy in the Third Division final at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Although the match was a mere formality as both sides have gained promotion after their success in the Super League, Matuall forced their way to 203 in 49.4 overs. In reply, Talent Hunt were bowled out for a paltry 109 in 26.3 overs.

For Matuall, Partha Dutta took four wickets and with the bat, it was Fazle Nayeem, who top-scored with 43 off 68 balls with two boundaries and a six.

Only Shahin Iqbal of Talent Hunt stood up in the whole match, as his five-wicket haul somewhat put up some resistance.

DIVII CRICKET Rayer Bazar and Kalabagan Cricket Academy (KCA) brightened their chances of surviving the drop after their easy victories in the relegation league games of Second Division Cricket League yesterday.

At the Dhaka University ground, KCA won by an emphatic margin of 157 runs against Udiya Club while Chandpur Cricket Academy (CCA) suffered a six-wicket loss at the hands of Rayer Bazar at the City Club ground.

Abdul Majid's 106 off 107 balls to propel KCA to 243-8 in 40 overs after the match was delayed due to overnight rain in the area. Later, Three wickets each Golam Rabbani, Rezaul Hossain and Wasim Iqbal made sure Udiya were skittled out for 86 in 23.5 overs.

Away in the Pallabi venue, CCA were bowled out for 194 in 49.4 overs. In reply, Mohammad Sohag's unbeaten 84 throttled Rayer Bazar to victory in the 46th over.

UNIVERSITY CRICKET State University of Bangladesh (SUB) coasted to an easy 68-run win over Brac University in the Fair Play Twenty20 tournament at the ULAB campus cricket ground in Ramchandrapur yesterday.

Batting first, SUB amassed 175 in 19.4 overs with Fayyaz top-scoring with 30. In reply, Brac only reached 107-7 in their quota of 20 overs.

DIVII KABADDI Arbachin and Swarnali Sangsad moved to the semifinals of the Second Division Kabaddi League after winning their respective matches at the Outer Stadium kabaddi court.

In the day's quarterfinals, Arbachin eliminated Freedom Fighters Rehabilitation Society 44-40 with three lonas while Swarnali Sangsad outplayed Star Sports 58-29.

PIONEER FOOTBALL Jatrabari Jhatika Sangsad played out a 1-1 draw with Mir Hazaribagh in the day's only match of the Dhaka City Corporation Pioneer Football League at the Dhupkhola ground.

Rana put Jatrabari ahead in the fifth minute before Papel scored the equaliser for Mir Hazaribagh in the 40th minute.

In today's matches, Adamjee face Power Sun of Gandaria and later, his Bangladesh Sporting Club taking on Titu Smriti Sangsad at the same venue.

Akram to groom pace aspirants of Pakistan

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan's former captain and fast bowling great Wasim Akram will hold a specialised training camp for aspiring pacers across the country.

Akram, in his hometown Lahore these days, will also try to groom the young pace talents and scout out new faces for as part of the Pakistan Cricket Board's programme to invest in the budding players in the country.

Akram had uncovered the talented Sohail Tanvir, who is now fast becoming an impressive performer at the top level, in a similar camp last summer.

Akram said Tanvir had shown glimpses of his talent even in the camp and would be a good performer for the country as he improves and gains experience.

"He certainly has the required potential and pace to do well," PCB chairman Nasim Ashraf said. "We want to invest in the new talent and slowly keep on grooming them. We have invited other former greats to supervise similar camps and work with the new players."

Akram, who took over 900 Test and one-day wickets in an illustrious career said he was keen to repay back to Pakistan cricket and transfer some of his experience and knowledge to young players who have the potential and commitment to break into big time cricket.

Abahani ride

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Imran Khan sealed the victory four minutes later with a spectacular goal when he dribbled past three rival players to successfully complete a move from middle of the pitch.

After six rounds, Abahani stretched their tally to 18 points while Sonali Bank remained on 10 following their second loss.

Aaron, the future Mark?

Cricket

AFP, London

Back in 2004, New Zealand saw an opening batsman who started off as a spin bowler before re-igniting his professional career with Otago score 93 and 101 in the first Test at Lord's.

It may be too much to hope that Aaron Redmond can achieve similar heroics when he makes his Test debut at the top of the order for New Zealand at Lord's here on Thursday.

But hopes are high the Otago batsman can cement a place as an opener, a position that has caused New Zealand plenty of problems recently.

Cementing a place, for a start, would be a relief not just to Redmond but very likely to his father too.

Rodney Redmond has become the answer to one of cricket's more enduring trivia questions: Name the New Zealand batsman who on his Test debut scored 107 and 56 against Pakistan in 1973 but was never picked again.

Redmond senior struggled with contact lenses on the subsequent tour of England and never got a second chance. His son, while hoping for similar debut success, would obviously like a somewhat longer international career.

The initial signs are encouraging. After a successful season opening for Otago, leg-spinner Redmond, who made his first-class debut for Canterbury was included in the squad for England in place of the out-of-form Matthew Sinclair.

Last week, against the England Lions, the national A side he made well-constructed scores of 146 and 64.

"Over the last couple of years, I've been trying to become a lot more consistent, not just making 20s and 30s but pushing on and not having so many dry periods," the 28-year-old explained.

"Of late, it's been going okay but the thing is not to rest on your laurels.

"The biggest challenge is going to come soon. If I can take the chance that would be great."

New Zealand pace bowler Chris Martin, who played alongside Richardson, sees similarities in Redmond's game to that of the former opener.

"There's a guy who's been adding a little bit more confidence to the top order, Aaron Redmond. "We had a guy like Mark Richardson who would bat for 130 balls and blunt the attack for a while and be out there being a menace."

"I think Aaron's pretty much going down that line as well. He just wants to bat time and stay out there. That helps our middle-order."

New Zealand couldn't manage a single fifty opening stand during their 2-1 series defeat by England in March but Redmond, born in Perth, Australia, where his father still lives, hopes he can follow Richardson's example in plugging the gap.

"The way Ricco played he was a great batter," said Redmond. "He didn't have many technical flaws and the biggest thing he brought out into the middle was his guts and determination."

Richardson was, however, a

notoriously slow mover and Redmond said: "Hopefully, I'm a bit faster than him!"

For Redmond, there was nothing surprising about him becoming an opening batsman.

"In the early days, in Perth, I was at the top of the order.

"Then, when I came back to New Zealand I went to Canterbury, dropped down the order and became more of a bowling option. But over the past few years, it's reversed again. I've batted at No.3 and this year I've opened again."

"There's not too many differences, the biggest thing is the patience you need and the ability to cope with the new ball."

At the New Zealand academy, Redmond had a reputation as something of a party animal but he was keen to stress those days were long since behind him.

"Over the last couple of years, I've learned a lot more about myself. Sometimes you come to a stage where you have to make a decision. Something like this (Test cricket) doesn't get given to you."

Now Redmond hopes he can put into practice some fatherly advice.

"The biggest thing he said was to go out there and enjoy it. The media talks a lot about 1973, he doesn't talk about it too much. He's good, he's fine."

And Redmond knows exactly where his father, an accountant, will be watching the first Test.

"He got himself a new plasma TV a year ago. I'm sure he'll be glued to it."

Just as the Kiwis will hope that Redmond junior will be glued to the crease for a long time.

Akhtar derails Delhi

FROM PAGE 17

Kolkata in the ascendancy, Laxmi Ratan Shukla was given an over and he took the remaining three wickets to seal the victory as the crowd erupted.

Earlier, Glenn McGrath was typically miserly with the new ball and Pradeep Sangwan also didn't offer too many loose balls as Kolkata struggled to inject some momentum. Aakash Chopra's troubles with the bat continued and he managed only 13, despite being reprieved early on by Gautam Gambhir at wide slip.

His dismissal was greeted with a roar by the crowd as local boy Ganguly strode out. They had more to cheer as he imperiously slammed his second ball, a free hit, over the bowler's head for six, but were

silenced two deliveries later when he was bowled by Yo Mahesh after his attempted pull failed to make contact with the ball.

With Kolkata at 47 for 2 after seven, Salman Butt and David Hussey tried to rebuild and while they strung together a 40-run stand, there were unable to provide the acceleration the innings desperately needed. Besides Butt's two powerful drives through cover off Yo Mahesh, there weren't too many boundaries and the runs came mainly in the form of singles. Just as they were giving Kolkata a platform from which they could take off, Butt perished for 48, slicing a Mahesh delivery to McGrath at mid-off.

Hussey then had to play his by-

now-familiar role of trying to rescue Kolkata from the top-order's failings. He is the world's leading six-hitter in Twenty20s but he failed to provide the necessary fireworks; there were a couple of huge slices on the leg side but Hussey fell attempting another for a run-a-ball 31, lobbing a catch to midwicket.

However, Shoaib's heroics helped Kolkata defend the paltry total and consolidate their fourth spot. Delhi, meanwhile, again demonstrated their inability to win when the top order falls and now less than two weeks after being in the top spot, they face an uphill battle to make the semifinals.

SCORES IN BRIEF KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS: 133 for 6 in 20 overs (Butt 48, Chopra 13, Ganguly 7, Hussey 31, Taihu 7, Shukla 10, Saha 5 not out, Abdulla 1 not out, Sangwan 1-29, Mahesh 2-34, Maharoof 2-25)

DELHI DAREDEVILS: 110 all out in 17.5 overs (Gambhir 10, De Villiers 7, Tiwary 9, Dhawan 7, Dilshan 25, Mishra 31, Maharoof 10, Mahesh 3, Akhtar 4-11, Dinda 1-29, Shukla 3-6) Result: Kolkata Knight Riders won by 23 runs.

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



ELATION AND DEJECTION: Abahani's Shuvo runs off to celebrate his second goal against Sonali Bank in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Hockey League at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with numbers 1-11 and letters R, P, G, G, N, A, R, P, U, N, I, E, A, J, H, R, U, M.

CRYPTOQUIP R P G G N A R P U N I E A J H R U M M T H P V B T J N J D H J H P X V G R U B Z N G M P H R D A F P V G P V I X A N F R K H V U P Z M T D K R I I Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SUPPOSING A CHERUB IS OUTSIDE ON A SCORCHING HOT DAY, COULD HE BE A NINETY-DEGREE ANGEL? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: R equals I