

IPL popular with English

CRICINFO, undated

Despite claims from England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chairman Giles Clarke that the IPL will not impact on the England team, speculation is growing that leading players are preparing to use the window between the end of the West Indies tour and the start of the 2009 season to head to India.

The second IPL season is scheduled to be held between April 10 and May 29. England return from the Caribbean in March, and traditionally the first Test of the summer is not until mid May, allowing them a four to five-week gap to play in the IPL.

Assuming that all the leading players sign new central contracts with the ECB, in theory they will need permission from it -- and, where applicable, their countries -- to play. That will place the board in a quandary as earlier this week a spokesman reiterated Clarke's assertion at the start of the season that the early end to the West Indies tour was to allow players to rest rather than play elsewhere. But the players' desire to take part in the lucrative IPL might force the board to stand down.

Adam Wheatley, Kevin Pietersen's agent, made clear to The Times that his client was keen to play in India. "I think the ECB wants to appease the players. There is at least a window now, albeit a short one, so I think Kevin will be able to play in the IPL. He might only play two or three games next year, then maybe a bit more the year after."

Vijay Malhiya, the owner of the Bangalore Royal Challengers, who despite a huge financial outlay failed to make the last four in the IPL, told the Daily Telegraph that English players were firmly in his sights. "Some swapping around will have to be done but we will be looking at English players and I have set my team management working on the composition of the squad for next year."

A winning

FROM PAGE 17

to Jaipur. It's not always about money for retired internationals sometimes the joy of raising a squad is more than satisfying."

With Warne, came other handy recommendations notably Darren Berry from Victoria, who as director of coaching complemented the leggie's style of functioning.

Then, Rajasthan got their domestic drafts spot-on. "It was about carefully filling each slot," Castellino says. Fully aware that seven domestic players were too large a number to be dismissed to a fill-in-the-blanks game, the Royals backed up their international recruits with equally spunky home choices.

"We did a lot of research on players from our 'catchments area'. Statistics and records were carefully assessed, we spoke to several state-level coaches before picking them. So, Swapnil (Asnodkar) was specifically picked as back-up opener. Yusuf Pathan fitted the all-rounder tag perfectly," he says, adding that under Warne's personalised leadership, even Munaf Patel, who had initially been written off, came on to deliver.

Gujarat Ranji coach Vijay Patel talks about how medium pacer Siddharth Trivedi, who missed the India bus when he was on the top of his game in 2005 before drifting for two years, found firm footing in the IPL. "Sometimes you know you are a good bowler, but need a boost. Warne has ensured that Trivedi gives it more than his best," Patel says.

While nerves reduced the best of mighty Mumbai to shreds on Monday night, Niraj Patel and Ravindra Jadeja coolly took Rajasthan home. They even sent back the drinks men who came currying with messages at the beginning of that nerve-racking final over, while Mumbai had half a dozen towels and bottles spread across the field.

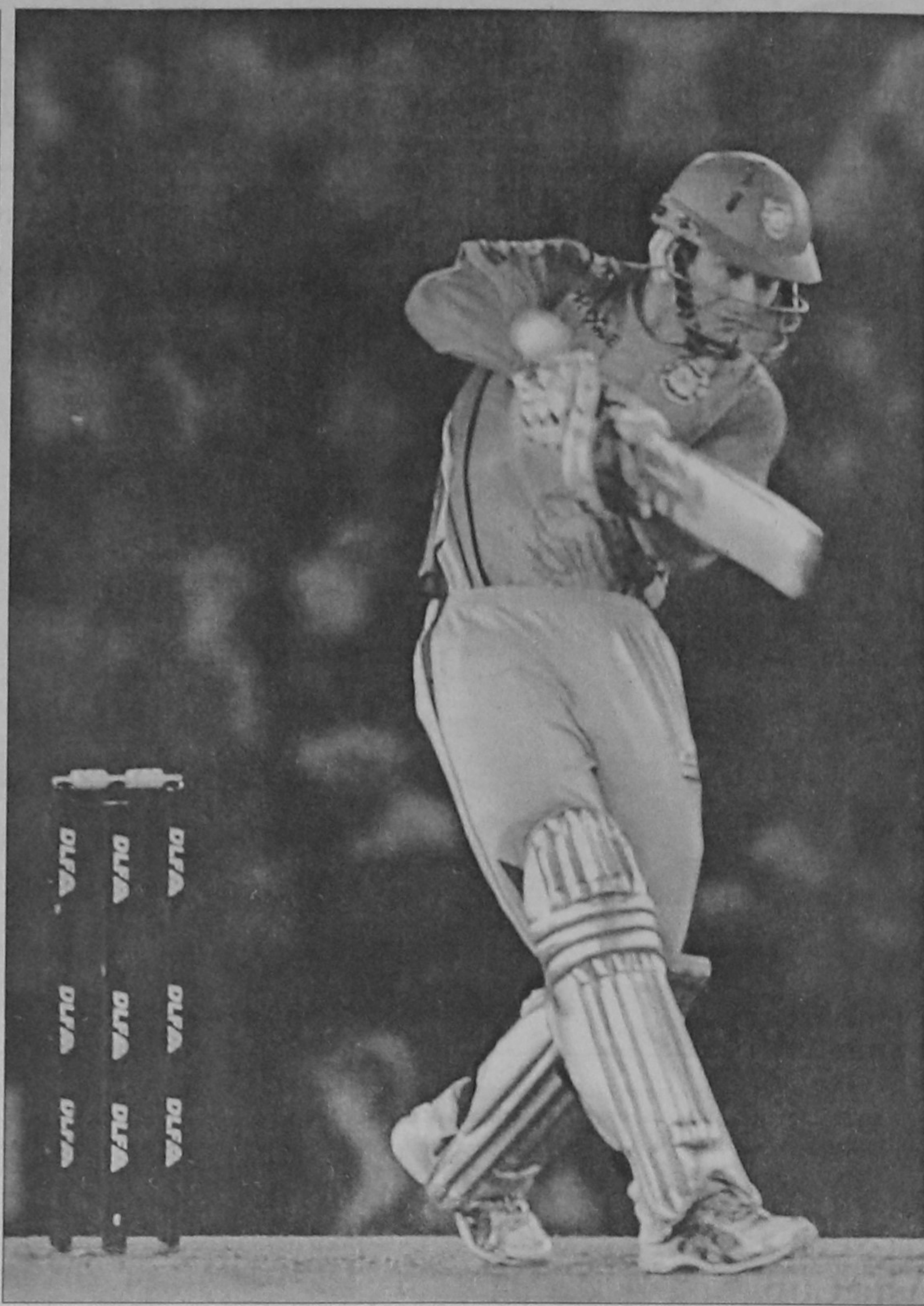
"Niraj doesn't hit long, he just plans innings very well," Vijay Patel says. Under-19 World Cupper Jadeja, meanwhile, has revelled in all situations he has been thrown in, and grinned punch-pleased every time Warne has anointed him 'Superstar'.

Graeme Smith has merged happily in the jigsaw using his heavy blade on the field, and his humour and banter off it while Sohail Tanvir has turned into an unplayable proposition with his quirky action doing most of the damage.

Off the field too, Emerging Media benefited from their Leicester connection. "We brought experience of everything, from holding matches at stadiums, building on fan base to how to best treat players since they are our main assets," Castellino says.

As an extension, the Royals support-community has spread to not just the UK and Australia, but Rajasthan is eyeing the huge expat Marwari community. "Why limit it to Jaipur, don't forget that some big Marwari names like Laxmi Mittal and the Birla family to name a few have roots in Rajasthan," he adds, informing also of their partnership with premier institution BITS Pilani, to further broaden the base.

"Every team is as good as their next game," Warne has declared. Far from being a ragtag bunch, the Rajasthan Royals know precisely what they want next.



Punjab's Australian batsman Shaun Marsh lifts the ball over mid-wicket during his swashbuckling hundred against Rajasthan at the PCA Stadium in Mohali on Wednesday.

IPL won't count

CRICINFO, undated

The Indian Premier League might have provided a launching pad for a number of previously unheralded players but the Indian national selectors are unlikely to be heavily swayed by Twenty20 performances when they choose the squad for the forthcoming tri-series in Bangladesh and the Asia Cup in Pakistan.

Barring injuries, the players who helped India lift the CB Series crown in Australia are likely to be preferred. Sachin Tendulkar, however, has been ruled out of both tournaments due to a groin injury. However, a few youngsters could be thrown into the mix if one of the main players is rested for the tournament, one that starts on June 8.

"Most of the players who were part of the CB Series squad have been doing well in IPL also," one of the selectors told Cricinfo. "That was largely a young side so we need to give importance to continuity. If there are injuries we will look at a few players in form."

The most obvious vacancy is in the spin department. Harbhajan

Singh's ban has opened up a slot and there could be a temptation to pick three spinners, given that it's summer in Bangladesh. Piyush Chawla, the legspinner, will be expected to retain his spot but expected to be heavily swayed by Twenty20 performances when they choose the squad for the forthcoming tri-series in Bangladesh and the Asia Cup in Pakistan.

Apart from his offbreaks he can also swing a match around with the bat. The fact that he's done well in all formats this season -- four-day, one-day and Twenty20 matches -- is a big plus in his favour. Amit Mishra, the legspinner, who had a fine domestic season, has also staked a claim through his good IPL performances.

The batting line-up picks itself. Virender Sehwag didn't play in the final part of the CB Series but would be expected to retain his spot in the squad. Rohit Sharma and Gautam Gambhir have both set the IPL alight and would be expected to shoulder a bulk of the burden. All indications suggest that it's unlikely that the selectors will look beyond the line-up that did the job in Australia -- unless injuries force one or two of the players to miss out.

A number of youngsters have made an impact in the IPL but the selectors might be tempted to wait just a bit longer before bleeding them. An India A team is scheduled to visit Israel and Australia (for an Emerging Nations three-nation tournament) in July and some of the young guns may be given a chance there.

Rarely have India had such a wealth of fast-bowling options to choose from. Irfan Pathan, Sreesanth, Praveen Kumar, RP Singh and Ishant Sharma did a sterling job in Australia and all have been among the wickets off late. Even if one of them were to be unavailable because of injury, there's VRV Singh, Pankaj Singh, Vijaykumar Yomahesh and a slew of others who have the ability to fill the breach.

However, Zaheer Khan might not be in the mix -- he's managed 13 wickets in 11 IPL games but the recurrence of his ankle injury, which ruled him out of the recent Test series against South Africa, could see him missing out on the action.

Aussies unsettled

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Sarwan identified the aim now is for West Indies to play positively and keep the pressure up under Australia if they are to have any chance of winning.

"I think we've got to be positive, we've got a lot to take from the first Test," he said.

"We had Fidel Edwards bowling very well, and Shivanine Chandepaul's hundred in which I thought he showed a lot of determination, and it's important that we take a page out of the way they approached things, and we have to continue to be positive."

The VRCG is hosting its inaugural Test, after it was constructed as a gift to Antigua and Barbuda from China ahead of the 19th Cup last year in the Caribbean.

Both sides will hope that the pitch will offer much more than the feathered a few miles down the road at the Antigua Recreation Ground, where international cricket in the island lived for more than two decades and Brian Lara twice established the record for the highest Test score, and national hero Sir Vivian stoked the previous fastest Test hundred.

Australia have now won 13 of the last 14 Tests they have contested against West Indies and will seek to stamp their authority.

They hold the Frank Worrell Trophy -- symbol of Test supremacy against West Indies -- and they have not lost a Test series in the Caribbean since 1991.

The third and final Test between the two sides starts on June 12 at Kensington Oval in Barbados.

The Aussies also contest a Twenty20 International and five One-day Internationals on this trip.

SQUADS

WEST INDIES (from): Chris Gayle

(captain), Ramnaresh Sarwan (vice captain), Sulimann Benn, Dwayne Bravo, Shivanine Chandepaul, Fidel Edwards, Xavier Marshall, Runako Morton, Brenton Parchment, Darren Powell, Denesh Ramdin, Darren Sammy, Devon Smith, Jerome Taylor.

AUSTRALIA (from): Ricky Ponting (captain), Michael Clarke (vice captain), Doug Bollinger, Beau Casson, Stuart Clark, Brad Haddin, Brad Hodge, Mike Hussey, Phil Jaques, Mitchell Johnson, Simon Katich, Brett Lee, Stuart MacGill, Ashley Noffke, Andrew Symonds.

Umpires: Mark Benson, and Russell Tiffin.

Blatter assures

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In Kuala Lumpur earlier this month, initiated the meeting between the chief of world football's governing body and the three-member BFF delegation.

It was learned that Blatter had a one and half hour long sitting with Salahuddin and BFF vice-presidents Abdus Salam Murshedi and Manzoor Hossain Malu, who are now in the Australian city to attend the 58th FIFA Congress.

"The delegation is very happy to have talked with Blatter, told Salam over phone," told BFF vice-president Badal Roy here last night.

"Salam said that it was very positive and the FIFA president has agreed to help the BFF in development of the game. Our president has informed Blatter about his future plans and asked for FIFA's help," added Badal.

The Congress ends today and the BFF delegation is expected to return home tomorrow.

Afriidi predicts bleak Tests

PTI, Karachi

With the Indian Premier League taking Twenty20 cricket's popularity to dizzying heights, Pakistani all-rounder Shahid Afridi foresees a bleak future for Tests as the five-day format would struggle to find favour among fans seeking instant entertainment.

Afridi, who returned home after a lacklustre outing with the Hyderabad Deccan Chargers in the IPL, said the league had been a grand success and the support and interest of the people had left him amazed.

"Even though our team performed badly but still in our final game there was a big crowd out to support us and this shows the interest the IPL has created," he said.

"I can't say if 50-overs cricket would be affected by the popularity of twenty20 but certainly Test matches would be hit hard as people are more interested in seeing instant and exciting cricket," he added.

The flamboyant all-rounder, who came a cropper with the willow in the IPL, admitted that he has been ignoring his batting for bowling.

"I know I disappointed and let down my fans with my batting failures. But now I am going to pay attention to my batting once again and I am confident I can get back into form soon."

"I am looking forward to playing in the tri-series in Bangladesh against India it will be a good opportunity to make amends," he stated.

Hayden ruled out of tour

CRICINFO, undated

Australia received a jolt ahead of Friday's second Test with Matthew Hayden returning home after failing to recover from a lingering Achilles injury. Ricky Ponting's team missed Hayden in the first Test in Jamaica, especially in the second innings when they collapsed to 18 for 5 before recovering to score 167.

"He's no good," Ponting told AAP. "Haydos will be going home pretty much ASAP."

"He had some scans after the game in Jamaica and, just with the time difference, he had to wait to get the experts back there to have a look at those, and obviously there's some tendon damage. It's just not going anywhere so we just want him to get home ... and get him back on a programme to get him right for the Champions Trophy."

Alex Kountouris, the side's physiotherapist, said Hayden's right Achilles tendon injury has not made sufficient progress during his time in the West Indies. "He will not be able to participate in the second Test and was highly unlikely to be available for the third Test," Kountouris said. "With the large volume of cricket to be played over the next 18 months it was decided he should return to Australia to undergo rehabilitation and consult specialists. This means he will not be available for the five one-day internationals against West Indies."

Ryder ruled out of ODIs

BBC ONLINE, undated

New Zealand batsman Jesse Ryder has been ruled out of next month's one-day series against England after failing to recover from a hand injury.

The 23-year-old injured his right hand in a drink-related incident and underwent surgery in February but he continues to have difficulty lifting.

He will be replaced by Peter Fulton, who is in England with the Test side.

"It's an opportunity for somebody else. We've just got to be patient," said Black Caps coach John Bracewell.

"It may put this particular series under a bit more pressure by not having one of your best players there, but it increases your depth later on down the track," added Bracewell.

Ryder, who has a history of disciplinary problems, damaged an index finger and thumb breaking a jaw window to gain access to its toilet.

Tim impressed with Windies

CRICINFO, undated

West Indies' fighting performance in the first Test has convinced Australia's coach Tim Nielsen that his opponents are on the way up the world rankings. Currently placed at No. 8, West Indies battled with Australia over the opening four days in Jamaica before folding in the 95-run loss.

"They could definitely be up in the middle rungs and fighting for a top three or four spot with the quality of player and the natural talent they've got in their team," Nielsen told the Sydney Morning Herald. "We kept saying the whole way through the game that our challenge was not to have fits and spurts, but to do it as well as we possibly can for five days. I think that was the difference in the end."

Nielsen warned West Indies more was needed than relying on natural ability. "Test cricket is definitely about talent ... but in the end it is the ability to execute your skills and reproduce them over and over again," he said. "That's probably the difference in the two sides at the moment. If the Windies can do that, they'll definitely jump up the ladder."

The below-par performances of Mitchell Johnson and Stuart MacGill in the first Test did not concern Nielsen. MacGill picked up four wickets for the game while Johnson was out-bowled by Stuart Clark and Brett Lee.

B-Licence for ten

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Among ten new B-Licence holders are current national coach Abu Yusuf, eminent coach Shafiqul Islam Manik and former national footballers Satyajit Das Rupu, Saiful Bari Titu and Mahbub Hossain Rony.

The others are Ujjal Charabarty, Shamsuzzaman Yusuf, Sheikh Zahidur Rahman, SM Zakaria Babu and Paritosh Dewan.

Wasim wanted

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Indian Premier League outfit Kolkata Knight Riders had offered him a coaching job.

"Neither has any offer come nor have I approached anyone for this," he stated.

Meanwhile, Ashraf said he would meet Akram soon to personally offer him the national bowling coach's job yet again.

"His feedback is very valuable to us," he said.

No change for Kiwis

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

John Bracewell, the New Zealand coach, has confirmed the side will retain the same batting line-up for the third and final Test at Trent Bridge starting on June 5, despite their six-wicket defeat at Old Trafford. New Zealand's inexperienced batting was exposed after they capitulated for 114 in the second innings, squandering an imposing first-innings lead of 179.

Bracewell said the top three -- Jamie How, Aaron Redmond and James Marshall -- would be retained and was willing to give Marshall more time to settle into his No. 3 position after scores of 0 and 28.

"We're not really concerned about our opening batters, they're making progress and we want to be consistent with that throughout

this series, so Redmond and How will open in the next Test," Bracewell told NZPA. "We don't want to muck around with James Marshall by shifting him up the order, we want to secure him in that position as well. We don't want to be shifting guys in and out of positions when we're trying to develop a young side and try to build their confidence and experience."

Looking ahead to the three-day tour game against Northamptonshire starting on Friday, Bracewell said Peter Fulton would open the batting with Redmond, as cover for the injured How. How suffered a cracked left index finger in a fielding session during the second Test but is likely to be fit in time for Trent Bridge. Bracewell also confirmed that Jacob Oram, Chris Martin, Iain O'Brien and the captain Daniel Vettori would sit out the tour game.

New Zealand are still waiting on the fitness of batsman Daniel

Flynn, who's yet to recover after being struck on the face while batting at Old Trafford. If Flynn isn't fit for Northampton, Vettori will come in.

On New Zealand's bowling composition, Bracewell said Tim Southee would have a chance to compete with O'Brien and Kyle Mills for two spots in the final Test. O'Brien was the most impressive of the seamers at Old Trafford with match figures of 4 for 111, including the wickets of the in-form Andrew Strauss in both innings.

"Northampton gives us a chance to look at some other players and bring them into Test contention, in particular Tim Southee, and see what option that gives us. I was pretty happy with what Iain O'Brien did, but the Trent Bridge surface and conditions indicate it does swing a lot more there, so that brings both Kyle and Tim back into contention and that makes those positions competitive."

MacGill worries Aussies

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Several concerns emerged from Australia's effort in the first Test, where the world's No. 8 team seriously challenged them, but the most worrying aspect was the form of Stuart MacGill. The team management has been adamant that MacGill remains the top spinner in Australia and can be a valuable asset for the next couple of years. His performance in Jamaica might have the selectors and coaches wondering if they spoke too soon after his return from surgery.

MacGill's match figures of 4 for 143 look reasonable and he finished off the Test with two wickets in two balls when he removed West Indies' No. 9 and No. 11 batsmen. The big problem was that he never seemed like getting a middle-order wicket in the second innings. On the fifth day of a match where the pitch was playing tricks, against a team not adept at handling high-quality spin, it was a telling result.

The timing was not ideal for MacGill, who is trying to convince his doubters that he is still a match-winner after having an operation on his right wrist in December. The surgery dealt with the carpal-tunnel syndrome that had troubled

him in Hobart in November, when he had a miserable match against Sri Lanka and delivered some wild full tosses due to numbness in his hand.

He declared the operation a success and made a reasonable comeback in the Pura Cup, which makes it even more baffling that he was back to wayward ways at Sabina Park. MacGill has always been prone to sending down loose balls, but it was forgivable because so many other deliveries would be potential wicket-takers. Unfortunately, in his comeback Test, his ripping legbreaks were too often longhops, while the full tosses remained.

His analysis flattered him. The two wickets to finish the game were genuine tallenders, while of his two successes in the first innings, the ball that got Shivnarine Chandepaul was such an ordinary full toss that Chandepaul himself, the most occasional of legspinners, would have been ashamed of it. He was also largely responsible for giving West Indies a sniff on the final day when his poor spell allowed Darren Sammy and Denesh Ramdin to build a handy partnership after Stuart Clark and Brett Lee, who rattled the top order, were taking a much-needed break.

For a man who shows little joy at picking up wickets and rarely

appears satisfied on the field, it was strange that MacGill seemed so unperturbed by his struggles. Is the desire still there? He claims that he is desperate to play at the highest level for as long as possible, but if he changes his mind he has other things to fall back on, including a television career that began with a wine programme last year.

At 37, he is already looking older than his years -- the grey crew cut doesn't help -- and after he also battled with a knee injury and general fitness late last year, there must be some lingering doubts in the minds of Australia's decision-makers over whether he really is a long-term option. Their problem is that in the domestic scene the spin cupboard is alarmingly bare. Shane Warne always had a grand sense of timing and his announcement that he would consider an Ashes return -- if asked -- came at an awkward moment for MacGill.

Still, one bad match does not mean a man who has taken 207 Test wickets at a strike-rate of 53 should be written off. But what MacGill can count on is that he will be monitored very closely in the Caribbean.

McKenzie, Morkel given contracts

CRICINFO, undated

Neil McKenzie, Robin Peterson and Albie Morkel have been upgraded to national contracts in a bid to plug some gaps identified by Cricket South Africa (CSA). Gerald Majola, CSA's chief executive, confirmed the deals on Wednesday -- a month after the initial contract list was announced -- as he called for South Africa to push on further.

"Although the Proteas have recently completed their most successful season, there is still room for improvement," said Majola. "After close examination of the talent available, it was felt that Neil, Albie and Robin would fill the identified gaps and should be drawn in as contracted players."

Mickey Arthur, South Africa's coach, and Joubert Strydom, the head of selectors, were consulted about the additions which brings the number of contracted players to 18. The trio's deals take effect on June 1 and run through to April 30 next year.

Majola added: "It was also established that their inclusion as national contracted players would not infringe on the Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) with SACA, nor would it impact negatively on the revenue sharing process or on CSA finances."

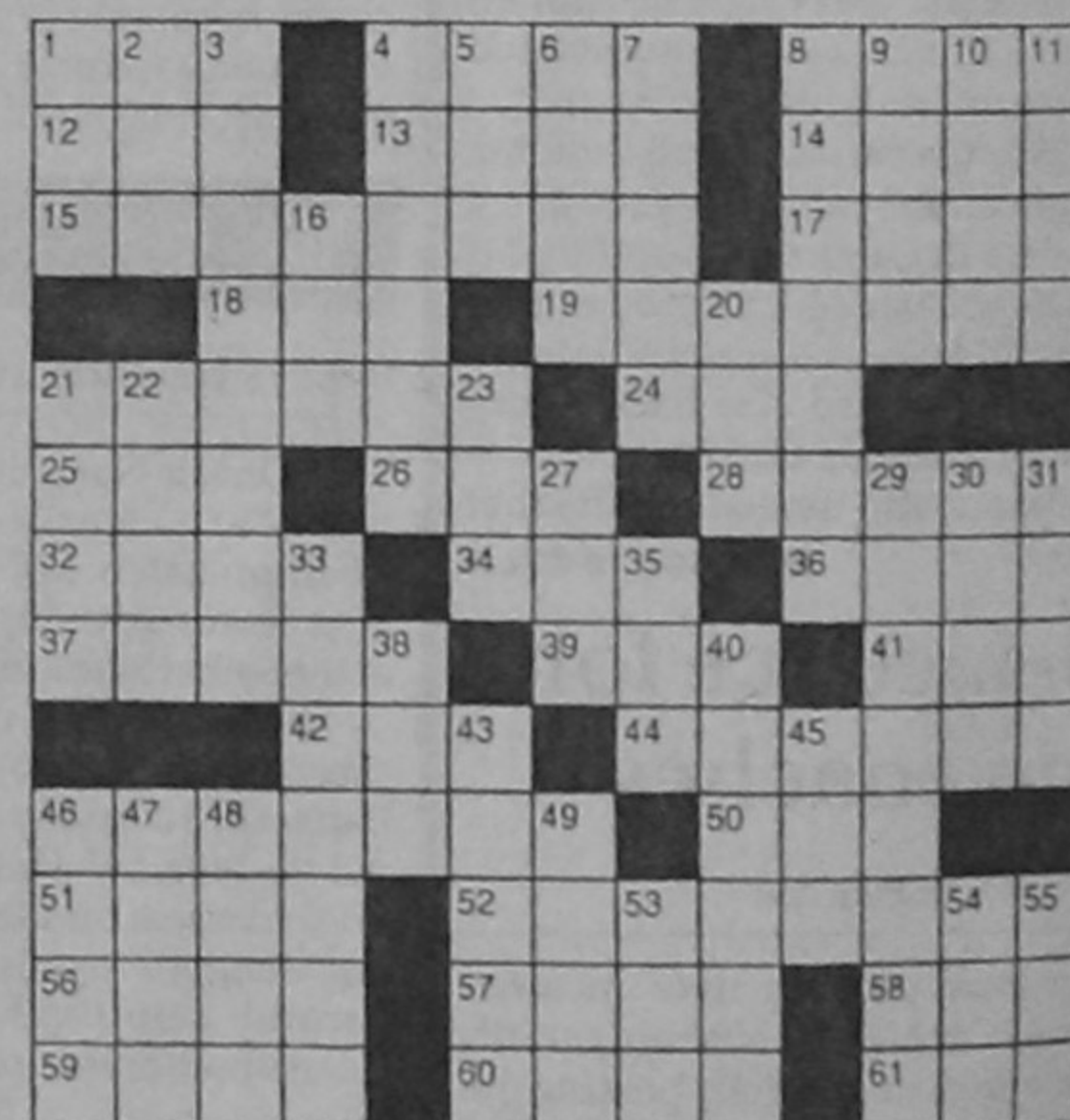
CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 42 Branch 1 Four nts. 44 Snow 4 Metal 4 refuse 8 Spud's buds 12 Discover- 13 "Oh, where, oh, where can --?" 14 Lummock 15 Holiday 17 Taj Mahal 18 "The Greatest" 19 Speech 21 Spot 24 Inventor 25 mmm 25 mmm 26 Dily bud 28 Couches 32 Family- 34 Boxer 36 Catalan kid 37 Annual visitor 39 Spigot 41 Took out of context?

DOWN 1 Head of state 2 "Eureka!" 3 Site 4 Comic bit 5 Muumu accessory 6 "Peek--" 7 Category 8 Joy 9 Boo Boo's mentor 10 Modern coin 11 Ollie's pal 12 Brewery product 20 Capp and Capone 21 Works on the sound-track 22 Pound of verse

23 Piece of advice 27 Egyptian boy king 29 Unhealthy attachment 30 From square one 31 Lays down the lawn 33 Depot 35 Whale group 38 Jackie's second 40 Majestic home 43 Specks 45 Barracks bed 46 Pindaric works 47 "Billy Budd" captain 48 Plankton component 49 Wine region of California 53 Louis -- 54 Lennon's lady 55 Beak

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CRYPTOQUIP

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"PUCVY UM LIJLOCVLK."

Yesterday's Cryptquip: A POLLUTED SHORE

WHERE MUCH INDUSTRIAL GARBAGE IS DUMPED

HAS BEEN DUBBED "THE WASTE COAST."

Today's Cryptquip Clue: P equals W