

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 counties -- 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 Mallya, 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 Munir 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 drinksmen who came scurrying with messages at the beginning of that nerve-wracking final over, while Mumbai had half a dozen towels and bottles spread across the field.

"Niraj doesn't hit long, he just plays 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.

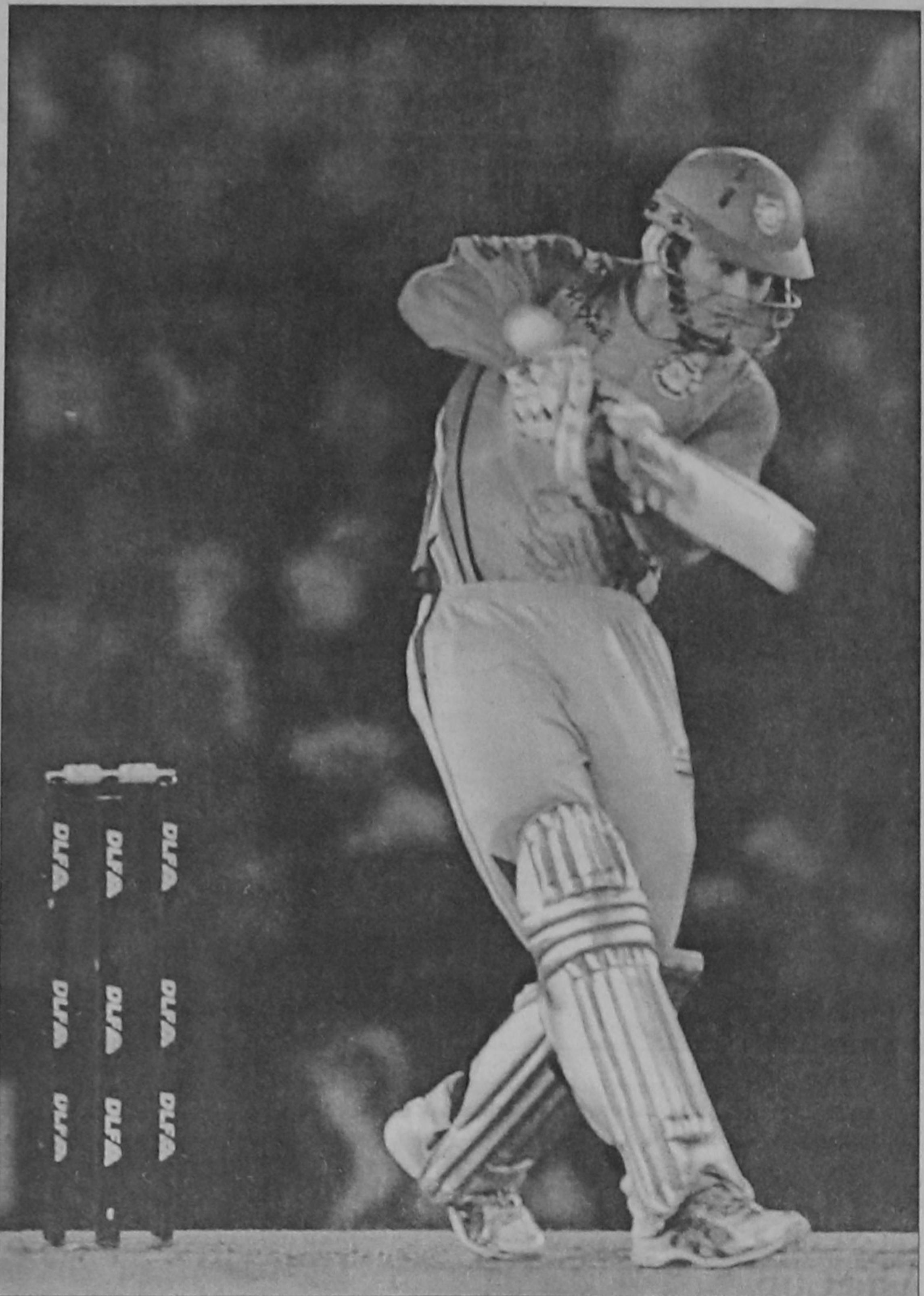


PHOTO: INTERNET

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 Yusuf Pathan's recent heroics make him a strong candidate.

Apart from his off-breaks 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 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, Vijay Kumar Yomahesh and a slew of others who have the ability to fill its slot.

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 blooding 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, Vijay Kumar 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.

Afridi 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. "Hayden 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 in February but continues to have difficulty fielding.

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 bar window to gain access to its toilet.

Terry smiling again

FROM PAGE 20

Trinidad and Tobago this weekend was it had more to do with garnering CONCACAF votes for the bid to host the 2018 World Cup.

Capello gave Jermaine Defoe his first start for nearly two years in a 4-2-4 formation that allowed Wayne Rooney to play a roving role.

Gerrard thought he had opened the scoring with a volleyed finish from David Beckham's free-kick, but referee Kyros Vassaras had already whistled play dead before the ball was delivered.

Capello's pre-match demand for more English spirit from his players suggested he has already realised that perspiration rather than inspiration will be the defining factor for a squad short on pace and lacking a genuine playmaker.

Rooney is the only player capable of filling England's creative void and Capello has asked the Manchester United forward to be more selfish and forget about wasting energy on defensive chores.

He linked up well with Defoe at times but it was the Portsmouth forward who wasted a chance to open the scoring when he steered Gerrard's cross wide from close-range.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	42	Branch	43	Down	23	Piece of advice	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Four qts.	44	Showy	1	Head of st.	13							14
4	Metal		parots	27	Egyptian boy								
8	Spud's buds		Enthusiastic	3	Site	king							
12	Discoverer's cry	50	Parcel	4	Applause	muumuu	29	Unhealthy attachment					
13	"Oh, where, oh, where can I go?"	51	Sandwich	5	of land	accessory	6	"Peek-a-boo"					
14	15 Holiday	52	Sandwich	6	Modern	attachment	30	From square					
15	17 Taji Mahal	53	Reason	7	Colonial protest	one	31	Lays down the lawn					
16	18 The Greatest	54	for	8	Modern	lawn	32	Depot					
17	19 Speech	55	coin	9	Traditional	35	33	Whale					
18	20 Spot	56	Therefore	10	Colonial protest	group	34	Jackie's product					
19	21 Inventor	57	story	11	Traditional protest	second	35	Specks					
20	22 Whitney	58	Unit	12	Traditional protest	hubby	36	45 Barracks bed					
21	23 Spotted	59	Actor	13	Traditional protest	home	37	22 Pound of verse					
22	24 Inventor	60	Rescue	14	Traditional protest	soundtrack	42	51					
23	25 Whitney	61	Francisco's Hill	15	Traditional protest	track	43	52					
24	26 Inventor	62	Rescue	16	Traditional protest	verses	44	53					
25	27 Whitney	63	San Francisco's Hill	17	Traditional protest	works	45	54					
26	28 Couches	64	Traditional protest	18	Traditional protest	captain	46	55					
27	29 Family abbr.	65	Traditional protest	19	Traditional protest	component	47	56					
28	30 Catalan kid	66	Traditional protest	20	Traditional protest	region of California	48	57					
29	31 Annual visitor	67	Traditional protest	21	Traditional protest	53 Louis	49	58					
30	32 Boxer	68	Traditional protest	22	Traditional protest	54 Lennon's lady	50	59					
31	33 Catalan kid	69	Traditional protest	23	Traditional protest	55 Peak	51	60					
32	34 Catalan kid	70	Traditional protest	24	Traditional protest	56	52	61					
33	35 Catalan kid	71	Traditional protest	25	Traditional protest	57	53	62</					