

TT qualifiers from today

UNB, Dhaka
The zonal phase of the AB Bank 29th National Table Tennis Championships will start today in Rajshahi.

BCCI will think over Warne's offer later

PTI, Mumbai
Indian Premier League title-winning Rajasthan Royals skipper Shane Warne might have offered his services to mentor the country's spin bowlers but the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) feels it's too early to give a thought to the leg spin legend's proposal.



Ajax goalkeeper Imran (bottom) tries in vain to stop Sonali Bank forward Krishna Kumar's (L) third goal during their Green Delta Premier Hockey Super League match at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Door opens for Warne?

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

The sudden retirement of Australian leg-spinner Stuart MacGill over the weekend could see bowling great Shane Warne come out of international retirement, cricket commentators said Monday.

MacGill called quits on his 44-Test career Sunday midway through the second Test against the West Indies in Antigua after admitting that at 37 he was no longer up to the rigours of international cricket.

The veteran, who spent much of his playing career in Warne's considerable shadow, only made the Australian tour of the Caribbean after overcoming serious knee and wrist injuries.

Only last month Warne, who retired from international cricket following the fifth Test against England in Sydney in January 2007 with a then world record 708 Test wickets, raised the prospect of playing again for Australia.

Warne, a year older than MacGill at 38, reportedly said: "If Australia really needed me, and there was no-one else around, and (captain) Ricky Ponting thought I could do the job, you would weigh up the options."

"If Stuart MacGill fell over and broke his leg, and there were no other spinners around, and Ricky came out and said, 'Mate, can you please help us out for this one-off tour? We need you', that is something I would weigh up."

Former Australian leg-spinner and radio commentator Kerry O'Keefe said Warne, who has been playing in the domestic Indian league, could well make a shock international return.

"Obviously, he has to come back and play first-class cricket... and whether or not the grid of Test cricket as a player, and not a captain, is as attractive for him, we're going to find out I guess, because this will generate a lot of interest now."

performing," Warne told an Australian newspaper last month. "I would still love to be playing international cricket, and miss it because I devoted 20 years to first-class cricket. It is a big part of my life."

Australian selectors now have to decide who will be the team's first-choice spinner for Australia's four-Test tour of India in October following the retirements of MacGill and Brad Hogg.

MacGill said he will play out the current Antigua Test, with young left-arm spinner Beau Casson likely to make his debut in the third and final Test starting in Barbados next week.

Arambagh sign four

SPORTS REPORTER

Arambagh signed four more footballers for the second B. League, due to start in September this year, yesterday at the BFF Bhaban.

The first team to sign players during the May 15-June 20 transfers for the professional football league, they had recruited Akram Hossain, Piaruzzaman Piru and Farhad Hossain last month.

Different right

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notice that apart from the fact that I wasn't bowling as I would have liked, things weren't working the way they are supposed to work," he said.

MacGill, a wine buff and prolific novel reader, defended his right to be different in a sporting culture that often encourages uniformity.

"It is a team sport and some people are still of the opinion that all cricketers should be the same. I will argue till I am blue in the face, not just for my own sake but for the sake of all young cricketers coming through who are a bit different, who am I to tell you what sort of music you should listen to?"

"If you like a glass of red rather than an icy cold beer, good on you. It doesn't matter, so long as you step across the line and make a contribution and don't get in the way of anyone else," he said.

Contrasting challenges for Serbian duo

French Open

AFP, Paris

It will be contrasting challenges for Serbian pair Ana Ivanovic and Jelena Jankovic in the first two of the women's French Open quarter finals on Tuesday.

Third seed Jankovic takes on teenage Spanish qualifier Carla Suarez Navarro, playing in her first Grand Slam tournament, while second seed Ivanovic goes up against Swiss veteran Patty Schnyder playing in her 48th.

Schnyder holds a 4-3 winning record against Ivanovic, but the 20-year-old from Belgrade has taken the last three and will start a strong favourite, a sentiment shared by Schnyder.

"Yeah, she's tough. I think the way she plays she's just making the big favourite after (Justine) Henin retired here."

Ivanovic showed she is back to top form with a 6-0, 6-0 thumping of Petra Cetkovska in the fourth round, but she was refusing to see too far ahead to where a first Grand Slam beckons.

"That's one thing I don't want to think about, because obviously I feel great, all these matches I played, and I feel very confident going into my next round," she said.

"But I don't want to think too much. What if I win or am I going to play good next match and even win that? So I just basically want to take it match by match."

Ivanovic undoubtedly has the power to outgun the 29-year-old Schnyder, and only a repeat of the bout of nerves she showed in losing in straight sets to Henin in last year's final looks likely to derail her.

Apart from knowing nothing about her 19-year-old opponent, Jankovic is worried by a painful right arm and shoulder that has seen her forced to wear a support brace here and seek medical treat-

ment during games.

It struck again during her drawn out fourth round win over Agnieszka Radwanska of Poland and the 23-year-old, who like Ivanovic hails from Belgrade, was despairing.

"I wish I didn't have any injuries," she complained. "I wish I was healthier and could enjoy my games."

"It's like the whole thing is hurting me. It started low down and now it's going up. It's like a chain and I don't know what I have to do. I will see the physios and I will try to do my best to recover."

Suarez Navarro, who has upset Amelie Mauresmo and Flavia Pennetta on her way into the last eight, said she had nothing to lose and was just enjoying the ride.

"I like the atmosphere here. You feel that the crowd loves tennis," the Canary Islander said.

Jankovic will start a huge favourite but there must remain a question mark over that arm injury.

Carter clinches 100m at Golden League

Athletics

AFP, Berlin

Nesta Carter put the finishing touch on a great day for Jamaican sprinting when he won the men's 100m at the Golden League meeting here on Sunday.

His time of 10.08sec was way outside Usain Bolt's new world record of 9.72sec set in New York on Saturday night, but he claimed he would put in a spirited challenge for a bronze medal at the Beijing Olympics behind Asafa Powell and Bolt.

Carter said after his win at the Olympic stadium that Jamaican sprinting had been put on the map this weekend. "It has been a big day for Jamaica when Usain Bolt got the world record. I also contributed to it with this win."

"I think third spot after Asafa Powell and Usain Bolt is open for the Olympic Games at 100 metres and I want that place."

And on his victory, where he beat out Kim Collins of St Kitts and Nevis (10.12) and American Ivory Williams (10.13) into second and third spot, Carter said: "It was a pretty good start, but I was not expecting a win today."

Regional rivalry

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India, under British coach Bob Houghton, have a great match winner in Baichung Bhutia who have three championship medals in the regional football extravaganza. It will be the veteran striker's fourth appearance after missing the show in Dhaka due to injury, the only time India failed to make the final.

The favourites, highest ranked team in the tournament with a FIFA ranking of 151, have retained most of their senior players and played preparation matches in Portugal.

Although seasoned goalkeeper Sandip Nandi has been left out due to injury, India have members of the 2005 champion team like Mahesh Gawli, Deepak Mondal, NS Manju, Anwar, Sameer Naik, Steven Dias, Climax Lawrence, NP Pradeep, Mehrajuddin, Renedy Singh and rising star Sunil Chetri.

Bangladesh, finalists in three consecutive championships, left home without much conviction and Abu Yusuf, the only local coach to have led the side into a SAFF Championship, faces a tough task.

Looking for their first international victory in two years, the SAFF runners-up whose current ranking is a low 180 have a great chance to make a winning start though as they face Khare Bahadur Basnet's minnows Bhutan (FIFA ranking 187) -- a team of unknown quality -- before taking on the meet's lowest ranked side Afghanistan (ranking 196).

The death of the ODI?

DILEEP PREMACHANDRAN



When you consider how much the Indian Premier League (IPL) borrowed from World Series Cricket, it's quite ironic that its success might lead to the eventual extinction of the pajama cricket that was the cornerstone of the Packer revolution. As much as World Series Cricket was about fair pay, improved TV coverage and superior marketing of the sport, it was also about establishing one-day cricket as a distinct entity, played in coloured clothes, under lights, and in front of crowds that came expecting to be entertained.

It was razzmatazz with some substance. Packer's focus was on gladiatorial fast bowlers and the strokeplayers that could take them on. Three decades later, the IPL advertised its players as warriors. When Andy Roberts fractured David Hookes' jaw with a vicious bouncer, people knew that the World Series wasn't some hit-and-giggle enterprise. The IPL had a similar moment, when Zaheer Khan left Dominic Thorne looking like a young Mike Tyson had seen him. Packer was a pioneer and an original, and the IPL's copycats succeeded because they took his blueprint, adapted it to an Indian context, and threw in a dash of Bollywood for good measure.

This year, after an uninterrupted run of 28 years, Cricket Australia pulled the curtain down on its annual one-day tri-series. It's fair to say that its decline had mirrored that of the one-day game.

After the spectacular success of the World Twenty20 in South Africa, and the inaugural IPL season, the 50-over game is on life support, and it may only be a matter of time before the plug is pulled. Crowds and television audiences caught in the thrall of the Twenty20 game are unlikely to shed a tear.

It's amusing to hear greats of the past talking of how the IPL's success could have dire consequences for Test cricket. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Test-cricket constituency is a distinct one, and it generally consists of people who have played the game at some level, whether that's back garden, park, first-class or international. More importantly it's a group of people that appreciates what Milan Kundera called Slowness, those not obsessed with instant gratification.

Such fans will never abandon Test cricket for the crash-bang-wallop thrills that Twenty20 offers. He or she may go and watch Dumb and Dumber, but it's never going to replace 400 Blows or In the Mood for Love in his affections.

Sadly, one-day cricket has no identity. In that respect, it's like your stereotypical Bollywood movie with the hackneyed script that tries to have something for everyone and ends up having nothing. It says much about the lack of imagination of those that administer the game that the 50-over game has evolved so little since the Packer years.

Compare that with Lalit Modi. You may not like the man or his hubris, but he has taken an existing concept, fine-tuned it, and ensured

that the cricket world will never be the same again. After Sunday night's final, which could have been scripted by Gregory Howard of Remember the Titans fame, Modi and the IPL hold all the cards, while the ICC and other boards have next to nothing to bargain with.

The last World Cup in the Caribbean was a fiasco, an object lesson in how not to organise an event. Poor crowds, overpriced tickets, a lack of atmosphere and an interminable schedule all combined to make it perhaps the worst of all major competitions. In contrast, the IPL's head honchos didn't behave like stentorian schoolmasters, and the entertainment package that accompanied the games attracted everyone from five-year-olds with temporary tattoos to middle-aged women who had decided to forego a staple diet of TV soaps.

Where now for the IPL? After what happened on Sunday night, there's little doubt that the second season will be huge. Despite the concerns of the ECB and others, every single one of the world's top players is likely to take part. If they do try to prevent the likes of Kevin Pietersen from playing, they'll only end up being checkmated like the Australian Cricket Board was after Packer's bold gambit.

What is likely to happen is this: both England and Australia, and perhaps South Africa and Pakistan too, will endeavour to jazz up their own Twenty20 events so that they can at least compare to the IPL. A Champions League will surely result from it, because the stupendous response in India has con-

firmed that people are ready to invest both time and money to watch the best play the best, even if it's only over three hours.

The franchises, some of whom might even break even despite the huge amounts invested in the first year, also have a role to play. Manoj Badale, of the Emerging Media group that owns the Rajasthan Royals, reckoned that it would take a couple of years for the club culture to truly take root, but you can rest assured that teams like Rajasthan won't be spending the next ten months idle.

The reality is that no league can prosper if it operates only over six weeks. American Football has the shortest season of any major sport, but even that lasts 16 weeks, and then a month of playoffs. The football (soccer) seasons in Europe, the NBA in North America and Major League Baseball all last much longer, which is why they become such an integral part of fans' lives.

What does the Indian cricket fan do now? Next up is a tri-series in Bangladesh, followed by an Asia Cup that features teams like Hong Kong. It's the classic champagne-followed-by-flat-beer scenario, and it will be interesting to see what the TV ratings are like. Back when Doordarshan, the national broadcaster, was all we had, everyone watched it. Then, with the onset of cable TV, no one bothered.

The IPL has created a revolution, especially in the fan demographic, but has now left town. For the moment, the talk is of creating a four-week window, most likely in April. It's only a band-aid solution. In the long run we're looking at a

A Dhoni run

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owners showed any interest in the Aussie colt, who was simply overlooked in the first two rounds of bidding before Kings XI Punjab coach Tom Moody roped him in just nine days before the IPL got underway.

Marsh, however, can still draw some solace from the fact that his sterling show in the Twenty20 event at least won him an ODI recall in the Australian team.

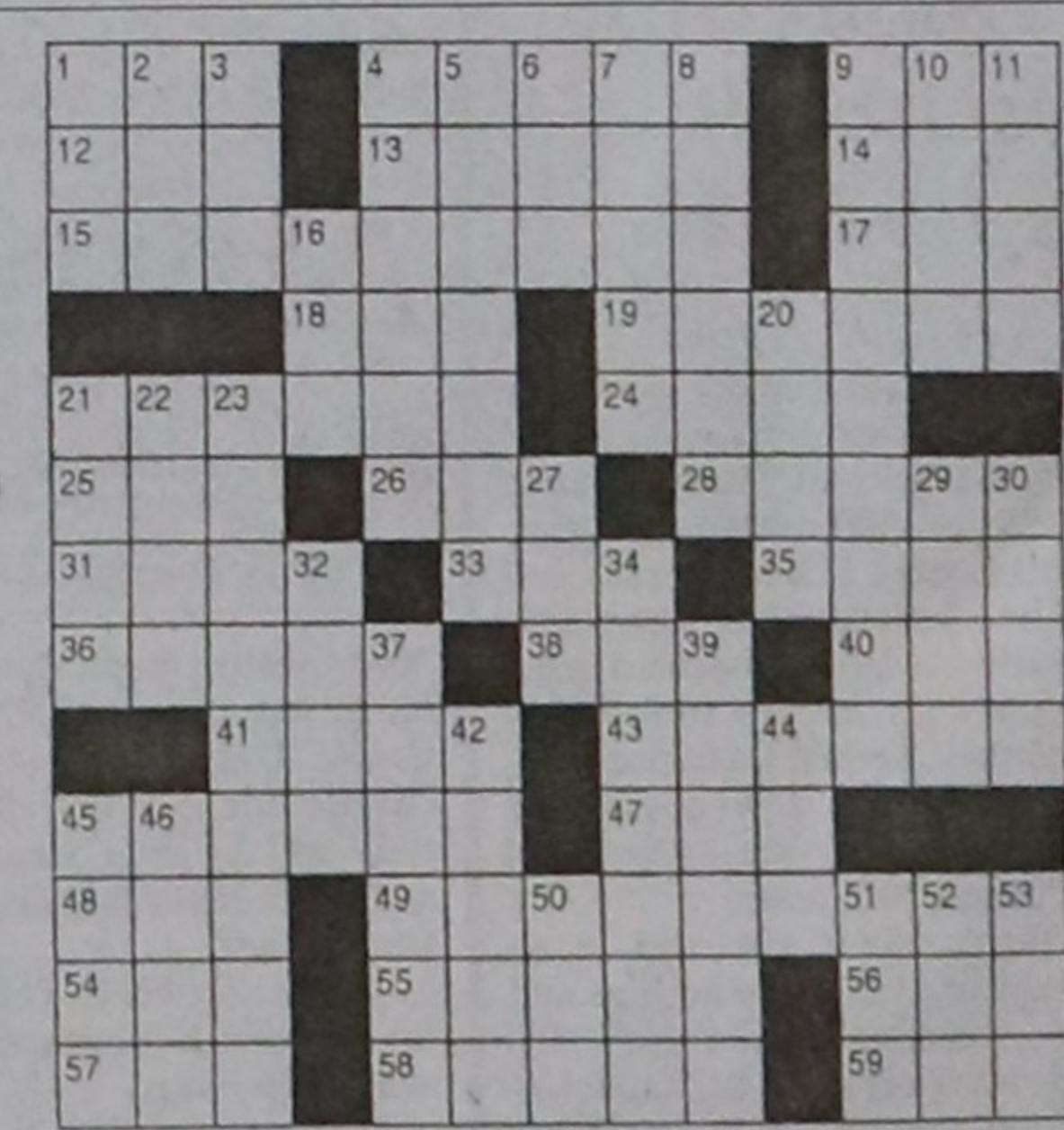
Gautam Gambhir (534) trails Marsh in the run-getters' chart with an average of 41.07 and the left-hander proved a good buy for the Delhi Daredevils, who had coughed up 2.9 crore rupees for him.



Double amputee South African athlete Oscar Pistorius, who aims to compete against able-bodied athletes at the Beijing Olympics, runs during a training session on the track of the Dutch city Emmeloord on Sunday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Many times, in poetry
4 Moorehead or De Mille
9 Leading lady?
12 Existed
13 Treasure
14 Twice VII
15 Took advantage of
17 Handheld organizer (abbr.)
18 Flaggedy doll
19 Loose overcoat
21 Got one's teeth
24 Old
25 Bagel topper
26 New-comer to society
28 Tends
31 Datebook notation (abbr.)
33 Massage
35 Break suddenly



DOWN
5 Sponsorship
8 Past
10 Havebills
11 Quickly
16 Recipe abbr.
18 Explated (for)
19 Molar
20 "or" to be"
21 Partner of Tinker and Chance
22 Tranquillize
23 Told how or why
24 "Livin' La Loca"
25 Author Hunter
26 Legislation
27 Unopened rose
28 Pot base
29 Shadrow-box, e.g.
32 Actress Hatcher
34 Tenor Andrea
37 Roman dramatist
38 Bit roles
42 Courage
44 Enthusiast
45 Part of TLM
46 From the beginning
50 Pirata costume feature
51 A Gershwin brother
52 What couch potatoes do
53 Tokyo's old name

CRYPTOQUIP
WJDIIRW YPOUJ DVPBL D
VBCCRYX DWLTUII DYC FUT
RYWTRZRYDLRYX ZRIIROU:
"LFU ILDTJUL JULLUT"
Saturday's Cryptoquip: BECAUSE I GOT INK STAINS ON MY SMALL OUTDOOR GRILL, DOES THAT MAKE IT A BLOTCHY HIBACHI?
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals S