

Alonso conquers Far East

INTERNET, undated

Felipe Massa cut Lewis Hamilton's lead in the Formula One drivers' standings to just five points with two races remaining by finishing seventh Sunday in an action-packed Japanese Grand Prix won by Renault's Fernando Alonso.

Hamilton has 84 points ahead of next Sunday's Chinese GP in Shanghai, followed by Massa on 79 with Poland's Kubica seven points further back in third.

"I think it's a good boost for the last two races because we are still in the fight," said Kubica. Hamilton had a poor start from pole position, allowing second-placed Raikkonen to pass him before pushing the Ferraris of the Finn and Massa wide on turn one.

"I had nowhere to go and lost many places," said Raikkonen afterwards. The chaotic start also saw David Coulthard and Kazuki Nakajima

collide, ending the Scot's interest in the race, and when the dust settled Kubica found himself leading Alonso while Hamilton trailed in sixth.

"I was not really able to pull away, Fernando was keeping the gap," said Kubica. Meanwhile, Hamilton's race got worse on lap two as Massa clipped him as the McLaren driver looked to have passed the Ferrari at the hairpin, causing the Briton's car to spin.

McLaren immediately opted for a one-stop strategy as Hamilton returned to the pits for new tyres and fuel, returning in last place. While Raikkonen managed to

make his way up to fourth place, passing Trulli on lap nine, McLaren's situation deteriorated further.

With 51 laps remaining, Heikki Kovalainen retired due to engine problems and Hamilton received notice of a drive-through penalty from race stewards for forcing the Ferraris wide going into the opening corner.

Massa too was given his drive-through penalty for the collision with Hamilton, while Singapore GP winner Alonso returned from his pitstop ahead of Kubica to take over the race lead with Raikkonen now running third.

"In the second stint we managed to get some free air and the car handled really well," said Alonso. "Part of the victory was in the second stint."

Alonso pitted for the second and final time with 24 laps remaining but came out behind Bourdais, while Kubica pitted three laps later, briefly promoting Raikkonen to the position of race leader.

Raikkonen made his final stop with 19 laps to go, returning just behind Kubica while Massa continued his slow movement up the field to find himself in the points in eighth place.

Massa then clipped Bourdais as the Frenchman exited the pits to stall his progress while Kubica initially struggled to hold off Raikkonen who himself saw Piquet Jr in the second Renault looming in his mirrors.

"Once the tyres grained out I was able to pull away," said Kubica. Massa kept his nerve in the final stages, managing to snatch eighth spot from Red Bull's Mark Webber, who was on a one-stop strategy, with three laps to go.

Bourdais' penalty failed to improve Massa's position still further and set up a thrilling climax to the season.



Renault's Spanish driver Fernando Alonso kisses the trophy after winning his second consecutive Grand Prix with victory at the Fuji Speedway in Japan on Sunday.

Championship leader Hamilton of McLaren-Mercedes finished out of the points down in 11th after incurring a drive-through penalty and also spinning following a clash with Massa, his nearest rival for the drivers' title.

Massa received a drive-through penalty of his own for the incident with Hamilton but still managed to earn two points from the race to cut the deficit to the McLaren driver to five points with just two races remaining.

The Toro Rossos of Sebastian Bourdais and Sebastian Vettel finished in sixth and seventh, respectively, but Bourdais was later hit with a 25-second time penalty that dropped him four places to 10th after he was deemed to have caused a collision with Ferrari's Massa late on in the race.

This moved Massa up to seventh with Mark Webber of Red Bull completing the points placings. Nelson Piquet Jr completed Renault's great day by taking fourth, followed by Toyota's Jarno Trulli.

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Yuvraj, Kaif to captain

CRICINFO, undated

Yuvraj Singh, Mohammad Kaif and Subramaniam Badrinath have been picked to lead India Blue, Green and Red respectively in this year's NKP Salve Challenger Trophy.

The series, to be held from October 23-26 in Cuttack, will provide a chance for the likes of Robin Uthappa, Virat Kohli, Yusuf Pathan, Piyush Chawla and Laxmipathy Balaji to impress the national selectors. Amit Mishra, who was called up out of the wilderness for the first two Tests against Australia, is in the Blue team. Rudra Pratap Singh, also part of India's Test squad, has found a place in the Green team.

Swapnil Asnodkar, the Goa opener who impressed during the Indian Premier League, has been dropped after a poor run with India A during the recent tri-series against Australia and New Zealand.

Each team will play once against each other to decide the finalists.

T20 inventor alarmed

CRICINFO, undated

The marketing man credited with inventing Twenty20 cricket has some concerns about the short-ended format's effect on the sport.

Stuart Robertson was marketing manager of the England and Wales Cricket Board in 2000 when he devised the format for the 20-over-a-side game, trying to overcome dwindling crowds at county matches.

Now star players having come out of retirement to sign lucrative contracts with the cashed-up Indian Premier League (IPL) and the game, packaged perfectly for three hours of television or an afternoon or night away at a stadium, could spread to the United States and even China.

Robertson said on Thursday he's not sure whether the sport and its stars can be stretched so many ways in a schedule full of international commitments.

"That's going to be a really tricky and interesting one going for-

ward," Robertson, now the commercial director of English country Hampshire, said.

"If the model is to replicate the IPL, the IPL is so powerful because it has all of the world's stars playing



STUART ROBERTSON

attracting foreign players. India will also host the inaugural Champions League competition later this year, featuring eight domestic Twenty20 teams representing five countries.

Robertson urged the International Cricket Council to monitor the amount of Twenty20 tournaments played, to prevent the risks of too much cricket and players getting burned out.

"I kind of wonder if the ICC should be playing a stronger role perhaps in managing it," he said. Robertson admitted the priorities of elite cricketers could change if Twenty20 continued its popularity.

"If you ask a current player, they've been brought up since they were 5, 6, 11, 12 knowing Test cricket is the pinnacle of their sport," said Robertson, who remains a supporter of Test and 50-over matches.

"It would be interesting to ask a young Indian player who's now 16 or 17 who is breaking into a Twenty20 environment, and ask them in five years what the most important part of their sport is."

World number one Jelena Jankovic of Serbia beat Russian Vera Zvonareva in the final to win the women's draw of the 2.4 million dollar Kremlin Cup here on Sunday.

Jankovic won 6-2, 6-4 in one hour 21 minutes to record a fourth victory in five head-to-heads with Zvonareva this season and clinch her fourth crown this year.

"I feel really emotional winning my third event in a row here," Jankovic said. "I feel great as the world's number one and really enjoy it."

"It was very tough to win the final as Vera never gives up. She forced me to play my best tennis to win today. I had a lot of fun this week and probably will come back here next year to defend my title."

The 23-year-old Serbian, who was playing her her sixth final of the season, started the match with an immediate break for a comfortable 2-0 lead. Jankovic then broke again to take the opening set in 33 minutes.

In the second set Jankovic produced two more breaks but Zvonareva, ranked ninth in the world, picked up steam and broke back to level on both occasions.

But in the ninth game Jankovic managed to make the deciding break, going on to wrap up the match and take the title.

Jankovic received a silver trophy and a 196,900-dollar prize check, while runner-up Zvonareva pocketed 105,800 dollars.

David miffed by BCCI-SLC deal

CRICINFO, undated

David Morgan, the International Cricket Council (ICC) president, has said the 70-million-dollar proposal between Sri Lanka Cricket and Indian Premier League (IPL) chairman Lalit Modi is "quite unacceptable behaviour against the background of Sri Lanka's signed agreement with the ECB".

The Daily Telegraph has quoted Morgan condemning the deal, which, if ratified by the BCCI, would force the abandonment of Sri Lanka's Test series in England in May 2009. According to the report, Morgan pointed out that only last month the ICC reaffirmed the primacy of Test cricket with the unanimous agreement of all Full Members.

Sri Lanka's tour is due to run from April 21 to May 30, while the IPL is scheduled for April 10-May 25. The series clashes with the latter stages of the IPL's second season, and a number of the Sri Lankan squad -- such as captain Mahela Jayawardene, Muttiah Muralidaran and Kumar Sangakkara -- have signed lucrative contracts to play in the IPL.

Sri Lanka's sports minister, Gamini Lokuge, asked the board to release players for the IPL, indicating that Sri Lanka could be forced to field a second-string side to England. In September, Arjuna Ranatunga, the interim committee chief of SLC, insisted the tour would go ahead. "We have a memorandum of understanding with the England and Wales Cricket Board for the tour and we must honour that," he said.

Sri Lanka's one-day tour of Pakistan was cancelled in April-May this year because the dates clashed with the IPL's inaugural tournament.

Kremlin Cup Jankovic's

AFP, Moscow

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McMillan's tell-all

CRICINFO, undated

Craig McMillan, like his brother-in-law Nathan Asle last year, has lifted the lid on some of the more dubious aspects of John Bracewell's regime. In the end he's probably done as much to strengthen his critics' belief that at times he was his own worst enemy.

Out of the Park, released last week, is an entertaining jaunt through McMillan's tribulations and trials, the latter seemingly coinciding with the appointment of Bracewell in 2004.

Bracewell had been McMillan's coach on a youth tour to England in 1996, prompting the author to recall: "It was on that that I got an insight into one part of his personality -- he doesn't like to admit when he gets things wrong." Funny enough, that's an accusation just as easily levelled at McMillan.

Still, this is his book and his chance to get a few things off his chest. The dreaded peer review system looms large.

It's hard not to sympathise with McMillan here. Being asked to leave a room and think of words to describe yourself while the rest of the team did the same exercise sounds like kidology at best and patronising excrement at worst.

Three words which I thought the group would use to describe me -- I chose 'competitive', 'stubborn' and 'distant', wrote McMillan. "The three I selected as those I wanted the group to use were 'competitive', 'team player' and 'renewed'."

Just why you would want your team to describe you as a library book that took longer than expected to read is for McMillan to say. But he guessed his teammates wanted him to "stop being closed off" and, when a group led by Stephen Fleming came back with far more exacting demands, it's fair to say McMillan's sense of humour ran out.

"The three words they used were 'competitive', 'stubborn' and 'self-centred'. I was judged guilty of only looking after myself. It was recommended I give to others with both actions and attitude, be internally driven, look after my diet and fitness and open my mind to different points of view." Ouch.

Without any claim to being a human resources expert, shouldn't effective management deal with these issues before they become so vexing adults are made to sit squirming in front of their 'mates'?

If McMillan's gripe seems justified, others aren't so convincing. In team sports you have to do things you might not necessarily agree with, like shaving for a photo, or switching music off (or batting out

of your favourite position). The rules might seem draconian but remember how well New Zealand did in the anything-goes days of the mid-90s? In this regard McMillan seems unnecessarily intransigent.

His batting was a thing to behold: maverick, maddening, muscular and magnificent -- all sometimes within the space of an over.

He is, too, a mass of contradictions. His resilience is evident in his ability to become a world-class sportsman despite the significant handicap of Type 1 diabetes, yet he is unusually sensitive to criticism, even for a sportsman.

He is a deep thinker of the game -- I recall John R. Reid, who wrote the foreword, telling this newspaper he would make an excellent international captain -- yet is more prone than most to brain explosions at the crease.

His mistrust, or plain dislike, of the media was well known, yet he is carving out a nice little niche for himself in that same industry now.

Say what you want about McMillan -- and everyone has over the years -- but you can't deny he was entertaining.

It still seems like there's something missing, even now, when the fourth wicket falls and there is no longer a slightly round, sweated right-hander striding to the crease with a hint of menace in his eye.

Khulna win on third day

CRICINFO, undated

Under-19 players Nasir Hossain and Rony Talukder must now play matured knockers if Barisal are to start off their NCL campaign on a positive note.

BRIEF SCORES

KHULNA: First innings 178 and second innings 187.

SYLHET: First innings 74 and second innings 256 all out 79.4 overs (Rahman 2, Imtiaz 5, Nazmul 0, Saikat 10, Mithun 2, Rajin 135, Sharifullah 38, Abul 0, Nabil 0, Shuvashish 33, Tushar 1 not out; Ziaur 4-63, Dollar 1-14, Robiul 5-60).

Man-of-the-match: Nabil Samad. Result: Khulna won by 35 runs.

BARISAL: First innings 273 all and second innings 149-4 in 70 overs (Uttam 35, Hannan 0, Faruque 45, Imran 17, Nasir 30 not out, Rony 11 not out; Shafaq 1-20, Alamgir 1-21, Suhawardi 1-30, Farhad 1-42).

RAJSHAHI: First innings 215 all out in 71.5 overs (Shakil 42, Jahurul 8, Farhad 5, Anisur 18, Mashud 19, Mushfiqur 34, Sabbir 18, Suhawardi 0, Shahzada 40, Alamgir 4, Shafaq 10, Sajjud 6-51, Talha 2-66, Nasir 1-12, Arafat 1-44).

DHAKA: First innings 210 all out in

72.4 overs (Omar 43, Anwar 6, Shamsur 5, Nadif 3, Marshall 36, Mominul 22, Nazmul 45, Arafat 8, Imon 6 not out, Al-Hamim 6, Niaz 0; Tareq 4-44, Younus 5-59, Kamrul 1-39).

CHITTAGONG: First innings 48 for no loss in 19 overs (Salahuddin 26 not out, Nafis 13 not out).

Franklin hoping

CRICINFO, undated

"If I can start the season on time and finish the season that that is a massive tick."

"If I play for Wellington, good. If I go beyond that and regain my sport in the New Zealand team, fantastic."

Franklin attempted a comeback in August as part of the New Zealand Emerging Players Tour to Australia but was troubled by the problem knee.

"In hindsight my expectations may have been higher than reality," he told the Dominion Post.

"I got told at the outset by the surgeon that the recovery would be six to eight months and being the athlete you only really hear the number six. Then I thought if it goes really well it might only be four months."

Warriors falter

CRICINFO, undated

what stole everyone's heart was Nafees's straight drive off Jesuraj. It was a perfect copybook shot.

However, in trying to go for another ambitious stroke, Nafees spooned out a catch to Syed Mohammed at point.

Continuing in the same vein as Nafees, Aftab Ahmed reeled off three boundaries and flicked a six off Vignesh as the Warriors reached 50 in five overs. That Aftab got a reprieve did not take anything away from his effort. And when Aftab, after scoring 30, was fooled by a delivery from left arm spinner Syed while attempting a reverse sweep, it reflected the Warriors' desperation so often seen in this format of the game.

After the Warriors lost Bashir and Alok Kapali in quick succession with both falling to Tamil Kumaran, the Dhaka Warriors reached 100 in the 15th over, spurred by wicketkeeper Dhiman Ghosh who made an unbeaten 21, Nazimuddin (20) and Farhad Reza who hung on for a while.

Given the strength of the Superstars' batting, the target of 143 did not look difficult at all and that was only confirmed by the whirlwind start given by Harvey and Vignesh. Rafique did manage to put a leash on the Superstars batsmen for some time by dismissing Vignesh with an arm ball and removing Jesuraj shortly thereafter. At the other end, Mosharrif Hossain claimed the wicket of Harvey. Rafique finished with figures of 2 wickets for 22 runs.

But any hope of the Warriors was put paid by Arnold who made 42, the highest in the match with the help of two sixes and as many fours and Hemath Kumar who hit 21.

The man of the match went to Syed Mohammed of Chennai Superstars for bowling a fine spell of four overs during which he conceded just 12 runs and claimed a wicket.

Draw looms large

CRICINFO, undated

They were the highest number of extras given away by an Australian team against India in an innings, surpassing the 45 Allan Border's tourists conceded in Mumbai during the 1986 series.

Kumble, who came in on Saturday evening at the fall of Harbhajan's wicket, put on 31 for the ninth wicket with Zaheer before he was leg-before to Watson for five.

Watson finished with 3-45, while left-arm fast bowler Mitchell Johnson failed to add to Saturday's tally of four wickets.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the fourth day of the first Test between India and Australia at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore on Sunday:

AUSTRALIA: First innings 430 (Katich, 66, Ponting 123, Hussey 146; Zaheer 5-91, Sharma 4-77)

INDIA: First innings (overnight 313-8) Gambhir lbw b Lee 21 Sehwaq c Hayden b Johnson 45 Dravid lbw b Watson 51 Tendulkar c White b Johnson 13 Laxman c Haddin b Johnson 0 Ganguly lbw b Johnson 47 Dhoni b Clarke 54 Harbhajan c Haddin b Watson 9 Zaheer Khan not out 57 Kumble lbw b Watson 5 Sharma b Clarke 6 Extras: (b-23, lb-23, nb-6) 52 Total: (All out in 119 overs) 360

Fall of wickets: 1-70, 2-76, 3-94, 4-106, 5-155, 6-195, 7-232, 8-312, 9-343, 10-360. Bowler O M R W Zaheer 15 4 30 1 Sharma 12 3 27 2 Harbhajan 27 5 76 2 Sehwaq 7 1 12 0 Kumble 7 0 25 0

Clark 17 3 58 0 Johnson 27 4 70 4 Watson 19 4 45 3 White 13 2 39 0 Clarke 17 2 38 2

AUSTRALIA: Second innings Hayden lbw b Zaheer 13 Katich c Laxman b Harbhajan 34 Ponting c Laxman b Sharma 17 Hussey b Harbhajan 31 Clarke c Sehwaq b Sharma 6 Watson not out 32 Haddin not out 28 Extras: (b-12, lb-11, nb-3, w-6) 32 Total: (For 5 wks in 68 overs) 193 To bat: White, Lee, Johnson, Clark. Fall of wickets: 1-21, 2-49, 3-99, 4-115, 5-128.

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Ganguly's

CRICINFO, undated

will and the inexorable passage of time and it is not ever a fair contest.

John Wright, the coach with whom captain Ganguly frequently knocked heads as captain and also set new benchmarks, says ageing batsmen first sense an inner loss of an 'earliness' that is as natural as breathing.

A shot that would have zipped to the fence now only fetches two because the old self was early on it. "Deep down," says Wright, "you know. You can still get the job done, play for a bit then the game catches up with you."

In the last few years of his career, Ganguly did more than merely get body to obey mind, using every last scrap of resolve to fight his way back into the team. Those combined circumstances have gained on him.

In Sri Lanka, his batting had none of the authority it had in England when he looked confident, dominant and he looked the fluency found early in Australia and his disdainful command over spin deserted him too.

Before the series against Australia, Ganguly had two poor innings in Chennai against the unregarded New Zealand-A. He came into the Bangalore as undone as a threat's school tie. There was a threat to kidnap his daughter.

For a player whose career has gone by with a background debate about who and what he really is, maybe all of it suddenly seems stifling and irrelevant.

Maybe he wants to taste once more what cricket feels like without the noise of argument. And so he will. And like it always is with this elegant, obstinate, surprising cricketer, India will be riveted-right to the end. Gowell, Sourav.

(Sharda Ugra wrote this on the India Today website)

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and clues.