

'Prasanna best keeper'

Three-dayer in BKSP starts today

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

It isn't quite a bombshell but when someone with so few Tests under his belt is classified as the 'best by far' in a certain field, it does turn a few heads or in yesterday's case, warm up a few cold ears.

Kumar Sangakkara, the Sri Lankan vice-captain, came out of the warmth of the Mirpur dressing room a few minutes after wicketkeeper Prasanna Jayawardene had completed a catching drill in the foggy centre of the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium with any of the coaching assistants and as the last man to leave the ground, it gave a hint of the hard work he puts in.

But no one was prepared for Sangakkara's words which completely put into perspective what the Lankans think of the 29-year-old wicketkeeper.

"We have got Prasanna Jayawardene who right now would be the best keeper in the world by far," declared Sangakkara, although the

question directed at him was of his own situation in terms of playing as a batsman-wicketkeeper ahead of the three-day practice match against BCB XI that begins in BKSP today.

But Sangakkara preferred to wax praises on the glovesman from Colombo who gave a good account of himself during the series against India last August, snapping up stumpings in every Test and handling the likes of Muttiah Muralidaran and the mystifying Ajantha Mendis with a lot of assurance. Perhaps that's why Sri Lanka can have the luxury of fielding two full wicketkeepers, something that hasn't been done since England's pairing of Alec Stewart and Jack Russell some time in the mid 1990s. Stewart was the better batsman of the two and played as one while Russell was regarded as the best keeper in England.

But Sangakkara's statement would go a long way in giving the junior wicketkeeper confidence ahead of the series.

"He's doing the job for us. So it is a win-win situation for everyone," said the classy left-hander.

Back to the reporter's original question of Sangakkara's preference to play solely as a batsman and his response was purely to do with numbers.

"Statistics show that I bat better when I don't keep in Test match cricket," said Sangakkara, who averages 83 when playing as a pure batsman while scoring 54.8 per innings when playing as a wicketkeeper.

Sangakkara is still nursing a slight cut on the little toe of his right foot and although he informed that it is only a matter of time for him to recover, he still isn't sure whether he would be available for the game in Savar.



Sri Lanka's star wicketkeeper-batsman Kumar Sangakkara carries along his two trusted bats as he strolls at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

NAT'L CRICKET LEAGUE Rivals worry of weather

SPORTS REPORTER

The battle between Barisal and Rajshahi will at last have a conclusion when the tenth and final round of the National Cricket League begins across the country today.

Table-toppers Barisal take on Dhaka at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium while Rajshahi host Khulna. The Sylhet-Chittagong tie will be the wooden spoon decider as both teams are lurking on the bottom of the points table.

Barisal were involved in a heart-stopping draw with Chittagong where the home side almost ran away with the match on the last day of the ninth round game. But despite that, the Barisal side took away more points than Rajshahi who had an unforgettable time of it.

Rajshahi suffered hugely in

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

Mushfiq plans to stop Murali

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

In an otherwise disappointing series in July last year, young Mushfiqur Rahim had a partnership with Mohammad Ashraful at the P. Sara Stadium in Colombo that proved a point -- one could still read champion off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran if he applied himself.

There was no doubt about the ability of the Bangladesh captain who had sometimes successfully managed the dangerman but it was something new to see the way young Mushfiqur handled Muralidaran during his career best knock of 80.

So, when this man says something about the record-breaking bowler, who holds a staggering record of picking up 76 scalps in nine Tests against the Tigers, ahead of another challenge at home it definitely deserves some attention.

"The Sri Lanka bowling has lot of variety especially in the longer-version game but without any doubt Murali is the main threat. It

was not so easy to read his doosra but what I feel is that now we can read it much better," said a confident Mushfiqur while talking with the reporters during a break in practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

"I'm now more matured to handle this bowler while Ash (Mohammad Ashraful) had a good record against Sri Lanka as he got some runs against them. He proved that nothing is impossible," he added.

The teenage wicketkeeper-cum-batsman, who so far played 12 Tests and already made many believe that he has got the potential to become a good batsman in the highest level, also said that they have to be courageous enough to survive against Muralidaran during the two-match Test series which will kick-off from December 26 at Mirpur.

"It would be unwise to be bogged down against him, rather we have to be brave enough to handle him. We have to make sure that we rotate the strike to keep the scoreboard running," he suggested.

The soft-spoken Mushfiqur was also very

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



PHOTO: STAR

SIZE DOESN'T MATTER: Bangladesh wicketkeeper batsman Mushfiqur Rahim tries to slip past a tackle from tall fast bowler Shahadat Hossain while playing a game of football during the Tigers' practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Rahul back with a bang

Cricket

AFP, Mohali

India took charge of the second and final cricket Test against England here on Saturday after posting a commanding 453 in their first innings.

Rahul Dravid returned to form with a century and Gautam Gambhir completed 1,000 runs in the year as India survived a middle-order slump to leave England with a mountain to climb.

The tourists, seeking a series-levelling win after losing the first Test in Chennai by six wickets, must not only put up a big total, but also give themselves enough time to bowl India out a second time.

England, who were due to bat nine overs before stumps, were unable to begin their reply as umpires Daryl Harper and Asad Rauf called off play due to fading light.

Dravid and Gambhir put on 314 for the second wicket after coming together at the dismissal of Virender Sehwag in the second over of the match on Friday.

Dravid scored 136, his 26th Test century and the first in 20 innings since making 111 against South Africa in Chennai in March.

Left-handed Gambhir, who was on 106 overnight, went on to make 179 to take his tally this year to 1,037 runs from eight Tests at an average of 69.13.

India were comfortably

placed at 320-1 when England fought back with four quick wickets to reduce the hosts to 339-5 in the post-lunch session. Dravid reached his hundred midway through the

morning session by flicking James Anderson for a single to loud cheers from some 2,000 home fans and from his teammates in the dressing room.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6



PHOTO: AFP

THIS IS FOR MY CRITICS: Under pressure Indian batsman Rahul Dravid drives the ball through the covers during his fine knock of 136 on the second day of the second Test against England in Mohali yesterday.

TOUR OF BANGLADESH Zimbabwe call up new faces

CRICINFO, undated

Batsman Malcolm Waller and wicketkeeper Forster Mutizwa are the two new faces in the 15-man Zimbabwe squad, which was announced on Friday, for the tour of Bangladesh in January.

Both additions bolster Zimbabwe's batting line-up which has been struggling of late, evident from the previous ODI series against Sri Lanka, where they failed to post 200 -- managing scores of 127, 67, 166, 146 and 133 -- in the five matches.

Chamu Chibhabha, who disappointed during the 0-5 thrashing at home, has been axed from the squad along with Timycen Maruma, Shingirai Masakadza and Regis Chakabva.

Waller, 24, is the son of former Zimbabwe international Andy, and has played just three first-class matches and a handful of domestic one-dayers, though he did show promise with 3 for 46

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

ECB may not invite Tigers after 2010

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

England are planning to scrap home Test series against Bangladesh after 2010 because of the increasing commercial unfeasibility of such contests, suggest reports in the UK press.

The move, if formalised at an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) organised conference next month, will come as yet another blow to a Bangladesh side struggling to justify its status as a Test-playing nation; they are already an unattractive invitee for India, which has refused to invite them for a tour since they became the tenth country to receive Test status in 2000.

Giles Clarke, the ECB chairman, told reporters in Mohali about plans to hold a conference next month in which ways to ensure the primacy of Test cricket will be discussed. According to the Independent, members of the England team, former England cricketers and directors of cricket at the 18 counties will meet in Leicester on January 19.

Among other things on the agenda will be the quality of Test cricket and the number of one-sided contests. England, Clarke revealed, will not play Zimbabwe till they have a side of reasonable

standard and, after 2010, will not invite Bangladesh, choosing instead to play there.

"If we are going to have a proper strategy for Test cricket we want to have games like that we have just had in Chennai," Clarke said. "It showed everybody just what a Test can be. There is a very hard-fought game between Australia and South Africa taking place in Perth at the moment. We have to make sure that the standard is there. Our friends in India feel pretty similarly."

An International Cricket Council (ICC) spokesperson told Cricinfo that it expected all current Future Tours Programme (FTP) commitments to be fulfilled, and any subsequent arrangements would only emerge after the ICC board had decided on a way forward after the current FTP ends in 2012.

"The ICC expects all its members to fulfil their obligations under the FTP," the official said. "The ECB will fulfil this obligation by hosting Bangladesh in 2010. The nature of the ICC's FTP after 2012 is currently under discussion within the ICC board. From the ICC's perspective, we would like all members to play each other as often as possible. If the ECB chairman has a specific view on this, he can put them before the ICC board, of which he is a director."

According to the FTP, Bangladesh tour

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Smith keeps SA in hunt

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Graeme Smith knew there would be pain in his elbow throughout his 108, but he will have to wait to learn whether the courageous display was enough to avoid the hurt of another defeat to Australia. Smith's hundred gave South Africa, who started their innings with the target of 414 as close as their country is to Perth, a chance to dream of the second-biggest successful chase in history.

Mitchell Johnson's tenth wicket of the match and a

quick follow-up by Brett Lee, who removed the impressive Hashim Amla for 53, eased the growing stress of the Australians late in the fourth day of the first Test at the WACA as the visitors finished at 227 for 3. With at least 91 overs remaining, the number on the horizon is a significantly more manageable 187 for South Africa, but the main problem is key wickets have already fallen.

If South Africa make it, it will be because of the example of Smith, a captain who is desperate to beat Australia and talented enough to achieve it. He was the chief provider on a surface that

shows no signs of deteriorating, a factor which provides another boost for the tourists.

The throbbing in Smith's elbow gradually transferred into pain in Australia's side as he refused to be broken by rain breaks, the size of the task, regular bowling chances or Jason Krejza's exaggerated appeals with balls pitching outside leg. During the interruptions Smith received massages and while they were not for relaxation, he operated calmly throughout the afternoon. He knew the contest could be lost quickly, but that it would have to be won over a 10-hour wrestle.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

DAY'S EVENT

BCB XI v Sri Lanka
3-Day warm-up match, Day 1
Venue: BKSP

Nat'l Cricket League
(Four-Day), Day 1
Rajshahi v Khulna
Venue: Rajshahi Divisional Stadium
Dhaka v Barisal
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
Sylhet v Chittagong
Venue: Sylhet Divisional Stadium
Citycell B. League
Abahani v Farashganj
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Time: 4:30pm

McIntosh, Flynn pull NZ

Cricket

AFP, Napier

A century stand by Tim McIntosh and Daniel Flynn put New Zealand in the box seat as they hunted down the West Indies first innings total of 307 in the second cricket Test here Saturday.

At stumps on the second day New Zealand were 145 for two, with McIntosh on 62 and Flynn out for 57, requiring a further 163 runs to get their noses in front.

The West Indies first innings was wrapped up in an hour on the second day with a masterful 126 not out by Shivnarine Chanderpaul providing the backbone of an undaunted 307 on an easy wicket.

The chief destroyer for New Zealand was Iain O'Brien who finished with career best figures of six for 75 from 26 overs.

New Zealand's reply started with an early setback when the out-of-form Jamie How survived two chances before falling for 12, pulling Fidel Edwards straight to Seawarrior Chattergoon at square leg.

McIntosh was given a life when he skied an attempted pull shot. Edwards, looking for his 100th Test wicket, and wicketkeeper Denesh Ramdin both ran for the catch then pulled out at the last moment allowing the ball to drop between them.

New Zealand were then 36 for one and the lack of calling proved costly for the West Indies as the home side added 101 runs before Edwards reached his milestone with the caught and bowled dismissal of Flynn for 57.

In between, the novice pair -- McIntosh in only his second Test and Flynn in his ninth -- had made it clear they were determined to break New Zealand's string of top order failures

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



Did U Know?

The name of the decathlon is derived from the Greek words dec and athlon meaning 'ten' and 'contest'.



STAR Cricket
Australia v South Africa
First Test, Day Five
Live from 8:30am

Neo Cricket
India v England
Second Test, Day Three
Live from 10:00am

ESPN
English Premier League
West Bromwich v Man City
Live from 7:25pm

Arsenal v Liverpool
Live from 9:55pm

STAR Sports
English Premier League
Newcastle v Tottenham
Live from 8:55pm

Primera Liga
Betis v Bilbao
Live from 2:00am (Monday)



Ijaz Butt

(Pakistan Cricket Board chairman)
"Pakistan cricket is more sinned against than sinning." Taking a gloomy view of the latest tour cancellation by India to the country.