

Age doesn't matter for Thompson

CRICINFO, *undated*

Ewen Thompson, New Zealand's new left-arm seamer, believes he's fit and ready to make a mark in international cricket despite getting a late call-up, at the age of 29. Thompson, who was included in the squad for the two Twenty20 internationals against West Indies starting on Friday, is known in domestic circles for his commitment to fitness.

"At 29 you're starting to mature as a cricketer," Thompson told NZPA. "If you look at other sports, like athletics, you don't see many 22-23 year-olds winning that. You certainly respect your body a little bit more as you age."

"I do things a lot better than I did as a youngster and I find I get through the seasons a lot easier now."

Thompson is currently the leading wicket-taker in the State Championship with 17 wickets from four games. He said he was confident of carrying on his good form to the international scene and his skills as an all-rounder will be put to test in cricket's shortest format. The selection chief, Glenn Turner, praised Thompson for his lower-order hitting.

"I think you just got to be aggressive with the ball, vary [your deliveries] as much as you can and enjoy the occasion," Thompson said. "You just stick to what you know, and stick to your disciplines."

"It will be nice to walk out of the sheds and get the first ball under my belt and then start trying to compete."

The Twenty20s will be played in Auckland and Hamilton on December 26 and 28 respectively.

We never gave up: Dyson

CRICINFO, *undated*

West Indies coach John Dyson has said his team deserves credit for pushing New Zealand in an evenly-contested draw in the final Test of the two-match series. A series of convincing individual performances ensured an outright result was never in prospect in the decider, but Dyson said earning a draw was "better than losing".

"We came here obviously trying to win, as the first match was affected by the weather. We expected a very good pitch here and that's what we got. I'm pleased with the way the team fought throughout this match," Dyson said. "At no point in this match did we give up and that is what I'm very pleased about. It ended up a pretty good game and could have gone either way in the final afternoon."

Key contributors to the draw in Napier were the Australian-born Brendan Nash, with scores of 74 and 65, and fast bowler Fidel Edwards, who took a career-best 7 for 87 in the first innings before making an invaluable 20 with centurion Chris Gayle to delay New Zealand's second innings until only 60 overs were available. Nash featured in crucial partnerships in both innings to stall New Zealand's progress. In the second innings West Indies were effectively 42 for 4 when he combined with Gayle to add 124 for the fifth wicket. "He's done very well for his first series," said Dyson.

West Indies' second-innings 375 was largely down to Gayle's 197, a vital knock which spanned roughly eight-and-a-half hours, and contributions from the lower order. Though he was out first ball in the second innings, Shivnarine Chanderpaul made a vital century in the first on a batting pitch where taking 20 wickets was not easy.

The drawn series means West Indies remain at seventh place and New Zealand one behind them on the ICC Test rankings.

Daniel Vettori, meanwhile, identified opener Tim McIntosh and Jamie How as positives from the series -- one that extended New Zealand's unbeaten record against West Indies to ten Tests, five won and five drawn, dating back to a ten-wicket loss at Bridgetown in 1996.

McIntosh, in his second Test, batted for 455 minutes for his first-innings 136 in Napier, and that pleased his captain. "It was an openers' hundred, I think as a New Zealand team that's something we've been crying out for a long time," said Vettori.

NZ, WI change gear

First T20 international today

Cricket

CRICINFO, *undated*

After no results in a drawn two-match Test series, it's understandable that both New Zealand and West Indies would be desperate to slip into a new format with hopes of notching up a result. While neither side has really been comfortable in Test cricket this year, it might be stretching it to say they're more comfortable in Twenty20.

New Zealand haven't proven a very good Twenty20 side, as five wins in 16 outings indicate. In fact, they've lost their last seven matches, dating back to September 2007. West Indies have just three wins from eight games -- in the ICC World Twenty20 in South Africa last year, they lost both their matches and a six-wicket defeat at the hands of Bangladesh was particularly galling.

It is against that scenario that the two teams move into the limited-overs leg of the tour -- starting with a pair of Twenty20 matches before five one-day internationals. The venue for the first game on Boxing Day is Auckland's Eden Park, where the two teams

have played just one Twenty20 match, in February 2006, which resulted in a tie when both teams scored 126.

While these two Twenty20 matches will ideally provide a platform for results after the Tests ended without a definitive winner, both sides will need to pick themselves up. Seven of the current West Indies squad were part of the Stanford Superstars side that won the 20 million dollar winner-takes-all Stanford 20/20 for 20 extravaganzas in Antigua last month, so that should give the side plenty of confidence.

Jacob Oram returns for the hosts after missing the drawn Test series. He was also sidelined for the Australia series in November because of a back problem which had forced his early return home from the tour of Bangladesh and New Zealand coach Andy Moles was glad to have the hard-hitting all-rounder back.

New Zealand's line-up will look virtually the same to those who watched them in action in the Tests, with nine of that squad line-up expected to play a part.

West Indies will have a new-look opening pair compared to the Tests with Xavier

Marshall likely to partner captain Chris Gayle. Shawn Findlay and Brendan Nash will compete for a middle-order spot while all-rounder Kieron Pollard, who scored 120 runs in two innings in the WICB Cup as well as taking nine wickets at 14.22, might play if West Indies want to rest one of their strike bowlers.

The Eden Park pitch has traditionally suited batting, not always providing the bowlers sharp bounce or speed, and there could be more of the same for this Twenty20 outing. Also Auckland forecast says partly cloudy, but by the time the match starts the conditions should have cleared up and a cool evening is on the cards.

TEAMS

WEST INDIES (possible): Chris Gayle (captain), Xavier Marshall, Ramnaresh Sarwan, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Brendan Nash, Kieron Pollard, Denesh Ramdin, Jerome Taylor, Suleiman Benn, Fidel Edwards, Shawn Findlay.

NEW ZEALAND (possible): Brendon McCullum, Jesse Ryder, Daniel Flynn, Ross Taylor, Scott Styris, Jacob Oram, Tim Southee, Daniel Vettori (captain), Kyle Mills, Mark Gillespie, Jeetan Patel.

SA's chance at hand

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in Perth. The off-spinner Nathan Hauritz has taken the place of the axed Jason Krejza, with Peter Siddle holding his position ahead of Ben Hilfenhaus for his first Test at his home ground in Melbourne. A knee problem hampered Andrew Symonds in the field in Perth but the problem was not considered serious enough for him to be rested for the second Test.

South Africa have named the same side that earned the remarkable win at the WACA. The only question mark was over the fitness of Ashwell Prince, whose cracked thumb kept him out of the Perth line-up. Prince was making good progress but was not considered quite ready for a return at the MCG and his replacement JP Duminy, who struck the winning runs on his Test debut, has proven a more than capable Test No.6.

The MCG pitch is generally one of those surfaces that has something for everyone. It'll offer some early seam movement, a bit of swing and some

turn later in the match. After Hayden made a century there last year he called it the toughest surface he had batted on for two years. No batsman has made a century in the two Sheffield Shield games at Melbourne this season and spin has accounted for only two wickets in those matches. That statistic is slightly disingenuous though; Victoria's primary slow bowler Bryce McGain is injured and only one spinner has been given a decent spell at the MCG this season.

TEAMS

AUSTRALIA: Matthew Hayden, Simon Katich, Ricky Ponting (captain), Michael Hussey, Michael Clarke, Andrew Symonds, Brad Haddin, Brett Lee, Mitchell Johnson, Nathan Hauritz, Peter Siddle.

SOUTH AFRICA: Graeme Smith (captain), Neil McKenzie, Hashim Amla, Jacques Kallis, AB de Villiers, JP Duminy, Mark Boucher, Morne Morkel, Paul Harris, Dale Steyn, Makhaya Ntini.

Nasir inspires MSC

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An otherwise defensive Arambagh got their lone chance in the 25th minute and almost stunned their mighty neighbours but Mostafa Kaba headed a corner by Nayan onto the crossbar with Tabith Awal's silly effort on the rebound hitting the side netting.

Egyptian midfielder Hazem, who scored their match winner in a 1-0 away win against Khulna in the last round, picked up Bukola with a fine lob seven minutes later but Mohammad's top scorer from Nigeria was defeated by Piru, who dived to parry an angled shot.

Nasir came into action soon but he failed to beat Piru, who was getting better save by save. The Arambagh custodian pulled off yet another brilliant save in the injury time when he left his goal to block Bukola's shot after Robin had created an opening.

The second half belonged to Nasir, the fullback who has effectively turned into an

attacking midfielder. His speed, skill and ability to score have proved that the young boy is ready to take his place in the national team, as a rightback even if not as a midfielder, after the ageing Hassan Al Mamun's retirement, which is very close.

He opened up the rival defence two minutes after resumption but Arambagh's defensive shell blocked three attempts inside from the box before finally giving up on the hour.

This time, Nasir exchanged passes at the right flank with Bukola before getting a rebound off Piru following a strong low drive, giving a lurking Robin the chance to slot in his sixth league goal.

TEAMS

MOHAMMEDAN: Aminul, Kamal, Emmanuelle, Rajani (Saikat), Ripon, Nasir, Aziz, Hazkat, Faisal, Mahmud, Bukola (Komol) and Robin (Ron).

ARAMBAGH: Piru (Mitul), Tutul, Ratan (Nadir), Akram, Shahjada, Moudud, Kaba, Moloy, Nayan, Tabith (Turjo) and Nicodemus.

Referee: Tayeb Hasan.

Focus firmly on cricket

FROM PAGE 17

he will be accurate enough against them this time.

"We have had some bad decisions in the recent past, I think the decision that could have gone on our way could have made a lot of difference to the result of the game. Whether it is Steve or other umpires I don't know, but we just play. When we start getting success, I think a lot of 50-50 will come our way. So we will have that time -- hopefully in this game," was the cheeky answer of Siddons.

"And they all are going really well at the moment, so I expect them to do well. And Shakib of course doing a good job, hopefully he will keep striking," he added.

Interestingly, Bangladesh will look forward to engaging a different kind of opponent -- the umpiring of West Indian Steve Bucknor and hope that

Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mehrab Hossain, Shakib Al Hasan, Rajin Saleh, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), Shahadat Hossain, Enamul Haque, Mahbubul Alam, Sajidul Islam.

SRI LANKA (from): Mahela Jayawardene (Captain), Kumar Sangakkara (vice-captain), Malinthra Warnapura, Michael Vandort, Thilan Samaraweera, T. M. Dilshan, Prasanna Jayawardene (wicketkeeper), Chaminda Vaas, Muttiah Muralidaran, Dhammika Prasad, Chamara Kapugedera, Farveez Maharoof, Dilhara Fernando, Thilina Thushara Mirando and Rangana Herath.

PCB & SLC sit Saturday

CRICINFO, *undated*

Officials from the Pakistan and Sri Lanka cricket boards will meet at the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday to discuss the fate of Sri Lanka's tour to Pakistan in January.

The tour, which materialised after India pulled out, had been confirmed between the two boards but is now in some doubt after the sacking of Arjuna Ranatunga as chairman of the interim board of Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC).

Sri Lanka's Sport Minister Gamini Lokuge, who dissolved Ranatunga's administration on Tuesday, said Ranatunga's decisions -- presumably including the one to tour Pakistan -- will be reconsidered.

"Everything has been handed over to Sports Secretary S. Liyanagama, the competent authority to oversee the cricket administration, and he'll be looking into security in Pakistan before final decision is taken with regard to the tour," he said.

"The buck stops with me as far as our performance is concerned. I think we've all been a little bit disappointed with the way some of the results have gone. I think we all knew at the start of this year that we had some very tough cricket ahead of us."

Ranatunga had earlier said that Sri Lanka would not hesitate to send a team to Pakistan and expressed confidence in their ability to provide adequate security.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has not yet heard anything from the SLC, but hopes the situation will become clearer after Saturday's meeting. "Our last official contact with them was when they requested the itinerary change and we accepted. Since then we have heard nothing," Saleem Altaf, PCB's chief operating officer, told Cricinfo.

"The change in their board is an internal matter. We deal at a board-to-board level and not just with individuals. We've got a confirmation from them but the issue will be taken up at the ACC meeting. Until then we go ahead with the preparations as planned," he said.

There are indications already, however, that should the SLC show further hesitation over the tour, the matter might be taken up at the government level.

Pakistan haven't played any Tests in 2008 and their last one-day series was against West Indies in Abu Dhabi in November. They also played in the Ktly Cup -- a tri-series tournament involving India and Bangladesh -- and the Asia Cup, but having managed full-fledged ODI series against Bangladesh and Zimbabwe at home this year, any cricket against credible opposition will be the greatly appreciated.

Clark not in a hurry

CRICINFO, *undated*

Stuart Clark, who had a successful surgery on his right elbow last week, has said he will not rush himself back into action for Australia's tour to South Africa if it puts his career at risk.

"I would rate myself as an outside chance for the South African tour," Clark told the Sydney Morning Herald. "I'll be doing my best to make it, but I'm going to make sure I don't rush it and do more damage for the sake of making the trip."

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"I don't care when the match is finished as I am not in a hurry to go back home. I haven't played like that before but you know it will be good for fast bowlers to have a break."

"But it all depends on what the situation is after three days, whether it will stop the momentum or start something going. It'll be interesting and something new for me," admitted Jayawardene.

But the best was saved till last when the Lankan captain was asked of his reaction to Shahadat Hossain's words.

Here's the full version: "He has

Ricky hopes for best

Cricket

CRICINFO, *undated*

avoid being the captain to lose Australia's first series at home since Border's side went down to West Indies in 1992-93.

After South Africa's brilliant win in Perth, Australia were left in the unfamiliar situation of being 1-0 in a three-Test series. It is a position they have never recovered from for a series win in their 120 years of Test cricket. For such a comeback to occur this time, Ponting needs his senior men to lead the way.

Matthew Hayden and Brett Lee have come under fire during the week as both men have struggled to find their trademark spark and Ponting is desperate for the pair to lift themselves on the biggest stage.

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