

Lee headache for Australia

CRICINFO, undated

Australia will almost certainly enter the series finale in Sydney next week with a vastly inexperienced attack after learning Brett Lee faces a month out of the game due to a foot injury. Lee has been out of form and was unable to improve his series figures of 1 for 200 when the problem kept him off the ground for the entire third day against South Africa at the MCG on Sunday.

Lee has what the team physio Alex Kountouris described as a stress reaction - "on the way to being a stress fracture" - in the fourth metatarsal in his left foot. While there is a chance Lee could bowl in the second innings, it could take as little as one ball to turn the small crack into a stress fracture and a four-to-six-week layoff is probably required either way.

"I don't think he'll be able to play the Sydney Test," Kountouris said. "We'll wait and reassess at the end of the game but if he's got what we think he's got and it's been confirmed by scans that he's got a stress fracture, it'll probably mean we're going to have to rest him for a period of time to let it settle. We'll probably get a specialist opinion but it will be something between four and six weeks I think."

That would rule Lee out of Australia's ODIs against South Africa and New Zealand and would mean a potential return in the Test series in South Africa that begins in late February.

Kountouris said the injury was caused by overuse and was not uncommon in fast bowlers. Lee has also had problems with his left ankle and has had four operations on the joint, the most recent of which kept him out of last year's World Cup.

Lee's lack of penetration has been a concern against South Africa and he leaked 68 runs from 13 overs as the pain increased throughout the second day at the MCG. Losing him for the Sydney Test would take the heat off the selectors to justify his inclusion but it would also leave Mitchell Johnson in charge of a young attack. Michael Clarke, the vice-captain, said a lack of Test experience in the bowling group would not be a major worry.

"I think I look at it the other way," Clarke said. "I remember when I got my opportunity to play Test cricket, it's a great feeling and you really look forward to that day and I think whoever -- if somebody does come in for Brett Lee -- I know they'll be looking forward to that opportunity and hopefully they can get hold of it with both hands."

Peter Siddle and Nathan Hauritz are each in their third Test and the candidates to replace Lee include the uncapped Ben Hilfenhaus, who joined the squad after the WACA loss. The Sydney local Doug Bollinger will also come into the equation, as will Shane Watson, who filled in as 12th man while Lee rested in Melbourne.

AFP, Newcastle

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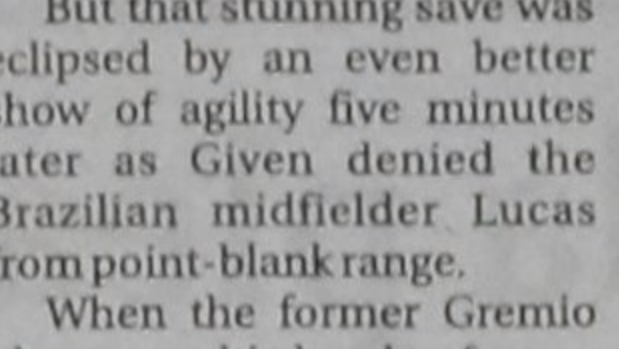
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Still a long way to go

AFP, London

England football legend Paul Gascoigne's 12-year-old son said in comments published Saturday that he thought his dad would likely "die soon" and wished that he would "go away" from the family.

Gascoigne has battled alcoholism and depression since his playing days -- earlier this year, he was sectioned under British mental health laws and arrested on suspicion of causing criminal damage in separate incidents.

"If I could wish, I would wish that he would go away from us," 12-year-old Regan Gascoigne told a documentary to be broadcast on Channel Four television on January 5.

"He's probably going to die soon," he said, in comments published in the Daily Mirror tabloid.

Gascoigne -- known to fans as "Gazza" -- made 57 appearances for England, and played for clubs including Newcastle, Tottenham, Lazio in Italy and Glasgow Rangers.

Considered one of the most talented players English football has ever produced, he is best known for his exploits in the 1990 World Cup finals in Italy where he helped his country to reach the semifinals.

As good as

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Samaraweera on strike with two fuller-length deliveries and then played the one-two card by beating his outside edge with a good length ball.

Not quite game over for the gutsy right-hander who then went on to miss Mashrafe's final fling, another full ball that jagged in after pitching and hit middle and off-stump.

No matter how genius this performance was, the air around Mashrafe was of inevitability. Maybe his daily brilliance is spoiling us and the man himself doesn't seem to understand that this, 14-4-24-2, was a work of art.

Reduced

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against England and only one five-wicket haul in his last 12 Tests but even without many wickets, he has enhanced his reputation.

His opponents dread his exaggerated reverse swing, a factor which was enough to win him his first man of the series award on home soil with returns of eight wickets at 21 runs apiece in the two-Test series against England.

Most are now inclined to compare him with the legendary Wasim Akram of Pakistan in his prime.

AFP, London

Fabio Capello insisted on Saturday that he does not yet deserve to be compared to Sir Alf Ramsey, the man he hopes to emulate by transforming England into world-beaters.

Ramsey coached England to their only World Cup success back in 1966 but Capello's impressive first year in charge of the national squad already has many observers tipping the Italian's team as champions in South Africa in 2010.

But Capello says there is plenty of work ahead if the England of Rio Ferdinand, John Terry, Theo Walcott and Wayne Rooney are to be kings of the world.

"Someone spoke to me

about this big manager (Ramsey) but we have to wait. He's up here -- I'm still down here," said Capello.

"It's a very long way to arrive at the level of Sir Alf Ramsey -- it is difficult and very, very long."

Capello has overseen a dramatic improvement in the national team's fortunes in 2008.

After the low of failing to qualify for Euro 2008 under Steve McClaren, England have reached the end of the year on course for the World Cup finals boasting a perfect record in the qualifiers.

For good measure, they ended 2008 with a 2-1 friendly win over Germany in Berlin with their only loss in the year coming against France.

"It's been step forward, step forward," Capello said.

"I'm very happy because

the last game against Germany we played very well. The first 11 was new players, some players who hadn't played a lot of games, and we won and this is very important for the future."

"We had another (stepping) stone for the future."

Capello added that, unlike McClaren, he was determined to maintain barriers between himself and his players.

"It's not important to play cards or games with the players. It's not important to me to be one of the lads," said the Italian.

"The important thing is respect. I always say a manager is one against 24 always -- there is one boss, one leader being judged by 24 players, in every moment he is under scrutiny and it's important the players know that is my role. The leader is the leader."

AFP, Madrid

Spanish giants Real Madrid are keen to sign Ecuadorian international winger Luis Antonio Valencia. As newspaper reported here on Sunday.

The 23-year-old Wigan Athletic star has become Real's preferred target after they dropped their interest in Aston Villa's Ashley Young and having pulled out of a deal for Liverpool's Jermaine Pennant because of his wage demands.

Valencia -- scorer of three goals in 20 matches this term -- would cost Real 17.5million euros and they could face stiff competition for the former Villarreal player from several of Wigan's Premier League rivals.

Real -- who are fifth in the title race some 12 points adrift of Barcelona -- are in desperate need of reinforcements to their squad after several key players such as Ruud van Nistelrooy and Malian midfielder Mahamadou Diarra suffered season ending injuries.

They have already signed French international midfielder Lassana Diarra from FA Cup holders Portsmouth for 20million euros.

AFP, Newcastle