

Smith to play sans pain

CRICINFO, Sydney

Graeme Smith will fight through the pain of a debilitating elbow injury for one more match in the hope he can take South Africa -- and be fit for the return series next month. Smith knows he should be having surgery but wants to be available for both engagements and will miss the one-day campaign in the hope he can recover.

"It's something I'd like to get rid of," Smith said at the SCG. "It's probably reached the point of surgery, but the length of time out of the game after having surgery was probably eight to 12 weeks, which doesn't give me much time to do that now."

Smith has chosen a technique where he will have his own blood injected in the tear in his right elbow twice over the next six weeks. "It's not a gamble," he said. "It's pretty simple. This is the last port of call before surgery and hopefully it works. If it doesn't, I'll go as far as I can and do what I have to do."

The problem has been hampering Smith since the Indian Premier League and is so painful he sometimes struggles to brush his teeth, but "they're clean at the moment". "It's getting worse and worse the more you use it and the more you play," he said. "I just feel that I can hopefully push it out for one more game."

"It's been such a terrific year, last year, and I would like to finish the series on a high with the boys. Then I'll do whatever I can to make sure I'm strong and ready for the home series."

Aussies for less nets

INTERNET, undated

The Sydney Test has been delayed by a day this year to give the players more rest after the Boxing Day game, but it might not be enough to offer Mitchell Johnson any significant help.

Johnson has been worn down by his work over the first two matches, delivering 108.2 overs, and did not bowl in the nets at the SCG on Friday.

Peter Siddle, who is in his second series, also operated for only 10 minutes as they tried to recover in time to make an impact in the third Test.

The out-of-form Matthew Hayden continued the trend by not batting in the nets during the team session.

Australia's players also had a day off on Thursday, so they will have no excuse for not being fresh.

Tigers to fight

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NOT THINKING about the personal milestone. It has been an honour to play for Sri Lanka and I have said this before that I never expected to play 100 Tests when I started off. I want to enjoy the day and the moment and I would love to perform and lead the team to victory in this match," said Jayawardene, who is also 74 runs shy of 8,000 Test runs.

"This is the start of another important year for us. Last year we beat India in a Test series, drew against England and beat the West Indies in the Caribbean for the first time in our history. This is a new year and we have a lot of cricket in front of us."

"And it's good to see Ajantha back. We'll make a decision on him after our practice session. The boys are very keen to start afresh," said the Lankan skipper.

Abahani

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AGAINST Farshaganj in the last round as Mamun, Joy and Ibrahim were busy creating chances for the strikers. Their return of form should be a cause for worry for the other title contenders.

The home side, desperate to equalise, went on the offensive after the break but failed to materialise the chances. Even hard working defender Dhiman was rushing near the Abahani goal often to inspire forwards Raphael and Chowmnin but Abahani held on to the slim lead as Biplab kept his cool against constant shooting.

TEAMS
ABAHANI: Biplab, Obaidur, Samad, Nazrul, Waly, Abul, Mamun, Joy (Pranotosh), Emeke, Ibrahim and Emilly.
CTG MOHAMMEDAN: Mamun, Pradip, Shawkat, Dhiman, Sharif, Camara, Masud, Anthony (Daulat), Towhidul (Chowmnin), Ridon and Raphael.

NZ look to bury past

Second ODI against WI today

AFP, Christchurch

New Zealand will be looking to put a summer of stalemates behind them when they face the West Indies in the second one-day international here on Saturday.

After two drawn Tests and a win apiece in the two-match Twenty20 series -- the home side were on top in the first one-day clash on Wednesday in Queenstown before rain brought an early end to the game.

When the rain came, the West Indies were struggling at 129 for five in the 36th over.

"It's obviously disappointing the game was cut short because the little bit we did see, we managed to get in a very strong position," said coach Andy Moles.

West Indies captain Chris Gayle conceded that New Zealand had the upper hand and the home side are keen to continue their momentum from that match on the unpredictable wicket at Christchurch's AMI Stadium.

New Zealand did not lose a ODI series last year and a clean sweep against the West Indies would lift them to fourth in the world rankings.

Explosive batsman Brendon McCullum said he could feel the team's confidence growing.

"We made some inroads into their batting in the first match. I think we bowled really well and had some good stuff going on in the field as well," McCullum said.

"The guys seemed to step up and just flip back into that confident mood we normally

operate in. From that perspective as a team we're travelling pretty well."

Much of New Zealand's success has been put down to astute planning with a specific blueprint for each player.

"The one-day format of the game, we have good history in and we showed again when we applied pressure (in the first ODI) the team looked very dangerous," Moles said.

"We spoke about certain areas we wanted to bowl to certain players and the guys performed really well."

New Zealand's cause was also helped by the absence of key West Indian batsman Shivnarine Chanderpaul, who missed the first match with a hand injury and remains a doubt for the second encounter.

Gayle said a decision on Chanderpaul could be delayed until just before the toss to give him as much time as possible to recover.

"He's our number one player," said Gayle. "If you don't have Shiv in the team it's a big loss."

Crucial to New Zealand's plans for the second game will be the state of the Christchurch wicket, where sides have scored scores of 300-plus over the past decade.

In the last match here 10 months ago, England were restricted to 242 with the wicket favouring New Zealand's spin pairing of Daniel Vettori and Jeetan Patel.

Similar conditions could see Patel replace Grant Elliott in the New Zealand line-up.

"That wicket was a bit slow and took some time as I recall so we will just have to see what the surface looks like when we get there," Vettori said.

'Cricket to defy trials'

AFP, Sydney

ICC chief executive Haroon Lorgat said Friday that cricket -- currently grappling with major challenges such as security problems -- has overcome bigger hurdles in the past.

"As the ICC enters its second century, the game faces challenges -- safety and security, player workload, balancing formats, ensuring a competitive balance between ICC members, staying on top of corruption and plenty more besides," Lorgat said, launching the International Cricket Council's centenary year.

"But then again cricket has always faced challenges just as big, if not bigger, than those currently confronting us -- Bodyline, illegal bowling actions in the 1950s and 1960s and corruption, to name just three."

"And, as a successful global sport, cricket will not be unique in facing such significant challenges."

The Indian government denied its cricketers permission to play in Pakistan in the wake of November's Mumbai terror attacks.

The ICC postponed the Champions Trophy one-day tournament in Pakistan in September over security concerns -- the same reason given by Australia for not playing a Test series there last March.

Cricket is also facing the challenge of accommodating different formats of the game -- Tests, one-day internationals and the shorter Twenty20 matches -- into its calendar.

But despite these issues, Lorgat said there was plenty for the cricket community to smile about.

"Cricket is a game that gets plenty right, has plenty to celebrate and has plenty to look forward to," he told reporters at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Lorgat said the game has always dealt with its challenges and as a result is stronger than ever.

"We are perhaps the only sport with three viable forms of the game at international level and we are about to launch the world's first Global Cricket Academy in Dubai with state-of-the-art facilities for the world," he said.

"And, as a governing body that ploughs all money earned back to its members, we have just begun investing 300 million dollars into the development of the game among our second and third-tier members, the biggest commitment to grow a sport outside of soccer."

Lorgat said some of cricket's great players -- Shane Warne, Glenn McGrath, Adam Gilchrist, Inzamam-ul-Haq, Shaun Pollock and Brian Lara may have moved on but the recent performances of Ajantha Mendis, AB de Villiers, Dale Steyn and Ishant Sharma suggest cricket's future is in good hands.

The ICC's centenary year of 2009 is intended to be a global celebration with events taking place around the world, including the Women's World Cup, the World Twenty20 competition and the Champions Trophy.

Dead rubber full of life

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BE SCARED, but he is wary. "We've got a few interesting challenges ahead of us in this game, a few unknown factors," he said. "(McDonald) is one of them, Bollinger's the other. We've got to make sure we really meet those challenges on the field."

The tourists, who spent New Year's Eve on Sydney Harbour, have little else to worry about and named an unchanged side after Ashwell Prince's cracked thumb did not heal in time. For the past two matches the South Africans have achieved new things, chasing 414 in Perth for the second-biggest pursuit in history, and beating Australia in Melbourne for their first series victory here. They are trying to ensure the final game will not be a letdown.

"It's obviously difficult when you've had such great moments in the last two Tests to do it again," Smith said. "The squad is quite calm. Each player is still hungry for performance. There's a real motivation to win the series 3-0. That would be fantastic. That opportunity hasn't come around for many teams often against Australia. Here we sit with that in front of us."

Life is much more difficult for the Australians. Ricky Ponting's leadership has been questioned alongside the decisions of the selectors after 2008 concluded with series losses to India and South Africa. Matthew Hayden, the country's most successful opener, has become a match-by-match prospect due to poor form and Brett Lee, Stuart Clark, Andrew Symonds and Shane Watson are injured.

The new collection has led to Australia breaking with the strange notion of not picking two left-arm fast bowlers in the same attack (Chris Matthews and Bruce Reid were the last to be used together when they played against England in 1986-87.) While the change of angle will test the batsmen, the bowlers' footmarks will also help the off-spinner Nathan Hauritz, who will benefit from any help.

"It's not anything to do with looking to have two left-armers in the side, you've got to pick the guys you think are the best suited to the conditions," Ponting said. "When you've got left-armers as well and you've got a right-arm offspinner in your side that becomes pretty handy."

At a team meeting before training on Friday the Australians outlined their goals for the year and focused on a fresh start. "The culture that a lot of us grew up in was a very strong winning one and that's what hopefully we've got to do for the younger guys coming into the side right now," Ponting said. "I think it's important that we move on from the last couple of weeks as quickly as we can."

TEAMS
AUSTRALIA: Matthew Hayden, Simon Katich, Ricky Ponting (capt), Michael Hussey, Michael Clarke, Andrew McDonald, Brad Haddin (wk), Mitchell Johnson, Nathan Hauritz, Peter Siddle, Doug Bollinger.
SOUTH AFRICA: Graeme Smith (capt), Neil McKenzie, Hashim Amla, Jacques Kallis, AB de Villiers, JP Duminy, Mark Boucher (wk), Morne Morkel, Paul Harris, Dale Steyn, Makhaya Ntini.



Australia bowler Andrew McDonald in his delivery stride during a practice session ahead of the third Test against South Africa in Sydney yesterday.

ECB to manage team rift

AFP, London

England's build-up to their tour of the West Indies, as well as their campaign to reclaim the Ashes, was clouded in controversy on Thursday when skipper Kevin Pietersen and coach Peter Moores were reported to have fallen out.

The Daily Telegraph said that Hugh Morris, the managing director of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), will hold urgent talks with the two men this weekend to find a solution to the power struggle.

"The outcome of those talks could decide the futures of the two most influential figures in the England dressing room and Morris may face the dilemma of having to dismiss Moores, a figure he grew up with playing cricket for England schools," reported the newspaper.

Earlier, it was claimed that the pair clashed over the decision not to recall former skipper Michael Vaughan for the forthcoming tour of the West Indies.

Pietersen is thought to have wanted Vaughan alongside him in the Caribbean but selectors opted to keep faith with Ian Bell and Owais Shah.

An ECB spokesman said: "We don't comment on speculation."

Moores took over from Duncan Fletcher following the 2007 World Cup in the West Indies.

However, England were beaten by South Africa in the Test series at home last summer before losing both recent Test and one-day series in India.

England face a busy 2009. They leave for the Caribbean on January 21 for four Tests, a Twenty20 international and five ODIs.

That is followed by a return series against West Indies in May before the Twenty20 World Cup and then the Ashes in July and August.

ASIAN JR SQUASH Pakistan refuses to send team to India

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan refused to clear its national junior squash team on Friday to travel to India for the Asian junior championship amid heightened tension between the two countries.

Pakistan's sports minister Pir Aftab Shah Jilani cited security issues for barring both the junior squash team and national senior hockey team's travel to India.

"We sought advice from the external ministry and took the decision that it's not advisable to send the teams to India over security fears," Jilani said.

Pakistan squash team was due to defend its team and individual titles in the championships to be held in Chennai from 16-23.

The hockey team was due to compete in the double-leg tournament in Chandigarh from January 31-February 9.

Anticipating the decision, India had already replaced Pakistan with New Zealand, Germany, the Netherlands and hosts India are the other teams taking part.

Riyad leads

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59 off 75 balls with five boundaries and a six.

Skipper Anisur Rahman, who top-scored with 64, helped him add 85 for the fourth wicket.

BARISAL-KHULNA
Part-timer Nazmus Sadat picked three middle-order wickets and ended as the man-of-the-match.

Barisal were never in the hunt, being bowled out for 111 in 45 overs.

Amit Mazumder struck an unbeaten 58 as Khulna made light work of Barisal's total.

Off-spinner Nasir Hossain took three for 19 from eight overs.

BRIEF SCORES
SYLHET: 162 all out in 46.3 overs (Sharif 38, Mithun 32; Riyadh 2-24).
DHAKA: 163-3 in 40.5 overs (Marshall 65*, Riyadh 65*; Saikat 1-19).
Result: Dhaka won by seven wickets.
RAJSHAH: 229 all out in 48.1 overs (Anisur 64, Hamidul 59; Tariq 3-39).
CHITTAGONG: 172 all out in 44.1 overs (Rezaul 59, Masum 49; Saqlain 4-17).
Result: Rajshahi won by 57 runs.
BARISAL: 111 all out in 45 overs (Nasir 20; Sadat 3-16).
KHULNA: 112-4 in 37 overs (Amit 58*; Nasir 3-19).
Result: Khulna won by six wickets.

ICC hopeful of visas

CRICINFO, undated

The ICC will table a report on the state of the game in Zimbabwe at its board meeting at the end of the month and will make a special request to the Australian government that Peter Chingoka, the Zimbabwe Cricket chairman, be allowed to attend. Chingoka and Ozias Bvute, the managing director, were put on Australia's banned list last month for being associated with the president Robert Mugabe's Zanu-PF regime.

Perth will host the meetings on January 31 and David Morgan, the ICC chairman, was "hopeful" Chingoka would gain a short-term visa. "Certainly Mr Chingoka was allowed into the UK on two occasions after the initial application was put on hold," he said. "We're making strenuous efforts to try to ensure a visa will be made available for this specific purpose."

While the Australian government considers Chingoka an inappropriate guest, Morgan said the ICC believed he should be granted access for the meeting of the "top committee for our sport". "That is our policy," Morgan said. "We realise that the Australian government may not grant a visa."

Chingoka and Bvute have been in charge of the administration in Zimbabwe during a period when they have lost Test status, watched most of their best cricketers leave the country and also dealt with accusations of severe financial irregularities. The ICC sent a delegation to the country in November that was led by Dr Julian Hunte, the West Indies

board president, and included Haroon Lorgat, the ICC chief executive, and Arjuna Ranatunga, the former Sri Lanka captain.

While Lorgat would not signal what would be in the document, he said the group did not speak with government or sports ministry officials. "We confined our investigation to Zimbabwe cricket itself, to the level it's being played in, the facilities that are available and the structures that produce a team capable of playing Test cricket," Lorgat said. "I cannot pre-empt what



HAROON LORGAT

will be in it.

"The task team will table the report and the board must decide how to deal with it, and whether to release it." Previous investigations into the state of the financial situation in Zimbabwe Cricket were suppressed by the ICC.

On a day when the ICC wanted to celebrate its centenary year, Lorgat and Morgan were instead forced to defend the organisation from its stance on Zimbabwe. The ICC's mission statement was read out to the administrators, which includes values of "openness, honesty and integrity". "We certainly aren't going to change

the mission statement and we seek to fulfil the mission," Morgan said. "It certainly isn't the most easy of tasks."

Scheduling is another problem faced by the ICC and its wish for a Test championship has not been supported by India and England, who are looking to expand their series. "We need to convince some of the key members that it is the route to go," Lorgat said. "There are some concerns about the volume of cricket that is needed to be condensed in the cycle that is proposed in that Test championship. It's very much a work in process. I think it would create better context for Test cricket."

Crowds for the format are dwindling throughout most of the major countries and day-night Tests are being viewed as an option to help keep popular for spectators. If a ball that can last and be seen under lights is developed, Lorgat said he would be favour of the changes.

The past year also witnessed an explosion in the popularity and quantity of Twenty20 cricket, while several tours and competitions were postponed due to security concerns. "The game faces challenges -- safety and security, player workload, balancing formats, ensuring a competitive balance between ICC Members, staying on top of corruption and plenty more besides," Lorgat said.

"Cricket has always faced challenges just as big, if not bigger, than those currently confronting us -- Bodyline, illegal bowling actions in the 1950s and 1960s and corruption, to name just three. The key we all need to remember is that cricket has always dealt with those past challenges and is now, as a result, stronger than ever."

Bollinger wants to keep it simple

CRICINFO, Sydney

Doug Bollinger is the sort of bowler that could quickly develop into an Australian cult figure. He is fast, swings the new and old ball and takes wickets regularly, especially at the SCG. It was those traits that earned him a spot ahead of Ben Hilfenhaus for the third Test, but he also brings colourful off-field characteristics.

A year ago he was bald, but now has locks as lush as the outfield, and he speaks with the honesty of a guy who grew up in western Sydney. After hearing about his recall to the squad this week he said he would give 150,000% for his country; he was told on Friday morning he would become Australia's 405th Test player.

When asked whether he would rest well the night before the game he said: "I hope I sleep well, I'll just try and take it as another cricket game, basically. If I think about it too much I'll go insane." Are you nervous? "Yeah."

In the past 14 months Bollinger has taken five five-wicket hauls at the SCG, including 6 for 47 in his last match here against South Australia. A Sheffield Shield season of 45 wickets at 15.44 in 2007-08 won him tours to West Indies and India, but he had to wait for an opportunity after slipping behind Peter Siddle, who he will share the new ball with.

"I'm just going to go out there and just do what I've been doing for New South Wales and try swinging the ball," he said. "Just try to intimidate batsmen and just try to be competitive. I'd just like to compete and do well, I'm not out there to make friends."

Graeme Smith and the South Africans do not know much about Bollinger, but they are learning quickly about his quirks. "Any guy who is going to try 150,000% in this game is someone we're going to have to respect," Smith said teasingly. The tourists have traded jokes about Bollinger's hair on the team bus, but say they won't use them on the field.

While Bollinger spoke off the cuff, Andrew McDonald, the other debutant, was more cautious. McDonald's long-term options are less certain -- he comes behind Andrew Symonds and Shane Watson on the allrounders' list -- and he was not sure that he would be batting six.

Jacques Kallis is the player McDonald has looked up to most during his career, but he was reluctant to describe the balance between his batting and bowling qualities. "I'll let you guys make up your own minds," he said. "I'm not going to put myself in any category." He bats at five or six for Victoria and chips in with regular overs.

average of 64.22. His second most recent innings was an unbeaten 107 against Pakistan in Abu Dhabi in November.

His absence places additional pressure on captain Gayle and Ramnareh Sarwan at the top of the order. They are the only batsmen in the squad with more than 30 ODIs, the only ones who have hundreds to their name apart from Xavier Marshall's 157 not out against Canada, an associate ICC team, in Toronto in August.

The only batting alternatives are Brendan Nash, Shawn Findlay, Kieron Pollard and Carlton Baugh, the second wicketkeeper.

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Nash proved his worth in his vital innings in the Tests, but, much like Larry Gomes and Jimmy Adams, other left-handers of his method from earlier eras, his game is suited more to five than one day. Pollard and Findlay are feeling their way and don't seem up to it at this level. There is not much more to say about the choice of two keepers.

The situation supports Gayle's point, made during the home series against Australia, that it is self-defeating to introduce so many new players at one time.

One of Runako Morton (49 ODIs, average 33.25, two hundreds) and Devon Smith (26 ODIs, average 23.27) would have lent necessary experience, even if not backed by imposing figures. Surely, in the absence of Dwayne Bravo, Darren Sammy should have been here. The West Indies

Shiv in doubt

CRICINFO, undated

Shivnarine Chanderpaul, the West Indies batsman, could miss the second ODI against New Zealand in Christchurch on Saturday with a hand injury. He sat out the first rain-ravaged ODI of the five against New Zealand on New Year's Eve as he was being treated for discomfort between thumb and forefinger in his left hand.

"It's just the constant jarring of the bottom hand against the handle," Chanderpaul said. "It was becoming more and more painful every time I bat so I thought it needed a rest before it got even worse."

Virgil Browne, the team's physiotherapist, has been treating it daily and an assessment on when Chanderpaul can play will be made on the morning of the match.

His absence leaves a huge hole, either in the middle order, as has been the norm in recent times, or as Chris Gayle's opening partner, where he has been so effective in the past. With 7,719 runs, nine hundreds and an average of 40.84 in 238 ODIs, Chanderpaul is irreplaceable in a batting line-up of severely limited experience and quality.

And he remains hungry for runs, whatever the length of the game.

His 13 ODIs last year -- against South Africa, Sri Lanka, Australia and Pakistan -- brought him 578 runs at an

were happy to ring out the old year and hope for better in one-day cricket in the new.

There were three white-washes in 2008 - 5-0 to South Africa and Australia, 3-0 to Pakistan - against a 2-0 triumph over Sri Lanka (one with Chanderpaul's four and six off the last two balls, the other by the Duckworth/Lewis method) and 3-0 in the Toronto tournament involving Bermuda and Canada.

It is a shocking record. The first four ODIs of 2009 follow over the coming two weeks. Chanderpaul's continuing absence would not bode well for an immediate improvement on 2008.

Salman knows

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Mendis had appeared in trials for the Kolkata Knight Riders and I got a chance to watch him bowl and also played him in the nets," Butt said.

"He uses his top finger to obtain speed off the surface and turn without changing his action," the opener added.

Bowlers who use just two fingers to obtain turn and speed from street cricket in Pakistan are described as tape tennis specialists.

Mendis has been a run-away success since the Asia Cup held in Pakistan last year during which he bamboozled the batsmen with his variations taking six for 13 in the final against India in Karachi.