

NZ tour litmus test for Dhoni, says Ganguly

PTI, Mumbai

Expressing concern over lack of practice matches for the Indian cricket team on the tour of New Zealand, former skipper Sourav Ganguly on Friday said the visit will test Mahendra Singh Dhoni's leadership ability.

"The series will judge Dhoni as a captain as he has led the squad mostly in the sub-continent. But the side did well under him to beat Australia in the ODI's down under," Ganguly told reporters here.

The left handed batsmen, who led India during the last tour to New Zealand in 2002, said lack of match practice for the squad in tough conditions will only add to the challenges.

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Rapid Chess title Sagar's

SPORTS REPORTER

FIDE Master Minhasuddin Ahmed Sagar edged Grandmaster Abdullah Al Rakib in tiebreakers to become unbeaten champion in the Shaheed Dibash Rapid Chess tournament, sponsored by Spain Probashi Daba Samaj in assistance with Bangladesh Chess Federation.

Sagar and Rakib both earned eight points in the daylong competition at the chess hall-room yesterday before being separated by the tie-breaking system.

Four players earned seven points each with GM Ziaur Rahman finishing third. He was followed by FM Abu Sufian Shakil, Arman Monir and Mohammad Ali in the

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Did U Know?

American legend Pete Sampras is the highest earner in professional tennis, claiming an incredible 41,994,440 dollars during his 13-year career.



The guys dug deep. Flintoff was bowling on one leg, so to get very close is a great effort."

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Cricket stifling competition?

AL MUSABBIR SADI

Just when it looked safe for football and cricket to settle down at their respective homes, the long-lingered ghost returned.

The recent comments of the country's sports minister and cricket officials stating that they want to host the opening ceremony of the 2011 Cricket World Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium and are also looking forward to having it as an alternate venue for World Cup matches has given birth to a burning question: Will the old tug-of-war between football and cricket over the national number one stadium resurface?

If it really happens, where will football go?

No one would argue cricket's rise to be the number one game in recent times but everyone feels that no country can rely on just one game's glory and put the other sports to bed.

It was by their own choice that cricket high-ups had decided to quit the BNS and make Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur their 'home'.

Although many had then severely criticised the move, it proved to be a wise decision and the Mirpur venue is now well recognised worldwide for its excellent facilities, especially for ground conditions.

After cricket's departure, a healthy atmosphere was created as football found hard ground beneath its feet. They got a permanent ground and after a year of hibernation, football rolled again under the federation's charismatic new leadership.

After a long time, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has successfully completed the second edition of the B. League and also announced a busy schedule for the latter part of 2009.

BFF's new president Kazi Salahuddin has not only introduced new competitions but he also ensured lucrative sponsorship deals that were unheard of in the past. Almost a dead game a year ago, country's once most popular sport is now set to revive its glory.

But even talks of cricket's possible return could end all that.

If the venue is chosen for the World Cup, for just the opening ceremony or matches, it will have to go through a lot of renovation. To do that, it will need over a year, meaning cessation of all football competitions. The ground now belongs to football and athletics as the government has also built an expensive track here.

Can this country afford to remove the track and put up another one? It can be mentioned that top athletics competitions were also halted for seasons when the track at the Mirpur Stadium was removed for the making of the 'home of cricket'.

With the South Asian Games coming to the country in early 2010, the BNS remains the only venue for preparation of local athletes as well as for competition.

There is no need for jeopardising all of that when cricket has both Mirpur and Fatullah grounds in the capital and international venues at Bogra, Chittagong and Khulna within an hour's distance as the crow flies.

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Windies' great escape

Cricket

AFP, St John's

England and West Indies drew the third Test on Thursday when play was called off due to bad light with the home side on 370-9 and with four overs to bowl at the Antigua Recreation Ground.

West Indies still lead the five-match series 1-0, but they were indebted to their last pair of Daren Powell, who finished unbeaten on 22 off 55 balls in a knock spread over 65 minutes, and Fidel Edwards who made five in a stay which ate up a crucial 34 minutes.

Adding to England's problems was a worrying right hip injury suffered by star all-rounder Andrew Flintoff which could rule him out of the fourth Test in Barbados from February 26. He will undergo a scan later on Friday.

West Indies had earlier seen Ramnaresh Sarwan make 106, his 13th Test hundred.

"It's pretty tough to take. We had to work exceptionally hard for our wickets today," admitted England skipper Andrew Strauss who saw West Indies an unlikely 503-run victory target.

England had been held up for the better part of the day as Sarwan fashioned a typically polished century.

For close to two hours, England were kept at bay, as Sarwan and Chanderpaul added 148 for the fourth wicket.

But Broad collected their prized scalps in an inspired spell of fast bowling before tea that sunk West Indies to 261 for five.

Before a crowd packed with scores of

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West Indies captain Chris Gayle, whose team enjoyed an innings victory in the first Test in Jamaica by bowling out England for a paltry 51, said: "Give credit to the way England batted -- but Shivnarine Chanderpaul (55) and Ramnaresh Sarwan batted really well."

In an enthralling last period, England looked set for victory.

When Suleiman Benn fell to off-spinner Graeme Swann in the first over of the last 15 for 21 runs, West Indies were 353 for nine.

But the visitors could not deliver the knockout punch, as Powell and Edwards batted through 10 more overs before umpires Daryl Harper and Rudi Koertzen offered them the light.

Stuart Broad was England's most successful bowler with three wickets for 69 while Swann took three for 92.

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Heroes hail drawn Test

Cricket

AFP, St John's

Two key players who helped West Indies draw the third Test against England on Thursday felt it was one of the team's finest performances in recent memory.

Ramnaresh Sarwan, who led the West Indies batting with his 13th Test hundred, a defiant 106, described the Test as "one of the best he has ever played in".

And Daren Powell, who batted agonisingly for 10 overs in a last wicket stand with Fidel Edwards to formalise the result, felt the entire match was a "test of character" for the home team.

Sarwan felt the draw justified the emotional roller-coaster on which the team been put through over the past week, following the aborted second Test at the Vivian Richards Cricket Ground.

"We knew we were up against it from the very first day when England got away to a pretty good start," he said.

"We knew how important it was to bat and occupy the crease. For me to bat and occupy the crease, and get a century was very pleasing."

"This Test match was up there for me... It is something that I will hold very dear to the way we fought back."

"With two Test matches left, and the position in which we were, I know many people thought we would have lost it. But for us, this result is a victory."

Powell said the rest of the team felt that they could not let down Sarwan and compa-

triots Shivnarine Chanderpaul, after they shared 148 for the fourth wicket to put West Indies in a position to draw the match.

"When we saw the way Sars and Shiv batted in the second innings, there was total consensus from everybody else in our team that everyone that came behind them had to make sure we did not let them down," he said.

"Sarwan played a brilliant innings, and for us to back it up, we needed to draw this Test match."

He added: "We won the Test in Jamaica with a day to spare. We did not expect it, but we did, and coming into this

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game, Tuesday was the only day we had practice. After that it was total chaos."

"But we came to the Antigua Recreation Ground for this Test, and we toiled away... But this result has proven to us that if we go out there and fight every day, we can do the job."

Sarwan hoped West Indies can avoid a similar situation in the fourth Test at Kensington Oval in Barbados, starting next Thursday, and can put themselves in a formidable position to win the match from early.

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