



New Zealand wicketkeeper Brendon McCullum plays a cut shot during training in Wellington on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

Big-hitting Warner joins Durham

AFP, London

Big-hitting Australian batsman David Warner on Wednesday signed to play for Durham in the Twenty20 Cup, the English county announced.

The 22-year-old was the first Australian player to debut for his country without any first class experience since 1877 and he marked the occasion in style with a 43-ball 89 against South Africa in a Twenty20 match in January.

Warner already has an average of 64.6 after playing in just eight one day games for New South Wales.

Once the Twenty20 Cup has finished, West Indies star Shivnarine Chanderpaul will fill the Durham overseas slot.

"I've heard great things about Durham and I'm delighted to be joining them later this year," said Warner.

"I enjoy playing Twenty20 cricket and to be brought in especially to play in the UK's domestic competition is a real honour and challenge."

Boards warned after Antigua fiasco

AFP, Johannesburg

Chief executives of major cricket countries agreed Wednesday that host boards will have to guarantee the suitability of grounds for international matches following the Antigua fiasco.

All countries will be required to notify the International Cricket Council (ICC) in February each year which venues it planned to use over the next 12 months, together with a written guarantee that the grounds were of a suitable standard.

The decision was made after the second Test between West Indies and England at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium earlier this month was abandoned after just 10 balls because of an unfit outfield.

"The members of the ICC Chief Executives Committee have now reaffirmed that it is the host Member Board's responsibility to produce a venue that is up to standard and fit for the purpose of staging internationals," said ICC chief executive Haroon Lorgat.

The circumstances that led to the abandonment are being investigated by the ICC. Match referee Alan Hurst has submitted a report to the ICC which has been forwarded to the West Indies Cricket Board, which in turn must submit its own report.

ICC general manager, cricket, David Richardson and chief match referee Ranjan Madugalle will study the evidence before passing judgment.

The ICC has the power to impose a sanction ranging from a warning or a fine up to a suspension of international status for the venue.

The chief executives also decided at the end of their two-day meeting here that there should be a substantial increase in prize money for the ICC Test Championship.

Currently the team finishing top of the table on April 1 each year receives 175,000 US dollars with the second-placed team receiving 75,000 dollars.

Prize money is likely to be made available for teams finishing lower down the table.

BCCI in a spot of bother

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

The Indian board faces an embarrassing situation after letting Sachin Tendulkar appear for a Masters Twenty20 match in Wellington on Friday where he will play alongside Hamish Marshall, the former New Zealand batsman who featured in the unauthorised ICL last year.

New Zealand Cricket (NZC) confirmed in a press release that Tendulkar will turn out for the NZCPA (New Zealand Cricket Players' Association) Masters side while Dinesh Karthik, who is also part of the Indian squad on this tour, will play for ACA Masters.

Heath Mills, the NZCPA chief executive, said Marshall, who played for ICL's Royal Bengal Tigers, will also be part of the NZCPA squad.

The BCCI has shunned official contact with ICL players and last year, refused to let VVS Laxman appear for Nottinghamshire because the county had ICL players in its ranks.

"The ICL players are allowed to play in New Zealand domestic cricket," Mills said. "Moreover, Hamish is not an ICL-contracted player. He finished his contract last year." But an ICL official told Cricinfo that Marshall, who played his last ICL game on November 8, is still with the private league.

According to Mills, Marshall is currently playing with Gloucestershire.

Ratnakar Shetty, the BCCI's chief administrative officer, declined to comment for the moment. Gary Kirsten, the India coach, was

quoted in the NZC press release as saying that the Masters game was "a great opportunity for Tendulkar and Karthik to have a few hits - we were happy to work with the Players' Association to bring them into the Masters teams."

Niranjan Shah, the Indian team's manager in New Zealand, said the BCCI would take up the issue with Justin Vaughan, the NZC chief executive. "No Indian player will play for a team that has an ICL player," Shah said. About Marshall, Shah said that it "would not be a problem" if the batsman is no longer an ICL player.

New Zealand has about eight ICL players and currently there are four of them - Marshall, Shane Bond, Chris Harris and Daryl Tuffey - playing on the domestic circuit.

NZC has billed the International Masters game at the Westpac Stadium on Friday as the curtain-raiser to the Twenty20 International between India and New Zealand that will be held later the same day at the same venue.

Meanwhile, discussions are still on between the BCCI and NZC over a practice match for India's Test specialists, including Rahul Dravid and Laxman, who will join the tour later. It was previously proposed that these players be drafted into any one of New Zealand's domestic squads for a match but that plan has been opposed by NZCPA, who said it breached the board's one overseas player per team rule.

"We will be having a meeting with the NZC soon," Mills said. "Justin Vaughan is in South Africa for the ICC meeting, so we are waiting for him to be back. But we are expecting a decision in the next couple of days."

Captains slate

FROM PAGE 17 international cricket, there won't be any bowlers, they will be like endangered species," said Jayawardene, who steps down as skipper after the second Test in Lahore starting from March 1.

Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan, the highest wicket-taker in Test cricket with 769 before this match, finished with his worst-ever figures of 1-172, while new sensation Ajanta Mendis took 1-157.

When asked if the behaviour of the wicket changed from day to day, Jayawardene said: "It didn't behave at all. See, we always knew that the way the wicket played it would be tough for a result."

"We dominated probably for four days in this Test match and I am quite happy with the result. As a batsman, I don't think I have complaints. I

think even our bowlers also wanted to bat on that wicket." Sri Lankan coach Trevor Bayliss said the Test should have had a better pitch.

"It would be bad for Test cricket if you get one of these every time," said Bayliss, an Australian.

Pakistan coach Intikhab Alam lambasted the pitch after the first day's play, when Sri Lanka put on 406-3.

"We asked for a pitch which has some grass and bounce but unfortunately this is not what we wanted," said Alam.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Ijaz Butt Wednesday said he would investigate how the pitch came to be.

"The curator has the final authority," said Alam of PCB's chief curator Agha Zahid, who played one Test for Pakistan in 1970s.

Biman flying high

FROM PAGE 17 although Abahani missed their injured captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. With the new ball, Shubhashish Roy was the peak of Abahani attack with 3-32 from seven overs to restrict the opponents to 263-8.

Former Indian international Venugopal Rao was adjudged man-of-the-match for his 77 off 82 balls in the Abahani innings.

TORUN-MOHAMMEDAN Khaled Mashud's Surjo Torun joined Abahani at second place with five wins from six games after they rattled 163-5 with 13 overs remaining at BKSP.

The early dismissal of in-form Indian opener Sandeep Sharma on Wednesday did not affect their chase of a paltry target set by struggling giants Mohammedan as Junaid Siddique and Hannan Sarker added exactly 50 runs to their overnight 31-1.

Both the batsmen contributed 33 runs after afterwards, Anisur Rahman's 41 off 50 balls eased Surjo Torun's way to hand Mohammedan their third loss in the fray after a tie and two wins.

Surjo Torun's Saqlain Sajib was man-of-the-match after mopping the Mohammedan tail with 3-22 from ten overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF CITY CLUB: 236-9 in 50 overs (Rasel 32, Nadim 70, Nabil 2-28, Niaz 4-39)

BIMAN: 237-4 in 50 overs 9Sadat 75, Niaz 92, Jahurul 37,

Shafaq 1-53, Sirajullah 1-27, Hossain 1-55). Result: Biman won by six wickets.

ABAHANI: 290-7 in 50 overs (Imran 70, Venugopal 77, Nasir 42, Abul 3-49, Monir 2-67)

OLD DOHS: 263-8 in 50 overs 9Nayem 90, Ejaz 32, Rahman 36, Subhashish 3-32, Arafat 2-34)

Result: Abahani won by 27 runs. MOHAMMEDAN: 159 all out in 49.2 overs (Shuvo 38, Shaiful 3-22, Sajib 3-22)

SURJO TORUN: Junaid 33, Hannan 33, Anisur 41, Murad 2-31)

Result: Surjo Torun won by five wickets.

Dhoni wants

FROM PAGE 17 the flying start could have netted a more competitive 180.

"One area we need to improve on is analysing the situation," he said.

"At times when you're successful (hitting sixes) it looks very good but you have to realise what a safe score is on that wicket."

"You have to decide whether you want to push for 200 or a score you can defend."

Murray out of Dubai Open

AFP, Dubai

Andy Murray, who began 2009 as favourite to win the first Grand Slam of the year, admitted that he has been bugged by a virus ever since the Australian Open as he announced his withdrawal from the Dubai Open on Thursday.

The world No.4 from Britain has the best record on the men's tour with 15 wins out of 16 so far, but suddenly the future is looking uncertain after the revelations about his long-term medical condition.

Murray began to feel worse after his impressive straight sets second round win over Arnaud Clement yesterday (Wed). "I woke up in the middle of the night sweating," he said.

Aussies fight

FROM PAGE 17 playing in his first Test at the age of 29, showed good composure.

He was surprised by an early bounce from Steyn, which hit him on the gloves before he had scored, but then played confidently in rapidly deteriorating light.

It was a nightmare debut for Hughes, who flashed at a ball above head height which he should have left alone.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the first day of the first Test between South Africa and Australia at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg on Thursday: AUSTRALIA: First Innings Hughes c Boucher b Steyn 0 Kitch c McKenzie b Steyn 3 Ponting b Ntini 8 Hussey c Kallis b Morkel 4 Clarke c Boucher b Steyn 68 North not out 47 Haddin not out 37 Extras: (lb-7, nb-4, w-1) 12 Total: (For 5 wks in 68 overs) 254 To bat: McDonald, Johnson, Siddle, Hillenhaus. Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-18, 3-38, 4-151, 5-182.

Bowler O M R W Steyn 19 2 82 3 Ntini 16 4 53 1 Morkel 16 2 65 1 Kallis 4 0 19 0 Harris 11 2 18 0 Duminy 2 0 10 0 SOUTH AFRICA: Smith (cap), McKenzie, Amla, Kallis, De Villiers, Duminy, Boucher (wkt), Morkel, Harris, Steyn, Ntini. Umpires: B Bowden (NZL), S Bopkins (WIS). TV umpire: Asad Rauf (PAK). Match referee: J Crowe (NZL).

Younis No.1 batsman

PTI, Dubai

Pakistan captain Younis Khan's triple hundred in the drawn Karachi Test against Sri Lanka catapulted him to the top of the ICC Player Rankings for Test batsmen which has only one Indian, Gautam Gambhir, in the top 10.

Younis batted for nearly 13 hours in Karachi to become just the third Pakistan player in history to get past the 300-run mark in a single Test innings after Hanif Mohammad (337 v West Indies at Bridgetown in 1958) and Inzamam-ul-Haq (329 v New Zealand at Lahore in 2002).

Younis was the only real mover in the top 20 of the rankings although Mahela Jayawardena's double hundred in the same match means he stays in fourth position as Australia's Michael Clarke drops two places to fifth position.

Having been knocked off his number-one perch, West Indies' Shivnarine Chanderpaul is now in second spot with Kumar Sangakkara of Sri Lanka in third.

Younis will have to continue to score heavily to maintain his stay at the top because he has a very slender one-point lead at the top with almost every player in the top 10.

Gambhir's opportunity to improve his position will come when the Test series against New Zealand gets underway next month.

BSJA awards postponed

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA) awards, scheduled for tomorrow morning at the NSC Tower, have been postponed due to unavoidable reasons.

BSJA will announce a fresh date later.

The ceremony, sponsored by Square Toiletries, will give awards to best sportsmen, sports personalities and organisations from 2002-08.

Yossi gives

FROM PAGE 17 from inside the area and Amauri headed on the resulting corner just past the outstretched leg of Giorgio Chiellini at the far post.

"What I think we still have to work on a lot is to have more control even in these tough games," Hiddink said. "It's not an easy team to play against, Juventus. They can play very well in between your defensive and midfield line. So it's very difficult to play them."

Bayern Munich had to wait until the 41st minute to take the lead in Lisbon, but after Franck Ribery shot low through goalkeeper Tiago's legs the Germans went on the rampage in the second half.

Luca Toni's glancing header from Massimo Oddo's corner in the 57th landed conveniently for Miroslav Klose, who bundled the ball over the line for his sixth goal in the competition.

Ribery sent Tiago the wrong way with a 63rd-minute penalty kick and Toni netted twice in the final six minutes, both times assisted by Ribery.

Villarreal dominated possession at home to Panathinaikos, but the Greek visitors took the lead in the 59th when Giorgos Karagounis unleashed a shot from 25 meters (yards) that tipped off the hand of Villarreal goalkeeper Diego Lopez before bouncing into the net off the crossbar.

The advantage lasted just seven minutes, midfielder Jakub Wawrzyniak bringing down Robert Pires and Rossi, an American-born Italian, converting from the penalty spot.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

FROM PAGE 17 Azaduzzaman scoring in the 72nd minute.

2ND DIVISION VOLLEYBALL

Nabadoy Sangha defeated Nabajatok Majlish on a 3-0 set (21/15, 25/12, 25/12) at the Dhaka Volleyball Stadium.

Bangladesh Jail plays Nagar Samaj Kalyan in today's match.

SCHOOL CRICKET

Kanchipara Academy High School became champions of the Standard Chartered National School Cricket Competition defeating Mohimganj High School, at the Gaibandha Stadium.

Batting first, Kanchipara were bowled out for 162 in 31.2 overs. In reply, Mohimganj High were restricted to 122 for the loss of all wickets in 47.2 overs.

Shahinur of Kanchipara was declared man of the match, for scoring 50 and taking two wickets.

Younis lifts Pakistan

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

In two years Younis Khan has gone from shunning the captaincy of Pakistan's cricket to being hailed Thursday as its saviour after his epic 313 runs in the first Test against Sri Lanka this week.

The 31-year-old Younis's marathon innings of 12 hours and 48 minutes not only helped Pakistan draw the match but elevated him to the top of the International Cricket Council (ICC) batsmen's rankings.

But more than his batting, Younis's fearless attitude and positive approach suggests he is the man to lead Pakistan cricket out of a turbulent period.

Former Pakistan captain Rashid Latif expressed great confidence in Younis.

"Younis taking the responsibility and leading from the front augurs well for Pakistan cricket. He doesn't demand respect, he commands it and this is the best quality for a captain," said Latif, widely regarded as Younis's mentor.

Wasim Akram, another former Pakistan captain, believes Younis can bring home the laurels.

"Younis showed that records matter less and team comes first. I think if he stays as captain, Pakistan can win the 2011 World Cup," said Wasim.

He was referring to two records that came within striking distance for Younis

this week -- Hanif Mohammad's Test score of 337 runs for Pakistan in 1958 and Brian Lara's world record of 400 in 2004.

Many believed Younis would never lead Pakistan again after he turned down an offer of the captaincy following team's shock first-round defeat in the 2007 World Cup held in the West Indies.

Pakistan also lost their admirable coach, Bob Woolmer, who died in the

team's Jamaica hotel following their humiliating defeat against minnows Ireland.

Left with no choice, cricket authorities inducted young Shoaib Malik, who failed to get along with seniors as problems mounted for Pakistan.

Some top players, including ace batsman Mohammad Yousuf, were unavailable for selection after they joined the rebel Indian Cricket League (ICL), and the team continued to

fare poorly at international level. Pakistan's 2-1 defeat in the one-day series against Sri Lanka last month forced the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to replace Malik with Younis.

Younis also resigned from the captaincy before the Champions Trophy 2006, saying he did not want to be a "dummy" captain. But he accepted the role after a change in the PCB set-up the next day.

This time around, Younis, who was also reluctant to lead Pakistan on a tour of India when Malik was injured in 2007, was more determined.

"This is our team and we will have to work hard to lift it. I don't fear losing if we lose. I will make no excuses but everyone must support us," said Younis after accepting the captaincy.

"I am straightforward, open minded and will not let the team spirit down. We have to build this team and even if we lose some key players, it will not sag our spirits because you can't have seniors with you all the time."

Latif said Younis will provide Pakistan with back-up players.

"His heart is clean and he truly wants to help Pakistan cricket. For him, a senior and a junior player are the same and he will also prepare back-up players for the future. For him, the team is like his family," said Latif.

Younis has also supported his real family after losing two of his brothers, one in an accident, a sister and his father in the last five years.

It wasn't difficult for Guardiola to foresee the danger, and to warn his players in the locker room before the kickoff: "Juninho is one of the best players in the world, capable of winning a match on his own."

Picture, then, the scene at Stade Gerland in Lyon. The contest is barely warmed up, just seven minutes old. Juninho, now aged 34 and talking of retirement, stands innocently enough over the ball. Innocent not because of the distance, but because the angle of approach would not suggest a direct shot at goal.

The instant he strikes it, all those watching in the ground or on television realize that Juninho has conjured danger where none seemed to exist.

As the ball flies through the air, he stands there like a golfer who has hit a shot out of the rough, moving a hand as if to guide the curve of the ball along the path he intended.

Valdes comes forward from his net, begins to backtrack and finally seems to lose his bearing as the ball deceives him in flight and nestles, as intended, inside the furthest post.

A brief silence is followed by rapturous applause. Juninho, real name Antonio Augusto Ribeiro Reis Junior, looks the least surprised. He

Bringing art to life

Football

ROB HUGHES

In a field where art is movement, and where pace is paramount, it takes someone special to score out of stillness. Juninho Pernambucano is special, even by the standards of the great Brazilians who down the decades made us gasp at the impudence of their free kicks.

Juninho's goal in Tuesday's 1-1 draw between Lyon and Barcelona may have begun as still life, but the flight he induced on his kick from 30 meters, the almost supernatural way he angled the ball and caused it to curl with a trajectory that made a decent goalkeeper appear like a drunken sailor, was very definitely art.

"Juninho's goal was a really nice one," acknowledged Josep Guardiola, the young coach of Barcelona. Guardiola has seen a few free-kick specialists in his time. "It was not a mistake from Victor Valdes - nobody could have stopped it."

Valdes is Barcelona's goalkeeper. He has spent countless hours in training against men like Ronaldinho, Lionel Messi, Xavi Hernandez, Thierry Henry, all of whom are accomplished "dead ball" strikers.

Ribery sent Tiago the wrong way with a 63rd-minute penalty kick and Toni netted twice in the final six minutes, both times assisted by Ribery.

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studied a long line of Brazilians who brought the so-called dead ball to life. He would practice and practice, like Didi in the 1950s, Rivelino in the 1970s, Zico in the 1980s and Rivaldo in the 1990s.

There is a video of a training session of the Brazil national squad in which Juninho rehearses free kicks. Standing behind a line of cut-out dummies, the goalie, Julio Cesar, points to a spot on the underside of his crossbar, inviting Juninho to beat him from 20 meters.

Once, twice, three, four, five times, Juninho does just that. Always with the right foot, always with a different cut or swerve or spin on the ball. Always with a smile on the faces of watching national team colleagues.

Knowing what Juninho will do is no defense to preventing it. Juninho moved from Brazil to France eight years ago, and is on course to his eighth consecutive French league championship with a Lyon team that is a class above the rest in its land.

But on Tuesday they faced the best in Europe. Barcelona, perhaps in contention with Manchester United, possesses the sweetest rhythm and flow, and any number of forwards capable of turning a match.

Yet Barca has stalled, slightly, after their record-breaking season. After Juninho's strike, they had to dig deep to rescue the match. They did so an hour after going behind. A corner from Messi was flicked on by Rafael Marquez, and headed into the net by Henry at the far post. The result leaves the teams delicately balanced for in the second leg at Barcelona's Nou Camp stadium in two weeks' time.

(Rob Hughes is sports correspondent, International Herald Tribune)

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword grid with clues: ACROSS 1 Cried like a crow, 6 Sweet potato, 9 Plead again, 12 Open-mouthed, 13 Microbrewery, 14 Ostrich, 15 Gondolier, 16 Ben-Hur author, 18 Place, 20 Augments, 21 Long March, 23 Copperhead, 24 Thing of value, 25 Heidi's home, 27 Some exams, 29 Grated, 31 Petunia. DOWN 17 Textbook chapter, 19 Home, 21 Scratch, 22 Miss, 24 The whole, 25 Shooting match, 26 Helix, 28 Following, 30 Tokyo, 32 Midsized kangaroo, 33 Prior, 34 Wine option, 36 Pays out, 38 Less refined, 39 Obliterate, 40 Isn't, 41 perpendicular, 42 Sports, 45 Spring wind?, 46 Touch, 48 Tramar contents, 50 Up to, in verse, 51 Compass pt.

Cryptogram grid with clues: C S L D P H W C E A L F E E A G C L R, U J O O D P P W D P D K S E G F S C L R, L J D L E C R L E W J O C S J E H D, S J J X F R O D P X K D U C O J.

Yesterday's Cryptogram: DAD MADE AN EFFORT NOT TO CAUSE FOREST FIRES. HE CLAIMED IT'S NOT NICE TO FUEL MOTHER NATURE. Today's Cryptogram Clue: P equals W