



Players and officials of National Cricket Club of Nilphamari pose with the National Club Cup trophy at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

WAGs distract players: Slater

PTI, Melbourne

Presence of wives and girlfriends (WAGs) during the Test matches would act as a distraction and pose a threat to Australia's Ashes defence, according to former cricketer Michael Slater.

Cricketer Australia, keeping in mind the long tour, has invited WAGs for the first two Test against England in July.

Slater feels that it was important for players to spend quality time together to create bonding, than with WAGs.

"There is no doubt that in that initial phase of a tour you want the blokes to be able to hang around for dinner together and have a few beers, just to be in each other's pocket to get that team harmony going," Slater said.

Slater railed CA for inviting the WAGs to the Ashes planning camp at Coolumb in Queensland.

"The WAGs being at a camp when you're setting up for your next six months of cricket, I don't know that that's the way it needs to go, I don't think it's right."

"In terms of the preparation, when you're coming up with your strategy you don't need the partners there," Slater was quoted as saying by the Herald Sun.

The former opener cited the example of legendary Allan Border, who had barred the entry of WAGs into the team hotel until the series was won.

"Now that's outdated but that was the regime and what he thought was the right way to go and we won the series, they won under the same regime also in the late '80s," he said.

T20 test for

FROM PAGE 17 himself available for Chennai's semi-final, but he was not considered good enough to be picked and returned home.

Shane Watson, who must prove his fitness from a groin injury over the next month to make the Ashes tour, had a light work on Monday and Ponting said he should be available to bowl during the Twenty20 tournament. However, Ponting said what happened over the next month would not guarantee spots for the Ashes. "I don't think you can take much out of Twenty20 form ahead of Test matches," he said. "We've got two tour games and that will be the best chance to get a look at the guys who will play in the Tests. We'll start thinking of the Ashes make-up in the tour games."

Shearer to get

FROM PAGE 20 For the first time in 16 years, Newcastle are no longer a top-flight club, but Shearer has no intention of feeling sorry for himself.

The Newcastle legend, who took charge for the final eight games of the season after Joe Kinnear's heart surgery, met the squad for an end of season debriefing on Monday and reportedly told them there would be a major overhaul of the playing staff if he stays.

"If I'm here next season, there are going to be big, big changes," the Times quotes him as saying.

Newcastle's annual wage bill is estimated at around 74 million pounds and Shearer is willing to axe high-earning flops like Michael Owen, Mark Viduka, Claudio Cacapa and Peter Lovenkrands, who are all out of contract.

Fabrizio Coloccini, Geremi, Obafemi Martins, Alan Smith, Jose Enrique and Jonas Gutierrez could also be sold.

Seniors await battle

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Brett Lee and Stuart Clark will have to wait until the first two tour games to secure their spots in the bowling pecking order for the Ashes. Both men are coming back after lengthy injuries and must leapfrog a couple of the incumbents to win places in the opening Test of the series in Cardiff on July 8.

Mitchell Johnson grew into the attack leader in Lee's absence and was backed up by Peter Siddie and Ben Hilfenhaus, who are both expected to suit English conditions, during the strong 2-1 victory in South Africa. "Where Stuart and Brett are in the pecking order, we don't know at the moment," the captain Ricky Ponting said. "Lee is a bit of an unknown [after ankle surgery]. The first two games before the first Test will tell us."

Australia are already talking about playing more than 11 in the lead-up matches in Hove and Worcester to give all five of their frontline weapons a chance to impress, as well as testing the fitness of the all-rounder Shane Watson. In 2005 there was only one first-class affair after the one-day series and the lack of lead-up time led to Jason Gillespie and Michael Kasprovic struggling without the extra work.

Another factor both Ponting and Michael

Clarke spoke of during the team camp on the Sunshine Coast was the time it takes for visiting players to get used to the Duke balls used in England. "Our guys will get a great opportunity to use their [England's] cricket ball for a few weeks leading into the first Test," Ponting said. "That was probably what brought us undone last time, their ability to use their ball well and we were a little off the boil with it."

Reverse-swing was one of England's major strengths when they ended Australia's 16-year hold on the urn, but Clarke was confident the current batsmen would be able to negotiate the tricks this time. "Our knowledge, certainly of the guys who have been there before, is a little bit more educated than what it was four years ago," he said. "Generally the difference with the English ball and the Kookaburra [which is used in Australia] is our ball swings from the start."

"It doesn't swing as early in England, then it starts to swing a bit later. Reverse-swing is as big a part as natural swing over there. It sounds like they are having a pretty good summer with weather, that being the case it will probably be pretty dry and we'll have to combat reverse-swing as well."

Australia could not get the ball moving as easily as England's bowlers and that trend was repeated in India last year despite the acquisition of Troy Cooley, the bowling coach behind the 2005 success. Tim Nielsen, the current coach, believes he has a complementary attack that can be relied on in all conditions.

PCB denies contact

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Pakistan's cricket authorities have said they weren't contacted at all with regard to their ouster from the pool of teams that form the lucrative Champions League, a further worrying indicator of their increasing isolation in world cricket.

The tournament - with 6 million dollars in prize money - is scheduled to be held in India this October and though the number of teams participating has increased from eight to 12, Lalit Modi, the tournament's chairman, said no team from Pakistan would be among them. "Unfortunately, the Pakistan government won't give them [the players] clearance to come to India, and since Saturday was our cut-off date, it's not possible to have a team from Pakistan this year," Modi was quoted by AFP as saying on Sunday.

But a senior PCB official, reacting to Modi's comments, told Cricinfo the board had not been contacted at all by anyone regarding the tournament. "Sialkot had been invited for the first tournament but since that was postponed, we have heard nothing from them at all. We weren't told about any cut-off dates or deadlines. I am surprised Mr Modi is second-guessing what the Pakistan government is likely to be thinking in October," the official said. Incidentally, the PCB's domestic Twenty20 tournament is currently underway with a winner due to emerge on May 29.

Pakistan had a representative - Sialkot Stallions - for last year's tournament that was postponed following the Mumbai attacks. Relations between India and Pakistan then deteriorated; India refused to tour in January and Pakistan's government stopped their players from travelling to India to take part in the IPL - the basis of the decision - though that situation is open to review and, possibly, to change given how quickly relations between the two countries fluctuate.

Prior, Shah lift Eng

FROM PAGE 17 balls with seven fours, but his next ball saw him stumped by wicket-keeper Denesh Ramdin off giant left-arm spinner Suleiman Benn.

Strauss's Middlesex colleague Shah forced the pace by hammering Edwards so hard for four through mid-wicket that Ramnaresh Sarwan had to go off injured, after getting a hand to the ball.

Shah completed a run-a-ball fifty in flamboyant fashion with a wristily pulled six off Bravo, that also brought up a century partnership with Prior.

England's batting powerplay yielded 55 runs in five overs.

Shah then made the most of a free-hit to launch Jerome

Taylor for six only to hole out next ball with England 289 fir five in the 46th over.

Paul Collingwood, on his 33rd birthday, took England past 300 with a four off Taylor before next ball striking the paceman for six.

SCOREBOARD Scoreboard of England innings in the third one-day international against the West Indies at Edgbaston on Tuesday:

ENGLAND Strauss st Ramdin b Benn 52 Bopara b Bravo 49 Prior b Taylor 87 Shah c Morton b Taylor 75 Mascarenhas c and b Pollard 0 Collingwood b Taylor 23 Morgan not out 6 Bressnan c Rampaul b Pollard 9

Broad not out 6 Extras: (b-2, lb-7, w-10, nb-2) 21 Total: (For 7 wks in 50 overs) 328 Fall of wickets: 1-81, 2-129, 3-278, 4-279, 5-289, 6-308, 7-317.

Did not bat: Swann, Anderson. Bowler O M R W Taylor 10 1 59 3 Rampaul 4 0 29 0 Edwards 6 0 43 0 Bravo 6 0 43 1 Benn 10 0 51 1 Gayle 5 0 31 0 Pollard 9 0 63 2

WEST INDIES: Chris Gayle, Brunako Morton, Ramnaresh Sarwan, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Dwayne Bravo, Denesh Ramdin, Kieron Pollard, Jerome Taylor, Fidel Edwards, Ravi Rampaul, Suleiman Benn Toss: West Indies

India clear favourites: Manjrekar

PTI, New Delhi

Former Test player Sanjay Manjrekar put his money on defending champions India but pace great Wasim Akram reckons Pakistan, mostly bereft of international cricket, would be hungry for success in next month's ICC World Twenty20 in England.

Manjrekar had no doubt that Mahendra Singh Dhoni would lead the most formidable squad to try and defend the title they won in 2007 even though he was candid enough to admit it doesn't necessarily mean they would win the title again.

"India certainly look the strongest team on paper, even though that does not mean they would win the title again," Manjrekar said.

Reminded that India could not defend the ODI World Cup title which they had won in 1983 under Kapil Dev, Manjrekar said Dhoni's men were a much stronger unit and stood better chance to lift the trophy again.

"Soon after the 1983 World Cup, West Indies toured India and hammered us. Unlike them, Dhoni's team is strong enough to defend their title," Manjrekar said in a programme in the English ball and the Kookaburra [which is used in Australia] is our ball swings from the start.

Manjrekar felt this Indian team is stronger than the side that won the inaugural tournament in 2007 and dismissed the notion they would be bogged down by the pressure of defending the title.

BFF & DIU

FROM PAGE 17 gesture on their part to spare a thought for the country's footballers.

"We welcome this initiative of DIU to teach our footballers the basics of English and communication. There is no age limit to learn a new language or a new skill," said BFF vice-president Kaz Nabil Ahmed.

BFF officials also believed that better English language skills would ease the communication between national coach Edson Silva Dido and the players.

BFF general secretary Al-Musabbir Sadi and Mizanur Rahman signed the deal on behalf of their respective organisations.

Baz in high demand

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

New South Wales could fork out 250,000 dollars to secure Brendon McCullum for October's Champions Twenty20 League after his New Zealand domestic team, Otago, were announced as one of the extra sides in the expanded tournament. The Blues are likely to lose David Warner to his IPL franchise, Delhi Daredevils, for the two-week event and would view McCullum as a strong replacement.

McCullum made a controversial fly-in appearance for New South Wales in the Twenty20 final against Victoria in January so he could qualify for the Blues. McCullum and Warner are among a group of players who have reached the Champions League through two teams and must therefore decide which side to represent.

Should Warner choose Delhi Daredevils, the franchise would need to pay New South Wales compensation, as would the Blues to Otago if they signed McCullum. David Gilbert, the chief executive of Cricket New South Wales, said if they received money for Warner they would consider making Otago an offer.

"There is no doubt having Brendon McCullum in your team increases your chances of a win, that is an undeniable fact," Gilbert told the Sydney Morning Herald. "It's about ensuring we have got all the bases covered. It is certainly something we will consider. It is a cost-neutral exercise."

It could have been a three-way race for McCullum's services had his IPL team, Kolkata Knight Riders, not had such a dismal tournament. Earlier in the year McCullum said it

would be his preference to play for Otago, although a hefty cash injection could tempt them to accept an offer from New South Wales.

"Given the fact he has played for them in the last 12 months, I think it could happen," Ross Dykes, the Otago chief executive, said. "You can't ignore the figures like that. But on the other hand, you have loyalty reasons for which you wouldn't want to do it. Brendon would have to be involved in these discussions."

Craig Cumming, the Otago captain, said that he was keen to retain McCullum. "We get first dibs on him [McCullum] now that Kolkata didn't get through," Cumming told Radio Sport. "Someone would have to have a pretty strong argument to get him out of the team that I'm playing for. [For guys like Brendon], they play for New Zealand and the franchises in the IPL but this is unique in that you're representing your province on a world stage. This is a real opportunity for him to do something a little bit different from what he normally does because it is for his province. It's a unique chance."

Other players with decisions to make include Dirk Nannes (Victoria and Delhi Daredevils), Andrew McDonald (Victoria and Delhi Daredevils), Cameron White (Victoria and Royal Challengers Bangalore), Nathan Bracken (New South Wales and Royal Challengers Bangalore), Herschelle Gibbs (Cape Cobras and Deccan Chargers) and Farveez Maharoof (Wayamba and Delhi Daredevils).

Victoria's coach Greg Shipperd is also in an unusual position having been in charge of the Delhi Daredevils, who qualified by virtue of finishing on top of the IPL table. However, Shipperd has previously stated that Victoria would be his first priority should both his teams reach the Champions League.

Sania blames injury

FROM PAGE 17 Bhupathi, made her the first Indian woman to win a Grand Slam title.

"The amount of people who came up to us and said congratulations - those kind of things are really small things, but they really mean a lot," Mirza said.

"A stranger walks up to you and says 'I'm so happy', because you win a tennis match. You bring smiles to people's faces."

"It's great support, because there's a lot of Indians out there trying to support you, but there's also a lot of pressure."

"That's the way it is though. They expect me to win every match I play, but I think I'm used to it now."

OTHER FIRST RD RESULTS

Women Svetlana Kuznetsova (RUS x7) bt Claire Feuerstein (FRA) 6-1, 6-4 Jelena Jankovic (SRB x5) bt Petra Cetkovska (CZE) 6-2, 6-3

Petra Martic (CRO) bt Mara Santangelo (ITA) 6-4, 6-2 Melinda Cizink (HUN) bt Anastasiya Sevastova (LAT) 3-6, 6-4, 6-1

Sybille Bammer (AUT x28) bt Nathalie Dechy (FRA) 6-3, 7-6 (7/1)

Magdalena Rybarikova (SVK) bt Kristina Mladenovic (FRA) 6-1, 2-6, 8-6

Aleksandra Wozniak (CAN x24) bt Monica Niculescu (ROM) 6-4, 4-6, 6-3

Caroline Wozniacki (DEN x10) bt Vera Dushevina (RUS) 4-6, 7-5, 6-1

Men Juan Martin Del Potro (ARG x5) bt Michael Llodra (FRA) 6-3, 6-3, 6-1

Marc Gicquel (FRA) bt Rainer Schuttler (GER x27) 6-0, 6-0, 6-4

Daniel Gimeno (ESP) bt Evgeny Korolev (RUS) 6-4 abandon Victor Crivoi (ROM) bt Simon Greul (GER) 6-1, 7-6 (7/1), 6-2 Novak Djokovic (SRB x4) bt

Nicolas Lapentti (ECU) 6-3, 3-1 abandon

Andreas Beck (GER) bt Ivan Navarro (ESP) 7-6 (11/9), 6-4, 6-1

Gael Monfils (FRA x11) bt Bobby Reynolds (USA) 6-2, 6-3, 6-1

Extra crowd at IPL final

INTERNET, undated

Celebration could have actually turned into mourning after it was revealed that nearly 38,000 spectators watched Sunday night's Indian Premier League final in the Wanderers Stadium which can host 31,000 at the most.

According to The Star, an additional 7000-strong crowd made their way into the stadium wielding counterfeit tickets, which could have led to a disaster.

Gauteng Cricket Board CEO Alan Kourie admitted coming across "an incredible number" of counterfeit tickets and said the stadium had never been such choc-o-bloc.

"We've informed the metro police about the tickets we found but we suspect there must have been many more because I have never before seen the stadium this full. It's dangerous," Kourie said.

"On the grass embankment, the family area on the west side of the stadium, they were packed in like sardines; there was no room to move there at all. Over on the open stand it was just ridiculous."

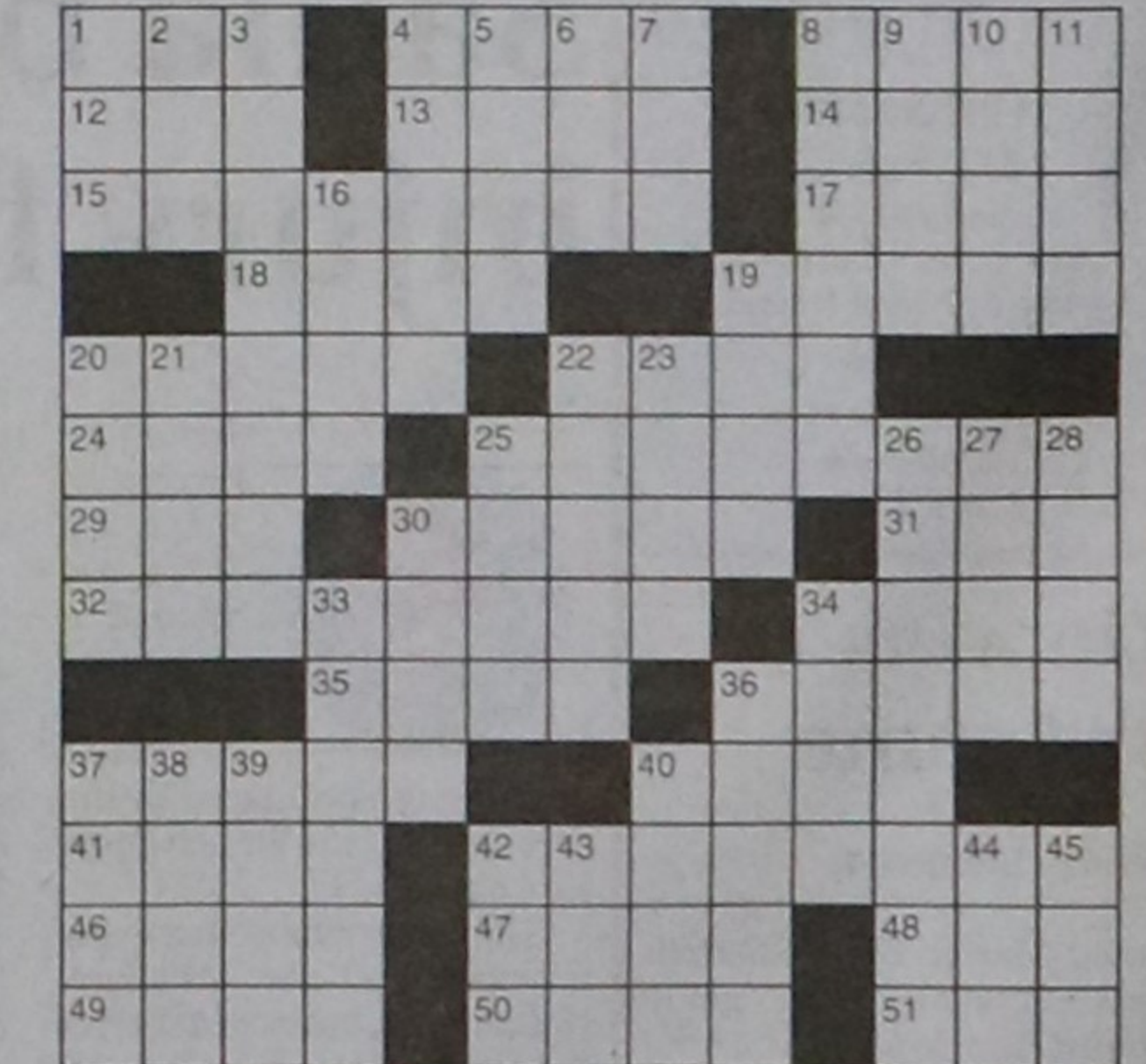
"In both the Unity Stand and the Centenary Stand, there were people sitting in the aisles and standing behind the seats. We were sold out for the Australia game and I can tell you that it was not as full as this," he said.



Bangladesh Football Federation general secretary Al-Musabbir Sadi (2nd from L) and registrar of Daffodil International University Mizanur Rahman shake hands after signing MoU on behalf of their respective institutions at the BFF House yesterday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Use a ray gun 4 Impale 8 Puppy's attacks 12 Lemieux milieu 13 Harvard rival 14 Redact 15 Mrs. Odysseus 17 Gaucho's weapon 18 Bugle call 19 Big man on campus? 20 Ire 22 Old phone feature 24 Swine 25 1930 Harold Arlen song 29 Equi- 30 Automaton 31 Historic time 32 It merged with Tanganyika in 1964



CRYPTOQUIP QLWU FVUE FAZZCTMT VDW FVMHUR V ZACB DVKMWO VZZ VO AUKW H QACZB TVE OLVO T KZVF-ADHUR Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF YOUR FLUFFY LITTLE CAT OR DOG IS TREATING YOU TERRIBLY, COULD ONE CALL IT FURBALL ABUSE? Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals A