

Mash wants 100 per cent First Test against West Indies starts today

Cricket

AFP, Kingstown

Bangladesh will be looking to add to the misfortunes of the West Indies as they begin a two-Test series in the Caribbean at the Arnos Vale Sports Complex on Thursday.

The West Indies are coming off a tense four-match one-day international series loss to India, and are still unsettled with their attack weakened by the absence of the injured Fidel Edwards.

Bangladesh have fond memories of their last trip to the Caribbean five years ago, when they ran the home team so close that it prompted the salacious comment from then Windies captain Brian Lara that if his side could not beat Bangladesh in the Test series, he would immediately resign.

New Tigers captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will again be trying to accomplish what his predecessors have not been able to do - make Bangladesh a tougher, more resilient opponent, particularly away from home.

"The first thing I said after becoming the captain is that we have a problem with our confidence level," said Mortaza.

"It's not that we can't play at the international level, we have played Test matches for five days in the past and beaten international teams.

He added: "There is however, no use dwelling on the past and I have spoken to

the boys to believe in themselves and keep their confidence high throughout the tour.

"If we start playing well from the first match we will go into the first Test match with a good momentum. As the captain I want all of them to give 100 per cent, win or loss comes secondary to it."

The first match of this Caribbean tour against West Indies-A was not a huge success, or even came close to what Mortaza had in mind.

But the Tigers managed to rebound from another slipshod batting performance in the first innings to bat a little more steadily in the second, and the bowling put the second string West Indies side under early pressure before they allowed the A-Team a lead of 53.

Bangladesh can take some confidence from this, and though Chris Gayle and company will be a little bit more formidable than the A-Team in the Tests, the Tigers can enter the series with a little

more peace of mind.

Not so West Indies, after they were stung by the 1-2 loss of the ODI series to India, and would hate to slip on the cliched banana peel that are the Bangladeshis.

"We are looking forward to Bangladesh right now," said Gayle following the final ODI against India which was abandoned because of rain. "We need to go back to the drawing board ahead of that series."

The West Indies captain will be under the microscope again, following his ill-advised comments about quitting Test cricket and the post during the recent two-Test series in England.

It set off a maelstrom of debate about the future of the game, and has moved administrators around the world to insist that Test matches must remain at the pinnacle in the face of the threat it faces from the Twenty20 version.

To be taken seriously, Gayle and his side will have to overcome the Bangladesh challenge - and in a purposeful way - not only to appease West Indies fans, but so they can repair the tattered image of West Indies cricket with the real and present danger of a two-tiered system in Tests now looming.

Arnos Vale's only Test 12 years ago between West Indies and Sri Lanka ended in a tense draw with the visitors 36 runs short of a victory target of 269.

The venue however, has been a regular stop in the Caribbean for ODIs and has staged 17 in which the pitch has often

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PHOTO: AFP

England captain Andrew Strauss avoids a bouncer from Australian left-arm paceman Mitchell Johnson who however had the last laugh by having the southpaw caught of a snorter in the slip on the first day of the first Ashes Test in Cardiff yesterday.



Did U Know?

Romanian midfielder Ion Radu was sold by Second Division Jiul Petrosani to Valcea in 1998 for 500kg of pork (worth about £1750)



Carlo Ancelotti
(Chelsea manager)

"John Terry is a symbol of this team. He will be captain next season: he said he wants to stay for ever and we want to keep him for ever."



TEN Sports

West Indies v Bangladesh
First Test, Day 1
Live from 9:00pm

STAR Cricket

England v Australia
First Ashes Test, Day 2
Live from 5:00pm

ESPN

Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 9:30pm

South Asian shooting

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan snapped Indian shooters complete domination on the fourth day of the 5th South Asian Shooting Championship when they won two gold medals out of eight at the BKSP shooting range yesterday.

For the first three days it was India who grabbed all the gold medals but Pakistan denied their bitter rivals in the skeet events during the penultimate day's competition. They won the team event with a score of 333 and Reza Ali Munir scored 114 in the individual events to win the other gold for Pakistan.

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Seeking replacements WICB canters at boycott threats

Cricket

AP, Kingstown

The West Indies Cricket Board is desperately seeking to put together a team to face Bangladesh after leading players announced a boycott of the upcoming Test series because of a long-standing contract dispute.

The Board on Tuesday began seeking to put together a second-string side - including many players involved in its Under-19 tournament - to fly to St. Vincent where the first Test is set to begin on Thursday.

Bangladesh are scheduled to play two Tests, three one-dayers and a Twenty20 international on their four-week tour.

The president of the West Indies Players Union, Dinanath Ramnarine, a former Test leg-spinner, on Tuesday said that the 13 players originally selected for the first Test had withdrawn since the West Indies Cricket Board failed to address concerns about lack of con-

tracts for recent tours.

"The fact remains that the players have played their last four tournaments without a contract," Ramnarine said on Tuesday. "They are now being asked to play their fifth consecutive series without a contract which is highly unacceptable."

"Having considered the situation carefully and dispassionately, and bearing in mind their own welfare without ignoring the concern of other stakeholders, the players have requested me as President of WIPA, the players' body, to inform the WICB, sponsors and the public that, regrettably, they cannot with immediate effect continue playing without any contracts with the WICB," Ramnarine said.

WICB confirmed in a press release that there were still contract disputes with the players and WIPA regarding previous tours but claimed that the action taken by the players "constitutes a clear breach of the collective bargaining agreement between WICB and WIPA."

The two bodies have had a number of wrangles

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Akhtar wants to return for SL ODI series

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Injury-prone paceman Shoaib Akhtar said Wednesday he wants to return to international cricket in the one-day series against Sri Lanka after missing out on Pakistan's World Twenty20 triumph.

The 33-year-old was withdrawn a week before the start of the World Twenty20 last month -- which Pakistan won by beating Sri Lanka -- after a doctor said the player was suffering from genital viral warts.

"It was a heartbreak missing out on Pakistan's World T20 success, but that's in the past now and I want to play the one-day series against Sri Lanka," Akhtar told AFP.

"I have attained full fitness and have been gaining rhythm in bowling. I hope to stage a comeback in the one-day series against Sri Lanka, if I am selected," he added.

Pakistan lost the first of three Tests against

Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

The Test series will be followed by five one-dayers and one Twenty20 match. The first limited over international will be held at the holiday resort of Dambulla on July 30.

Akhtar managed to play just four Twenty20 matches last year, and the controversial fast bowler's 12-year career has been plagued by injuries and disciplinary problems.

After serving a ban for publicly criticising the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), the board allowed Akhtar to play at the international level and included him in the three-match one-day series against the West Indies last November.

But he was again sidelined with a hamstring injury and only returned for two one-day internationals against Sri Lanka earlier this year, before being dropped because of poor performance.

He played in four of the five one-day internationals against Australia in April-May, where he again under-performed.

Pakistan's interim chief selector Wasim Bari

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U-19s stare into abyss

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh U-19 team suffered batting blues against their England counterparts in the first four-day at the North Marine Road ground in Scarborough.

The visiting side were struggling to avoid an innings defeat as they scored 194 for six in their second innings till the filing of this report. Bangladesh U-19s were still 38 runs behind the England Under-19s first innings total of 502, on the third day.

Mominul Haque shone in both innings with 90 and 80 runs.

Bangladesh Under-19s were all out for 270 runs in their first innings in reply to England U-19 team's huge first innings total of 502.

Borthwick caused the main damage by picking up five wickets.

Ban on foreign players in the offing

CRICINFO STAFF

The BCCI's technical committee has recommended foreign players should not be allowed to play in domestic cricket from the 2009-10 season and the number of 'guest players' (those from areas outside their jurisdiction) be reduced to the original three.

In the recent past England's Vikram Solanki and Kabir Ali and Bangladesh's Enamul Haque Jr played in the Indian domestic cricket.

The committee has also recommended that Ranji knockout games be played on a home-and-away basis instead of neutral venues that were used for the last two seasons. "The venue would be decided based on the previous

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Kevin, Colly consolidate

Cricket

AFP, Cardiff

Kevin Pietersen and Paul Collingwood kept Australia at bay with an unbroken century stand as England got through the second session of the first Ashes Test here Wednesday without losing a wicket.

At tea, England were 194 for three with both Pietersen and Collingwood having made responsible fifties to be 52 not out and 50 not out respectively.

Their stand was worth 104 after they'd come together with England faltering at 90 for three.

The pair knew all about building a big partnership after sharing an England fourth-wicket record against Australia of 310 at Adelaide in 2006/07.

Pietersen twice drove Ben Hilfenhaus through extra-cover for resounding boundaries shortly after lunch but his innings had so far featured just three fours in all.

Australia captain Ricky Ponting, after 31 overs of seam bowling, eventually turned to Nathan Hauritz.

The off-spinner had been selected for this

match despite his two wickets on tour so far costing 260 runs.

Pietersen and Collingwood then proceeded to score steadily against Hauritz (none for 41 off 15 overs) as they rebuilt the innings.

Hauritz only looked like taking a wicket when Pietersen charged down the pitch before being saved from a possible stumping when the ball hit his pads.

Left-arm spinner Michael Clarke, primarily a batsman, came on at the other end as Ponting looked to give his quicks a breather.

Clarke almost bowled Pietersen around his pads, the ball missing leg-stump by a whisker.

England went 21 overs between boundaries before Collingwood ended the drought with a couple of square cuts off Hauritz and Pietersen followed up by driving Clarke to long-off.

Before lunch, Australia's pace trio battled hard to overcome a placid pitch.

When fast bowler Brett Lee, a veteran of 76 Tests, was ruled out Monday with a rib injury it meant Australia, who thrashed England 5-0 in 2006/07, would go into this match with an attack where all the bowlers were making Ashes debuts.

They were given a boost thanks to a brilliant catch by Mike Hussey.

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Full marks for Kumara

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Pakistan captain Younus Khan Wednesday hailed the 'brilliant' leadership of his counterpart Kumar Sangakkara after the Sri Lankan led his side to victory in his first Test as captain.

Sri Lanka pulled off a dramatic 50-run win in the first Test at Galle Tuesday after Pakistan faltered in the second innings when chasing a modest target of 168.

Pakistan, who began the fourth day's play needing just 97 to win with eight wickets in hand, lost their last eight batsmen for 46 runs, handing Sri Lanka a 1-0 lead in the three-Test series.

"A lot of credit for the win should go to Sangakkara," Younus told AFP. "His captaincy was brilliant on the last day, especially his decision to give the ball to a spinner."

"He made the right moves in his first Test as captain."

On a lively wicket that had assisted seamers on the first three days, Sangakkara instead gave the second over on the crucial fourth day to left-arm spinner Rangana Herath.

The gamble paid off handsomely. Herath

dismissed the two overnight batsmen, Mohammad Yousuf and Salman Butt, with his first four deliveries, and took two more wickets to finish with career-best figures of 4-15 from 11.3 overs.

The 31-year-old, who had 36 wickets in 14 previous Tests, was not due to play in Galle, but a knee injury to spin wizard Muttiah Muralidaran forced the selectors to summon him from England, where he was playing league cricket.

Sangakkara said he was tempted to start the day with two fast bowlers, but decided to give the ball to Herath because he had troubled Yousuf in the first innings even though the batsman scored a century.

"We knew if we were to have a chance, the first five to six overs were going to be crucial," Sangakkara said. "We needed two to three wickets and we got them five down very early."

"An over or two to Yousuf swung the decision in favour of Rangana. I must admit we were outplayed by Pakistan in the first three days but showed character to come back strongly."

Sangakkara, who took over as captain after Mahela Jayawardene stepped down voluntarily earlier this year to concentrate on his batting,

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D/L aims to rock 'n' roll

Cricket

AFP, London

To an outsider, the complicated world of cricket can seem mundane and impenetrable and the last thing that a rock musician would write an album about.

But this has not deterred Irish musical all-rounders Neil Hannon, best known for his work with The Divine Comedy, and Thomas Walsh, member of the band Pugwash, from taking up the challenge.

Performing under the name Duckworth Lewis Method, after the complex mathematical technique used to set a target for rain-interrupted matches, the pair have penned a tribute to the ancient game, just in time for the Ashes.

"There's a complete absence of cricket songs," Hannon explained to AFP. "Because of its long and varied history it lends itself to good writing. There's so many subtleties to it."

They are bidding to join a limited group of cricket-themed songs, including

10CC's hit "Dreadlock Holiday" featuring the line "I don't like cricket, I love it", and Lord Beginner's 1950 calypso hit "Victory Test Match," written after the West Indies first Test win on English soil.

The album's release this week coincides with the start of the oldest and most bitterly fought sporting competition in world sport.

England and Australia will do battle over five Tests, potentially 150 hours of fierce competition, to claim the coveted urn, which is currently held by Australia.

"I think England ought to win but I wouldn't like to venture by how much," Hannon said.

"Half the reason we made this album about cricket is that it represents something that goes against the incredible pace of modern existence," he added. "You can just sit and exist, it's like meditation."

"We're living in a Twitter world where everything is ridiculously instant and pared down to the minutest degree," bandmate Walsh added. "Cricket is the complete opposite of that."

The surge in popularity of cricket in

Ireland, where it was long derided as a symbol of British colonialism, has been due to impressive performances by the national team and the popularity of Twenty20, the shortest form of the game.

"Maybe people will stop thinking of cricket as just an English thing because it's not. If that was the case why do so many ex-empire countries play it and beat England regularly."

"People are coming to us and saying 'I've always loved the game, I've just been afraid to say it,'" Walsh added. "Ireland beating Pakistan (during the 2007 One Day World Cup) on St Patrick's Day was incredible."

"We're not making any political statement, it's just good that countries took the game from Britain and said: 'We can play it this way.' That's what makes the game brilliant."

There is concern among fans that the razzmatazz and instant excitement of Twenty20 cricket, which rewards risk-taking and power-hitting, could dilute the appeal of the more studious five-day Test match version.

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PHOTO: COURTESY

Indian Harveen Srao (L), who won the 10m air pistol gold, poses for photographs with silver medalist Pakistani Mehwish Masood (R) and bronze winner compatriot Heena Shidhu at the BKSP shooting range in Savar yesterday.