

Johnson's hopes fade

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

The Australians have recorded their maiden first-class victory on this tour of England, but the path to a Test triumph appears more treacherous by the day. Another dispiriting performance from Mitchell Johnson has cast significant doubt over his mechanical and mental readiness for Edgbaston, and placed the one-time spearhead in grave danger of the axe.

Johnson conceded at least one boundary in each of his first six overs on Sunday: a streak that could have stretched to seven but for the negative tactic to bowl short and wide of the Northamptonshire batsmen in the closing stages of his spell. His main persecutor, Niall O'Brien, is more notable for his work behind the stumps for Ireland than his first-class average of 27.68, but the left-hander was made to look every bit the specialist batsman after thumping Johnson for seven of his nine boundaries en route to 58, scored in better than even time.

Johnson's woes also extended to the field, where he dropped Ben Howgego at mid-on off the bowling of Stuart Clark, but it was his analysis of 1 for 65 from 11.1 overs -- ending a match in which he dismissed a solitary tailender, and conceded runs at close to six-per-over against a second-division county line-up -- that might have tipped the selection scales against him. Demotion at Edgbaston would represent a stunning fall from grace for a bowler who, barely a

month ago, arrived on these shores touted as the world's most dangerous paceman and charged with leading Australia's Ashes defence.

Johnson conceded 45 runs in his opening seven-over burst, and his second spell in the final hour of play proved similarly disappointing. Bowling to the Northamptonshire tail, Johnson watched forlornly as his eighth over was dispatched for 12 runs. His next, a maiden, was greeted with a rousing Bronx cheer from the Wantage Road pavilion, as was his eventual dismissal of David Wigley -- concluding a stretch of 35 wicketless overs, dating back to the first innings of the Lord's Test.

"He didn't bowl as well as he would have liked at Lord's," said Tim Nielsen, the Australian coach. "He had some times today when he went for four, five and six an over with the ball flying through gully and slip. That's the nature of the beast."

"The conditions were probably a bit different here to what it was in Lord's. We didn't have our best day or best game with the ball. We also lost 6-30 but we're not calling for five bokes to be dropped from the batting group. That's the game of cricket. Some days you nick them, some days you whack them, other days you bowl all right and some you don't. We've got to keep preparing well and try to do it better each week."

As was the case in the first innings, Johnson's inconsistent length contrasted with that of Clark, who further enhanced his selection chances with two wickets. Clark might well have made a greater impact in the wickets column if not for the dropped catches from Johnson

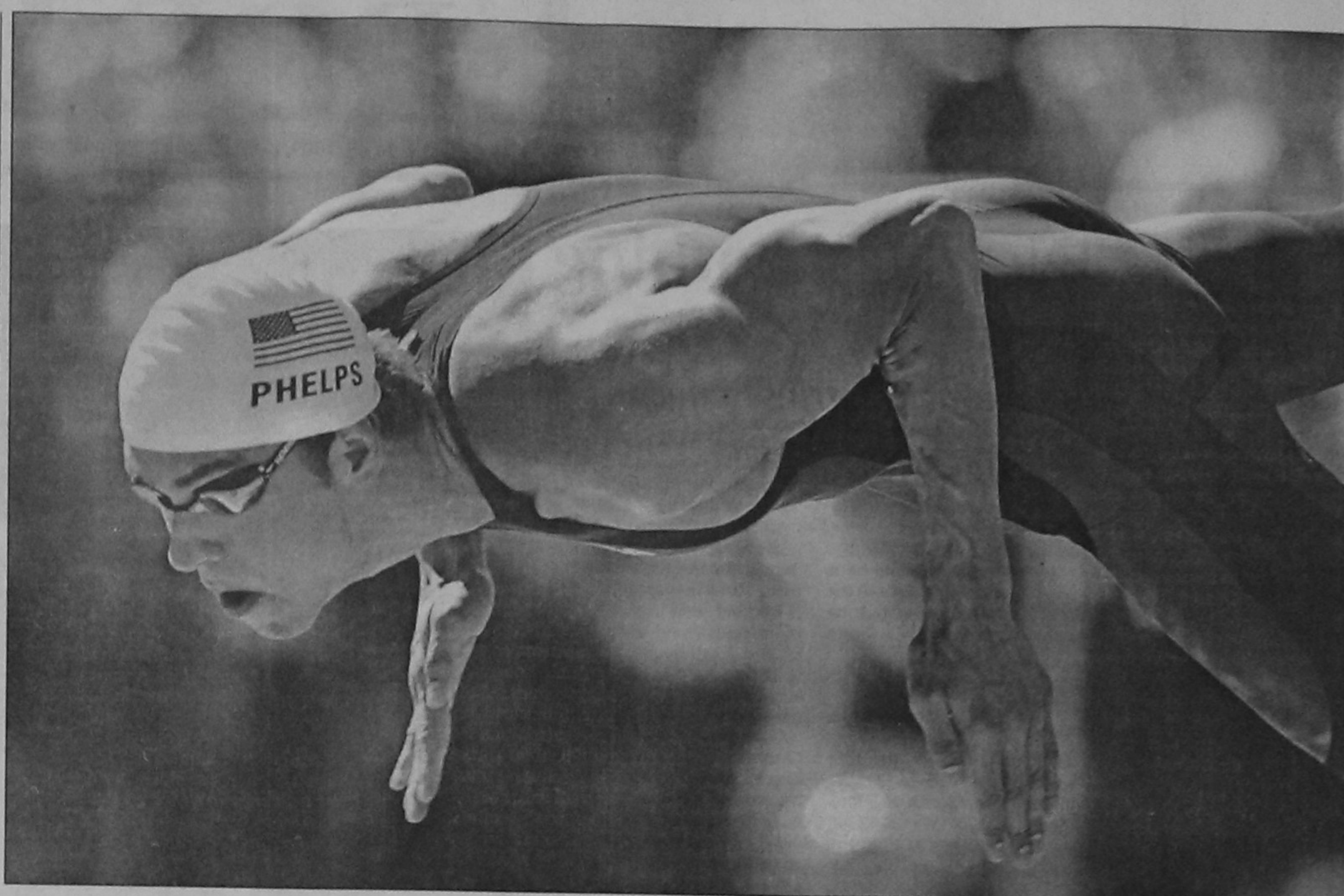
and Phillip Hughes, but nonetheless appears poised to provide the Australian attack with the pressure-building accuracy it lacked in the two Ashes Tests to date.

Entering the three-day match at Wantage Road, many observers felt Clark would duel with Peter Siddie for a sole pace berth at Edgbaston, only for the crosshairs to shift to Johnson as the match progressed. Siddie, curiously, bowled just four disciplined overs in the second innings, possibly indicating the desire of the Australians to keep him on ice for Edgbaston.

"There's nothing wrong with him," Nielsen said. "He's bowling well, he had a good hit out to start. We wanted to get (the others) some bowling and we had to fit them all in."

Australia's allrounders, Shane Watson and Andrew McDonald, did their future selection prospects no harm, with Watson belting his second half-century of the match in the morning session -- this one raised in just 28 deliveries -- and McDonald claiming 4 for 15 from 11 overs.

"He played a pivotal role in four Test matches in a row, where we won three of them, against South Africa," Nielsen said of McDonald, who also scored a sparkling 75 at the top of the order in the second innings against Northants. "He offers us flexibility with our bowling in that he can bowl long spells. He's accurate. He does chip in for wickets as we saw today. He got nearly 70 in his last Test innings for Australia. He catches well. He's a ripping bloke around the team. He brings plenty to the table."



American superstar Michael Phelps prepares to swim during the 200m freestyle qualifications at the FINA World Swimming Championships in Rome yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Indians to play inter-corporate cricket league

CRICINFO, undated

Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Rahul Dravid, Virender Sehwag, Yuvraj Singh and other Indian stars are likely to be part of the Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI) inter-corporate tournament, for which the board has announced the participants and venues.

The 12-team tournament will be held in the first week of September, and will involve 50-over-a-side matches, with the winners picking up 1 crore rupees and the runners-up getting 50 lakh rupees.

The teams have been split into four groups of three, and the first phase of the tournament will have a round-robin format, with the top team in each group advancing to the semi-finals. One semi-final will be held in Mohali and the other in Bangalore, which will also host the final on September 8.

League matches to be played between September 1 and 3.

Group A: Indian Revenue, ITC, Air India (Blue). Matches to be held in Mohali.

Group B: Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited, MRF Oil and Natural Gas Corporation. Matches to be held in Vishakhapatnam.

Group C: All-India public sector sports promotion board, Tatas, Indian Oil Corporation. Matches to be held in Dharamsala.

Group D: Air India (Red), India Cements, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited. Matches to be held in Bangalore.

First semifinal: Mohali -- September 5.

Second semifinal: Bangalore -- September 6.

Final: Bangalore -- September 8.

Massa able

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injuries when he was struck on the head by a spring that broke loose from compatriot Rubens Barrichello's Brawn GP car during qualifying for the Hungarian Grand Prix on Saturday.

The debris hit Massa's helmet just above his left eye at around 275 kph.

Massa was airlifted to a hospital run by the defence ministry and underwent surgery for skull damage immediately.

The Ferrari driver has been kept in an induced coma since then to help his body to get through the postoperative phase of 48 hours but was woken up from time to time to get information on his condition.

Bocskai said a slow recovery was about to start although "this is not the phase yet when this can be stated as a certainty".

A test to determine if water had accumulated in his bowels was negative, Bocskai said, adding the results were "reassuring".

On Sunday, Massa underwent a computed tomography (CT) scan to determine if cerebral damage had occurred.

Asked whether the driver suffered brain injuries, Bocskai said: "The doctors did not observe any signs from the CT to confirm (an injury) but (...) it is still early to say anything."

Massa is to undergo another brain scan Monday and an update on his condition will be issued later, ministry spokeswoman Andrea Nagy said.

Phelps's farewell to new stroke

Swimming

AFP, Rome

Michael Phelps's experiment with a new freestyle stroke, designed to help him conquer the 100m free, is officially over.

"I'm happy to see it go," Phelps said. "It was frustrating."

The 14-time Olympic gold medalist had unveiled the windmilling stroke earlier this season, but coach Bob Bowman had said Sunday night that he'd be taking Phelps back to his freestyle roots.

"When I look at it, I see this kind of stroke, and he's not really doing the new stroke and he's not really doing the old stroke," Bowman said after Phelps led off the US 4x100m freestyle relay team that snatched a surprise gold over Russia and heavily favoured France.

Phelps's lead-off leg of 47.78 was outside his American record of 47.51 set in leading off the victorious relay squad at the Beijing Olympics.

"I would say we're going back to the old

stroke and that's the last time he's doing that," Bowman said. "So to be that close to his time (from Beijing) is really good."

Phelps, who was content to post the second-fastest time in heats of the 200m freestyle on Monday morning, said the detour had left him a little off-kilter with his original freestyle stroke, but it was coming around.

"My old stroke's kind of off a little bit, but it's getting better, felt smoother this morning."

The 200m free is the first of Phelps's three individual events in Rome, to go with three relays. He will also swim the 100m and 200m butterfly.

It's far from the gruelling schedule that saw him net an unprecedented eight gold medals at the Beijing Games, especially with the absence of the demanding 400m individual medley.

Even so, the 24-year-old said he expected to be feeling it by the end of the week.

"It's probably going to be about the same because I'm not in as good a shape as last year," Phelps said. "One of the trainers today said 'How's your body feeling?' I said by the end it's going to feel the same as in Beijing."

Aussie spinners to flick 'doosra'

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australia's leading spin bowlers say they are firmly against coaching the controversial 'doosra', with one Test great saying it is an illegal delivery.

The 'doosra', an Urdu term for a ball that turns away from a right-hander, as opposed to a conventional off-spinner which turns towards him, has engendered debate over its legitimacy in world cricket.

Pakistan spinner Saqlain Mushtaq has been credited with introducing the unorthodox finger-spinning delivery and it has been used by, among others, Test cricket's all-time leading wicket-taker Muttiah Muralidaran and India's Harbhajan Singh.

But a gathering of Australia's prominent spin bowlers at a 'spin summit' last month in Brisbane, details of which emerged on Monday, concluded that the doosra cannot be bowled legally and there was no place for it to be taught in Australia.

The verdict had the unanimous agreement of the group including Shane Warne, Stuart MacGill, Jim Higgs, Gavin Robertson, Terry

Jenner, Peter Philpott and Ashley Mallett.

Mallett, a former Test off-spinner and now an author, said he believed the doosra could not be delivered by a finger-spinner without it being 'chucked' and was thus against cricket's rules.

"There was unanimous agreement that the off-spinner's 'other one', the doosra, should not be coached in Australia," Mallett wrote in the Adelaide Review published Monday.

"I have never seen anyone actually bowl the doosra. It has to be a chuck."

Shoaib courts PCB trouble

AFP, Lahore

Controversial Pakistan paceman Shoaib Akhtar ran into trouble Monday again as cricket authorities accused him of violating his contract by criticising team management during a television interview.

The 33-year-old paceman blamed his withdrawal from the World Twenty20 team on team managers, saying he considered taking a legal action against them after a confidential medical report was leaked.

The paceman was found to be suffering from "genital warts" a week before the team's departure for last month's World Twenty20 in England and was withdrawn from the team, which won the event by beating Sri Lanka in the final.

"Akhtar has been served with a show cause notice as he violated the code of conduct," director of operations at the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Zakir Khan, told AFP.

India safe

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important members of the FIH family. For the global development of hockey, it is important that Indian hockey should come up and play to its true potential.

"The FIH hopes that hosting the 2010 World Cup will give a tremendous boost to Indian hockey."

Eight-time Olympic champions India failed to qualify for the 2008 Beijing Games but have gained an automatic entry for the World Cup by virtue of being the hosts.

India, which hosted the 1982 World Cup in Bombay -- now Mumbai -- have won the tournament once in 1975 in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur.

Contador conquers France

FROM PAGE 17
Champs Elysees and his 10th from the past two editions, Contador threw his arms in the air in triumph.

The Spaniard first won the race in 2007, and since then he has shown his class by winning the Tour of Italy and the Tour of Spain -- winning both races in 2008 when his team were not invited to the Tour de France.

"There was always a risk I could lose right up until the end, but I held on," said Contador.

"The Tour is the hardest race in the world, but this year it was particularly difficult. That's why I am so happy."

After a quiet start to the race during which Astana teammate

Armstrong came close to taking command Contador moved up a gear once the action moved to the mountains.

He distanced most of his rivals, including Armstrong, on the first summit finish to Arcalis in the Pyrenees on stage seven and then won the second summit finish at Verbier to pull on the yellow jersey.

After some thrilling stages in the Alps, where Schleck proved his only worthy rival, Contador continued to dominate before ending any doubts over his superiority by defiantly winning the second time trial.

There was suspense right up to Saturday's penultimate stage but sadly for the organisers -- who had hoped the yellow jersey battle would end there -- it was all about the podium places.

On Saturday Armstrong did enough to hold on to a third place which was under threat from Britain's Bradley Wiggins, who finished fourth.

Norwegian Thor Hushovd meanwhile did enough at the finish to keep the sprinters' green jersey for the points competition, emulating his feat of 2005.

Hushovd and the rest of the sprintfield were well beaten in the battle for the stage, but the Norwegian had bigger objectives.

"I started this morning with one aim, to keep this green jersey," said Hushovd, who finished with 280 points, 10

more than Cavendish.

"I battled throughout the race to win this jersey. I didn't want to take any risks in the final sprint."

Italian Franco Pellizzotti of Liquigas finished as the 'King of the Mountains', having won the polka dot jersey awarded to the best climber.

Schleck, the only rider to really threaten Contador, capped his superb second place finish by securing the white jersey for the best placed rider aged 25 and under for the second consecutive year.

Racing in the Saxo Bank team with older brother Frank, Andy has been tipped as a future Tour de France winner and will likely be a key player next year when he faces Contador and Armstrong, who will race for different teams.

Schleck, who finished runner-up in the 2007 Giro d'Italia, said: "I owe part of this achievement to my brother Frank, who for three weeks sacrificed himself trying to help me."

Having ended his three-and-a-half year retirement in January 2009, the 37-year-old Armstrong proved he can still cut it in the peloton by dominating a host of younger rivals to claim a deserved podium place.

However the already slim chances of him and Contador racing for the same outfit were buried on Saturday when the Spaniard said he would not race with Armstrong in his new team for 2010, RadioShack.

New ball nothing

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thought they would have had more bounce and pace. But it suited our spinners, and Razzak came back into the side, bowled well, and did a good job for us."

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of first one-day international between West Indies and Bangladesh at Windsor Park in Dominica on Sunday:

BANGLADESH
Tamim c Fletcher b Roach 0
Zunaed c Lewis b Bernard 36
Ashrafur run out 57
Rokibul b Roach 12
Shakib c Dowlin b Roach 54
Mushfiqur c Sammy b Lewis 11
Mahmudullah c Bernard b Miller 42
Nayeem not out 7
Razzak lbw b Roach 0
Rasel b Roach 7
Rubel not out 1
Extras: (b-1, lb-8, w-10) 19
Total: (For 9 wks in 50 overs) 246
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-74, 3-97, 4-128, 5-149, 6-228, 7-230, 8-231, 9-241.

WEST INDIES
Richards lbw b Razzak 1
Fletcher b Rasel 5
Smith lbw b Shakib 65
Reifer c Rokibul b Mahmudullah 3
Dowlin b Razzak 10
Bernard c Tamim b Nayeem 38
Sammy lbw b Razzak 28
Lewis b Rubel 21

Miller not out 16
Roach run out 0
Pascal lbw b Razzak 0
Extras: (b-4, lb-1, w-2) 7
Total: (All out in 43.4 overs) 194
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-8, 3-23, 4-42, 5-120, 6-130, 7-171, 8-189, 9-191.

Bowler O M R W
Rasel 8 0 30 1
Razzak 9.4 0 39 4
Mahmudullah 7 0 38 1
Shakib 8 0 26 1
Naeem 7 0 28 1
Rubel 4 0 28 1
Result: Bangladesh won by 52 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Abdur Razzak.
Toss: West Indies.
Umpires: Billy Doctrove and Tony Hill.

Akhtar's

FROM PAGE 17
and one of the best Pakistani bowlers but it will take him some time to return because Aamer is now bowling really well."

He pointed out that international returns were not easy and cited the cases of Umar Gul and Sohail Tanvir. "Even Sohail Tanvir was struggling in Twenty20," Akram said. "Umar Gul is phenomenal but I don't think he bowled well enough in the Test matches (in Sri Lanka)."

My advice to Gul is: Twenty20 and ODI are fine but if you are to be recognised as a good bowler you have to do well in Test cricket too."

Rafa upbeat

FROM PAGE 20
Andriy Voronin, Albert Riera and Fernando Torres also got on the scoresheet.

But at this early stage, the manager would not be drawn on what he thinks is his best 11.

"We still have three more games before we start the season against Tottenham so there's still plenty of time to decide on the team," he said, adding that there may be new players on their way to Anfield.

"I am really pleased with the squad and as professionals we tend not to talk about our targets but we do have some, but we will keep them to ourselves."

One headache still unresolved is whether Xabi Alonso will stay or go to Real Madrid.

The midfielder played 13 minutes on Sunday and Benitez said he must make up his mind.

"He has three more years on his contract and we know that he's a great player. That's the reason we signed him and we've renewed his contract," he said.

"So you will have to ask him."

Liverpool flew back to England late Sunday with a friendly against Espanyol on August 2 their next action, a game that is expected to see the return of captain Steven Gerrard.

He missed their Asian tour after being accused of assault but was cleared of the charges on Friday.

Terry staying

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Carlo Ancelotti had made it clear they wanted Terry to stay.

Former Chelsea manager Guus Hiddink said he expected Terry to remain with the London club.

The Dutchman, who led the club in a caretaker capacity from February until the end of the season before returning to his full-time role as Russia coach, told the BBC: "It depends always on the circumstances within the club and City have a lot of ambition. They want to be competitive with the top four."

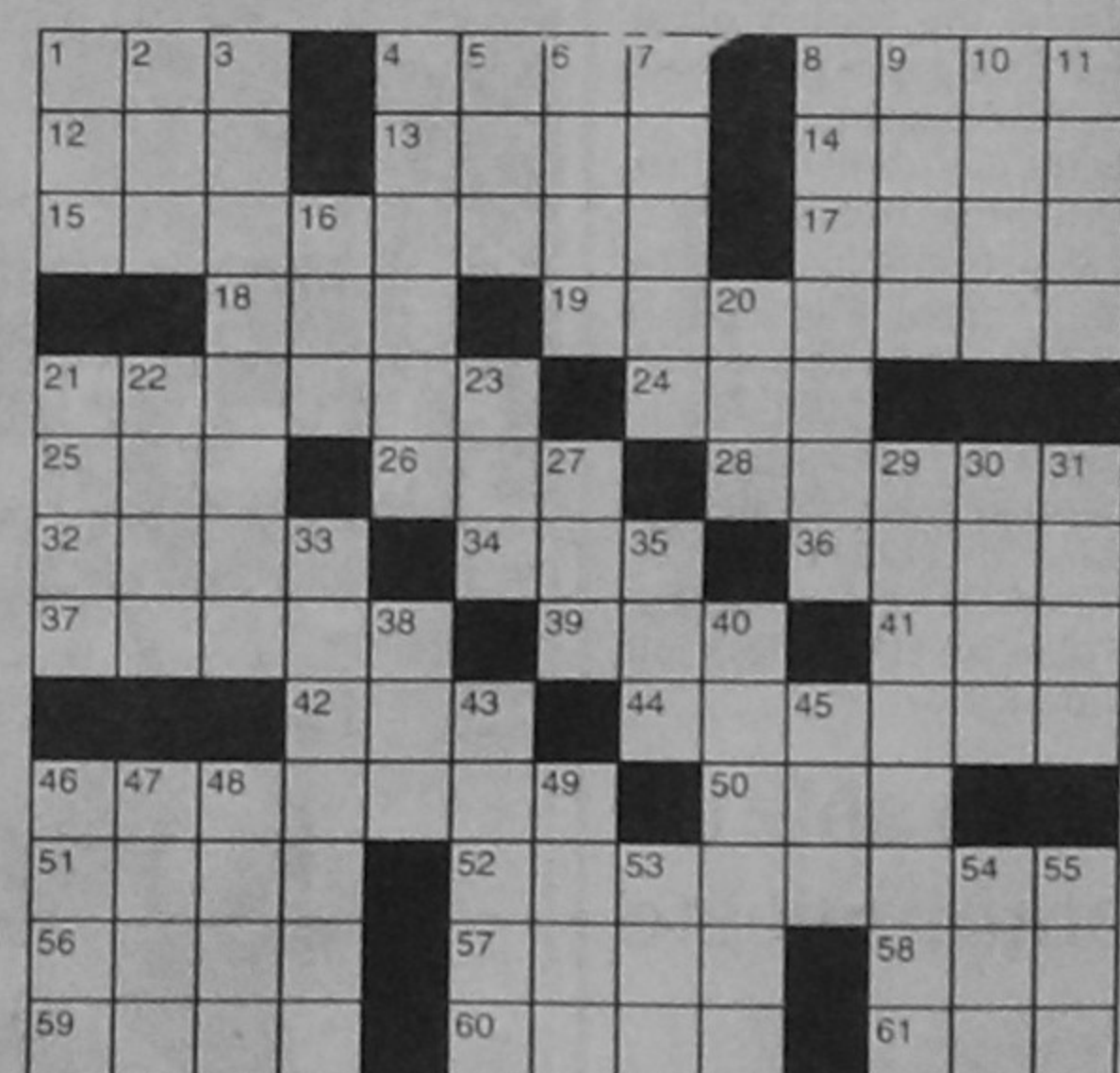
"I haven't spoken with John, but if the team is competitive enough there shouldn't be any concern at Chelsea."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 Suitably
4 Agenda
8 Inquisitive
12 Scratch
13 Evoking
14 Killer
15 Offstage
17 "Hud"
18 Swab
19 Charm-
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24 Nosh
25 Fuss
26 Early
28 Ball-
32 Type-
34 Chic
36 Entreat
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57 Unrivaled
58 Author
59 Winged
60 Basin
61 Put down
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Solution time: 25 mins.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: HOW OFTEN HAVE I
WARNED YOU TO PICK UP THAT PRONGED FORK
VERY CAREFULLY? TINE AND TINE AGAIN!

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: T equals E