



Abahani's Argentine trainer Diego Alvaro (R) conducts a training session at the Zia Uddyan in the city yesterday.

Afridi lifts Pakistan

AFP, Colombo

Pakistan's new Twenty20 captain Shahid Afridi smashed 50 off 37 balls to steer the world champions to 172-5 in a T20 international against Sri Lanka here on Wednesday.

Afridi hit two sixes and four boundaries in his maiden game as captain after replacing Test and one-day skipper Younus Khan, who has retired from the shortest format of the game.

A sell-out crowd of 35,000 at the Premadasa stadium watched the first T20 match between the rivals since the World Twenty20 final in England in June, when Pakistan beat Sri Lanka by eight wickets.

Pakistan, who elected to bat after winning the toss, lost a wicket off the first ball when

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Did U Know?

Physiologists claim that rowing a 2,000-meter race – equivalent to 1.25 miles – is equal to playing back-to-back basketball games.



Kevin Pietersen

(England batsman)

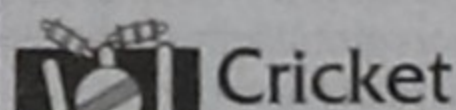
"I hate missing matches for England and especially during an Ashes summer but now that the decision has been made to undergo surgery I'm confident I can return to the England team injury-free following a course of rehabilitation."



ESPN

Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 9:30pm

ENGLAND V AUSTRALIA: 5TH ASHES TEST, THE OVAL Marcus not in for a call



CRICINFO, undated

England's national selector, Geoff Miller, has ruled out the possibility of a shock comeback for Marcus Trescothick, but has admitted that Mark Ramprakash is being seriously considered in a one-off capacity for the crucial fifth Test at The Oval, as England attempt to bounce back from their Headingley humiliation, and reclaim the Ashes for only the second time in 20 years.

Speaking to Cricinfo, Miller said that the squad selection, which will be announced at 9.30 on Sunday morning, would have to strike a balance between the long-term requirement to build the tight and cohesive unit essential for future England success, and the short-term desire to win the world's most prestigious Test series. And that means that Ramprakash, who turns 40 next month but has averaged 100 in each of his last three seasons for Surrey, cannot be discounted.

"Mark has not stated he's not available for international cricket, so we will discuss that," Miller told Cricinfo. "It's not just my decision, it's a team decision, and we'll sit down as a unit. We have a consistency and continuity angle as far as selection policy is concerned and we try to stick to that as much as possible. But we do want to win this series, which is a matter of winning this game in a one-match situation, so it's a very difficult equation as (is the case with) all selection policies."

At the same time, Miller defended the players he selected for the fateful fourth Test at Headingley, and reiterated that there would not be a kneejerk reaction ahead of the Oval showdown, regardless of how much speculation is going on in the media.

"I don't think anyone has ever said being a selector is an easy job, and one bad performance like that spotlights it," said Miller. "A selector is there to be shot at – if we do well the players have done well, if we do badly it's the selectors' fault – and that goes with the territory. We fully understand that, but the job now is to rectify the performance and win at The Oval, and that's what our minds are on."

Oval, and that's what our minds are on.

"What's happened is that the press have jumped on one mediocre performance -- which it was, and there's no getting away from that, it was very much an under-performance, and that has got to be rectified -- but it's not as though we are three or four-nil down, it's 1-1. If we win this Test match we regain the Ashes, and that's what we intend to do."

"We as an England team tend to do well with our backs to the wall so we are hoping we can bounce back mentally and technically, and I'm sure the players can, because they are international quality players."

In particular Miller defended his No. 3 batsman, Ravi Bopara, who entered the series on the back of three consecutive hundreds against West Indies but who has since managed 105 runs at 15 in four Tests. At Headingley he looked like a man in need of a break from the front line as part of a middle order that contributed 16 runs for six dismissals, but Miller disagreed.

"Not necessarily," he said. "It's an option, certainly, and we'll strongly look at it, but you don't become a bad player overnight, just because you're in a bad trot. It also depends what you are like mentally as well as technically. We'll look at it in discussion with the captain and coach, see what he's like in the changing room, and if it's necessary we'll go down that line."

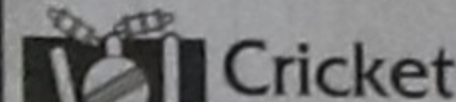
"But we don't just make changes for the sake of making changes," he said. "Our meetings are not two-minute affairs, never have been, never will be. We'll look at every aspect of each game separately, and hopefully make the right decisions because this Test decides the series."

Those decisions will also include the role that Andrew Flintoff may or may not make in what will be his final Test before retirement. On Monday a leading specialist, Andy Williams, concluded that the swelling in his right knee had reduced significantly, but though he welcomed the news, Miller said that Flintoff would ultimately be judged by how he performed in the nets, just as he was prior to his omission at Headingley.

"It looks very favourable at the moment, but we'll wait and see what's happened in a couple

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Younus won't give in



AFP, Karachi

Pakistan captain Younus Khan accepts responsibility for historic Test and one-day defeats in Sri Lanka but is rejecting calls to resign, lashing out at his critics instead.

Pakistan lost the three-Test series 2-0 with one match drawn, and went down 3-2 in the one-dayers, to post their first-ever series defeats in both forms of the game in Sri Lanka.

Interviewed in Wednesday's Jang newspaper, Younus said that as skipper, he accepted responsibility for the dismal showing.

"I accept the responsibility of defeat, but will not apologise to anyone nor will I resign as captain because it's part of the game to lose and win," he was quoted as saying.

Younus, 31, is not part of the team playing the only Twenty20 match against Sri Lanka in Colombo on Wednesday against Sri Lanka in the newest form of the game after guiding Pakistan to the World T20 title in England in June.

Younus rounded on the campaign to oust him as captain.

"I am trying my level best to lead the team and achieve the best results but some people want me to relinquish the captaincy, which I won't. Am I not a good captain, or do I lack leadership qualities?" he said.

Former Pakistan players have launched a scathing attack on Younus, also demanding the head of coach Intikhab Alam, manager Yawar Saeed and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officials.

Pakistan, needing 97 runs with eight wickets intact, lost the first Test at Galle by 50 runs. They were also well set at 285-1 in the second innings of the second Test in Colombo, before losing the match by seven wickets.

"Resignations should come from top to bottom after the humiliating defeats," former chief selector and international spinner Abdul Qadir said.

Younus told Jang that the team's success in the last two one-day matches showed it was able to win in Sri Lanka.

"We won the last two one-day matches by huge margins, and it proved that the team had the capacity and the talent to win the Tests and one-day matches. But due to the batsmen's inconsistency, we failed to finish properly," he said.

Younus defended team unity after criticism from former players and the media.

"There were no differences in the team. In fact I can say that the team was never as united as it was during the Sri Lanka tour," Younus said, rejecting match-fixing allegations levelled against the team.

"Baseless allegations are affecting the team's performances," he said, after reports emerged of bookmakers trying to contact Pakistani players in their Colombo hotel during the Tests last month.

"No one should doubt my integrity. I can never resort to any wrongdoing."

The PCB said it had reported the matter to the Anti-Corruption and Security Unit of the International Cricket Council, which gave the Pakistan team the all-clear after an investigation.

BAF president named

SPORTS REPORTER

ASM Ali Kabir, secretary of Communications Ministry (Road and Railway Department) has been made president of the Bangladesh Athletic Federation yesterday.

The Youth and Sports Ministry appointed Kabir under the second 20 of the National Sports Council Act-1974. The ministry a few months earlier appointed ATM Hayatuzzaman Khan the Bangladesh Athletic Federation president.

Asian chess

SPORTS REPORTER

GM Ziaur Rahman was in the second position of the Asian Zonal Chess Championship at the end of the sixth round held yesterday in Delhi, India. Zia earned 4.5 points from five matches, said a Bangladesh Chess Federation press release.

Zia beat Amir Karim of Pakistan in the day's round while GM Reefat Bin Sattar, who earned one point also playing five matches, enjoyed an off-day yesterday.

In the women section, Sharmin Sultana Shirin beat Indian Women Grandmaster Swathi Ghatge to earn 2.5 points from four games.

Women's handball

SPORTS REPORTER

Viquarunnissa Noon School and College recorded a massive 16-0 win over Ispahani Girl's School and College in the 12th Delta Life Women's Handball Competition at the Women's Sports Complex ground yesterday.

In the day's other matches, Holy Cross 'B' defeated Central Women's College 'B' by 3-1 goals while Siddeshwari Girl's College crushed Central Women's College by 13-1 goals.

BCCI to do the battle

INTERNET, undated

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) will write to the Attorney-General Goolam E Vahanvati on the controversial "whereabouts" clause of the World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) code adopted by the International Cricket Council (ICC).

The BCCI, apparently, is keen to ensure that it has clarity on the issue, even as a high-powered ICC committee attempts to settle the matter. The first question the board is asking is whether the obligation to disclose whereabouts would infringe on fundamental rights under the Indian Constitution, if they were obligations imposed by the Indian State.

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Shakib not getting complacent

SPORTS REPORTER



Stand-in skipper Shakib Al Hasan was on the lookout against complacency despite the Tigers tightening their grips on Zimbabwe by winning the first two games of the five-match series quite convincingly.

"I believe we have been successful so far because we could keep our concentration going for the entire match. Also, we never allowed pressure to get to us. The boys are playing according to the game plan and I attribute the results to team effort," Shakib, who led from the front with a blazing hundred to script a 49-run victory in the second match, was quoted as saying in TigerCricket.com.

"The series is still open and that's why we just need to keep our focus and do our job in the middle," he said.

Bangladesh have now won seven ODIs on the trot with Shakib himself is on a five-match unbeaten streak as captain. They will play their third one-dayer at the Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo tomorrow.

The 22-year old left-hander Shakib hit a dazzling 64-ball 104, the fastest century by a Bangladeshi and the ninth quickest in ODI history, and took two wickets to star in Bangladesh's victory in the second match after former skipper Mohammed Ashraful guided the team to an eight-wicket victory in the first match with a hundred.

The world's number one all-rounder in the one-day rankings was determined to maintain the momentum and regarding his own eye-

catching form the 22-year-old felt that attitude was key.

"I have seen that you have more chances of succeeding if you go into a game in a positive frame of mind. I have tried to be positive and it has worked for me so far," said Shakib.

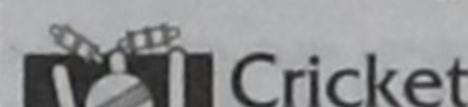
The Bangladesh players, fresh from their 49-run win in the second ODI, had a much needed day's rest yesterday in Bulawayo in their hectic schedule. With a two-day gap before the third

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SHAKIB AL HASAN

Ricky stokes Ashes fire



AFP, London

Australia captain Ricky Ponting believes England's focus on Andrew Flintoff's fitness and other selection issues will dent their hopes of regaining the Ashes.

Ponting's team claimed a resounding victory at Headingley over the weekend to tie the series at 1-1 and leave England needing to win the final Test at The Oval next week.

In the days since Headingley, the fitness of Flintoff and the form of England's middle-order batsman has come under close scrutiny and Ponting admits he has enjoyed seeing Andrew Strauss's team under the microscope.

For much of the series it was Australia who were criticised over team selection after disappointing displays in the second and third Tests.

But in his column in the Daily Telegraph, Ponting said: "It is very hard for us not to notice these distractions. Admittedly these side issues do not make winning the Oval Test any easier for us, but it is fair to say the speculation makes it harder for England."

"Up until the last couple of days we were the

story. Following the defeat at Lord's the questions were all about our team and how on earth we could win the Ashes. That all seems to have changed."

"It's all proof to me that two weeks can be an awfully long time in cricket. For the first time since the end of the Cardiff Test talk and attention has shifted away from us."

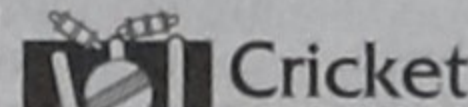
Ponting also claimed England gambled with their decision not to risk Flintoff at Headingley as the all-rounder struggles with knee injury that has forced him to announce his retirement from Test cricket at the end of the series.

"Flintoff bowled well at Lord's and when you travel around England you can sense the people love him," Ponting said. "He gives everyone a lift and enlivens the crowd. But apart from Lord's, where we performed poorly, we have played him pretty well in this series and England have a tough decision to make."

"Looking back to last winter, I had a similar choice to make when Ben Hilfenhaus and Peter Siddle were carrying injuries in South Africa. It got to a stage where I had to ask directly if they were ready to go and could get through the Test match."

"When you are involved in selection as a captain you want players to be 100 per cent honest with you."

Clark's place not certain



CRICINFO, undated

Stuart Clark's first innings burst may have been the pivotal moment in Australia's thunderous victory at Headingley, but Andrew Hilditch, Australia's chairman of selectors, insists the veteran paceman will not be guaranteed a starting berth for the fifth Test.

Hilditch, speaking at Australia's limited-overs squad announcement on Tuesday, was adamant Mitchell Johnson, Peter Siddle and Ben Hilfenhaus remained Australia's first-choice Test fast bowlers, with Clark set to duel with Nathan Hauritz for the final bowling berth ahead of the Ashes decider at The Oval.

Clark dismissed Alastair Cook, Paul Collingwood and Stuart Broad in a sublime first innings performance which yielded figures of 3 for 18 from ten overs. His unwavering accuracy and unnerving bounce provided the Australian attack with the pressure-building intensity it sorely lacked at Lord's and Edgbaston, and his

outswing perfectly complemented Johnson's movement back into England's right-handers on a torrid first morning.

It was no coincidence Clark's first call-up of the series coincided with Australia's first victory, however Hilditch refused to concede that his panel had erred in not picking him earlier in the tour. Moreover, Hilditch predicted Clark's involvement in the fifth Test would be more dependant on conditions than form, with a dry pitch to tip the selection balance back in Hauritz's favour.

"(South Africa) was one of the best series victories I've been involved in and we had three strong fast bowlers in Johnson, Siddle and Hilfenhaus which took us through that series," Hilditch told reporters in Adelaide. "It was always going to be very tough for someone to knock them out."

"Although they've probably taken a bit of time to hit their straps, the reality is all three are now the leading wicket-takers in the Ashes, so I think all those selections have been absolutely spot-on. We've also played on very dry wickets

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PHOTO: STAR

A Siddeshwari player is about to shoot in their 12th Delta Life Women's College Handball match against Central Women's College at the Dhanmondi Women's Complex yesterday.