

Mates back Ponting

AFP, Sydney

Australian cricketers refused to blame beleaguered captain Ricky Ponting for the deflating Ashes loss to England as they returned home on Wednesday.

Fast bowler Stuart Clark, one of a handful of players not required for a limited-overs series in England and Scotland, said calls to replace Ponting were "ludicrous."

"Ricky Ponting has got my full support and I think he's the best man to be captain," he told reporters at Sydney Airport. "I think it's ludicrous that anyone say anything other."

Opening batsman Simon Katich said the whole team must take responsibility for the second successive failure in England, both under Ponting, which toppled Australia from its long-held number one Test ranking.

"There was 11 of us out there that had an opportunity to win the Ashes—you can't just blame it on one person," he said.

"We had our chances throughout the whole five Tests. Unfortunately when those chances came around, whether it was Cardiff, Lord's, The Oval, we didn't grab them."

Cricketer Australia has backed Ponting to stay in the job despite calls for Michael Clarke, Katich or even retired spin master Shane Warne to take over.

Meanwhile Ponting, who is due to arrive home later, insisted he "couldn't be more excited about the future" in an article for The Australian newspaper.

"While we had bad sessions at Lord's and The Oval which cost us both games, we completely dominated England at Cardiff and Leeds, showing there was little between the teams," the captain wrote.

"Coming off the back of our strong series victory in South Africa earlier in the year, I believe we're on the right track and our younger players can only get better with experience."

Bhaji wants

FROM PAGE 17

that much but as a cricketer I want to play more Test matches. It is just you need to bring a lot of people into the stadium by creating that kind of buzz in the market," Harbhajan said. As a solution, suggested recently by Sachin Tendulkar, Harbhajan said it would be good to offer free entry to students on weekends.

"If Sachin Tendulkar plays a Ranji Trophy match a 25,000-strong crowd turns up. So if you plan properly then certainly we will draw people back to the stadium to watch Test cricket," Harbhajan said. "I have seen whenever we play in Chennai or Bangalore we get the same crowd as we would get for a one-day match."

SL make

FROM PAGE 17

drive and looped the ball back to the bowler.

Sangakkara and Jayawardene had put on 40 for the third wicket when Vettori was rewarded a second time during an unchanged 17-over spell to reach the milestone.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the first day of the second Test between New Zealand and Sri Lanka at the Sinhalese Sports Club on Wednesday:

SRI LANKA: First innings Paranevithana c Taylor b Vettori 19 Dilshan c & b O'Brien 29 Sangakkara c Oram b Vettori 50 M Jayawardene not out 79 Samaraweera not out 78 Extras: (b-2, lb-4, nb-1) 7 Total: (For 3 wickets in 90 overs) 262 To bat: Kapugedera, Muralidaran, Thushara, Prasad, P Jayawardene, Herath.

Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-75, 3-115.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Martin	14	2	45	0
O'Brien	16	3	52	1
Vettori	30	11	65	2
Oram	18	6	45	0
Patel	9	1	32	0
Ryder	3	1	17	0

Much ado

FROM PAGE 17

BFF president SA Sultan assured them that a portion of the Balur Math would be kept for the children, but the whole ground was now going under the control of the BFF and thus they had taken to the streets.

The committee submitted a memorandum to the BFF general secretary Al Musabbir Sadi and was later due to submit the letters to the state minister for youth and sports, chairman of the parliament committee of the youth and sports and the NSC secretary.

BFF general secretary Al Musabbir Sadi said that at the moment they had nothing to do as the government allotted the land to them and now they are awaiting the decision of the government.

Ricky vows redemption

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australian skipper Ricky Ponting said Wednesday he was as hungry as ever despite his side's loss in the Ashes series and would love to tour England again in 2013, even if he was no longer Test captain.

Ponting faced a grilling from the media at Sydney Airport after arriving back on home soil as the first Australian captain in 119 years to lose two Ashes series in England.

He batted away suggestions he may stand down as captain, saying he wanted a chance at redemption in the next Ashes tour of England in four years' time, when he will be 38 years old.

"Having a pretty bitter and sour taste in my mouth at the end of that Test match, I'd love to be able to go back and give it one more crack," Ponting said.

Australia's most prolific scorer of Test runs said he still had a lot to offer the team, both as a batsman and a leader, but vowed to continue his Test career even if he lost the captaincy.

"If it ends up getting to the point where I'm not the captain, my hunger and determination to keep playing this game are as good as ever," he said.

"If that's with a 'c' next to my name, all well and good. If it's not, I still think I have a lot to offer, particularly a lot of the younger guys who are around our set-up at the moment."

While the once all-conquering Australia has slipped from first to fourth in the Test rankings, Ponting said the young side was heading in

the right direction.

He said the bowling attack of Ben Hilfenhaus, Peter Siddie and Mitchell Johnson, as well as all-rounder Shane Watson, would learn from the defeat.

"In years to come those guys are going to win a lot of Test matches for Australia and as a result of this series they all should become better players," he said.

Ponting is in Australia for a short break arranged before

the Ashes loss and will miss his side's Twenty20 matches against England, a one-dayer against Scotland and the start of the one-day series against England.

"I've got four one-day games to play at the end of this Ashes tour when I go back (to England), I've got the Champions Trophy (in South Africa next month) around the corner... that's all I can focus on at the moment," he said.



PHOTO: AFP
Australia captain Ricky Ponting speaks at a press conference at the Sydney International Airport after arriving back from England yesterday.

Tim looking for answers

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Tim Nielsen, the Australia coach, has begun the soul-searching after his side's Ashes defeat, wondering what he could have done differently while trying to convince himself everything possible was ticked off. On the last tour Nielsen's old mentor John Buchanan suffered the same result, but this crop's loss was harder to deal with due to the sudden late turnaround.

Back in 2005 the defeat was sensed weeks out from The Oval. Until Australia's collapse of 10 for 87 last Friday, Ricky Ponting's men were convinced they would take the Ashes in south London, win or draw. A couple of days on and Nielsen is analysing his responsibility in the result.

"I take a lot of it," he said as the team sped by train from London to Edinburgh for Friday's one-dayer against Scotland. "I feel as though maybe there are things I could have done. Were they well enough prepared mentally before the game? We hope we talk about all of those different scenarios so they're ready for them when they happen. Did we have a plan in place, a mindset in place that allowed them to adapt and cope with continual loss of wickets?"

So many questions with answers that are probably 'no'. It was the crucial moments, at Lord's and The Oval, where both the young and experienced members of the side failed. On Sunday, while the hosts partied, the visitors were beginning the glum reflections.

"In the end that's what my role is, I'm not running away from that," Nielsen said. "I understand that my job is to support and set up the team as well as they can be so they play their best, and we didn't play our best. There's got to be something missing."

"That's what the last couple of days have been for me, searching for that answer or trying to find in my own mind what I could

have done better or where we could have done things differently to ensure a different result."

In this part of the Ashes cycle there is less than a year and a half before the chance for revenge comes at home in 2010-11. However, it is an age before Australia can attempt to erase their misfortune in England.

"For me it was definitely a feeling of opportunity lost," Nielsen said. "You don't know where you'll be in four years' time, we don't know who will be around, you don't know what injuries will occur, or what could happen in your world. That means you need to grab these opportunities when they present, that's the biggest thing that's burning me at the moment. We had our chance and we didn't quite nail it."

All the players are feeling the pain, particularly as they see -- or try to ignore -- the joy in the faces of the England players and their supporters. "People are going to cop it in different ways and process it in different ways," he said. "Some of the young blokes probably woke up and, while it hurts, it would never have the hurt as say a Ponting or a Clarke or a Katich, who have gone through it all before, or a Lee. They may think 'Geez that's two times now.' That starts to ram it home a little bit."

"It's going to chew at you for as long as you let it -- that's the challenge, not to let it become all-consuming. We can't change it now, we can't fix it, we've got to live with it."

On Monday night the Test specialists left London and the following day the squad travelled to Scotland for their only warm-up before the nine limited-overs matches against England, beginning with a Twenty20 in Manchester on Sunday. "It's not going to be any retribution or anything like that," Nielsen said. "We've got a World Cup in 18 months so we're really looking forward towards that, and we've also got the Champions Trophy in South Africa on the back end of this tour." None of those tournaments mean as much as the Ashes.

Jamie couldn't be happier

FROM PAGE 17

though still very young and on the whole very inexperienced, have just shown the wisdom and improvement that comes with time."

He also heaped praises on Shabib Al Hasan's captaincy. "Shabib's captaincy was successful although at times his youth was tested and his patience with others of lesser ability in his team tested. He led magnificently with his own performance throughout the tour and I think won three or four man of the match awards and man of the series as well."

And what he believe is that after this fantastic success, the critics admit his team's improvement at the highest level.

"If nothing else I hope that all of those who saw fit to criticise this team of young cricketers can now admit that there is definite signs of us improving and that we are on the right track for big things in the future. Young players take time to mature and gain confidence at this level and we have now taken a major step forward," he added.

The Australian coach, who

is now enjoying vacation at home after a long 51-day trip, however said that his young side needs to improve more to threaten the top sides at the world's rankings.

"We all know that we have a long way to go to be classed as a real threat to the top four teams but they will no longer take us lightly," he observed.

"We know we have room for improvement in areas such as fielding and in many other departments, however all of this will take time and cannot be solved by words or criticism but will be solved by hard work and commitment, both of which this group of players have vowed to continue," he added.

And he firmly believes that this young side is very much on track to becoming a very competitive team.

"We would all love instant success at all levels but we should be realistic and be enthused by the prospects of this group. I am excited and my experience with the Australian team tells me that our players are on track to becoming a very competitive team," he said.

"For now let's celebrate the team's latest triumph and keep supporting them as they grow and attempt to find their way at the highest level."

The Tigers next assignment is against Zimbabwe in October at home and after the series the big challenge is ahead for the Siddons men.

"We have a very big season coming up, especially from the end of December. We have series' against Sri Lanka and India, a tour of New Zealand and a home and away series versus England. We also have another chance to perform in the World T20 in May. All of this in the space of just five months."

"Our next assignment is against Zimbabwe in October and I am sure we will have another very competitive series with the winner being the team that makes the least mistakes and who applies more pressure in the crucial moments of the matches. This is something we are working hard at doing."

The national players will come back to their business on September 10 to prepare for the series.

Dementieva to lead Russia

AFP, Perth

Olympic champion Elena Dementieva will spearhead Russia's campaign at the 2010 Hopman Cup.

Hopman Cup organisers confirmed Wednesday that the world No.4 and Beijing Olympics gold medallist would partner countryman Igor Andreev in the mixed teams tournament here in January.

The 27-year-old Dementieva will be making her Hopman Cup debut at the 22nd edition of the event, which Russia have only won once, in 2007.

"It's great to have one of the game's top women's players, who hasn't been to the tournament," director Paul McNamee said.

"She is very consistent, one of the women who could finish at No.1 at the end of the year and we are delighted that she is coming."

"Elena and Igor are both familiar with team competitions and they will be competitive, no doubt about that."

Dementieva reached a career-high ranking of No.3 earlier this year and recently won her third singles title of the year in Canada.

Andreev is ranked 30th in the world and reached the fourth round at Wimbledon this year.

Australian pair Lleyton Hewitt and Samantha Stosur had already been confirmed for the event.

India against

FROM PAGE 17
sports movement from Olympics downwards."

The company's managing director, Samir Gaur, told the newspaper it was fully committed to the project despite the ministry's stand.

"Yes, we went to the ministry seeking government concessions. If we need be, we will go again," he said. "We're 200 per cent committed to the F1 race in India."

Gaur told Reuters in April that JPSK Sport would get the track ready in time despite the global economic meltdown.

Cricket-mad India has warmed to F1 with support escalating since Narain Karthikeyan became the first Indian driver in the series in 2005.

While there is no Indian driver currently in F1, liquor and airline billionaire Vijay Mallya owns the Force India team.

Murali signs

FROM PAGE 17

Murali, with 777 Test wickets to his name, said he was relishing the prospect of playing at Australian sports temple the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

"What a thrill it will be to play in front of a home crowd at the mighty MCG, representing Victoria in a strong competition," he said.

"It's an exciting prospect and a great honour, and I look forward to playing my part in the Bushrangers' team and hopefully entertaining Victorian and Australian fans."

Federer, Safina top seedings

AFP, New York



Fifteen-time Grand Slam winner Roger Federer and rising Scottish star Andy Murray are seeded one-two in men's singles

respectively for the US Open, the United States Tennis Association announced Tuesday.

Russian Dinara Safina is the No. 1 women's seed for the tournament which begins Monday at the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center.

Former world No. 1 Rafael Nadal follows Murray as the third seed while Serbian Novak Djokovic and American Andy Roddick round out the top five on the men's side of the draw.

Djokovic was the runner-up to Federer in the 2007 tournament while Roddick won the 2003 US Open for his only major title so far.

Swiss superstar Federer is the men's all-time leader with 15 majors, including three of the

last four Grand Slams. He won the French Open and Wimbledon titles earlier this season.

Safina, who was runner-up at the Australian Open and French Open this year, is followed by reigning US Open champ Serena Williams. Serena's sister Venus Williams is third while 2004 US Open finalist and reigning Olympic gold medallist Elena Dementieva is fourth. Last year's US Open runner-up Jelena Jankovic rounds out the top five.

Former US Open champ Maria Sharapova, who took 10 months off following major shoulder surgery, is seeded 29th.

The 11-time major champion Serena Williams has won three of the last four Grand Slams on the ladies' WTA Tour.

Dementieva is fresh off her impressive victory in Sunday's final of the Toronto WTA tournament which vaulted her past Serb Jankovic into fourth place in the world rankings.

The draws will be announced on Thursday.

Intikhab defends Asif's inclusion

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Pakistan coach Intikhab Alam has defended the inclusion of controversial fast bowler Mohammad Asif in the Champions Trophy squad, saying he feels it will add experience to the bowling attack. His stand follows comments from former players that taking Asif to next month's tournament in South Africa was ill-advised.

Asif is currently serving a ban imposed on him by the PCB last September after testing positive for the banned substance nandrolone. The ban expires on September 22, a day before Pakistan's first match of the tournament.

"I don't think Asif's selection is a gamble because he is in good shape and working hard to be 100 per cent fit for the big tournament," Intikhab said. "I

think Asif's presence in the team will lend experience and sharpness to the bowling attack especially on the South African pitches where pace bowlers usually have a good time. And don't forget Asif has a good record in South Africa."

Asif was outstanding during the three-Test series in South Africa in early 2007, grabbing 19 wickets at 18.47, but was less successful in the one-dayers that followed, finishing with three wickets at 46.66.

Pakistan captain Younis Khan also welcomed the return of Asif, but warned against expecting too much from a player whose last international exposure in nearly two years is a couple of ODIs against Bangladesh. "He (Asif) has not played for a long time and we will not be putting too much pressure on him," Younis said. "We are not going to South Africa with high expectations from him. He will require time to settle down in international cricket again."

Younus has one target

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Younus Khan, the Pakistan captain, has said beating India will be one of his top priorities in the Champions Trophy, when the two sides clash on September 26 in Centurion. His remarks echoed those of teammate Umar Gul from Sunday, and underline Pakistan's poor record against India in ICC events.

"The fact that we lost twice to India, in the inaugural World Twenty20 in 2007 and then also in that World Cup match in 2003 in South Africa still hurts," Younis said. "India is a very good one-day side but it is my burning ambition to set the record straight against them and defeat them this time in the Champions Trophy in South Africa."

The only time Pakistan have trumped their arch-rivals in

ICC tournaments was in the 2004 Champions Trophy. "It would be a big moment when we play India in the Champions Trophy pool match in Centurion on September 26 as we have not played against each other for a while now," Younis said. "It will not be easy but we have some extra incentive to beat India given our track record in South Africa."

Relations between the two countries have been strained after the terror attacks in Mumbai last November, and they haven't played each other since meeting in the Asia Cup nearly a year ago. A huge crowd turned up at The Oval in June when India and Pakistan faced off in a warm-up game ahead of the World Twenty20.

The other two teams grouped with India and Pakistan in the Champions Trophy are Australia and West Indies. The top two sides from the preliminary phase progress to the semifinals.

Sallu, Sanju

FROM PAGE 17

"Yes, Salman came to see me with the possibility of buying an IPL team. We were just exploring the possibility of what the process would be. And he has been interested for quite a while. He is interested in a new team. He talked to me in the past. I think he is a serious buyer," Modi said.

Two new IPL teams are to be introduced in 2011. Early reports say Khan is interested in bidding for the Nagpur or Kochi team.

Last year, the average bid was 150 million dollars per team, so Salman will need a serious amount of cash.

Bidding for the new teams will take place in January. The big IPL players will also be back on the market next year.

Shah Rukh Khan, Juhi Chawla, Shilpa Shetty and Preity Zinta are the other star owners of IPL teams.

Shah Rukh Khan owns Kolkata Knight Riders, a team that has been at the bottom of the table in both the IPL seasons. The team is co-owned by Juhi Chawla.

Shilpa Shetty took over as co-owner of the Rajasthan Royals in the second season. Preity Zinta was seen cheering her team Kings XI Punjab through both the seasons.

Muktis alive

FROM PAGE 17

Explaining his long absence from club coaching, Tipu said that he was busy with the boys of the Canary Wharf Football Academy for three years and got the offer from Mukti-joddha when he was still enjoying the coaching.

Muktijoddha's probable squad: Nizam Majumdar, Atiqul Islam Tareq, ATM Khairul Hasan Titu, Saifur Rahman Moni, Jalal Uddin, Manwar Hossain, Shahaj Uddin Tipu, Firoz Mahmud Titu, Rashidul Islam, Ashraf Hossain, Amit Khan Shuvro, Ajmol Hossain Biddut, Rasel Ansari, Arup Kumar, Ronny Islam, Rokonozzaman Kanchan, Amin Rana, Tajul Islam and Walid Khan.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS		DOWN	
1 A welcome sight?	39 Tokyo's old name	2 Embarrass	21 Polish money
4 "Eureka!"	41 Region	3 Ankles, to anatomists	23 November birthstone
7 Halloween option	45 Incarcerates	4 Rudiments	24 Kyoto cummerbund
12 "The Daba Honey-moon"	47 Crony	5 Piled	25 Card-table call
13 Wager	48 Simon's partner	6 Places in the heart	26 Consumed
14 Proportion	52 "Hail!"	7 Verifiable	28 H, to Hellenes
15 Gridlock component	53 Pseudonym of a sort	8 Operated	30 Seek the hand of
16 Garnet variety	54 Prior to	9 List-ending abbr.	31 Go back
18 Fool	55 Trail the pack	10 Have a bug	32 "7 Faces of Dr. —"
19 Steeple	56 Wear	11 Place-kicker's pride	33 Hostel
20 Expert	57 Boar's mate	17 Very dry, as champagne	36 Intend
22 — de cologne	58 Crafty		37 Ravel piece
23 Frat-party garb			40 Levees
27 Started			42 Fiery gems
29 Cheap			43 Fleet-related
31 "Cats" inspiration			44 Plaintive poem
34 Put into words			45 Equitable
35 Small chicken			46 Passel
37 Feathery accessory			48 Petrol
38 Osseous			49 Heidi's height?
			50 Carnival city
			51 Distant

1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9	10	11
12				13				14				
15				16			17					
18				19								
20			21		22				23	24	25	26
			27	28			29	30				
31	32	33						34				
35					36		37					
38					39	40			41	42	43	44
				45				46		47		
48	49	50	51								52	
53						54					55	
56						57					58	