



India's cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar (second from R) gifts a book to Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan at the '60 Not Out' event while master batsman Sachin Tendulkar (L) and former cricketer Gundappa Biswanath look on in Mumbai on Thursday.

Gayle wants new beginning

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Chris Gayle wants West Indies' tour of Australia to be the new beginning the region desperately needs after another round of strikes and disputes. While Gayle was a key figure in the four-month boycott as the side's captain, he is now charged with leading the reuni-fication process that starts with the three-Test series of Australia.

It won't be easy as the old players mix with the new but one benefit of their marathon trip from the Caribbean to Brisbane, extended by half a day due to a delay in London, was that the 15-man squad has had plenty of bonding time. Before they departed the players spoke about leaving the distractions at home. While they were in the air Viv Richards was saying Gayle would have to change his attitude to show he wanted to be in charge.

Gayle is one of the most targeted men in the game, mostly for his love of lucrative one-day leagues over Test cricket. Now he is hoping to focus on peace and unity. "That's life," he said of Richards' comments. "I am trying to move on, it doesn't make sense to fight with each other. That's not the real cause to be here in Australia."

While Gayle is so laidback -- even when severely jet-lagged -- that he makes hippies seem stressed, he could snap if the criticism continues from the



CHRIS GAYLE

have lost at home to Bangladesh while the main players were on strike over the pay and contractual disputes. He arrived in England a couple of days before the opening match, preferring to boost his bank balance with more games in the IPL, and was soon backtracking after saying he wouldn't be so sad if Test cricket died.

When asked on Friday what the series in the Caribbean last year -- which Australia won 2-0 -- meant, Gayle said he could-

n't remember much about it. The critics would say it showed his lack of interest in the game's traditional format but he did miss two games of that campaign with a groin injury and his head has been in the clouds for most of the week.

He does regret the damage caused by the strike that fractured an already split cricket region. "That's the last thing we wanted to do, bring the game into disrepute," he said. "Having said all that, it's after. This is a new beginning and hopefully things can be better from here on in."

As captain Gayle is now working with David Williams, the coach, and Joel Garner, the manager, in moulding the group into a unified unit. However, he knows they are starting from behind following the Bangladesh defeat and their early exit at the Champions Trophy.

"It set us back, to be honest," Gayle said. "But at the same time we have to move forward, trying to forget about what happened in the past. We're back to square one, it's a rebuilding process right now. Even though we're rebuilding up we have a good chance of winning."

SQUAD
Chris Gayle (captain), Adrian Barath, Sulieman Benn, Dwayne Bravo, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Narsingh Deonarine, Travis Dowlin, Brendan Nash, Denesh Ramdin, Ravi Rampaul, Kemar Roach, Darren Sammy, Ramaresh Sarwan, Jerome Taylor, Gavin Tonge

Smith intrigued by Strauss absence

INTERNET, undated

Graeme Smith has stopped short of calling England a weaker team without Andrew Strauss in the line-up for the two Twenty20 internationals starting Friday but admits he is slightly surprised by the captain's absence.

Strauss' no longer plays cricket's shortest format at the highest level meaning he is on a one-week break during his country's two-and-a-half-month tour to South Africa. Paul Collingwood is set to lead the team at the Wanderers and then Centurion on Sunday and with both sides looking to land the first blow, the Proteas skipper is keen to see how the visitors cope without their main opener.

"He must have his own reasons," Smith said. "Looking at it from a team's perspective, he's obviously playing well and scoring runs."

He added: "He started the tour games and has gone well in the warm-up games. He's a new captain and I guess he'd want to stamp his mark and sort of get his personality on the environment."

"So him stepping away for a week, I don't know. One thing it does do is it probably keeps him fresh throughout the tour."

"It's something I guess the England team will have to cope with. It's an interesting dynamic and I don't know how it's going to affect them."

Strauss and Smith were of course the focal point in the two sides' last meeting during the Champions Trophy in September when the former denied the latter a runner.

Free-to-air Ashes!

Cricket

AFP, London

The England cricket team's home Ashes matches with Australia could be forced on to free-to-air television under a review of televised sport in Britain, reports said Thursday.

The inquiry is expected to place the Ashes under the heading of the "crown jewels" of British sport which must be seen by the widest possible audience when its recommendations are published on Friday, several newspapers said.

Ashes matches in this year's series were only shown on pay-per-view broadcaster Sky, owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation.

The report by David Davies, a former executive of the English Football Association, is also expected to list football World Cup and European Championship qualifiers involving England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

It is equally likely to recommend "protecting" the Wimbledon tennis championship and the Open golf championship, which are already shown on terrestrial television in Britain.

Supporters of changes to the current system

argue that England's win in the 2005 Ashes, shown on free-to-air Channel Four, was watched by millions more viewers than this year's series broadcast by Sky.

But the government is not obliged to follow the recommendations, and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) will protest that the financial impact would be devastating for the sport which has a 300 million pound (500 million dollar, 330 million euro) deal with Sky.

An ECB spokesman said the organisation had not seen the report, adding: "We have not been given the courtesy of being shown the report ahead of publication."

The Evening Standard newspaper claimed that Prime Minister Gordon Brown was prepared to accept the recommendations to strip Sky of its exclusive TV rights in revenge for his treatment at the hands of the Murdoch-owned Sun tabloid.

Brown phoned Murdoch to complain about the Sun's criticism of his government's handling of the war in Afghanistan.

The prime minister's office said the pair spoke on Tuesday at the height of a row over Brown's apparent misspelling of a dead soldier's name in a hand-written letter of condolence to the victim's grieving mother.

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