

'Zaheer's form not a concern'

PTI, Dhaka

Zaheer Khan has leaked runs in the two matches India played in the Idea Cup tri-series here so far but his junior India teammate Virat Kohli feels the pace spearhead is experienced enough to come up with a strong performance in the next couple of games.

Zaheer conceded runs in the two matches -- against Sri Lanka and Bangladesh -- India has played so far in the tournament without taking any wicket but Kohli said the team is not worried about his form. "Zaheer bhai has not done that badly. He is such an experienced bowler that he can his rectify mistakes and come out with a strong performance. There is nothing to be worried," Kohli said after the team's practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium ahead of tomorrow's match against Sri Lanka.

Country before cash for Siddle

PTI, Melbourne

The Indian Premier League riches have failed to enthrone rising Australian pacer Peter Siddle, who has opted out of the cash-awash Twenty20 event to ensure peak fitness for national commitments.

The 25-year-old, who has played 16 Tests and 12 one-dayers, said his priority right now is to cement his place in the national team and he doesn't want to exhaust himself by playing in the IPL.

"The offer was there to go over but my decision is to give this year a miss and just concentrate on trying to play as much cricket as I can for Australia," Siddle was quoted as saying by the 'Australian Associated Press'.

"That's my No. 1 goal, what I want to do. There are a big couple of years coming up and what I want to do is try and play every form [of cricket for Australia]," he added.

'Woods isn't bigger than the game'

PTI, Kapalua, Hawaii

Not even Tiger Woods is bigger than the sport itself and golf will continue to prosper with or without its marquee star, says 18-time major championship winner Jack Nicklaus.

"It's not all about one person," Nicklaus said on Friday. "The game is a big game." Nicklaus has said previously he expects Woods to eventually break his major championship record but even if it doesn't happen, the sport always have a strong world-wide popularity.

"Tiger always has been a big influence on the game," said Nicklaus, who is four majors ahead of Woods. "But the game had Bobby Jones, the game had Walter Hagen, Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, Tom Watson, Lee Trevino, Nicklaus.

"The game always survived that. The game will continue to go forward. Tiger is a big influence, probably the largest one we ever had. And certainly, we hope he comes back and plays.

DDCA to form Dev body

PTI, New Delhi

The Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA), under fire for the Kotla pitch fiasco, is willing to consider a long standing demand to form a Cricket Improvement Committee for efficient and transparent functioning of the body.

Top DDCA officials, who met former Test cricketers today to discuss the issue in the aftermath of the Kotla fiasco, said such a committee comprising mainly of players can be formed only after it gets the nod from its Executive Committee.

The demand for such a committee had been gaining ground for sometime now and the pitch episode, which led to the abandonment of the recent India-Sri Lanka one-dayer, had triggered a wave of protests against the current office-bearers.

"It was a detailed and long meeting, during which the former cricketers have given some important, fruitful and positive suggestions. They have proposed a Cricket Improvement Committee for DDCA involving the former cricketers.



Winners of the 11th Square Golf Tournament are seen with chief guest and Army Chief General Abdul Mubeen and other guests during the prize-giving ceremony at the Kurmitola Golf Club on Friday.

Eng duo not bothered

Cricket

AFP, London

England pacemen James Anderson and Stuart Broad both insisted Saturday they had nothing to be ashamed of after being caught up in suggestions of ball-tampering during the third Test against South Africa.

The Proteas raised concerns over the state of the ball after television pictures showed Broad stopping the ball with the underside of his boot and Anderson working on it with his fingers moments later.

However, South Africa did not follow through with a formal complaint and the International Cricket Council declared the matter closed, meaning neither fast bowler would face disciplinary action.

However, former England captain Michael Vaughan said the duo had been "lucky", with Anderson especially fortunate to have avoided a ban which would have ruled him out of

next week's series finale.

But Anderson told Saturday's edition of Britain's Daily Mirror newspaper his actions at Cape Town's Newlands ground were entirely innocent.

"To be caught up in suggestions of ball-tampering was a huge disappointment," said the Lancashire quick.

"It led to a lot of comment and cast a shadow over me and Stuart Broad when we'd done nothing wrong except be a bit absent-minded and lazy.

"I know my old England captain Michael Vaughan is entitled to his opinion but I was a little bit hurt by some of the comments he made about me, because I'd like to think he knew me well enough to know I wouldn't do something like that," Anderson insisted. He added: "I definitely was not altering the ball to try and help us, I was just looking at it and playing with it. There was a tuft of leather that had come up and I wasn't digging in any nails or anything like that into the ball."

Broad meanwhile conceded he'd been lazy in stopping the ball with his boot but said it was ridiculous to believe that could

help induce reverse-swing or somehow alter the ball's condition in another way that would aid the bowlers.

"My actions in stopping the ball with my boot have been questioned but I am not the first bowler to stop a ball with his size 12s and I will not be the last," Broad told Saturday's edition of Britain's Daily Mail.

"It was close to 40 degrees Celsius out there in Newlands at the time and, if I was guilty of anything, it was just laziness in not bending down to pick up the ball.

"Ball-tampering? That's astonishing. For one thing, if I was skilled enough to be able to step on the scuffed up side of the ball and know exactly what I was doing to create an unfair advantage with my feet, I would be playing football in the Premier League rather than cricket for England."

England, in a repeat of the series opener, drew the third Test with just one wicket standing on Thursday.

That left them with an unbeatable 1-0 series lead ahead of the fourth and final Test at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg which starts next Thursday.

Pak MP wants Ijaz's sacking

Cricket

CricketInfo, undated

The head of Pakistan's parliament committee on sports has called for the sacking of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Ijaz Butt, calling him "physically unfit" and questioning his handling of the aftermath of the Lahore attack on the Sri Lankan team's bus last March.

Jamshed Dasti urged Pakistan's president Asif Ali Zardari to dismiss the 71-year-old Butt. "He [Butt] has gone too old," Dasti said. "Mr Butt is physically unfit, he can't even walk properly, he can't even see properly," Zardari, who is

also patron of the PCB, had appointed Butt in October 2008 in place of Nasim Ashraf.

"Mr. Butt has also done nothing to help in finding what went wrong when gunmen attacked the Sri Lankan team in Lahore last year," Dasti said. Several Sri Lanka players were injured and six policemen were killed when gunmen opened fire at the visitors' team bus and security convoy last March.

In October, Dasti had also levelled match-fixing allegations and called for changes in the PCB after Pakistan crashed out of the Champions Trophy.

He had called then-captain Younis Khan for a meeting seeking an explanation about the team's loss to Australia in a

close league match; Younis resigned after the meeting but was later reinstated.

Pakistan's Test series loss in Australia is also a cause of concern for Dasti. He said the team manager Abdul Raqueeb, coach Intikhab Alam, PCB chief operating officer Wasim Bari and Butt will be summoned in the near future to discuss the national team's performance.

"I hope by the time next meeting is convened Mr Butt will be replaced by some other responsible man as the chairman of the PCB," Dasti said.

The PCB responded by calling Dasti's remarks "unworthy for a member of parliament and not befitting his stature." In a statement, the

board said: "Such personal remarks cannot and will not do anything good for the game of cricket in Pakistan as we have already witnessed the impact of such remarks that put the career of a very refined cricketer Younis Khan in turmoil."

Butt is currently in Bangladesh for the launching ceremony of the 2011 World Cup.

Mancini wants

FROM PAGE 20 The Paraguay striker has been struggling with a calf injury and is yet to feature under the new City boss but Mancini is hoping to be able to count on him for Monday night's trip to Blackburn.

"It would be a big game for Rocky as Blackburn are his old club, but we will have to see if he is OK," he said. "Roque is most important for us, and I do not want to lose him. He was injured for 15 days and we missed him. For me, he is important to the team."

Kim's good start to '10

Tennis

AFP, Brisbane

Belgium's Kim Clijsters beat fellow countrywoman Justine Henin 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (8/6) to win a drama-charged final of the Brisbane International tennis tournament on Saturday.

The two great rivals battled it out for two hours, 23 minutes before Clijsters eventually claimed victory on her fourth championship point. Henin's hopes of winning her first tournament since making a comeback to the sport ended with the loss, but she showed enough to suggest she will be a major force at the upcoming Australian Open.

Clijsters, who made her own comeback midway through last year, played some brilliant tennis in the first one and a half sets and appeared headed for an easy victory.

But she stumbled badly when trying to close out the match at 4-1, and Henin seized on her opponent's nerves, attacking relentlessly and winning five straight games to put the match back on even terms.

Henin kept the pressure up at the start of the

third, winning her first service game, breaking a shell-shocked Clijsters then holding her own serve to lead 3-0 and take an apparently firm grip on the final.

Clijsters refused to give in, however, and broke back to put the set back on serve only to give away the advantage in the eighth game when she put an overhead smash into the net to concede the break.

But in yet another twist Clijsters broke back immediately, winning the game in almost identical fashion, this time Henin putting a smash into the net.

Henin brought up two championship points in the next game when Clijsters served at 4-5 to stay in the match, but couldn't convert either and Clijsters held on, with the set almost inevitably going to a tie-break.

Clijsters had appeared the more vulnerable throughout the third set, but she quickly opened up a 4-0 lead in the tiebreak, taking it to 5-1 with a second serve ace.

She brought up three championship points at 6-4, but Henin fought back again to make it 6-6.

However Henin then served a double fault and this time Clijsters made no mistake, taking her 36th title with her fourth match point.

Yousuf bucks up mates

FROM PAGE 17

expect the criticism," Yousuf said. "I'm not saying don't criticise us but maybe it should be more constructive and it should also highlight the positives that have come out from the Test series as a whole."

Changes are expected in the Test side for Hobart and one is guaranteed. In an unusual move indicative of just how seriously they are viewing the loss, the PCB has issued a release stating that Sarfraz Ahmed is not only flying out to Australia, he will also be keeping wickets in the third Test ahead of Kamran Akmal.

The positions of Faisal Iqbal and Misbah-ul-Haq will also come under intense scrutiny; they have one fifty between them in four innings here. However, the paucity of Pakistan's batting resources is such that they will most likely be replaced by Khurram Manzoor and Shoaib Malik, both of whom were dropped halfway through the New Zealand tour. Questions will be asked about why Fawad Alam was so hastily sent back and not tried after one Test failure in New Zealand; that came two Tests after a debut hundred as an opener, a position he had

never played in before.

"We have to look at the positives as we get ready for Hobart," Yousuf said. "Nobody can say whether we will win or lose but we just have to play good cricket for the entire duration. We had our moments in the first Test, where we fought hard. We did well for three days in Sydney. I think the positives are that we know we can compete with any side in the world."

"We now need to learn from our mistakes because if we do then we can beat any side out there."

Flower thanks Colly

Cricket

CricketInfo, undated

Coach Andy Flower hailed Paul Collingwood's "bulldog spirit" after his role in England's latest great escape at Newlands, saying that it typified the fight of the team. Collingwood added 112 in 57 overs with Ian Bell for the sixth wicket, but England still needed Graham Onions to break out the final over -- in a repeat of his heroics from Centurion -- to secure the thrilling draw.

For Bell, his five-hour 78 was a breakthrough innings after he responded to a pressure-cooker situation with a composure not previously seen at the highest level, but Collingwood's innings was his third match-saving contribution in the last seven months following his efforts at Cardiff and Centurion. He was given a serious working-over from Dale Steyn in a gripping hour after lunch, but resisted everything the paceman could throw at him during an electric spell.

"He's a typical British bulldog," Flower said. "He's a great fighter, great to have in the changing room, lots of energy and what we have seen is he's been using some of the experience gained over the years to help him through these situations."

"When you talk about consistency of selection, that is one result of it -- you get hardened cricketers from this exposure to playing the best sides in the world. We want to go on to greater things with this England side, so we're happy to have fight as a characteristic in our dressing room. But it's also something I think English cricketers will inherently have, because they're playing for their country."

Flower was also impressed by Bell's contribution, which followed his 140 in the second Test at Durban, and his career appears to have turned a corner. "His big hundred in Durban, that contributed to getting us into a winning position, and then a match-saving innings yesterday certainly will make him feel personally more confident," he said. "It was good for us to see that he can perform like that under pressure again."

However, as the team began a few days off in Cape Town, Flower remained a realist and knows England avoided defeat despite other periods of sloppy batting. In the first innings, the top six all contributed to their own downfall while Alastair Cook and Andrew Strauss also played weak shots second-time around. With a series to win in Johannesburg next week, he knows those mistakes can't be repeated.

"One of the most obvious areas where we can improve is losing some of those soft dismissals that we had in the first innings," Flower said. "If we'd got a proper first-innings score we would have been able to put them under more pressure in their second innings."

Of England's batsmen it is Kevin Pietersen who is struggling the most after a barren Test at Newlands in which he followed his second-ball duck in the first innings with a sketchy 6 on the fourth day. Despite his 81 at Centurion, which played a key role in that draw, there is still something missing from Pietersen's game and his footwork appears out of sync. It is a sign of England's collective resolve that his shortcomings haven't proved costly, but Pietersen's form is now a cause for concern.

"All players have dips occasionally, and he's no different," Flower said. "He's got a superb record. He's had a dip just very recently and this last Test wasn't a good one for him personally."

"What we're looking for is for him to get back into his normal, confident form and I'm pretty confident he'll do that. We always tweak things in our techniques, all through your career. Even the real greats like Tendulkar will be doing that. But I'm pretty sure he'll be back at his confident best very soon."

Flower also backed his bowlers after the ball-tampering row that emerged on the third day following TV pictures of Stuart Broad standing on the ball. "If they wanted to raise it, they should have done it formally," he said of South Africa's approach. "But relations are fine. They are two competitive units battling it out, so you expect a little bit of toing and froing."

"Our bowlers have shown a lot of skill with reverse-swing. The abrasive pitches here have helped get the ball into condition to do it. We'll be going about things in exactly the same way."

Hopman Cup Spain's

Tennis

AFP, Perth

Tommy Robredo lifted Spain off the canvas to win their third Hopman Cup title with a 2-1 win over Great Britain in a thrilling final here Saturday.

Great Britain was on the verge of its first success in the mixed teams tournament when 15-year-old Laura Robson stunned experienced Spaniard Maria Jose Martinez Sanchez to give her side the lead and world No.4 Andy Murray then breezed through the first set against Tommy Robredo.

Murray, who declared pre-match that he would not lose to the world No.16, hadn't dropped a set in singles all week and his early dominance on the back of an impregnable serve suggested he would finish the 27-year-old Spaniard off quickly and claim the title for the British.

However the pugnacious Robredo, seeking his second Hopman Cup title, clawed his way back into the contest as Murray fell away slightly and ultimately notched a memorable victory in three sets, setting up live mixed doubles.

Despite again Robson belying her inexperience with her poise in a tense doubles clash, Murray struggled to recapture his best form and the fourth seeds won the important points to take the deciding rubber 7-6 (8/6), 7-5.

The British held three set points in the first set of the doubles at 6-3, but then

dropped the next five points. Although the British were able to save two championship points in the second set, it was third time lucky for the Spanish and fittingly it was a Robredo backhand winner down the line that sealed the result.

Spain also won the title in 1990, through Emilio Sanchez and Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, and in 2002, when a teenage Robredo teamed with Sanchez Vicario.

Martinez Sanchez admitted she thought the final was lost after her defeat at the hands of Robson.

"Tommy was the hero of the day," Martinez Sanchez said. However, Robredo said it was a team effort.

"It was a great final," he said. "I want to congratulate Maria, she said today I did great job but here no one wins alone so it is for her and our team."

Although Great Britain were part of the inaugural Hopman Cup back in late 1988, it was only their fourth appearance here and first since 1992.

In the women's singles, Robson, the world No.405, stunned the 26th-ranked Martinez Sanchez, who hadn't previously been beaten in singles here this week, in straight sets, 6-1, 7-6 (8/6), confirming her status as a player of exceptional promise by rattling off 28 winners.

With one rubber already unexpectedly squared away, the in-form Murray had the chance to live up to his bold pre-match declaration and therefore clinch the tie for Great Britain.

Great Britain's first

Hopman Cup title beckoned after Murray's flying start, but Robredo regrouped and the Spaniard levelled the match on the back of some brilliant forehand winners, before maintaining that form in the third set to win 1-6, 6-4, 6-3.

Giants

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After resumption, Mohammedan had seemingly no bite to increase the margin though coach Maruful Islam brought in Mamun Mia, Alamgir Kabir and a fit-again Alamu Bukola none had any impact on the match.

Mohammedan's margin, however, could have been bigger had an Emily header off a Mamunul Islam cross not come off the crossbar in the 61st minute.

TEAMS MOHAMMEDAN: Aminul Haque, Wali Faisal, Nasir (Rana), Hasan Al Mamun, Demi Emanuel, Arman Aziz, Mamunul Islam, Ariful Islam (Mamun Mia), Emeka Christian (Bukola), Nasiruddin and Zahid Hasan Emily.

BROTHERS UNION: Jahangir Alam (Iran Sheikh), Tofazzal Hossain Apu, Youfuz Ali Khan Ripon Khan, Sawkat Russel Enock Bentil, Tanvi Chowdhury (Didarul Alam), Ranjit Kumar, Sabuj Kumar (Faisal Ahmed), Tanmoy Hossain Taru and Murad Ahmed Milon.

Yellow cards: Ripon Khan (Brothers), Emeka (Mohammedan). Referee: Tayeb Hasan

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution time of 27 mins.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with letters and numbers for solving.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WHAT IS THE SYSTEM FOR OVERLAYING PLASTIC ON A CERTAIN VOWEL? THE PROCESS OF E-LAMINATION. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: N equals O