



South Africa captain Graeme Smith pulls the ball as Pakistan wicketkeeper Zulqarnain Haider (R) looks on during the fourth ODI at the Dubai Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Media roast Aussies

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australia's unease over the state of its cricket deepened Friday ahead of this month's Ashes series, with media labelling many Australian cricketers as overrated, over-indulged and overpaid.

One newspaper said Australian cricket was in crisis amid descending gloom with the once-mighty national side having lost its sixth straight match in all forms of the game going back five months.

Ricky Ponting had the task of arresting that form slump as he returned as captain of Australia's side for the second one-day international against Sri Lanka in Sydney Friday.

The Daily Telegraph said Australian cricket has "lost its mojo", mainly because it lacks talent but also because it has become soft and indulgent.

Under the headline "Why Australian cricket is in crisis," senior cricket writer Robert Craddock said: "Many players are getting huge money and national caps without earning either."

"Mike Hussey and Marcus North had to inject 10 years of gruelling first-class toil to get their national spurs. Several average interstate cricketers have got theirs recently after less than 10 games," he said.

Craddock said Australia was handing out a glut of national caps and creating a generation of players who think three or four good interstate games, rather than that many good sea-

sons, should be a passport to international cricket.

He said at least six of the Australian team will earn more than one million dollars (one million US) this year -- no matter how the team performs.

"This is the age of the silver spoon. Players have never been better looked after," he said.

"It's got to the stage where players have almost become over-managed. Many players lack the ability to think for themselves off the field and that can flow into their on-field psyche."

The Melbourne Age said there was pressure on Cricket Australia to act to stop the malaise in the game.

"That cricket is being challenged like never before is not in doubt," it said.

"Cricket Australia has not been averse to pulling the bedclothes over its head in the past, but last week's revelation of a report into falling television audiences and stagnant crowds drew acknowledgement of the changing climate, and the need to act."

The Australian newspaper said Australian cricket continued to "slide further into the mire" following Wednesday's embarrassing ODI loss to Sri Lanka, who posted a world record 132-run ninth-wicket partnership to snatch an improbable victory in Melbourne.

Cricket Australia said Friday more than 430,000 tickets had been sold for this summer's international series, including the Ashes, and it was releasing further tickets that had now become available.

The Ashes series against England gets underway in Brisbane on November 25.

SA 274/6

AFP, Dubai

South African captain Graeme Smith capped his return after suffering injury with a solid 92 to help his team reach 274-6 against Pakistan in the fourth day-night international here on Friday.

Smith missed his ninth one-day century by just eight runs after winning the toss and electing to bat, lifting South African innings with a 94-run stand with AB de Villiers (49) on a flat Dubai Stadium pitch.

Smith, who injured his left hand during South Africa's eight wicket win in the first one-day last week, hit nine boundaries during his 105-ball innings, before he was trapped leg-before in the 31st over.

De Villiers then took charge along with Jean-Paul Duminy (36) as South African added 84 in the last ten overs to post a challenging total in their bids to wrap up the series which they lead by 2-1.

Pakistan won the second match by one wicket in Abu Dhabi, while South Africa won the third match in Dubai by two wickets.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: 274 for 6 (Smith 92, De Villiers 49, Duminy 36, Ingram 27 not out, Botha 28 not out; Akhtar 2-51, Riaz 2-61, Hafeez 2-37)

NTF kids

tennis

SPORTS REPORTER

Asar, Masfia and Ruzaina were among eight winners in the 2nd National Tennis Federation Kids tennis competition at the Ramna courts yesterday.

Six matches will be held on the opening day. Bangladesh Cricket Board president AHM Mostafa Kamal will declare the seven-day meet open while sponsors Transcom Beverage's managing director Golam Kuddus Chowdhury and Bangladesh Hockey Federation general secretary Khandokar Jamiluddin will

be present. Apart from the trio who were victors in the beginners group, Tajwar (intermediate beginners), Araf and Afrida (advance beginners), Noor (intermediate) and Nafi (advance intermediate) also won at the different age groups.

Bangladesh Tennis Federation's acting general secretary Sheikh Moinuddin Wali Ullah, member Delwara Rahman and former tennis player Shamim Ahsan distributed prizes among the winners.

Shakib

FROM PAGE 17 fourth last season while all-rounder Sohrwardi Shuvo, Abdur Razzak and Junaid Siddiqui may fill the pool quota for Surjo Torun.

Newly promoted side Prime Dhaleswar are also going to make a good team with Imran Ahmed, Nadif Chowdhury, Rubel Hossain, Nazmul Hossain and Arafat Salahuddin ready to sign in their book.

BKSP, Victoria Sporting Club and Orient Sporting Club are the other clubs in the 12-team competition, with all three looking to survive in the country's topmost cricket competition.

A team will be able to field two foreign players in a match but can register up to five in their squad. The Premier Division T20 is likely to start from November 26 and the national players will not be available for the competition, while the 50-over competition will kick off after the Zimbabwe tour in December.

'Barca getting better'

AFP, Madrid



Barcelona defender Gerard Pique hit back at criticism of the team's tactics this season claiming recent achievements speak for themselves as they aim for their third successive league title.

Despite the fact the Catalan side are just one point off leaders Real Madrid and have won six out of their last seven games, they are not playing teams off the park as their fans have become accustomed to in the last two seasons under coach Pep Guardiola. Injuries have not helped the team while new striker David Villa has taken his time to settle, although he appears to have hit form with a brace in the 5-0 win last weekend over Sevilla.

In mid-week they struggled against the strength and tenacity shown by FC Copenhagen and could only manage a 1-1 draw in the Champions League tie.

"We don't know how to play any other way and we have managed to win eight out of ten titles doing it so we are ready to die this way," said Pique ahead of Sunday's game with Getafe.

"We aim to get better game by game physically as well as tactically and we know that Madrid are always going to be there or thereabouts in the title chase."

Barca prepare for the game with Pique, Xavi Hernandez and Carles Puyol all injury doubts.

Real Madrid take on local rivals Atletico Madrid with their work done in the Champions League after substitute Pedro Leon earned them a late draw in the glamour tie against AC Milan on Wednesday night.

It has been a successful start to life at the Bernabeu for coach Jose Mourinho with the team top of the table domestically and five points clear in their Champions League group. Real face an Atletico side who will be in high spirits after an important away win in the Europa League against Rosenborg.

Behind the top two Villarreal and Valencia are desperately trying to keep up.

Brazilian Nilmar has improved a lot since his first season at Villarreal and is now a potent threat in attack. Borja Valero has also been a useful addition in midfield as cover for the ageing Marcos Senna. They take on Athletic Bilbao this weekend while Valencia face a tricky away trip to Sevilla.

"It is an important game for us if we want to remain among the top teams. Sevilla are a side which plays direct football but are not at their best at the moment and so we need to attack them," said striker Roberto Soldado.

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FIXTURES

Saturday
Real Sociedad v Racing Santander, Espanyol v Malaga

Sunday
Zaragoza v Mallorca, Villarreal v Athletic Bilbao, Almeria v Sporting Gijon, Osasuna v Hercules, Levante v Deportivo La Coruna, Getafe v Barcelona, Real Madrid v Atletico

Espanyol have been relegation candidates in recent seasons but they have started well and will be looking to take advantage of a Malaga side in crisis.

The struggling Andalusian club fired their Portuguese coach Jesualdo Ferreira and ex-Real Madrid trainer Manuel Pellegrini has just been appointed.

Bottom side Zaragoza have made a woeful start and need to improve against Mallorca while Deportivo La Coruna above them are little better and they take on promoted Levante.

Also new to the top-flight are Hercules who brought in prized assets Royston Drenthe and David Trezeguet in the summer.

They managed a surprise victory at the Nou Camp earlier in the season but as they prepare to take on Osasuna their objective is survival.

Real Sociedad and Racing Santander face each other also looking for mid-table security as too do Almeria and Sporting Gijon.

Mercury rises in Rome

AFP, Rome



Derby fever is especially fervent in Rome this week as the two city rivals prepare to do battle at the Stadio Olimpico on Sunday.

Lazio have had to live in Roma's shadow for several years but their surprising start to the season has seen them open up a four-point gap at the top of the table.

That has got the sky blue half of the city more excited than normal ahead of Sunday's game and around 4,000 people turned up to watch a midweek practice match between Lazio and their own youth team.

Even given Lazio's lofty position in the Serie A table, Roma are still regarded by many as the better team, although Lazio will be nominally the home side at the ground they share.

But what has given Lazio fans extra confidence and perhaps hit the self-belief of Roma's is that giallorossi cap-

tain Francesco Totti will be suspended due to his dismissal last week against Lecce for pushing Ruben Olivera.

It means that for once, the cards look stacked in Lazio's favour and although coach Edy Reja insists they're not equipped to last the distance at the top of the tree, victory on Sunday would not only give their fans a huge boost but would also suggest that this team is at least good enough to qualify for the Champions League.

However, not everyone is agreed on whether Totti's absence will help or hinder Roma.

Although the club talisman and the darling of the terraces, Totti is almost 35 and many think he is not just past his best but also keeping a more deserving player out of the team.

Without Totti's imposing presence some think other Roma players may feel freer to express themselves.

And Lazio captain Tommaso Rocchi says he for one isn't relieved by Totti's absence.

"We would have been happier to see him on the pitch, maybe his absence is an advantage for Roma given the results in the last few derbies," he said, a reference to last year's equivalent fixture in which Totti was withdrawn at half-time as Roma won 2-1.

However, Rocchi had a warning to his own teammates.

"Often the team in the better form, the one that seems superior, normally has more to lose," he said.

"We need to forget everything we've done until now and to prepare as best we can for the game."

"I'm sure we'll play well. I think the level of Roma and Lazio is the same, we're in better shape than them."

"We need to play perfectly. Lazio are the team of the moment, the most in-form team and everything's going for them. It'll be very tough," he said.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Bologna v Lecce, Inter Milan v Brescia

Sunday
Fiorentina v Chievo, Bari v AC Milan, Juventus v Cesena, Lazio v Roma, Napoli v Parma, Sampdoria v Catania,

GM chess

SPORTS REPORTER

GM Ziaur Rahman and FM Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagar maintained joint lead in the Berger Six Seasons Grandmasters Chess tournament at the close of seventh round at Tulip Lounge of the Uttara Club yesterday.

Both Zia and Sagar have 4.5 points as Zia drew with IM Sahaj Grover and Sagar drew with FM Yee Soon Wei. Sagar now needs only a point from the last two games for his second International Master norm.

GM Niaz Mursheed and FM Abu Sufian Shakil were jointly in second position with four points each. Niaz drew with GM Vakhidov Tair while Shakil beat FM Mehdi Hasan Parag. FM Sayatan Das beat Bitan Banerjee.

Eng bowlers start well

AFP, Perth

England's bowlers made an impressive start to their Ashes tour against Western Australia at the WACA Ground on Friday.

Sent into the field by WA captain and Australian Test batsman Marcus North for the three-day tour match, a full-strength England side made an immediate impact striking twice in the second over of the day through Stuart Broad.

Although fringe Australian one-day player Adam Voges made a stylish 72, every English bowler tasted success with Broad picking up three wickets as the home side battled to 242-8 before declaring late in the day.

England were 10-1 at stumps with captain Andrew Strauss on five and night-watchman James Anderson yet to score.

Opener and vice-captain Alastair Cook made an unlucky start to his tour, bowled by Steve Magoffin for just five after the ball struck him on the body as he attempted a pull shot and deflected onto the stumps.

Anderson, who bowled considerably better than his 1-48 suggest, said it was an encouraging start for the attack that Strauss has said will be his trump card in the Ashes.

SL clinch series

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Hauritz in the 20th over. Up to that stage Dilshan had looked comfortable in compiling 47 off 57 balls with five boundaries.

All-rounder Shane Watson got a wicket in his first over when he had Mahela Jayawardene lbw for five as he attempted to pull.

After a rain delay, Kumar Sangakkara was out for 45 off 52 balls when he was shaped for a square drive off Watson and top-edged to Clint McKay at third man.

Watson finished Australia's best bowler with two for 34 off eight overs.

Sri Lanka began well with the wicket of Brad Haddin for one in the second over and then got the prized wicket of Ponting for 10 when the Australian skipper top-edged a pull shot straight to Chamara Silva at deep backward square-leg.

Watson looked dangerous before he was trapped lbw for 40 off 44 balls by the wily Muralidaran, who was playing in his 339th ODI.

Michael Clarke followed seven balls later to a tumbling catch by Muralidaran at third

man off Thisara Perera for 25.

Mike Hussey (15) lofted to Mathews to give Muralidaran his second wicket of the innings.

Australia's remote chance of pulling the game out of the fire vanished when big-hitting Cameron White was bowled off-stump for 35 by Kulasekara, leaving the home side at 155 for six.

Mitchell Johnson (23) and Steve Smith (33) went in the same over, bowled by Suraj Randiv as the game meandered to its inevitable conclusion.

Hauritz (4) and McKay (6) went cheaply as Sri Lanka rejoiced a milestone triumph. **SCORES IN BRIEF** SRI LANKA: 213 for 3 in 41.4 overs (Tharanga 86 not out, Dilshan 47, Sangakkara 45, Mathews 17 not out; Watson 2-34)

AUSTRALIA: 210 all out in 37.4 overs (Watson 40, Clarke 25, White 35, Smith 33; Muralidaran 2-30, Kulasekara 2-48, Perera 2-39, Randiv 2-53) Result: Sri Lanka won by 29 runs (D/L method) and lead three-match series 2-0.

Man-of-the-match: Upul Tharanga.

Barisal edge a thriller

FROM PAGE 17

Dhaka's reply was typically hasty with Anamul Haque Bijoy hitting an unbeaten 64 off 86 balls.

Uttam Sarkar earlier smashed eight boundaries in his 44-run knock, as Dhaka won by six wickets.

CHITTAGONG-SYLHET In a match of little consequence, Chittagong annihilated Sylhet with a 121-run win at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi.

Batting first, Chittagong made 251-7 with Faisal Hossain hitting a characteristic 49-ball 58 and a welcome half-century from Aftab Ahmed. Nafis Iqbal top-scored with 69 from 113 balls to set up the large Chittagong total.

Sylhet were condemned to their fifth defeat in a row after Faisal picked up five wickets for 28 runs.

It confirmed a man-of-the-match award for the all-rounder but Sylhet continued their dismal domestic performance.

BRIEF SCORES RAJSHAHI: 220-9 in 50 overs (Anisur 61, Zubair 46; Gazi 2-25).

BARISAL: 221-7 in 50 overs (Hannan 58, Rabbi 50; Reza 2-50).

Result: Barisal won by three wickets.

KHULNA: 170 all out in 47.5 overs (Sahagir 54, Tushar 53; Robin 5-27).

DHAKA: 171-4 in 36.5 overs (Bijoy 64 not out; Bishwanath 3-19).

Result: Dhaka won by six wickets. **CHITTAGONG:** 251-7 in 50 overs (Iqbal 69, Aftab 52, Faisal 58; Tapash 2-42).

SYLHET: 130 all out in 36.1 overs (Sayem 45; Faisal 5-28). **Result:** Chittagong won by 121 runs.

DRU cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

DRU-Pepsi Inter-House Media Cricket begins today at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium with 32 teams taking part in the knockout event.

Six matches will be held on the opening day. Bangladesh Cricket Board president AHM Mostafa Kamal will declare the seven-day meet open while sponsors Transcom Beverage's managing director Golam Kuddus Chowdhury and Bangladesh Hockey Federation general secretary Khandokar Jamiluddin will

BDR bounces past Police

SPORTS REPORTER

Chittagong, Bangladesh Rifles and Bangladesh Army won their respective matches in the Citycell 24th National Basketball Championship at the Dhanmondi Basketball Stadium yesterday.

Army defeated BKSP 78-46 and Rifles thrashed Bangladesh Police 108-62.

In the other match, Chittagong beat Narsingdi 74-66.

India in driving seat

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in the last 25 minutes before lunch to pick three quick Indian wickets, including that of star batsman Sachin Tendulkar for 40.

Tendulkar offered a simple return catch to Patel, disappointing a sizeable crowd that was expecting to celebrate his 50th Test ton on Diwali, the festival of lights.

Venkatsai Laxman (40) was trapped leg before by Patel (3-135) after he had shared 66 runs for the fourth wicket with Tendulkar.

"I am delighted to take Tendulkar's wicket," said Patel. "It is the biggest scalp of my career. I was probably trying too hard yesterday. I had also been bowling a little fast."

"I shortened my run-up and just told myself to keep believing that I belong to this level of cricket. My idea was to bowl as many dot balls as possible and apply pressure on the batsmen."

The Indians were slow off the blocks after resuming at their overnight score of 329-3, putting on 63 runs in two hours of play in the first session.

Tendulkar, who scored the first of his six double centuries against New Zealand at the same venue in 1999, was uncharacteristically subdued during his nearly three-hour

stay at the crease. He hit five fours in his 133-ball knock.

New Zealand were hit by a groin injury to rookie pacer Hamish Bennett, who did not come out to bowl.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings 487 (Gambhir 21, Sehwaig 173, Dravid 104, Tendulkar 40, Laxman 40, Harbhajan 69; Vettori 4-118, Patel 3-135) **NEW ZEALAND:** First innings 69 for 2 (McCullum 38 not out, Taylor 18 not out; Zaheer 1-14, Ojha 1-15)

Sharmin

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27 in Guangzhou, China. "To be fair, we do not have any hope of winning medals in the Games, but we are expecting that the shooters will show improved performances to improve their rankings at the world level," said the BSF general secretary.

SQUAD:

Asif Hossain Khan, Abdullah Hel Baki, Shahriar Chandan, Ramjan Ali, Nadimul Islam, Iqbal Hossain, Sharmin Akhter, Akhter Ratna, Sharmin Akhter, Tripti Dutta, Sadia Sultana, Sabrina Sultana, Sharmin Shila, Armin Asha and Rony.

Men's handball starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

The EXIM Bank 20th National Men's Handball Championship will get underway at the handball stadium today.

Khulna will take on Rajshahi in the opening match. A total of 28 teams are taking part in the meet where 24 teams will compete in the first round.

Last year's champions, runners-up, third and fourth place finishers got direct entry into the second round.

In connection with the competition, a press conference was held at the Bangladesh Handball Federation yesterday.

Bangabandhu Gold Cup

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Rajnagar Govt. Primary School reached the semifinals of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup Primary School Football tournament with a solitary goal victory over Sadarampur Govt. Primary School in the quarterfinal at the Munshiganj Stadium yesterday.

Rajib netted the all-important goal in the second half.



Players and guests pose for a photograph after the conclusion of the National Tennis Federation kids tournament at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY