

Dhoni hides Tendulkar

Cricket

AFP, Johannesburg

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni downplayed the role of batting superstar Sachin Tendulkar Monday ahead of a three-Test series against South Africa.

Much of the media hype before the first Test from Thursday at Centurion Park centres on the showdown between Tendulkar, seeking his 50th Test ton, and South Africa pace ace Dale Steyn.

But Dhoni told a media conference at the match venue that the clashes between the Tests sides ranked first and second in the world with India on top were all about teamwork.

"Cricket is a team sport and not about individuals. We place more importance on the process and how we are preparing for the Tests," the 29-year-old right-hand batsman stressed.

"We know how much talent there is in the Indian squad. Preparing well and adapting well... these are the areas we are concentrating on right now," he added.

South Africa coach Corrie van Zyl backed the Indian skipper: "It is an excellent Indian team and if you are talking about them, you cannot single out individuals."

Dhoni was upbeat about the wickets

amid reports South Africa are preparing pace-and-bounce-friendly ones to aid their seamers at the expense of the Indian spinners.

"Most of our cricketers are used to playing here, whether it is the shorter forms of the game or Test cricket. We will assess the wickets and decide how we need to play."

The skipper said the Indian attack had impressed at home and abroad on wickets that were not always supportive with the bowlers adapting quickly and successfully to trigger victories.

He also dismissed statistics showing India have won only one of nine previous Tests in South Africa, stressing the series was not about history or past achievements.

South Africa received a double boost Monday when captain Graeme Smith and fellow batsman Hashim Amla were cleared to play in the first Test after recovering from injury.

Smith broke the ring finger on his leg hand in a one-day game against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates last month and Amla hurt his wrist fielding in a Test against the same country.

After Tests at Centurion, Kingsmead in Durban and Newlands in Cape Town, South Africa and India play a Twenty20 game on January 9 in Durban followed by five ODIs spread around the country.



India superstar Sachin Tendulkar (R) and star off-spinner Harbhajan Singh share a funny moment during a practice session at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Monday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

Jimmy not jetlagged

Cricket

AFP, Perth

In-form seamer James Anderson is confident the English pace attack won't lose any of its potency in the third Ashes Test starting Thursday at the WACA Ground, despite a couple of untimely setbacks.

After their second Test triumph in Adelaide to take a 1-0 lead in the series, England can retain the Ashes with a win here, but will need to do so without fast bowler Stuart Broad, who has been ruled out of the rest of the tour with an abdominal strain.

Anderson himself has to deal with jet lag and limited preparation, having flown across the world twice in the last week after a dash back to England for the birth of his daughter, Ruby.

The self-styled leader of the English pace attack only arrived back from England on Monday afternoon.

Anderson, who claimed eight wickets in the first two Tests and produced the opening day spell which put England on the path to victory in Adelaide, said he was confident his own form wouldn't suffer from his jaunt home.

"I didn't get into a sleep routine in England and didn't try to acclimatise back to English conditions," he said.

"I tried to stay on Australian time, so to speak, and I think I've done that well."

"I had a good night's sleep last night and I've got two days of preparation for the Test and I don't see why I won't go well."

In fact, Anderson said the brief break from a long tour could work in his favour.

"I feel fresh," he said. "I am probably happy for the rest from bowling after a tough first two Tests."

Anderson said he was confident which-ever pace bowler was called into the side to replace Broad would do a fine job, with towering Chris Tremlett expected to get the nod ahead of Tim Bresnan.

"Whoever replaces Stuart in the side, we have got three guys that are raring to go and they are all quality bowlers," he said.

"I am sure they will fill Stuart's shoes as well as they can."

"All three can do a fantastic job for us."

Anderson welcomed news that WACA curator Cam Sutherland had predicted a pitch with more of the pace and bounce for which the venue was once famous.

He admitted that he found the WACA surprisingly slow in the tour opener against Western Australia last month, which England won outright in under three days.

"It is nice to hear there might be some pace in the pitch and some grass left on it maybe," he said.

"If it does swing it is a nice bonus for us."

India wait on Zaheer

CRICINFO, Centurion

India looked a side at comfort with itself during their first full practice session with the whole squad for the Tests, but there was cause for concern with Zaheer Khan choosing to go through just fitness drills due to what seems like a hamstring injury.

ESPNcricinfo understands that the scans have failed to pick anything, but neither Zaheer nor the team wants to risk aggravating the injury.

"As of now he is not [fit]," a team source told ESPNcricinfo Monday. "There are still three days to go to the Test, so we didn't want to take any risks." So, even as the rest of the team had a good workout in the nets at the Supersport Park in Centurion, Zaheer spent time with Paul Chapman, the team physio.

He went through the light fitness drill gingerly, often holding on to the groin area.

It could be an injury picked up during the fourth ODI against New Zealand, in Bangalore. As he finished the 49th over of the New Zealand innings -- only his eighth in the match -- Zaheer went back holding on to the groin area. Then Zaheer was making a comeback from a groin injury that had him miss the third Test and the first two ODIs against New Zealand. He also didn't feature in the fifth and final ODI in Chennai.

Beer slightly better than Doherty!

Cricket

AFP, Perth

In an extraordinary slap in the face for Ashes debutant Michael Beer, one of the men behind his remarkable rise to

selector Darryl Foster, part of the selection panel that handed Beer his first class debut just two months ago, offered a less than glowing endorsement to Wisden Cricket on the left-arm spinner.

"He's okay," was Foster's uninspiring assessment of

Ground on Thursday as a "panic selection".

Foster said Australia had fallen for the "three-card trick" in believing star English batsman Kevin Pietersen is vulnerable against left-arm spinners.

He questioned that assessment and doubted whether Beer would do any better than the nine other spinners that have come and gone since Shane Warne retired.

Foster said Beer, with just six first-class games and 16 wickets to his credit, was only "slightly better" than the spinner he replaced, Tasmanian Xavier Doherty.

"He seems to be a reasonably good competitor. Whether he's class enough for that level, time will tell," Foster said of Beer.

"Doherty wasn't up to that task and I don't know that any left-arm spinner here would be up to it."

"I think Beer is slightly better, he's taller than Doherty, his action is good, he does get some drop and a bit of flight and he's turned the ball on the WACA, which is surprising."

"But I do think it's a panic decision."

"I don't know why they are determined to play a spinner."

"Once upon a time they would have played four quicks at the WACA and left it at that."

Foster's comments came just 24 hours after 26-year-old Beer himself admitted he wasn't sure if he was ready for the big stage of Test cricket.

"It is a hard one that," he said on Monday when asked if he was up to the challenge.



PHOTO: INTERNET

CAN HE HOLD THIS SMILE? Michael Beer has a laugh during training at the WACA in Perth on Tuesday.

Test cricket has questioned Beer on wisdenricricket.com, describing his elevation to the national side for the third Test starting at the WACA

Zulu rules in rookies' Cup

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batted at number eight or seven in the line-up, and his highest score was only an unbeaten 52 against Sri Lanka at Northampton. He had only one other fifty in the tournament; proof that he scored whenever needed and was in the form of his life. He almost took South Africa to the final after blasting an unbeaten 31 from 16 balls in the semifinal against Australia.

As much as his penchant for big hits, it was his composure under pressure that made him such an impact player in the tournament. An example of Klusener delivering under pressure was when he smashed the likes of Wasim Akram, Shoaib Akhtar and Saqlain Mushtaq to pull off an unlikely victory against Pakistan in a Super Six match at Trent Bridge.

It was not only his batting that made opponents cower. Using the seaming conditions perfectly he picked up 17 wickets, the fourth highest for the tournament and the highest for South Africa. He picked up five for 21 against Kenya at Amstelveen.

Australian captain Steve Waugh was the second highest run-scorer of the World Cup with 398 runs, including an unbeaten innings of 120 against South Africa in the Super Six match at Leeds; an innings played under immense pres-

sure when the heat was on in Australia's last chance to qualify for the semifinals.

Geoff Allott of New Zealand and Shane Warne of Australia created new Cup records, taking twenty wickets each. Geoff Allott sat top of the bowling charts, having played one match fewer than Warne, who raised his game when it mattered by taking four wickets apiece in the semifinal and final.

Pakistan's gloveman Moin Khan led the keepers' list with fifteen dismissals from ten matches, while West Indian Ridley Jacobs came in second with fourteen from only five matches.

Though he did not know it at the time, the 1999 World Cup was to be Shane Warne's last. In the 2003 edition he was banned for a year after failing a dope test on the eve of the tournament, and subsequently quit one-day internationals. It was also the last tournament for the twins Steve and Mark Waugh, both having considerable success with Mark finishing fourth on the tournament batting charts.

Iconic Sri Lankan captain Arjuna Ranatunga retired after the World Cup. His Indian and South African counterparts in the tournament, Mohammed Azharuddin and Hansie Cronje, would not be allowed to play cricket any longer after their involvement in the match-fixing scandal that rocked the world the following year.

BCB sits to fix WC

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"I want to officially start the camp from January 8 and I believe there would be some gap in between the league matches so that we can continue our practice. I will prefer to start the camp with maximum 23 players and now it's up to the selectors," said Siddons over telephone.

The Australian will return to Dhaka on January 6.

Chief selector Rafiqul Alam informed that they had already submitted the list to the board, as it must be sent to International Cricket Council (ICC) very soon.

"We picked mostly from the players who were in our consideration for the last two years and we also included a few promising players in the long list," said Rafiqul.

BCB's cricket operations committee chairman Enayet Hossain Siraj however informed that they would also talk about the New Zealand cricket board's proposal of playing two Tests and five one-day internationals immediately after the World Cup.

"We will discuss on the New Zealand proposal but it will not be easy to find a slot for accommodating the series," said Siraj.

Cox's Bazar

FROM PAGE 17

here. Rasul came with his friend to watch the Afghanistan-Nepal match.

"We've come all the way to watch this match. This is a big event for the district and I could not miss the experience. Maybe, I will come tomorrow with my kids to watch Bangladesh's match."

A walk around the stadium revealed the true excitement of the locals to witness the spectacle. The roofs and windows of adjacent buildings were thronged with eager onlookers and the high walls beyond the stadium and the trees surrounding it were perilously populated for an experience that is very unique and rare for a place more known for its tourism than its sports.

Women's h'ball

SPORTS REPORTER

The Dhaka Sports Association finished third in the Exim Bank 21st National Women's Handball Championship with a massive 27-9 win over Dhaka University at the Handball Stadium yesterday.

Dhaka dominated the show with an 11-6 lead in the first half of the place-deciding encounter. Dhaka's Jolly was the top scorer with seven goals while Sathi and Hosne Ara found the destination four times each for the winners. Sima, Bitasta and Bilkis also scored two goals each.

The final between Bangladesh Ansar and the Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation will take place today.

Victory Day

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Mushtaque was an inspirational official of Azad Boys Club. On the blood-splattered night of March 25, 1971 Mushtaque was shot dead by the occupation force near his beloved club, which was at that time situated at Dhaka's Gulistan.

TEAMS

SHAHEED MUSHTAQUE XI: Jahriar Nafees (captain), Jahirul Islam (vice-captain), Shamsur Rahman, Fazle Mahmud, Nazimuddin, Alok Kapali, Marshall Ayub, Sahagor Hossain (wicketkeeper), Shahadat Hossain, Syed Rassel, Dollar Mahmud, Mohammad Elias and Shaker Ahmed.

STAND BY: Mahbulul Alam and Forhad Hossain.

SHAHEED JEWEL XI: Mohammad Mithun (captain), Shabbir Rahman (vice-captain), Rony Talukder, Anamul Haque, Nasir Hossain, Shuvagata Hom, Asif Ahmed, Mahmudul Hasan, Kamrul Islam, Nur Hossain, Nazmul Hossain, Alauddin Babu and Shuvashish Roy.

STAND BY: Mominul Hoque and Abul Hasan.

Archery C'ship starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Uttara Bank 4th National Archery Championship will get underway today at the Army Stadium with 150 archers including 40 women participating in the three-day meet.

Archers from 53 teams -- 13 district sports associations, three services teams, one institution and 36 clubs -- will fight for 12 gold medals in three events of recurve bow, compound and bamboo bow.

Bangladesh Ansar, comprised mostly of national team players, are tipped as the favourites.

"Archery has been flourishing mostly through individual efforts so far, hence we have brought in clubs in the national championship. We hope to hold a club championship in a couple of years since the number of DSAs have been gradually increased," said Bangladesh Archery Federation general secretary Razib Uddin Ahmed Chapal at a press conference at the Bangladesh Olympic Association yesterday.

Recurve and compound

are international events but bamboo bow is a local invention and it has been kept in the championship as the bamboo bow is usually used during the talent hunt programme, informed Chapal.

Of an estimated yearly budget of Tk 52 lakh provided by Uttara Bank, over Tk 3 lakh will be used for the championship, said Uttara Bank executive general manager Selim Nazrul Haq.

"Archery in Bangladesh had started its international journey since 2005 and considering this, it is still a baby though we have already got some international success," said federation president Lieutenant General Moinul Islam.

He hoped that archery would go further if they could ensure proper training for the archers. In this regard they had placed a five-year plan to the authority concerned in response to the Prime Minister and were searching for a place to establish a training academy," said the former BDRDG.

Chapal informed that Abul Kashem Mamum, an archer of

the compound event, has been named for FITA gold award for his performance in the Delhi Commonwealth Games where he scored 681 out of 720.

Premier League

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series, will be available for the most coveted 50-overs-a-side domestic competition from the very first game.

PARTIAL FIXTURES

Dec 18: Mohammedan v Orient at Dhanmondi

Biman v Prime Doleshwar at Rajshahi

Abahani v Surjo Torun at Bogra

Dec 19: Kalabagan v BKSP at Bogra

Victoria v Gazi Tank at Rajshahi

CCS v Old DOHS at BKSP

Dec 21: Mohammedan v Prime Doleshwar at Rajshahi

Biman v Surjo Torun at Bogra

Abahani v BKSP at BKSP

Dec 22: Kalabagan v Gazi Tank at BKSP

Victoria v Old DOHS at Rajshahi

CCS v Orient at Bogra



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Archery Federation president Lieutenant General Moinul Islam (C) speaks during a press conference, organised in connection with the Uttara Bank 4th National Archery Championship that starts today, at the Bangladesh Olympic Association Auditorium on Tuesday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Grill, for short

6 Plot

12 Department

13 Chalk-board accessory

14 Vitamin C source

15 List

16 — mater

17 Distort

19 Shaker — OH

20 Keeping everyone waiting

22 Conk out

24 Helgenberger series

27 14-Across' coat

29 On

32 Nuts

35 Bridge

36 Infamous Roman

37 — au vin

38 Rent

40 Pebbles' pet

42 Justice Dept. division

DOWN

2 Composer

3 Of the kidneys

4 Satchel

5 Interrogate

6 Withered

7 Three, they say

8 Possesses

9 Pleasing in appearance

10 Bump into

11 Blunders

12 Feathery accessory

18 Half-dollar face

21 "Bow-wow!"

23 Cartesian conclusion

24 Lettuce variety

25 Dine

26 Po folks?

28 Scorn

30 Yoko of music

31 Without delay

33 Inseparable

34 Trinity member

39 "Were — That Special Face"

41 Little hooter

42 Datum

43 Highland hillside

45 Scored 100 on

47 Juno's counterpart

48 Handy pc. of Latin

49 Curvy character

51 Morsel

53 Hot tub

Solution time: 27 mins.

LET PROD QUAY
ILO RUBE URGE
ZEPPELIN INON
ZEBRAS INN
WEBER DEW SEE
HILL RUN BLEW
IRA TEN BLESS
ZEBRAS PEI
HUNG ZERO HOUR
OREO ERIN SRI
PIER DALE ESP

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CRYPTOQUIP

OMUMF XR AKXEK U WUOM
UCVJRM VP QLUICKXMF
ALXMRQ XCISFCFRMO ULF
CURJPUEMJLFY: IFREXSWURXU.

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: BECAUSE THE VOLLEYBALL OFFICIAL IS DEPRIVED OF SOMETHING, MIGHT A PERSON SAY HE'S BE-REFFED?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: K equals H