

Eng decimated further

AFP, London

England may have won the Ashes and triumphed at the 2010 World Twenty20 but even their fans may think twice about backing them to win the World Cup after an injury-hit finale to their tour of Australia. Not only did they lose a seven-match one-day series 6-1, bad enough in itself, they also ended the tour with injury worries regarding six members of their 15-man squad. The most concerning was to left-handed batsman Eoin Morgan, who already in his relatively brief England career has more than once demonstrated the happy knack of being able to pace a run chase with a mixture of conventional strokeplay and quirky reverse hits. But the former Ireland international is now in danger of missing the World Cup completely after fracturing a finger in the fourth one-day against Australia. Veteran all-rounder Paul Collingwood (back spasm), Yorkshire seamers Ajmal Shahzad (hamstring) and Tim Bresnan (calf), key off-spinner Graeme Swann (back/knee) and pace bowler Stuart Broad (abdominal strain) also had their tour of Australia cut short by injury.

"We're pretty confident the other guys are going to be fit, but Eoin Morgan we are not sure of at this stage," said England captain Andrew Strauss of his Middlesex teammate. "It's a big loss for us potentially. He is particularly important in those conditions as well, being able to clear the ropes in the manner that he does." England have just a three-day turnaround in between returning home and then flying out to the sub-continent ahead of their World Cup opener against the Netherlands -- a team they lost to in the 2009 World Twenty20 at Lord's -- on February 22. "The first thing to ponder is who is fit and who is not fit," Strauss said. Since making the last of their three losing appearances in a World Cup final in 1992, England have often struggled to find a top-order batsman capable of exploiting the fielding restrictions in the first 15 overs. The tour of Australia did see Jonathan Trott come good in both the Tests and one-dayers, including a fine innings of 137 in an England record total off 333 for six in the sixth ODI in Sydney. But the fact England still lost that match highlights worries about their ability to bowl with sufficient accuracy. For all that one-day cricket was pioneered as a professional sport by the county game in the 1960s, England

have never won a World Cup. Both England players and administrators believe they are unlikely to do so for as long as the World Cup follows an Ashes tour in Australia -- always considered the ultimate challenge for an England cricketer. And it's hard to shake the view that while Test success is cherished in England, one-day wins are treated as an optional extra. Australia, three-times successive World Cup champions, would be the first to point out that playing in Ashes series ahead of the global showpiece need not damage your prospects unduly. But then again, they have been at home and, for much of the time, have been winning more often than not against their old rivals. Certainly, it is to avoid a clash with the 2015 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, that England have brought forward their next Ashes tour to 2013/14. "Our schedule is ridiculous going into this World Cup," said Kevin Pietersen, arguably England's most talented batsman and a man they could do with firing on all cylinders in Asia. "It has been for England teams for a very long time, and that's probably why England have not done well in World Cups."



Spain's Tommy Robredo kisses the ATP Open trophy after defeating Colombia's Santiago Giraldo in Santiago yesterday.

Watson's second in a row

AFP, Melbourne

Shane Watson capped an outstanding playing year by winning Australian cricketer's top individual award, the Allan Border Medal, for the second straight year on Monday. Watson's win capped a superb night in Melbourne for the 29-year-old allrounder, who also won his second consecutive one-day international player of the year award and his first Test player of the year award. He was also runner-up to David Hussey in the Twenty20 award, which was given for the first time. Watson polled 295 votes in the Allan Border Medal, which combines votes for every match in all three formats that Australia has played in the year to February 2. He finished 100 votes clear of Michael Hussey (195) and Mitchell Johnson (193) in the medal voting. In other awards, New South Wales batsman Usman Khawaja was named state player of the year and NSW paceman Trent Copeland was the young player of the year.

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Isinbayeva back & wins

AFP, Moscow

Russia's pole vault queen Yelena Isinbayeva returned to competition in style at the Russian Winter indoor meeting winning the event, landing a season's best result of 4.81m here on Sunday. Isinbayeva needed to execute only one attempt at 4.61m to win the competition and gain sweet revenge over Poland's Anna Rogovska, who defeated her at the world championships in Berlin and Doha. Later Isinbayeva, who has set and incredible 27 world records -- 15 outdoor and 12 indoor -- during her career so far, also cleared 4.81 on the first attempt to eliminate any doubts in her supremacy in the pole vault sector. But she was unable to clear attempts at 4.91. Ponting sure

'Aus ready for title'

AFP, Perth

Australia cricket coach Tim Nielsen says his team is in good shape for their World Cup title defence despite injury doubts over several key players. The Australians, aiming for a fourth straight title, wound up their preparation for the tournament with a 57-run win over England in their final one-day international in Perth on Sunday. They completed an emphatic 6-1 win over the tourists and Nielsen said the taxing seven-match series had been ideal for his team ahead of the World Cup in India, Sri Lanka and

Bangladesh. England were left to rue a lengthy injury list at the end of a series they believed was too long and Australia have fitness concerns of their own, but Nielsen said he was happy with how his team was placed. "We've had an excellent preparation," he said after the win in Perth on Sunday. "The most pleasing thing about the seven games is we have had contributions at different times from pretty well everyone in the squad. "Everyone has got the feeling their game is in pretty good order, everyone is pretty clear with their roles. We are going in in pretty good shape." While Nielsen's confidence is up, there is still

considerable doubt over the final make-up of Australia's 15-man squad. Captain Ricky Ponting (finger), veteran batsman Mike Hussey (hamstring) and first-choice spinner Nathan Hauritz (shoulder) all have to prove their fitness for the World Cup, which starts on February 19, while reserve Shaun Marsh is also sidelined by a hamstring strain. Nielsen admitted the injuries were an unwelcome distraction and said some crucial decisions on player fitness would be made over the next 48 hours. But he was upbeat about Ponting's prospects, after the skipper came through a batting session in Sydney on Friday. "He seems to be getting better every day and is at least where we would like him to be, which is great," Nielsen said. "But he hasn't played any competitive cricket in a while, so that in itself is a risk." Nielsen said Australia needed to be wary of the temptation to take injured players into the six-week tournament. "We can't afford to just have 11 or 12 players in our first couple of games. We need to have some coverage," he said. Australia, still the number one ranked side in ODIs despite their slide in Test cricket, go into the tournament on a 23-match winning streak in World Cup matches, having been undefeated at the last two tournaments.



PHOTO: INTERNET

Star Australia all-rounder Shane Watson poses with the trophy after being named the Australian ODI player-of-the-year for the second year running yesterday.

Cultivating a winning

FROM PAGE 16 with hard work." Nafees can also be considered a member of the old-guard having played under Habibul Bashar as well. "It is like a relay race," says Nafees. "[Habibul] Bashar and his team had bought the team to a certain level and Shakib is now carrying it on. We are moving forward, that is unquestionable," says Nafees. His words are vindicated with performances of the highest calibre in series wins at the Caribbean and the recent back-to-back series wins at home which have raised public interest to a crescendo. But with increased expectations comes increased pressure. The World Cup at home is the sternest test of them all. How will Bangladesh stand up to this? "People handle pressure in different ways; some thrive under it, some play their best when they don't have it," he

says. "But there is a stern belief within this side because we are finally winning." A lot of this credit must go to Jamie Siddons as all readily admit, but it is an adage of ex-coach Dav Whatmore's that comes to mind. "Develop a winning habit," he continually drilled into the players. It seems that they finally have. Eden awaits

PCB says bans 'regrettable'

AFP, Karachi

The head of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Monday said lengthy bans given to three Pakistani players for spot-fixing were "regrettable" but promised to help them in their rehabilitation. "PCB terms the verdict against the three players as regrettable and a sad reality which must be faced," Ijaz Butt said in a statement. An International Cricket Council (ICC) anti-corruption tribunal on Saturday banned former Pakistan captain Salman Butt for ten years, Mohammad Asif for seven years and Mohammad Aamer for five years after a hearing in Doha. The charges against them related to alleged incidents during the Test against England at Lord's last year, when Britain's News of the World newspaper claimed the players were willing to deliberately bowl no-balls.

Robredo's 10th title

AP, Santiago

Tommy Robredo beat Santiago Giraldo 6-2, 2-6, 7-6 (5) on Sunday to win the Movistar Open clay-court tournament. The sixth-seeded Robredo won his 10th ATP title after failing to reach a final last year. "Ten is a very nice number and it feels good to lift the trophy again," Robredo said. The eighth-seeded Giraldo let the third set slip away after he led 5-2. The Colombian was playing in his first ATP final and has reached the quarterfinals or better in three tournaments this season. The 28-year-old Robredo said he saw his opening late in the match.

Ansar reign

FROM PAGE 16

DSA in straight 3-0 sets while women's team also followed their footsteps by defeating Biman in 3-0 sets. However, the surprising results came in the boys' team event where Kishorganj DSA shocked Bangladesh Biman in 3-0 sets in the final, said a BTTF press release yesterday.

Sony nat'l

FROM PAGE 16

In the girls' U-16 singles, Mobashera Firoz Mourin defeated Pinky Bepari 6-2, 6-3 to move into the quarterfinals while Mahin Reza Khan defeated Sazzad Hossain 6-4, 6-4 to advance into quarterfinals of the boys' U-16 singles.

Marsh sings for minnows

AFP, Sydney

Australia Test great Rod Marsh on Monday warned the major countries not to take the smaller cricketing nations lightly at this month's World Cup. Marsh, 63, the Director of Coaching at the International Cricket Council's Global Academy in Dubai, has worked with players from Ireland, Kenya, the Netherlands and Canada extensively over the past two years in preparation for the tournament from February 19. "I am not saying one of those teams will win the World Cup, but I am saying they will give a very good account of themselves," Marsh told Australian Associated Press from Dubai. "These guys have prepared probably better than most of the Test nations, because they haven't had all the other competitions and distractions. "Australia and England, for example, have had the Ashes and a long one-day series." Ireland reached the Super Eight stages in 2007 and Marsh believes they have the talent to repeat that achievement this year. "Ireland are always well prepared, they have experienced players, most are playing

county cricket and they are in pretty good shape," he said. "They actually think they can win the tournament and not just compete, which I think is fantastic." Batsmen from the ICC Associate nations have been using advanced batting and bowling machines as they look to give themselves the best possible chance of success at the tournament in India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. "We've strived to get them into a position where they know all about batting on the subcontinent," Marsh said. "We identified that the biggest problem for these guys in the past was that they didn't make enough runs. "There has been a heap of footage shown to them about how the top players bat on the subcontinent and how they handle reverse swing. They cannot be any better prepared." Marsh was in charge of the Australian youth academy between 1990 and 2001 before taking on a similar role with England for five years. He believes Australia are still the team to beat in the World Cup. "Australia are still the top one-day team and although I cannot possibly pick a winner of the World Cup, they are still the team to beat because they are the holders," he said.

Pak greats call for reform

FROM PAGE 16

"What prevails in our system is that the patron of the PCB (President Asif Ali Zardari) appoints the chairman who doesn't ban key players because he fears his team will lose and he will get sacked," he told AFP. Many believe Pakistan missed the chance to purge cricket after a match-fixing

inquiry led by judge Malik Mohammad Qayyum between 1998-2000 saw Salim Malik and Aatur Rehman banned for life. Six other players -- Wasim Akram, current national coach Waqar Younis, Inzamamul Haq, Mushtaq Ahmed, Saeed Anwar and Akram Raza -- were fined. "I conducted a judicial inquiry which could have served as a way to purge our cricket but my recommendations to keep close eyes on Pakistan players were now followed," Qayyum said recently. Former captain Rameez Raja said the latest bans will serve as a warning to future players.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 1 Minus-cule bit 5 Lend an illegal hand 9 Eviscerate 12 Trade-mark symbol 13 Old Italian money 14 Spring mo. 15 Travel while campaigning 17 Fish eggs 18 Mono alternative 19 Minimal change 21 Yoked beast 22 Saw 24 "The Amazing —" 27 Bear hair 28 Pirates' quaff 31 Geological period 32 Anger 33 Mate of 37- Across 34 Predicate necessity 36 Legislation 37 Mate of 33- Across 38 Cancels out "Forget it!" 41 "— Foolish Things" 43 One side of the Urals 47 Old garment 48 "Phooey!" 51 Clay, today 52 Incite 53 On the briny 54 "Ulalume" writer Solution time: 25 mins. B A I L G E M P R O F U L N A L E T L O G E R O C K F O R D A C R E R E H E A R S O C K E T S K I T H E W A M P E F T O B E Y S T O U R Y O U O L I O M I N O S O P T L P S K Y L E D E C M O R A Y S R E U S E S I D O L S H A M R O C K D I C T A U F B U R Y I N K Y Y E T S L U E 55 "Desire Under the —" 56 Ollie's pal 20 Early bird? 22 Emanations 23 TV host Carey 24 Gun the engine 25 Exist 26 Noted steel tycoon 27 Stuff 29 Eggs 30 Prized possession 35 Clear the tables 37 Heart lines? 39 Sill 40 Rapa — (Easter Island) kiln 41 Snare 42 Head light? 43 Tackles' teammates 44 Brewer's kiln 45 Entreaty 46 Vivacity 49 "You've got mail" co. 50 Aries

Grid for crossword puzzle with numbers 1-56.

CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: PLACE THAT HOUSES MANY MEDICAL PICTURES OF A BIG SITCOM FAMILY: THE DEPARTMENT OF BRADY-OLGY. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Y equals E