



Ace England spinner Graeme Swann bowls during a training session at Swalec Stadium in Cardiff yesterday, ahead of the first Test against Sri Lanka starting here today.

PHOTO: AFP

LAW WANTS TO GIVE ENGLAND TOUGH TIME First Test starts today

Cricket

AFP, Cardiff

Stuart Law has warned England against taking Sri Lanka lightly even though he concedes they face "the toughest deal on the planet" playing the Ashes-winners in a Test series starting here on Thursday.

Former Australia batsman Law is the interim coach of Sri Lanka following the decision by compatriot Trevor Bayliss, to whom he was the assistant, to return home to take charge of New South Wales after guiding the islanders to this year's World Cup final, where they lost to India.

This three-Test series sees Sri Lanka without legendary off-spin star Muttiah Muralidaran, now retired completely, and slingshot fast bowler Lasith Malinga, who has quit Tests on injury grounds.

As if that were not bad enough, first-choice seamers Nuwan Pradeep (cruciate ligament) and Dilhara Fernando (knee), each of whom was in the wickets during the win over the second string England Lions last week, which followed a tour-opening victory over Middlesex, could both be ruled out of the first Test.

Nevertheless, Law told reporters here on Tuesday: "I would be very surprised if England took us cheaply or under-estimate us."

"Last time we met was in the World Cup quarters [where Sri Lanka thrashed England by 10 wickets] so I think they realise no matter where we play, we are going to be competitive."

Law, a prolific batsman in state cricket, who won just the one Test cap

such as Australia's top-order strength in the 1990s and early 2000s, knows England well from his successful stints with county sides Essex and Lancashire.

And he's been impressed by what he has seen of late.

"I've said openly, in the last 18 months England have been the best team in world cricket. We are preparing for them to be the toughest deal on the planet at this stage."

There are concerns as to whether Sri Lanka's depleted attack can bowl England out twice, but Law said: "It seems that everybody else isn't confident in our bowling."

"We haven't got Murali but we've got good spin. In English conditions, I believe we've got the seamers who can take 20 wickets."

As for his own future, he said: "No doubt a lot of our board will turn out for the [second] Lord's Test match and maybe there are conversations to be had then. I'm not really thinking too far ahead. We have a big five days ahead and that's what I'm focusing on."

Sri Lanka's batting has been bolstered by the arrival of former captains Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene from the Indian Premier League (IPL) while all-rounder Farveez Maharoof, in good form for Lancashire, has been drafted in as seam bowling cover.

Encouragingly for the tourists both skipper Tillakaratne Dilshan and Tharanga Paranavitana have made two hundreds apiece on tour.

But England captain Andrew Strauss got a good look at Sri Lanka's bowlers while making a century for Middlesex, as did county colleague Eoin Morgan

while scoring 193 for the Lions -- an innings that sealed the former Ireland left-hander's return to the Test squad following Paul Collingwood's retirement.

Another Middlesex man, fast bowler Steven Finn, could be the player to drop out of England's 12-strong squad, leaving fellow Ashes-winners James Anderson, Chris Tremlett, Stuart Broad and Graeme Swann to form an attack that will be without the injured Tim Bresnan.

England have lost just three out of 22 home Test series since 2000, winning its last four in a row. And their record since Strauss replaced Kevin Pietersen as captain in 2009 is played eight, won six, drawn one and lost one.

But stranger things than Sri Lanka winning in Cardiff have happened in the Welsh capital -- for example, six years ago Bangladesh beat then world champions Australia in one of the great one-day international upsets.

TEAMS

ENGLAND (from): Andrew Strauss (captain), Alastair Cook, Jonathan Trott, Kevin Pietersen, Ian Bell, Eoin Morgan, Matt Prior, Stuart Broad, Graeme Swann, Chris Tremlett, James Anderson, Steven Finn.

SRI LANKA (from): Tillakaratne Dilshan (captain), Tharanga Paranavitana, Lahiru Thirimanne, Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardene, Thilan Samaraweera, Dinesh Chandimal, Prasanna Jayawardene, Thisara Perera, Suraj Randiv, Ajantha Mendis, Rangana Herath, Dilhara Fernando, Chanaka Welegedara, Suranga Lakmal, Nuwan Pradeep, Farveez Maharoof.

Overdose of cricket!

AFP, New Delhi

The Indian Premier League (IPL) has been as noisy and flamboyant as ever, but some experts believe it has suffered a poor year caused by its ballooning format and cricket overkill following the World Cup.

The IPL bandwagon, which started rolling just six days after India won the World Cup in Mumbai on April 2, will eventually come to halt after 74 games with the final in Chennai on Saturday.

The event has revolutionised cricket since it burst onto the scene in 2008 with a heady mixture of international stars, swashbuckling Twenty20 action and Bollywood glamour tapping India's immense market for the sport.

But there were signs this year that its novelty factor may be wearing thin with falling spectator and television audience figures causing concern.

According to the latest study by UK-based consultancy Brand Finance, the IPL's brand value has dropped by 11 per cent since last year. Currently, the IPL is valued at 3.67 billion dollars, against last year's 4.13 billion dollars.

Television viewing numbers were down 22 per cent for the first 26 games across six key markets, according to TAM Media Research, India's leading ratings agency.

Much of the blame has been put on "cricket fatigue" after India won the six-week World Cup at home, triggering wild celebrations across the country.

Others have pointed to superstar players, such as Yuvraj Singh, disappointing loyal fans by switching between sides that have been trying to build up a passionate following from scratch.

Official figures have not been released but many stadiums were not sold out for games, despite being scheduled in the evening.

The addition of two new sides to the competition also attracted criticism that the event was becoming bloated and out of control.

"There's an overkill of cricket," said Bunty Sajdeh, chief executive of Cornerstone, a Mumbai-based sports management company.

"For any Indian fan, winning the World Cup was the pinnacle. Anything after that is of little value. Other than that, the changes in team's composition have been a major factor."

"Fans find it difficult to accept a new player in their local team who has played for the rival team in the past few seasons."

The IPL has also encountered problems since the 2010 edition with the sacking of its founder and supremo Lalit Modi, who personified the event's brash and extrovert nature.

Siddharth Mallya, co-owner of the Royal Challengers Bangalore franchise compared the IPL without Modi -- who faces criminal charges on corruption allegations -- to "sugarfree candyfloss".

"It looks the same, tastes the same but you know something is missing," he told reporters in Mumbai on Mon-

day adding that "Modi had a vision." The wealthy Indian cricket board, owners of the IPL, did their best to keep fans happy with the usual razmatazz of cheerleaders, thumping music and designer-clad Bollywood actresses in the stands.

Discussion centred on Shane Warne's farewell season -- tainted by controversy after a bust-up with a cricket official -- Chris Gayle slaughtering bowlers and Sourav Ganguly's ill-advised comeback.

As ever, Sachin Tendulkar's every move attracted huge interest.

Despite the grumbles, many point to the IPL's strengths and its ongoing commercial success. Sponsorship soared about 30 per cent from last year, according to industry estimates.

"The IPL is surviving because it is a very great business model with a win-win situation for everybody involved," Shreedhar Swamy, a popular cricket blogger, told AFP.

"The owner gets publicity and money, viewers get entertainment, players get new fans and more money. Nobody's complaining."

Amrit Mathur, chief operating officer of the Delhi Daredevils, brushed aside talks of declining interest in the IPL and said reports of poor TV ratings were "misleading".

"Initially there was some spectator fatigue but it has been an unusual year because of the World Cup," he said. "Things have picked up recently, and on a scale of ten I would rate this IPL at eight."

Federer's flying start

AP, Paris



Playing an opponent who had never lost a match at the French Open, Roger Federer made it look easy

Wednesday by winning 13 straight games from the first set to the third.

The 2009 champion at Roland Garros, despite being broken early in the match, beat French wild card Maxime Teixeira 6-3, 6-0, 6-2 to reach the third round. Teixeira is now 1-1 at the French Open after winning his first tour-level match on Sunday.

"He fought hard, and afterwards he was trying to get the best score," Federer said of his 22-year-old opponent. "The score was balanced for 1 1/2 sets, but even then he fought hard."

Top-ranked Caroline Wozniacki and 2010 French Open finalist Sam Stosur also advanced to the third round. On the men's side, No. 7 David Ferrer of Spain, No. 9 Gael Monfils of France and former US Open champion Juan Martin del Potro made it through.

Later Wednesday, Novak Djokovic was scheduled to be back on court in the second round, as well as 2010 French Open champion Francesca Schiavone.

Federer didn't face a single break point in his opening match, and Teixeira managed only one on Wednesday -- and he converted it. But then after the Frenchman held to go to 3-3, Federer dominated and didn't lose another game until the Teixeira made it 4-1 in the third set.

"During 1 1/2 sets you're really well focused, and after this you can relax a little at the end of the match. And it was a bit simpler as well at the end," Federer said. "Now I'm very happy with these types of matches. I can practice more and so on, but now I'm really in the tournament, which is a good thing."

Teixeira had beaten another French wild card, Vincent Millot, in the first round.

"I gave it all. I did what I could," Teixeira said. "To play against Roger is an incredible experience. I'll never forget it and it will be great memories."

Federer will next face 29th-seeded Janko Tipsarevic, who beat Pere Riba of Spain 6-1, 6-3, 6-0. Tipsarevic took Federer to five sets in the third round of the 2008 Australian Open, eventually losing 10-8.

Del Potro, who beat Federer in the 2009 US Open final, defeated Blaz Kavcic of Slovenia 6-3, 6-2, 6-4. The

25th-seeded Argentine could face Djokovic in the third round.

Ferrer advanced by beating Julien Benneteau 6-3, 6-4, 6-2. The Spaniard has twice reached the quarterfinals at Roland Garros, in 2005 and '08.

No. 31 Sergiy Stakhovsky of Ukraine also made it through.

Wozniacki beat Aleksandra Wozniak of Canada 6-3, 7-6. The Dane trailed 6-3 in the tiebreaker but won the final five points, saving three set points to reach the third round.

Wozniacki, who won despite hitting nine fewer winners than her opponent, again played with a bandage on her left thigh.

Stosur, who lost to Schiavone in last year's final at Roland Garros, advanced to the third round by beating Simona Halep 6-0, 6-2. The eighth-seeded Stosur had 21 winners and broke her opponent six times before she served out the match at love.

No. 10 Jelena Jankovic of Serbia, No. 13 Svetlana Kuznetsova of Russia, No. 14 Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova of Russia, No. 17 Julia Goerges of Germany, No. 28 Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia and No. 29 Peng Shuai of China also won, while Gisela Dulko of Argentina eliminated No. 32 Tsvetana Pironkova of Bulgaria.

Hosts

FROM PAGE 16 fought 3-2 win to set up the final clash against India, who defeated Sri Lanka 3-1 in semis.

The girls of Bangladesh followed in the footsteps of the boys' as they went 3-0 down to Malaysia. SA Minara lost to Hoying 11-4, 11-8 and 11-8, Fatima Tuz Zohra lost to Lee R You 11-4, 11-5 and 11-6 while Snigdha Rahman lost to Chua W Zhen 11-9, 11-2 and 11-9 to be eliminated from the group stage.

Malaysia, however, went down straight 3-0 at the hands of Thailand in the semifinal while China thrashed India straight 3-0 in the other semifinal to set up the final clash against Thailand.

MSC's Rwandan

FROM PAGE 16 his home country following a request from his family.

Mohammed expressed their deepest condolences at the death of Ismael and its former Iranian coach Nasser Hezaji, who also died of cancer on Tuesday.

Dilshan won't

FROM PAGE 16 was turned down by Sri Lanka Cricket chairman D.S. de Silva, who said Tuesday: "The circumstances, with regards to security, don't allow us to play matches there. Even the ICC [International Cricket Council] has not given us security clearance."

Since the attack, no major nation has toured Pakistan, forcing the country to play 'home' series in the United Arab Emirates, England and New Zealand.

Jenner no more

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Former Australian Test cricketer Terry Jenner, who helped turn Shane Warne into one of the world's greatest bowlers, died Wednesday aged 66.

Leg-spinner Jenner suffered a massive heart attack while coaching in England in April 2010 and never fully regained his health, passing away at his home in Adelaide, Cricket Australia said in a statement.

While he played nine Tests in the 1970s, Jenner was also known as the only Australian Test cricketer to be jailed -- spending two years behind bars for embezzlement.

He turned his life around after meeting Warne, who he started coaching in the early 1990s, and was regularly on hand to refine the Test great's action during his record-breaking career.

"Working with Shane changed everything," Jenner said late last year.

"I was out there earning the respect of people and the good news is that I felt like I'd redeemed myself for the downs I had."

The success he had with Warne opened up many avenues, including being an Australian Broadcasting Corporation commen-

tator, with his roaring voice telling young spinners to "give it a rip" a regular feature.

"Terry was a very, very strong influence on Shane Warne. That says it all," former Australian captain Allan Border told Fox Sports News.

"There's not a spin bowler in the country who hasn't had any time with Terry Jenner. He's just one of those fellas who connected to the younger generation. He was just so passionate about it."

Born in Perth, Jenner represented Western Australia but moved to South Australia four summers after his debut.

The move paid off with his first Test coming in the series opener of England's 1970-71 visit, and he collected the wickets of John Edrich and Geoffrey Boycott.

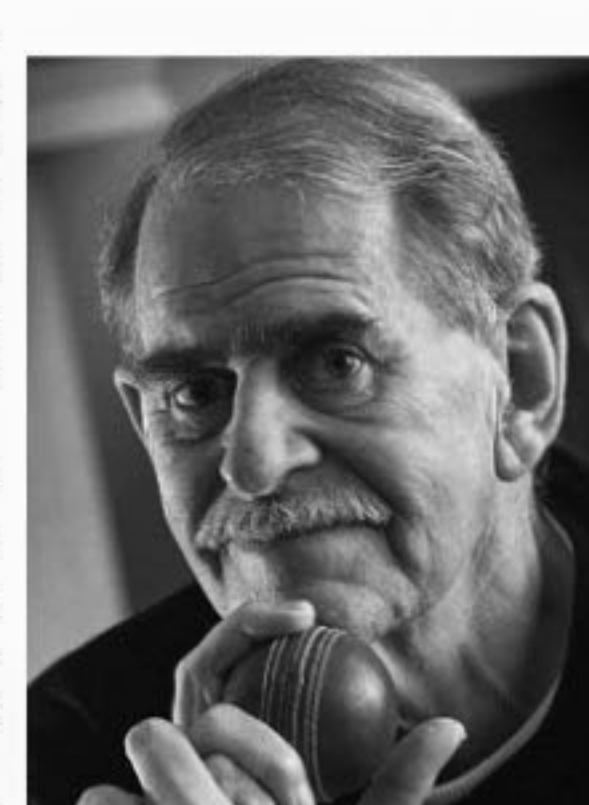
His most famous involvement in that Test series came when, batting at No.9, he was

hit in the head by a John Snow bowling. The incident resulted in Ray Illingworth taking his side off the ground following an angry response from the Sydney crowd.

His Test career ended in 1975 with 34 Test victims.

After winning three Sheffield Shield trophies, he stepped down from first-class cricket altogether in 1976 with 389 wickets at an average of 32.18.

His funeral will be held at the Adelaide Oval at a date to be announced.



TERRY JENNER

Eduard drives

FROM PAGE 16

Sakhnevich then turned provider for the third as he square-passed one to the unmarked Nigerian Duke, who fired home from the edge of the six-yard box in the 69th minute.

"I am very pleased after scoring two goals and providing the other that helped Sheikh Russel win the game," said Sakhnevich, adding that they have an eye on the league title.

"It is very much possible to win the league title but we will have to win remaining five matches. Even though the matches against Sheikh Jamal, Abahani and Mohammedan will be tough, we are looking forward to secure full points from those," said Sakhnevich.

Daryl, Asoka

FROM PAGE 16

international umpiring debut in 2009 and has since umpired in two Tests, 25 ODIs and three T20Is. As a cricketer, he played 31 Tests and 141 ODIs for Sri Lanka between 1993 and 2004 and was part of Sri Lanka's World Cup-winning squad in 1996.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IF A GROUP OF GYMNASTS PERFORMED SOMERSAULTS IN UNISON, COULD YOU CALL THAT FLIP-SYNCHING?

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: H equals T