

Warne to stay at the MCG forever

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

Newly-svelte Australian leg-spin legend Shane Warne joked that a hefty bronze statue of him unveiled at the Melbourne Cricket Ground Thursday was a "lifelike" memento of his time in Test cricket.

"It's 300 kilos that statue, it's pretty lifelike for when I played," said Warne, who drastically slimmed down after he began dating his now-fiancée Liz Hurley.

"It's a great honour, it's a bit weird seeing yourself up there, but I'm very proud."

The statue depicts Warne in his pomp -- with earring, dated hairstyle and paunch -- and he joins 10 other Australian sporting greats including cricketers Don Bradman and Dennis Lillee who have been immortalised outside the MCG.

Warne, 42, reminisced about his best moments at the ground, including his breakthrough 7-52 to beat the West Indies in 1992-93, his hattrick against England in 1994 and his 700th Test wicket in 2006.

Hurley and Warne's children were on hand to witness him unveiling the statue with the help of Mark Taylor, captain for much of the spinner's Test career.

"I'm glad we sat for there for about four hours measuring between my nose and my ears, so thank you very much," Warne joked with sculptor Louis Laumen.



PHOTO: AFP

Shane Warne stands in front of a statue of him outside the famous Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday.

Rated one of the five best cricketers of the 20th century by cricket bible Wisden, Warne took a pioneering 708 Test wickets in a 145-Test career that made him the scourge of batsmen worldwide.

He bowed out of professional cricket with the Indian Premier League's Rajasthan Royals in May, only to announce his comeback last month with the Melbourne

Stars in Australia's Twenty20 Big Bash League.

Known as much for his off-field antics as his prodigious cricket talent, the formerly chubby smoker has always been sensitive about his weight.

Warne recently shed 12 kilogrammes (26lbs) after swapping alcohol and fast food for water and health shakes.

Marsh's test of fitness

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australian batsman Shaun Marsh will test his fitness in a Twenty20 match on Thursday evening and is confident he will be ready to go for next week's opening Test against India.

The 28-year-old left-hander, who has been struggling with a debilitating lower back injury, was named in Australia's squad for the Boxing Day Test on Wednesday with uncapped all-rounder Dan Christian included as back-up.

After taking part in a three-day training camp for Australia's batsmen, Marsh said his back had improved considerably and should allow him to play his first Test on home soil at the Melbourne Cricket Ground next Monday.

"I'm hitting the ball well, I've had a really good two or three days and I feel that I haven't lost too much of my touch since South Africa and playing tonight will give me a bit more indication of where I'm at," he told reporters on Thursday.

Squad likely

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Akter Ratna, Sharmin Akther, Tripti Datta, Sadia Sultan, Asif Hossain Khan, Abdullah Hel Baki, Shahriar Chandan, Ramjan Ali and Armin Asha.

The first six shooters will take part in their respective 10m Air Rifles events while Chandan, Ramjan Ali and Armin Asha will take part in Skeet and Pistol events.

The NSF general secretary has already informed some clubs like Chittagong Rifles Club, Narayanganj Rifles Club and Army Sports and Board and the response has been generally positive.

MS's mantra is simple

Cricket

REUTERS, Sydney

Live in the moment, keep it simple and work hard.

It may not be the most sophisticated philosophy to come out of India but it is a concise mantra which has served Mahendra Singh Dhoni well in four years as captain of his country's cricket team.

As India's first skipper from outside the main urban centres, the 30-year-old has already delivered the Holy Grail of the World Cup and over the next month takes on the challenge of leading his team to a maiden Test series triumph in Australia.

Hailed by master batsman Sachin Tendulkar as the finest captain he has played under in a career spanning more than two decades, Dhoni's leadership is not about rousing pep talks or even inspired gambles.

"The important thing is that he keeps things simple and not complicated," chairman of selectors Krishnamachari Srikkanth said recently.

What Dhoni does display is leadership by example, no less so than when he promoted himself up the batting order and hit 91 not out to lead India to the World Cup triumph on home soil in early April, sealing the dramatic victory with a six.

The wicketkeeper-batsman cut his international captaincy teeth in the Twenty20 format by leading his country to victory of the inaugural World Cup in 2007.

There was immediate success too when he took the reins of the one-day side and led them to a series victory in Australia. He assumed the test captaincy in 2008.

"I love to be in the moment, I love to analyse things a bit," Dhoni said in a recent interview with CNN news channel.

"Very often what is important is to realise what went wrong, not only when you are losing a series or a game, but also when you are winning a series. You need to realise which are the areas

you need to work on."

There have been calamities along the way, of course, including criticism of his wicketkeeping and his own poor form when India crashed out of the 2007 50-over World Cup in the first round.

Subsequently, the biggest setback of his leadership came when the Test team where humiliated 4-0 in England earlier this year and relinquished the number one world ranking they had earned in December 2009.

One of Dhoni's great attributes, however, has been his ability to keep his head in the midst of the frenzy that often surrounds the sport in cricket.

Away from the cricket pitch, Dhoni keeps a low profile and enjoys nothing better than returning to Ranchi to be with his three dogs and collection of motorbikes.

Australia will present him new challenges as captain, including an often hostile reception from local media, crowds and even the players, but Dhoni has shown in the past that he has the cool temperament to deal with them.

"I believe that he's the best captain in world cricket today. He's a leader by example," South African Gary Kirsten, who was coach of India from 2007 until after the World Cup, said upon his departure from the job.

"He expects his troops to be ready for battle. He's calm and level-headed. I have never seen him lose his temper. If things don't go well, he takes the responsibility."



MAHENDRA SINGH DHONI

mad India.

"He is always calm and never shows his frustration," Tendulkar said after the World Cup triumph. "These are some of the human qualities which have made him such a good captain."

Mahendra Singh Dhoni was born in Ranchi, now the capital of the state of Jharkhand, and grew up playing cricket with a tennis ball on the red dirt of his home town.

Describing someone from a place with a population of two million people as a 'country boy' might sound absurd to non-Asians, but that was the reality

for Dhoni and his path from India's outback to the cricketing elite was one that had been travelled by very few.

"When I was playing for my school, the only thing I wanted to do was get selected for the under-16 or the under-19 district teams," he said.

"Frankly, I never thought that I would represent my country one day. Now I'm leading my country, so it's like a fairytale."

"I never thought I'd do all these things. I lived in the moment, I kept working hard."

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Football

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Of those seven teams, two sides will have to face an early exit after playing their first knock-out match with Beanibazar SC facing Wari Club on the opening day while Uttar Baridhara Club will take on Agrani Bank on Sunday.

Apart from these four teams, Cox's City, Chittagong Abahani, and Victoria Club will have to face the challenges of Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Army, BKSP and Air Force to secure a place in the final round.

Clarke's biggest Test?

Cricket

REUTERS, Melbourne

A swashbuckling century on debut against India was the making of Michael Clarke as a Test batsman. Seven years later, the one-time golden boy of Australian cricket might hope a home series against the same team could be his making as a captain.

Tasked with leading Australia out of the cricketing doldrums, the 30-year-old has endured a baptism of fire since taking over from Ricky Ponting, who relinquished the captaincy with the team at its lowest ebb in a quarter of a century.

Inheriting a team demoralised after suffering humiliating defeat to England in the Ashes on home soil, Clarke's nine months at the helm has

seen Australia mix rousing Test victories with losses farcical in their ineptitude.

Clarke led Australia to a 1-0 series victory in Sri Lanka before splitting series 1-1 away to South Africa and home to New Zealand.

Australia's loss in the second Test against New Zealand in Hobart, their first defeat in 26 years on home soil against their trans-Tasman rivals, left a particularly sour taste and declarations of "crisis" in local newspapers.

Against second-ranked Test side India and their stable of ageing champion batsmen, Clarke faces his biggest test as captain while under pressure to deliver the goods in front of a still-sceptical public.

"All of us feel we're playing inconsistent cricket at the

moment ... We go one step forward and two steps backwards," Clarke wrote in his newspaper column last week.

"I'm confident we can make amends against India ... I think it's going to be a really good contest between youth and enthusiasm versus some old wise heads in the Indian team."

Clarke is nothing if not up for a challenge, and has a record of defying critics and revelling in the spotlight.

The New South Welshman stroked a brilliant 151 on debut in Bangalore in 2004 and posted another two half centuries as Australia won their first Test series in India in over three decades.

Dropped after a poor away series against England in Australia's 2005 Ashes loss, Clarke fought his way back into the side and helped guide

them to their 2007 World Cup win with an unbeaten half-century in the semifinal against South Africa.

Off the field, the telegenic boy from Sydney's blue-collar west has generated headlines of a different sort, featuring in the tabloids' society pages with his taste for fast cars, model girlfriends and tattoos.

With underwear modelling among his many sponsorship endorsements, Clarke's celebrity has grated with sections of the Australian public more used to hard-bitten figures like Allan Border, Mark Taylor and Steve Waugh occupying the country's "second highest office" after the prime minister.

He stoked controversy by leaving New Zealand mid-tour in 2010 to be with his

fiancée Lara Bingle, but returned days later to blast 168 in Australia's Test win in Wellington having just ended his engagement with the model.

With Ponting sidelined through injury, Clarke's first taste of the captaincy in January resulted in an innings thrashing in the fifth Ashes Test in Sydney and as he was jeered by home spectators in Brisbane during the subsequent one-day series.

Australia went on to crush England 6-1 under Clarke's stewardship and he later remarked he doubted he would ever win over the whole country.

"For me it's about earning the respect of the doubters by leading the team in the right way and playing cricket in the right way," Clarke said on his permanent appointment to the captaincy in March.

Clarke has since led from the front with three centuries in his last five Tests, banishing a long run of poor form at the crease.

Handed expanded powers as a selector, he has also been credited for lifting morale in the dressing room while making astute tactical decisions on the field.

But he has also been an accomplice in Australia's recent crimes against batting.

Clarke was as guilty as any of his team's batsmen when they were skittled for 47 in the first Test loss against South Africa in Cape Town and when they lost by seven runs to New Zealand after cruising at 159 for two when chasing 241 for victory.

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105 junior shooters and 75 women and girls -- are taking part in the fourth edition of the competition which includes 10 events.

The senior and junior shooters will start the battle from Saturday.

IFC Bank is providing Tk

10 lakh for the championship.

Kvitova best Czech Rep athlete

AFP, Prague

Reigning Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova, the world number two in the WTA tennis rankings, won the Czech Athlete of the Year prize at a ceremony on Wednesday.

Kvitova beat mountain biker Jaroslav Kulhavy, the 2011 world and European champion and World Cup winner, and speed-skating world champion Martina Sablikova for the prize.

The 21-year-old Kvitova also led the Czech women's tennis team to the Team of the Year prize after clinching the Fed Cup trophy following a 3-2 win over Russia in Moscow in November.

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Shakib numero

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everything easily, which I think is the strength of my character," said Shakib, who thanked everybody from the ball-boys to his teammates for his success at the international level.