

Bresnan out of Pak series

AFP, Dubai
England will be without paceman Tim Bresnan for the forthcoming Pakistan series because of injury, the England and Wales Cricket Board confirmed on Monday.

The 26-year-old paceman, who still has soreness in the elbow which was operated on last month, already missed England's opening three-day tour match against an ICC Combined XI which they won by three wickets in the United Arab Emirates on Monday.

England play a Pakistan Cricket Board XI in the second side match, also to be played in Dubai, from January 11-13.

Bresnan took 16 wickets in the three Tests he played against India at home last year -- a series which lifted captain Andrew Strauss's men to number one in Test rankings.

CITYCELL B'BALL

Army beat Khulna

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Army beat Khulna by 68-48 points to finish top of their group in the Citycell 25th National Basketball Championship at the Dhanmondi Indoor Basketball Gymnasium yesterday. The winning side led the first half 29-27.

Mithun and Alamgir caged 20 points and 18 points respectively for Army while Soyeb scored 15 points for Khulna.

India to name

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In 2008, India, under Mahendra Singh Dhoni, had won the Commonwealth Bank Series, which also involved Sri Lanka. They beat Ricky Ponting's Australia 2-0 in the best-of-three finals, played in Sydney and Brisbane. That victory came immediately after India had lost a hard-fought Border-Gavaskar Trophy by a 1-2 margin. This time around, India are already 2-0 down, going into the third Test that begins at the WACA this Friday.

Incidentally, in 2008 the Commonwealth Bank, the sponsor of the tri-series, had decided to discontinue sponsorship. Now it has revived the deal, primarily due to the extra value it fetches in terms of TV rights.

Latif's 'advice'

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Latif pointed out that there was no other plausible reason for Tendulkar not scoring his 100th international hundred.

"I have seen many of his innings in the last 10 months and in these two Tests and he is definitely not out of form or facing issues timing the ball. He is moving well and is balanced at the crease this can be judged by the fact that he has scored runs but fallen short of the hundred," the former Pakistan captain pointed out.

Latif also felt that critics and former players calling for the heads of their senior batsmen need to accept that India didn't have the bowling firepower to bowl out Australia twice.

"How can any team hope to do well with a bowling attack that lacks penetration, experience and can't provide support to its batsmen? The problem is apart from Zaheer Khan they don't have much variety and options. Dropping Harbhajan Singh for the Tests was also a mistake because clearly Ashwin is not ready for Test cricket."

Faridpur

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The capital side won 10-0. National forward Russell Mahmud Jimmy scored four goals with a hat-trick, Rubel struck thrice while Sheikh Mohammad Nannu, Enamul Kabir and Asaduzzaman Chandan scored one each for Dhaka. Earlier in the day's first match, BKSP got a 2-0 walk-over win against Gaibandha.



PHOTO: AFP
England XI captain Andrew Strauss plays the pull on the last day of their three-day practice match against the ICC Combined XI at the ICC Global Cricket Academy in Dubai Sports City yesterday.

Eng open with a win

Cricket

AFP, Dubai

Steve Davies and Stuart Broad shared a resolute seventh stand of 61 to help an unimpressive England to win the three-day tour opener against ICC Combined XI by three wickets here on Monday.

It was a case of second batting failure for the tourists as, chasing 261 to win, England owed the win to captain Andrew Strauss (78), Ian Bell (39) and Jonathan Trott (35) on the final day at the Global Cricket Academy ground.

Kevin Pietersen (one) and Eoin Morgan (three) flopped a second time in the match and when Bell departed at 199-6, England looked down and out before Davies (37 not out) and Broad (31) saved their blushes.

Despite the win England's batting looked rusty ahead of the first of three Tests against Pakistan which starts here from January 17.

England will have another opportunity to settle their batting on the slow, dusty pitches here as they play the second warm-up game against a Pakistan Cricket Board XI, also in Dubai, from January 11-13.

Strauss and Alastair Cook (26) looked solid during their opening stand of 63 but Afghanistan's spinner Mohammad Nabi (3-66), George Dockrell (1-28) and Majid

Haq (1-42) derailed on the run chase.

Strauss and Trott added 70 for the second wicket but England lost five more wickets before reaching the 200-mark. Strauss hit 13 boundaries and a six during his 96-ball innings but his departure put England in trouble.

It was left to Broad and Davies to carry their team within one run of the victory.

Earlier, the ICC Combined XI declared their second innings at 164-9 with Afghanistan's wicket-keeper batsman Mohammad Shahzad notching a second half-century of the match with a defiant 74.

Shahzad, who scored 51 in the first innings, held the Combined XI innings and added 43 for the eighth wicket with Haq who scored 256 not out. Shahzad hit 13 boundaries during his attractive 104-ball knock.

Broad finished with 3-22, a match haul of seven wickets, while James Anderson took 2-62.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ICC COMBINED XI: First innings 281
ENGLAND: First innings 185 for 8 declared
COMBINED XI: Second innings 164 for 9 (Coetzer 31, Shahzad 74, Haq 26 not out; Anderson 2-62, Broad 3-22)
ENGLAND: Second innings 261 for 7 (Strauss 78, Cook 26, Trott 35, Bell 39, Davies 37 not out, Broad 31; Nabi 3-66)
Result: England won by three wickets.

Illness scare for Marsh

Cricket

REUTERS, Sydney

Australian top-order batsman Shaun Marsh was unable to fulfil a media engagement ahead of the third Test against India in Perth because of illness on Monday.

Team officials said the 28-year-old should be fit to train with the rest of the team on Tuesday ahead of Friday's start to the Test at the WACA.

Marsh won a race to be fit for the first Test but his form in the four-match series has been far from convincing, despite Australia making a strong start with emphatic wins in Melbourne and Sydney.

Playing at number three in the batting order, Marsh has been out for a duck twice and made three in the second innings at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Mike Hussey, who bucked his own run of poor form with a superb 150 not out in Sydney, replaced Marsh in Monday's news conference and backed his fellow Western Australian to find his touch at his home ground.

"The WACA crowd always give the local guys a huge welcome and a louder roar than any other player, so he's got plenty of motivation to play exceptionally well in this Test," Hussey told reporters.

"It's always tough when you have been out of the game for over a month to be able to come straight back into Test match cricket and perform straight away.

"It does take a bit of time. But he has been working very hard and he's been hitting the ball very well in the nets.

"So it's just a case of him being able to get through that first half an hour of his innings and then if he gets a start, I'm sure he'll want to turn it into a big hundred."

Marsh, the son of former Australia opener Geoff Marsh, made his Test debut in Sri Lanka earlier this year and has been included in the 12-man squad for the third Test against India.

Franchises

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houses including Europa Group, Orion Group and Walton have put forward a bid.

After the documents are opened at mid-day, there will be accumulation of data through template and live projection and the results will be declared within the hour.

Among the franchisees, Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna are said to be in high demand for various reasons. It was heard that three bidders have the capital's franchise while the defending Twenty20 champions Rajshahi are also sought after. Khulna's appeal too is most likely due to Shakib Al Hasan being their icon player.

Fear pervades

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security team when PCB president Zaka Ashraf visited Dhaka last month and after that news have been coming from Pakistan that they are all set to give full-proof security to the Bangladesh cricket team.

"Since we have a scheduled tour on the Future Tours Programme, that's why we promised to send a security team before making any decision. We are more concerned than the players about their security and safety. I think it's too early to say anything because we are yet to decide anything," said BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus.

Pacy WACA awaits India

Cricket

CRICINFO, Sydney

If India are to make a comeback in the series, they will have to do it the hard way. The WACA curator feels the pitch is getting back its original -- famously quick and bouncy -- characteristics, and expects this track to behave similar to the one used in the Ashes last season, when Australia played four quicks and won the Test inside four days.

Australia have lost James Pattinson to injury but have the services of Ryan Harris and Mitchell Starc should they want to go in with four fast bowlers for the third Test, starting on Friday the 13th. Starc made a case for himself with figures of 3 for 17 in a rain-curtailed BBL game on Sunday night in Sydney.

"We are hoping it will certainly be like last year," Cameron Sutherland, the curator, said. "It [playing four fast bowlers] won't be the wrong decision if the preparation goes as it is expected to."

The proper preparation will begin on Tuesday. Right now the pitch is hard to tell from the outfield. Sutherland is happy with what is underneath. "It is pretty hard underneath," he said. "We have already done a lot of work just

getting the grass where we want, coverage-wise. The actual rolling starts tomorrow."

In the BBL game at the WACA on Sunday night, Perth Scorchers scored 184 and won by 42. Expect batting in the Test to be tougher, though. India won the last Test they played here, but this is expected to be a different surface altogether. "We're expecting more pace and bounce than the last time," Sutherland said. "Good cricket wicket last time, but we hope to have maybe an extra 20 per cent pace and bounce."

That won't be music to India's ears, beleaguered as they are by six straight losses away from home. "That's what we are aiming for. We are in a better place now than when India came here the last time," Sutherland said. "We have redeveloped the whole wicket block over the last four years, and we are starting to get some really good results."

"We have changed our oil type, tried to align it to the traditional WACA characteristics. Probably more so pre-1980s, and it has taken a fair while to achieve that. We have also changed the grass type and how we prepare the wicket. We have tinkered with the whole model basically, and come up

with something we think is pretty close to the mark."

Sutherland's dream pitch is a kiss-off, where the ball just kisses the surface and bounces off. He says they are getting close to it. "We weren't getting any cracking," he said of the days when Perth lost its bounce, relatively speaking. "We were getting some hardness, but not really hard. We weren't getting grass recovery, which made it hard to get a surface where we could get some nice kiss-off, where the ball hits and carries through. We are pretty close to achieving that now. Mostly that comes from the soil. It's a combination with the grass as well. One allows the other to work in harmony. So we are pretty close to where we want to be."

However, Michael Hussey, a Western Australian himself, is not getting carried away with the pitch. "I hope it's a nice, fast bouncy pitch," he said. "We play those conditions very well. It is very different to what the Indian players are used to from their home country. But having said that, they've got unbelievably experienced players who have been in Australia before, performed well in Australia before, so I expect them to adapt to the conditions pretty quickly."

Kallis plans well ahead

PTI, Ohannesburg

South Africa all-rounder Jacques Kallis will not play in all the five ODIs against visitors Sri Lanka as he plans in advance to participate in what could be his sixth and last World Cup for the country in 2015.

"I think I will play in at least the first two and then decide about the rest of the series," Kallis said.

Kallis explained that he would be talking to Proteas coach Gary Kirsten about his plans.

A week after being written off following a pair in the second Test against Sri Lanka, Kallis led the Proteas to series victory with a double century during the final Test -- his 150th -- in Cape Town last week.

Thrilled at the success at his favourite ground, Kallis said he had no plans to retire yet, and still dreamt of winning the World Cup for South Africa.

"Only time will tell whether I'll get another chance to do that. I doubt whether I'll still be able to play for another 10 years, because no one has the right to play in South Africa. It's a privilege that you have to earn," Kallis was quoted as saying by weekly City Press.

"For now, I'm just taking it match by match, month by month and year by year. If I manage myself and my workload properly, and the old body plays along, it may just happen again."

A teams sans

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through their six-wicket win in the first game on Sunday. The six replacement players for the Bangladesh A team arrived in Chittagong on Sunday.

Stosur sent packing

Tennis

AFP, Sydney

Francesca Schiavone upset US Open champion Samantha Stosur's preparations for next week's Australian Open with a straight sets opening round win at the Sydney International on Monday.

The Italian matched home favourite Stosur's power with aggression to secure a 6-2, 6-4 win in 90 minutes in the feature match on Ken Rosewall Arena.

The loss followed Stosur's second-round exit from the Brisbane International last week and has left the world number six short of match practice heading into the season's first grand slam starting in Melbourne on Monday.

Schiavone, ranked 11, has been a tricky opponent for Stosur, beating her in the 2010 French Open final and in last year's Fed Cup tie in Australia.

"I think I was really aggressive, and she couldn't play her game at the best," said Schiavone, who next plays Daniela Hantuchova.

"You have to play at a top level, and I think

it's not easy for her to play here in Australia. I think to play at home, when you love something, is tough to catch it."

"For the Australian Open it will be different. She has big power and big shoulders to do it."

Stosur, who mastered Serena Williams in last year's US Open final, said she failed to cope with the centre court crowd's expectations.

"I think today I certainly didn't handle that side of things at all well," Stosur said.

"I think playing in Australia, I want to play the best I can play and do it all here this month right here right now."

"Then when it doesn't happen, it's obviously disappointing. It probably makes it more disappointing here than anywhere else."

Defending champion Li Na, third seed Victoria Azarenka and eighth seed Marion Bartoli all progressed to the last 16.

China's Li needed just an hour to sweep past Russia's Ekaterina Makarova 6-0, 6-3 after reeling off the first nine games of the match.

The French Open champion next faces South African Chanelle Scheepers for a place in the quarterfinals.

Li, the first Asian player to win a grand slam, beat Kim Clijsters in last year's Sydney final before losing to the Belgian two weeks later in the Australian Open final.



PHOTO: AFP
Italy's Francesca Schiavone hits a backhand during her first round match against Samantha Stosur of Australia at the Sydney International tennis event yesterday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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13 Rage
14 Exploding star
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18 Pigpen
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52 Donkey
53 Cameo gem
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5 Having set-in stains
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8 Requests for information
9 Gloomy
10 Elliptical
11 Country trio -- Antebellum
16 Dems.' rivals
20 Old
21 French coin
21 Case for storing valuables
22 Pea holder
23 Moment
24 Pair
25 Moray, for one
26 Tokyo-based carrier
27 Affirmative action?
28 Shock and --
29 Legislation
31 Wager
34 Ph. bk. data
35 Foundation
37 Weapons' handles
38 Luxurious fabric
39 Large, heavy wagon
40 Bullets et al.
41 Wildebeests
42 Unsigned (Abbr.)
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CRYPTOQUIP

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: PHYSICIST FAMOUS FOR HER DISCOVERY OF A SUPPLY OF RARE DECORATIVE ARTICLES: MARIE CURIO.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: D equals T