

Oldies' days numbered?

Cricket

AFP, Perth
India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni admitted pressure was mounting on his team's star batsmen after yet another double failure by their ageing top-order in the third Test at the WACA Ground.

Dhoni, speaking after his side was dismissed for 161 and 171 in the third Test to go 3-0 down in the four-match series, said he expected gradual change to the line-up after India's second successive innings defeat.

With the exception of Sachin Tendulkar, it has been a lean tour for India's celebrated top-order and Dhoni said the time was looming when India would need to start exposing some younger batsmen to Test cricket.

VVS Laxman, 37, has scored just 102 runs at 17 in the series and is under pressure to retain his spot for the final Test in Adelaide, with 24-year-old Rohit Sharma pressing for a Test debut after being 12th man in Perth.

Opener Virender Sehwag, 33, has 118 runs at 19.66 and 39-year-old Rahul Dravid has scored 168 runs at 28.

It was youngster Virat Kohli who offered most resistance in the third Test, top-scoring in both innings in his seventh Test.

"Once the number of matches increase where you haven't scored as a batting unit, the pressure keeps mounting," Dhoni said of his veterans.

"If you see last couple of series, they haven't done well but it's to their averages and amount of runs they have scored that they

have not done well.

"At the same time they must be feeling the pressure but it is very common to them, throughout their career they have faced that kind of pressure."

Dhoni, who admitted Indian Test cricket was at its lowest ebb for some time, said there was young talent waiting in India and he expects it to start being phased into the side after the current Test series.

He understands the push for youth, but said it needed to be a carefully considered generational change.

"It should be a very careful decision given what they have done for the country and given the experience they have which they can share with youngsters," he said.

"Most of our batters who would come in, they would perform in India. But you need to find a way as to how they could perform outside India. It is a good option to see youngsters coming in, I think it would be a good exposure to them."

Dhoni said he was not aware of rumours that Laxman was considering retirement. He also dismissed suggestions by former captain Sourav Ganguly that he didn't care about Test cricket.

"It is only I who know I seriously I take it," he said. "It is difficult for others to judge it."

And the captain also said the gulf between the sides was not as great as the lopsided series suggested.

"I would make it simple, Australia is playing very good cricket at this point of time, and we are not playing to the kind of potential we have," he said. "That's why the result looks so different, same was the case in England."

Insult to injury!

AFP, Perth

India's horrific tour of Australia got worse when captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was suspended for one Test by the International Cricket Council (ICC) Sunday for a slow over rate.

Dhoni was punished under the ICC Code of Conduct after being two overs behind the required rate, adding to the humiliation of his team's defeat in the third Test by an innings and 37 runs inside three days.

It means struggling opener Virender Sehwag, whose place in the team has been questioned due to his poor form against Australia, is likely to captain India in Adelaide for the fourth Test starting Tuesday week.

Sehwag, who is currently Dhoni's deputy, has captained India three times previously, for two wins. But before the third Test he was reported to be at loggerheads with his skipper.

Dhoni, who was also fined 40 per cent of his match fee, is the first captain to be punished under the new two-strikes rule when captains are automatically suspended if they commit two over rate infractions within 12 months.

His previous misdemeanour came in July against the West Indies in Barbados.

Dhoni's place behind the stumps will be taken by 27-year-old wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha, who will be playing his second Test.

UNDER-18 CRICKET

BKSP win

on Day 2

SPORTS REPORTER

BKSP won their three-day match against Rajshahi on the second day of the Young Tigers Under-18 Cricket Competition at the Faridpur District Stadium yesterday.

Resuming at 107 for 5 BKSP went on to score 243 for 9 declared. In reply Rajshahi were bowled out for 108, giving BKSP a target of only 19 which they chased down without losing any wicket.

Sylhet were well and truly on top as they went on to score 210 for 4 declared from an overnight 45-2 against Dhaka North at the Shamsul Huda Stadium in Jessore. In reply Dhaka North were teetering at 55 for 6 in their second innings having made only 150 in their first.

Rangpur were bowled out for 184 in their first innings in reply to Dhaka South's first innings score of 103-9 declared at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra. In their second innings however Dhaka South made amends and were in a strong position ending the day at 286-5.

Chittagong resumed on their overnight score of 27 for one to make 259 for 6 declared in their first innings and were in a strong position against Khulna at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi. Khulna scored 137 in the first innings. In reply Khulna were 27 for 1 in their second innings.

Hockey reaches quarters stage

SPORTS REPORTER

The Super League lineup of the Trust Bank-ViyellaTex 28th National Hockey Championship was completed after Bangladesh Navy emerged Group G champions with a massive 7-0 win over Patuakhali at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Sohag and Mortaza struck two goals each while Sibah, Bachchu, Hasan and Rabbani netted one goal each for the winners, who have been slotted in Group B in Super League along with Dhaka, BKSP and Tangail.

Novak the man to beat

Season's first Grand Slam starts today

AFP, Melbourne



australian open
The Grand Slam of Asia-Pacific

Defending champion Novak Djokovic will be bidding for his third consecutive grand slam trophy when the Australian Open champion gets his title defence under way in Melbourne.

The Serbian world number one dominated last season, winning three of the four grand slams and goes into the year's opening major as the man to beat against chief rivals Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer and Andy Murray.

Djokovic kicked off his sensational 2011 with victory over Murray in the Australian Open final and then added the Wimbledon and US Open crowns, beating Nadal both times in the title matches.

Only four men on five occasions have won three or more consecutive grand slams in the open era -- Rod Laver, Pete Sampras, Nadal and Federer twice.

The Australian Open, starting today, is the toughest of the four grand slams to hold onto with only nine successful title defences in the open era compared with 17 at Wimbledon and 13 at Roland Garros.

"I'm always trying to take the positive side and say, 'OK, I've done it once, I can do it twice'," Djokovic said of his chances.

"I feel that I'm at the peak of my career. I feel that physically, mentally, game-wise, I'm right up there."

Last year's Australian Open final triumph over Murray was the first of seven straight tournament wins in a 41-match winning streak that was finally ended by Federer in the semi-finals of the French Open.

Djokovic, 24, won a career-best 10 titles in 11 finals last year. He defeated world number two Nadal six times and overall was 21-4 against top-10 opponents.

But former Australian Open champion Nadal said he was over the shoulder injury that dogged him late last year and was determined to challenge for the top ranking he lost to the Serb at Wimbledon in July.

"Novak is the best because last year he had a fantastic year," Nadal said Sunday. "He's the number one. He deserves to be there."

I will be fighting every moment to try to compete against everybody with positive chances of victory.

"I am healthy. That's the important thing. I am healthy and I am ready to work hard."

Ten-time Grand Slam champion Nadal, 25, has a chequered record at the Australian Open, winning in 2009 but failing to make the semi-finals in three of the past five visits.

Federer, who holds the all-time record for grand slam wins, is bidding to become only the second man along with Roy



Serbia's world number one Novak Djokovic will look for a repeat of a magnificent last year when the season's first Grand Slam, the Australian Open, starts in Melbourne today.

PHOTO: AFP

Emerson to win five or more Australian Opens.

World number three Federer, who won his 16th grand slam title in Melbourne in 2010, could also end up overtaking Jimmy Connors' record of most open era grand slam matches (233) if he reaches this year's final.

The Swiss great, competing in his 49th consecutive major, is the oldest of the men's top four at 30 but his durability always makes him dangerous in the second week of a major tournament.

Federer finished last year strongly, winning three straight tournaments and is confident of carrying the momentum into 2012.

"I think it's only helpful that I finished so strong. I had so many great finishes to the year," Federer said.

"Very often did I take this momentum into the following year. I hope it's going to be the same again."

"For this, I need the Australian Open to start well for me, win the first few rounds, get hopefully on a roll, see how far I can go."

World number four Murray, 24, bidding to become Britain's first male major winner since Fred Perry in 1936, has suffered shattering defeats to Federer and Djokovic in the past two Australian Open finals.

He now has tennis great Ivan Lendl as his coach and had immediate success with a crushing win over Ukraine's Alexandr Dolgoplov in the final of this month's Brisbane International.

BCCI lambasted

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

Former players and the media trained their guns on India's powerful cricket board Sunday after Mahendra Singh Dhoni's team slid to another humiliating series defeat overseas.

Australia smashed India by an innings and 37 runs inside three days in the third Perth Test on Sunday to clinch the four-match series, after winning in Melbourne by 122 runs and Sydney by an innings and 68 runs.

It was India's seventh successive loss abroad, following their 4-0 rout in England last year, in a dismal run that has taken the sheen off their limited-overs World Cup victory last April.

As the nation debated the future of ageing batting greats, Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul David and Venkatsai Laxman, the cash-rich Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) was trashed for its short-sighted policies.

"They (BCCI) are doing extremely well when it comes to making money and controlling world cricket," said former captain Kapil Dev. "But what is the use if your team fails to win matches abroad?"

Another former captain Bishan Bedi said the emphasis on the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 competition had cost India dearly.

"I am saying this with a heavy heart, but once the IPL comes around in April, every Test defeat will be forgotten," Bedi told AFP. "The game has been badly damaged by the BCCI."

Others felt the BCCI was so occupied with making money and promoting the IPL that it failed to plan a transition period for when Tendulkar and other veteran batsmen wane.

"Indian cricket's problem is not much

shortage of talent as self-delusion," said noted sports critic Ayaz Memon. "Being the richest in the world is not necessarily synonymous with the best."

"Building a truly great team needs long-term vision, rigorous planning, strong leadership and some luck with the right talent coming together at the same time."

Former captain Sourav Ganguly said India were never the best Test side in the world, despite the number one ranking it held for close to two years until their demolition in England.

"You can never be the best if you don't win abroad," said Ganguly, India's most successful Test captain. "India have not just lost in England and Australia, they have been drubbed."

Ganguly joined the growing chorus to rebuild a side currently staffed by senior players who are nearing the end of their careers.

"We will definitely have to make big changes after the current tour," he said. "Otherwise good luck to Indian cricket."

With India not due to play an overseas series until the tour of South Africa in late 2013 and the next home series still seven months away, the selectors were urged to use the opportunity.

The immediate concern was the future of Dravid and Laxman, who have had a poor run in Australia, even as Tendulkar appeared in good form despite failing to score his 100th international century.

"They have served India so well in the past, but they can't go on for ever," said former team-mate Sanjay Manjrekar. "The selectors must take a call to blood younger players."

Dravid turned 39 this month, Tendulkar will reach the same age in April, while Laxman will be 38 later in the year.

Teams want to move on

First Pak-Eng Test in UAE from tomorrow

Cricket

AFP, Dubai

Pakistan and England hope to move on from the 2010 spot-fixing case as they enter the first of three Tests starting in Dubai Stadium from Tuesday -- their first encounter since the scandal.

Salman Butt, then Pakistan's Test captain, and pacemen Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer were handed lengthy bans by the International Cricket Council last year before an English court gave them prison sentences.

The trio and their agent Mazhar Majeed were charged for conspiring to bowl deliberate no-balls during the Lord's Test in 2010.

But to their credit, Pakistan have not lost a Test series since then as Misbahul Haq has led them admirably -- both on and off the field.

Despite that the prelude to this series -- shifted to the United Arab Emirates because of security concerns in Pakistan -- was marred by the talk of the scandal, much to the anger of Misbah.

"It's two years now and we have moved on from that difficult period," said Misbah, not selected for that 2010 tour. "We want to focus on cricket. That is what we have been doing for a year and a half and that saga is past for us."

Since the Lord's Test, Pakistan drew 0-0 against South Africa, beat New Zealand 1-0, drew 1-1 against the West Indies, beat Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka 1-0 and Bangladesh 2-0.

Misbah credits his players for the unbeaten run.

"The credit goes to the team and to players -- after that difficult time everybody stuck to the task, gathered their thoughts and everybody wanted to prove to the world that we are good players and a good team," said Misbah.

"The key is performance of the team is showing that everything is going on well and

we are determined to give our best against a tough opponent who are ranked number one in Tests."

England captain Andrew Strauss, who led his team to 3-1 win in that spot-fixing marred series, also showed resolve to move on.

"The spot-fixing stuff is something we're desperately keen to move on from," said Strauss last week. "What's happened before is water under the bridge and I hope both sides can play the game in the right spirit."

Pakistan's squad still has paceman Wahab Riaz, Umar Akmal and Imran Farhat despite their names being mentioned by Majeed during the fixing trial.

But Strauss has no complaints over those inclusions.

"It's their (Pakistan) obligation and duty to pick the best side they think is available to them," Strauss said.

"We will play whichever XI is selected. We should see this series as an opportunity to erode or eradicate the perception that there's always issues between Pakistan and England."

Pakistan beat Sri Lanka in a Test here in October last year, employing two spinners Saeed Ajmal and Abdul Rehman. They are likely to use the same ploy against England and Bangladesh.

England are also considering the option of playing both their spinners in Graeme Swann and Monty Panesar along with two seamers in James Anderson and Stuart Broad.

Panesar, who last played in the Cardiff Test of the 2009 Ashes, warmed up with an eight wicket haul in the second tour match.

England may have a few worries over the form of middle-order batsmen Kevin Pietersen, Ian Bell and Eoin Morgan -- who all flopped in the lead-up games but Alastair Cook, Strauss and Jonathan Trott were among the runs.

Muktis, BJMC

FROM PAGE 16

top-flight football, Team BJMC proved their worth by holding Mohammedan SC and beating Muktijoddha to emerge group champions and set a quarterfinal clash against Old-Dhaka outfit Rahmatganj MFS.

"We will definitely go there for a win and leave the field with a victory," said BJMC coach Zakaria Babu though he admitted Rahmatganj are an unpredictable side.

"I am confident about the win because the boys have been improving every match. If they can keep their momentum, they will come out winners," said Zakaria.

"It will be bonus for us if we can cross the quarterfinal hurdles as Team BJMC are a better side than us but we will try not to give them any room in the game," said Rahmatganj coach Mahmudul Haq Liton.

Law to coach

FROM PAGE 16

confirmed to the Daily Star earlier this week that he will miss this season's BPL but is interested to join next year.

A functional

FROM PAGE 16

only century stand in a match that saw 30 wickets fall for a total of 701 runs.

Cowan is cautious while Warner is aggressive, but the century-maker said he believed it could be the start of a long and profitable union.

"We're jelling together," he said. "As people have said, we're an odd couple, but when we're out there we keep each other going."

"We always talk to each other every ball. I know Ed's game, I know where his release shots are to get off strike when difficult periods are happening."

"And it's the same with me. When he thinks I'm playing too loose he'll come down to me and keep a rain check and say 'mate you've got to keep playing straight'."

"I respect that and I'll always listen to my partner. "Hopefully we can keep continuing this and hopefully it's one of many big partnerships."

Warner, who has played in five Tests, has shown he can compete at the highest

level but is eyeing more consistency in his game.

"I've always said I'd like to be more consistent in all three forms that I'm playing," he said.

"Runs today, and you might miss out the next game, but that's cricket. Hopefully it wasn't a one-off thing."

"I showed I could play maturely as well in difficult situations. Hopefully I can continue my form."

Moni brings

FROM PAGE 16

he stood in the South Africa-Zimbabwe three-match series in October 2010.

As a left-arm spinner, Moni has played 10 Test matches (over 2001-03) and 29 ODIs for Bangladesh from 1990 till January 2002. Apart from the international career, Moni was a dependable all-rounder for the country during its time as an Associate Nation.

Moni will leave for New Zealand on January 19.

India perish

FROM PAGE 16

Dhoni also failed once again, caught in the slips by a diving Ricky Ponting for two from the bowling of Siddle. The captain has made just 102 runs in the series at 20.40.

SCOREBOARD

INDIA: First innings 161 (Kohli 44; Hilfenhaus 4-43)

AUSTRALIA: First innings 369 (Warner 180; Cowan 74; Siddle 30; Yadav 5-93; Zaheer 2-91)

INDIA: Second innings (overnight 88-4)

Gambhir c Hussey b Starc 14

Dhoni c Ponting b Siddle 2

Kumar c Clarke b Hilfenhaus 6

Zaheer c Clarke b Hilfenhaus 0

Sharma c Cowan b Hilfenhaus 0

Yadav not out 0

Extras: (b-1, lb-5, w-3) 9

Total: (All out in 63.2 overs) 171

Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-25, 3-42, 4-51, 5-135, 6-148, 7-171, 8-171, 9-171

Bowler O M R W

Harris 16 3 34 1

Hilfenhaus 18 6 54 4

Starc 12 4 31 2

Siddle 15.2 5 43 3

Hussey 2 0 3 0

Result: Australia won by an innings and 37 runs and lead four-Test series 3-0.

Man-of-the-match: David Warner.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Soft muddy stuff

5 Swab-bie's tool

8 Cinderella's horses, really

12 Apiary structure

13 Anger

14 Out of control

15 Iowa city

16 Slapstick missile

18 Joan of Arc, for instance

20 Slanders in print

21 Cambodia neighbor

23 "Le Coq —"

24 "Old soldiers —"

28 Use a strainer

31 Opposite of 24-Down

32 "No man is an island" poet

34 Lincoln, to pals

35 Safe-cracker

37 Be dishonest

39 Historic time

41 Thin streak of smoke

42 Thespians

45 Concealed

49 Formal attire

51 Architect

52 Tardy

53 Grecian vessel