

## Hants sign up Ajmal

AFP, London

English county Hampshire said on Friday that they have secured the services of Pakistan off-spinner Saeed Ajmal next season as a two-month replacement for Australia Twenty20 skipper George Bailey. The 35-year-old Ajmal, who has taken 122 wickets in 23 Tests and was instrumental in Pakistan's win over England in the United Arab Emirates earlier this year, will play in August and September when Bailey joins Australia's limited-overs squad.

Bailey is likely to be involved in Australia's T20 internationals against visitors England.

"I am very pleased to be joining Hampshire to play in the County Championship," said Ajmal, who has previously turned out for Worcestershire in the 2011 campaign.

"I have always enjoyed playing in England and look forward to playing my part in helping Hampshire get promoted," he added in a statement on the club's website agesaw.com The southern English county start next season in the second division.

## IHC beat

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opener Roney in the very first over before Rohan and Partha Tanveer repaired the innings with 37 and 23 respectively but soon faced a collapse after the departure of Rohan and Partha.

Rabeed Imam and Mohammad Isam gave some hopes of reaching the target as Rabeed struck 35 and Isam scored 29 but their efforts were not enough in the end.

BSJA finally fell short by 29 runs with Fazley Rabbi Moon and Raihan Mahmood remaining unbeaten on 7 and 4 respectively.

Ajai was adjudged man of the match for the sparkling half-century and two wickets he took.

Veteran sports journalists Qamruzzaman, Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury, BSJA president Syed Mamun and General Secretary Saydur Rahman Shamim distributed prizes among the winners.

## Don't worry

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be worried or concerned about this year. Everything will be transparent this year."

He further said that the franchisees were asked to provide bank guarantee for the foreign players' payments within seven days, and 14 days for the local players. "I am hopeful that they will respect their commitments," said Sinha. "If someone doesn't provide the bank guarantee within the stipulated time, then we will take strong action. There is no doubt about that," he added.

With regard to the official agreement between the franchisees, the governing council and event management company, Game On Sports, Sinha told that all the agreements would be signed 'in the next 3-4 days'.

"Documentation is obviously a must. Without it, we can't run the league properly," said Sinha.

While the new governing council's chairman's optimism provides hope, the practice of setting 'new deadlines' was something that was carried out, unsuccessfully, by members of the previous council as well. Only time can tell whether Sinha and Co can organise a controversy-free BPL this year.

### SECOND T20 TODAY

# India seek 2-0 sweep

Cricket

PTI, Mumbai

After rebounding superbly from the Test loss to England with a convincing victory in the Twenty20 series opener, India would be keen to complete a clean sweep of the shortest format by winning the second and final game on Saturday.

Having gained the winning momentum again, the hosts would be eager not to let it go out of grasp especially with the high-profile series against Pakistan to follow immediately after the conclusion of the T20 stint at the Wankhede Stadium.

India will take on Pakistan in a two-match T20 series from December 25 to be followed by a three-game ODI series.

England, who have suffered their first reversal to India in a bilateral T20 game after having lost two others in the World T20 events, would also look forward to squaring the rubber and returning home

# Vernon scare for SA

Cricket

CRICINFO, Johannesburg

Vernon Philander is in doubt for the New Year's Test against New Zealand after a flare up of his left hamstring during the first-class match between Cobras and Titans at Newlands.

Philander bowled five overs and took a wicket before leaving the ground to have scans. Initial estimates were a recovery time of 7-10 days, but that has been extended out to up to two weeks following the results of scans.

"MRI scans revealed that Vernon suffered a Grade 1 strain to his left hamstring. Injuries of this type usually have a 10 to 14 day recovery period," said Mohammed Moosajee, the South African team manager who is also a medical doctor.

"We will assess the injury as the week progresses, and this will help determine whether his availability for the Test series will be affected. At this point he will not bowl again during the match and will only bat if necessary."

The first Test starts in 12 days' time, on January 2, so it is a tight time scale for Philander. The second Test follows on January 11, which will give him three weeks to recover. Should Philander miss the first match, Rory Kleinveldt is likely to play, as he did when Philander's back seized-up and forced him to miss the Adelaide Test against Australia.

Philander's troubles are the latest in a long list of niggles that have plagued bowlers in 2012. It came on the same day that Tim Southee was ruled out of the New Zealand squad for the Tests with a thumb injury. Southee's unavailability has left the visiting side without a third marquee player, having already lost Ross Taylor and Daniel Vettori -- the former to miscommunication, the latter to injury.

South Africa's bowling coach Allan Donald had said Southee could go on to become the "best swing bowler in the world," when he worked with New Zealand. Southee himself was looking forward to facing South Africa, having been dropped from the side after one Test against them in March.

"It's a big loss. Tim [Southee] has been our No.1 bowler in Test cricket for the last while," Brendon McCullum said. "He is a real leader of the attack, even at a young age. He had a keen eye on this series to test

for Christmas and New Year on a high note.

Though India cantered home on Thursday, the home team has some issues to solve immediately in both batting and bowling to achieve their aim of a 2-0 whitewash.

England too have their problems, the prominent among them is to find an effective spinner in the middle overs as Danny Briggs's left-arm spin was taken to the cleaners along with James Tredwell's off-spin.

Stuart Meaker provided the extra pace to trouble the Indian batsmen, including Yuvraj, and Tim Bresnan was also impressive, while Wright was effective with his slow medium bowling.

In batting, Hales, who had flopped in his previous three games against India, came good with his forthright batting. England would hope the others -- that includes their hard-hitting captain Morgan -- deliver in the last game of the first half of their visit.

himself out against some of the best Test bowlers, Morne Morkel and Dale Steyn and the like."

New Zealand's options for a replacement are thin. One of their candidates, Mark Gillespie, who played against South Africa earlier in the year and was due to take part in the Twenty20s, has a side strain and the timeframe on his recovery is unknown. As a result, they may be forced to turn to old hands in an emergency.

Thirty-one year-old Ian Butler leads the Plunket Shield wicket charts with 25 scalps from six matches while 33-year old Brent Arnel is third with 21. Both have played Test cricket before with Arnel last turning out against South Africa in Hamilton.

Should New Zealand choose to go the other way and opt for youth, left-armer Mitchell McClenaghan will be forefront in their plans. He is currently in South Africa with the T20 squad and took three wickets in the warm-up fixture, where he reached speeds in the mid-140s. He has been in bowling coach Shane Bond's thinking.

Bond hinted before news of Southee's injury was out that McClenaghan could force his way into the one-day side with good performances in the shortest format. "I first saw him in 2010 and he was the same then. In the practice match, he bowled the same as at home, which is aggressively, run in and try to bowl fast. There's competition within our squad. We haven't named a one-day team so there are chances on this tour for guys to put their hands up. Mitchell has got himself in really good physical condition and he deserves his opportunity. Hopefully he will take it on this trip."

McClenaghan made a comeback last season after a lengthy injury break. He underwent three surgical procedures on his hips but made an explosive return when he was part of the Auckland side that dismissed Otago for 63 last summer. McClenaghan took 8 for 23 in that match. He has played four matches in this year's Plunket Shield and has claimed 14 wickets at an average of 34.85 to be eighth on the bowling charts.

## Dilshan ponders Test

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stop Test cricket.

"If he comes back, it would be good for the side. Everyone would be happy to see him back but I don't think he will change his mind."

## Serena plans to play at Brisbane

AP, Brisbane

Brisbane International organisers say Serena Williams still plans to compete in the December 30-January 5 event despite minor surgery on her big toes that forced her to withdraw from a December 29 exhibition in Thailand.

Brisbane tournament director Cameron Pearson said Thursday he had been assured by Williams' agent that the WTA player of the year will "be fit and ready" for the event at the Queensland Tennis Centre.

Williams has been affected by chronic foot problems since treading on glass and badly cutting both feet in 2010.

The five-time Australian Open winner played at last year's Brisbane International but pulled out because of an ankle injury at the quarterfinals. Later in the year, she won Wimbledon, the US Open and the women's singles title in the London Olympics.

## IPL opener at Kolkata on April 3

CRICINFO, New Delhi

Defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders will kick off IPL (Indian Premier League) 2013 by hosting Delhi Daredevils at Eden Gardens on April 3. The 76-game league will have the same format as it did in the 2012 season, with each of the nine teams playing the others home and away, before the playoffs.

The top four teams at the end of the round-robin stage on May 19 will qualify for the playoffs. The Qualifier 1 will be played in Chennai between the top two teams in the league and the winner of that match will secure a place in the final, in Kolkata on May 26. The loser of the Qualifier 1 will play the winner of the Eliminator, contested between the third and fourth teams in Chennai, in Qualifier 2, and the winner of that match in Kolkata will make the final.

## SL may call

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Lasith to come in and take quick wickets," News.com .au quoted Ramanayake, as saying.

"We haven't discussed anything about it. I would like to see him back in the team definitely, but it's his decision," he added.



Despite surgeries on her toes, American Serena Williams plans to play in the Brisbane International. PHOTO: STAR FILE

# Starc thanks Siddle

Cricket

CRICINFO, Melbourne

Peter Siddle is taking on the mantle of leadership and example among Australia's bowlers that -- until recently -- Ricky Ponting and Michael Hussey held for the batsmen.

Mitchell Starc attributed his much improved display on the final day of the Hobart Test against Sri Lanka to being lifted by Siddle's efforts, which matched his Herculean display against South Africa in Adelaide.

A prodigious talent, Starc is pleasing Australia's selectors, coaches and the captain Michael Clarke by gathering in consistency and nous each time he bowls in a Test, and also by staying fit when so many around him are falling prey to injury.

His fiendish burst of reverse swing on an uneven final day surface at Bellerive Oval was arguably Starc's best display to for his country to date, and he put much of it down to watching Siddle give his all in the spell that preceded it.

"Sidds was outstanding again in Hobart and was pretty much the heart and soul of the attack," Starc said. "For me just to follow on from him, I played pretty much a supporting role with Sidds there probably deserving 10 wickets. Not just the bowlers [are lifted by Siddle], the whole team is.

"Having him around the squad he's full of energy and he's always giving 100 per cent whether it be in the nets or in the field and that drags the whole squad along. As he's shown in Adelaide, though unfortunately not getting over the line there, but again in Hobart pretty similar performances where he's given absolutely everything he's had. He's sat down and had nothing left after the game. It was great for him we got that result after what happened in Adelaide.

"When you have guys like Ricky Ponting and Mike Hussey in the squad they bring so much energy and a different feel to the group. I think Sidds is well on the way to being someone like that, who just lifts everyone up. When he's on bowling you know something most likely

is going to happen."

Starc's progress has been helped greatly by his developing durability, which has allowed him to be fit for selection whenever Australia's selectors have come calling over the past 12 months. By avoiding the treatment table, Starc is gathering in knowledge about his bowling, aided by advice from the likes of Wasim Akram, Jason Gillespie and the Australian bowling coaches past and present, Craig McDermott and Ali de Winter.

"That consistency is coming. I've got to find that balance between being over aggressive and containing one end. That will come, I'm still learning, I'm only 22," Starc said. "I'm taking it all in my stride and learning from each game. That's something we did from the game in Perth -- I went for a few runs there.

"In Hobart we had 450 runs on the board so you can afford to be a bit aggressive there. As you saw I went for a couple of runs but we got the win in the end so we can take some confidence from that and being able to get that result even with a bowler down as well.

"Injuries are unfortunate, they seem to go hand in hand with fast bowling. I'm looking after myself doing all I can to stay on the park and make sure I'm recovering well and playing well. You can't worry too much about what the other guys are doing. Can't worry too much about what the others are doing but we're all preparing the way we can and stay on the park."

Despite his strong last-day form in Hobart, Starc may yet find himself carrying the drinks on Boxing Day in order to ensure he maintains his run of games without injury, the better to be fit for his home Test at the SCG from January 3. Mitchell Johnson and Jackson Bird are both a chance of being called into the Test side for the final match of 2012. However Starc is eager to bowl at the MCG, having also run the drinks in the corresponding match last year.

"It's always a big occasion the Boxing Day Test. If I get the nod to play for Australia again it's going to be a nice one to run out in front of a big crowd," Starc said. "Hopefully I can contribute again if I get the chance in Melbourne."

# Notts impose IPL bar

Cricket

CRICINFO, London

Nottinghamshire have told three of their England players -- Michael Lumb, Alex Hales and Samit Patel -- that they will not be able to pursue interest in taking part in the Indian Premier League (IPL) next year.

The trio, who are all part of England's current Twenty20 squad in India, had been keen to try and secure deals in the tournament which runs in April and May, therefore clashing with the start of the English domestic season. Of the three only Lumb has previous IPL experience with Rajasthan Royals and Deccan Chargers.

It is by no means certain that any of them would have been picked up for the IPL although Hales has consolidated his England place this year with consistent scoring including a 26-ball fifty in the first T20 against India in Pune. On Thursday Hales was bought in the BPL auction, from which Lumb withdrew his name.

Mick Newell, Nottinghamshire's director of cricket, said: "We were very clear that we expected all of our players to be available to us as we would be severely weakened if we were to lose them for that period of time at that stage of the season.

"The players asked me to consider releasing them to enable them to take part in the IPL but they are key members of the squad and I explained that we wouldn't be able to allow them to take part."

Nottinghamshire's stance continues the uneasy relationship between English cricket and the IPL. Although the county game has not seen an early-season mass exodus to India, it will be interesting to watch whether other counties take a lead from Nottinghamshire to try and protect their own interests instead of losing key players.

Players fortunate enough to secure deals are understandably keen to take them up, but they can leave significant holes in the counties for the first six weeks of the season. Essex have previously had to cover for the absence of Owais Shah and Durham for Paul Collingwood.

The tournament has also meant weakened international sides arriving for tours and players arriving at the last minute before a Test series. That is likely to happen again next season with New Zealand's two-Test series clashing with the IPL.

Nottinghamshire's centrally contracted England players, Graeme Swann and Stuart Broad, would have their participation in any IPL deals that were offered decided by the ECB.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Guests inaugurate the day-long Gemcon Victory Day Cup Golf Tournament at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.