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Exodus hurts former folks

AFP, Sydney
Ireland's management expressed frustration on Friday at seeing Dublin-born Eoin Morgan installed as England captain for the World Cup, but their complaints are unlikely to generate widespread sympathy.

Chief selector and former Ireland captain Alan Lewis said it was "irritating" that 28-year-old Morgan, who originally made his ODI debut in Irish colours, will skipper England at the World Cup which starts on Saturday.

Lewis told the Slog Sweep podcast that Ireland would be in a much stronger position had Morgan and fellow defector Boyd Rankin not decamped to play for England.

"It is a wee bit irritating to think where we could be if Eoin and Boyd were available," Lewis said.

Fast bowler Rankin's defection backfired when he failed to make the England World Cup squad, but that did little to assuage Lewis's frustrations.

"I look at the England set-up and over the last 10 years, three people from this little island where cricket is the fourth or fifth sport are playing for a country whose national sport is cricket," he added.

"I wouldn't want to deprive Eoin Morgan the opportunity with the ability he has, I'd want to play at the top level, and in honesty every Irish supporter would wish him well, it's a great story, but it's a great frustration. To get our players back, that's part of the next step."

But Ireland find themselves in a tricky position when it comes to the use of foreign talent, and Lewis's comments drew criticism from fans.

"Sorry, Ireland, but a country which has consistently imported players from around the world has no room to be critical when its better players want to play at the top level," one fan wrote on the CricInfo website.

Ireland were captained by Australian-born Trent Johnston at the 2007 World Cup while their 2015 squad boasts Brisbane-born Alex Cusack.

Dubliner Ed Joyce played for England at the 2007 tournament in the Caribbean but he switched back to Ireland for the 2011 edition and will be key for them in Australia and New Zealand.

Ireland and England are not the only nations who have foreign talent on their radar.

Scotland's 15-man squad features seven non-Scots, including two key South Africans.

Durban-born Preston Mommsen is captain while Richie Berrington, who hails from Pretoria, hit 66 in the team's three-run loss to West Indies in a warm-up game in Sydney on Thursday.

The United Arab Emirates, playing in the World Cup for the first time since 1996, have just three Emirati-born men in their squad with the bulk of their talent drawn from Pakistan and India.

Local player Mohammed Tauqir was installed as captain to replace fellow 43-year-old Khurram Khan from Pakistan.

So what if Bailey doesn't play!

AFP, Melbourne
George Bailey says he is comfortable with losing the captaincy and his place in the Australian team when Michael Clarke is ready to return to lead the side at the World Cup.

Bailey will take charge in Clarke's absence for Saturday's tournament glitzy curtain-raiser against England before a 90,000 full house at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Clarke was Thursday ruled out of his country's World Cup opener as he battles to fully shake off his hamstring problems but is expected to feature in Australia's second game against Bangladesh in Brisbane on February 21.

Asked if he was feeling under pressure by the Clarke situation, Bailey told reporters Friday: "No. I think it's a pretty basic equation there. So what will be will be."

"I don't think I will [hold my place], but that's fine. I think it's great that he's on track. Certainly from the initial time of his injury, I think he's done a remarkable job to get back in time."

"To even have murmurs of him playing in this game. To be available for the next game, which was always the plan, I think he's done a great job."

Bailey, who has won 15 of the 28 ODIs in which he has captained his country, said there was no split purposes within the home squad over the switching of captains.

"Hopefully, they get a good grounding in everything. I don't think our one-day leadership's changed that much over a long period of time."

"We should be reasonably settled with the way we want to play. I don't think there's too much



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different on whether Michael's captaining or I'm captaining.

"I certainly think that we've had a group of players playing so much cricket together that regardless if Michael or I or 'Boof' [coach Darren Lehmann] are saying something in front of the group, we still have a general idea of the direction we're going, the way



we want to play and the way we want to be seen as a team.

"That doesn't change. The outcome hopefully will be the same as well."

Bailey, who was the ICC's second-ranked ODI batsman some 16 months ago and remains Australia's top-ranked batsman, said his batting stacked up well at the 50-over international level despite a recent run of low scores.

"I actually feel like I'm hitting the ball really well. I actually feel like my role has changed a bit with the team in terms of the way we play," he said.

"Certainly, I'd like more runs there's no doubt about that. Our record as a team in the games that I've played is bloody good I reckon, and I'll stand behind that and what we've achieved as a group is very, very good."

"I think if you look at my international career it stacks up pretty well against just about anyone. So I'm really comfortable about where I'm at."

"But like every single batsman that's about to take part in this tournament I want some runs."

Bailey has a highest ODI score of 156 against India in Nagpur and also hit an unbeaten 125 against the West Indies in Perth. In 56 matches he averages 41.74.

A determined Michael Clarke puts in a throw during his side's fielding session at the MCG yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Clarke feared career was finished

AFP, Sydney
Hobbled Australian captain Michael Clarke said Friday he feared his career was finished as he toiled to recover from hamstring surgery.

But the 33-year-old veteran, who will sit out Saturday's World Cup opener against old enemy England, also admitted that if he was forced to quit, then he would accept his fate.

"When scans confirmed I had torn my hamstring [after the last day of the Adelaide Test against India] I thought I might just have played my last game of cricket," Clarke told the Sydney Daily Telegraph.

"I had suffered my fourth hamstring [injury] in six months and my back was flaring up."

"I had just scored a century in memory of my little 'brother' [Phillip Hughes, the Test batsman who died after being hit by a bouncer in a domestic game in November] in a winning Test side."

"If that was to be the end, I thought, I would have no regrets."

Clarke said he had learnt to put his career worries in perspective following the death of Hughes as well as his father's diagnosis of cancer in 2007.

"My attitude changed a lot. To that point I had been totally consumed by cricket. But that all turned upside down the day I learnt dad had Hodgkin's lymphoma."

"It made me realise that in the grand scheme of life, cricket was just a game."

WORLD CUP COCKTAIL

Afghanistan will head into the cricket World Cup with momentum after downing a spirited United Arab Emirates by 14 runs in the teams' last warm-up match in Melbourne on Friday.

A match that had meandered for much of a steamy day at Melbourne's Junction Oval sprang to life late in the afternoon as the dogged Emiratis scrambled hard to reel in their opponents' 308-9, but paceman Dawlat Zadran intervened to bowl Javed and the Middle Eastern minnows succumbed quickly thereafter.

SCORES IN BRIEF
AFGHANISTAN: 308 for 9 in 50 overs (Shenwari 58; Javed 4-39)
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: 294 all out in 48.2 overs (Khurram 86)
Result: Afghanistan won by 14 runs.

Disgraced Vincent issues warning
"My name is Lou Vincent and I'm a cheat."

With those words the disgraced former international batsman warned the more than 200 players in the World Cup about the perils of corruption.

Banned for life last year after admitting to a range of match fixing offences,

Vincent, 36, has been used by the ICC to issue an emotional video message to players ahead of the tournament.

The New Zealander appeared for about 30 seconds in footage that was shown to players from the 14 competing nations, as well as the staff, before they were also addressed by the ICC anti-corruption unit chairman, Ronnie Flanagan.

'India should fear Irfan'

Rahul Dravid may have termed India as favourites against Pakistan in their opening Cricket World Cup clash, but he warned the Men in Blue to beware of Mohammad Irfan, the 7-foot pacer who can turn the game on his day.

"The key player from Pakistan is Mohammad Irfan. Having watched him bowl just recently, I believe he is going to pose a challenge to the Indian batsmen," Dravid said.

"We spoke about the strength of Pakistan's bowling. He is going to hold the key. If he picks up early wickets and pushes India back, it will allow the spinners to come in," he added.

Kiwis punters choice
A punter has bet \$10,000 that New

Zealand will come away with the World Cup, the biggest bet ever made on the team.

Bookies expected to take \$1 million of bets for the two games today, the first of the World Cup.

Over the course of the tournament about 300,000 bets were expected.

However, two significant bets, one of \$5,000 and another of \$6,000, were made yesterday for New Zealand to win the tournament.

In December 2013 when books opened they were at \$12 to win, and over 60 per cent of the money bet so far has been for New Zealand.

Oz out to 'kill' Eng

Australia have unveiled their plans to unleash an all-out fast bowling frenzy and "kill off" the besieged tourists.

"With our attack we can do a lot of damage up front and kill games off," said captain George Bailey.

"We can win games early which is just so exciting."

England's gloomy body language at the MCG nets would suggest they're almost resigned to being like lambs to the slaughter, as they have been all of this summer and the last.

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INFO ZONE

NEW ZEALAND		SRI LANKA		AUSTRALIA		ENGLAND	
M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
9	3	9	6	6	4	6	2
HEAD TO HEAD IN WORLD CUPS		HEAD TO HEAD IN WORLD CUPS		HEAD TO HEAD IN WORLD CUPS		HEAD TO HEAD IN WORLD CUPS	
M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
89	41	89	40	130	76	130	49
IN ALL ODIS				IN ALL ODIS			
M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
89	41	89	40	130	76	130	49
LAST MEETING : 29 th Jan 2015 at Westpac stadium, Wellington. Sri Lanka won by 34 runs.				LAST MEETING : 1 st Feb 2015 at Perth. Australia won by 112 runs.			
KEY PLAYERS							
							
Kane Williamson	Kumar Sangakkara	Steven Smith	Joe Root	Average	35.84	Average	40.00
46.26	40.99	88.63	80.04	Strike Rate	88.63	80.04	80.04
82.78	78.08	5.20	5.74	Economy Rate	5.20	5.74	5.74
5.56	---	1147	1600	Total Runs	1147	1600	1600
2452	13693	27	11	Total Wickets	27	11	11
24	---						

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Freshness




Courtney Jamieson from New Zealand managed to steal a quick picture with Sri Lankan paceman Lasith Malinga, describing it with the hashtag #curlsgetthegirls!

GOOGLE'S WORLD CUP

Narendra Modi @narendramodi Spoke to President @ashrafghani, PM Sheikh Hasina, PM Nawaz Sharif & President Sirisena. Conveyed my best wishes for the Cricket World Cup.

