

# FROM FANTASY TO REALITY

The ICC will not be short of blueprints but its seriousness about altering the five-day format might be tested in the coming months. Here's TOI's take on a possible new beginning for Tests...

Partha Bhaduri | TNN

New Delhi: This might be a tough ask. If you are a Test cricket buff, set aside, for an instant, the associated sentiments. Forget the indulgent, intellectual delights of absorbing five days of nuanced interplay between bat and ball. The thrill of watching even an absorbing draw, the mythology of unforgettable past contests. Forget the wisdom in tampering with the credentials of a classic format. Or the ethics involved in messing with the aura of tradition.



Opinions are divided over whether the traditional five-day Tests should be reduced to four days

## FOUR-DAY TESTS TRADITION AND INNOVATION

Instead, place yourself in the shoes of ICC president David Morgan, and think about what you could do to better market a niche sporting product which thrives only on a handful of keen annual contests.

As former Test cricketer Arun Lal says, "There is no right or wrong in it. The crowds are simply not coming in for Tests, unlike in T20. Sadly, Tests are fast becoming unfashionable and tedious for newer generations. If the audience de-

sires change, if broadcasters want change, it is inevitable."

Yet, Tests represent the pinnacle of cricketering achievement for players and change has its birth pangs. A cult cannot go mainstream without compromising. Morgan's comments on the need for reducing Tests to four-day affairs and making technical upgradations to make night Tests - read prime-time

TV slots - a possibility has understandably set off a wave of resentment among past masters. Even administrators are generally cagey dwelling on the unknown.

The first casualty has to be the draw, although Tests have become more result-oriented than anyone would have guessed: Since the last 10 years, only 24.95% of Tests have been

drawn, out of a staggering 465 matches. Since 2000, 75.68% Tests have produced results. Between 1990 and '99, the corresponding figure was 64.27%.

Of the 17 matches played so far in 2009, though, 47.06% have been drawn. So where does one draw the line? The better idea would be a cap on overs. Here's our simple proposal: A maximum of 80 overs per side per

"If you take a look, most Tests are giving results in 4 days or 4-1/2 days. Probably that's why they have mooted this idea. I am sure Test cricket has a place of its own. The players too realise the importance of doing well in Tests"

-Sunil Gavaskar

innings, ensuring an innings is completed in a day. If the side batting last (on Day 4) fails to chase down the target, it loses. If the batting side is bowled out in less than 80 overs, their remaining quota would be added on to the opposition's share of overs as a bonus. For example, if Side A is bowled out in their first innings in 60 overs, then Side B will face a maximum of 100 (80+20) overs when it's their turn to bat.

Undoubtedly, many more interesting ideas will crop up as the ICC pushes to make four-day Tests a reality. partha.bhaduri@timesgroup.com

## Pak will find it tough in SL, feels Afridi

Karachi: Shahid Afridi feels Pakistan would face a big challenge of switching over to Test cricket and adjusting to Sri Lankan conditions after their month-long stint in cold English conditions for the World Twenty20 event.

"The series in Sri Lanka would not be easy at all. It will be a big challenge for our players to make a successful adjustment from T20 cricket to Tests as well the different weather conditions," Afridi said. Afridi won the man-of-the-match awards in both the World T20 semifinals and final with his all-round performance. The 29-year-old, how-



ever, has decided to skip the Test series here and concentrate on the One-day and T20 format of the game because he feels he was better at those. "As it is I have not played too much Test cricket in the last few years, so I wanted to take rest and prepare for the One-dayers in Sri Lanka," he added.

With Younus Khan announcing his retirement from Twenty20 cricket, Afridi is tipped as the next T20 captain. "I have never run after captaincy. Just playing for Pakistan and seeing my country win is a big enough bonus for me," Afridi said.

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## SNAPSHOTS

### Boxing legend Arguello dead

Boxing great Alexis Arguello died at his home of a single gunshot to his chest in an apparent suicide on Wednesday. An autopsy report said the bullet hit 57-year-old Arguello's heart and left lung, and concluded the probable cause was suicide. Arguello had spoken publicly of his struggle with depression, alcohol and drug use. He retired from boxing in 1995 with a record of 82-8 with 65 knockouts and was a champion in three weight divisions.

**Rohit clinches javelin gold**  
Rohit Kumar clinched gold in boys' javelin-throw as India added three more medals to their kitty on the third day of the inaugural Asian Youth Games, in Singapore on Thursday. Rohit hurled the javelin for a personal best of 74.60m, which bettered his previous mark of 71.52 that he set at the Junior Nationals in Mysore last year. In girls' 400m hurdles, Sushma Mekala clinched bronze.

**Sharath improves ranking**  
Paddler Achanta Sharath Kamal has climbed up three places to achieve his career-best standing of 67 in the latest International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) rankings. The reigning national champion was 70th in last month's rankings.

**Red Bull name new driver**  
Red Bull replaced F1 reserve driver Brendon Hartley with British F3 champ Jaime Alguersuari on Wednesday. Spain's Alguersuari, 19, will assume his new duties at next week's German GP.

**CWG venues 50% complete**  
There have been concerns over the venues for the 2010 Commonwealth Games in recent days and on Thursday, a statement in the Rajya Sabha revealed that more than half the work is still to be completed in majority of stadiums. The Sports Ministry statement said only five of the 17 venues have been completed 50 per cent. The Games will be held from October 3-14 next year.

## Martyn blames Buchanan for 2005 loss

London: Former Australian batsman Damien Martyn has blamed ex-coach John Buchanan for the team's failure to retain the 2005 Ashes, saying the team management made the mistake of considering it as just another series and not planning it right.

"All comments by Warne and MacGill are right and you'd find that 99 per cent of the group

### ASHES COUNTDOWN 5 DAYS TO GO

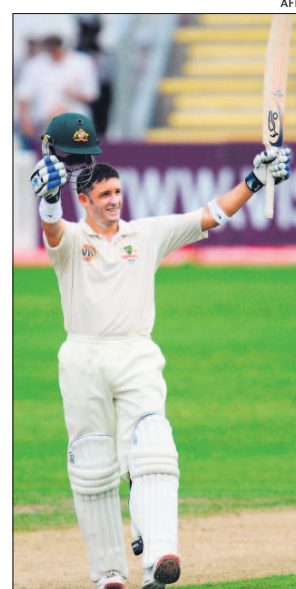
from that era would agree. The management team didn't plan right, we had a not-very-good, quick preparation in Brisbane and then we landed and away we went," Martyn said.

Martyn, who joined Shane Warne and Stuart MacGill in slamming Buchanan, said Australia's poor preparation was "one of a million behind-the-scenes reasons" for the series defeat. "We got slack, everything

clicked for them, they haven't played that well since then and they won't ever again," he told the *Wisden Cricketer*.

**McGrath talks to rookie pacers**  
Fast-bowling great Glenn McGrath has passed on his assessment of the upcoming Ashes and England players to greenhorn Australian pacers in a bid to help them get an edge in the series beginning next week.

McGrath, who boasts of an outstanding record against England with 157 wickets at an average of 20.92, interacted with Aussie fast bowlers at a meeting in Worcester and gave them tips for the Ashes. "I was just passing through town and truck (Australian bowling coach Troy Cooley) asked, 'Do you want to just come along and say something to the boys?' We had a bowlers' meeting and I just sat in there and offered my \$5 worth," he was quoted as saying by *Herald Sun*.



**LONE WARRIOR:** Michael Hussey warmed up for the Ashes with a 150 against England Lions in what was their last practice tie

### Hussey's 150 in Aussies' 358

Worcester: Australia failed to make a breakthrough against an inexperienced England Lions opening pair after being dismissed for 358 on the second morning on Thursday.

The Lions, England's 'A' side, reached the lunch interval on 64 without loss in what is Australia's final match before next week's first Ashes Test in Cardiff.

Australia earlier added another 21 to their overnight total, with Michael Hussey reaching 150 before Stephen Harmison (4-80) cleaned up his off-stump with a slower delivery to add to his Wednesday wickets of Phillip Hughes, Simon Katich and Lee.

**Brief scores**  
Australia 358 (Simon Katich 95, Mike Hussey 150, Mitchell Johnson 47; Graham Onions 3/70, Steve Harmison 4/80, Tim Bresnan 3/46) vs England Lions 64-0 AGENCIES

## Galaxy mates blast Beckham

New York: LA Galaxy teammates have described England football star David Beckham as a lousy captain and a tightwad.

Current captain Landon Donovan said he is no fan of Beckham, and unleashed a simmering resentment in *The Beckham Experiment*, a book compiled by author Grant Wahl, excerpts of which are revealed in the latest issue of *Sports Illustrated* magazine.

It is claimed Becks' best pal and personal manager, Terry Byrne, was instrumental in getting Ruud Gullit the job as

### EXTRA TIME FOOTBALL ROUND-UP

Galaxy coach. And Gullit's appointment made Donovan realise how much Beckham lacked as a captain.

"By July 2008, the LA players had seen enough to realise that Beckham might be a good teammate - but he wasn't much of a captain. It's one thing to take part in team events, but it's another thing to lead, to rally the players during tough times," Donovan said. "When Gullit gave the players an optional training day, Beckham didn't show up. As captain you should at least come in and show your face."



**OUT OF FAVOUR:** David Beckham has been called a 'lousy captain' and 'tightwad' by his Los Angeles Galaxy teammates

**Ronaldo faces police inquiry**  
Cristiano Ronaldo is facing a police probe after he lashed out and kicked a teenage girl's car window. Ronaldo, 24, claims he was protecting his mom when he kicked the car window that terrified 17-year-old Sara Pardal.

The winger faces an inquiry for allegedly wounding and destroying property after Pardal, treated in hospital for cuts, complained to police. "I regret what I did, but I can't promise that I would not react in the same way again in the same circumstances," the *Daily Star* quoted the defiant footie as saying.

**Ribery wants to join Real**  
France star Franck Ribery is set to leave Bayern Munich, but only for Real Madrid. "It is decided. I want to leave," French sports daily *L'Equipe* quoted Ribery as saying. "Yes, it will be Real or nothing."

**Ron's goodbye meal with Fergie**  
Cristiano Ronaldo made a flying visit to Manchester to say goodbye to his old boss Alex Ferguson. The star striker flew on a private jet from Portugal for a discreet meal at one of Alex's favourite restaurants. AGENCIES

## Somdev has no plans to change his game

Ruhi Batra | TNN

New Delhi: That Somdev Devvarman has a cool head on his shoulders is a big news but the fact that he hasn't allowed marginal success in the past few months to affect his thinking process or playing style speaks volumes about the maturity with which the guitar-strumming 24-year-old approaches tennis and life.

A dry run after the Chennai Open has left him with just 8 wins out of 23 matches but Devvarman, ranked 129 on the ATP ranking ladder, isn't bothered. "Stuff like this happens.

The most important thing is to treat either a win or a loss the same way. It's one of those things... inevitable. You have to be professional and mature enough to realise that there will be bad days and I know that," said Somdev in an informal chat during his one-day visit to the city on Thursday, fresh after a break with his family back in Agartala.

"I feel like I'm playing well and I'm in good form. I'm losing a lot of close matches but that hasn't sent me scurrying around to make changes in my game or routine. The last thing I want to do is make changes. That's not

the way I play tennis."

He minces no words either when asked to rate India's chances against South Africa in the Davis Cup World Group playoff tie in September. "It's a very winnable tie. We're up against a very good South African team but I think the pressure will be on them, playing at home and all that. Our doubles team has to be the shoe-in favourite and among the singles, I know Kevin's (Anderson) game pretty well. I think we stand a good chance of making it to the World Group," Devvarman, who qualified for doubles at Wimbledon with Anderson, said.

Apart from winning the Davis Cup tie, qualifying for the US Open is high on Somdev's list of priorities. "Most definitely. Grand Slams are Grand Slams. My game is right there. I'm looking and feeling good for the summer and it's just a matter of a few points," he stressed.



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