

OUTPLAYED AND OUT-FOUGHT, ENGLAND FACE SELECTION HEADACHE

LONDON: Stick with a team that has been thrashed by Australia or ring the changes? That's the dilemma facing England's selectors when they meet on Tuesday to select a team for the third Ashes test following a 405-run humbling at the hands of Australia in the second test at Lord's that finished prematurely on Sunday.

"There are some good players on the outside and we've got a selection meeting," said England's coach Trevor Bayliss, an Australian appointed shortly before the start of the five-match Ashes series. "I'm not going to speculate on what exactly will happen until Tuesday."

That didn't stop just about every England cricket fan from speculating on Monday after England collapsed to 103 all out in its second innings, chasing a massive 509 runs to win after four days in which Australia rediscovered its lost form after losing the first test in Cardiff.

For some fans, it's a question of how many players to drop.

The bowlers were generally spared from criticism on Monday, but a list of batsmen - including opener Adam Lyth and Gary Ballance, Ian Bell and Jos Buttler - are all in the firing line.

Buttler has been successful as a wicketkeeper so will probably be spared although he only managed 13 and 11 at Lord's. England's real problem is the top order.

"Eight times in the last seven tests England has been 50 or less for 3 after 15 overs," said ex-captain and opener Mike Atherton, pointing out a problem that threatens to cripple England.

Captain Alastair Cook has rediscovered his form this year. He was in the runs in the home series against New Zealand and scored 96 at Lord's in the first innings, England's highest scorer in the game.

But apart from a century against New Zealand, Lyth has failed and Cook's quest for a convincing opening partner continues. There has not been a settled partner since Andrew Strauss retired three years ago. Bayliss said players needed confidence.

"What you've also got to do is give the players that are in there as much confidence as possible as well," he said. "They are obviously good players and the reason they are in the team is because they are thought of as the best players in England at the moment."

Ballance has scored heavily in the past, but Australia appear to have exposed a fundamental flaw in his complete lack of foot movement, a rare fault in an international batsman that has been concealed by an impressive eye for the ball.

And veteran batsman Ian Bell, one of England's classiest players until recently, has only managed 128 runs in his last six games for England. At 33, there are calls for Bell to be put out to grass.

England may fiddle with the batting order, promoting in-form batsman Joe Root to No. 3 from his present position at 5, where he has found himself struggling with the tail.

Bayliss also weighed into the debate about English pitches after Australian bowlers found life in a wicket where England could get almost no bounce or movement.

"We've got no control over what the wickets are like, but certainly a flat wicket plays into the Australians' hands," said Bayliss.

"We want to win this series and for anyone to win a series you have to take 20 wickets per match," he said. "A flat wicket suits not only their batters but also the bowling attack they've got, more so than it does ours." While England was collapsing on Sunday, Jonny Bairstow was busy scoring a century and showing he is in the form of his life for his county Yorkshire. Bairstow averages over 100 this season and is the favorite to be given another chance for England. —AP

BANGLADESH LOOKS TO IMPRESS IN TESTS

CHITTAGONG: Emboldened by its first ever ODI series victory over South Africa, Bangladesh now wants to impress in the longer version of cricket when the two-match test series starts today.

Bangladesh showed it still has a way to go before it can compete in the test format, when it played Pakistan and India after the World Cup. It lost against Pakistan and drew a weather-affected series against India. However, Bangladesh's stunning comeback in the ODI series - winning 2-1 after a crushing loss in the first match - could see the team carry that form into the first test at Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

"(Test cricket) is a different format but the way we came back against South Africa in the ODI series is a testament of our progress," said Bangladesh test captain Mushfiqur Rahim. "Our players have been in good rhythm and so it's our best opportunity."

Bangladesh had won four successive ODI series over the past eight months following a first-ever appearance in the World Cup quarterfinals. But its test statistics are dismal.

It has played 91 tests, winning just seven - all against Zimbabwe and a second-string West Indies side in 2009. "To achieve anything is a big challenge," Mushfiqur said. "We have done so well in the one-day cricket, the new challenge for us is to replicate that in the tests. Almost the same players play in the tests as well, so why aren't we able to put in similar performances?"

Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha urged his players to be unfazed by the South African pace attack, which will be bolstered by the presence of Dale Steyn and Vernon Philander.

"The biggest challenge will be their bowlers," Hathurusingha said. "We want to play aggressive cricket, believe in ourselves. We have to play big moments intelligently as well."

South Africa is looking to maintain its success on the road. It last lost a series away from home nine years ago, in Sri Lanka in 2006.

It has since played 14 away series, of which seven have been in the subcontinent, winning 10 and drawing the other four - in India and the UAE.

South Africa has won all eight of its tests against Bangladesh. Seven of those wins came by an innings margin while the other was by five wickets inside four days.

"The way Bangladesh have played in the ODIs, they have been an in-form team and I am sure they will be taking plenty of confidence in the tests," South Africa captain Hashim Amla said. "But test cricket is a different format ... One of the strengths of the South African team is that we don't put a lot of emphasis on what the opposition can do. We mainly focus on our own strengths." —AP



LONDON: Australia's players celebrate in this file photo. —AP

GANGULY TO HELP ADVISE WAY AHEAD AFTER IPL SUSPENSIONS

NEW DELHI: The Indian cricket board has brought in former national team captain Sourav Ganguly to help put the Indian Premier League back on track after two of its teams were suspended by a Supreme Court-appointed committee last week.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India, which runs the IPL, yesterday named the 43-year-old Ganguly in a working group that will examine the two-year suspension verdict on Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals over corruption-related charges during the 2013 season.

IPL chairman Rajeev Shukla, BCCI secretary Anurag Thakur, treasurer Anirudh Chaudhary and legal adviser Usha Nath Banerjee will be the other members of the

committee. The BCCI said in a statement that "the committee will share its recommendations with the governing council (of the IPL) within a timeframe of six weeks after consulting all the key stakeholders."

The committee has been formed amid local media reports that some BCCI officials are in favor of tougher punishment for the two teams.

The Justice Lodha committee, which also announced life bans on Chennai team principal Gurusath Meiyappan and Rajasthan co-owner Raj Kundra for betting on IPL games or being in contact with illegal gamblers, had said last week that the BCCI was free to even ban the teams permanently.

"It is for the BCCI to consider terminating the teams and the Supreme Court judgment is clear on that. The BCCI can do that," Justice Lodha said.

The working group's immediate aim will be to advise the BCCI on the format of the IPL since it is now reduced to six teams.

A six-team league would decrease the number of matches in the six-week season from 60 to 34, and would mean re-negotiating contracts with broadcasters and the remaining franchises because the tournament is based on a revenue sharing model.

The committee is expected to advise on whether two new teams should be brought in - for a 10-strong league in 2019 - and on how to assimilate players of the two sus-

pended teams.

Chennai, a two-time champion and the runner-up this year, is led by India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni and features New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum, West Indies allrounder Dwayne Bravo and South Africa batsman Faf du Plessis.

Rajasthan, the inaugural IPL champ in 2008, is led by Australia's Steve Smith, and includes India batsman Ajinkya Rahane, and New Zealand pace bowler Tim Southee.

The IPL scaled back to eight clubs from 10 after expansion club Kochi Tuskers was scrapped on an alleged breach of contract in 2011 and Sahara Pune Warriors withdrew in 2013. —AP



NEWTON: Ryan Hunter-Reay celebrates in Victory Lane after winning the IndyCar Series auto race at Iowa Speedway. —AP

IOWA SPEEDWAY A 'CROWN JEWEL' FOR INDYCAR SERIES

NEWTON: In the wake of the Iowa Corn 300, social media was once again buzzing about the show the Verizon IndyCar Series put on at Iowa Speedway.

For the past several installments of the yearly open-wheel visit to the 7/8-mile track in Newton, close racing and thrilling finishes have enthralled fans and delighted sponsors who shell out millions of dollars to promote races. But unlike their NASCAR counterparts where the schedule rarely changes, the scheduling for the IndyCar Series leaves some doubt year-to-year about stops on their tour - the Indianapolis 500 notwithstanding.

So after another nearly unanimously popular event, is IndyCar's future firm at Iowa Speedway? To ask track President Jimmy Small, it's likely, if not certain.

"IndyCar is, hands down, the best race here. We want to keep it here. It's a part of our vision to raise the overall profile of motorsports. I can't imagine it not being here," Small said on Saturday. "They were the first sanctioning body to take a chance on us, first major race to happen here at Iowa Speedway, and there's a lot of significance involved in their presence."

"This race, this series is really important to have here for a number of reasons." Where a series sees a venue fit into its plans and where the venue sees the series fitting into its plans don't always match up.

As of this race weekend, IndyCar, by all accounts, sees Iowa Speedway as an important and vital part of its schedule because ovals are still a major part of the plan. The track and region have a

major role in that, because the fans that attend the races are among the most intelligent and dedicated IndyCar fans on tour. The evidence for that comes from people who follow the series to every track, stay in all those cities and interact with those fans. Longtime motorsports journalist and unabashed critic of racing, Robin Miller, has changed his tune over the years on where Iowa Speedway stacks up in the IndyCar mix. If you asked him in 2007, he couldn't have wanted IndyCar to go elsewhere more. But he stood on pit road Saturday night and said on live television Iowa Speedway provides some of, if not the best racing all season.

"This has become one of the four or five best stops on the whole circuit," Miller said. "In terms of racing, it's always one of the best races. In terms of fans, they get it; it's probably first or second. People wear T-shirts, they watch television, they watch other races, they come up and talk to me intelligently about racing."

"I think what you've got here, is I think IndyCar has figured out this is one of our crown jewels and they ought to keep this thing."

IndyCar racers and team owners consistently praise the track and fans for the same reasons Miller mentioned. They don't want to lose a trip to the Midwest, either, which has historically been the foundation of open-wheel racing in the United States. Between that at the tradition of ovals in IndyCar, it's more than appreciated.

"I think it's really important because we don't want to lose ovals," said team-

owner Michael Andretti. "It's part of the tradition of IndyCar racing and this is a very important track. I think it's very important to keep it on the schedule and I hope they're going to be able to do it."

Small said he's had multiple conversations with IndyCar about 2016, even one in which the series brought him an offer for a date for next season.

The ball is squarely in Small and his staff's court, as it were, to figure out a way to make it work for 2016. Even if there's a desire for the race to return, Small has to be a businessman first and a fan second, because he still has a bottom line to consider. Iowa Speedway still is not removed from the financial pits it was in before NASCAR purchased the track in November 2013, so financially sensible decisions need to be made.

"You can't overlook all the elements involved in bringing in a racing series," Small said. "Between ticket sales, sponsorship and everything else we do here, it's really important that we continue the tradition on that side of things too."

"We took over this business, we're happy to be here and we're here for the long term, but we have to make really good business decisions, too. It's really tough out there and we're doing everything we can to make this a more hospitable place and bring fans back that maybe have been turned off in the past." It's those fans, and how many of them show up for the IndyCar race weekend, that provide a positive from Iowa Speedway's perspective on bringing the series back. —AP

WOODS VOWS TO FIND A WAY BACK

ST ANDREWS: Tiger Woods has vowed to battle on against the dimming of the light after another desperately disappointing showing at the British Open.

The game's once predominant force packed his bags and headed for home after finishing seven shots adrift of the cut mark and tied for 147th place out of 156 starters at St Andrews. That came a month after he slumped out of Chambers Bay and the US Open in a similar gloomy fashion just a month ago. They are just the latest humiliations in a year that has seen Woods mired in by far the worst slump of a professional career which started 19 years ago.

Woods had sympathetic support from the knowledgeable St Andrews golf fans as he trudged his way off the course late Saturday evening. They had cheered, admired and lionized him in 2000 when he won his first Open Championship by a whopping eight strokes, and five years later when he triumphed by five shots at an Old Course he calls his favorite place in the world. There is much head-shaking and hand-wringing now over the way things have gone. Woods himself had no real answer as to what he needs to do next, short of sticking to his guns. "Keep going. Keep going forward," was all he could offer. "I play in a couple weeks in (Washington) D.C., so looking forward to playing the Quicken Loans, and hopefully win that event so I can get into a place that I know very well." In fact the last time Woods was in that (winning) place was at the 2013 WGC Bridgestone-Invitational at a time when he was still ranked first in the world. Since then it has gone from bad to worst, first with a succession of injuries and then with changes to his swing pattern that for the moment just do not seem to be working, although he insists that things are heading in the right direction. Coming into St Andrews he genuinely felt he could win his 15th major title and move to within three of the all-time record held by Jack Nicklaus. The reality though was very different to his expectations.

"I'm just not scoring. Every opportunity I have to make a key putt or hit an iron shot in there stiff with a short iron and get some momentum going, I haven't done that," he said.

"I haven't gotten anything out of my rounds. I'll hit good shots, I'll string together some good shots and good holes and put myself in position to make a run, and I don't do it."

Woods at least has one major left to play this year - the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits, Wisconsin next month - to try and save something from the wreckage of a year that also saw him split with longtime girlfriend, champion skier Lindsey Vonn, in May. —AP



ST. ANDREWS: United States' Tiger Woods tips his cap in this file photo. —AP