



Murali says domestic cricket is a joke

Rex Clementine reporting from Nottingham

Two days prior to the third and final Test Match against England here at Trent Bridge in Nottingham, Sri Lanka's senior most player Muttiah Muralitharan made a scathing attack on domestic cricket blaming the structure back at home for the troubles of national cricket team.

According to Muralitharan, world's second highest wicket taker, the lacklustre domestic cricket tournament was not fit to prepare players for the top level.

Either top or middle order collapses have become quite common in Sri Lankan cricket in the last year or so hardly giving Muralitharan a substantial score to bowl at and the off-spinner let out his frustration on domestic cricket. "It's been happening for the last six or seven months," Muralitharan said of Sri Lanka's collapse in the first innings at Edgbaston where the tourists were bowled out for 141. "What you've got to understand is that this is a young team and straight away you can't ask them to perform," he said.

"I would say our domestic cricket is very poor and not even up to the standard. That's where the problem is. From playing three day cricket back at home and to come over here and play five day matches there's quite a difference," Murali said blaming the domestic cricket tournament which the administrators admit needs serious attention, but instead of addressing the issue do more harm by further increasing the number of clubs.

"If we want to be a good side the domestic structure has to be good. The sad part is that the young players we have here have got to learn all the tricks at the top level when they start playing Test cricket and they've got to spend about two or three years to come up with the goods and you have to be patient with them."

His answer to make domestic cricket more competitive was to make it professional and reduce the number of clubs. "They have to make domestic



cricket professional and they should pay the players and make cricket full time. What happens now is that players practice after work and even play matches during weekends when there's no work. It's something like carnival cricket and therefore the players don't put their heart into it because their livelihood doesn't depend on cricket alone

here like gyms, indoor cricket facilities and it's professional and that's why they are playing well."

"I have been playing county cricket for four years and I know how serious these guys take it. The days where people played cricket for the love of the game are gone. When you say that people played for fun, they just wanted fun and our club cricket is fun cricket too. People have to live and they need to get paid and if people are not well paid no one is going to come and play. Here in England, these guys have got physios, trainers, masseurs and everything is basically there. If you don't perform your contract is gone and someone else will take your place," Murali added.

150 would have been touch and go. Muralitharan has bowled exceptionally well in England so far and although he was unlucky on quite a few occasions at Lord's to not get few more wickets he had things going for him at Edgbaston where he got 10 wickets for 115. He picked up all four England wickets in the second innings when the hosts were in a bit of a wobble chasing 78 and felt that a score of 150 or above would have made it an interesting contest.

"I thought something like 200 would have been difficult for England to chase and if we had got 150 or 160 it would have been touch and go. But if it's not good enough and the bottom line is that we didn't bat well in the first innings," Muralitharan said.

Murali, 34, could well be playing his last Test Match in England as Sri Lanka are not scheduled to play in this country until 2011 by which time the champion spinner would be nearing 40.

Muralitharan indicated that family commitments and other issues could indeed shorten his career. "If I put my mind into it I will play for another five more years. But it all depends on a lot of factors, your family life, how the team is doing. It all counts. When you have a young family it's difficult to travel around every other month. And then you can't be part of a losing side for too long. You've got to win some matches too," he said.

Bandara for precautionary scan

Leg-spinner Malinga Bandara was to go for a precautionary scan Wednesday evening after he twisted his ankle while fielding yesterday at Trent Bridge.

Bandara, who was overlooked for the first two Tests, twisted his right ankle while attempting a high catch during a fielding drill.

Team manager Michael Tissera told reporters that Bandara had received ice treatment and would go for precautionary scan later in the day.

Henin - Hardenne on track for Paris hat-trick



Paris, Paris FRANCE : Belgian Justine Henin-Hardenne in action in her match against Estonia's Maret Ani during the French Open at Roland Garros in Paris yesterday. Henin-Hardenne won 6-3, 6-0. - AFP PHOTO

Armstrong cleared in doping enquiry

THE HAGUE, May 31, 2006 (AFP) - Independent Dutch investigators cleared Lance Armstrong of doping in the 1999 Tour de France on Wednesday, and blamed anti-doping authorities for misconduct in dealing with the American cyclist, according to Dutch newspaper De Volkskrant.

A 132-page report recommended convening a tribunal to discuss possible legal and ethical violations by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and to consider "appropriate sanc-

tions to remedy the violations."

The International Cycling Union (UCI) appointed Dutch lawyer Emile Vrijman last October to investigate the handling of urine tests from the 1999 Tour by the French national anti-doping laboratory, known by its French acronym LNDD.

Vrijman said Wednesday his report "exonerates Lance Armstrong completely with respect to alleged use of doping in the 1999 Tour de France."

Nandani Wijesundara, not Nayana



It was not Nayana Kumari who established a new Sri Lanka record in the women's discus. The picture caption should have appeared as follows. Padma Nandani Wijesundara is seen in action at the Sugathadasa Stadium on Sunday. She established a new Sri Lanka record in the women's discus.

Cricket election this month

Sports Minister Jeevan Kumaratunga yesterday said that he would call for cricket board election before the end of this month. The date is to be announced shortly. The Sri Lanka Cricket is currently run by an Interim Committee headed by Jayantha Dharmadasa.

"The other thing is that they should reduce the number of clubs or provincial teams to eight or nine or even less and then you'll see good players playing against equally good players. The players will be ready when they reach the top level which is not going to happen in three-day domestic cricket which we do now," he added.

"Even India is reaching new heights. They are going at a rate. You can't say there's no money in Sri Lanka Cricket. There's plenty of money. They are getting 40-50 million US Dollars over a period of four years through television rights. We are going to host the 2011 World Cup too and that means more money. If you can't spend some portion of it for players at domestic level then that means there's something wrong somewhere," Muralitharan said.

Incidentally, corruption and financial mismanagement are words that Sri Lanka Cricket has dealt with too closely during the last few years with fingers pointed at two businesses oriented rival families, who themselves are involved in a bitter battle for power of the lucrative cricket board.

Muralitharan also felt that facilities at domestic level need serious attention too. "Facilities need to be improved too. We've been going through many counties here in England and when we see the facilities

Rs. 50 million from SLT for South Asian Games

by Champika Fernando

With just 78 days left for the start of the 10th South Asian Games (SAG) in Colombo, the National Olympic Committee (NOC) secured a Rs. 50 million sponsorship from Sri Lanka Telecom (SLT).

The SAG will be held in Colombo from August 18-28 with the participation of over 2000 athletes from eight regional countries, in 19 disciplines.

This was revealed at a press conference held on Tuesday evening, minus NOC top officials who left for the Maldives to attend a SAG organizing

committee meeting. Sports Minister Jeevan Kumaratunga, SLT representatives and some NOC members were present.

In its commitment to develop and strengthen relations between the member nations through sports SLT will contribute Rs. 50 million as the



Shuhei Anan, Chief Executive Officer, Sri Lanka Telecom (SLT) and Anil Obeyesekera, Chairman, SLT, hand over the sponsorship cheque to Sports Minister Jeevan Kumaratunga and South Asian Games Sponsorships Committee Chairman, Nalin Attygala. (Pix by Nihal Chandrakumara)

principal sponsor, behind the government which has granted Rs. 600 million towards the games.

"No doubt, we make profits as the leader in the communication industry in Sri Lanka and it's our social responsibility to support the biggest multi-sporting event to take place in Sri Lanka," said SLT Chairman, Anil Obeyesekera.

In addition to the financial commitment, SLT will provide various state of the art telecommunications facilities which could be utilized during the games.

Speaking at the press conference, Nalin Attygala, Chairman Sponsorships and Marketing Committee, thanked the sponsors for their generosity.

"I was given the task of collecting Rs. 300 million a month ago and I have managed to collect more than Rs. 150 million to date. I certainly appreciate SLT's kind gesture," Attygala said.

Meanwhile, Sports Minister Jeevan Kumaratunga has ordered that all venues should be ready for use by July 17, the latest. The minister's ultimatum came after he paid an inspection visit to the Sugathadasa Sports Complex which is yet to be refurbished.

