



HOME ADVANTAGE: McGrath (right) celebrates after a dominating performance that for now has silenced his critics.

Aussies will twist the knife in England's back: McGrath

CRICKET
Ashes Test

BRISBANE — Old stager Glenn McGrath, sensing English haemorrhaging, says Australia can nail the opening Ashes Test with a couple of early wickets on Saturday's third day at the Gabba.

The 37-year-old paceman, written off by critics as being over-the-hill, hit back with the wickets of England opens Andrew Strauss (12) and Alastair Cook (11) with consecutive deliveries as the tourists stumbled to 53 for three at stumps.

Ian Bell (13) and Kevin Pietersen (6) will carry huge responsibility to the crease for England on Saturday.

After another demoralising day for England chasing Australia's massive 602 for nine declared, the momentum is well with Ricky Ponting's team, who are driven to retrieve the Ashes after losing it last year.

McGrath, the consummate competitor over 13 years in the Australian XI, is confident that if the home side maintain the pressure, more English wickets will come.

"To get a couple of wickets early on always does wonders for the confidence," McGrath, who has increased his Test career tally to 544 wickets, said.

"I was probably 95 per cent happy with how I bowled.

"Looking forward I think I can really nail it tomorrow. We

want to go out and show them why we are the best team in the world."

McGrath, the long-time leader of Australia's four-man bowling attack, says he is reveling in bowling on the bouncy Gabba pitch.

"There's enough variation in the wicket. It swung a bit today. It's got good bounce.

"We haven't bowled on a wicket with that sort of bounce this season.

"So guys like myself and Stuart Clark really enjoy wickets that have that bounce.

"If we can remain patient, build up pressure, then the wickets will come."

McGrath said he can feel the noose tightening around the England team, but wants to drive home the advantage earned over two days of outplaying the tourists.

"We've definitely got a lot of momentum now, and the confidence is with us," he said.

"But you only have to look back at last year's first Test at Lord's where we had momentum, we had confidence and we won that Test quite convincingly, but England turned it around in the next Test."

"We'll be trying to drive it home tomorrow," he added.

"A lot of times in Australia, when we go one-up, there's not too many series we lose.

"We won't be taking it easy for the rest of this Test or the series." — AFP

ALL READY FOR WAR

The trash talking begins ahead of boxing extravaganza at Suntec

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IT WILL be a throwback to the good old days in the 1960s and '70s on Saturday night at Hall 601 of Suntec Singapore International Convention and Exhibition Centre.

From 7.30pm, eight boxers will officially usher back boxing as a sport in Singapore, one that used to see fans through the Gay World Stadium, the Singapore Badminton Hall and the Tanjong Pagar Community Centre.

In the main event of the Showdown in Singapore, big punching Philippines champion Dondon Sultan and Australia's Eddie "Psycho" Delic will battle it out for the vacant World Boxing Foundation (WBF) world welterweight (63.5kg-66.7kg) title in a scheduled 12-round bout.

Also at stake is the WBF Intercontinental bantamweight (51-54kg) belt, which will be contested between Australia's rising star Emmet Gazzard and Thailand's Saensak Singmanasak.

Singaporeans Mohd Nor Rizan and David Alexis will take on Pornthep Kawponkanpim (six-round super-bantamweight bout) and Denadai Sithdara (four-round cruiserweight bout), respectively.

All eight boxers attended the weigh-in at the Rogues Restaurant & Bar on Friday. It didn't take long before the trash-talking started.

Gazzard, 23, seemed the most confident of the lot.

The WBF Asia-Pacific super-bantamweight champion, who won his title in October after knocking out Thai Thongcharoen Suwanasil in four rounds, has built up a fierce reputation.

So far, in his four fights, Gazzard has knocked out each of his opponents. His one-round demolition of Shane Brock and Samart Twingym in Queensland earned him rave reviews all across Australia.

Coming from an illustrious boxing family where uncles Tony and Billy Barber used to be Australia's light middleweight and bantamweight champions, respectively, Gazzard is perfectly at home with his newfound star status.

"To carry this bit of reputation is easy. It's much better to be in the spotlight than not," said Gazzard.

As far as his opponent goes, he said: "I don't know him. No strategy, nothing. I just want to smack a good one in and I'm through.

"I just know it. I can't begin to tell you how much I want this title. This will open up doors to America for me."

Gazzard's opponent, Saensak, a former muay thai champion with 60 wins and 30 losses, was the picture of cool and calm, unusual in the world of tough-talking boxers.

The World Boxing Organisation Asia-Pacific bantamweight champ said: "I'm not the least bit worried. I'm shorter but if I can get inside his defence, I can get him.

"Willpower will carry me through. I'm certain I will win."



GEARED UP FOR BATTLE: Sultan (left) is confident he can stop Delic, but the nervous Aussie promises to be in the groove.

defending Singapore's pride and he says he is up for the challenge.

"Boxing or not, our South-east Asian neighbours look down on Singapore sport and they have never given us that respect.

"They say we are not tough, they say our kids are not tough and I want to set the record straight.

"This may be my first competitive bout in six years but believe me, I'm highly motivated to win."

Main event contenders Delic

and Sultan — the favourite — were both relaxed at the weigh in. But Delic admitted that the nerves were killing him inside.

He said: "I'm feeling good but at the same time, really nervous about the fight.

"When the fight starts, I'll get into the groove but from now till then, it's going to be an edgy ride."

Said Sultan: "I enjoy being the favourite. It serves as motivation, more than bringing on pressure.

"I'm very happy because I was six pounds overweight just a few days ago. There will be no big meals for me. Just four eggs before the fight and I'm ready."

Venue: Suntec Convention Hall 601
Time: 7.30pm
Tickets from SISTIC outlets or www.sistic.com.sg
Hotline: 6348-5555

Sultan and Delic as different as chalk and cheese

WHEN Dondon Sultan locks horns with Eddie "Psycho" Delic for the World Boxing Foundation world welterweight title on Saturday, it will be a battle between boxers with very contrasting styles.

While Sultan is a famed knockout (KO) artist with seven KOs from 13 victories, Delic's record of having gone the full distance in 15 of his 19 career fights sets up an intriguing battle.

After successfully shedding the extra six pounds for Friday's weigh-in, Sultan's trainer Edmund Villamor believes the time has come for his prizefighter to show Delic what Philippines boxing is all about.

"We were worried about the weigh-in but now that that's over, you can tell how much more relaxed Dondon is," said Villamor.

"Delic should be worried about an opponent who is now in a better state, mentally.

"After the weight issue, being able to fight is a tremendous lift for Dondon."

In the opposite corner, Paul Fyfield is tipping his man to come out on top.

Delic had said earlier that he was "prepared to fight a

thousand rounds to beat Sultan", and that spirit, according to Fyfield, epitomises what the former kickboxing champion is all about.

"Eddie is a tough, tough fella," said Fyfield.

"He will keep on fighting until he can't fight anymore. He won't budge easily, if at all.

"Eddie is extremely resilient as a character and it shows in his fights.

"Dondon can throw all the punches he wants to, but it's only going to wear him out.

"And remember, the 'Psycho' can punch just as hard."

Not according to Villamor, though. The Filipino, based in Sibuy City, hasn't seen a better puncher than his charge.

He said: "I don't know who Delic has fought in the past, but I'm sure he will be surprised by Dondon's power.

"Dondon has never been in better shape in his career. In my three years with him, he is in the best condition right now.

"I am expecting him to control the fight from start to finish. People will talk about his KO record but really, that's not something we plan for in our preparations. He can fight all the way." — CUBBY LEONG



ALL SMILES: Sultan (left) and Delic are in relaxed mode ahead of their world welterweight showdown at Suntec.

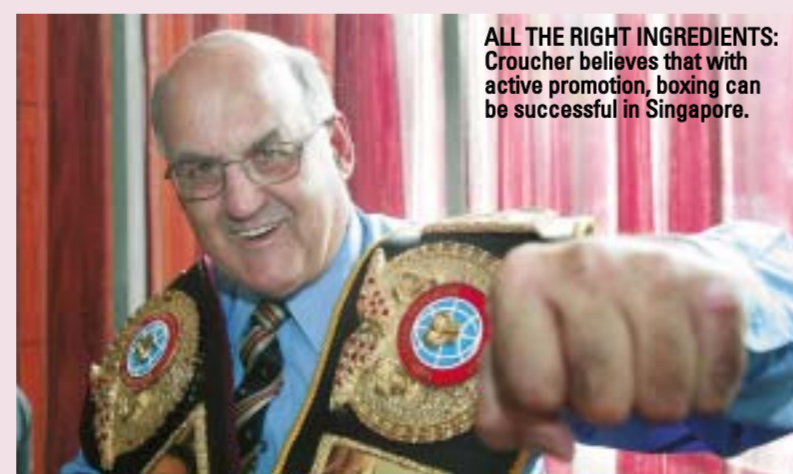
Singapore can be Asia's premier

WORLD Boxing Foundation (WBF) president Mick Croucher is at the helm of an organisation whose operations span from Asia to Europe to the Americas.

Having sanctioned fights in the United States, New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, Spain, Thailand, Philippines and China, the 59-year-old Australian knows boxing inside out.

So when the former light middleweight champion says Singapore can be the "hub of boxing in the region", it is likely Saturday night's Showdown in Singapore — the nation's biggest fight night since 1989 — will not be the last of its kind to reach these shores.

Croucher said: "Singapore can



ALL THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS: Croucher believes that with active promotion, boxing can be successful in Singapore.

be the hub of boxing in South-east Asia. It even has the ability to be bigger than New Zealand, Fiji and potentially, better than Hong Kong.

"You guys have the right ingredients to succeed here.

"You have the infrastructure in place. Singapore is a financial

boxing venue, says WBF chief

hub and has the ability to draw the corporate muscle. And you've also got the casinos set to be completed in a few years' time.

"John (Leung, the Showdown in Singapore promoter) is an intelligent promoter, someone who really loves the sport. He has the ability to be one of the biggest promoters here in Asia. You put that altogether and it all adds up."

Croucher is enthusiastic about bringing more title fights to the Lion City.

"I'll be very happy if 2,000 can show up on fight night (Saturday). But that is not high on the agenda," he said.

"I'm a boxing man whose family has been associated with the

sport for the last 100 years. I'll bring fights here, whether it's for 100 or 100,000 people.

"I love boxing and I work 12 to 18 hours a day to make things happen. Singapore is still finding its feet with regard to the sport and I can't see why it won't grow with more active promotion."

The Singapore Boxing Association may have been de-affiliated from the Singapore Sports Council in 2001 but Croucher believes the sport can be revived.

Citing the example of China where boxing is slowly but surely gaining in popularity, Croucher believes Singapore can start building a strong base of boxers to one day challenge the likes of Philippines

and Thailand.

After all, boxing is one of the oldest and most fiercely contested medal sports at the SEA Games, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and Olympics Games.

Croucher said: "We brought a few Aussie and Filipino fighters to Guiyang, China two years ago and the sport has grown tremendously since then.

"It can happen to Singapore too. Singapore can begin to attract potential boxers by generating interest in the sport.

"I've been coming to Singapore from 1974 and to watch it grow to what it is today, it is just amazing. The opportunities here are endless." — CUBBY LEONG



A star comes to town

TRACK legend Carl Lewis will be in Singapore next week to host the opening of Nike's latest store at Vivocity on Dec 1. The store, located at #01-178 at Vivocity, is the largest of Nike's retail outlets in Singapore. The 45-year-old American, who is visiting Singapore courtesy of Nike, is regarded as one of the world's greatest ever athletes, winning nine Olympic gold medals — including the 100 metres at the 1984 and 1988 Olympics — and eight world championships, and his 65 consecutive wins in the long jump is one of the longest undefeated runs in track and field.