

Stokes prioritises England player welfare

England captain deflects questions on reported excessive drinking during mid-series break in Noosa

- Stokes faces questions over team's Noosa break
- Captain emphasizes player welfare over addressing claims
- Jofra Archer ruled out of series remainder

AFP | Melbourne

England captain Ben Stokes said protecting England players' welfare was his top concern yesterday amid claims of excessive drinking on a mid-Ashes beach break, without directly addressing the allegations.

Stokes was peppered with questions ahead of the fourth Test in Melbourne about the team's behaviour at Noosa between the second and third Tests after British media reports compared it to a "stag-do".

Unverified social media footage appeared to show opener Ben Duckett drunk and disoriented.

Their disastrous tour took another hit yesterday when pace spearhead Jofra Archer was ruled out of the rest of the series with a side strain.

England cricket chief Rob Key on Tuesday pledged to investigate the drinking claims, while



England's captain Ben Stokes reacts during a training session

the England and Wales Cricket Board said in a statement it was intent on establishing the facts.

Stokes, whose team have already lost the Ashes, said his main concern was the players' mental welfare and to ensure they were ready for the Melbourne Test starting Friday.

"I'm obviously aware of the reports and everything circulating around right now," Stokes said.

"My main concern right now is my players, and how I handle this moment right now is the most important thing to me.

"The welfare of everyone in there, and probably some certain individuals as well, is the most important thing to me right now as England captain.

"It's never a nice place to be in when not only the media world, but also the social media world, is piling on top of you," he added.

"It's a very tough place to be in as an individual. As an individual, when you know you've got the support of the people who are sort of leaders, in a sense, it's very good to know that you've got that support."

Asked directly whether his

teammates had "done anything wrong in Noosa", Stokes replied: "I've just answered everything there."

No leg to stand on

England went to Queensland tourist resort Noosa after losing the first two Tests in Perth and Brisbane heavily.

They spent several days on the sand and around restaurants and bars before travelling to Adelaide, where they lost the third Test as Australia retained the Ashes.

Britain's Daily Telegraph re-

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BEN STOKES

ported that "after drowning their sorrows after the Brisbane Test, it is no exaggeration to say some, certainly not all, players drank for five or six days".

It added that players "did nothing outrageous in Noosa" but there was concern over the level of drinking, with England's professionalism already under the microscope after their limited preparations.

Stokes conceded that when a side was losing there would be scrutiny, and "rightly so".

"When you are 3-0 down you don't really have a leg to stand on but we've got two games of cricket to play. That's what we have to focus on," he said.



Social media footage reportedly showed opener Ben Duckett drunk and disoriented. The Daily Telegraph reported some players drank for five or six days straight after the second Test, raising questions about professionalism

"We haven't won a game in Australia for a long, long time."

England have gone 18 Tests since winning a match in Australia, dating back to their last series victory there in 2010-11.

Their capitulation in this series in 11 days of play is the joint second quickest in more than a century, since the 1921 Ashes was completed in eight days.

Making matters worse, Archer will take no further part in the tour, with Gus Atkinson replacing him in Melbourne.

The under-performing Ollie Pope paid for his poor form at number three, with Jacob Bethell taking over in the only other change.

Batelco Fitness on Track offers fun post-Christmas workout early Friday morning at BIC



Manama

Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) gets in on the festive cheer as it hosts on tomorrow day its widely popular Batelco Fitness on Track, offering fans a fun physical activity within a unique setting.

The event's latest edition is scheduled to take place from 6am to 10am at 'The Home of Motorsport in the Middle East', making for an ideal post-Christmas workout.

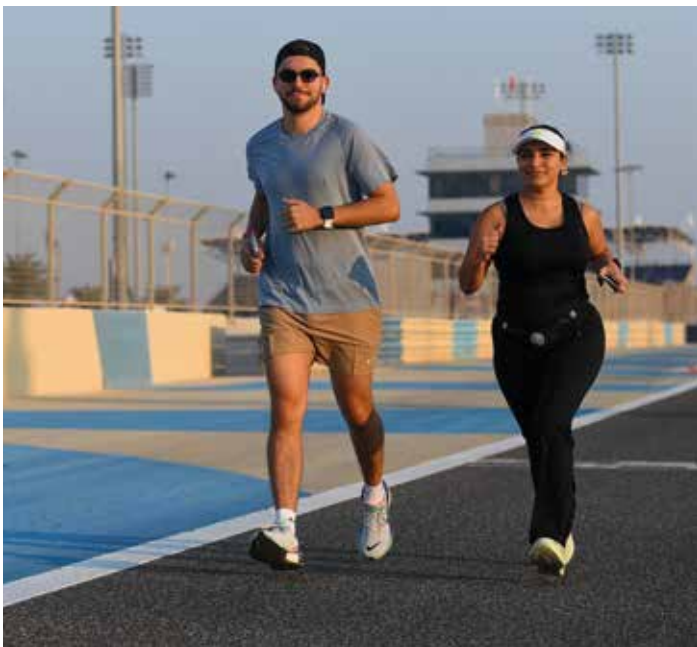
Participants will be able to take part in the activity either

individually or with family and friends.

Friday's Batelco Fitness on Track will be the perfect occasion to break in a sweat while enjoying the cool morning temperatures, all within the safe and secure environment of a world-renowned Formula 1 venue.

The activity can be done either on foot or on a bicycle, giving participants the chance to select their preferred workout programme.

Runners and walkers will be utilising BIC's 2.550-kilometre



Inner Circuit, while cyclists will get to ride their bikes along the 3.543-kilometre Outer Circuit, with another dedicated area for children's cycling.

The cost to take part is BD2 for cyclists and BD1 for runners. Payment must be made upon booking. Children under the age of 12 can participate for free if accompanied by a paying adult.

BIC's Batelco Fitness on Track Season Pass is still also available – ideal for regular participants as it grants access to all Batelco Fitness on Track events throughout the season. At the

affordable price of just BD15, the pass is a great way to save money over the course of the year, with Batelco Fitness on Track being held multiple times each month, all the way through to April of 2026. Season Passes can be purchased by contacting the BIC Hotline.

For more information on Friday's Batelco Fitness on Track or other events and experiences at BIC, visit bahraingp.com, call the BIC Hotline on +973-17450000, or follow the circuit's official social media channels.

Australia's Lyon determined to bounce back after surgery



Australia's Nathan Lyon walks with the aid of crutches as he shakes hands with England players

AFP | Melbourne

Off-spinner Nathan Lyon is determined to fight his way back into the Australian team after undergoing surgery for a torn hamstring, coach Andrew McDonald said.

The 38-year-old faces an extended period on the sidelines after damaging his right hamstring saving a boundary on day five of the third Ashes Test in Adelaide.

McDonald said Lyon remained a key part of their plans as reports speculated that his 141-Test career could be over.

It is the second serious inju-

ry Lyon has sustained in two years after being ruled out of the previous Ashes series against England with a calf injury picked up at Lord's in 2023.

He had surgery on Tuesday, but was expected to be with the team during the fourth Ashes Test in Melbourne starting Friday.

"He's pretty shattered," McDonald told cricket.com.au late Tuesday. "He's a huge part of what we do.

"He's facing a long recovery timeframe. That type of injury, it's going to be a hard period for him to get back to where he was.