



FOCUS

# THE FULL MONTY

BY IVAN SMITH

MUDHSUDEN SINGH 'MONTY' PANESAR IS ENGLAND'S NEW SPIN WEAPON. WILL HE LIVE UP TO THE HYPE THIS SUMMER?

**H**ow can you have a cult following before you've played your 10th Test match? How can you go from clown to contender within one series? Or from useful to vital within three? You can if you're Mudhsuden Singh 'Monty' Panesar, the surprise package of the 3 mobile Ashes Series.

Every Ashes team strives to produce its secret weapon, and this time Panesar, the gentle Sikh finger-spinner, is England's. As the past nine months have proved, his skills are considerable and his threat to Australia is very real.

Monty Panesar is one of the fringe players to have benefited from England's terrible injury problems since the last Ashes. With Ashley Giles, the "King of Sp(a)in", stricken with a serious and long-term hip injury, the selectors took a chance on Panesar for series in India and Sri Lanka — and were well rewarded.

Hailing from the unglamorous town of Luton, the 24-year-old graduate of Loughborough University is the first Sikh to play for England. As an English spin bowler he is rare: less in the mould of Giles — a defensive stalwart (albeit still capable of surprising turn) — and more of the great sub-continental magicians of spin, such as Bishen Bedi and Harbajhan Singh. He is an attacking player, fast through the air. A wicket-taker.

But Panesar's Test career, short and steep though it is, has not been one free of strife. Picked for his wickets, England fans were rather more delighted to learn that the rookie had a terrible reputation as a batsman and fielder — and wasn't much better in the flesh. Every mistake was greeted with glee; it didn't help that the coaches scheduled extra fielding sessions for him before play, in front of the world.