

Freedom in football 'We're not favourites'

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP
Bangladesh 2003

SPORTS REPORTER

The world football itself is full of excitement, drama and tears of joy and sorrow. And, for the people of Afghanistan this beautiful game is beyond football. The third South Asian Football Championship in Dhaka symbolises a new life and freedom of every Afghan.

Having spent a good part of their lives out of the country, five young German-based Afghan players travelled from the safety of Europe to unite with their brothers who had hardly kicked a ball for nearly six years during the Taliban rule.

The other players are coming from home via New Delhi and are expected to reach Dhaka today, a

day before the eight-team regional tournament kicks off at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

And when the rest of the squad joins them it will be a watershed for their beloved homeland, ravaged by war for 23 years.

"It's a great feeling to play for my country. I'm very excited to meet the other teammates and play as one in our first international match," said 18-year-old Nazib Nadvil.

Nazib, a defender who plays in the fourth division of German league, does not know anyone other than his four mates -- forward Obaidullah Karime, midfielders Danesh Baktiari, Omar Nazar and Safi Nasir.

Nazib, the youngest of the five, is also oblivious of their opponents in the 11-day meet.

"We have not even seen

Bangladesh or India play on television while in Germany. Our journey to Dhaka started when our assistant-coach told us that we would be playing for the national team," said Nazib.

Though Nazib was overwhelmed with patriotic fervour, but he was fully aware of the reality that his country's return to the international football in Busan Asian Games last September was far from inspiring.

"We lost all the three games and conceded 33 goals. But we want to win here. We are semi-professional players and this tournament is not at the same level like in Korea. Hopefully, we will win all the three group matches."

Afghanistan will kick off their campaign against Sri Lanka in the second match on the opening day.

Omar Azhar, the 26-year-old

midfielder, has more memories of his country than the others. Yet, neither he nor his four mates had ever played at the famous Kabul Stadium.

"Though I visited relatives on holidays, but I never got the chance of playing there," Omar said of the stadium that was used as a killing field during Taliban regime.

Taliban rulers deprived the youths of all sorts of sports entertainment for a long time. Even the children were not allowed to fly kites, let alone run with a soccer ball.

But under the changed circumstance since September 11, Omar dreams of walking on to the Kabul Stadium and playing in front of his home crowd.

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Coach Stephen Constantine thought India did not deserve to be given the favourites' tag going into the Third SAFF Championship, which kicks off tomorrow.

"I do not consider us favourite for the title. This is a new look team and we like the other teams have come here to win every match," he said on arrival in the city yesterday.

The Briton however conceded that he brought an understrength squad without star striker Baichung Bhutia, defender Depak, Mahesh Gauly and medio Tomba Singh. The four players had to miss the Dhaka tournament due to injury.

"Any team that misses four frontline players is an understrength team. But it will provide an opportunity for the younger members to

prove themselves." The Indian coach was more concerned with how to bring the best out of his new outfit that has



STEPHEN CONSTANTINE

only trained together for five days prior to their departure from New

Delhi. "This team has not played together in any international match for the last 22 months," he said.

He was of the opinion that Baichung's absence would have a bearing on India's chase for a hat-trick of titles. The undisputed kings of South Asia won the inaugural edition in Kathmandu in 1997 and defended their crown two years later in Goa.

But Constantine preferred not to bank on records as an indicator for success.

"Past records mean nothing to me. Had it been the case then France would not have been eliminated from the preliminary round without scoring a single goal," said the 40-year-old who had a coaching stint with Nepal.

"All the teams have a realistic chance to win the tournament. Sri Lanka has been preparing for the

SEE PAGE 14 COL 5



Did U Know?

Harald Schumacher, West Germany's great goalkeeper and twice World Cup silver medalist, is perhaps best known for his assault on French defender Patrick Battiston in the 1982 semifinal. After losing his second World Cup final in 1986, he said he wanted to come back in 1990 and win the Cup at his third attempt. But in 1987, he wrote a book and claimed 90% of the players in the German Bundesliga took drugs! He was never picked for the German squad again after that. He escaped to Turkey and played league soccer there instead.



What to Watch

ESPN
Australia vs Sri Lanka World Series, Sixth ODI
Live at 9:13 am
English Premier Football League Newcastle United vs Liverpool
Repeat at 5:30 pm
Crickit Programming
Super Selector
Live at 7:30 pm
Sportscentre Hindi
Sport News
Live at 8:30 pm
Western Union World Football Taped Version at 9:30 pm
STAR Sports
Crickit Programming
Super Selector
Live at 7:30 pm
Sportline Tonight
Sport News
Live at 8:00 pm
Futbol Mundial
Taped Version at 11:00 pm



Talk Turkey



Romario
(Brazilian soccer super star)
"The home which shelters me now will be my last."
On his next football club.

Star WHIZZ KID COMPETITION 18
Tick the correct answers, The Daily Star
Competition closes at 8 pm Jan 10, 2003 and draw

- Who lifted Div I chess title?
Titus Club | Biman | Ansars
- Who won Reuters' sportswoman of 2002 award?
Hingis | Serena | Jones
- Who won the man-of-the-match award in the second and final Test between Bangladesh and West Indies?
Jacobs | Kapali | Mashud
- Who won 2002 FIFA World Player of the Year award?
Owen | Ronaldo | Carlos
- Who clinched World Squash Open title?
Name
Class Roll No.
School Address

Gaibandha cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT
Hiru Smrity Sangsad defeated Trisha Smrity Sangsad by 55 runs in the second round of the Jogesh Chandra Smrity tournament at Gaibandha Islamia High School ground yesterday.
Batting first, Hiru Smrity made 115 for nine wickets in the stipulated 20 overs.
In reply, Trisha Smrity were all out for 60 runs in 13.4 overs.



FOOTBALL BRINGS THEM TOGETHER! On political fronts, neighbours India and Pakistan are poles apart but interestingly enough the national football teams of the two countries will be sharing the same hotel and will face off in the opening match of the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship. The Indians (L) and the Pakistanis (R) are seen here arriving at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday where all the teams will be staying during the 11-day tournament.

Shane did not kiss

AFP, Sydney
An Australian businessman tried to blackmail the Australian Cricket Board by claiming bowler Shane Warne stole a kiss from his 16-year-old niece in a public street, a court heard Wednesday.
Christopher Kent, 45, who lives in Queensland state in eastern Australia, appeared in the Melbourne Magistrates' Court charged with trying to blackmail the board for 5,000 dollars (2,850 US) and for using a telephone to cause menace.
In January last year, the girl and several friends reportedly pursued Australian cricketers Warne, Australia's premier spin bowler, and pace bowler Brett Lee in a car on the Gold Coast tourist strip until the pair pulled over in their sports car.
The court heard Kent told the ACB Warne subsequently kissed the girl and he demanded money to keep silent about the incident.
Police said there was no evidence to support the allegation against Warne, who has described it as an attempt to cash in on his fame.
Defence lawyer Jason Murakami said Kent maintained his innocence and would vigorously defend the charges.
The case is due back in court March 5.
Warne is the second-greatest wicket-taker in Test cricket but is currently nursing a shoulder injury.

Whitewash would have made him quit captaincy
AFP, London
England cricket captain Nasser Hussain's father said Tuesday his son would have resigned from his post if the team had suffered an Ashes whitewash.
Joe Hussain told BBC Radio Five Live: "I can't be 100 per cent sure but I believe had England lost 5-0 then they would be looking for a new captain."
However, England's 225-run win in the fifth Test at Sydney on Monday -- Australia's first home Test defeat for four years - meant they avoided the whitewash although they still lost the series by a crushing 4-1 margin.
Joe Hussain added that Nasser had been upset by criticism from former England captains Ian Botham and Bob Willis, now both commentators on satellite broadcaster Sky Sports.
And he said that Botham in particular was in no position to

Barisal in command

Cricket
SPORTS REPORTER
Barisal ensured their first point in the Ispahani Mirzapore 4th National Cricket League when they took a first innings lead of 135 runs against Sylhet at the Fatullah Stadium yesterday.
On the third day of the four-day match, Sylhet, resuming on 201 for eight in reply to Barisal's 347, were all out for 212 in 90.4 overs.
Barisal spinner Nadif Chowdhury led the attack with five wickets for 62 runs from his 28 overs.
Barisal then scored 169 for nine in their second innings at close, taking an overall lead of 304 already.
In the day's other match, Dhaka earned an 86-run first innings lead over Chittagong to keep their hopes alive in the title race.
Resuming the day on 231 for five in reply to Dhaka's first innings 376, Chittagong lost their last five wickets for 59 runs as they were bowled out for 290.
Dhaka's new ball bowler Anwar Hossain Monir ripped through the Chittagong middle-order to finish with six for 58.
Dhaka, in their second innings, scored 66 for one at stumps.

SCOREBOARDS
Scorecards on the second day of the two Ispahani Mirzapore National League four-day matches yesterday:
Dhaka v Chittagong
Bowler O M R W

MUNIR ... 6 for 58

DHAKA: First innings 376 for 8 in 100 overs (Fahim 60, Neeyamur 57 n.o., Naimur 39, Jahangir 38, Mosaddek 37 n.o., Ahsanullah 4-97)	Munir	17	5	58	6
CHITTAGONG: First innings (overnight 231 for 5 in 50 overs)	Neeyamur	5	0	29	0
Nafis b Munir	Mosaddek	17.3	3	79	2
Aftab c Fahim b Naimur	Fahim	12	2	37	0
	Naimur	24	4	73	2
	Aminul	2	0	9	0
	DHAKA: Second innings				
	Rashedul batting	43			
	Jahangir c Nafees b Ashiq	2			
	Mazharul batting	13			
	Extras: (lb-3, nb-3, w-2)	8			
	Total: (For 1 wkt in 19 overs)	66			
	Fall of wicket: 1-21.				
	Bowler	O	M	R	W
	Tareq	7	1	22	0
	Ashiq	6	1	25	1
	Aftab	3	0	8	0
	Ahsanullah	3	0	3	0

Barisal v Sylhet
BARISAL: First innings 347 for 9 in 100 overs (Prosenjit 93, Nayan 59, Nadif 51 n.o., Imran 3-66)
SYLHET: First innings (overnight 201 for 8 in 81 overs)
Parvez lbw b Faruque 84
Sishir lbw b Nadif 34
Tushar lbw b Anis 7
Nasirul lbw b Nadif 18
Rajin c Sadik b Nadif 13
Hadi run out 2
Rana c Anis b Nadif 5
Rezaul lbw b Nadif 12
Ejaz c Anis b Arman 1
Imran not out 22
Nasir c Anisur b Arman 0
Extras: (b4, lb-8, w-2) 14
Total: (All out in 90.4 overs) 212
Fall of wickets: 1-113, 2-132, 3-139, 4-140, 5-171, 6-176, 7-176, 8-179, 9-205.
Bowler O M R W
Anis 14 4 39 1



Bangladesh football team members check-in at the Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

Dev squad make seniors sweat

SPORTS REPORTER
Bangladesh World Cup team struggled to score a three-wicket win over the BCB Development squad in a practice match at the BKSP ground in Savar yesterday.
In a reduced 45-over-a-side match, which began one-hour behind the schedule due to thick fog, the BCB Development squad garnered a moderate 146 all out in 37.2 overs. Three players of the senior team -- Hannan Sarkar, Mohammad Ashraful and Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza -- played for the Development side.
Mohammad Ashraful scored highest 47 off 66 balls with three boundaries while middle-order batsman Riyad and opener Nayeem made 27 and 22 respectively.
Left arm spinner Mohammad Rafique and occasion medium pacer Ehsanul Haque took three wickets each for the national team.
In reply, the seniors reached home in 30.3 overs with Habibul Bashar hammering highest 44 off 51 balls with seven boundaries. Rafique chipped in with an unbeaten 31 while Alok Kapali and Khaled Mahmud scored 19 runs each.
Mashrafe, playing his first match, bowled well to finish with two wickets. Rubayat Haq and Shafaq Al-Zabir also captured two wickets each.

It was the last practice match for Khaled Mashud's men before they fly off to Namibia for a two-week conditioning camp on January 13.
SCORES IN BRIEF
BCB DEVELOPMENT SQUAD: 146 all out in 37.2 overs (Ashraful 47, Riyad 27, Nayeem 22, Ehsanul 3-15, Rafique 3-21, Talha 2-23)
BANGLADESH: 149 in 30.3 overs (Habibul 44, Rafique 31 n.o., Kapali 19, K Mahmud 19 n.o., Mashrafe 2-26, Shafaq 2-47, Rubayat 2-51)
Result: Bangladesh won by three wickets

Sub-junior chess

SPORTS REPORTER
Minhazuddin Sagar took a solo lead at the end of the sixth round of the 23rd National Sub-Junior Chess Championship yesterday.
He is followed by eight players in second position with five points each. They are: Shamim Akter Liza, Saima Almas, Mahfuzur Rahman Shahin, Shamsuddoha Shakin, Obaidul Islam, Shuvro Ghosh, Sajedul Karim Shibly and Jasimuddin.

Almost everyone's here

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP
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SPORTS REPORTER

The stage is set for the 3rd South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship to start at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in capital Dhaka from tomorrow.

The eight-nation meet, the most prestigious football tournament of the South Asian region, will kick off with a mouthwatering Group A tie between bitter foes India and Pakistan at 4:45 pm. Focus will be also on war-ravaged Afghanistan, who have been included in the SAFF competition for the first time and their opening match in the same group against Sri Lanka at 6:45 pm will hold plenty of historical and emotional significance.
Hosts Bangladesh, who had lost 0-2 to India in the final of the previous edition at Goa in 1999, will begin their much anticipated campaign on Saturday with a Group B clash against Nepal at 3:45 pm. Fast

improving Maldives and the national team from the mystic land of Bhutan, who incidentally are making their maiden appearance in an international tournament after being granted FIFA membership, are Bangladesh's other opponents in the group and are scheduled to face-off at 5:45 pm on the same day.
Tournament favourites India, who have lifted the championship trophy on both occasions, Pakistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bhutan have already arrived in Dhaka.
Five Germany based Afghan booters accompanied by two officials also flew in to the capital yesterday straight from Europe. The other members of the Afghanistan team, who are now in Indian capital New Delhi, reportedly obtained their visas from Bangladesh High Commission yesterday and are expected to reach Dhaka today. Nepal are also due today.

The first SAFF Championship was held in Nepal in 1997 with India recording an emphatic 5-1 win over Maldives in the final.

Zaheer zaps Kiwis

Cricket

AFP, Wellington
Zaheer Khan slammed a career-best unbeaten 34 amid mounting tension as India defeated New Zealand by two wickets in the fifth one-day international here Wednesday for their first win on the tour.
The tail-ender played a vital supporting role in a 44-run stand for the eighth wicket with Yuvraj Singh (54) to help his team surpass New Zealand's 168 in a day-night match of fluctuating fortunes at the Westpac Stadium.
New Zealand had already clinched the seven-match series by winning the first four one-dayers.
Left-arm fast bowler Zaheer was in the limelight from the beginning as he grabbed 3-30, including two wickets off successive deliveries in his opening over, to restrict the hosts to a modest total.
He then finished the match under lights with a winning single off seamer Andre Adams to spark rare celebrations in the Indian camp.
He struck one six and three fours in his 42-ball knock as India tasted their first success after losing a two-Test series and the four successive one-dayers.
Zaheer was not the only hero as Yuvraj also played a key role in India's victory with his 10th half-century in 57 matches after star batsmen Sachin Tendulkar and skipper Sourav Ganguly had failed to score.
The Indian batting yet again failed to click against the New Zealand pace attack as the tourists collapsed to 116-7, with Shane Bond, Scott Styris and Andre Adams each bagging two wickets.
It all began with Ganguly, who was caught behind off the first ball of the innings as he chased and edged an outgoing delivery from Daryl Tuffey.
Bond virtually broke India's back when he yorked Dinesh Mongia (2) and trapped Tendulkar leg-before.
Styris had free-stroking Virender Sehwag (45) caught by Stephen

Fleming at first slip just when the batsman had begun to look dangerous. Sehwag cracked nine fours, including three in an Adams over, in his 40-ball knock.

Adams put more pressure on India when he got rid of Mohammad Kaif (1) and Anil Kumble (2), who fell in a peculiar fashion.
Adams attempted a bouncer, but the ball slipped from his hand and fell in his own half. Kumble initially ducked and then tried to smash it on the second bounce, but hit his stumps in the process.
India were nine short of victory when Yuvraj was superbly caught by Chris Harris off left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori, but Zaheer kept his cool under pressure to steer his team home.
Earlier, New Zealand were struggling at 3-3 and then 51-5 before being rallied by lower-order batsmen Adams (35) and wicket-keeper Brendon McCullum (35), who shared a rollicking 48-run stand for the seventh wicket.
Adams smashed three sixes and three fours in his 27-ball knock as the hosts scored 117 for their last five wickets.
Fleming (19) became the second New Zealander after Nathan Astle to complete 5,000 runs in his 187th one-day, initially dominated by the Indian fast bowlers.
New Zealand made a nightmare start as they lost two wickets for no score after electing to bat.
Zaheer dismissed opener Astle and Mathew Sinclair off successive balls in his opening over and Harris in his next.
Astle was trapped leg-before, while Sinclair was bowled shoulder-arming.
Harris survived the hat-trick ball with a defensive push, but did not last long. He contributed one before being trapped leg-before offering no stroke.
Chris Cairns (25), returning to international cricket after nearly eight months due to a knee injury, played an attractive cameo before being bowled through the gate by

SEE PAGE 14 COL 1