



Did U Know?

Ricky Ponting became the ninth Australian and the 35th in the world to have played 100 Tests or more.

India, England finalise dates on Monday

Representatives of the Board of Control for Cricket in India will meet their England counterparts in London on Monday to conclude their fixture list. Indian board secretary Niranjan Shah said on Friday.

Shah told Reuters India would be represented by former board president IS Bindra and vice-president Lalith Modi, both of whom are members of the board's marketing committee.

Zim cricketers' strike puts WI tour in doubt

Zimbabwe's cricketers say they will not go to West Indies in May for a Test and ODI tour unless their contracts are agreed, they are paid match fees going back to August last year, and if chairman Peter Chingoka remains in office.

Senior professional and all-rounder Andy Blythe told AFP: "We would be extremely sorry about this. We do not wish to damage the ICC tours programme nor make things difficult for West Indies."

United States lift Hopman Cup title

The United States claimed their fourth Hopman Cup international mixed teams tennis tournament title here Friday after defeating the Netherlands 2-1 in the final at Perth's Burswood Dome.

The American pair of Taylor Dent and Lisa Raymond were forced to a special match tie-break in the deciding mixed rubber which they won 10/7.

Michaela Krajcek had earlier beaten American veteran Raymond 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) while Dent had levelled the tie with a 6-1, 6-4 win over Peter Wessels.

The mixed doubles was a closely-fought affair but the Americans emerged winners 4-6, 6-2 (10/7).

An MSC-Abahani

They survived a close call when Gilsun, taking a through from Parvez Babu, fired the ball wide of lone keeper Biplab in the 62nd minute. Biplab's legwork then saved a low drive by Felix from handshaking distance before Emeka almost made it 2-0 from a freekick but this time, Ali spotted the curling shot timely and fisted out for a corner.

Brothers paid for bringing youngster Emily and Lito too late in the match and even their inclusion could not find a hole in the tight Mohammedan backline and finally beat an outstanding Biplab.

Yellow cards: Munna, Arman Aziz (Mohammedan) and Siraji, Felix (Brothers).

TEAMS
MOHAMMEDAN: Biplab, Nazrul, Odaf (Kamal, 46th minute), Rezaul, Hassan, Arman Aziz, Munna, Divine, Emeka, Alfaz (Nakib, 72nd) and Francis (Asad, 89th).

BROTHERS: Ali, Siraji (Liton, 66th), Sujun, Shuvra, Masud Rana, Parvez, Hicham, Abul, Gilsun (Elimy, 79th), Felix and Paul.

Referee: Tayab Hassan.

Dravid says

Pakistan was a difficult place to play cricket.

"Pakistan is always tough but this Indian team has the capacity to face anything which comes its way, whether it's hard pitches, good bowling or any tough weather," said Chappell, who praised Dravid as captain.

"Rahul has shown himself to be a very good captain, he is learning very quickly and it is a tough job, there are certain areas that he needs to be courageous to take decisions. He has the capacity to be the best India has had."

India open their tour with a three-day match against Pakistan A at Bagh-e-Jinnah Stadium from Saturday. The first Test starts here from January 13.

Lanka's lost opportunity

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

Sri Lanka's dream of a return to winning cricket was shattered on Friday when their batsmen squandered a great bowling performance by Chaminda Vaas to lose to New Zealand by 21 runs.

Shane Bond and Jeetan Patel were the bowling heroes for the home side as they pulled off an unlikely victory to go 4-0 up in the five-match series of one-day internationals.

After being nicely set up by Vaas, who bagged a five wicket haul as New Zealand were restricted to a low score of 224 for nine, the Sri Lankan batsmen made a flying start.

At 136 for three in the 27th over a Sri Lankan victory appeared likely, but it all went wrong for the visitors as they lost the last seven wickets for 67 runs to be all out with 20 balls remaining.

They were still in the game, and ahead of the run rate, in the 39th over when a two-wicket blitz in three balls by Bond removed the last of the recognised batsmen and exposed Sri Lanka's fragile tail.

"After the start we got from (Jehan) Mubarak and (Kumar) Sangakkara we let ourselves down in a big way... 225 was a gettable total," said a disappointed Sri Lankan captain Marvan Atapattu.

But it was a vital bowling performance for New Zealand after the batsmen fell 20-30 runs short of what was achievable, said captain Stephen Fleming.

"We probably weren't as good with the bat as we needed to be and that's part of the area we need to develop, but we were gutsy enough to defend the score," he said.

"Bondy did what we needed him to do. He came in and bowled fast and turned the game in our favour."

While Bond did the damage at one end finishing with three for 39, off-spinner and man-of-the-match Jeetan Patel, playing only his fourth one-day international, baffled the Sri Lankans at the other taking two wickets and giving away only 23 runs.

With New Zealand already holding an unbeatable 3-0 lead in the series before the match, captain Stephen Fleming decided to experiment on winning the toss and elected to bat first.

New Zealand typically prefer to chase totals and faced with the unusual situation of setting a target they struggled for momentum.

Peter Fulton and Hamish Marshall both made half-centuries to anchor the New Zealand innings, and Fleming made 37, but the rest of the top order failed to fire.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the fourth one-day international between New Zealand and Sri Lanka in Wellington on Friday:

NEW ZEALAND				
Vincent c Muralitharan b Fernando	8			
How c Sangakkara b Vaas	5			
Fleming b Vaas	37			
Fulton c Maharooof b Fernando	50			
Marshall c Vaas b Maharooof	50			
Styris c Maharooof b Vaas	13			
Cairns c and b Vaas	2			
McCullum c Arnold b Vaas	1			
Vettori b Muralitharan	7			
Franklin not out	29			
Bond not out	9			
Extras: (lb-5, w-4, nb-4)	13			
Total: (For 9 wkts in 50 overs)	224			

Fall of wickets: 1-14, 2-14, 3-85, 4-131, 5-154, 6-163, 7-165, 8-183, 9-189

Super-sub: Patel for Fulton

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Vaas	10	1	39	5
Fernando	10	1	51	2
Maharooof	10	0	49	1
Dilshan	10	0	37	0
Muralitharan	10	0	43	1

SRI LANKA

Bandara c McCullum b Franklin
Mubarak c Cairns b Patel 53
Sangakkara b Cairns 52
Jayawardene c McCullum b Franklin 12
Atapattu c Vincent b Vettori 19
Dilshan b Bond 17
Arnold lbw b Patel 11
Maharooof lbw b Bond 0
Vaas c Howby b Styris 9
Bandara c Styris b Bond 12
Fernando not out 4
Extras: (lb-3, nb-2) 5

Total: (All out in 46.4 overs) 203

Fall of wickets: 1-16, 2-92, 3-106, 4-136, 5-156, 6-171, 7-171, 8-184, 9-189

Super-sub: Bandara for Muralitharan

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Franklin	7	1	38	2
Bond	9.4	1	39	3
Cairns	6	0	28	1
Styris	4	0	22	1
Vettori	10	0	50	1
Patel	10	0	23	2

Result: New Zealand won by 21 runs and led the 5-ODI series 4-0. Toss: New Zealand.

Umpires: Tony Hill and Darrell Hair.

Mighty midgets can't convince Argentine chief

AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentina's pint-sized strikers Lionel Messi, Carlos Tevez, Javier Saviola and Sergio Aguero may strike fear into World Cup opponents, but their own football federation chiefs not convinced.

"Those who would like to see these four play together can rent the film 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' rather than watch the World Cup," Julio Grondona, the president of the AFA, told the Ole newspaper.

"Football is a mixture of physics and different techniques," Messi, who plays at Barcelona, Tevez of Brazilian side Corinthians and Saviola of Sevilla are all assured of their place in coach Jose Pekerman's squad for the World Cup finals in Germany this summer.

Aguero, of Independiente, is tipped to be in the squad. x

Ugly scenes

FROM PAGE 12
formance as he thought that at the end, it was important who won the game.

"To me the result is more important than anything and although my boys didn't stick to my plans, I am happy," said Manik, who was satisfied to take his team to the final in his first assignment with the Black and Whites.

"As a coach it would be my third consecutive final in the tournament," said Manik who guided Mukhtijodha to successive finals in the last two seasons. "I think country's football lovers will also be happy as they would be able to see the two most popular clubs in the final after a three-year gap."

"I told my boys to forget the past and start the new year in a happy mood. We were under pressure as Mohammedan failed to lift any trophy recently. Now we are satisfied and of course confident to give our loyal supporters something to cheer about," he added.

Imran's tips

FROM PAGE 12
most of in-form Akhtar.

"Akhtar has been a transformed bowler and won Pakistan the series against England. If he gets hard tracks he can come good again because there will be a lot of winter moisture for fast bowlers on the pitch."

Akhtar took 17 wickets in Pakistan's 2-0 Test series triumph over Ashes-winners England last month.

Imran said that in beating England, Pakistan had defeated tougher opponents than India, who recently beat Sri Lanka at home.

"It promises to be a very tough series but I think Pakistan have the edge. Besides their pace attack they have beaten Ashes-winning England and Inzamam is firing both as a good captain and as an ace batsman," said Imran.

He said Indian captain Rahul Dravid had also earned respect as a leader.

"Dravid is a good batsman and he has got the respect of his team, which is the key to the success of a captain," said Imran, who led Pakistan to their only World Cup title in 1992.

Ozzyabek, Georgi Transcom Cup golf champs

SPORTS REPORTER

Ozgun Ozzyabek clinched the men's title while Supa Georgi won the women's crown in the Transcom Cup Golf Tournament at the Kurmitola Golf Club on Friday.

A total of 318 golfers including 17 ladies took part in the two-day meet which was sponsored by Transcom Group.

Chief of Army Staff of Bangladesh Army and president of Kurmitola Golf Club (KGC) Lt Gen Moeen U Ahmed gave away prizes among the winners.

A large number of participants including diplomats, high civil and military officials attended the prize giving ceremony. Latifur Rahman, Chairman and Managing Director of Transcom Group was also present at the function. The prize distribution was followed by a lucky draw.

Earlier Chief of General Staff of Bangladesh Army and vice president of KGC Maj Gen Iqbal Karim Bhuiyan inaugurated the prestigious meet.

OTHER RESULTS
Runner-up: J O Park; Senior winner: Lt Col Marzuk Ahmed (ret'd); Runner-up Nine Hole: Lt Col Shahriar A Chowdhury (ret'd); Best Gross: Syed Mohammad Ali; Ladies Best Gross: C D Hawang; Junior winner: Master Mudrek; Front Nine winner: Akira Myamoto; Back Nine winner: Mozifuz Islam; Nearest to Pin: Reazuddin Ahmed; Longest Drive: Mario Omar Zavaley; Winner Nine Hole: Air Cdre Manzoor Alam; Senior Winner Nine Hole: Manzur Murshed.

PRIMERA LIGA

'Best' Barca set for derby

Football

AFP, Madrid

Spanish league leaders Barcelona return to duty after the winter break on Saturday with a derby clash against city rivals Espanyol whose coach believes Frank Rijkaard's side is the best he has ever seen.

Barcelona, who have 40 points from 17 games, enjoy a two-point lead over Osasuna who take on Racing Santander on Sunday.

But Espanyol coach Miguel Angel Lotina insists that the destination of the title this season is already a certainty.

"This is the best Barca I've ever seen," said Lotina.

"Things have changed and football has moved on, but this team is more superior to its rivals. The players are stronger and faster and for me they are the team playing the best and, what's more difficult, the most effective football."

SERIE A

Trezeguet looking for more

Football

Reuters, Milan

Serie A leaders Juventus face Palermo in Sicily on Saturday with striker David Trezeguet looking to score for the 10th successive match.

The France forward has 11 goals from the past nine games and is just two short of Argentine Gabriel Batistuta's all-time record of scoring in 11 consecutive Serie A matches.

With 14 goals from as many games this season, Trezeguet has been crucial to the success of Fabio Capello's side but points out his strike rate reflects the quality of service he receives.

"The truth is I rely on the team and my goals are the fruit of the work of my team mates," he says. "If the team is in good health and moving the ball around then I'm going to score goals."

"We have everything in place to continue this marvellous run of form even though we know that Inter are a great team, with excellent individuals, who will be on our tails right to the end -- and that

Despite the flattery, Rijkaard is determined that his team don't let the praises cloud their judgement.

"We all know that historically these types of matches are special, both on the pitch and for the fans," said the Dutchman.

"You never know before the game how you are going to react and that's what makes a derby special."

Rijkaard also warned his team's fans not to get carried away and that the time for celebration will come in May with what they hope will be a Spanish League/Champions League double.

"I don't believe in euphoria - I believe in hard work and doing things right," said Rijkaard.

"If we go out too overconfident, we'll fall into a dangerous trap. Any team we play is capable of making life difficult for us and the players have to show their maturity, continue to improve and forget any ideas about euphoria."

Skipper Carlos Puyol shows no sign of flagging despite having played 32 consecutive games and is an ever-present this season.

goes for Milan too," adds Trezeguet.

Capello has few options in defence, though, with Alessandro Birindelli, Jonathan Zebina and Robert Kovac all injured and full-

back Gianluca Zambrotta suspended.

Palermo, who have lost their last two games, have disappointed of late after a promising start to the campaign and coach Luigi Del Neri will likely be without attacking midfielder Franco Brienza who is struggling with an ankle injury.

Second-placed Inter Milan, on a run of six successive wins, play away to Siena on Sunday while AC Milan, nine points adrift of Juve in third place, host Parma at the San Siro.

Walter Samuel's Argentina international Walter Samuel is refusing to concede the title to Juve with more than half of the season still left to play.

"We won't give in until its mathematically impossible," said the defender.

"Hopefully we will get closer to Juve before we play them at home on February 12. We need to keep them in sight and there's no shortage of belief at this club that we can catch them."

Inter and Juventus are not the only option for the former Bayer Leverkusen ace come this summer.

Juventus, Manchester United and Chelsea have also been associated, while Bayern still hope to keep the 30-year-old.

They are willing to offer him a four-year deal worth £3m a season in an effort to avoid losing him for nothing.

Inter are in pole position to sign Michael Ballack after Real Madrid pulled out of the chase, according to reports.

The Spanish giants were highly fancied to net the Bayern Munich star once his contract expired at the end of the season.

However, stories in Italy on Friday claim that Real have opted to snub his arrival as a favour to the Italian giants.

Inter are alleged to have eased Real's capture of Antonio Cassano this week by not interfering with negotiations.

Now the Estadio Bernabeu outfit are prepared to do the same with regard to Ballack, given the excellent rapport between both clubs.

Real and Inter have done a massive amount of business in recent years involving players such as Ronaldo, Walter Samuel and Luis Figo.

Inter want the German playmaker to fill the void which

"I'm always ready to play. I don't need a break", he said.

Real Madrid, who are fifth but 11 points behind Barcelona, face fourth-placed Villarreal on Sunday.

Villarreal coach Manuel Pellegrini will be without injured striker Antonio Guayre but influential midfielder Juan Pablo Sorin should be fit.

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Smith seeks revenge

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Graeme Smith was ever defiant after Ricky Ponting batted Australia to a 2-0 series triumph here Friday promising a tough time for the Australians in their return Test series in South Africa in March.

Ponting scored an unbeaten 143 as Australia easily chased down a 287-run target with more than 15 of the innings' allotted 76 overs remaining to win the final Sydney Test by eight wickets on the last day.

The skipper's gamble to declare an hour before lunch backfired but the South Africans were only interested in winning the match and not holding out for a draw having fallen behind in the series with last week's second Test defeat.

There are three more Tests to be played in South Africa in a few months and Smith is vowing the Proteas will hit back hard.

"When we get back home in front of our supporters, we're going to play for a win," he said. "We're going to back ourselves, we're going to be confident, we're going to stand up and we're not going to back down."

"Certainly, when Australia come to South Africa it's going to be one of their toughest times ever."

Smith blamed missed opportu-

nities for his team's series loss here and urged his players to develop a killer attitude to knock over Ponting's team the next time they meet.

"Looking back, we've had opportunities and we need to be a little bit more decisive when our opportunities arrive," Smith said.

"In the first two Tests we let ourselves down in key moments, so that's certainly one key area we can look at."

"A team like Australia has been dominant over the last few years when they get into that mode where they can smelt the kill, they take it and that's an area that we're looking to get to."

"I believe that against any other team in the world we would have won this series, we would have dominated the series."

"It's about the best team in the world, when you get that sniff you must have that killer attitude."

"We still believe we can beat them, other teams think they can beat them. Credit to them, they've played the better cricket, they've got the better results, and we're looking forward to the home series."

Smith backed his declaration decision as being positive and right for his team and for cricket.

"Everyone in the whole team wanted to be