

Partex brighten promotion hopes

SPORTS REPORTER

Partex Sporting Club brightened their chances to get a place in the top flight of metropolitan cricket when they registered a 57-run victory against Gazi Tank in the First Division Cricket League at the BKSP yesterday.

With the outcome Partex improved their collection to 24 points from 13 matches to join Young Pegasus atop the table. Pegasus, however, have one match in hand.

Partex, while defending a moderate 197, dismissed Gazi Tank for 140 in 34.1 overs.

In other matches, Ali Nishan hammered unbeaten 83 off 95 balls as Jatrabari Kirta Chakra (318-5) handed a massive 164-run defeat on Young Pegasus B (154 all out in 32.3 overs) at the City Club ground.

At the Dhaka University ground, Dhaka Mariner (227 all out in 49.5 overs) rode on a 76-run knock by Rana Hossain to snatch an exciting one-run victory over Prantik Kirta Chakra (226-9 in 50 overs) while Uttara Sporting Club (210-4) defeated Dhamondi Club (208-9) by six wickets at the Jagannath Hall ground.

ITF Jr tennis at BKSP from tomorrow

BNEWS, Dhaka

The SBSL-BKSP Fourth International Junior Tennis tournament begins tomorrow at the Tennis Complex at BKSP, Savar.

International Tennis Federation (ITF) junior world ranking group-4 players from 25 countries including Bangladesh will take part in the seven-day meet.

State Minister for Youth and Sports M Fazlur Rahman will officially declare the tournament open on January 23.

The participating countries are Armenia, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, China, England, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Moldova, Pakistan, Philippines, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Turkey, Singapore, Thailand, USA, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Chinese Taipei and Bangladesh.

ICC welcomes Zim decision

CRICINFO, undated

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has welcomed the decisions of the interim committee in charge of Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) to withdraw from its Test commitments until 2007, and to commission an independent investigation into allegations of financial mismanagement.

ICC president Ehsan Mani said that ZC had made the right decision in withdrawing from Tests in 2006. "Zimbabwe Cricket has taken a sensible step in withdrawing from its Test cricket commitments for the coming year."

Vaughan upbeat about India tour

AFP, London

England captain Michael Vaughan, who had knee surgery four weeks ago, remained upbeat about his fitness prospects on the run-up to the tour of India which starts next month.

Vaughan will need further medical tests before the squad assemble on February 12 for the trip which includes three Tests and seven one-day internationals.

Vaughan returned early from the pre-Christmas trip to Pakistan to have surgery on the injured right knee which forced him out of the opening-Test defeat in Multan. But he insists everything has been going well in training.

"The knee is good and it's gone quite well since the operation four weeks ago," said Vaughan during an exclusive webchat with SunOnline.

Clijsters' fear

AFP, Melbourne

Second seed Kim Clijsters said Thursday she may withdraw from the Australian Open as she struggles with intense pain from a back injury.

The Belgian downed China's Meng Yuan 6-4, 6-2 to book her third round berth but needed medical treatment on her lower back and said she was not confident of making her next match, scheduled for Saturday.

Asked if she could continue, she replied: "I'm sort of waiting every day to see how it feels, so I can't tell you now."

Clijsters said the back problem, a complication arising from a right hip injury sustained in a Sydney warm-up tournament, was particularly annoying because otherwise she was playing excellent tennis.



Roma team members converge on their captain Francesco Totti after he scored against Reggina during their Serie A clash at the Olympic Stadium in Rome on Wednesday.

SERIE A

Milan duo cut gap on Juve

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Juventus had their lead at the top of Serie A trimmed to eight points when they were held to a 1-1 draw at Chievo Verona on Wednesday.

The result at Chievo's Bentegodi stadium left Juventus with 53 points from 20 matches. Second-placed Inter Milan kept their title challenge on course with a 1-0 victory over bottom-placed side Treviso.

AC Milan lie third on 43 points after a Filippo Inzaghi goal gave them a 1-0 win against Ascoli.

Florentina remain fourth on 40 points despite a 3-1 defeat at the hands of Sampdoria.

Chievo had lost every game against Juventus at the Bentegodi since they arrived in the top flight in 2001 and did not look capable of much resistance in the early stages as keeper Alberto Fontana twice parried shots by Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

It seemed only a matter of time before Juve took the lead, but in the 22nd minute a Chievo break ended with midfielder Franco Semoli racing down the left to cross for Daniele Franceschini to volley past Gianluigi Buffon.

Their lead was short-lived. Midfielder Patrick Vieira headed Juve's equaliser just past the half hour but the champions never managed to stamp their authority on the match.

Both teams created chances in the second half. Chievo defender Federico Giunti hit a long-range effort just over the bar while at the other end Fontana dived to scoop Alessandro Del Piero's low cross away from the feet of David Trezeguet.

The draw was only the third

Aussies bring in new blood for SA clash

AFP, Melbourne

Australia will bring in two new players for their return tri-series limited-overs clash with South Africa here on Friday, naming opener Phil Jaques and bowler Brett Dorey in the team.

Simon Katich was ruled out after suffering a groin strain in training Thursday and the selectors announced that Jaques, who made his Australian debut against the Proteas in the Boxing Day Test, would be his replacement.

Dorey will replace Nathan Bracken, who is being rested.

Test discard Damien Martyn will open the batting with Jaques while regular one-day opener Adam Gilchrist also takes a break.

Both sides have one win each so far in the tri-series and will be playing each other for the second time. South Africa won the first clash by five wickets.

South Africa have their own injury problems with all-rounder Jacques Kallis on his way home for treatment on his elbow, joining pace bowlers Andre Nel and Makhaya Ntini.

Inexperienced all-rounder Johan van der Wath has been called from South Africa to replace Kallis while Nel has been replaced by paceman Dale Steyn.

But there was some good news for the South Africans with fast bowler Charl Langeveldt -- who has a groin strain -- able to bowl in the nets on Thursday. He now has a chance of playing in Friday's match.

Premier League

FROM PAGE 16

Brothers on 12 points only have a mathematical chance in the championship.

"I see little hope for the other teams because DOHS have to lose four matches to make the title race wide open. I think most of the teams are concentrating on the runners-up position," said Mohammed and national captain Habibul Bashar yesterday.

Sonargaon skipper Mohammad Ashraful expressed same sentiments and said that their first target of reaching the Super-Six has been fulfilled.

time this season the leaders had dropped points in Serie A, following a 3-1 defeat to Milan in October and a 1-1 draw with Lazio in December.

The main beneficiaries of Juve's slip were their nearest challengers Inter, who went ahead in the 22nd minute at Treviso courtesy of a Julio Cruz header.

Adriano went close to extending their lead with a shot that hit the post just before the break.

Treviso occasionally made life uncomfortable for the visitors. Andre Pinga curled a free kick against the bar and Marco Borriello was unlucky not to earn a penalty after he was flattened by Inter defender Ivan Cordoba.

Milan's players also laboured for their three points, though after

Capello unfazed by points drop

Football

REUTERS, Rome

Juventus coach Fabio Capello said he saw no reason to be worried after his side's lead at the top of Serie A was cut to eight points following a 1-1 draw with Chievo Verona.

"If this was supposed to be an alarm bell, it hasn't rung yet," Capello was quoted as saying in La Gazzetta dello Sport on Thursday.

The draw against a lively Chievo side was only the third time this season that the Italian champions had dropped points in Serie A following a 3-1 defeat to Milan in October and a 1-1 draw with Lazio

in December.

At the weekend they reached the halfway point of the season with a 10-point advantage over Inter, prompting some Italian papers to announce that Juve had "killed" the championship.

After the draw with Chievo, Capello simply repeated his mantra that the title race still had a long way to run.

"They (Inter and Milan) have gained two points on us. It's only right that they are happy. But I think they were thinking positively even before this round of matches," he said.

"The championship is not over yet. We are only just past the mid-way stage."

Dokic's dad will kidnap her?

Tennis

AFP, Melbourne

Rattled tennis star Jelena Dokic distanced herself further from estranged father Damir Thursday after he reportedly threatened to kidnap her, sparking concern from tennis authorities.

Damir Dokic, renowned for his erratic behaviour, was quoted by a Serbian newspaper as saying that he was seeking to kidnap his daughter and even threatened to kill an Australian as revenge for her returning to the country.

He reportedly said Jelena had been brainwashed and vowed revenge against Australia for what he said was a conspiracy to aid her return to a country she fled in 2001.

Jelena dumped Australia to represent Serbia, where she was born, amid controversy over allegations by her father-coach that the draw for the 2001 Australian Open had been rigged against her.

But she returned in December to try and resurrect her fading career.

"This has proven to be yet another unfortunate distraction around my return to Australia and competitive tennis," the former world number four said in a statement.

"I have spent my life recovering from events such as this. I will continue to work very hard on getting back to the top of my game and putting comments like these firmly behind me."

Damir told Serbian daily Kurir in a report widely used by Australian media that "Australia with the help of Croatia and the Vatican have brainwashed my daughter".

"I have thought about dropping a nuclear bomb on Sydney since Jelena lost in the first round this week, for which Australia is to blame."

Altaf will accompany pace bowler Shabbir Ahmed to Dubai for an appeal hearing on January 21 regarding a 12-month suspension imposed on the Pakistani bowler for having an illegal action.

The PCB has appointed former Test pacer Sarfraz Nawaz to modify Shabbir's action and has prepared video footage that it believes will help his career at the hearing.

International umpires now rarely call a bowler for a suspect action on the field and instead report him to the ICC.

India's NZ tour

FROM PAGE 16

executive Martin Snedden said.

Reuters adds from Melbourne that Australia's next Test series against the West Indies, scheduled for 2007, has been postponed indefinitely, Cricket Australia (CA) said on Thursday.

The series was due to be played in the Caribbean after the World Cup but was dropped when the West Indies Cricket Board said it would prefer not to host two major tournaments in a year.

"The West Indies have concerns about having two marquee events back to back, they would prefer to spread them out, and frankly that makes sense," CA spokesman Peter Young told the Melbourne Age newspaper.

Hayatou defends timing of ANC

AFP, Cairo

African football supremo Issa Hayatou has defended the timing of the African Nations Cup despite protests from many European clubs.

Hayatou said wet weather would prevent many African countries hosting the 16-team competition in June or July during the European close season.

"We would not have decent pitches to stage the tournament. It would be more like water polo than football," Hayatou told a press conference here before the biennial Nations Cup kicks off Friday.

French and English clubs have been particularly hard hit at a crucial time of the season with six players from Saint Etienne called up and four from Bolton Wanderers.

Asked why the mid-year World Cup had been awarded to South Africa in 2010, Confederation of African Football president Hayatou said weather conditions in north and southern Africa were favourable for football at that time.

"But for the rest, it is not possible," he stressed.

North African countries Egypt, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia were the other contenders for the 2010 World Cup, destined to be the first edition of the quadrennial tournament staged in Africa.

BCCI at odds with the ICC

REUTERS, New Delhi

The Indian cricket board has voiced its opposition to International Cricket Council (ICC) plans of adding fresh tournaments to the calendar due to the negative impact they would have on its revenue.

Board secretary Niranjana Shah revealed that the ICC wanted to include more events, including a Twenty20 World Cup, adding that it would also affect the Indian board's plans to secure a regular home series every year during the peak season from October.

"We don't mind honouring ICC decisions, but they can't go on adding tournaments and taking away from our pie," he told Reuters on Thursday. "Eighty per cent of the money comes from India."

Indian board officials will raise the issue when they meet the ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed at its headquarters in Dubai on Friday to finalise details for the Champions Trophy to be staged in India in October-November, he added.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is seen in confrontation with the ICC after announcing this week that India would skip the biennial Champions Trophy after 2006 because it was being held during its busy season, and consequently, would affect its revenue.

The ICC has warned the BCCI against making such a unilateral decision.

PCB wants ICC umpires to call faulty bowlers

REUTERS, Lahore

Pakistan cricket authorities want the International Cricket Council (ICC) to encourage and back umpires to call bowlers with suspect bowling actions instead of making them go through a lengthy review process.

"There is a law which clearly defines what is an illegal action and empowers umpires to no-ball such bowlers," Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) director Saleem Altaf told Reuters on Wednesday.

"The ICC needs to encourage its umpires to practically apply this law on the field despite the pressures of such an action," he said.

Altaf will accompany pace bowler Shabbir Ahmed to Dubai for an appeal hearing on January 21 regarding a 12-month suspension imposed on the Pakistani bowler for having an illegal action.

The PCB has appointed former Test pacer Sarfraz Nawaz to modify Shabbir's action and has prepared video footage that it believes will help his career at the hearing.

International umpires now rarely call a bowler for a suspect action on the field and instead report him to the ICC.

India's NZ tour

FROM PAGE 16

executive Martin Snedden said.

Reuters adds from Melbourne that Australia's next Test series against the West Indies, scheduled for 2007, has been postponed indefinitely, Cricket Australia (CA) said on Thursday.

The series was due to be played in the Caribbean after the World Cup but was dropped when the West Indies Cricket Board said it would prefer not to host two major tournaments in a year.

"The West Indies have concerns about having two marquee events back to back, they would prefer to spread them out, and frankly that makes sense," CA spokesman Peter Young told the Melbourne Age newspaper.

Cassano, Vieri off the mark

Football

INTERNET, undated

Antonio Cassano and Christian Vieri both opened their scoring accounts with their new sides in away Cup matches on Wednesday.

Vieri came on to score in the dying seconds of Monaco's 2-0 away win over Toulouse in the French League Cup, finishing off a counter-attacking move that caught the home side out as they pressed forward for a deserved equaliser.

Antonio Cassano, meanwhile, netted just four minutes into his debut in the Copa Del Rey in Seville.

Coach Lopez Caro fielded a strong side as the Madrid outfit took on Real Betis in the first leg of the quarterfinals but, with the score goalless, sent on Cassano in

the 62nd minute.

With barely his third touch of the ball he had ripped the net for his new team following his 3.5m-pound transfer from Roma earlier this month.

Cassano seemed to slightly impede goalkeeper Toni, who fumbled a high cross into the path of the forward for him to side-foot home from six yards.

Cassano's delight was apparent for all to see as he had delivered at the first time of asking and scored what was to be the only goal of a closely-contested game.

"The fans were calling me fat from the sidelines, yet I remained relaxed and played my own game," he said.

"I couldn't have dreamt of a better debut. I haven't played a game for a month and it is only normal that I'm not at my best physically. However, I'll soon be on top form again."



Real Madrid's Italian signing Antonio Cassano celebrates after scoring on debut against Real Betis in the Spanish Cup quarterfinal in Seville on Wednesday.

Pak pitch the focus

Cricket

AFP, Faisalabad

Rivals India and Pakistan will have one eye on the weather and the other on the pitch as they prepare for the second Test starting here on Saturday.

The prevailing cold and wet conditions in northern Pakistan, which made it difficult for the groundsman to provide a sporting wicket, ruined the first Test in Lahore earlier this week.

There were six centuries in the weather-curtailed Test that ended in a draw after Pakistan amassed 679 for seven declared and India replied with 410 for one on a batsman-friendly wicket at the Gaddafi Stadium.

Pakistan's chief curator Agha Zahid, who came under fire for the dead track he provided in Lahore, is hard at work at the Iqbal Stadium trying to prepare a result-oriented wicket.

It is a task that former opener Agha, who played one Test against the West Indies in the 1980s, said was easier said than done.

"We can only do our best but we can't beat the weather," he said.

"We need a strong sun to make a hard wicket but the rain three days back and mild sunshine after that has made our job very difficult."

A bright sun lit up this central Punjab town on Thursday but cold and wet weather has been forecast over the weekend.

Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq denied he had deliberately ordered a dead pitch in Lahore to ensure his team did not lose the first Test.

"It was said that I had asked for the grass to be shaved off, but how can I do that when there was no grass on it in the first place?" said Inzamam.

Irrepressible Indian opener Virender Sehwag, who smashed 254 in the first Test, said the fear of losing had prompted Pakistan to prepare a flat wicket in that game.

"They had lost the series to us two years ago and did not want to take a chance," said Sehwag.

Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer said the Iqbal Stadium wicket will produce better cricket than what was on offer in Lahore.

"Lahore was depressing but I think this track will do a bit more than at the Gaddafi," the former England batsman said.

"This one may have a tennis ball bounce. If the sun stays out it should

Zim decision clears way for tri-series

AFP, Faisalabad

Zimbabwe's decision to suspend its Test status for the rest of the year has given India and Pakistan a chance to firm up plans for a lucrative one-day series later this year.

The Asian rivals hope to rope in world champions Australia for a tri-series in September ahead of the International Cricket Council's Champions Trophy in India in October-November.

The tri-series, which will be held in India or Pakistan, will replace Zimbabwe's scheduled tour of Pakistan in September.

"We now have the option of going ahead with the tri-series," Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Shahryar Khan told AFP on Thursday.

The tri-series has been tentatively scheduled to run between September 12 and October 5, soon after Pakistan return from a tour of England and before the Champions Trophy tournament begins in India from October 7.

Jayasuriya fit again

AFP, Colombo

Veteran opener Sanath Jayasuriya has returned to Sri Lanka's squad for the remaining triangular series matches in Australia after recovering from a shoulder injury, the selectors announced Thursday.

The aggressive left-handed batsman will join the squad in Sydney and is available for selection for the third game, Sri Lankan selector KM Nelson told AFP.

Sri Lanka will take on Australia in their next game at Sydney on Sunday.

Jayasuriya, 36, was part of Sri Lanka's squad on the twin tours of New Zealand and Australia but had to return home when he aggravated the injury after slipping in the bathroom on the morning of the second match at Christchurch.

The national selectors said Jayasuriya's inclusion strengthens the team as he is now able to bat, bowl and field after passing a strenuous fitness test at home.

The Sri Lankan selectors said seamer Akalanka Ganegama will also join the squad to replace Farveez Maharoof, who was ruled out due to a groin injury.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 40 Judge 2 Cruising 21 Dundee 1 Epithet 3 Lance 3 Tear 4 Solid 24 Coop 5 Alfred E. Neuman's magazine 45 Clad like a grad 5 South American 49 Rival of Connors 50 Writer 6 Candle count 7 Peacenik 8 O'Hara 53 Neighbourhood 15 Contradict 16 Gun the engine 54 Under the weather 55 Muscat's land 56 London gallery 57 Long-lived 58 Longings 23 Draft 24 Base run-ner's goal 27 Half-year 32 Zsa Zsa's 33 Bambi's aunt 34 Plaything 35 Voice behind the story 38 Sugar source 39 Thicken

Grid for crossword puzzle with numbers 1-39.

DOWN 1 Roses-to-be care? 19 'Why should I care?' 20 Sign up 21 Dunder 22 Bill's partner 23 Draft 24 Base run-ner's goal 27 Half-year 32 Zsa Zsa's 33 Bambi's aunt 34 Plaything 35 Voice behind the story 38 Sugar source 39 Thicken

CRYPTOQUIP PG P T N N C X E V A B X M E S D J N L J L E G A Q Y P K F D Y P K E V E P S G E U N B M C G B T T D G K 'E U F P K ' G Q N B L G E S D ?' Yesterdays Cryptoquip: IF YOU INVENT A POPULAR COCKTAIL, I'D THINK THAT AFTER YOU DIE YOUR SPIRIT LIVES ON. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: N equals O