

Sagar keeps winning

SPORTS REPORTER

Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagar continued his winning spree to keep the solo lead in the BASIC Bank 27th National Junior (Under-20) Chess Championship at the end of the seventh round at the federation hall-room yesterday.

Sagar won the seventh round board against Imran Ali Elin to secure maximum seven points while Golam Mostafa, Mosabbir Khan Shibli and Sharif Hossain followed him with six points each.

In the day's other matches, Mostafa beat Shuvo, Sharif beat Saif and Shibli beat Siam.

Prantik, Kadamtala split points

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Prantik Krita Chakra shared points with Kadamtala Sangsad in a 1-1 draw yesterday's Rahman Foundation Second Division Football League at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur on Friday.

Tariqul Islam put Prantik ahead in the 10th minute while Nazrul Islam levelled the margin for Kadamtala three minutes later.

Prantik earned eight points and Kadamtala three after four rounds.

Totti is king, says Pele

INTERNET, undated

Roma and Italy star Francesco Totti is the best on the planet, according to Brazilian legend Pele.

The South American made the surprising statement on Thursday, adding that he believes the Azzurri will be major players at this summer's World Cup.

"He is the best player in the world," the former No 10 noted. "He has just been a little unlucky in the past."

Totti has under-performed at the last two major tournaments when he was sent-off in the 2002 World Cup and was banned at Euro 2004 for spitting.

Yet Pele believes that the classy attacking midfielder has what is needed to lead Marcello Lippi's side to glory on German soil.

"Brazil are favourites even if I think that Italy are the strongest side around right now," he added. "In fact, they were the best team at the last two editions."

Nevertheless, the three-time World Cup winner is expecting other smaller nations to make an impact.

"The World Cup is always a box of surprises," he continued. "Everyone is saying that Brazil will win but the favourites don't always triumph."

"I like the look of the Czech Republic," added the former Santos great. "They are a good team who play football, a bit like Brazil."

"Out of the African nations, I'll indicate the Ivory Coast."

Donald changes heart

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Former South African paceman Allan Donald has withdrawn his application for the post of England bowling coach and will remain involved with his country's high performance coaching programme.

"I have given much thought to the matter and have withdrawn my application for the England bowling coach post," Donald said in a statement released on Friday by Cricket South Africa (CSA).

"I will rather stay with Cricket South Africa's high performance programme and throw my full weight behind it. My heart lies with South African cricket and I want to do everything I can in the effort to make us the best in the world."

"I will also be writing to the board of Cricket South Africa to apologise for making a public statement about my England application before discussing the matter with CSA," Donald said.

Karachi promises

FROM PAGE 12

illness concerns for some players. Woolmer said Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq was ready for action after being forced to miss the last three days of the second Test with a back strain.

The Pakistan coach was also confident that pace spearhead Shoaib Akhtar, recovering from an ankle injury, would play.

"Inzamam and Shoaib look good to play," said Woolmer. "I can't see them missing such an important game."

Pakistan, however, will be without opening batsman Shoaib Malik, who was not considered for selection following the death of his father on Wednesday.

Imran Farhat is the likely replacement, but Woolmer said a final decision on the playing eleven would not be made till Sunday morning.

In-form Indian opener Virender Sehwag, who suffered a bout of food poisoning in Faisalabad, has recovered fully, according to team manager Raj Singh Dungarpur.



Tunisian players celebrate after Selim Ben Achour scored the second goal against South Africa during their African Nations Cup match at the Haras el-Hodoud Stadium in Alexandria on Thursday.

Tunisia, Guinea thru' SOUTH AFRICA BOW OUT

AFP, Alexandria



Africa Cup of Nations EGYPT 2006

Classy Tunisia defeated South Africa 2-0 here at the Haras El-Hodoud Stadium Thursday to join Guinea in the quarterfinals of the 2006 African Nations Cup.

The defending champions went in front after 33 minutes through Santos, who collected a misplaced back pass by Bennie McCarthy and his shot slipped through the hands of Bafana goalkeeper Calvin Marlin for his fourth goal of the competition.

They doubled their lead in the 57th minute courtesy of Selim Ben Achour who smashed home a low cross from the right taken by skipper Hatem Traabelsi.

In the earlier Group C match played here the Syli Stars of Guinea recorded a dramatic 2-1 victory over Zambia to book their place in the last eight.

Tunisia and Guinea, who have both recorded six points from two matches, will clash Monday here to

REUTERS, Rome

SERIE A Livorno next for rejuvenated Roma

erratic results on the pitch overshadowed by Antonio Cassano's long-running contract dispute.

Cassano's departure to Real Madrid earlier this month seems to have cleared the air, however, and the team he left behind is now playing with a flair and fluency not seen since coach Fabio Capello packed his bags for Juventus.

Roma captain Francesco Totti has, as usual, been the team's most reliable goalscorer, but winger Mancini's excellent form has played a big part in the revival.

The Brazilian has scored four times in Roma's last three matches and Spalletti will hope he can continue the run against Livorno, who have drawn their last three games to lose a little momentum.

As well as pushing for a win, Roma and Livorno will hope Fiorentina drop points away against Udinese.

Udinese, with just one win in eight, have lost striker Vincenzo Iaquinta to injury, captain Valerio Bertotto to suspension and midfielders Sulley Muntari and Christian Obodo to the African Cup, but Fiorentina's poor away

form - three wins in 10 matches this season - suggests an upset is possible.

Juve welcome striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic back from suspension for the game against Ascoli. The rangy Swede is expected to partner David Trezeguet, pushing Alessandro Del Piero back on to the bench.

Inter should have few problems overcoming bottom-of-the-table Lecce, who sacked their coach Silvio Baldini midweek and replaced him with youth team manager Roberto Rizzi.

Injuries to striker Fabio Bazzani and midfielders Marco Tonetto and Andrea Gasbarroni have weakened Sampdoria's squad for their Milan trip.

Ascoli v Juventus, Chievo v Reggina, Empoli v Parma, Lecce v Inter Milan (1930) Messina v Cagliari, Roma v Livorno, Treviso v Lazio, Udinese v Fiorentina

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EUROPEAN CUPS TIES

Barca, Juve shocked

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona may be almost invincible in the Primera Liga but the Catalan giants suffered a hiccup in their quest to land this season's Spanish Cup as they lost their quarterfinal first leg at Real Zaragoza 4-2 on Thursday.

The Barca juggernaut was, if not derailed, at least given a good bump by Zaragoza, who netted three times in four first-half minutes to establish a 3-0 lead.

Diego Milito and Ewerthon, with a brace, had left the visitors seemingly dead before Henrik Larsson and Ronaldinho closed the gap with strikes after 38 minutes and on the hour.

However, in injury time of a pulsating encounter, Milito struck again to give Frank Rijkaard's men work to do in the return at the Nou Camp on February 1.

The defeat put an end to Barca's winning run which stretched back 130 days and took in 13 league wins, three in the Champions League and two in the Spanish Cup.

There was defeat for Serie A leaders Juventus too, who went down 3-2 at home to Roma in the first leg of their Italian Cup quarterfinal.

Roma took the lead against the run of play at a snowy Delle Alpi stadium in the 38th minute. Olivier Dacourt picked out Mancini whose intelligent run sprung Juve's offside trap, and the speedy South American cut inside Gianluca

Pessotto before firing a right-footed shot past Christian Abbiati.

Roma went further ahead in the 61st minute when Tommasi, captain for the day in the absence of the injured Francesco Totti, raced on to Mancini's clever pass before clipping the ball past the advancing Abbiati.

Perfotta made it 3-0 with a cool finish six minutes later after good work from substitute Alessandro Rosi.

But Juventus staged a rousing fightback led by substitute Alessandro Del Piero whose two goals mean Juventus are still very much in the tie.

Del Piero struck from close range after Pavel Nedved's cross had caused panic in the Roma defence to lift the home side's spirits.

And Juve's leading scorer doubled his haul in stoppage time when his heavily deflected free-kick found a way past Gianluca Careli.

AFP, Dhaka

Mohammad Rafique and Mohammad Ashraf were awarded sportsman of the year for 2003 and 2004 respectively by Bangladesh Sports Writers Association (BSWA) on Friday.

Former footballer and Water Resources Minister Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed handed over the SA Mohsin trophies to the two cricketers as chief guest at the BSWA Awards at a local hotel.

A total of 20 players, organisers and officials were awarded for the year 2003 and 2004. Among them, 12 awards were given for the year of 2004.

Habibul Bashar (cricket), Matiur Munna (football), Abul Hasem (coach), Mahbubur Rahman (umpire), Shaheen Mahmud (organiser), Dutch-Bangla Bank (patron) and Bangladesh Chess Federation (active federation) received the awards for 2003.

The 2004 awards went to Khaled Mashud (cricket), Rubel Rana (swimming), Fouzia Huda Jui (athletics), Zahid Hossain (hockey), Biddyt Kumar Roy (weightlifting), Sharmin Akhter (shooting), Shaiful Islam Manik (coach), Akhtaruddin Shaheen (umpire), Lotus Kamal (organiser), Partex Group (patron) and Narail District Sports Association (active association).

Kazi Shahed Ahmed, director of Abahani, and Dulu Afendi, an organiser of Narayanganj, were awarded for their contributions to the country's sports.

FIXTURES

(all 1400 GMT kick-off unless stated)  
Saturday  
Palemo v Siena (1700), AC Milan v Sampdoria (1930)  
Sunday  
Ascoli v Juventus, Chievo v Reggina, Empoli v Parma, Lecce v Inter Milan (1930) Messina v Cagliari, Roma v Livorno, Treviso v Lazio, Udinese v Fiorentina

Federer makes

FROM PAGE 12 relaxes a little bit.

Kiefer, who was in his first slam semi-final, self-destructed with a faltering service and volleying clangers, twice double-faulting on break point and committing a total of 53 unforced errors.

The German, who was fined 6,000 US dollars for unprofessional conduct and obscenities in earlier rounds, was off his best and looked to have been dented by his extra six hours on court but Federer to reach the semi-final.

The Swiss broke Kiefer's serve six times and only gave up his own serve once when he lost the second set.

It improved his record over Kiefer to 8-3, winning their last seven meetings, and extended his winning streak this season to 11 matches.

Federer broke Kiefer's serve in the fourth game of the first set after the German double-faulted on break point.

EURO 2008 QUALIFIERS

France pitted against Italy

Football

AFP, Montreux

The draw for Euro 2008 made here on Thursday pitted the continent's traditional powerhouses France up against Italy while England under new management go into unknown territory.

Whoever is named as Sven-Goran Eriksson's successor will have to steer the Euro 2004 quarterfinalists through Group E where they will face Russia for the first time in a competitive international.

In what looks a relatively kind group England will also be rubbing shoulders with Croatia, first round rivals in Portugal two years ago, Israel, Estonia, and minnows Macedonia and Andorra.

Eriksson, who is standing down after the World Cup, reflected: "I think the man coming after me will be happy with this draw."

"There are more difficult groups. We know Croatia so that's good for England. Russia is not easy of course and Israel will be interesting."

England goalkeeper coach Ray Clemence also welcomed what looked like a favourable draw.

"We beat Croatia 4-2 at Euro 2004," he recalled. "They are quite good going forward but always vulnerable at the back, you never know what to expect from them."

"We have not played Russia or Estonia before and Israel are an improving nation, that will be a tough game out there."

"It won't be easy but I think we will be relatively happy with the draw."

Group B is arguably the dream group as it sees France taking on Italy for the first time since the 2000 Euro final which the French under Roger Lemerre won with a golden goal from David Trezeguet.

These two heavyweights were joined by Ukraine, who sailed through their World Cup qualifying group, Scotland, Lithuania, Georgia and the Faroe Islands.

France coach Raymond

Domenech was philosophical about the task set for the 1998 World Cup winners.

"Every group is difficult," he said. "On a personal level I'm happy to be facing Italy, they're always intense encounters, and we haven't played them for sometime."

"But today my only focus is on the World Cup, and July 9 (the date of the final)."

Like Domenech, Italy manager Marcello Lippi also had his mind on events closer to home.

"It's a tough group with teams boasting great traditions like France, but for now our attention is entirely concentrated on the World Cup. I'm only thinking about Ghana, the United States and the Czech Republic and not about France."

Ukraine's Oleg Blokhin added: "It was useless expecting an easy draw. All the qualifying groups are really strong with three or four serious challengers and it will be tough to get the right to play in the finals."

Scotland boss Walter Smith was hardly rubbing his hands with delight at the prospect of taking on France, Ukraine and Italy who were in their World Cup qualifying group.

"It's an extremely difficult task. We played well against Italy in Milan (World Cup qualifier lost 0-2) and drew 1-1 at Hampden."

"In the World Cup we were always catching up so we need to get off to a good start."

Defending European champions Greece are in Group C where the shock 2004 winners' rivals include the 2002 World Cup semifinalists and neighbours Turkey along with Norway.

The man who masterminded Greece's transformation from also-rans to champions was Otto Rehhagel who said he was satisfied with the draw.

"We know that as defending champions, everyone wants to beat us," said the veteran German coach.

Asked about the prospect of facing Turkey, Greece's longstanding regional sparring partner on the political front, Rehhagel said: "There

will be a lot of emotion involved."

The two nations met in qualifying for the World Cup, and Rehhagel reflected: "Both those matches ended 0-0, and they were fair and clean."

Portugal, beaten in the 2004 final on home turf by the Greeks are in Group A where the opposition is headed by Poland.

New manager Steve Staunton's Republic of Ireland, who missed out on World Cup qualification, find themselves in Group D with World Cup hosts Germany, their old foes the Czech Republic, and Wales, who they will be facing for the first time at this level.

"It's a good group with rivals that you have to take seriously, but it's manageable," said Germany coach Jurgen Klinsmann.

"It's not going to be an easy path but we have to approach it in a positive manner."

Perennial underachievers on the world stage Spain were drawn in Group F where the teams waiting for them include Sweden, Denmark, and Northern Ireland.

The Netherlands face among others Romania and Bulgaria in Group G.

The qualifying matches will get underway in September and run through until November 2007 when a total of 14 teams will have qualified for the finals joining hosts Austria and Switzerland.

Jayasuriya boost

FROM PAGE 12 They have named the same squad that won in Adelaide, minus fast bowler Nathan Bracken, for the match.

Cricketer Australia, the sports governing body here, said in a statement that Bracken had been left out of the squad for "personal reasons".

Wicketkeeper-opener Adam Gilchrist will again captain the side which is likely to see either pace bowlers Stuart Clark or Brett Dorey brought in to cover for Bracken.

PRIMERA LIGA

Real out to prove a point

Football

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid have 13 points to make up on league leaders Barcelona but the Spanish giants feel confident that they can still snatch the championship from under the noses of their bitter rivals. Like Barcelona, fourth-placed Real have been unbeaten since the start of the year and are looking to continue their impressive run at Celta Vigo on Sunday.

"We are back to being the old Real Madrid. If we keep playing like this then I'm sure we'll win something," said Zinedine Zidane, in the wake of beating Real Betis in the Spanish Cup on Wednesday.

The improved form of Zidane, and also England captain David Beckham, since the winter break has been instrumental in Real recapturing the flare that seemed to desert them shortly after the start of the season.

Raul Gonzalez and Ronaldo are still injured so the dilemma of coach Juan Ramon Lopez Caro of how to incorporate the two superstars into Real's winning formula remains several weeks away.

However, Lopez Caro may make two changes to the starting lineup that beat Sevilla 3-1 last weekend.

Spanish international Ivan Helguera could return to the centre of the defence in place of Alvaro Mejia and Lopez Caro also has to decide what to do about Julio Baptista, who has struggled since his return from injury.

Antonio Cassano, who made his first start against Betis since signing from Serie A side Roma earlier this month, and Roberto Soldado have both made good cases to be chosen ahead of the underperforming Brazilian striker.

Barcelona led the league with 49 points from 20 games and have a streak of their own to preserve at Real Mallorca on Sunday, having won their last 13 league games.

The Catalan club have edged close to Madrid's league record of 15 consecutive victories, from the 1960-61 season when legends Alfredo Di Stefano and Ferenc Puskas graced their side.

Frank Rijkaard rested several of his regular starters for the Cup match against Real Zaragoza on Thursday but Barca will be back to full strength for their short trip across the Mediterranean to face Mallorca, who are just one place

above the relegation zone.

Valencia, champions twice in the last four years, moved up to second last weekend after their 2-0 win at Betis, which extended their unbeaten run in the league to nine games although they are still 10 points adrift of Barca.

They play host to Real Zaragoza on Sunday but Valencia will be without captain and midfielder David Albelda, who is suspended.

After surprising every one over the first half of the season, third-placed Osasuna have stumbled and lost their last two games but the Pamplona-based side will be looking to recover their poise at home to Betis on Saturday.

FIXTURES

(all 1600 GMT kick-off unless stated)  
Saturday  
Cadix v Racing Santander (1700), Athletic Bilbao v Getafe (1900), Osasuna v Real Betis (2100)  
Sunday  
Alaves v Real Sociedad, Atletico Madrid v Deportivo La Coruna, Espanyol v Malaga, Sevilla v Villarreal, Valencia v Real Zaragoza, Real Mallorca v Barcelona (1800), Celta Vigo v Real Madrid (2000)

Prithul makes hosts proud

SPORTS REPORTER

Henry Prithul Mondol kept one prestigious medal for hosts Bangladesh when the BKSP student won the boys' doubles title in the SBSL-BKSP International Junior Tennis Tournament yesterday.

Pairing with Taipei's Hung, Bangladesh national champion Prithul defeated Taipei duo Chen and Peng 6-4, 6-3 in the doubles final at the BKSP.

Taipei's Hsin Han Lee clinched the boys' single with a comfortable 6-2, 6-2 win over Philippines' Joshu Dandan Kyle while Russian teenager Viktoria Kamenskaya won the girls' singles trophy defeating Uzbekistan's Nigora Sirojiddinova 6-2, 6-2.

Guo and Zhou lifted the girls' doubles crown beating Liu and Zhou 6-0, 6-3 in an all-Chinese final.

JFA Cup first semi today

SPORTS REPORTER

The first semifinal of the Second JFA Cup Under-16 Football Tournament between Dhaka and Satkhira will be held today at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. The match will kick off at 4pm.

Tangail take on Rangamati in the second semi at the same venue on tomorrow.



Recipients of the BSWA awards pose for photograph with chief guest Water Resources Minister Maj (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed at a local hotel yesterday.



Henry Prithul Mondol (C), doubles champion in the SBSL-BKSP International Junior Tennis Tournament, receives his medal from Youth and Sports Secretary Abul Kashem Mahbubul Alam (L) at BKSP yesterday.