

Ashraful goes to Liverpool today

SPORTS REPORTER

With a hope to gain consistency in batting, ace Bangladesh batsman Mohammad Ashraful leaves for England this morning to play minor county cricket.

The out-of-form right-hander, who scored only 68 runs in four innings of two Tests and 18 in two one-day matches in the just concluded home series against Australia, has signed for Rainhill Cricket Club in Liverpool.

"This is for the first time I am going to play league cricket abroad. I don't know how competitive the league is but my main concern is to score runs, nothing else," said Ashraful, who was rested for the second one-dayer against Australia for poor form.

"As per the contract I will play for the club till September but I will be available for national duty during this period," he informed.

There is hardly any doubt about his talent and ability, but the inconsistency in his batting is a serious issue.

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AI Muharraq's Brazilian forward Leandson (R) faces a sliding tackle from Brothers Union defender Amit Khan Shuvro during their AFC Cup tie at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR

Kenya ready to welcome Tigers

CRICINFO, undated

Bangladesh are hoping to play three one-day internationals in Kenya en route to their tour of Zimbabwe which is due to happen in July and August. The brief series depends on Bangladesh sorting out arrangements with the Zimbabwe board.

"We are in talks with Bangladesh who have expressed an interest, but we are still awaiting a programming schedule," Samir Inamdar, the Cricket Kenya chairman, told CricInfo. "It would be a useful warm-up for us going to Canada and we would welcome that."

Kenya are due to visit Canada at the end of July to play an Intercontinental Cup tie as well as some one-day internationals.

The Bangladesh A team is scheduled to tour Zimbabwe between June 12 and July 10, and the senior side would arrive soon after. A Bangladesh Cricket Board source confirmed that talks were ongoing and that "the ODI series is likely to be held some time between mid-July and the first week of August."

BU end losing streak

SPORTS REPORTER



Brothers Union restored some pride when they held Bahrain's Al Muharraq to a goalless draw in their last home match of the AFC Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Brothers remained at the bottom of Group A with two points but for Muharraq, who had won their home match against the men in orange in Amman 2-0, the draw was good enough to seal them a place in the quarterfinals as group winners.

Muharraq, who played second-placed Al Ahed on the sixth and final match day, took an unassailable lead with 11 points after Lebanese club Al Ahed's 2-1 loss to Mahindra United away in India also on Tuesday.

Muharraq, who carried a second-string side to Dhaka with only three players from the first team, created ample scoring chances but Brothers goalkeeper Aminul Haque made a

series of saves in the first-half to deny the Bahraini champions.

However, it seemed that Salah Alyaqoob's 54th minute freekick had crossed the line when Aminul gripped the ball but the home side got the benefit of doubt from the referees.

Brothers, boosted by the return of captain and national centre-back Mohammad Sujan and fullback Feroz Mahmud Titu from injuries, packed their defence with five players and had two great chances on the break. But striker Emily, who lobbed the ball over an onrushing goalkeeper Abdulaziz Buhajeh from just outside the area, saw his 35th-minute effort run harmlessly across the open net. Two minutes later, Masud Rana's centre came off the sidebar much to the relief of the visitors.

Brothers, who were a bit attacking in the first hour, went on the defensive and Al Muharraq came close to scoring nine minutes from time. But Fahad Hasan's long-range shot was parried by a diving Aminul.

"Yes we are happy, because we have put an end to the losing streak."

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NAT'L SCHOOL CRICKET Habib powers Dhaka Ideal

SPORTS REPORTER

Habibur Rahman scored 128 to take Dhaka Ideal High School to the semifinals of the Standard Chartered National School Cricket tournament at the Dhanmondi Cricket stadium yesterday.

Ideal High School edged past Mirpur Government High School by four wickets in one of the four quarterfinals that took place in the city.

Chasing 284 runs to win, Habib scored his 128 runs off just 111 balls that included twenty hits to the boundary.

BKSP also qualified for the semifinals predictably, when they crushed Willes Little Flower by 210 runs.

Kalindi High School also won convincingly by 129 runs against Kamarpara High School while Sourav Smrity trounced Kalatiya High School by 74 runs.

The semifinals will be held on May 4.

NAT'L SCHOOL FOOTBALL Fakhrul treble sinks Achmita

SPORTS REPORTER

Islamia Government High School of Mymensingh won the zonal championship when they crushed Achmita George Institute of Kishoreganj 6-2 in the banglalink tiger trophy National School Football tournament at the Mymensingh District Stadium yesterday.

Fakhrul Alam of Islamia scored three splendid goals while Masud, Kamrul and Sharif added one each.

For Achmita, Alamgir scored both their goals.

Away at the Patuakhali District Stadium, Jhalakathi Government Boys High School emerged champions of the Patuakhali Zone when they beat Kathalia Pilot School, also from Jhalakathi, by a solitary goal.

Zakir Hossain scored the all-important goal for the winners.

Afridi leads Ireland to shock win

AFP, London

Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi led Ireland to a shock 47-run victory over five-times winners Gloucestershire in a dramatic C&G Trophy clash on Sunday.

Ireland posted 193 for nine from their 50 overs at Bristol with Morgan, Afridi, Peter Gillespie and Langford-Smith all contributing.

Afridi then took three wickets for four runs from eight overs -- six of them maidens -- as Gloucestershire were skittled for just 146.

Steve Adshhead top-scored with only 24 as the hosts collapsed from 77 for two, with Kyle McCallan taking three for five.

It was only Ireland's third win over county opposition in the competition and their first away from home -- the others were against Middlesex in 1997 and Surrey in 2004.

Pakistan adopt rotation policy

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan are introducing a player rotation policy to prevent burnout before next year's World Cup in the West Indies.

"We have 75 playing days before the World Cup and the danger of losing some of our players to fatigue and fitness problems is real," Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq told Reuters on Tuesday.

"Which is why we have decided to adopt a rotation policy for the Tests and one-day internationals to preserve our players for the big tournament."

Pakistan are in England from June to play four Tests and five one-dayers before taking part in the International Cricket Council (ICC) Champions Trophy in India in October and November.

They also play three Tests and three one-dayers against West Indies at home in November-December, and then fly out to South Africa for a full tour before the World Cup.

"The boys have been through a hectic schedule for the last six months which has involved lot of travelling. In the last few games you could see some of them dropping in their motivational levels," Inzamam said.

"Players facing burnout and fatigue due to the gruelling international calendar is a real issue and we have to take steps to keep our best players available for the World Cup."

Asia promises huge WC



AFP, New Delhi

Asia's cricket chiefs celebrated the award of the 2011 World Cup by vowing Monday a spectacular event that will be "as big as the one for football".

A joint bid by India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh defeated the rival bid by Australia and New Zealand 10-3 at the International Cricket Council's (ICC) Executive Board meeting in Dubai on Sunday.

Inderjit Singh Bindra, the former Indian cricket boss who made the Asian presentation on Sunday, said he was confident from the start that the bid would win.

"We only had to stress that cricket is a religion in our part of the world, everything else is secondary," said Bindra.

"Bollywood movies, official functions, even marriages, are arranged depending on the cricket schedule. No

one does anything else if a big match is being organised. There will be more than a billion viewers in the sub-continent and another billion in the rest of the world.

"We are confident 2011 will represent a new landmark as a cricketing and sporting milestone. The cricket World Cup will be as big as the one for football."

Bindra, who led the sub-continent's successful bids for the 1987 and 1996 events, said it was remarkable team work by the four nations that secured the vote.

"I may have made the presentation yesterday, but the credit has to go to all four countries," he said. "We are a close-knit unit and that is how it will stay."

Of greater significance, Bindra added, was the fact that the ICC agreed that every third World Cup will be held in the Indian sub-continent, the region that drives the sport's economics.

What, however, remained unsaid

was the hectic backroom diplomacy that went on through Saturday night in Dubai ahead of the vote.

The numbers were clearly against Australia and New Zealand, who needed the mandatory support of seven of the 10 Test-playing nations for their bid to succeed.

With the four Asian nations having joined hands, Australia and New Zealand could, at best, have garnered six votes between themselves.

But they could have ensured the vote be postponed to a later date had they succeeded in roping in South Africa, Zimbabwe and the West Indies along with their trusted backer England.

In the end, only England supported the trans-Tasman bid as the Asians first sealed the South African and Zimbabwe votes and then won over the West Indies by promising to organise fund-raising events during next year's World Cup in the Caribbean.

The real 'Forrest Gump'

AFP, New Delhi

A five-year-old child stunned onlookers when he ran a distance of 65 kilometres (40.3 miles) in seven hours in eastern India on Tuesday.

Watched over by his coach, paramilitary forces and TV crews, and trailed by army doctors and an ambulance, Budhia Singh ran between the holy town of Puri in the eastern state of Orissa and its capital Bhubaneswar.

Budhia, almost a real life version of the fictitious Forrest Gump, began the race from a temple in Puri at 4.00 am local time but collapsed two kilometres short of the designated finish

line -- the headquarters of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Bhubaneswar -- at 11.02 am, television reports said.

He was taken to hospital where his condition was described as stable.

Budhia has already taken part in the Delhi half-marathon and other distance races across India but Tuesday's outing was much longer than the official marathon distance of 42 kilometres (26 miles).

CRPF official S.S. Gill said his organisation will support Budhia's dream of running even longer distances in future.

"I hope he goes far, we will help

him realise his dream," said Gill of the child, whose daily routine includes a seven-hour run.

The story of how Budhia's talent was discovered is even more astonishing.

When his father died two years ago, his mother, who washes dishes in Bhubaneswar, was unable to provide for her four children and sold Budhia to a man for 800 rupees (20 dollars).

His new father enrolled him in a judo class run by Biranchi Das, who noticed Budhia's penchant for running.

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WUNDERKIND: Budhia Singh, the five-year-old boy who ran a distance of 65 km in seven hours, is accompanied by soldiers as he runs along a road on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Did U Know?

Jacques Kallis became the first South African cricketer to score 8,000 Test runs. He reached the milestone during the first innings of the second Test against New Zealand in Cape Town on April 30.



Jose Mourinho

(Chelsea manager)

"We know one day we have to lose the championship but for now it's fantastic. To win successive titles is not easy but we have been ahead from the start of the season and I think we deserve it."

After winning the English Premiership title.

Warne rules out one-day return

AFP, Southampton

Shane Warne has firmly rubbished rumours of an impending return to Australia's limited-overs squad.

Warne, back in England for the start of a county season with Hampshire, said he had no intention of coming out of his self-imposed one-day international retirement.

The Hampshire captain was mystified as to why Australia coach John Buchanan thought he might be ready to change his mind in time for the World Cup next year in the West Indies.

"I must have said it 14,000 times. I have retired and I have no aspirations to return," Warne said Monday after skipping.

"I have to be fair to the squad. There is a lot of cricket ahead in the next year with the ICC Trophy, the VB series and the World Cup and they have to prepare," the legendary leg-spinner added.

"If Ricky said to me at some stage 'look we really need you', then I would think about it, but I don't think it would ever come to that."

"The team has done really well without me and I will be barracking for them in the World Cup, but not playing for them," explained Warne, who missed the whole of Australia's victorious 2003 World Cup campaign in South Africa after failing a drugs-Test which later saw the 36-year-old Victorian banned from professional cricket for a year.

Warne, who has taken 293 wickets in 194 one-day internationals, subsequently went into voluntary retirement from one-dayers.



BITS AND BOBS

FIFA confirms Rooney deadline

AFP, London

World football's ruling body FIFA have confirmed that England could replace injured star striker Wayne Rooney up to 24 hours before their opening World Cup game on June 10.

Rooney is in a race against time to be fit for England's campaign, which kicks off against Paraguay, after breaking a metatarsal bone in his foot in the 3-0 defeat against Chelsea last weekend.

Eriksson is due to name his 23-man World Cup squad on May 15, and despite the fears of Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson the Swede is adamant that Rooney can shake off the injury to play a role in Germany.

FIFA rules allow for any player selected for the competition to be substituted, provided evidence of serious injury has been submitted.

It means that if Rooney is picked, then it is decided he is not fully fit his place in the squad could be taken by another player up until 24 hours before their opening match.

Germany second Favourites

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany are second favourites behind champions Brazil to win the World Cup, according to German bookmakers, after England striker Wayne Rooney suffered an injury which is likely to keep him out of the tournament.

BetandWin, Germany's largest private bookmaker, have Brazil as 4-1 favourites while the odds of hosts Germany were cut to 8-1 from 9-1. England are now quoted at 8.5-1, after 7.5-1 before Rooney was injured at the weekend for Manchester United. Italy are 9-1 and Argentina 10-1.

Inzaghi earns Italy recall

INTERNET, undated

The inclusion of AC Milan striker Filippo Inzaghi was the main talking point after Italy coach Marcello Lippi named a 29-man squad for a pre-FIFA World Cup get-together at the Centro Tecnico Borghesiana training centre in Rome on 2 and 3 May.

The 32-year-old, who has scored 21 goals in 48 international appearances, has not played for his country since scoring twice in a 4-0 rout of Azerbaijan in October 2003 and has never appeared under Lippi, his former coach at Juventus.

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Berlin based artist Martin Keck presents the world's biggest football painting in the German town of Schwarzenfeld on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP