



Did U Know?

Portugal's Ricardo is the first goalkeeper to save three shots in a penalty shootout at a World Cup.



Lilian Thuram
(French star footballer)
"Certain players like (Marco) Materazzi shouldn't even exist because they are the sickness of this game and give a negative image."

Freddie close to full fitness

AFP, London

Andrew Flintoff's chances of playing for England against Pakistan in next week's second Test at Old Trafford have improved after returning for county duty with Lancashire.

Flintoff's return to four-day action got off to a miserable start as he was dismissed for just four in the clash with Kent on Tuesday.

The England all-rounder, attempting to prove his fitness after recovering from an ankle injury, lasted just eight balls before he fell to Kent's impressive South African paceman Tyron Henderson.

However, Flintoff then produced a typically entertaining cameo with the ball to make up for his disappointing performance with the bat.

Flintoff bowled with his customary venom in taking two for 11 in an opening six-over spell that saw him knock Robert Key's off stump out with his very first ball.

He returned late in the day for a further four-over burst to finish with figures of two for 16 from 10 overs including three maidens.

Flintoff also took a magnificent one-handed slip catch to dismiss David Fulton off the bowling of Glen Chapple, as he consigned his batting failure to memory.

Lancashire coach Mike Watkinson told Sky Sports News: "He ran in very hard for his first spell and got good pace. He then came back with a four-over spell to finish play at the end and I think he's quite pleased with the way it all went."

Flintoff's initial spell was important not just for England supporters, but also for the loyal Lancashire fans who had earlier seen their team struggle to 218 all out in near-perfect batting conditions at Canterbury.

The 28-year-old brought the visitors back into the game after Key (16) and Fulton (29) had looked comfortable in putting on 29 for the first wicket.

But Flintoff's introduction to the attack put a whole new complexion on the game, and he removed Key before trapping Martin van Jaarsveld in front for six.

Kent finished on 130 for four, still 87 runs behind Lancashire's first innings.

Tigers pack up for safari

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Africa-bound Bangladesh cricket team completed their home preparation yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur relishing the prospect of recording their first-ever away series victory.

Habibul Bashar's men leave Dhaka with a tag of 'favourites' on Sunday morning to play a five-match one-day series against Zimbabwe before taking on Kenya in three matches.

The team think-tank met the press after forty-nine days of practice at the under-constructed venue where both coach and the captain showed their sheer confidence to win the series.

There is no doubt that their recent records against the two

African rivals gave them the courage to think positive. In their last meetings the Tigers had pulled off their first-ever one-day series victory against Zimbabwe in January last year and had completed a 4-0 whitewash of Kenya in March this year at home.

"Most people would say that Bangladesh have had much more encouraging performances than Zimbabwe and they have had some problems as you all know. We will be leaving Bangladesh as favourites," responded coach Dav Whatmore.

"I think what evens up things a bit is the conditions over there. We need to get adjusted to the condition as quick as possible," added the Sri Lankan-born Australian.

The selectors took the trip as an opportunity to have a look to the young talents at the highest level and Whatmore also gave a mes-

sage to young guys like uncapped Forhad Reza and Sakib Al Hasan and wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim.

"This is a fantastic opportunity for the new ones to make a mark in Bangladesh cricket and do something real good for themselves. But first of all they have to get into the eleven and if they get into the eleven in the next three weeks then they have to put their best foot forward and put pressure on the selectors because there is not too much time left between now and March-April next year," he said referring to next year's World Cup in the West Indies.

Captain Bashar said that the 'favourites' tag indicated a good sign for Bangladesh cricket and it definitely helps them to continue their recent-time supremacy against their rivals rather than just putting pressure on them.

"It is a very positive thing that

people are expecting us to win a series. It proves that we have progressed as a team. The conditions are totally different but we have a very balanced team and I think we can adjust to any condition and perform to our ability," said the country's number one batsman.

To the Bangladesh skipper, a 5-0 win is not an impossible task although he thought that this Zimbabwe squad are better.

"We can definitely say that we are going to start as favourites based on the standard we have set over the last year. It may not be easy because this Zimbabwe side are probably a bit better than the one we had faced at home but nevertheless we will go there believing that we can win all the matches," Bashar assured.

When coach and captain talked about the target, chief selector Faruque Ahmed had to explain why left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak was included in the last minute and why they picked a second wicketkeeper in the team.

"True it will be seamer-friendly conditions in Zimbabwe but our spinners have had brilliant success in previous occasions against both our opponents. That is why we have picked an extra spinner to give balance to the bowling attack," explained Faruque.

"For us it is a luxury to play two wicketkeepers in the same match and that is unlikely to happen. But we want to have somebody as a backup and ready to keep wicket if something happens to long-serving (Khaled) Mashud," said Faruque regarding the selection of Bogra lad Rahim.

Faruque however hinted that Rahim has a good chance to stand behind the stumps in the series.

"Definitely we will try one of them and see who best serves the team," he added.

Bashar doesn't know who is the captain!

SPORTS REPORTER

It had already been made public that Habibul Bashar was retained as Bangladesh cricket captain until next year World Cup.

But if you asked Bashar how he wants to see the renewal of his tenure, you would overturn by a question 'are you sure I am captain until World Cup?'

"I don't know whether my job has been extended or not because the board has yet to officially confirm my reappointment," angered the usually soft-spoken Tigers skipper while he was talking at a press conference yesterday.

It is funny that Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) took the decision in its June 21 executive committee meeting but has yet to convey it to Bashar.

BCB joint-secretary and media committee chairman Reazuddin Al Mamun, however, said that he will find out the reason behind the incident.



Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar (C) speaks during a press conference at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Enough for Joy, Arman

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Arman Mia and Arif Khan Joy have decided not to join the national camp for Bangladesh's 2007 Asian Cup qualifying home match against Qatar.

Both the midfielders had unofficially announced their retirement from international football previ-

ously inform the federation about his retirement from international scene.

Inked by the absence of any competitive football for the past nine months, Joy said that he has lost the motivation to play.

"I don't know what the federation officials are doing. Without any competitive game, playing this match will only be a burden for the footballers. Because, they will be

sudden," added the defensive midfielder.

Arman Mia had a wish to retire from the field but he thinks he has been deprived of the chance.

"I wanted to go out after the SAFF Championship in Pakistan. But many persuaded me to play in the AFC Challenge Cup at home," said Arman, the creative midfielder who virtually had no rival for the playmaker's position for a decade.

"Much to my frustration, I was dropped from the Challenge Cup squad. That's why I decided not to play any more," said Arman while trying in vain to hide the pain behind the decision.

Arman was injured during the final of the SAFF Championship against India and did not recover for the Challenge Cup, the team management had said earlier.

With the under-23 team preparing for the SA Games, the absence of two major midfielders would be a big headache for coach Hassanuzzaman Babloo, who will have very limited options.

Not only his squad of 20 will be reduced to 18 players but also he will have just three midfielders in the side.

The national team are due to start training tomorrow for their third match of the Asian Cup qualifiers against Qatar, to be held on August 16 in Chittagong.



ARIF KHAN JOY



ARMAN MIA

ously and now want to stick to their decisions.

Joy, who captained Bangladesh to finish runners-up in the SAFF Championship in Pakistan in December 2005 and the AFC Challenge Cup at home last April, has become involved in politics and only has interest to carry on with his domestic career.

Joy has been working in his constituency in a bid to get nomination for the coming general elections and he would not even be available in Dhaka for a few more days.

Talking over telephone, the national team and Abahani captain told yesterday that he will soon

made the scapegoat for failure," Joy told.

"Nobody will blame the officials. I don't see any reason to go and play one international match all of a

Pro League in Nov

Bell ringing for early polls

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) will launch their first ever Professional League in the first week of November in Dhaka, it was decided after an executive committee meeting of the football governing of the country yesterday.

The league was due to begin in September but the BFF had to delay the start due to lack of ground.

The new date has been set on confirmation of the availability of the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The transfer will be held from September 1 to October 31, informed BFF general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal after the

meeting.

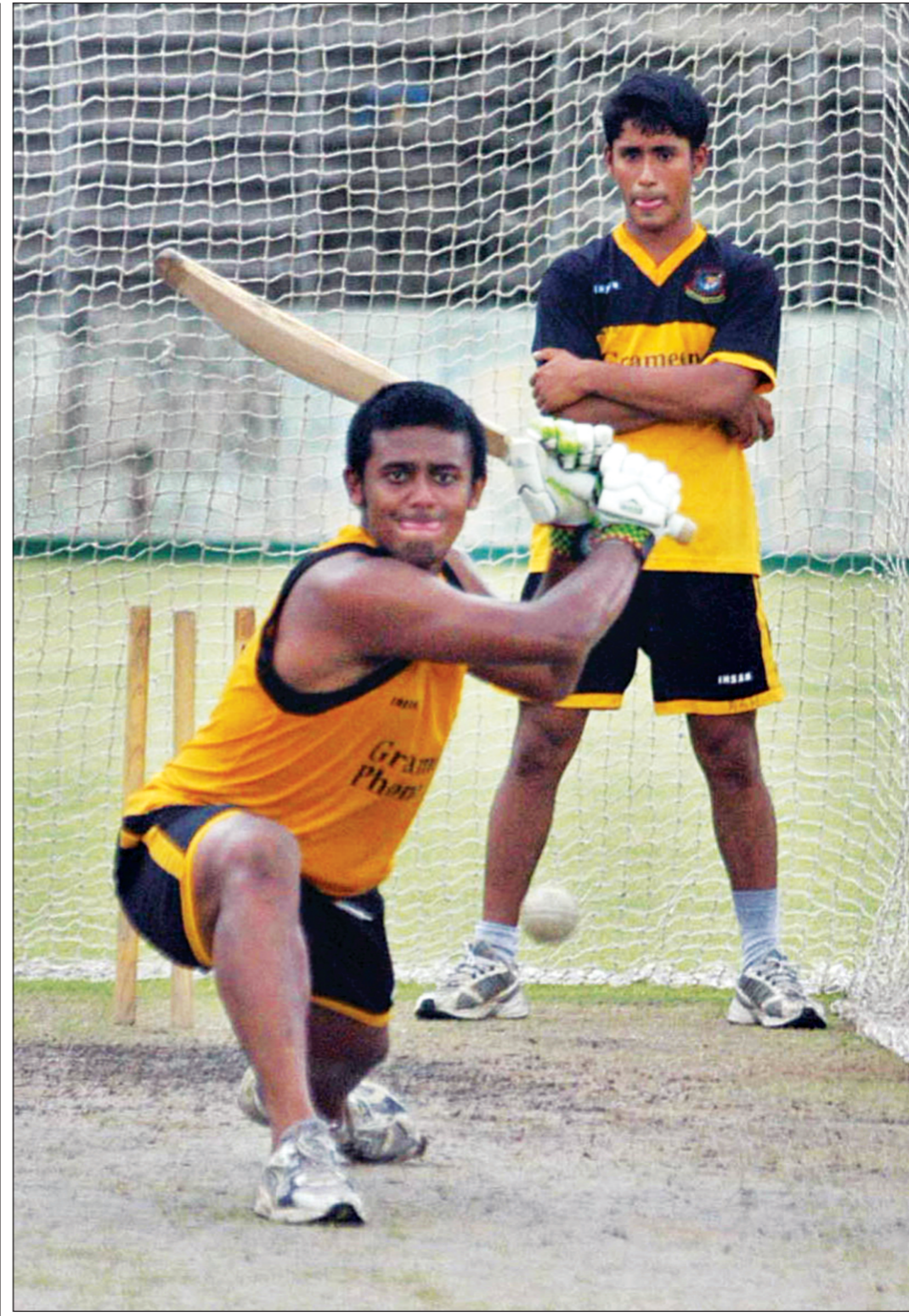
"We want to make the Pro League a success. So we have to start it in Dhaka. Although venues outside the capital would be available, it would serve our purpose," added Helal.

He also said that the annual general meeting of the BFF will be held on September 9 in Dhaka.

The rumour is rife that the present executive committee wants to hold an early election in a bid to renew its tenure before the new government takes charge. The next election is due in April 2007. A probable date for the early election could be during the reign of the caretaker government, any time after October this year.

The BFF general secretary

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Bangladesh opener Shahriar Nafees practises sweep as teammate Mohammad Ashraf looks on during the team's final practice session at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Under-strength SA land in Sri Lanka

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

South Africa, led by their first non-white captain Ashwell Prince, arrived in Sri Lanka on Wednesday to play two Tests and a one-day series also featuring India.

The Proteas are depleted by the absence of regular captain Graeme Smith and star all-rounder Jacques Kallis, both of whom are injured.

Veteran pace bowler Shaun Pollock will also miss the first Test, having chosen to stay home with his wife who is expecting a child next week.

Only 12 of the 14 players arrived

on Wednesday, Rookie spinner Thandi Tshabalala, will join the squad next week from Australia where he is representing a junior South Africa team.

The South Africans begin the six-week tour with a three-day match in Colombo on Saturday.

The two back-to-back Tests and the tri-series will also be played in Colombo.

The first Test will be held at the Sinhalese sports club from July 27-31 and the second at the Sara stadium from August 4-8.

The tri-series will be played at the Premadasa stadium and the Sinhalese sports club from August 14-29.

Sri Lanka are buoyant after a

successful tour of England where they fought back to draw the Test series 1-1 and blanked the hosts 5-0 in the one-dayers.

Sri Lanka will, however, be without opening batsman and regular captain Marvan Atapattu, who is nursing a back injury. Mahela Jayawardena will lead the home team.

SQUAD
Ashwell Prince (captain), Jacques Rudolph, Hashim Amla, Nicky Boje, Mark Boucher, AB de Villiers, Boeta Dippenaar, Herschelle Gibbs, Andrew Hall, Andre Nel, Makhaya Ntini, Shaun Pollock, Dale Steyn, Thandi Tshabalala.



South African paceman Makhaya Ntini (L) lights a traditional oil lamp as he, along with the rest of the team, arrives at the team hotel in Colombo on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP