

JUBOK PHONE NAT'L FOOTBALL

Shariatpur in 2nd round

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts Shariatpur knocked Faridpur out in the tiebreaker in the opening match of the qualifying round of the Jubok Phone 23rd National Football Championship yesterday.

The Padma zone match rolled into the shootout in front of a huge 18,000 cheering crowd at the Shariatpur Stadium after the regulation time ended 1-1.

Mahmudur Rahman Rashid put Faridpur ahead in the early second minute but Tariq Hossain equalised the margin in the 32nd minute.

The home side then won the battle 4-2 in penalties to move into the second round of the competition.

Rajbari take on Munshiganj today at the same venue while Magura meet Narail at the Magura Stadium in the opening match of Kapotakkha zone.

A total of 70 teams are taking part in the countrywide knockout phase from where ten teams will join two automatic qualifiers, hosts Sylhet and holders Narayanganj, in the 12-team finals.



PHOTO: STAR

THE GRASS HAS GROWN TOO LONG: National footballers return to action for the first time since April as the camp for the 2007 Asian Cup qualifier against Qatar begins at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Friday.

Twenty20 doesn't interest Lara

PTI, Dubai

West Indies skipper Brian Lara says he is not fascinated by the twenty20 version of cricket because it does not test the ability of a player but agrees the new format has spectator value.

"Test cricket is my game. It is a game I really love to play. Before being asked to captain the team for the third time, I tried to guide my career in the direction of playing more Test cricket and less one-day games," Lara, the leading scorer in Tests, said.

"I don't think it (Twenty20) tests the ability of players like Tests do. But it is good for the crowd. You are playing a sport, and sport is all about spectators," Lara was quoted as saying by the 'Khaleej Times'.

Lara, who is in Dubai to appear on the Chevrolet Cricket Show while the Stanford Twenty20 Tournament is underway in West Indies, also said "it is necessary to produce results in Tests to keep interest in the game alive".

On the burnout issue, he said it might be true for big cricketers but he had no problem with WICB's itinerary.

"It may be true in the case of big cricketers. They are playing between themselves more often. A lot of factors are involved in it, like crowd, big money, television rights. I am fine with the sort of itinerary and fixtures we have," he said.

Woolmer happy with batsmen

AFP, Northampton

Problems with Pakistan's top batsmen were refuted by coach Bob Woolmer who said he had faith that his players would come good.

Vice-captain Younis Khan, who missed the Lord's Test with England due to a knee injury, returned to steady a fast sinking ship against Northamptonshire during Thursday's first day.

Khan hit an unbeaten 50 at Wantage road to dig Pakistan out of a hole after openers Salman Butt and Imran Farhat managed a miserable four apiece.

Inzamamul Haq and Mohammad Yousuf steered Pakistan away from defeat against England in the first Test a week ago after failures from the openers in both innings.

But there was no improvement against Northants as Butt and Farhat were both dismissed in quick succession, with opening bowlers Ben Phillips and Charl Pietersen showing the under-fire pair no mercy.

"There is not a problem with the top order batsmen," insisted Woolmer. "Lots of people are talking about it after their failure against England but I have faith in my players and I know they will come good."

"I am really pleased to see Younis get a 50 and be in such good form after he missed the first Test."

"These types of games are great because we can bring in players, like Younis, who have not had much time in the middle."

"It's good to get some match practice and much better than batting and bowling in the nets. It helps to get the guys scoring some runs and improves their form and confidence."

NAT'L AGE-GROUP SWIMMING

Sonia, Nazmul put BKSP on top

SPORTS REPORTER

After the first day's evenly poised battle, BKSP took absolute domination over Bangladesh Ansar in the medal hunt of the 22nd Keya Cosmetics National Age-Group Swimming Championships yesterday.

BKSP students set all six new records on the second day at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur, bagging 18 gold medals out of 34 decided on yesterday. Ansars and Alamgir Swimming Club each claimed six gold medals while Rajshahi DSA, Kushtia DSA, Meherpur Swimming Club and Rakib Swimming Club took one each.

BKSP's Sonia Akhter took the limelight in the girls' 15-17 years group winning five gold medals including breaking two national records in 200 and 50 metres freestyle. Sonia, who won three gold on the opening day of the three-day meet, also won 100m backstroke, 400m individual medley and 200m butterfly events.

Nazmul Haque (18-20 years) added three gold medals to his overnight two, setting new marks in 100 and 1500 metres freestyle. His other success came in 200m breaststroke.

His teammate Rabiul Alam set another new record, taking gold in 18-20 years 200m backstroke while Bithi Khatun broke the other old record in the women's 18-20 years group 800m freestyle.

Opening day's three-gold Laboni Akhter Jui had to settle for only one gold, the Ansars swimmer winning the 100m butterfly (women's 18-20 years).

Ansars' young prospect Arifa Khatun (11-12 years) continued her exploits at the pool winning her sixth gold medal. Alamgir Swimming Club's 10-year-old Faisal Ahmed also won two gold medals.

Today is the concluding day of the meet.



PHOTO: STAR

Sonia Akhter of BKSP in action during her successful 400m individual medley race in the 15-17 years section of the Keya Cosmetics National Age-group Swimming Championships at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur on Friday.

Pak openers struggle

AFP, Northampton

Pakistan's fallible openers both had another innings to forget as their problems continued on the opening day of a three-day tour match against Northamptonshire at Wantage Road on Thursday.

Salman Butt and Imran Farhat both struggled to make an impression during the drawn first Test at Lord's where it was left to middle-order stars Mohammad Yousuf and Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq to guide the tourists to safety in the initial encounter of a four-match series.

And it was a similar story against Northamptonshire, with Butt and Farhat falling for four apiece in Pakistan's first innings.

Both batsmen could lose their places come the second Test at Old Trafford starting a week Thursday with returning vice-captain Younis Khan, fit again after a knee problem, set to take one of the top-order batting spots.

Younis made 50 not off 66 balls with 10 fours as Pakistan closed on 97 for three in reply to Northamptonshire's first innings 269 for three declared.

Butt, dismissed for a first-ball nought in Pakistan's second innings at Lord's, lasted just four balls at the County Ground before he was caught behind by wicket-keeper Riki Wessels off Charl Pietersen.

Farhat stayed for slightly longer before driving Ben Phillips to century Stephen Peters at square leg.

The recently-arrived Taufeeq Umar did his chances no harm with a stylish 29 at a better than a run-a-ball before he too was caught behind.

Faisal Iqbal was seven not out at stumps.

Arjuna back to roots

AFP, Colombo

Former Sri Lanka captain Arjuna Ranatunga said on Friday his love for the sport forced him to resign from the post of deputy minister in the government.

"I love cricket above everything else and I am what I am today because of the game," said Ranatunga, who resigned as deputy minister of tourism on Thursday to devote more time to cricket.

Ranatunga, 42, handed in his resignation to President Mahinda Rajapakse after sports minister Jeevan Kumaratunga delayed naming a fresh interim committee to run the sport.

Last week, Rajapakse acceded to the request of 11 former cricketers to call off elections to Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) and asked the sports ministry to appoint an interim committee that would include Ranatunga.

The sports minister, however, has yet to name the panel amid speculation that he did not want Ranatunga to enter cricket administration.

"If my holding a deputy minister's role is a stumbling block in getting into the SLC, I thought I should step down," Ranatunga told reporters.

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Dimming hopes in athletics



SPORTS REPORTER

The last time Bangladesh had won an athletics gold medal in the SAF Games was in 1995. It was unheralded sprinter Mahub Alam who made the country proud by winning the 200m gold at the Madras Games. He almost made it a second gold two years later at Kathmandu but had to settle for silver after a painstaking photo finish.

Since then, Bangladeshi athletes' participation in the regional event has had been limited only to gaining experience.

After another blank at Islamabad in 2004, the athletics team will not look toward glory when they participate in next month's SA (South Asian) Games in Colombo.

However, coach Kitab Ali thinks that the squad will fare better than the one silver and two bronze medals won in Pakistan.

The federation selected 13 athletes for the trip but sources said that it would be down to 12 members as the Bangladesh Olympic Association has decided to drop 400m hurdler Afzal Hossain Surya.

"I am happy with the facilities. The training ground is ok, the food and accommodation are also satisfactory. We have been training for 8-9 months with a few breaks but overall, it has been appropriate and I would say it is better than the last SA Games," Kitab Ali told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Our main problem is lack of talented athletes. You can't have a standard finished product if the raw material lacks quality. This is the real situation in the country."

"Our target is to return with more medals than the last time and I feel we are ready for that. I believe

SQUAD

Men's: Masudul Karim, Hafizul Islam, Shamsuddin, Mohon Khan, Mahfuzur Rahman, Al Amin.

Women's: Shamsunnahar Chumki, Sumita Rani, Nazmunnahar Beauty, Ishrat Jahan Eva, Fouzia Huda Jui, Sathi Akhter.

(Fouzia Huda) Jui will be able to retain her long jump silver medal won in Islamabad and the women's relay team (4x100m) could do better by winning silver. We are also eyeing silver in the women's 100 or 200 sprints," he added.

Nazmunnahar Beauty, who won the 400m bronze two years earlier, will only run 100m and would be the part of the prospective relay team with national champion Shamsunnahar Chumki, Sumita Rani and Ishrat Jahan Eva. Chumki will naturally enter the 100m sprint, Sumita in the 100m hurdles and youngster Eva, who was the fastest woman in the country two years earlier as a 15-year-old, has been dragged in for the relay only.

High jumper Sathi Akhter completes the women's team.

The men's team, who returned without a single medal from Pakistan, would be under pressure to produce some results.

"I don't see much chance for the men individually in the sprints. I'd rather back the relay team (4x100m). We don't have good long distant runners. So we have to rely

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PHOTO: STAR

Masudul Karim (L) and Sumita Rani train at the Bangladesh Army Stadium on Friday for the relay events ahead of the SA Games to be held in Colombo next month.

Flintoff's return in doubt

Cricket

AFP, London

England captain Andrew Flintoff's hopes of returning to international action in next week's second Test against Pakistan suffered a major setback Friday as his ankle injury flared up again.

Flintoff suffered fresh discomfort while playing for his county Lancashire against Kent at Canterbury and is to see a specialist Saturday - just 24 hours before the selectors are due to name their squad for the second Test, which starts on July 27 at the all-rounder's Old Trafford home ground.

The star of England's 2005 Ashes series victory missed last week's first Test draw with Pakistan at Lord's, having begun his comeback with some Twenty20 appearances. But the selectors had said he would have to come through a four-day Championship match first before being recalled to the Test side.

Flintoff had looked on course for that return after the first three days of the Canterbury clash but, after bowling just two overs Friday, he suffered renewed problems.

A statement issued by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said: "Andrew Flintoff has made good progress with his rehabilitation from an injury to his left ankle. He has worked extremely hard and at every stage of the rehabilitation program has shown improvement."

"However, bowling in a four-day county championship match against Kent was intended as the final test of the progress that he has made."

"Unfortunately, he has experienced some discomfort today (Friday) and he will see a specialist tomorrow (Saturday) to reassess the ankle and future management of the injury."

"A decision as to whether he is available for the second Test against Pakistan will be made following his visit to the specialist tomorrow."

Flintoff bowled 19 overs in Kent's first innings, taking two for 45, but managed just four in total when the hosts batted a second time.

England were captained at Lord's by Andrew Strauss and the opening batsman would be the likeliest candidate to lead the team in the second match of the four-Test series against Pakistan if Flintoff was unavailable.

Strauss's leadership skills were though called into question during the recent 5-0 one-day series rout by Sri Lanka, which

Flintoff sat out, and again at Lord's where some observers felt a failure to declare overnight, despite a lead of more than 300, cost England a chance of victory on the last day.

But England had just four frontline bowlers on show at Lord's and, without Flintoff, rarely looked like bowling Pakistan out a second time.

The 28-year-old Flintoff, cemented his status as the world's leading all-rounder by last year scoring 402 runs and taking 24 wickets in England's 2-1 series win over Australia.

Earlier this year he led England to a 1-1 Test series draw away to India and was in charge for the subsequent 1-1 drawn series at home to Sri Lanka.

In the absence of crooked Ashes-winning captain Michael Vaughan (knee), England have made it clear they want Flintoff to lead the team for the return series in Australia starting in November.

Since the Ashes, England have won just two out of 10 Tests. But several players have been sidelined at various times with injuries and some remain out of action.

As well as Flintoff and Vaughan, England are currently without fast bowler Simon Jones (knee), left-arm spinner Ashley Giles (hip) and reserve paceman James Anderson (back).



Did U Know?

At 18 years 357 days, Lionel Messi became the fifth youngest goalscorer in the history of the tournament when he scored Argentina's sixth goal in the 2006 World Cup against Serbia and Montenegro in Gelsenkirchen.



Carlos Alberto Parreira

(Former Brazil football coach) "My duty was to get Brazil into the (World Cup) final and I must admit that I was not expecting this defeat." After losing to France in the 2006 World Cup quarterfinals.

Langer lives his dream

AFP, London

Justin Langer broke legendary West Indies batsman Viv Richards's Somerset record score when he made 342 against Surrey at Guildford in the County Championship on Thursday.

Australia opener Langer resumed on his overnight score of 234 not out but, after more than 10 hours at the crease, was eventually dismissed when he was caught at long-on by Neil Sarkar off former England leg-spinner Ian Salisbury.

In all the 35-year-old left-hander faced 416 balls with two sixes and 43 fours after passing Richards's 322, Somerset's previous highest individual score.

The West Indian set his mark in 1985 against Warwickshire at Taunton.

"For the last few years I've had the target of making a triple century in my diary," said the Australian.

"So the seed's been there for a long time and it feels great now to have achieved it. I'm thrilled by it and I'll look back on it with a great deal of pride."

On Wednesday Langer, in what was set to be his final match in England before returning home, broke the highest ever individual score at Guildford, beating the previous best of 228 recorded by Darren Bicknell in 1995.

Langer's was the tenth highest score in all first-class cricket in England.