

Surma qualifiers from today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

The Surma zone qualifiers of the Jubok Phone 23rd National Football Championship gets under way at the Habiganj Stadium today.

Eight teams, Chandpur, Comilla, Brahmanbaria, Narshingdi, Sunamganj, Moulvibazar and Habiganj will take part in the knockout competition with only the zonal champions making it to the 12-team finals in Sylhet.

Comilla will face Brahmanbaria in the opening match at 3.45pm. The final is slated for July 30.

The Moulvibazar DSA, who will take on Chandpur on July 26, have ignored footballers from Rajnagar, Kulaura and Juri upazilas in their team.

Moulvibazar squad: Jhantu, Dulal, Raju, Jamal, Badrul, Pablo, Noman, Sumon, Shaown, Moni, Ripon Sr, Ripon Jr, Shaheen, Emad., Rasel, Manik, Shamsu, Nasir, Liton, Shabu, Akib, Munna, Minar, Masum, Belal and Shahjahan; Ikram Rana (coach).

Nel nails SL A down

AFP, Colombo

South African paceman Andre Nel bagged four wickets to help bowl out a Sri Lankan second string side for 162 in a three-day practice game here on Sunday.

Nel took 4-39 as the visiting side gained a huge 303-run first innings lead and were 43-1 in their second innings at close of the second day's play against Sri Lanka A.

Resuming on 351-3, South Africa declared at 465-4. The home side only managed the wicket of Hashim Amla (150), who was trapped leg-before by seamer Akalanke Ganeagama.

Amla batted for over five hours, hitting 16 fours and a six off 272 balls.

Captain Ashwell Prince and A.B. de Villiers too got useful batting practice hitting contrasting unbeaten half-centuries.

Prince, 15 overnight, took 117 balls for his 50 while de Villiers reached 50 off only 46 balls with 10 fours.

After an excellent show by the batsmen, South Africa's seamers struck at regular intervals as Sri Lanka A were bowled out in 46.3 overs. But South Africa decided not to enforce the follow-on.

BRIEF SCORES SOUTH AFRICANS: 351 for 3 and 43 for 1 (Dippenaar 22*)
SRI LANKA A: 162 (Chandana 51, Nel 4-39).

Gilondo win opener

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Gilondo United Club blanked Jovat Sangha 3-0 in the opening match of the Shaheed Chan Mia Memorial football tournament at the Garpara Upazila Parisad ground here yesterday.

Deputy Commissioner SM Shamsheer Zakaria inaugurated the eight-team meet as chief guest. Garpara Association president and Manikganj Muktiyoddha Unit commander Golam Mohier Shiper was also present.

Rani shares

FROM PAGE 17 while Shamima Akhter Liza won her board against Farzana Hossain, Tanima Parveen beat Shamiha Sharmin, Zakia Sultana beat Salma and Sharmin Sultana won her board against Arifa Khatun to cash full points from two rounds.

Bring on Gatlin

BBC ONLINE, undated

Asafa Powell says he is ready to take on Justin Gatlin whenever and wherever.

The pair were due to go head-to-head in the 100m at the London Grand Prix in Crystal Palace on 28 July.

However, the American pulled out with a leg injury and the planned showdown between the joint world record holders has now been put on hold - yet again.



Did U Know?

The 2006 World Cup final was decided for only the second time on a penalty shoot-out following USA'94 where also Italy were involved along with Brazil.



South African bowler Andre Nel (C) celebrates after his dismissal of Sri Lankan batsman Prasanna Jayawardene (not in the picture) during the second day of a three-day practice match against Sri Lanka A in Colombo on Sunday.

Athers doubts Eng setup

Cricket

AFP, London

Former England captain Michael Atherton fears history is in danger of repeating itself after Andrew Flintoff was ruled out for 12 weeks Saturday with a recurring ankle problem.

England had hoped rest and rehabilitation would be the answer to a problem that had its origins in bone fragments left in Flintoff's left ankle from an operation at the beginning of last year.

But the man the selectors want to captain the team in Australia now faces a spell on the sidelines which could leave him desperately short of match practice before November's first Ashes Test in Brisbane.

For Atherton the situation has

worrying echoes of England's last tour of Australia in 2002/03.

"Going back to what happened four years ago that is exactly the situation the selectors were keen to avoid again, going out on a long, three-month tour of Australia.

"They said it wouldn't happen again but they are going to be faced with a tricky situation to justify somebody's inclusion."

And with Michael Vaughan, who led England to Ashes glory last year, also out of the return series, and fellow Ashes-winners Ashley Giles and Simon Jones both still sidelined, Atherton was adamant Flintoff was not an isolated case.

"It does seem to me that over the last four or five years this has been a regular problem for England players. "The management of injuries seems to be -- incompetent might be too strong a word for it -- recurring time and time again."

knowledge really that he's fully match fit," the former opener added.

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Roddick, Blake face-off

Tennis

AP, Indianapolis

Andy Roddick used his strong serve to overpower Robby Ginepri 7-5, 6-3 Saturday and move into the final at the RCA Championships.

Roddick will play James Blake for the title, pitting the top two players in the United States. Blake, the tournament's No. 1 seed, is ranked sixth in the world; Roddick, the second seed, is ranked 11th.

Blake defeated ninth-seeded Xavier Malisse 6-3, 2-6, 6-1 to advance. Roddick, who won the tournament in 2003 and 2004, eliminated the defending champion by winning 32 of 40 first-serve points (80 per cent) and 12 of 16 second-serve points. He hasn't lost

his serve all week.

Roddick is trying to become the tournament's second three-time winner. Pete Sampras won in 1991, 1992 and 1996.

"It's more what's happening off the serves," Roddick said. "Robby can handle (serve) paces as well as anybody. I tried to mix it up a little bit."

The fourth-seeded Ginepri said, "That's the best I've ever seen him serve. He played a great match."

Both players held serve until the 12th game of the first set, when Roddick broke Ginepri by winning the final three points. Roddick kept Ginepri on the run in the second set, winning four of the last five points of the sixth game to break Ginepri en route to a 5-2 lead.

Blake broke Malisse on his first two service games in the first set before Malisse rallied in the second

set. Blake rebounded to control the third set, breaking Malisse twice and winning the first three games and the last three games.

Blake said he had to start quickly against Malisse.

"If he gets the lead, he can play lights out and not give you much of a chance," Blake said. "His first serve wasn't coming in very well at the start, which I tried to take advantage of. One of my strengths is taking advantage of second serves."

Blake said dealing with Roddick's first serve could be trouble. Roddick has landed 70 percent of his first serves (149-of-213) this week.

"I'm pretty concerned with that," Blake said. "You've got to stay real focused on your serve, and make sure you hold, because he's going to hold almost every time."

Hard time awaits India

Cricket

PTI, New Delhi

India may have a tough task in the one-day international cricket tri-series in Sri Lanka if past records are taken into account.

Sri Lanka has claimed four titles since 1999, besides they have a better home record of winning 19 out of total 33 ODIs played by the two nations in the Emerald Isle.

India have bagged only two series, with nine one-dayers against the Islanders in their backyard while the fate of five matches remained undecided.

The two teams shared the ICC Champions Trophy in 2002-03 after rain washed out the final in Colombo.

Though Indians had a bright series against Sri Lanka and England (at home), Pakistan (in Pakistan), and a draw with South Africa (at home) but their winning streak was broken by 1-4 loss against the West Indies in the Caribbean.

However, the Rahul Dravid-led team can have some heart from the fact that India has a better track record at neutral venue and at home.

India and Sri Lanka have played 23 ODIs at neutral venues of which they won 15 matches and conceded seven while one ended in no result.

The tri-series, also involving South Africa, is slated from August 14 to 29 with all matches to be played in Colombo at the R Premadasa Stadium and Sinhalese

Sport Club (SSC) following the internal bickering in the Sri Lanka Cricket.

Both venues are happy hunting ground for the home players as the Premadasa venue holds the world record for the highest Test total of 952 for 6 declared by Sri Lanka against India in 1997-98.

David defends

FROM PAGE 17 Asked if he was confident Flintoff would play in the first Test of the Ashes rematch with Australia, in Brisbane on 23 November, Graveney said: "Yes -- let's be upbeat. I am confident."

He explained: "As far as the time line is concerned, we still believe Freddie will be on that plane with the rest of the team."

"Once he has the operation we can make our plan from there. If the symptoms they think are causing the problem are correct the 12-week span is probably accurate."

Flintoff joins seamer Simon Jones and spinner Ashley Giles as players who could go on the Ashes tour without having played for several months.

Jones has endured a string of knee and ankle problems while Giles, who has had a second hip operation, has not played since last November.

"We're investigating areas we can play cricket. South Africa is one, Australia is another," Graveney added.

"Maybe the Australians might allow some of our players to play in their domestic cricket."

Australia edge past Pakistan

Hockey

AFP, Terrassa

Australia began their Champions Trophy defence with a 3-2 win over Pakistan while Spain and Germany drew 1-1 and Netherlands beat Argentina 4-2 in the men's field hockey tournament here on Saturday.

With the mercury nudging 38 degrees (100-degree Fahrenheit), Pakistan turned the heat on the Kookaburras in the opening match but Australia opened the scoring in the first three minutes through Michael McCann.

Pakistan were level minutes before the break as Sohail Abbas scored from a penalty.

In the second half, Troy Elder made the difference for Australia, converting two penalty corners while Abbas responded with his second penalty.

Australian assistant coach Colin Batch paid tribute to "a quality team" that forced his side onto the back foot in the latter stages of the game.

"They made a lot of good saves from the good chances we created for ourselves and we had to defend at the end to secure the victory."

In the second match of the day, Germany got off to a flying start against the tournament hosts thanks to an individual goal by Tibor Weissenborn in the first five minutes.

He took the ball all the way from his own half into the Spanish circle to slide it past goalkeeper Bernardino Herrera from the left backline.

Despite their control and short passing, Spain were unable to break through the Germans' defence until five minutes before the final whistle when Santiago Freixa scored from a penalty corner.

German coach Bernhard Peters bemoaned his team's missed chances.

"In the second half we had three or four good chances to score the second goal but our young strikers were not calm enough in Spain's circle to capitalise on the chances, he said.

Meanwhile, Spain's Maurits Hendriks claimed his players had struggled to find their groove.

"In the first half we did not find our rhythm and this was reflected in the difficulty we had in finding the passes and the movement off the ball in the midfield," he said.

In the day's last day, three penalty corner conversions to Netherlands' Taeke Taekema helped seal a 4-2 score against Argentina.

Teun de Nooijer scored a brilliant individual goal to round off the Europeans' scoring while Pedro Ibarra and Lucas Cammareri found the net for the South Americans.

Vera shock for Serena

Tennis

AP, Mason

Vera Zvonareva ended Serena Williams' run in her first tournament in six months, beating the seven-time Grand Slam champion 6-2, 6-3 on Saturday to advance to the final of the Western & Southern Financial Group Women's Open.

Zvonareva, unseeded and ranked 52nd, will be making her second appearance in three years in the championship match of the Tier III event Sunday when she faces fourth-seeded Katarina Srebotnik, who upset defending champion Patty Schnyder 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (6).

"Two years ago, she was playing so well that I didn't get a chance to enjoy myself," Zvonareva said.

Williams committed 19 of her 34 unforced errors in the first set, while Zvonareva committed just six unforced errors in the match, none in the first set.

"I think the results are customary for somebody who makes that many unforced errors," said Williams, who expects to spend next week in training. "I was fighting, but my balls kept flying. Maybe I should've added more spin. I think I was just off today -- better now than three weeks from now. Every forehand, I think I was aiming at the ball kids or the umpire instead of the court."

Zvonera said: "I know Serena's a good player, and I knew I had to

really focus and not give her an opportunity to take over from the beginning of the match. I think she wasn't 100 percent ready to play her best today."

Williams, whose ranking dropped to 140th as she missed six months because of a chronic left knee injury, lost just 12 games in winning her first three matches of the tournament in straight sets.

Zvonareva, who was ranked No. 9 in August 2004, fell in the rankings last year while she battled injuries to her left ankle and right shoulder. She dropped just seven games while sweeping her first three matches.

"I expected to at least play on Sunday, but I guess Vera had her expectations, too," Williams said.

Zvonareva won the first five games of the match to take control of the first set and broke Williams to take a 2-0 lead in the second. Williams responded by breaking Zvonareva, but Zvonareva broke right back to take a 3-1 lead. They traded breaks again in the seventh and eighth games, with Zvonareva taking a 5-3 lead when Williams put a drop shot into the net on break point.

"It feels great," said Zvonareva, who has reached three finals this year. "To be in the finals is always a great feeling."

Zvonareva lost in the final of the Tier IV tournament at Auckland, New Zealand, in the year's first tournament and won the championship of the Tier III tournament at Birmingham, England, in June.

In the other semifinal Saturday,

the top-seeded Schnyder double-faulted twice during the tie-breaker, including on match point, when her second serve sailed long.

"Strange," Schnyder said. "I got a little tired. I don't know. My second serve is usually pretty reliable. That normally doesn't happen to me."

"Tiebreakers are like roulette," Srebotnik said. "Your back's against the wall. You have to take chances and hope you're lucky enough to win it."

Srebotnik, the world's 26th-ranked player, is in a final for the first time since losing to Klara Koukalova in Portoroz, Slovenia, last September.

Both players held serve until Srebotnik sent a crosscourt backhand wide on set point in the first set.

Schnyder received a warning from the chair umpire after she threw her racket twice and hit balls into the crowd twice while losing her serve in the fifth game of the second set. Srebotnik broke again in the ninth game to win the set.

Srebotnik broke Schnyder at love in the fourth game to take a 3-1 lead. Schnyder got back on serve by breaking Srebotnik in the seventh game to tie the set at 4.

"The third set, I started really well," Srebotnik said. "I felt like I didn't make any mistakes and I was up 4-1. Then she started playing more aggressively. She played an awesome three games, and when it got to four-all, you had to fight for every ball and every point."



Russian Vera Zvonareva is delighted after defeating Serena Williams in the semifinal of the Western & Southern Financial Group Women's Open tennis tournament in Mason on Saturday.