

Biman paddlers bag V-Day title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Biman clinched the men's team title in the Victory Day table tennis tournament when they blanked South East Club 3-0 in the final at the Woodenfloor gymnasium yesterday.

Ankhi of Lalbagh lifted the girls' U-16 single crown beating her teammate Sharmin 3-1 in the final while Palash of Sunnydale emerged the boys' U-16 champion with a 3-0 victory over his teammate Tanjir.

BDR first office league champs

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Rifles won the Design Zone First Office Handball League title defeating Bangladesh Police 32-16 in a one-sided final at the Outer Stadium handball court yesterday.

Man-of-the-tournament Khairuzzaman banged 12 goals while Saidduzzaman nine for the winners who led the first half 22-8.

Ruud lifts lid

FROM PAGE 20

Once the darling of Old Trafford, van Nistelrooy has now conceded that the manner of his eventual exit was 'tragic' as well as insisting that Ferguson should have treated him better.

"I do consider it kind of tragic," van Nistelrooy added.

"After all, Ferguson was the man who was there for me during my serious knee injury at PSV Eindhoven and even came to my sickbed.

"The way it all went down in the end does say something about the football world.

"But to me that does not permit you to treat people that way."

Pacesetters

FROM PAGE 20

Middlesbrough in a relegation battle.

Charlton have now gone 24 away matches without a victory.

Middlesbrough's win left West Ham United in the bottom three despite a battling 0-0 draw at Fulham. The struggling east London side, without an away goal since August, had Paul Konchesky sent off five minutes from time.

Muktijoddha

FROM PAGE 17

goalkeepers Aminul and Titumeer, defenders Hassan Al Mamun and Titu, medios Arman Mia, Saiful and Biddyt and forward Kanchan who all signed their contract for one year.

Centre-back Rajani, now in India, is expected to sign the documents as soon as he arrives.

Drug duo

FROM PAGE 17

Hamid also disagreed that Akhtar's decision not to sign a contract with the PCB could give him any leeway.

"Akhtar has not signed the latest contract, but he has signed an identical contract before and that contract in its provision is identical and under clause 3 of the contract he was bound not only by the PCB but by the ICC anti-doping policies as well," he added.

Hamid, however, refused to comment on the decision to exonerate the players.

"It is now for the CAS to decide," he said.

Bowlers toil

FROM PAGE 17

Needing to staunch the flow of runs, the Indians were forced to call back the likes of Zaheer and Munaf as the afternoon wore on. Munaf finally got Van Vuuren, brilliantly taken at slip by Laxman, and when Harbhajan Singh came on in the 54th over, an impetuous charge from Gobind presented Mahendra Singh Dhoni with a simple stumping.

By then he had made 88 from 128 balls, and the Indians gave him an ovation as the players trooped off the tea.

Harbhajan added two more wickets in the final session, and there was one for VRV Singh as well, as the Indians were forced to pull out all the stops in stifling conditions.

After the monotony of repeated net sessions though, this was one step closer to what awaits at Kingsmead on Boxing Day.

KP brands

FROM PAGE 17

But for all Pietersen's success against Warne, the spinner made amends when he bowled his Hampshire teammate around his legs in the second innings at Adelaide where his four-wicket haul turned what looked like a draw into a six-wicket win for Australia.

"The batsman might win the battle but never the war," Pietersen admitted. "It takes just one good ball or one stupid shot and it's 'See you later.'"

Gambhir, Patel to return



REUTERS, Durban

Pace bowler Munaf Patel is set to win back his place in the Indian team for the second Test against South Africa in Durban on Tuesday after recovering from an ankle injury.

Patel missed the last three one-day internationals and the first Test in Johannesburg after injuring his ankle in the second one-dayer in Durban on November 23.

He bowled in a match for the first time since hurting his ankle in a drawn two-day practice game against a KwaZulu-Natal Invitation XI in Durban on Saturday, taking two for 25 from eight overs.

India coach Greg Chappell said he had been heartened by Patel's performance.

"He's one of our top bowlers, so if he's fit he'll play," Chappell told Reuters on Sunday. "He seems to have pulled up all right today (Sunday), so it looks promising."

Dalmiya sinking fast



CRICINFO, undated

At the working committee meeting of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, two more nails, perhaps the final ones, were drilled into the coffin of Jagmohan Dalmiya, the former president of the Indian board and the ICC.

In a move that is widely being interpreted as a switching of loyalties, Brijesh Patel, a staunch Dalmiya loyalist, was given a post on a BCCI committee.

And perhaps more damningly, the representative of the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB), Saradindu Pal, said that his association respected the board's decision to expel Dalmiya.

"The CAB's secretary (Pal) told the board's working committee on Sunday that the CAB respects the board's decision (taken at Jaipur on December 16) by 29 votes in favour to expel Mr Dalmiya," N Srinivasan, the board's treasurer, and a man seen to be one of the driving forces behind the current regime's efforts to see the back of Dalmiya, told reporters in Mumbai.

"He (Pal) also said that Mr Dalmiya no longer functions as its president and an emergency meeting has been convened on the 27th (January) to take steps to implement the BCCI's decision," Srinivasan said.

With this, it appears that Dalmiya's fate in cricket administration in India is all but sealed, for the moment, at least.

Equally significant was the fact that Patel, the former Test batsman and currently president of the Karnataka State Cricket Association,

India will also consider selecting Gautam Gambhir to strengthen their top order.

Gambhir was not in the team who won the first Test by 123 runs in Johannesburg last Monday, India's first Test win in South Africa.

But after top-scoring with 79 in the practice match, Gambhir seems an appropriate replacement for the struggling Wasim Jaffer.

South Africa beat India by 157 runs in the one-day international in Durban on their way to a convincing 4-0 series triumph.

But India turned the tables dramatically with their win in Johannesburg and another victory in Durban would hand South Africa a third home series defeat in as many seasons following losses to England and Australia.

South African captain Graeme Smith acknowledged his team were feeling the heat.

"Our performance at home is something we really pride ourselves on, so not performing in a home Test match is always going to create pressure," Smith told a news confer-

ence.

"The public are quite demanding, which shows that they care. They want results."

Smith said he wanted an improved performance from spearhead Mahyaya Ntini, who looked lacklustre in the first Test despite taking six wickets.

"He (Ntini) would probably say that he wasn't at his best at the Wanderers," Smith said. "He's also a guy who needs to bowl a lot, and in one-day cricket he doesn't really get overs under his belt.

"But towards the end of our bowling in Johannesburg we was starting to hit his straps.

"He's a professional and he's come back from an ordinary Test match a few times, and there's no doubt in my mind that he will bounce back."

Smith said South Africa were likely to replace Herschelle Gibbs with AB de Villiers at the top of their batting order with Gibbs moving to number six.

was named on a BCCI committee. Outside of Bengal he was one of the few Dalmiya loyalists, and it was no coincidence that he was the only prominent member of the board not to get a posting in any of the board's 20-odd committees in the last AGM.

Patel is on the newly formed committee that will decide on how to disburse the funds the BCCI has allocated towards the development of other sports in India.

He is joined on this committee by MP Pandove of Punjab and Major SS Alhwalia from the Services. It's worth noting that no Ranji matches of either Karnataka or Bengal were to be telecast live when the BCCI announced its plans for the coverage of the current domestic season.

Karnataka remains one of the marquee teams in the domestic competition and Bengal were runners-up last year, and yet it was decided that none of their games would be shown live.

Patel's return to the fold helped along by the fact that a committee needed to be formed to decide on the requests from Abhinav Bindra, the shooter, and Karan Rastogi the Indian Davis Cup team member and upcoming tennis star, seeking financial assistance from the BCCI.

The board had received these requests in writing from the players themselves and not through the respective sporting federations.

It was then decided that the financial assistance would be disbursed directly to players who were in with a chance of Olympic medals. Although no formal policy has been laid down by the BCCI on how this will happen, the formation of a committee to deliberate on the issue is the first step towards concrete action.

With regard to more routine matters, it was decided cricket will not

be a part of the 2010 Commonwealth Games to be held in Delhi.

The working committee meeting of the board cited the Indian team's packed fixtures as the main reason. "The working committee discussed the invitation to take part in the 2010 Commonwealth Games and felt that the Future Tours Programme as it stands now is too crowded and would not lend itself to participate in the Games," Srinivasan said.

The meeting also decided to form a committee to finalise the parameters for the players' contracts. The committee comprises Inderjit Singh Bindra, president of the Punjab Cricket Association, Shashank Manohar, vice-president of the board, Niranjana Shah, honorary secretary of the BCCI, Ratnakar Shetty, the administrative head and Srinivasan.

"At this moment I can't say what the parameters will be but we will try to find the right balance," said Srinivasan. "The board members were concerned with the performance of the team and felt that players should be motivated to do well."

The meeting also did not discuss the nomination of Sharad Pawar, the BCCI president, for the post of ICC president.

However, Cricinfo has learned that the BCCI is "more likely to nominate than not nominate" Pawar for the post, by the January 1, 2007 deadline, in the words of a source.

When the BCCI held the CK Nayudu awards on November 4, the same day it inaugurated its new offices at the Wankhede Stadium, representatives of approximately 20 associate members of the ICC were invited to attend and a "majority" of them accepted and were present.

Curran under fire



CRICINFO, undated

Zimbabwe's recent poor results have led to renewed calls for Kevin Curran, the coach, to be replaced and also for more effort to be made to entice leading players who have walked away from the national game to return.

The latter seems increasingly unlikely as the World Cup draws closer, but the former is a growing possibility.

Curran has never been popular among some sections of the media and, so Cricinfo has learned, among certain players, but in fairness to him he has been faced with rebuilding a side decimated by internal squabbling and the much-publicised player exodus.

However, while defeats in South Africa and in the Champions Trophy were not unexpected, the way the side performed was not well received, and a 5-0 series whitewash in Bangladesh finally saw the veneer of acceptance

disappear.

Curran returned to Zimbabwe clearly unhappy with what had gone on in Bangladesh, and he added to potential discontent within the camp when he publicly called for some senior players to be axed for "playing wrong cricket at the wrong time".

Given the paucity of people knocking at the door for inclusion in the squad and his own fragile standing, it was not the most tactful of remarks.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe's Independent reported that Ozias Bvute, the board's managing director and a man not renowned for his cricketing pedigree, had offered his dollar's worth.

"The board will meet to review Zimbabwe's performances but we have a challenge ahead of the World Cup," he reportedly said.

"But in the true nature of being Zimbabwean, we believe no challenge is insurmountable." A less tactful source said it would be more accurate to say that Bvute was probably blissfully unaware of how bad things were rather than a born

optimist.

That view gathered credence when Bvute's comments about Zimbabwe's return to Test cricket in November 2007 was raised.

When the ICC feebly rolled over and agreed to them being readmitted a few months ago, it seemed a poor idea and one that stunk of compromise -- Peter Chingoka, the ZC president, may have many critics here, but he can smooth talk the world's cricket administrators to good effect.

"It's too early to rule out Zimbabwe's return to Test cricket," Bvute said.

"We have arranged a number of four-day matches and we'll assess the team's competitiveness in the long run. But our guys impressed in their last four-day game against Bangladesh, who people should admit are an improving side. Even Australia have struggled against them."

It may have escaped Bvute's notice, but Bangladesh were not anywhere near full strength as their main side were playing ODIs against Scotland at the time.

Aftab flays Abahani

FROM PAGE 17

eight Delwar Hossain to put up 163-8 before forcing Indira to finish on 113-6.

Partex also recorded their first win at the same venue with a six-wicket triumph against last round's surprise winner Kalabagan. Man-of-the-match Tariq Ahmed scored 31-ball 48 as Partex reached to 151-4 in 19.5 overs in reply to 147-6.

Today's matches: DOHS v Victoria (DCS), Biman v Partex (Fatullah), City v Kalabagan (BKSP) at 9am; Sonargaon v Mohammedan (DCS), Brothers v Pegasus (BKSP), Abahani v Indira Road (Fatullah) at 1pm.

SCORES IN BRIEF

MOHAMMEDAN: 115-9 in 20 overs (Imtiaz 12, Aftab 66, extras 6; Mashrafe 4-18, Ziaur 1-34, Manzarul 2-18).
ABAHANI: 106-9 in 20 overs

(Nazmus 16, Nazimuddin 26, Tushar 20, Manzarul 10, Mashud 15 not out, extra 1; Tapash 2-26, Sakib 3-17).
Result: Mohammedan won by 9 runs.

BIMAN: 127-5 in 20 overs (Raqibul 45, Javed 36, Shahadat 3-15).
OLD DOHS: 128-7 in 19.2 overs (Nadif 51, Mehrab 25, Mushfiqur 4-38).
Result: Old DOHS won by 3 wickets.

VICTORIA: 166-8 in 20 overs (Mabud 52, Faruk 37, Hasanuzzaman 24, Milon 20, extras 16; Kamrul 3-32, Sonnet 2-37, Farid 2-33).
CITY CLUB: 136-9 in 20 overs (Salahuddin 39, Nafees 10, Nipu 22, Tareq 21, extras 2; Wasel 2-30, Sajib 2-31).

Result: Victoria won by 30 runs.
BROTHERS: 120-9 in 20 overs (Shahriar 40, Hannan 21, Humayun

45, extras 5; Kapali 2-28, Rafique 2-15, Sharif 3-31).
SONARGAON: 121-6 in 19.5 overs (Al Shahriar 23, Kapali 56, extras 8; Taposh Gosh 3-19).
Result: Sonargaon won by 4 wickets.

KALABAGAN: 147-6 in 20 overs (Nahidul 55, Arafat 34 not out, extras 20; Azim 3-22).
PARTEX: 151-4 in 19.5 overs (Rajin 29, Arifur 46, Tariq 48, extras 9; Arafat 1-25, Rashedul 1-16, Reazul 1-16).

Result: Partex won by 6 wickets.
YOUNG PEGASUS: 163-8 in 20 overs (Karim 32, Delwar 33 not out, extras 11; Manwar 2-32, Saiful 2-26).
INDIRA ROAD: 113-6 in 20 overs (Rasel 41, Mehdi 20, extras 4; Delwar 2-7, Kamal 2-26).

Result: Young Pegasus won by 50 runs.

'Brian ahead of Sachin'

PTI, Melbourne

Glenn McGrath on Sunday named West Indies legend Brian Lara as the best batsman he ever bowled to in his international career, "just slightly ahead" of Sachin Tendulkar.

When asked to pick his toughest opponent in his 13-year-old career, McGrath picked Lara ahead of Tendulkar and said he was always driven to give his best when bowling against those two.

"To me it was always about how you went against the guys who were classed the best in the world," McGrath said here on Sunday after announcing he would quit international cricket after the World Cup in April next.

"I feel, personally, that on his day Brian Lara was probably the guy who was the standout, just slightly ahead of Sachin." Interestingly, McGrath has dismissed Lara 15 times in Tests, just four less than his biggest 'bunny' Michael Atherton whom he claimed 19 times. He dismissed Tendulkar six times.

The most successful fast bowler in Tests with 555 scalps, McGrath said his mental strength was his greatest asset.

"I feel what I actually did with the ball and the skill level -- there's a lot of other guys out there who had more skills to swing the ball, do well with the ball.

"My strengths were my accuracy, hitting that same spot, the bounce I'd get and the mental side of the game."

Lara to keep on playing

PTI, Melbourne

Retirements might be in vogue but West Indies batting legend Brian Lara appears in no mood to hang his boots now, saying he wants to play Test cricket for as long as he can.

The 37-year-old batsman however might consider quitting one-day cricket after the World Cup in his homeland in March-April next.

"I cut back on one-day cricket a couple of months ago because Test cricket is what I really love," said the West Indies skipper.

"Test cricket is the true test of your ability and that's the one game I'd love to play a bit longer. (Quitting one-day cricket) is looking that way. Since taking over the captaincy again, it has had an effect on me mentally and physically," said Lara who is holidaying in Australia.

Inter halfway

FROM PAGE 20

Inter went agonisingly close to levelling the score shortly after the break when Maxwell's low cross was nudged to the back post by Hernan Crespo, but Adriano's outstretched boot just failed to connect.

The Brazilian persevered and he finally ended his barren spell -- which dated back to March 29 when he netted against Villarreal in the Champions League -- diving low to head home Luis Figo's cross in the 65th minute.

Inter surged ahead 10 minutes later when another Figo cross was turned into his own net by Loria.

Play was briefly suspended as Atalanta fans fired Julio Cesar's goal hurling firecrackers onto the pitch, one of which almost hit the Inter keeper.

Julio Cesar pulled off a fine save to deny Massimo Donati and Maxwell cleared Ariatti's header off the goalline as Inter came under the cosh in the closing stages.

Roman bares

FROM PAGE 20

League, the FA Cup, the Carling Cup - I am interested in and just happy about. I don't have an opinion about Chelsea playing in a Super League. My feeling would be that you lose something of the beauty of the Premiership by joining something not defined at the moment. When Chelsea play a Carling Cup game in a small city and it could result in a draw - the excitement, the spirit, the atmosphere - that's the real beauty of football in England."

The 40-year-old portrayed himself as a genuine fan. "Something that really disappoints me is when Chelsea lose. I cannot stand it. Winning the first Premiership was a moment of happiness and I could talk about that for ages. This is a joy very different for Chelsea fans who'd been waiting for this victory for 50 years. I was very happy for myself, not only because Chelsea won the Premiership, but because the victory made so many other Chelsea fans happy. Being an observer to that made me happy."

He also reassured the fans that he is here to stay. "People who know me said I will win one or two Premierships and will not be interested after that. The reality is that we've won two Premierships, but I'm more excited about this particular season than last year or the year before. I am a fan of special nature. I'm getting excited before every single game. The trophy at the end is less important than the process itself."

Aus plan fitting farewell



AFP, Melbourne

Australia go into the fourth Ashes Test beginning Tuesday seeking to remain on track for a series whitewash that would be a fitting farewell to retiring bowlers Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath.

Both Warne, 37, Test cricket's greatest wicket-taker, and McGrath, 36, third in the Test bowling rankings, announced last week that they would retire from Test cricket at the end of the current Ashes series.

With Australia already holding an unassailable 3-0 lead to regain the Ashes, the departure of the two bowlers has given the home side added impetus to complete a clean sweep in the final two Tests.

Warne is poised to become the first bowler to capture 700 Test wickets in the fourth Test, needing just one wicket in his 144th Test before his hometown fans at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG).

Warne, who has tormented England batsmen with 186 wickets in 34 Tests over 13 years, is expected to receive an emotional send-off in Melbourne and Sydney as the Australians vie to emulate Warwick Armstrong team's 5-0 Ashes sweep here 85 years ago.

The showpiece Test of Australian cricket is likely to create a new world record for a single day's attendance with all tickets sold for Boxing Day to surpass the 90,800 for the second day of the fifth Test against the West Indies at the MCG in February 1961.

Warne says the job is half-finished as Ricky Ponting's Aussies eye another humiliation

of England.

"As far as I'm concerned we've got two Test matches to play and I just want to finish the series on a high," Warne said.

"I think if we can win 5-0 that would be a fantastic achievement for a great team."

With team departures dominating headlines ahead of the Melbourne Test, coach John Buchanan said he would work on keeping his team focused on beating England.

"With a range of news around us it might be a bit of a distraction but hopefully we are a better team than that," Buchanan said Friday.

"That's something we will talk about at training dealing with the distractions that will continue over the next two Test matches, and really try to finish on a high note.

"Our mission here is not only to win the Ashes but also establish a huge gap between us and England."

Australia took just 15 days to seize the urn off England, rebounding spectacularly from last year's series loss in England where it relinquished the Ashes after 16 years' ownership.

The much-anticipated series has been a huge let-down with Australia romping to massive wins over Freddie Flintoff's England team in Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.

Australia has only been dismissed twice in six innings highlighting England's inability to take 20 wickets after terminating the Australians' innings eight times in the 2005 series.

The sorry England performance has triggered recriminations with coach Duncan Fletcher under intense scrutiny over the team's preparation and selec-

tions amid conjecture that his job will be under review.

One casualty is likely to be wicketkeeper Geraint Jones, who registered a pair of ducks in Perth and has scored only 63 runs at 10.50 in the series. Chris Read is expected to be behind the stumps in the fourth Test.

Skipper Flintoff is determined his side will bounce back in the Melbourne and Sydney Tests.

"It hurts a lot, but we have to get over it (losing Ashes) and we've got two big Test matches still to play," he said.

"There are a lot of lads who want to prove they can win a Test match in Australia and prove they can play against Australia."

The Ashes series may be over as a contest but that hasn't dampened an insatiable appetite for cricket fans with officials anticipating a record attendance for an entire Test.

With attendances of 95,000 likely over the opening three days' play the record of 350,354 -- set in the vast arena in the third Test of the 1936-37 Ashes series in the Don