

Sport

Acme youth hockey

Three teams — Faridpur, Dhaka Education Board and BKSP — won their respective matches in the Acme 17th national youth hockey championship at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday. In the first match, Faridpur DSA smashed Sylhet DSA 7-0 goals after leading the first half 3-0.

Mizanur Rahman netted three goals while Firoz Miah scored two and Tarique Islam one for the winners.

In the second match, Dhaka Education Board defeated Rangpur DSA 6-3 goals after leading the first half 2-1.

Selim made a hat-trick for the winners while Shakil, Rashed and Emom netted one goal each.

Mahsin, Jamal and Moinul scored one goal each for the losers.

In the day's last match, BKSP earned a massive 7-0 goal victory over Rajshahi DSA after dominating the first half 2-0.

Maksum Alam of BKSP made a hat-trick while Imtiaz and Mazarul netted two goals each.

Shane's being realistic about Boxing Day

MELBOURNE, Dec 15 (Reuters/ Internet): Shane Warne said on Tuesday his hopes of playing in the fourth Ashes cricket Test against England were fading.

Leg-spin bowler Warne has not played in any of the first three Ashes Tests as he continues his comeback from shoulder surgery in May.

Warne has taken just six wickets at the unflattering average of 62.83 in three appearances for Victoria in Sheffield Shield competition since his return and admits time is running out.

"It is getting a bit tight for Boxing Day," Warne said of the Test, which starts on December 26 in Melbourne.

"I've only got one game before now and then and I guess

go in that next game."

Victoria take on New South Wales in Sheffield Shield match in Sydney, starting on Saturday.

It is another blow for the Australian leg spinner, whose standing has been tarnished by the bookmaker scandal involving him and fellow Australian cricketer Mark Waugh.

Warne said he had not given up hope of playing some role in this international season.

"I'm trying to get back as soon as I can," he said. "I've just got to be patient with it, keep bowling and when I'm right I will make myself available for selection."

Australia has already secured the Ashes for the sixth consecutive series without the man who is one of only two Australians to take 300 Test wickets. The West Indies tour in late February is now looking like a more realistic goal for Warne.

But his replacements, leg-spinning understudy Stuart McGill and veteran Colin Miller, have been major contributors to the home side's unbeatable 2-0 lead.

Barca to keep Van Gaal

BARCELONA, Dec 15 (Reuters/ Internet): Coach Louis van Gaal won the backing of Barcelona's board of directors on Monday following a three-hour meeting to discuss the Dutchman's future.

Van Gaal's position had been placed in doubt after a fourth successive league defeat against Villarreal Sunday left the club 10th in the Spanish first division, nine points behind its leaders Mallorca.

A crowd of 70,000 waved white handkerchiefs in the traditional Catalan protest and chanted for van Gaal and president Josep Lluis Nunez to go as the club now sits in its worst position in the table for 19 years.

But the Barcelona board decided at its scheduled monthly meeting on Monday to ignore those calls for change, opting instead to back Van Gaal.

Juventus eyes on Dugarry

MARSEILLE, France, Dec 15 (Reuters/ Internet): French World Cup striker

Christophe Dugarry could return to Italy to play for Juventus despite a previous unhappy spell in Serie A with AC Milan and his current success at Olympique Marseille.

Although Marseille deny having been approached by Juventus, looking for cover for the injured Alessandro Del Piero, Dugarry said on Tuesday: "The only thing I can say is that, in fact, they are interested. But for the time being it is uncertain."

Marseille coach Rolland Courbis said: "There has not been the slightest approach from Juventus."

But he did not rule out the French club considering a good offer from the Italians, saying: "It depends on the price, the possibility of replacing Christophe Dugarry and the player's choice."

Courbis said he was sure Dugarry was on a list of players who could interest

Juventus and that Dugarry's friend Zinedine Zidane, the Turin side's playmaker, would push for the striker to be signed.

Dugarry said he would not be against a third foreign experience despite spending the greater part of his time at Milan and then Barcelona over the last two seasons sitting on the bench.

Indians warm up well



WELLINGTON, Dec 15 (Reuters/ Internet): An unfinished partnership of 146 between Rahul Dravid and elegant left-hander Saurav Ganguly sped India to a morale-boosting eight-wicket win over Wellington on Tuesday.

It was the last match before the tourists' first Test against New Zealand, starting on Friday in Dunedin.

India began the final day of the four-day match at 30 for one, needing another 144 to win. They had trailed the province by 49 runs after the first innings, but clinched the match on Tuesday in the second over after lunch.

Ganguly, who dispelled a crisis in the first innings with a score of 93, was unbeaten the second with 79. Dravid, who came in on Monday when Wellington's bowlers were on top, was 66 not out.

The only blow India suffered on the final day came in the fourth over when Venkat Laxman, until then very circumspect, rose to the bait of a bouncer from Carl Balfin and hooked to be caught at long leg.

On a clear morning, Wellington's two main seam bowlers, Balfin and Robert Kennedy, found conditions less helpful than on the previous evening, when the ball moved about quite freely. But they stuck to their task with steady line and length.

And he dismissed any concerns about lack of runs from Navjod Sidhu and skipper Mohan Singh Azharuddin.

Despite this, 51 runs were scored from 14 overs in the first hour. Ganguly and Dravid were skilful at placing the ball and kept the scoreboard ticking with singles.

Runs were more abundant when Mark Jefferson, the left-arm spinner, came on after the drinks break.

At one stage, Ganguly hit three fours and a six off successive balls. It was during this flurry of brilliant shots that the left-hander passed his second 50 of the match, scored off only 63 balls.

At the finish, he had faced 77 and hit nine fours and a six.

Dravid, whose main role was that of anchor, batted more steadily until Wellington captain Roger Twose, with defeat inevitable, withdrew his front-line bowlers and put on the part-timers, including himself.

Dravid made hay at their expense and had 10 fours in his 66, which was made off 98 balls.

The 136 runs that the pair put on came off only 148 balls, and that despite a quiet start.

India's coach, former Test batsman Anshuman Gaekwad, highlighted the difference with his team's batting performance in the opening match at Napier.

"At last we managed to free ourselves from the habits of one day cricket and get into Test cricket mode. Our batting is quite ready for the Test match."

And he dismissed any concerns about lack of runs from Navjod Sidhu and skipper Mohan Singh Azharuddin.

Akram longing to tour India

LAHORE, Dec 15: Pakistan's ace pace bowler Wasim Akram said today he was eager to play in India, as cricket officials prepared to leave for the neighbouring country to finalise a schedule, reports AFP.

"I love playing at Calcutta and New Delhi, people applaud every good performance. Eden Gardens is one of the liveliest places to play cricket," he said.

Wasim, who was in the team that last toured India in 1987, said he reckoned Sachin Tendulkar as the best batsman in the world.

"I don't have to say anything, his record speaks of his greatness and it is always a challenge bowling at him," Wasim said.

A delegation of cricket officials was due to leave for India later in the day following a go-ahead by the two governments despite threats from Hindu fundamentalists to disrupt the tour.

The two teams have not played a Test series for nine years amid tense political ties between the neighbours.

Pakistan and India have played one-day internationals in Sharjah, Canada, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Dhaka but their last Test series was in Pakistan in 1989-90.

The Pakistani team participated in India's Independence Cup while India paid a reply trip to play three-day internationals last year.

"Besides taking most wickets in Test cricket my other wish is to tour India, I will love to bowl Sachin Tendulkar there," Wasim said.

"I don't know what the politicians think but I have always enjoyed playing and touring India without any fear, the people there have a sound knowledge of the game."

"It's unfortunate that we are restricted to playing on neutral grounds, it's time we sort out the problem," Wasim said.

Leeds earn full points

LONDON, Dec 15: Leeds United beat Coventry City 2-0 at Elland Road in a full-blooded match on Monday night to move into third place in the English Premier League.

David Hopkin scored his first goal of the season for Leeds in the 40th minute after Australia's Harry Kewell and Irish international Ian Harte had carved open the Coventry defence.

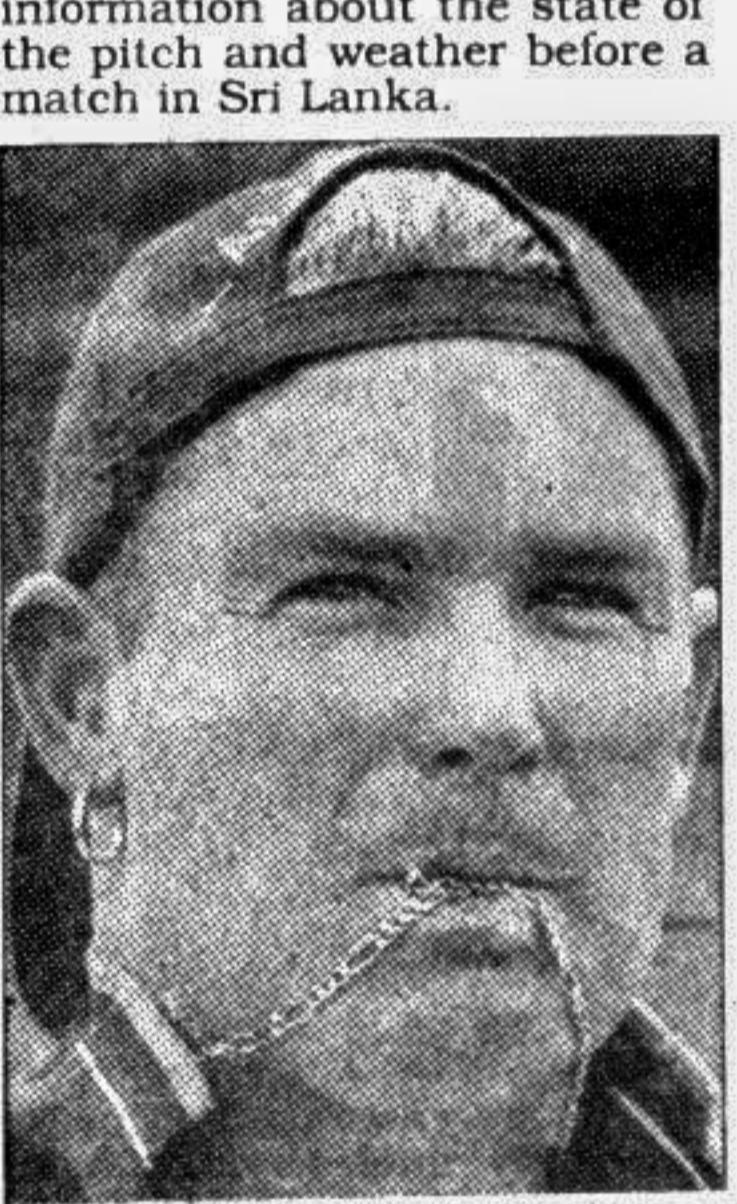
Lee Bowyer made it four goals in his last three matches when he slotted past Swede Magnus Hedman to sew it up 2-0 in the final minute.

England midfielder David Batty made his debut for Leeds after re-joining them last week from Newcastle, and was booked after just five minutes for a late sliding tackle on the greasy pitch.

However, Taylor said the final decision on whether Waugh and Warne would give further evidence rested with the two players.

"From the transparency point of view, I think everyone knows what is going on now. As far as I know, the full story is out now," he said.

Taylor said it was up to the Pakistani judge to decide whether the admissions by Waugh and Warne over the bookmaker scandal had affected the credibility of the earlier evidence.



The players were fined 19,000 Australian dollars (11,400 U.S.) for the offence which came just before the tour of Pakistan during which Warne, Waugh and off-spinner Tim May revealed that Salim Malik offered them 20,000 U.S. dollars each to throw a match in 1994.

"That's probably the way to go," he said Tuesday.

"Nothing has changed. The same thing still happened -- he offered us money to throw a game and we said no," Warne said of the Malik affair.

He expected the ABC to decide on whether they would testify in the next 48 hours.

But captain Mark Taylor said on Tuesday it was unlikely Warne and Waugh would travel to Pakistan to appear before a hearing and match-fixing inquiry.

Taylor said he believed it was unnecessary for Warne and Waugh to return to Pakistan as they had given all their evidence. "There is no change to that evidence that was given some six or eight weeks ago," Taylor said. "So the evidence that anyone can give now would only be very much along the same lines as that," he said.

The only thing that has happened between then and now is we know that Mark and Shane have taken a certain amount of money from a bookmaker in Sri Lanka in a bookmaker.

"Yes, Mark and I were involved with a bookmaker but nothing has changed between

what happened between Salim Malik, myself, Mark Waugh and Tim May," Warne said.

Waugh said he was annoyed his indiscretion had been linked to match-fixing.

"I think the thing that has most disappointed me is the link between what we did and match-fixing, which is two completely separate issues," Warne said.

"That seems to have got lost a little over the past week."

Since the news broke Warne has lost lucrative contracts with both The Mirror newspaper in London and The Age newspaper in Melbourne and there has been talk he could lose the vice-captaincy of the Australian limited-overs side.

But he said, "I've still got a smile on my dial."

"There is a lot of talk going around but so what, there is always going to be rumour and innuendo."

"I'm still the same person I have been for 29 years and people that are close to me still know what sort of person I am."

"But in these sorts of situations I suppose you work out who your real friends are, who aren't and who is on your side and who isn't."

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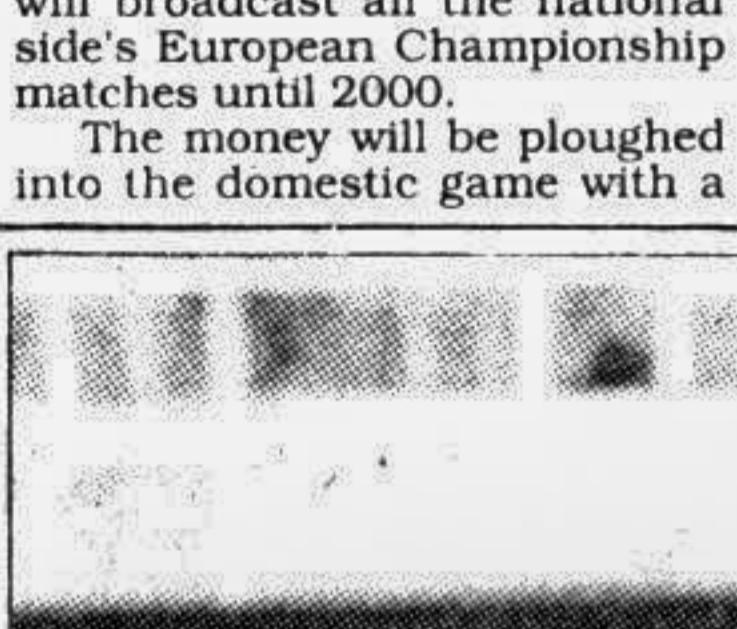
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