

Stargazing at Bangabandhu

Zakaria Simon



Any big event, and the Test final at the Bangabandhu is no mean one, sends the adrenaline pumping to the extent of often bringing out the exceptional among men of premium quality. Dhaka and the world will be watching closely the events at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. And in the five days to come, one or two will emerge the better amongst the best. Both Pakistan and Sri Lanka have a number of world greats and also some stars that have just begun to twinkle. Only time will tell, which group will provide the star of the Dhaka Test. As an appetiser, we offer samplers from both sides; stars who have already made the grade.

SAEED ANWAR

In the game of cricket when the job is to score runs, Saeed Anwar's name can be found in the upper echelon of a list of batsmen who are best in doing so. The short and skinny Pakistani opener may not be an imposing figure but his occupancy of the crease means the scoreboard will find itself in motion. Once the Karachi-born left-hander gets going, runs seem very easy to come by. A sweet timer of the ball, Anwar has even command on both sides of the wicket and all the grace of a traditional left-hander. And after being in and out of the Pakistan team in the early days of his career, he has now become an indispensable member. His records testify to his talents. After an uncertain start to his career, Anwar has accu-



mulated 3,027 runs from 68 innings in 40 Test matches at an average of 45.86. He also has eight centuries and 18 fifties under his belt. His highest score is 188 not out.

But over the years, Anwar, a national side member for almost a decade, has proven to be a player who performs his best only when in the right frame of mind.

Still, Anwar is the type of a batsman one would not hesitate spend money to watch and the followers of the game in this country would be expecting him to rise to the occasion.



CHAMINDA VAAS

Chaminda Vaas has in many ways been the architect-in-chief of Sri Lanka's recent upsurge in the international arena. His incisive left-arm pace bowling, which has invited comparisons with Wasim Akram, albeit somewhat prematurely, has given the Sri-Lankan attack the bite that was sorely missing previously. Vaas became the first Sri Lankan to take 10 wickets in a Test match in 1994-95, and at 25, a veteran of 27 Tests, he still thinks himself as a learner of the game. The Colombo-born player, who plays for Colts Cricket Club, has 84 wickets to his name at an average of 30.65 with one ten-wicket and four five-wicket hauls. His best figures are six for 87.

Vaas clearly has much to give to the future of Sri Lankan cricket and the Asian championship final here in Dhaka.

MAHELA JAYAWARDENA

Born on the 27th of May in 1977, Mahela Jayawardena is in the genesis of his career. The Colombo-born batsman has so far played only eight Test

matches and already entered a high society of batsmen by scoring a double century just in his seventh Test -- the second fixture of the Asian Test Championship in Colombo. The right-hander, who plays domestic cricket for Sinhalese Sports Club, made 694 runs from 12 innings at an average of 57.83 with two hundreds and four half-centuries.

But what the youngster



showed during his 242 last month against India is that he has a strong approach towards the game and that again could serve the Sri Lankan purpose in this final.

SHOAIB AKHTAR

"The fastest bowler in the world will be making his Test debut tomorrow", said the Pakistan captain about Shoaib Akhtar after the bowler was



called up by the selectors for the second Test against West Indies at Rawalpindi in 1997. But the speedster could not do justice to his captain's comments then. And until the first match of the Asian Test Championship in Calcutta last month, his performance had been pretty ordinary in the international arena other than a five-wicket haul -- his best so far -- in South Africa against the hosts last year. However, in the Asian Test at Calcutta his two furious consecutive deliveries that uprooted the leg and middle stumps of Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar, made him a hero overnight. Consequently, the Rawalpindi lad is being considered by many to be a decisive factor for his team in the final of the championship.

This 24-year-old pacesman has an inherent capability to generate ferocious speed on par with the world's fastest. Moreover, to make himself more of a fast bowler he has already added variety in his deliveries and this adaptability has helped him to become a lethal bowler by now.

Young and brimming with zeal and talent, Dhaka could be a perfect place for Shoaib to reign in pace.

U-21 snooker

Sajjad keeps title

Syed M Sajjad of Dhaka Club won the national U-21 snooker championship for the fourth time defeating Ashique Aziz of Dhaka Billiard Centre 6-3 (7/57, 60/63, 57/50, 55/39, 41/50, 75/52, 50/52, 51/43 & 60/12) held at the Dhaka Club yesterday, says a press release.

Earlier in the semifinals, Sajjad defeated compatriot Ziaur Rahman Azad 5-3 and Ashique had to use all his skill to beat Numayer Mahub of Dhaka Club 5-4.

In the third place playoff, Ziaur had 3-1 easy win against Numayer.

Kabadi in 8th SAF Games

KATHMANDU, Mar 11: This year's South Asian Federation (SAF) Games will host events in 12 fields, including the regional sport of kabadi, host Nepal's top sports body, the Nepal Sports Council said Wednesday, reports AFP.

"We have chosen twelve sports events for the forthcoming 8th SAF Games scheduled to be held between September 25 to October 4, 1999 in Kathmandu," South Asia Sports Federation president and Nepal Olympic Committee president Rukma Shumsher Rana said.

BEYOND THE BOUNDARY

RULES, LAWS AND VIDEOTAPES

Shakil Kasem



Cricket was always considered the last frontier in sports. It was one of the few games, is not the only one, which was governed by Laws, not Rules. It was the only game where each shot had its own name. It was the only game where the people who played were referred to as Gentlemen and Players, unlike other games where you could call them amateurs and professionals. In the not so olden days, when an individual turned pro, the public address system at English country grounds were wont to announce, "Today Cowdrey has become a Player, and so has ceased to be a Gentleman. He will from now on be referred to as MC Cowdrey, and not Cowdrey, MC." The times began to change.

It is said that the only permanent thing in life is change. So it was with cricket: the bastions of the once great and noble game crumbled with the Packer Series, and from then on the Ferris wheel of cricket fortunes began turning so furiously that cricket remained cricket no longer. No longer did cricketers get out of bed to don their flannels and play a match. They began to drive to the grounds, and THEN don their coloured pyjamas to play

a match. No longer was it the red cherry flying across the lush green outfield. It was (horror of horrors!!) a WHITE ball speeding across the sponsor's logo at long on. No longer did the batsman pull his cap down rakishly over one eye, as he squinted into the sun at extra cover. Now the LIGHTS (?) are all user-friendly. The dialectics and sociology of night cricket have turned the game around. The times have definitely changed.

No longer do umpires raise the fingers to signal a dismissal: they now draw a hollow box in the air. No longer is it the prerogative of host countries to hold their best umpires: neutral umpires now have to be imported. Dictionaries are being rewritten, and Webster is agast because the term "umpire" actually MEANT neutral. The times have indeed changed.

Test cricket was all about the conscious transcending the subconscious. It was a never ending sequence of happenings in a cricket match played at the highest level over a prescribed period of time. It was time versus energy, where only one or the other could fashion an outcome or determine a result. It was not meant to be charted or segmented into compartments for runs or wickets. Test cricket was not meant to be graded by points. Cricket was always a game of chance, because it begins with a toss. I went through the rules for the present format, and it seems that, when nothing else works, it is supposed to end with a toss. I can't take any such changes anymore. But we live and learn as we grow older and wiser. And so it must be.

There is talk now of how the game needs to be revamped and how the poor, long-suffering,

paying public should be given their just desserts, by way of massive doses of excitement lurking in every nook and cranny of test cricket. Bonus points and outright wins are the jargon of today. So also are bets, bribes and match-fixing. There is talk of the Lahore match, that a team that "should not" be in the final has reached the rarefied atmosphere by default, totally discounting the fact that the team which "should have" been there had choked when the chips were down.

There is talk also that the point system be revised. How? Perhaps we could introduce a jackpot over, say the 66th, where if the batting side can hit three consecutive sixes, it earns two extra batting points. Or, say, in the 82nd over, if the bowling side gets two wickets in consecutive balls, it also bags two extra points. We can get carried away here and suggest that three diving catches by the keeper in an innings count for power play and three points. Or maybe even ... The possibilities are endless.

But the framers of these rules have, in their time, played their cricket in quite the fashion that most dictionaries would term dour. Results were the farthest item on their cricket agenda. Great players they may have been, but not great enough surely to play god to this game. The world used to be amazed at the way they played the fastest of all bowling with the dead meant of the bat standing on tiptoe. There would in all likelihood be a collective hush, and collective oohs and aahs, as the ball would drop dead at their feet, mocking the vultures clustered around the batting crease.

They were also those who wheeled their arms over looping the ball in the air, pulling it back and forth with nobody beyond thirty yards from the bat. And not a run would be scored. And there were those like me, who were prepared to walk miles, spend a fortune and sit for hours transfixed by such spectacles.

Lata Mangeshkar cannot be asked for obvious reasons to sing her songs attired in leotards, nor can Shweta Shetty romp around in a Kanjeevaram. But they have their own slots and their own prime time ratings. Each in their own way. Why ask them to change? Does art imitate life, or does life imitate Jagmohan Dalmiya? Should I ask?

These gentlemen in question are, I understand, in Dhaka at the moment, perhaps only a three iron distance from where I am, but do I dare or do I dare? That's another story.



Sri Lanka's star batsman Mahela Jayawardena (L) is being attended to by the team physio after hurting his wrist during practice at the Bangabandhu Stadium yesterday.

—Star photo by Anisur Rahman

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