

## Nat'l cricket Final round starts from March 17

The final round of the National Cricket Championship will take place for the first time at four venues of the country from March 17, reports BSS.

Thirteen teams will play in four groups at four venues on knock-out basis. The group champions will play in the semifinals in Dhaka.

The teams are: Bangladesh Biman, Faridpur, Khulna, Dinajpur, Dhaka University, Jessore, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Mymensingh, Barisal, Narayanganj, Sylhet and Comilla.

All the final rounds matches and the semifinals will be three-dayers while the final will be a four-day match.

The semifinals and the final will take place in Dhaka.

### FIXTURES

**Mar 17-19:** Bangladesh Biman vs Faridpur at Rajshahi.

Mymensingh vs Barisal at Sylhet.

Sylhet vs Comilla at Mymensingh.

**Mar 19-21:** Jessore vs Rajshahi at Kushtia.

**Mar 20-22:** Khulna vs Dinajpur at Rajshahi.

**Mar 21-23:** Chittagong vs winners of Mymensingh and Barisal at Sylhet. Narayanganj vs winners of Sylhet and Comilla at Mymensingh.

**Mar 23-25:** Dhaka University vs winners of Jessore and Rajshahi at Kushtia.

**Mar 24-26:** Winners of Biman and Faridpur vs winners of Khulna and Dinajpur.

## Nash hopes for an upset

CHRISTCHURCH, Mar 15: New Zealand captain Dion Nash said today his side was lucky to be level with South Africa after drawing the first two Tests despite conceding 1,063 runs for just six wickets, reports Reuters.

"The statistics don't look very good and obviously we've had problems taking wickets," said

finished their second innings on 127 for one.

"But, thanks to the weather here, we are still level and that gives us a chance going into the last Test," Nash said.

Immediately after Monday's draw, New Zealand selection chief Ross Dykes announced an unchanged squad of 12 for the Thursday decider.

But left-arm seamer Shayne O'Connor looks set to replace fellow left-arm Geoff Allott, who has taken a disappointing one wicket for 262 runs in the first two Tests.

"Taking wickets is our priority at the moment so Shayne O'Connor is certainly still in the equation," Nash said.

South African captain Hanse Cronje said he ruled the loss of 212 overs of the second Test to bad weather but there was little his side could have done to change the outcome.

"Maybe we batttered a little too slowly on the second day (when South Africa scored 175 runs in 77 overs) but we didn't know we were going to lose so much time," he said.

"I think we accelerated the scoring well on Day Four but the rain won in the end."

South Africa declared at their overnight 442 for one, leaving the home side 274 runs behind, but Cronje said he considered declaring several times in the penultimate afternoon.

The possibility of bad light was always there so we thought our best bet was to build a big lead and hope for good weather on the fifth day," he said.

But rain delayed start of play until 1:40 pm on the final day, leaving time for only 60 overs, instead of the scheduled 100.

The tourists are also likely to make just one change for the third Test, a straight swap between Steve Elworthy and Allan Donald who has a torn stomach muscle.

"Allan is struggling with the injury," Cronje said. "It's a race against time."

"In fact, it's a race against time to have him ready for the last three one-dayers at the end of the tour," he said.

## Inter's ticket warning for fans

MILAN, Mar 15 (Reuters/Internet): Inter Milan told fans on Monday that any tickets still on sale for Wednesday's European Cup tie against Manchester United could well be forged.

The warning followed the arrest in Naples on Friday of three men suspected of printing 5,145 bogus tickets for the quarter-final second leg tie at Milan's San Siro stadium.

"Our advice is to not buy tickets outside the ground," an Inter spokesman said. "All official tickets have been sold so if there are tickets in circulation they could well be forgeries."

"It's important to stress this for both Italian and English fans," he said. "Italian police have already arrested three people in connection with producing false tickets."

All 80,000 tickets have been sold for the tie, Inter's biggest match of the season so far.

Some 3,500 have been sold to travelling United fans through official channels but additional English fans are expected to travel to Italy in the hope of buying black market tickets.

Italian media have said 1,000 such English supporters will descend on Milan while British reports have suggested the figure could be as high as 7,000.

A police spokeswoman in the city said her office would only reveal details of plans to monitor the match on Tuesday. She declined further comment.



MEMORABILIA: Pakistan speedster Shoaib Akhtar grabs a piece of history (a stump used in the final). —Star photo by Anisur Rahman

## Almanac of a distinct star

Hasan Masood

How eventful have been the last four weeks for Pakistan skipper Wasim Akram? It began with the inaugural Asian Test championship match between India and Pakistan at the Eden Gardens on February 16 and concluded with him receiving the trophy at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on March 15.

The world's best left-arm fast bowler inserted his name in different pages of the history book during this momentous period of his life.

It began with an outright 46-run emphatic win over arch rivals India in that opening match that concluded on March 20 at an empty Eden Gardens following crowd violence that spread over two days. With that historic win, the tall 33-year-old Brian became the first captain in five tries to win an India-Pakistan match at the Eden Gardens.

Then came the second match against Sri Lanka that began at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore from March 4. In that he earned the distinction of becoming the first Pakistani to get a hat trick in Test cricket since his country began playing at the highest level of cricket at the Firoze Shah Kotla, Delhi, against India in October 1952.

In that match Wasim bowled three Sri Lankan tailenders—Bandaranaike (0), Wickremasinghe (0) and Sajeewa de Silva (8)—out in three successive balls in the first innings to help Pakistan get full four bonus points.

To follow it up, last Sunday, Wasim went on to get his second hat trick in as many matches forcing Sri Lanka to nine for three wickets in their second innings on the third day of the final. This time he looked happier as he got the wickets with the new ball and against two top order bats—Avishka Gunawardene (0) and Mahela Jayawardene (1). Nightwatchman Wasim stepped into history as the winning captain of the world's first ever Test Championship.

With this rare treble, Wasim became only the third person in cricket history, after Australians T.J. Matthews and H. Trumble, to earn two Test hat tricks. Wasim, with that three wickets, captured a total of 15 in the Championship and earned the man-of-the-championship award.

"I am definitely feeling very proud, specially with my boys and the way they responded throughout the tournament. Specially after we had one bad year, they really came back well. We played well against India. We worked hard and at the end we got the result," said a beaming Wasim Akram after defeating Sri Lanka by an innings and 175 runs in the final yesterday.

"We had one bad year before I took over once again. Every team goes through a lean patch. The boys wanted to win themselves. Although I said two years back that I would never lead Pakistan again, it was they who really wanted me as their captain and I am very proud the way they responded."

"After today's victory, the whole team is excited. I want to personally congratulate every member of my team," said Wasim.

When asked what was the motivation behind Pakistan performing well this year, the Pakistan captain said that it all began with their series against India.

"After winning the Asian Test Championship, now obviously the World Cup is coming ahead. Before that we have two one-day tournaments in India and Sharjah that is pushing us to win," added Wasim.

"I always believed that Pakistan can win at any stage with our so much of potentials. We were 26 for 6 at Calcutta, but then we won that match. We have a lot of talented players in the side, who are capable of turning the fate of a match in favour of their country from any stage and that's our main recipe of success," said Wasim.

Wasim also praised the Bangladeshi crowd and supported the idea of holding the final at a neutral venue.

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