

**Close contest on the cards?**

LONDON, June 3 (AFP): If Australia's World Cup match against India at The Oval on Friday sticks to precedent, it should be a close affair.

And if it does go down to the wire, bank on Australian grit to pull them through.

The two sides have met six times in the tournament, with two of those games being decided by a single run — the smallest victory margin in World Cup history.

Both times it was the Australians who snatched the spoils.

In 1987 in Madras, their heroes were Geoff Marsh, the current team coach — and Craig McDermott, the former making 110 out of Australia's 270 for six and the latter taking four wickets as India fell just short.

In 1992 in Brisbane the margin was repeated. This time Australia had set a target of 237 for nine as Dean Jones made 90. The target was revised to 235 and, despite Mohammad Azharuddin's 93, India fell 22 yards shy again.

Tom Moody — who is likely to play against Azharuddin on Friday — took three for 56.

The most recent Australia-India encounter, in 1996 in Bombay, was another nail-biter. Again Australia batted first, their 258 built around Mark Waugh's 126. This time India fell 16 runs short. Sachin Tendulkar's 90 was cancelled out by Damin Fleming's five for 36.

Australia have won four of the six games against India.

**Bosnich returns to Old Trafford**

MANCHESTER, June 3: Australian international goalkeeper Mark Bosnich on Wednesday completed his move to European Cup holders Manchester United from Aston Villa on a free transfer, reports AFP.

The 27-year-old was unveiled at an Old Trafford news conference after agreeing a four-year contract with the club where he began his career as a teenager almost 10 years ago.

**Give cricket**

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tic plan to show the harmony in sporting arena is yet to be materialised. And the future of Bangladesh cricket remains uncertain as the NSC gave the authority of the Dhaka Stadium to football federation.

Few might claim that cricketers have got enough rewards, but they seem to forget that incentives are not rewards. A reward is something special. And a ground, most preferably the Bangabandhu National Stadium, will be the most appropriate reward for cricket.

Now another moment has come to evaluate cricket and cricketers, who have done the success-lorn nation immensely proud. And the premier, an ardent cricket fan, has got yet another big occasion to do justice to the promise she made earlier.

The cricketing fraternity will be waiting for a justice to be done.



The Bangladesh cricket team with Queen Elizabeth during a reception for the players taking part in the World Cup at the Buckingham Palace on June 2. —AFP photo

**Medvedev, Meligeni in last four**

PARIS, June 3: Andrei Medvedev, back in love and back in love with tennis, continued to turn around what once seemed a doomed career when he trounced Gustavo Kuerten in straight sets on Wednesday and advanced to the men's singles semifinals at the French Open, reports AFP.

The unseeded 24-year-old from the Ukraine beat the eighth seed and former champion 7-5, 6-4, 6-4 in just a shade over two hours to advance to a Grand Slam semi for the first time since he did it here six years ago.

Medvedev will now play another Brazilian after unseeded left-hander Fernando Meligeni beat sixth-seeded Spaniard Alex Corretja 6-2, 6-2, 6-0 in just 1hr 25min in his quarter-final in yet another surprise.

The other two men's semifinals had been decided on Tuesday when Andre Agassi, the 13th seed from the United States, thrashed Uruguayan qualifier Marcelo Filippini 6-2, 6-2, 6-0 in just 72min.

He now plays unseeded Slovak Dominik Hrbaty, ranked number 31, who ousted ninth-seeded Chilean Marcelo Rios 7-6, 6-2, 6-7, 6-3 in four sets.

**Man United fairest also**

LONDON, June 3: Treble winners Manchester United came out top of the table for a fourth time this season when the English Premier League announced their fair play awards for 1998/99 on Thursday, reports AFP.

**Javed sings for Bangladesh**

KARACHI, June 3: Former Pakistan cricket coach Javed Miandad, who stepped down days before the World Cup, today backed the Bangladesh team, saying it deserved Test status after its performance in the tournament.

"They deserve the Test cricketing status now. And I hope they get it as it will help them further improve the standard of the game," Miandad told AFP before departing for England for a family holiday.

Miandad's comments came after reports that Bangladesh seeks his services as coach following the sacking of former West Indian star Gordon Greenidge from the post.

Greenidge was reportedly sacked for saying that Bangladesh did not deserve Test status.

"They have shown tremendous talent and team work during the prestigious tournament. They are a good fielding side and need a little bit of improvement," Miandad said.

"If they do not get the status, the future of Bangladeshi players and the game as whole in that country will suffer."

The International Cricket Council is to decide whether or not to award Test status to Bangladesh in its annual meeting after the World Cup.

Bangladesh, first defeated qualifiers Scotland but its victory over tournament favourite

tes Pakistan by 62 runs in group matches stunned cricket pundits and fans.

Miandad said he had not received an official offer from the Bangladesh cricket board yet, adding "I will only decide once it comes my way."

"When we were in Bangladesh (during triangular Asian Test Championship) they showed interest in having me as coach but after that I have never had direct contact with the cricket officials," he said.

"I have improved my team and I can improve the performance of Bangladesh team or any team in the world," he said.

Miandad hit the headlines when he announced his resignation as Pakistan's coach barely three weeks before the start of the World Cup.

He cited family commitments for his resignation but sources in sports circles suggest the resigned after developing serious differences with senior players, including skipper Wasim Akram.

"There are no hard feelings. I wish them good luck for the World Cup and hope they return victorious as we did in 1992 in Australia," he said.

Miandad is legendary in cricket circles, having scored 8,032 runs in 124 Tests — during his 21-year career and earning the singular honour of playing in all six World Cup tournaments.

**BITS & PIECES**

LONDON, June 3: Pakistan's Shoaib Akhtar could be crowned the world's first 100-miles-per-hour bowler at the weekend after speed guns were unveiled at the cricket World Cup here today, reports AFP.

The gun, which measures the bowler's speed of delivery from the moment the ball leaves his hand until it bounces, was not used in the first round.

Organisers, however, decided to introduce them from the Super Six second phase, which opens on Friday with India's match with Australia at The Oval.

Akhtar, who has captured the public imagination during this event, was timed at 97mph during the Sharjah Cup one-day tournament in April.

Australia's Glenn McGrath and India's Javagal Srinath, estimated to bowl at around 93-4mph when operating flat out, will get first crack at the record.

Akhtar, dubbed the "Rawalpindi Express", gets his chance on Saturday against South Africa at Trent Bridge.

Jeff Thomson of Australia still holds the record for the quickest delivery on record, a 99.70 ball in 1975 in Perth.

He was at The Oval on Thursday to unveil the speed gun.

"I think it's a great idea," he said. "It's another angle on the match and we will be able to see how quickly a few different deliveries go through."

"It's like serving at tennis. You see one go through quick and you want to know how fast it was."

Thomson agreed the 23-year-old Shoaib would be the one to watch, saying: "It's going to be interesting, he looks to be sharpest of the lot at the moment."

**MR SLEDGER V MR GOOD MANNER**

LONDON, June 3(AFP): When Australia meet India in the World Cup here on Friday, cricket's top 'sledger' will come face to face with the sport's most polite player.

It should be fascinating to see if Glenn McGrath gets Sachin Tendulkar to rise to the bait — or if the Indian batsman convinces the Australian pace bowler to behave.

McGrath, among the top fast bowlers in the world, is adept at unsettling batsmen and tempting them into injudicious strokes with his glares and insults.

He was given a suspended fine for abusive language at the end of last year in the Ashes series, then punished again after spitting near a West Indian player at the start of this year.

Tendulkar, widely accepted as the best batsman in the world, has never said boo to a goose.

Pakistan pace bowler Saquib Javed, who is not playing at the World Cup, recalls how the Indian batsman managed to shut him up for good.

**Who versus who**

**SACHIN TENDULKAR V SHANE WARNE**

The greatest batsman of his generation takes on the greatest spinner in the world in a mouth-watering clash. The Indian, however, has the psychological edge after decimating Warne last year. Tendulkar's last three one-day innings against Australia have all ended in big hundreds. Warne featured in two of them.

During Australia's tour of India in February-March last year, Tendulkar made 1,130 runs in 12 innings, including a first-class double century, two Test hundreds and three one-day tons. He averaged 113. "I can't sleep at night," Warne joked. "I have nightmares about the guy."

**RAHUL DRAVID V GLENN MCGRATH**

McGrath was not on that Indian tour because of injury, but he now runs into an in-form Dravid, who is the tournament's highest scorer so far with 369 runs. Dravid made 104 against Kenya and 145 against Sri Lanka to join Australian Mark Waugh as the only batsmen to score back-to-back World Cup centuries.

McGrath returned to timely form in the last match against the West Indies with five for 14 after managing just five wickets in the previous four games. The brilliant pace bowler is the one if the Oval wicket is lively.

**MOHAMMAD AZHARUDDIN V STEVE WAUGH**

The rival captains are battle-hardened veterans of the one-day game, with Azharuddin having played 320 matches and Waugh 263. Azharuddin is laid-back, preferring to let his young wards do the running. Waugh is an uncompromising batsman and captain who loves to lead from the front. Their tactical could prove crucial to the outcome. (AFP)

**Abahani in Fed Cup final**

Holders Abahani reached the final of the Pedrollo Pumps 15th Federation Cup football tournament with a 3-0 win against Badda Jagarani Sangsad in the second leg semi-final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday, reports UNB.

In the first leg, Abahani were beaten 1-0.

Indian Raman Vijayan struck twice while Zakir netted one goal for the winners. Abahani line-up included another Indian player, Ranjan Dey. The celebrated Dhanmondi-based outfit dominated the first half 2-0. Vijayan, the East Bengal striker, put scored in the 30th minute with a left-foot nudge from Arman pass.

Zakir doubled the margin with solo effort after dodging the opposition custodian Apel in the 44th minute. In the 10th minute of the second half, Vijayan scored his second goal again from an Arman pass, to complete the winners' tally.

Badda Jagarani played impressively in the first 20 minutes and created pressure on the opposition goalmouth but lost their rhythm during the rest of the match.

Parvez Babu of Badda received yellow card.

**CF hails cricketers**

Cricketers' Forum hailed the triumphant return of the Bangladesh cricket team from their highly successful World Cup campaign, says a press release.

The Forum congratulated each and every member of the side for their remarkable achievements. The Forum also felicitated all members of the Bangladesh Cricket Board and all others who had been connected with the team over the last few years for their hard work and tireless efforts in this regard.



A disappointed Shahid Afridi. —Star file photo

**Fowler not for sale**

LIVERPOOL, June 3: Liverpool manager Gerard Houllier said on Thursday that striker Robbie Fowler was not for sale following reported interest from Arsenal, reports AFP.

Arsenal, managed by Houllier's fellow Frenchman Arsene Wenger, were said to have launched a 12 million pound

(18 million dollar) bid to buy Fowler but the that was dismissed as "a fabrication" by the Liverpool chief.

"Robbie is our player," said Houllier. "He has recently signed a new contract."

"We want to keep him and as far as I know he wants to stay. That remains the case unless I hear something from him to the contrary."

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Inzamamul Haq starts to walk. —Star file photo

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We congratulate the national cricket team on a magnificent performance and wish them all the best for the future.

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