

Schools h'ball UNB, DHAKA

Viqarunnisa Noon, Scholastica, Sunnydale and Shahjahanpur Railway Government High emerged champions in their respective groups to reach the semifinals of the Bata schools girls handball tournament on completion of the preliminary round matches yesterday.

Group A champions Viqarunnisa Noon will play the first semi-final with Shahjahanpur Railway Govt. High while Scholastica will take on Sunnydale in the other semis, both billed for today at the Dhanmondi Sultana Kamal Women's Sports Complex.

Eight group matches were held on the concluding day.

Shahjahanpur Railway Govt High outplayed Azimpur Girls School & College 5-1, Sunnydale defeated Bangladesh Rifles School & College 4-3, Mirpur Girls Ideal Laboratory Institute trounced Khilgaon High Girls School 5-0, Dhanmondi Tutorial beat Loreto School 4-1, Viqarunnisa Noon beat Motijheel Govt. Girls High 8-3, Azimpur Girls School and College beat Mohammadpur Preparatory School 3-2.

Natore cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

Natore Cricket Club (NCC) defeated Swarbarna Club by three wickets in the opening match of the Natore cricket league at the Sankar Govinda Chowdhury Stadium yesterday.

Winning the toss, Swarbarna decided to bat first and scored 103 runs losing all the wickets in 27.5 overs.

In reply, NCC made 109 for seven in 28.5 overs.

Aussies' Watson

FROM PAGE 13 but had worked very hard on his bowling to become a genuine all-rounder.

"I suppose I enjoy batting a bit more because it isn't as hard on your body, but I love both and I'm working hard on both," he said.

Australian skipper Steve Waugh said Watson could be the Test all-rounder Australia had been searching for decades.

SQUAD

Stephen Waugh (captain), Andrew Bichel, Adam Gilchrist, Jason Gillespie, Matthew Hayden, Justin Langer, Brett Lee, Darren Lehmann, Stuart MacGill, Damien Martyn, Glenn McGrath, Ricky Ponting, Shane Warne, Shane Watson, Mark Waugh.

Premiership Solskjaer show



AFP, London

An Ole Gunnar Solskjaer hat-trick helped Manchester United extend their lead at the top of the English Premiership Tuesday as the reigning champions stroled to a comfortable 4-0 victory at Bolton Wanderers.

Victory takes Sir Alex Ferguson's men four points clear of second-placed Arsenal at the top of the table although the Gunners have two games in hand on the reigning champions.

Norway international striker Solskjaer, making a rare start in United's attack, netted in the 15th, 39th and 64th minute for his third career hat-trick for United before Dutchman Ruud van Nistelrooy completed the rout.

Bolton rarely threatened in a one-sided contest and when they did get beyond the United defence they found visiting goalkeeper Fabien Barthez in outstanding form.

Diego Forlan, United's recent 7.5-million-pound (10.6-million-dollar) signing from Independiente, made an appearance as a second-half substitute but had little time to make an impression.

Ferguson was delighted to have ended a mini-slump which saw them lose 1-0 to Liverpool in the Premiership and 2-0 to Middlesbrough in the FA Cup in the past week - but remained cautious about being cast iron certainties for the title now they had taken the four point lead.

"We were back on song tonight," the Scotsman said.

"However now we really are into the business end of the season and we have to step forward."

"There can be no messing around," he added.

Ferguson, who steps down at the end of the season, said he believed this title race would go down to the wire.

"You always hope there is an exciting climax to the title race but it has seldom been the case," he said.

"It's good for the game and I think there will be 2-3 teams involved come the end of the championship," he added.

Solskjaer wants United to build the result into an extended winning

streak to keep them in the hunt for the title.

"I think we need to have a good run of seven or eight games now to make sure we are up there when April comes," he said.

The Norwegian has now fired in 13 goals in 19 appearances for the champions and claims he does not worry about the club's rotation policy - especially playing alongside the likes of van Nistelrooy.

"I know it is hard with a big squad here, so I don't mind sitting on the bench a few times," he added.

"He (van Nistelrooy) is a very nice player to play with. He stretches defenders and makes space for other players and scores goals as well."

Fredi Bobic should have put Bolton ahead in the fourth minute but he steered Michael Ricketts' teasing low cross wide of the post from close-range.

United weathered the early storm and slowly took control of the match and it was no surprise when they took the lead with a quarter of an hour gone.

Van Nistelrooy held the ball up in central midfield and waited for Ryan Giggs who came steaming forward down the left wing.

The Dutchman then fed Giggs who ran at the Bolton defence before squaring into the path of Solskjaer who tucked the ball past Jussi Jaaskelainen in the Bolton goal.

Solskjaer's 11th goal of the season silenced the home crowd and lifted United who stepped up a gear.

David Beckham almost added a second 10 minutes later but his 20-yard free-kick whistled past the post with Jaaskelainen stranded.

Finnish keeper Jaaskelainen did well to beat away a fierce shot from Roy Keane and then denied Beckham who latched onto the rebound.

But from the resulting corner Solskjaer added his second goal of the game to put United firmly in the driving seat.

Beckham swung the ball over and the Norwegian peeled away from his marker at the near post to glance in a header beyond Jaaskelainen.

United continued to dominate in the second half and Solskjaer completed his treble midway 19 minutes after the interval, glancing a header into the corner from Beckham's free-kick.

It was his first treble since December 1999 when he scored four in the 5-1 win against Everton at Old Trafford.

Uruguay striker Forlan came on 15 minutes from time, replacing Solskjaer.

Beckham and van Nistelrooy then squandered good chances in front of goal before the Dutchman scored his 24th goal of the season seven minutes from time thanks to Giggs' clever pass.

John Gregory's appointment as the new Derby manager looks imminent after he was spotted at The Valley watching his prospective new employers stumble to a 1-0 defeat to Charlton.

Gregory, who only left Aston Villa last week, had already departed by the time Chris Bart-Williams' inch-perfect 20-yard free-kick 11 minutes from time crept inside the near post to leave the Rams with just 14 games to save their top-flight status.

Elsewhere Noel Whelan fired 10-man Middlesbrough to a crucial 1-0 derby victory at Sunderland, his fourth goal in as many games.

Whelan struck with just 14 minutes gone, but the Teessiders were forced to battle all the way following defender Gianluca Festa's second-half dismissal for spitting at Kevin Phillips after the England striker had elbowed him in the face in a race for the ball.

ATC final in Pakistan

INTERNET, undated

After a five-month the Asian Test Championship (ATC) is set to spring back into action in March when Sri Lanka and Pakistan contest the final.

The final, tentatively scheduled for March 6-10, will also mark the return of international cricket to Pakistan, as Sri Lanka's cricket board have agreed to become the first major international side to tour there after the September 11 terrorist attacks in America.

The second Asian Cricket Council (ACC) managed Test championship was dealt a cruel blow before its commencement when India withdrew at the last moment citing political reasons.

Without the prospect of a high profile clash between India and Pakistan, the ACC was unable to find a title sponsor and international broadcaster, undermining its revenue raising objectives.

Pakistan and Sri Lanka romped to thumping innings victories against Bangladesh in the opening two games played in September.

With Pakistan and Sri Lanka's place in the final already guaranteed, the final group game, originally pencilled in for January 30 at Colombo, was abandoned.

Wasim Akram's Pakistan won the inaugural ATC crown in March 1999 when they crushed Sri Lanka by an innings and 175 runs in the final at Dhaka.

Lions, Congo sail

AFP, SIKASSO, MALI

Cameroon maintained their perfect start to the 2002 African Nations Cup Tuesday with a win over Togo as the Democratic Republic of Congo stunned Ivory Coast 3-1 to reach the quarter-finals.

With reigning champions Cameroon already confirmed as Group C winners after taking maximum points from their opening two games, attention turned to the question of who would join them in the second phase.

Pedigre suggested Ivory Coast were the likeliest bet, their talented squad favoured to secure a win over the Congolese at their match in the gold mining town of Kayes.

But a superb DR Congo performance, with fit-again Monaco attacker Shabani Nonda playing a key role, left the Ivory Coast 'Elephants' packing their trunks and heading for home.

Hingis on a roll



AFP, TOKYO

Martina Hingis eased aside Marlene Weingartner on Wednesday and then confidently declared she had a strong chance of winning her fourth Pan Pacific Open tennis title here.

The 21-year-old Swiss Miss, a finalist here for the past five years and victorious in 1997, 1999 and 2000, needed only 48 minutes to score a 6-1, 6-2 win over the German to claim a quarterfinal berth.

Weingartner, ranked 40 in the world compared with Hingis at four, hit four good first serves - one an ace and another a service winner - to win the fourth game of the first set to love.

But she was unable to hold serve again and only won two games in the second set by breaking Hingis.

In the quarterfinals Friday, Hingis will take on either Thailand's Tamarine Tanasugarn or sixth seed Magdalena Maleeva of Bulgaria.

Fourth seed Sandrine Testud of France joined Hingis into the quarterfinals with a tough 4-6, 7-5,

7-5 victory over Austrian Barbara Schett.

In the first-round, Sydney Olympic silver medalist Elena Dementieva used her powerful groundstrokes to beat Japan's Saori Obata 6-3, 6-3 and set up a glamorous battle against fellow Russian Anna Kournikova.

It will be the first clash between Dementieva and Kournikova on the WTA Tour, both of whom are also chasing their first career title.

Dementieva, 20, who enjoyed

her best season last year reaching a career high ranking of nine in April, is currently ranked 16 and said she was looking forward to the all-Russian encounter.

"I haven't played Anna, so it's going to be our first match. I hope it's going to be a good one, because we have never played. It's going to be very interesting for both of us," said Dementieva.



Winners of the annual sports competition of the Bangladesh Navy College are seen with Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas and Chief of the Naval Staff Rear Admiral Abu Taher at the Sailors Colony playground yesterday.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words.

CRYPTOQUIP

Cryptoquip puzzle with a grid of letters and a key for deciphering the message.

Premiership's top six

Table showing English Premiership table after Tuesday's matches with columns for team, played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, and points.

TV GUIDE

Large TV Guide section containing Today's Highlights, Pick of the Day (Barb Wire), and a detailed grid of TV programs for various channels like BT, ATN, HBO, STAR, ESPN, and Discovery.