

Abahani take on ROK Varsities in opener

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani will kick off their Kings Cup campaign in Bhutan against South Korean Universities on September 30.

The Sky Blues left Dhaka yesterday to take part in the 8-team tournament in Thimpu.

Abahani are pitted against Indian Army (October 2) and Nepal XI (October 4) in their remaining group matches.

Strauss not yet decided

AFP, London

England batsman Andrew Strauss said on Sunday that he has yet to decide whether or not to join international teammate Steve Harmison and boycott the scheduled tour of Zimbabwe.

"All the players have deep-rooted moral problems with going on the tour. It's not an easy situation for us to be in," Strauss told the BBC.

"The England and Wales Cricket Board is going to be sending out a cricket team to Zimbabwe - it's just a question of which personnel go."

"I can only speak for myself and I haven't made up my mind yet."

Earlier Sunday, chairman of selectors David Graveney insisted that injuries will not be used as a smokescreen to leave players out of the controversial tour of Zimbabwe in November.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) have assured players they will not face reprisals if they opt out of the five-match one-day tour as paceman Harmison on moral grounds.

But Graveney said that they remain committed to sending a full-strength squad, and will not be using injuries as an excuse to leave certain players out of the tour.

"The side has not been selected. We will finalise our squad today," Graveney told BBC Radio Five Live's Sportsweek programme.

"Steve Harmison is the only player who has indicated he is not going to Zimbabwe. We will then announce the squad on Tuesday."

Pakistan tour

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and now people from Pakistan will go to India and a lot of friendship will develop."

While India won the Test and one-day series on their first tour of Pakistan since 1989, the PCB earned as much as 23 million dollars from the tour.

Pakistan had to revise its programme for next year by inviting Sri Lanka in October this year instead of February-March as scheduled to accommodate the India tour.

Pakistan are likely to play the Tests first, with the five-day matches expected to start from February 25, two weeks after their return from Australia. The five one-day matches will follow.

It will be Pakistan's first Test tour to India since early 1999.

Pakistan have also agreed to play a one-day international in India on November 13 this year to mark the 75th anniversary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India.

Two batting

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but Whatmore did not want the media to talk to the talented youngster.

"Give him some time. He is under too much pressure," said Whatmore adding that Kapali looked good in the nets.

"He looked fine today but it is difficult to judge someone after just one day," said Whatmore.

Asian all-star athletics in Singapore

AFP, Singapore

Many of Asia's best athletes began arriving in Singapore on Monday as the city-state prepared to host a unique competition for the region's elite track and field stars.

Medallists from regional events such as the Asian Games, Southeast Asian Games and Asian Grand Prix events will compete in the inaugural Asian All Stars Athletics Championship on Tuesday.

Four Athens gold medallists, including Chinese 110m hurdle sensation Liu Xiang, will also travel to Singapore for the event, however they will only be here for promotional purposes and to conduct clinics rather than compete.

The other Athens Olympic victors are Chinese women's 10,000 metres runner Xing Huina, Japanese women's marathon champion Mizuki Noguchi and compatriot Koji Murofushi, who won the men's hammer throw event.

Indian long-jumper Anju Bobby George, who became her nation's first World Championship medalist with a bronze in Paris last year, will be the highest profile Asian athlete competing on Tuesday.

Anju, the Asian Games 2002 champion, beat Russian gold medalist Tatjana Lebedeva to win the long jump event at the Yokohama track and field meet last week in Japan, after finishing sixth in Athens.

Singapore is hoping the all-stars concept will become an annual event.



PHOTO: AFP

Sandeep Singh, who scored twice, celebrates after putting India into the lead in the second hockey match against Pakistan in Quetta yesterday. India won 4-1.

Davis Cup

Agassi factor



AFP, Charleston

Andre Agassi hasn't played Davis Cup since 2000, but US captain Patrick McEnroe said he would rule out a return for the eight-time Grand Slam champion.

Andy Roddick, Mardy Fish and Bob and Mike Bryan combined this weekend to put the United States into the Davis Cup final for the first time since 1997.

But McEnroe knows they'll face a tough challenge in Spain, who will certainly use the host's privilege of choosing the venue to stage the tie on clay.

It's a surface Agassi has proved he can succeed on - having won the French Open in 1999.

"There's a lot of options. I'm never going to say never about anything. If Andre called me, I'd take his call and go from there. But whether I'm expecting that to happen or whether I'm going to call him myself is something I'll think about.

"He's certainly capable of playing

great clay court tennis," McEnroe said. "And saying that, we all know where he stood on Davis Cup in the last few years, and we've missed him."

Agassi boasts a 30-5 win-loss record in a Davis Cup career stretching back to 1988.

Long a stalwart of the US side, in recent years Agassi, now 34, has preferred to save his ageing body from the wear-and-tear of Davis Cup travel and play.

"If he's interested and available, he knows my number," McEnroe said. "And I know his number."

But McEnroe is likely to go with the team that delivered victories in the quarter-finals and semi-finals.

Against Belarus here this weekend, Roddick and Fish won both opening singles matches before the Bryan brothers clinched the tie with a doubles win.

The final score in the tie, usually the best-of-five matches, will stand at 4-0 after Fish's final singles match was scrapped because of rain with the American leading Andrei Karatsev 3-0.

Roddick won his meaningless reverse singles 6-4, 6-2 over Alexander Skrypko.

He had already done his real work on Friday, posting a 6-1, 6-4, 6-4 victory over Vladimir Voltchkov, Olympic silver medallist Fish beat Max Mirnyi on Friday 7-5, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3, and the Bryans closed it out with a 6-1, 6-3, 7-5 win over Mirnyi and Voltchkov.

Roddick, the world number two admits that clay isn't his preferred surface. His best performance at Roland Garros was a third-round appearance in 2001.

"It's not my most comfortable surface," Roddick said. "That's not a secret. I'm not going to sit here and pretend it is. But that being said, I'd like to have to play well on clay for two days and that's what I'm going to try to do."

"I'm not going to let it psyche me out. I'm going to go over there, I'm going to give it my all. I'll be fine. Hopefully, it'll work out."

For his part, Fish was anticipating being named to the team that heads to Spain in December.

And he's hoping that the team can continue their success for one more round to bring home the 2004 Davis Cup title.

NZ hit a new low in Davis Cup



AFP, Islamabad

New Zealand was condemned to zonal qualifying for the first time in its Davis Cup history after losing to Pakistan in a hard-fought tie here Monday.

Pakistan's unassuming hero was Aqeel Khan who overcame tough resistance from New Zealand's Simon Rea to win 7-6, 2-6, 3-6, 6-2 after four and a half hours of fierce tennis.

The Davis Cup Asia-Oceania Zone Group I third round play-off

went into a fourth day after the last reverse singles could not be completed due to bad light on Sunday.

The teams were level at 1-1 after Friday's singles but Pakistan surged ahead with a straight sets win in the doubles.

New Zealand, who thrashed Pakistan 5-0 in Group I last year, came back with their number one player Mark Nielsen upsetting Pakistan number one Aisamul Haq in a gruelling five-set marathon.

Rae then gave the tourists big hope by leading 4-2 in the third set after both players won a set each before bad light suspended play on Sunday.

The left-hander Rae continued in the same vein Monday morning as he raced to a 2-1 set lead by winning the third set 6-3.

Khan, who won three of the four International Tennis Federation satellite events last month, hit back strongly to win the next two sets 6-3, 6-2 and once again played a key role in Pakistan's win.

"This is the best ever victory of my career as it avoided us a relegation," said Khan, who lost his first singles on Friday.

New Zealand non-playing captain Bruce Berlin refused to comment despite facing several questions from the media.

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

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