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AN ERA BEGINS: Players of Usha Kriya Chakra, who still have a match in hand, celebrate lifting the title of the Green Delta Premier Division Hockey League after beating Mohammedan Sporting Club at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium yesterday.

Usha's new dawn

Hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

In a break from tradition, Usha Kriya Chakra became champions of the Green Delta Premier Division hockey league for the first time with one match in hand after beating Mohammedan Sporting Club 2-1 yesterday at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium.

Usha's victory took their collection to an unassailable 33 points from 12 matches. Their nearest rivals and last year's champions Abahani are seven points behind with two games to play.

It was Usha's first major success in any competition since the club was established in 1975. Usha had in the past, regularly pushed powerhouses Abahani and Mohammedan in domestic hockey but never had title

success to show for although they have finished runners-up twice.

The small group of Usha faithful who came to the ground fully prepared to celebrate, burst into ecstasy as the final whistle blew and danced to drums of a party band.

Any other result than a Usha win would have kept Abahani's hopes alive but even without their three star Pakistani players—Mohammad Nadeem, Nayeem and Sajjad Anwar—Usha were never really threatened by as Mohammedan became surprisingly lacklustre after the first half with the game locked 1-1.

Just after the restart, Mohammedan defender Mustafizur Rahman Dinar virtually gifted a penalty stroke when he inexplicably failed to take his leg out of the way on the goal-line from an Usha attack having saved a similar attempt seconds earlier.

Usha captain Moududur

Rahman Shuvo made no mistakes in capitalising on the opportunity which proved to be the winning one.

Earlier, Shuvo had put Usha ahead in the 10th minute after receiving the ball from Zahid Bin Talib. But nine minutes later striker Zahidul Islam Rajan equalised for Mohammedan with a fierce hit.

Usha's triumph was particularly sweet for young coach Mamunur Rashid who in his first year in charge, made the club's long-standing dream a reality.

"It is really a great achievement for Usha as we could finally dethrone giants Abahani and Mohammedan. It was totally a team effort that brought the success," said the former Bangladesh star who had also spent three seasons as a player with the club.

"Most of our players are young but they responded brilliantly to my plans and I also give credit to our

three Pakistani players," added the BKSP product.

Mamun brushed aside whisperings that Mohammedan had 'given away' the game as they had no stakes in it.

"Mohammedan might have looked a little relaxed but that was always going to be a possibility because the game had no significance for them. But that doesn't take anything away from our victory as we fully deserved the title because of our consistent performance in the league," said Mamun.

Captain Shuvo heaped lavish praise on his coach.

"It was not easy to become champion beating Abahani and Mohammedan. The secret was our team effort, discipline and the coach who made a difference," said Shuvo.

The club dedicated their achievement to its founder late Syed Anwar Hossain.

Aminul, Javed upset Indian GMs

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh FIDE Master Khandokar Aminul Islam and Mohammed Javed upset two Indian Grand Masters in the third Parsvath International Open Chess Championship in Delhi on Tuesday.

Aminul won the board against Indian GM Dibyendu Barua and Javed defeated another GM Ramesh.

International Master Enamul Hossain Rajib and Aminul bagged maximum three points each after the end of the third round games while FIDE Master Abu Sufian Shakil, Mehdi Hasan Parag and Mohammad Javed secured two points each.

Div I cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Gazi Tank registered their seventh victory in the First Division Cricket League when they inflicted a five-wicket defeat on Eskaton Sabuj Sangha at BKSP yesterday.

Put in to bat first, Eskaton were all out for 168 in 48.1 overs with opener Ejaz making the team highest 42. Murad picked up three wickets conceding 26 runs in 9 overs.

Arif scored unbeaten 41 and Sanjoy added 34 as Gazi Tank, in reply, made 170 for 5 in 35.3 overs.

Gazi Tank improved their tally to 14 points from 10 matches while Eskaton remained on six from as many matches.

At the Jagannath Hall ground of Dhaka University, Kathalbagan Cricket Club defeated Wari Club by 74 runs.

SEE PAGE 14 COL 8

BKSP Int'l Jr tennis Locals rule the day

SPORTS REPORTER

Three local players Amol Roy, Henry Prithul Mandal and Ranjan Ram moved into the quarterfinals of the third BKSP International Junior Tennis Championship beating their respective rivals at BKSP yesterday.

Amol beat another local Anwar Hossain 6-4, 5-7, 6-4; Henry came from behind to defeat Tanarat of Thailand 5-7, 7-5, 7-6 and Ranjan beat Korean Gin Su Kim 7-6, 3-6, 6-4 to book their seats in the last eight.

Tigers 'favourites'

Cricket

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Chittagong

For the first time in their four-year Test history, Bangladesh will go into a Test match as favourites when they take on Zimbabwe in the first game of two here from today.

The reason is simple: the current crop of Zimbabwe cricketers is not as good as their predecessors used

to be who won all three previous series against the Tigers.

There will be no Heathcreek, Flower brothers, Alistair Campbell, Henry Olonga, Stuart Carlisle, Andy Blythe, Douglas Marillier, Travis Friend or Ray Price who masterminded the southern African nation's four victories in six previous meetings.

Instead, young and exuberant captain Tatenda Taibu has one of the most inexperienced teams -- the

members of the squad have an aggregate of 71 Tests only -- in recent times and will face the music of playing a very confident home side on a tailor-made turning track.

The visitors, however, already showed that they were no mean a side. Having scored over 500 runs for just three wickets against the second string Bangladesh team in the only warm-up match in the port city, Taibu's boys served a warning to the locals.

There has been much hype about Bangladesh's chances for their maiden Test win ahead of this series and the inspiration actually comes from a great batting performance by Mohammad Ashraf, who smashed 158 not out against India in the second Test in Chittagong last month, and the Tigers' consistent performance against their mighty neighbours in the following one-day series including a stunning victory.

Although skipper Habibul Bashar has been suffering from viral fever, he has been cleared to play and the home side will go into the match with a specialist attack comprising pacers Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza and Tapash Baisya and spinners Mohammad Rafique and Enamul Haque as expected.

Rajin Saleh returns to the side after being dropped against India in the last Test, leaving Manzarul Islam and Talha Jubair out from the 13-member squad.

The key, however, would be to continue with the form the Tiger showed against Sourav Ganguly's men and not let complacency take over.

With the wicket -- dry and grassless -- expected to start turning from the second day, left-arm spinner Rafique will be licking his lips in anticipation of slaughtering the rookie Zimbabweans.

The top Bangladesh wicket-taker will also have to play the big brother's role in guiding fellow left-armed Enamul, who relies more on

SEE PAGE 14 COL 6

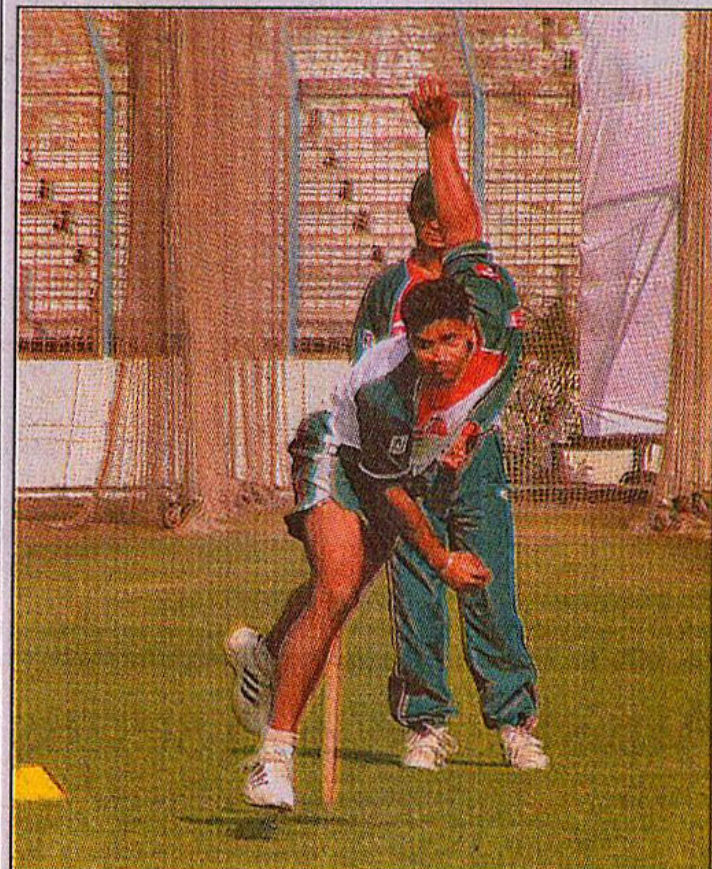


PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

Bangladesh fast bowler Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza bowls in the nets during their practice session at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

What to watch

- BTV & ESPN**
 Bangladesh vs Zimbabwe
 First Test, Day One
 Live at 9:20 am
- ESPN**
 Football Crazy
 Live at 5:00 pm
 Sportscentre
 Live at 8:30 pm
- STAR Sports**
 South Africa vs England
 Third Test, Day Five
 Live at 2:30 pm
 Sportsline
 Live at 9:30 pm

CRICKET

Green Delta Premier Cricket League
 Abahani vs Victoria (FCS)
 Mohammedan vs Uttara (DCS)
 Brothers vs City Club (BKSP)
 Green Delta Premier Hockey (Super League)
 Abahani vs Ajax (2:45 pm)

Aussies sweep series in style

AFP, Sydney

Australia brushed aside Pakistan for the third Test inside four days but skipper Ricky Ponting says his cricket world-beaters have the scope to improve even more.

In one of the most lopsided Test series here in recent times, Australia crushed Pakistan by nine wickets Wednesday following similar massive wins in Perth and Melbourne to consolidate their status as world cricket's premier team.

Ponting smacked the winning boundary off his first delivery to seal the victory off just 9.3 overs after the Australians were set 62 for victory late on the fourth day.

It was their first win of 2005 after winning 10 of their 14 Tests last year, only losing in the dead rubber Mumbai Test against India in November.

Pakistan last beat Australia 13 Tests ago in Sydney by 74 runs in 1995 and overall Australia lead Pakistan 10 to five since they began playing each other in 1956.

The Pakistan series triumph followed Australia's two consecutive victories over New Zealand in Brisbane and Adelaide in November. They next play three Tests in New Zealand in February-March.

Australia would have won by 10 wickets only for Justin Langer to be deceived by a Danish Kaneria wrong'un and bowled for 34 just four runs short of victory target.

The Pakistanis had a minor triumph by erasing a 264-run innings deficit to force Australia into

SEE PAGE 14 COL 2

Bashar feels time has come Taibu happy to be playing Test again

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

Bangladesh will try to get out of the 'we will try to play better and be competitive' approach for the first time in a Test when Habibul Bashar's men take on Zimbabwe in the first of two matches from today.

The Tigers will go all out against an under-strength Zimbabwe to end the wait of millions for a win after 34 attempts. Chasing their maiden Test

win in front of the home crowd will certainly be a pressure, but there will be no better time to do it after showing some improvement in the series against India last month.

"We have never before started a Test match expecting to win. As we have a fair chance to record our maiden win, this is the most important match for us.

"Definitely there is pressure and we have to accept it," Bashar said during Bangladesh's practice session at the MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.

"I think both Zimbabwe and complacency are our enemies. Like

everyone, I am not ready to accept Zimbabwe as a weak team. They are better than they are rated now. But I have a feeling that if we can repeat our recent performances against the others, we stand a fair chance to win. We just cannot take them lightly and have to rate them as any other team," added Bashar, who left for the hotel rather early to take rest to recover from flu.

To the most successful Bangladesh batsman with more than 2,000 runs under his belt, the key to win is to bat and bowl better

SEE PAGE 14 COL 5

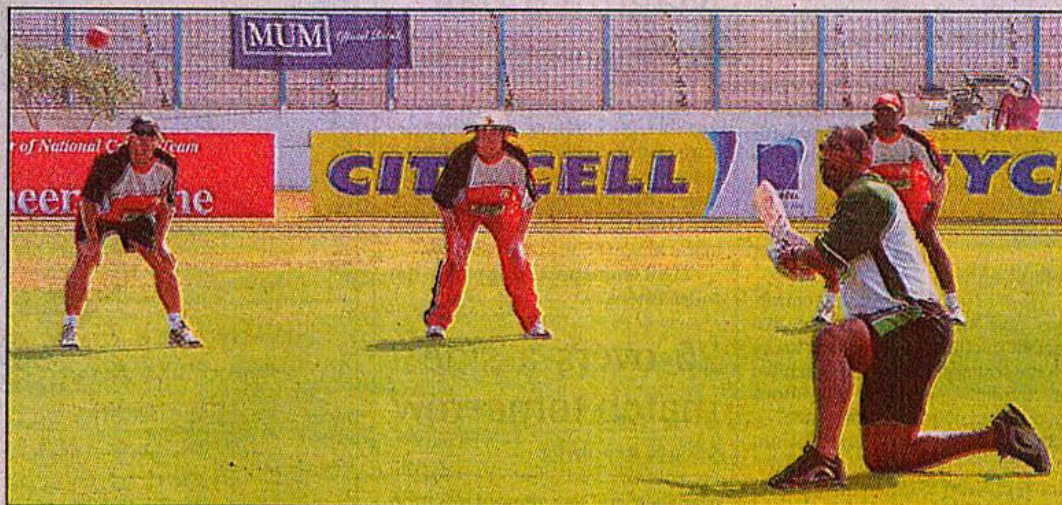


PHOTO: STAR

CATCHES WIN MATCHES: Zimbabwe coach Phil Simmons (R) gives away catching practice to his charges during their training session at the MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.

CITYCELL Zimbabwe Tour of Bangladesh

2005

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