

Kalabagan sign off in style

SPORTS REPORTER

Kalabagan Krira Chakra finished their First Division League campaign in style when they defeated Surjo Tarun Club by 59 runs at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Sunday.

The 18-team fray ended on Sunday with both Kalabagan and Sonargaon Cricketers returning to the Premier Division as champions and runners-up respectively. On the other hand, Wari Club and Nabin Sangha were relegated to the second division league.

Kalabagan, which returned to the top flight of domestic cricket after just one season, finished top of the table securing 28 points from 17 matches while Sonargaon bagged 26 from the same number of outings.

Put into bat, Kalabagan scored 146-7 in a curtailed 20-over game with Raju Parvez scoring highest unbeaten 45 off 35 balls.

In reply, Surjo Tarun were bundled out for 87 in 17.2 overs. Saif Mahmood was the wrecker-in-chief capturing four wickets for 27 in his four-over spell.

In another match, Gazi Tank outplayed Rupali Bank by nine wickets at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium to finish on 26 points but they had to be satisfied with third position as Sonargaon enjoyed a superior head-to-head record.

However, the game itself was short affair as Rupali Bank were skittled out for 41 in 13.1 overs. Gazi Tank raced to the target with 45 losing just one wicket in 8.3 overs.

Elsewhere, Azad Sporting Club beat Partex Sporting Club by five wickets at the BKSP ground in Savar and Bangladesh Boys managed an exciting one-wicket victory over Young Pegasus B at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

BCB XI open

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Arations for the English tour and our boys are looking forward to getting positive results," said the gifted 20-year-old right-hander after practice.

"We have to win first win two games and then who knows we could reach the final," he added.

The 14-member Bangladesh selection arrived in the Indian city on Sunday and went straight into practice for their first four-day match against East Zone, who will be captained by Sourav Ganguly.

The BCB XI are the second foreign side to play in the Duleep Trophy after England A had taken part last season.

The visitors however have their task cut out against an East Zone side for whom it is going to be a 'must-win' situation having lost their opening outing against Central Zone last week.

Besides indian skipper Ganguly, Rohan Gavaskar, the son of legendary batsman Sunil, is set to return to the side after missing the previous fixture.

East Zone coach V Venkataram said the return of Sourav and Rohan would bolster the team's batting strength against their Bangladeshi opponents.

Former Indian Test opener Shiv Sundar Das said he hoped that some consistent performances in the domestic circuit could help him resurrect his international career.

2nd Aus-NZ

FROM PAGE 13

Weeks with bruising to the bone on his left knee, and after soreness at training Monday he was advised to rest.

Wilson will be picking up where he left off after playing four one-day internationals against Australia in 1993 before embarking on a glittering decade-long All Black rugby career.

For Australia, batsman Mike Hussey and paceman Jason Gillespie replace Simon Katich and Michael Kasprowicz on Tuesday.

'India beatable at home'



AFP, Lahore

Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer Sunday said India are beatable at home and his young team can take inspiration from Australia and South Africa who won a series in India.

"It would be a challenging tour to a country which is regarded as one of the second best teams in the world but in recent years Australia, Pakistan and South Africa have beaten them and that would be an inspiration," Woolmer told AFP as Pakistan prepare for their tour of India.

"A home team always starts as a favourite but this Pakistan team is maturing and is ready for the India challenge."

Australia won their first series in India since 1965 last year while Hansie Cronje led South Africa to a 1-0 win in their series in India in 2000.

Pakistan under former captain Wasim Akram beat India in two of the three Test matches in their last tour of India in 1999.

"They (India) are an all-round team now than in 1999 and 2000 and it would be a challenge to confront the

likes of Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh," said Woolmer, who played 19 Tests for England and coached South Africa between 1994-1999.

Woolmer took over as coach in June 2004, replacing Javed Miandad after Pakistan lost the home series against India.

"It would be as challenging as Australia in a different sort of way but we won't be confronted with the same sort of fast bowling attack like Australia but Indian spinners would also be challenging," Woolmer said.

Pakistan announced a 16-member squad on Friday, recalling off-spinner Arshad Khan after express pacer Shoaib Akhtar pulled out due to injury.

Woolmer agreed Akhtar's absence would be felt but hoped other bowlers would come and fill the gap.

"Obviously a bowler of Akhtar's pace is very useful and we can't replace him because we don't have bowlers of his quality and so we will have to play a different type of cricket but in adversity others get a chance to do well."

He disagreed Pakistan's pace attack was depleted with fit-again Mohammad Sami under more pressure.

"I don't think it would put Sami

under pressure, it will give him a chance to become the strike bowler, he is due for some luck and hopefully take wickets when it matters."

Woolmer agreed with former Pakistan great Imran Khan that India were vulnerable on pace.

"Don't think about getting India out on spin, they played Australian Shane Warne with consummate ease and I tend to agree with Imran that they are more vulnerable on pace, people bowling in the right areas."

The Pakistan coach said scoring big in India would be vital.

"We haven't been convincing with the bat in Tests in the sense that we have not played long innings, something we must do in India and obviously India has the edge as they are very dangerous in batting."

"They can score big and in India if you score big the pitches deteriorate as they do there and assist spin so big scores are vital there."

On reports Indian batting maestro Sachin Tendulkar was doubtful for the series due to an elbow injury, Woolmer said: "Tendulkar is a very fine player but if he is not playing other players always step in, his absence would mean it's one less great player to get out."

Special Indian visa offices in Pakistan

AFP, Islamabad

India said Monday it would open special visa offices in the Pakistani cities of Lahore and Karachi to process thousands of fans who want to travel across the border for a historic cricket tour.

"The High Commission has put in place arrangements to facilitate timely issuance of visas to those desirous of witnessing cricket matches in India," an embassy statement said.

The special visa counters, which will be set up in local hotels and cultural centres, will start functioning in eastern Lahore from Thursday.

"The first will open in Lahore from February 25-27 and then in the second week of March while a visa camp in Karachi will open in the first half of March," the statement said.

Foreigner spree

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Ariel of Argentina and midfielder Jose of Brazil, defender Felix of Chile - on Saturday.

Re-born Brothers Union, who lifted both the Premier and National League titles last year, are set to rope in a Moroccan midfielder Hisam Inani after their three previous imports apparently failed to impress in pre-training.

Inani, a member of the Moroccan Olympic team, was expected to arrive in Dhaka last night.

"We have already three foreign players in the camp. But we need a quality midfielder and Inani might be the player we are looking for," said Brothers Union manager Amer Khan last night.

Each team can register up to three foreign players with two being eligible to feature in a match.

The 20th edition of traditional curtain-raiser will kick off at the Bir Shreshthra Shaheed Mustafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur on February 25.

Eighteen teams split into three groups will take part in the first phase with the group champions later joining five big guns - Abahani, Mohammedan, Muktiyoddha, Brothers Union and Sheikh Russell - in the final round at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Whatmore for

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Zealand and Pakistan, and won the tri-series without playing at their best, Australia's coach John Buchanan said the 50-over game format had become "tired".

However, Whatmore, who is starting to have success as coach of Bangladesh, could think of only one minor change to the rules that would spice up what he believes is a solid and successful format.

He said a 12th man should be allowed to be interchanged for another player and play an active part in the game as a batsman and bowler.

"If there was one change I'd make, it's that you could take to the field with 11, but your 12th man could be a replacement and come on to bat and bowl," Whatmore said.

"But, really, making big rule changes is not the answer. It just so happens that the tri-series you had over there was drab because players didn't perform well."

Whatmore challenged captains to be more proactive in the field, not always reverting to a long-on and long-off as soon as the 15-over field restrictions were lifted.

"I was watching a game this week, which was a perfect example of that," Whatmore said. "(England spinner) Ashley Giles was bowling, a new batsman at the crease and both mid-on and mid-off were back and there were just four in the ring. . . it was crazy. You've got to think on your feet and be flexible."

Former Australia coach Bob Simpson recently said unimaginative tactics, such as a reluctance to use strike bowlers in the middle of the innings, were contributing to one-day cricket's malaise.

Wasim finds Shoaib right



REUTERS, Karachi

Former Pakistan captain Wasim Akram has backed fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar's decision to withdraw from the Test series in India because of injury.

"I think he took the sensible decision. Because no bowler no matter how great is of any use to his team if he is struggling with an injury," Wasim told Reuters on Sunday.

"Shoaib should concentrate on regaining his fitness properly and then make a comeback in the one-day series in India but Pakistan will miss him in the Test matches."

Shoaib pulled out on Friday because of a hamstring problem but the Pakistan selectors will consider the 29-year-old for the one-day series is he fits.

Wasim, who captained Pakistan to two Test wins in India on their last full tour of the country in 1999, was also

pleased with the inclusion of off-spinner Arshad Khan, recalled to the squad after a five-year absence.

"The selectors have done well to recall Arshad Khan to partner Danish Kaneria. These two have a role to play to keep Pakistan in a Test on all five days," said the former fast bowler who took 414 Test wickets.

Meanwhile AFP adds from Lahore, Shoaib on Sunday denied suggestions that he pulled out of the tour of India due to fear of failure, saying he was genuinely injured and still wants to play in the one-day series.

"I have not run away from the tour, why would I?"

"I am disappointed to be missing the tour but people saying I have run away is more disheartening. If I get fit and the team needs me I will play the one-day series."

The 29-year-old, dubbed the Rawalpindi Express for his pace, said it would take him at least a month to recover from a hamstring injury.

"I like to run towards the field and

not away from it but what people don't understand is that a fast bowler can't play every game because it's too hard to do that," said Shoaib.

"It (the tour) would have given me a chance to make up for my not so good performance in the series we lost to India," said Shoaib. He took a meager seven wickets in Pakistan's 2-1 Test series loss to their arch-rivals last year.

His pull-out has further weakened a depleted Pakistan bowling attack with two other frontline pacemen - Shabbir Ahmed and Umar Gul - already out due to injuries.

The pace attack of the team, announced on Saturday, will now be led by Shoaib's new ball partner Mohammad Sami. He will be assisted by Navedul Hasan, left-arm Mohammed Khalil and all-rounder Abdul Razzaq.

Pakistan's former greats Imran Khan and Sarfraz Nawaz have termed Shoaib's absence a serious blow to Pakistan's chances on the tour.

Bhaji could be the first



AFP, Sydney

Indian off-spinner Harbhajan Singh is expected to become the first bowler in elite cricket to benefit from a relaxation of rules on chucking, an Australian biomechanics expert said Sunday.

The new International Cricket Council (ICC) rule, which comes into effect on March 1, allows bowlers to bend their elbows by up to 15 degrees.

Harbhajan was reported for a suspect bowling action late last year and has been assessed by expert Bruce Elliott of the University of Western Australia, who supervised a high-speed camera test on the cricketer in Perth last Thursday.

Elliott said his report to the ICC and the Board of Control for Cricket in India on Harbhajan would be based on the new ICC rule, which will deem almost all modern bowling actions legal.

This would be of benefit to Harbhajan, who was reported by English match referee Chris Broad during last December's Test series in Bangladesh for his "doosra", a delivery which turns away from the right-handers instead of coming into them like a normal off-break.

"I am assuming the reference to

angles will be under the new (ICC) regulations," Elliott told the Sun-Herald newspaper. "That's the way I will write the report."

The 24-year-old spinner, with 189 wickets in 43 Tests, had been given until February 18 to correct his action ahead of India's home Test and one-day series against



HARBHAJAN SINGH

Pakistan next month, Indian cricket board secretary Karunakaran Nair said.

Elliott said he had not yet examined the footage taken at the university's human movement laboratory but he was confident Harbhajan had bowled with similar intensity to Test match conditions.

"We can make a comparison to

the video from the match when he was reported -- that's things such as ball speed, arm rotation, position of the body and technique," Elliott told the newspaper.

"We had two arbiters in Daryl Foster, an expert coach, and Harbhajan himself to give a ranking to each delivery so that we were confident they were quality deliveries."

Foster, a former coach of the Western Australian state side, has been closely involved in helping bowlers such as Sri Lankan Muttiah Muralitharan undergo testing and remedial work at the Perth university.

Elliott said Harbhajan's doosra, which was more of a top-spinner, was significantly different from Muralitharan's, which was delivered with pronounced leg spin.

Harbhajan was reported for his bowling action in 1998 before being cleared by the ICC. He underwent remedial work in London where former England off-spinner Fred Titmus helped him remodel his action.

'I'm fully fit'

FROM PAGE 13

Pakistan are making their first full tour of India since 1999.

They arrive in India on February 28 to play three Tests and six one-dayers apart from two practice games.

India last year won a Test series 2-1 and a one-day series 3-2 on what was their first full tour across the border in more than 14 years because of political tensions.



PHOTO: AFP

World number one Roger Federer of Switzerland poses with the trophy following his victory at the Rotterdam Open on February 20.

Another crown for Federer



AFP, Rotterdam

Roger Federer triumphed in his 15th straight final without a loss on Sunday as he shut down the big game of Ivan Ljubicic 5-7, 7-5, 7-6 to finally lift a trophy at the 782,250-euros Rotterdam Open.

The Swiss world number one, who claimed 11 titles in 2004, now has two for this season -- both at the expense of his 19th ranked Croatian opponent.

Federer started the year with a win over the 25-year-old at Doha; the loss in two hours, 42 minutes was the third this season in a final for Ljubicic, beaten a week ago in Marseille by Swede Joachim Johansson.

Federer, playing for the first time since losing in the Australian Open semifinal to Marat Safin, has not been beaten in a tournament final since July, 2003, when Jiri Novak stopped him on clay at Gstaad.

"I don't know where the secret

comes from," said Federer, who has won 24 career crowns.

"You play one good final (like the US Open where he hammered Lleyton Hewitt last September) and suddenly you're on a roll."

"People start to talk and you're worried if it's going to last. Every time I win a semifinal I put pressure on myself," he said with a knowing smile.

The Swiss lost his serve for the first time this week at the hands of Ljubicic in the first set.

Federer takes away a cheque for 147,000 euros as he heads to Dubai to headline next week's ATP event along with Andre Agassi and Safin.

The Swiss winner struck a dozen aces, 42 unforced errors and 28 winners as he defeated Ljubicic for the fifth time in eight meetings.

"Today was very close, it could have gone either way," said Federer. "I'm happy I fought through, this will be big help for rest of season."

"This is a huge tournament, it ranks just after the Grand Slams and the Masters Series."

Federer said that things could

have been somewhat easier.

"I was hoping that the final would go like it did in Doha (in January). We had a tough first set there and then it was one-way traffic."

"Today, it was a different story, I knew quickly that it would be more difficult to break him. I had to focus, he was getting more balls back on my serve. I knew I had to fight hard."

Shahadat after

FROM PAGE 13

Overs remaining on Day Two with ease.

SCORES IN BRIEF

**BANGLADESH A:** 311 (Nafees 35, Raqib 20, Shamsur 10, Riyadh 33, Dhiman 29, Saqib 27, Rahim 111 n.o., Russell 11, Rajib 15, Shafaq 10; Mahwire 2-89, MacMillan 1-55, Mwayenga 1-45, Chibhabha 4-46) and 78-0 (Nafees 35 n.o. Raqib 40 n.o.).

**ZIMBABWE A:** 201 all out in 69.5 overs (Duffin 59, Sibanda 42, Mufambisi 31, Mahwire 14, Cremer 13; Tushar 3-22, Saqib 2-43).

Mauresmo shoots Venus down



AFP, Antwerp

France's top seed Amelie Mauresmo won the \$85,000-dollar WTA tournament here on Sunday after beating Venus Williams in the final.

Mauresmo beat the American third seed 4-6, 7-5, 6-4, just one week after losing to Russia's Dinara Safina in the Paris final, for her first victory of the season.

"This was a great final for a great tournament," said Mauresmo.

"I am so happy because the quality of my game went up and up during the whole week until the final."

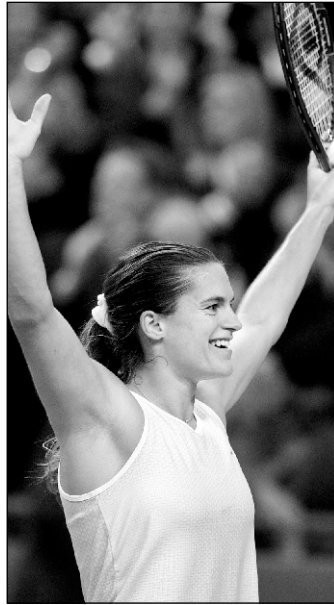
Mauresmo now heads for Doha next week where she is top seed while Williams plays in Dubai the week after.

"I was ready for victory," said Williams who won here in 2002 and 2003.

"It is very frustrating because I wanted to win this trophy for a third time. But Amelie played well, especially with her volley."

"I felt 100 per cent at the start of the final but then I began to feel pain in my stomach."

Mauresmo's superb volleying in



AMELIE MAURESMO

the final set made the difference as she claimed victory on her fifth match point after two hours and 18 minutes to deny the American what would have been a third title here.

It was also the Frenchwoman's fourth win over Williams in nine career meetings.

However, she had to overcome an unconvincing start to the final dropping her first service game and surrendering the first set in half an hour.

Williams sensed an opportunity and broke again to lead 4-2 in the second set and then led 5-3 to serve for the match.

Mauresmo, so often shackled by nerves on the big occasion, dug deep and she reeled off the next four games to take the second set 7-5 and level the match at one set-all.

In the crucial tenth game, Mauresmo squandered a number of match points but won the final on her fifth chance.

Beckhams 'Cruz'

FROM PAGE 13

Got Victoria's nose and lips. He's gorgeous so we're very happy."

British bookmakers William Hill said they had done a roaring trade as punters betted on what name the Beckhams would choose.

"Jose" had been 7-1 favorite while other choices included the names of Real Madrid teammates such as Zinedine, after French star Zidane, or Ronaldo, after the Brazilian striker.

There was no sign of "Cruz" on William Hill's list.

The baby was born at 10:40 a.m. (4:40 a.m. EST) after doctors at the Ruber clinic asked Victoria to come for an early delivery.

Beckham said both mother and child were doing well, although Cruz could remain in hospital for a few more days.

The Beckhams' other children were both born at London's exclusive Portland Hospital.

Beckham joined Real Madrid from Manchester United in 2003 to become one of the world's highest paid football players.

The doctor overseeing the birth, Juan Vidal Pelaez, said Beckham was present during the operation. Malcolm Gillard, a London doctor who delivered Brooklyn, was also there.

Although the baby was born earlier than expected, Vidal said it was normal. "The child's weight ...

confirms it was not premature and so the child will go home with its mother," he told a news conference.

If there were no complications, hospital stays after a caesarian were normally three or four days, he said.

Vidal said Victoria Beckham could have a fourth child, but the risks would be greater.

The Beckhams' relationship came under close scrutiny in 2004 following tabloid allegations that Beckham had had an affair with his personal assistant Rebecca Loos -- a claim the midfielder dismissed as "ludicrous."

Victoria, who achieved fame as "Posh Spice" with pop group The Spice Girls (news - web sites), initially refused to relocate to Spain because she wanted to pursue her solo singing career in Britain but later changed her mind.

William Hill also offered odds of 100/1 that Beckham's new son will play for England.

Asked by reporters whether the child would one day play football for the Spanish or English national side, Beckham replied: "He was born here, but we'll see, England will be the preference, but you never know."

Beckham played in Real's 2-0 defeat to Athletic Bilbao on Saturday night which left them seven points adrift of Spanish league leaders Barcelona.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

CROSS 1 The 2004 World Series, e.g. 6 Pure 12 The town cutup? 13 Jennifer, on "Friends" 14 Suitable for farming 15 Honor 16 Pickable 17 Help surreptitiously 19 Buxom model's monogram 20 Carthaginian queen 22 Still 24 Boom times 27 Ship-related (Abbr.) 29 Obsessed seaman 32 Advances 35 Quarry 36 Small combo 37 24 horas 38 "Amazing Race" episode

40 Carolina college collector 44 "A Little Bitty Tear" singer 46 Unsure one's reply 50 Do re mi, etc. 52 Lake near Syracuse 54 Pushes rudely 55 Long-vowel indicator 56 Voiced, in linguistics 57 Patriots' gear

2 Call it a day on the set 3 Underwent recession 25 Standard 26 Closeted secret 28 Laborious 30 "— was saying, ..." 31 Badge earners' org. 33 Give the once-over 34 Sticky stuff 39 Basic assumption 41 Family member 42 Springsteen nick-name 43 Toyota subcompact 45 Three-piece 47 Swamp 48 Tumults 49 TV chef 51 Ms. Martin 51 Ms. Gardner 53 Forty winks

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DOWN 1 Calcutta 10 Adoles-cent 11 "Desire Under the —" 12 Blackball 18 Running ballet step 33 Toyota subcom- pact 39 Basic assump- tion 41 Family member 42 Spring- steen nick- name 43 Toyota subcom- pact 45 Three- piece 47 Swamp 48 Tumults 49 TV chef 51 Ms. Martin 51 Ms. Gardner 53 Forty winks

CRYPTOQUIP GTWY NZLWZYW JWVZLWN EIPP EISKYF DTW GKYDWS, K FIWNN TW VZIPE JW XWXYIWKYXRYIRSA. Yesterday's Cryptoquip: SHE STARTED TO TELL HER FRIEND A TALE ABOUT A NOOSE, BUT THEN LEFT HER HANGING. Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals J

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.