

Whatmore renews his contract?

SPORTS REPORTER

Speculation was rife yesterday in the cricket arena that Dav Whatmore has extended his contract for two more years with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

The Australian coach's two-year contract expires on April 30 and Board announced a few days back that sealing the deal was only a matter of time.

Sources claimed that Whatmore signed the contract yesterday, but BCB officials kept denying it.

Whatmore left the Bangladesh team's training early yesterday, fuelling the rumour that the coach wanted to complete the paperwork before travelling to Chittagong for preparation.

Cricketers go to Ctg today

SPORTS REPORTER

The England-bound Bangladesh cricket team had their last practice session in Dhaka yesterday before heading to Chittagong for the last leg of their preparation. The Tigers, who fly to the port city today, will hold flyer nets there.

The preliminary 20-member squad concentrated on physical fitness in Dhaka under the supervision of coach Dav Whatmore.

Injuries were however the main concern of the team management in the final leg of the tour.

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THE FATE IS SEALED: Saiful Islam is exultant after scoring the second goal for Mukti Joddha Sangsad in the final of the Independence Day Gold Cup Football Tournament against Brothers Union at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Saturday.

PHOTO: STAR

Mukti's Cup of joy

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Nigerian striker Paul Nwakwuchu scored one and set up the other for Saiful Islam as Mukti Joddha Sangsad blanked Brothers Union 2-0 to lift the Independence Day Gold Cup yesterday.

Fresh after their upset win against Nebitchi FC in the AFC Cup earlier this month, Mukti Joddha emerged as deserving victors in a lacklustre final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Brothers, who were leading 1-0 in the March 30 final before it was abandoned after 12 minutes following a rainstorm, appeared ordinary in the rematch without their Russian striker Edward, who had scored the goal for the Orangemen.

With Edward already out due to heat related allergy on a stifling summer afternoon and the mercury rising to 35 degrees Celsius, the final never reached the expectations of the 10,000-strong crowd at the Big Bowl.

And for those, who spent sleepless nights watching live European football, the manoeuvring in the middle looked like action replays of those fast moving games.

However, the activities outside the playing area were frantic to say

the least. A white microbus patrolled the touchline until the entourage of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia entered the stadium through the northern gate just before half time.

Interestingly, the Prime Minister brought all the luck for Mukti Joddha, who struck their first goal within seconds of her arrival at the grand venue.

Although this is something unusual on a playing field, the spectators thoroughly enjoyed it. The only occasion they felt embarrassed when a former sports minister who was a guest of the final, nonchalantly entered the playing area while making his way onto the dais with the match still on.

Back to the match, Brothers almost took early blood when Khokon forced a fine save by rival keeper Aminul after 12 minutes but the Reds settled with Arman taking charge in the middle.

The national midfielder threatened to score four minutes later when he received a pass from Kanchan just inside the box but inspired defending by Orange skipper Sujon denied Arman's powerful shot.

Mukti Joddha pressed hard and earned a number of corners but only Paul came close to scoring with an 18-yard shot only to be denied by goalkeeper Tareq.

Brothers young midfielder Abul, who spoiled many of their own

attacks by taking numerous long-range shots on the rival goal without any avail, created a good chance ten minutes before the breather when he exchanged passes with Adil. But Aminul left his post and thwarted the final shot from close.

The goal came as soon as the Prime Minister arrived at the ground with Paul scoring from a goalmouth scramble.

Brothers' goalkeeper Tareq and centre-back Jewel Rana failed to negotiate a typical long throw by Belal from the left and Paul slammed the ball into the roof of the net after Pappu's first-time shot bounced off the defensive wall.

Woodwork denied Mukti Joddha five minutes into the second half when Masud Rana's backheader towards their own keeper was anticipated by Kanchan but the Mukti Joddha striker, who lost control after going round the custodian, placed the ball onto the sidebar.

Paul then helped substitute Saiful seal the victory on the hour with a fine defence-splitting through from the left. Saiful, who replaced Pappu at the break, enjoyed a free run down the right of the box and the overlapping fullback neatly placed the ball past Tareq.

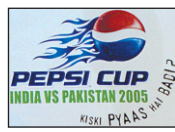
The defeat ended Brothers' hopes of a third title in a row after

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India need Afridi early

Pakistan want to keep momentum going

AFP, New Delhi



Stand-in India cricket captain Rahul Dravid says his team need to dismiss hard-hitting Shahid Afridi early if they want to square the six-match series against Pakistan here on Sunday.

The opener smashed a 45-ball century, the second-fastest in one-dayers, in the fifth game at Kanpur on Friday to help Pakistan gain an unbeatable 3-2 lead in the six-match series.

"It will help us if we can get Afridi out early," Dravid said ahead of the high-profile sixth and final match, to be watched by Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh amid tight security.

"We lost the last match because of Afridi's remarkable knock. That made all the difference. One cannot do anything if somebody bats like Afridi did yesterday," Dravid said here on Saturday.

The India skipper, who top scored for India with 86 in Kanpur, said he did not believe his team was under pressure even after losing three successive matches.

"It's disappointing to lose three matches in a row, but we've played some good cricket in the series. We now need to have just one good day on the field. We have the potential to level the series," said Dravid.

He said the team was motivated to win the crucial game, which is also John Wright's last as India coach.

"There is always motivation to win whether it is somebody's last match or not. John has been with the team for close to five years. It has been an eventful journey," he said.

"We have valued his contribution. He will be missed not only as a coach but also as a friend."

When asked whether the team would miss the services of regular captain Sourav Ganguly, Dravid said, "People also miss matches because of injuries. There are 15 guys in the team and everybody is keen to do well."

Ganguly is eligible to play after he appealed the six-match ban imposed on him by the International Cricket Council for slow over rate during the third and fourth matches of the ongoing series.

But the national selectors did not pick out-of-form Ganguly for the last two games.

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq said his team was keen to maintain the winning run and clinch the series.

"Having gained the lead, we now believe that we can win the series. We are in a good position and will try to capitalise on it," said Inzamam, whose team had lost the first two matches before staging a remarkable fightback.

"It's good to see the way we've fought back. Even in the Test series, we came from behind to draw level. The players are confident after winning three consecutive one-dayers."

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U-19s keep winning

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh U-19 cricket team recorded back-to-back victories against Sunshine Coast U-19s on their tour of Australia.

The tourists defeated Sunshine Coast by seven wickets in yesterday's day-nighter at the Caloundra Cricket Club ground in Queensland. Having shot out the local side for 92 in 34 overs, the Bangladeshi boys reached the target inside 24 overs with Mazhar Uddin and Raqibul Hassan scoring 42 and 32 respectively.

Sohrwardi Shuvo was the pick of the Bangladeshi attack, the left-arm spinner taking four wickets. Aslam Khan and Rezaul Islam grabbed three and two each respectively.

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BD women off on wrong foot

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh women's football team lost their historic international match 1-0 to Guam yesterday in the AFC U-17 Women's Championship in Korea.

Amy Atkinson scored the all-important goal for Guam in the 38th minute at the Nam Hae Public Stadium, according to a message received in Dhaka.

Bangladesh custodian Mona spent a busy day under the bar in severe cold and saved a 14th minute penalty.

Bangladesh take on Hong Kong in their next group match tomorrow.

Dhaka keep NCL crown



SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka retained their first-class title when their penultimate round game of the Ispahani Sixth National Cricket League against Chittagong ended in a draw at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Both teams were rewarded with three points as they had identical first innings scores of 288. The reigning champions increased their unassailable lead to 41 points and made the last round merely academic.

Nearest rivals Rajshahi finished runners-up with 34 points after they registered an emphatic nine-wicket win over bottom-side Barisal. It was only their third outright victory in the competition.

Away at the Sylhet Stadium, Khulna recorded their second outright victory when they handed Sylhet a seven-wicket defeat.

DHAKA-CHITTAGONG

A predictable finish was the only scenario left on the final day when Dhaka resumed their second innings on 194-4 after both sides' first innings totals.

After the runaway leaders were dismissed just before the lunch break for 278 it left Chittagong needing to chase an improbable target of 279. Sajjad Kadir added only four runs to his overnight score of 89.

Chittagong made a shaky start when they lost openers Masumuddin and Gazi Salahuddin for 11 runs but a 130-run third-wicket partnership between Nazimuddin and Faisal Hossain consolidated

the visitors position. Nazim, who struck 103 in the first essay, scored 82 off 134 balls and Faisal contributed 65 off 108 balls as Chittagong scored 213-4.

Dhaka captain Khaled Mahmud, who missed the last two rounds because he was attending the national camp, said that the team's tremendous spirit was the key to their third four-day title.

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CHAMPIONS AGAIN: Members of the Dhaka cricket team who retained the National League title on Saturday.

PHOTO: STAR

FEROZESHAH KOTLA

First ODI match: India v Sri Lanka, 2nd ODI, 15/09/1982

Last ODI match: India v England, 5th ODI, 31/01/2002

Matches played: 12

Matches won by home side: 6

Matches won by touring side: 4

Matches won by neutral side: 2

Highest individual innings: 145 R Ponting 1997-98 Australia v Zimbabwe

Best bowling: 6/41 V Richards 1989-90 India v West Indies

Highest team innings: 294/3 Zimbabwe 1997-98 v Australia

Lowest team innings: 176 India 1989-90 v West Indies

Highest run chase achieved: 281/4 India 1982-1983 v Sri Lanka

Ferozeshah Kotla another belter?

Cricket

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

How will the pitch at the Ferozeshah Kotla stadium, venue for the final one-day international match between India and Pakistan on Sunday, behave?

If curator Radheyshyam Sharma is to be believed, the pitch "will be full of runs."

"There'll be lot of runs. Batting will be easy as the day progresses. The more the sun shines, the better for batsmen," opined Sharma.

His remarks assume significance as the pitch for the match will be put to use for the first time after being re-laid.

Replying to a question, the curator said, "I can't predict how many runs it will produce but the pitch will be the best in India."

EXTRAORDINARY SECURITY

As part of extraordinary security measures, helicopters and anti-aircraft guns have been deployed around the Ferozeshah Kotla, where Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will watch the final ODI between India and Pakistan on Sunday.

Two helicopters will be parked at Ambedkar Stadium, a football ground, adjacent to the Kotla, in case of emergency evacuation.

The final mock exercise for emergency evacuation, involving security agencies and fire fighters, was held yesterday. A similar drill was held on Friday also.

A military helicopter made two landings inside the Ambedkar Stadium, where a temporary helipad has been constructed, and another army copter made an aerial survey of the stadium as well as the Kotla.

A special exit has been prepared at the Kotla to enable the VVIPs to use in case of emergency.

Anti-aircraft guns would be deployed at all the places Musharraf visits during his stay in Delhi and the sky over the Kotla has been declared "no-fly" zone during the duration of the match.

Radio-jammers have been installed in and around the stadium to prevent explosives being set off by remote-control.

All the officials for the match -- field umpires Billy Bowden of New Zealand and AV Jayaprakash of India, third umpire I Sivaram and ICC Match Referee Chris Broad -- will be provided with walkie-talkies because normal mobile phones would not work in view of deployment of jamming devices.

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What to WATCH

BTV & DD Sports

India vs Pakistan
Sixth ODI
Live at 9:30 am

ESPN

FA Cup (Semifinal-2)
Newcastle United and Man United
Live at 6:55 pm

Primera Liga
Levante vs Real Madrid
Live at 10:55 pm

STAR Sports

Football Crazy
Live at 9:00 am

Brazilian Football
Mogi Mirim vs Sao Paulo
Live at 1:00 am (Monday)