



Did U Know?

South Africa became the first team to beat West Indies in West Indies in two successive matches by 8 wickets.



Frank Rijkaard

(Barcelona coach)
"Great players make themselves known at bad moments and that is what Ronaldinho did. His great goal calmed us down."
After beating Valencia 2-0 in the Spanish League.

INDEPENDENCE DAY SOCCER

Abahani meet Russel in final

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

An early strike by Ariful Kabir Farhad took Abahani to the final of the Independence Day football tournament final with a 1-0 win over Muktiyoddha Sangsad here yesterday at the Rajshahi Stadium.

Absorbed in their dream to beat East Bengal in Dhaka today, Muktiyoddha paid for fielding an under strength side in the second semifinal as Sky-Blues striker Farhad separated the Dhaka heavyweights with a right footer after a long run down the middle in the fourth minute. It also gave Abahani some solace after losing last month's Independence Day Gold Cup semi in Dhaka to the same side.

Abahani will take on Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra in tomorrow's final.

The Reds, however, began brightly before an 18,000-strong crowd but Nigerian striker Paul saw his first minute effort bounce back off the rival crossbar.

Despite including three guest players from Brothers Union -- Russian goal poacher Edward, Moroccan striker Adil and midfielder Pranotosh -- Muktiyoddha failed to get an equaliser.

Farhad was adjudged the man-of-the-match.

Yellow Cards: Ujjal, Farhad (Abahani) and Paul (Muktiyoddha).

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Kolkata giants East Bengal's coach Subhash Bhowmik briefs his charges at a training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on the eve of their today's AFC Cup match against Muktiyoddha Sangsad.

PHOTO: STAR

Mukti-East Bengal prestige tie today

SPORTS REPORTER



The match kicks off at 5.30pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The second meeting of the two sides after their goalless drawn encounter at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata in March however has little bearings as far as the race for a second round berth is concerned. East Bengal are languishing at the bottom of the four-team table with a single point while Muktiyoddha lie just above them with four points thanks to a creditable away victory against Nebitchi FC of Turkmenistan.

But East Bengal's rare visit to Dhaka has more meaning as far as the football rivalry between clubs of the two neighbouring nations is concerned.

While Muktiyoddha will desperately look to win their first home match in the competition, a hand-capped East Bengal are here to prove a point.

"We have come here to play under difficult conditions. Not only that we are out of the race, I will also

miss my key players through suspension and injury," said East Bengal coach Subhash Bhowmik.

Subhash, who did not arrive with the team on Monday for personal reasons, joined his charges in training at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday immediately after his arrival.

"We played in the quarterfinals of the AFC Cup last year and also won the ASEAN Cup. But this time, nine players of that squad are not with me. Naturally, our strength has been undermined.

"I think there is little difference of standard between the two countries and there won't be any favourites in tomorrow's game. At least, I'll not give anyone an edge before the match."

The visiting coach still believes that the draw in Kolkata in the first round match was an upset.

"In the context of that match, I'd still say it was an upset. We really played well but all Muktiyoddha had was the long and powerful throw-ins by Belal."

Considering the Reds defender Belal still as a threat, the veteran said, "No one has ever seen anything like his throw-ins. He is unstoppable and that is the first thing my players will have to cope with tomorrow."

Subhash mentioned that as it

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'We won't take WI lightly'

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer said Tuesday his team were riding high after a successful tour of India but would not take the weakened West Indies lightly when they travel to the Caribbean this week.

"It would be nice to cap the first year as coach with a win in the Caribbean, but we will not underestimate the West Indies and have to play at our best," Englishman Woolmer told AFP.

Pakistan fly out on Wednesday to the West Indies, where they play three one-day games and two Tests.

Woolmer, a former batsman who played 19 Tests for England and also coached South Africa, said recent good showings in India had boosted his side's confidence.

"It's not only the confidence of the India tour, but the team on the whole is playing well."

Pakistan squared a three-match Test series 1-1 and won a six-match one-day series 4-2 on their tour of India last month. By contrast, the West Indies lost a four-match Test series at home to South Africa 2-0 and trail 2-0 in the ongoing three-match one-day series.

Woolmer, who turns 57 on Saturday, admitted his team would miss fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Sami, dropped from the squad due to injuries.

"Of course, the extra pace of Akhtar and Sami would have been handy, but it's unfortunate that both are missing through injury and we have to make do with the best available bowlers," said Woolmer.

He denied differences with Akhtar had led to his exclusion. "I have no differences with Akhtar," Woolmer said. "I have never said anything derogatory against him. What I had said was that he can come back to the team on showing match fitness."

Woolmer said he was not bothered by the fact Pakistan failed to win a series in the West Indies on their previous five tours.

"Every series is a new series. What has happened in the past does not bother me. This team stands a good chance of winning if

are also good players, so we would not take them lightly."

Pakistan open the tour with a limited-overs practice match on Sunday at Antigua before playing the first one-day international at St. Vincent on May 18.

The second and third one-day matches are scheduled for St. Lucia on May 21 and 22 before the first Tests in Barbados on May 26-30 and the second Test in Jamaica from June 3-7.

Shoaib demands an explanation

PTI, Karachi

Heartbroken after being ignored for the West Indies tour, Pakistani fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar on Tuesday demanded an explanation from the country's cricket authorities for his ouster from the team.

In an interview here at the National Stadium, where he had come to shoot a promo for Rashid Latif Cricket Academy, Shoaib, nevertheless, vowed not to give up and promised that he would be back in the side for home series against England.

"I am disappointed and heartbroken. I had conveyed my availability (for the West Indies tour) because I was convinced that I was fit. But even then, I have not been considered," Shoaib said.

"What puzzles me most is that nobody is willing to tell me whether I have been dropped on fitness grounds or disciplinary reasons or for not appearing before PCB's medical commission to prove fitness," the 29-year-old said.

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TOUR OPENER

Javed holds Tigers' innings

SPORTS REPORTER

Opener Javed Omar slammed a half-century but the Tigers lost three quick wickets after a decent start in their rain interrupted tour opener against British Universities at Fenner's in Cambridge yesterday.

Captain Habibul Bashar was the third batsman out when he lost his wicket in the first over after tea as Bangladesh slumped from 75 without loss to 99 for three. The tourists were 142 for three when this report was being prepared. Earlier rain had prevented any play before lunch.

Javed was batting on 78 with thirteen boundaries. Mohammad Ashraful, who had come in after Bashar's fall, was on 25. The Bangladesh skipper, who stroked the first ball he faced to the boundary, was out for 8.

The British Universities won the toss and sent the Tigers in on damp day. Javed and his partner Nafees Iqbal however ensured a creditable start to the tour. The partnership was broken when Nafees (24 off 63) was out leg before.

Bangladesh lost another wicket in very next over as left-handed Shahriar Nafees, one of the new faces in the squad, made a 5-ball duck two runs later.

Javed completed his fifty off 95 deliveries with seven boundaries. Bangladesh included have included raw fast bowler Shahadat Hossain Rajib in the squad for the three-dayer.

TEAM

Habibul Bashar (captain), Javed Omar, Nafees Iqbal, Shahriar Nafees, Mohammad Ashraful, Rajin Saleh, Khaled Mashud, Mohammad Rafique, Mashrafe Mortaza, Tapash Baisya and Hossain

Whatmore expected Mortuza in World XI

Cricket

REUTERS, London

Bangladesh paceman Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza was unlucky to miss out on selection for the Inter-national Cricket Council's (ICC) Super Series against Australia later this year, coach Dav Whatmore said on Monday.

Whatmore said the selection panel, led by former India opener Sunil Gavaskar, missed an opportunity to help Bangladesh cricket by failing to pick a single player from the fledgling Test nation.

"I was really hoping Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza might have been in that one-day group," Whatmore told reporters. "I reckon he was a bit unlucky."

"I would have said (to the selectors) 'look mate, it's your initial squad and this kid can play'."

A select ICC group of 39 were picked earlier on Monday, including 21 players who have been shortlisted for both the one-off six-day Test and a three-match one-day series to be hosted by the world's top-ranked team in October.

The captains and vice-captains will be announced when the squads are reduced to 20 each in July. In the following month they will be trimmed to 14 players for the one-dayers and 13 for the Test.

"It would have been a huge boost for him (Mortuza)," added Whatmore.

"He's coming from a team that's developing and it would be a huge shot in the arm for Bangladesh

cricket generally and it would really help the whole country along."

Mortuza, 21, who has taken 43 wickets in 16 Tests and 19 wickets in 18 one-dayers, said he believed he would not have been out of place in the select group which includes players like England's Darren Gough, South Africa's Shaun Pollock and Chaminda Vaas of Sri Lanka.

"Of course, I would have been ready," he said. "I have been playing



MASHRAFEE-BIN-MORTUZA

international cricket, have already played 16 Tests, and I have played against every team except for West Indies."

Mortuza was thrilled at the prospect of Bangladesh's first full tour of England, especially the first Test at Lord's which starts on May 26.

"I'm excited about Lord's," he said. "I have heard Lord's is the best ground in the world, so I am really excited."

NATIONAL TT Biman keep men's title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Biman retained the men's team title when they handed a 3-1 defeat to Bangladesh Ansar in the Meril 27th National Table Tennis Championships at the Shaheed Suhrawardi National Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The national flag carrier got off to a poor start in the repeat of last year's final as veteran Rochi lost to Pappu 9-11, 12-14, 11-13. But top seed Mahub inspired the comeback beating Edison 5-11, 11-5, 11-6, 11-6 in the second game and winning the final one against Pappu 11-4, 13-11, 6-11, 11-9.

In between, Hamlet earned an 11-6, 6-11, 11-4, 10-12, 11-3 victory against Kachi.

Earlier, Biman moved into the final beating Dhaka 3-0 in the semifinals while Ansars defeated Narail by the same margin in the other semi.

Ansars, who won the women's team title on Monday, also clinched the boys' team event blanking Narail 3-0 in the final. In the semifinals, Ansars outplayed Dinajpur 3-0 and Narail thumped Biman also by straight sets.

But Narail excelled in the singles events. Considered as a breeding ground, the young paddlers from the southern district won both boys and girls singles. Tinni won the girls' singles crown for Narail defeating Rahima of Patuakhali 4-0 in the final yesterday.

The women's doubles final will be an all-Ansars affair with Tumpa and Rinu pitted against favourites Saleha and Sonam. Tumpa and Rinu beat Jemy and Sumi of Gainabdh 11-2, 11-6, 11-4, 12-10 in the first semi and Saleha-Sonam won the second semifinal against Biman pair Rumi and Ratna.

What to WATCH

TEN Sports

West Indies vs South Africa
Third ODI
Live at 7:30 pm

ESPN

Sportscentre
Live at 8:30 pm
English Premier Football League
Man United vs Chelsea
Same Day Delay at 9:30 pm
Arsenal vs Everton
Live at 12:55 pm (Thursday)

STAR Sports

ATP Hamburg Masters
Second Round
Live at 5:30 pm
Sportsline
Live at 8:00 pm
Brazilian Football
Atletico Mg vs Ceara

Winter comes to town

SPORTS REPORTER

Australian pitch curator Richard Winter arrived in the capital Monday night to prepare eight central wickets at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Winter, who is in charge of the Western Australian Cricket Association (WACA) ground, will spend three weeks to prepare fresh wickets at the venue.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has hired him to make international standard pitches at their new home.

"Our first priority will be to prepare the central wickets and then try to take some help to build some practice pitches. Everything is ready and that's why we hope it would be finished within three weeks," said Rafiqul Islam Babu, vice-chairman of BCB's grounds committee, yesterday.

Piper handed suspension

AFP, London

The career of Warwickshire wicketkeeper Keith Piper is hanging by a thread after he was suspended for failing a drugs test.

Warwickshire confirmed the suspension on Monday, which follows the news last week that he had tested positive during their county championship match against Hampshire at Edgbaston last month.

The 35-year-old Piper will appear before an England and Wales Cricket Board disciplinary panel later this week after testing positive for a recreational drug.

A statement from Warwickshire declared: "The club are now in a position to confirm that the England and Wales Cricket Board have received formal notification from UK Sport that Keith Piper has provided a positive test sample for a banned substance.

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Rare honour for Dalmiya

PTI, New Delhi

As a recognition of his contribution to the world of sports, former Board of Control for Cricket in India president Jagmohan Dalmiya has been selected, along with FIFA boss Sepp Blatter and former International Olympic Committee chief Juan Antonio Samaranch, to receive the International Journal of History of Sport achievement award.

The three were selected from a list of 250 internationally acclaimed scholars of sports from around the world after a rigorous screening process. IJHS said in a release here on Tuesday.

The awards will mark the 25th anniversary of IJHS, a journal on sports studies, which is published by the Taylor and Francis Group, an international publishing house.

"They have helped to change the face of the world in the last 25 years through sport and the IJHS is proud to honour them as the foremost statesmen of modern century in the last quarter century," the release said.

The first of the three award functions would be held in Kolkata on July 15 in the presence of distinguished scholars from around the globe, it added.

On Dalmiya, who is the President of the Asian Cricket Council and a

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'Slim' Maradona in Madrid

Football

AP, Madrid

A slimmer and healthier looking Diego Maradona today said he had lost 27 kilograms since a recent operation and he was aiming to drop about another 20 kilograms.

"I'm feeling well. I'm down 27 kilograms. I'm aiming for 75 kilograms," a smiling and relaxed Maradona told a packed press conference in a central Madrid hotel hours after arriving in the Spanish capital from Havana, Cuba.

Maradona lost the weight after undergoing a stomach operation in March in Colombia. Before the operation, the 1.67m Argentine weighed 121kg.

"I needed to do it for my health and for my daughters," said the 44-year-old former striker who led Argentina to the 1986 World Cup title and 1990 final.

Referring to his battle with drugs he said, "I'm recovered, but not cured. This is a constant fight."

Maradona said he was in Spain "to get soaked in football" and to see friends.

"I want to meet Ronaldo person-

ally. I had a good telephone conversation with him," he said, adding that he also wanted to meet Arrigo Sacchi, Raul, Roberto Carlos and Vanderlei Luxemburgo.

Sacchi is a director at Real Madrid, and Luxemburgo is the team's coach. Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos and Raul are the superstars for Madrid.

Maradona said he also planned to see Atletico de Madrid play mid-week, and then travel to Barcelona to meet FC Barcelona's Brazilian world player of the year Ronaldinho.

Maradona played for Barcelona before moving to Italian club Napoli. He won two Serie A titles and the UEFA Cup with the southern Italian team.

Asked what he thought of Barcelona being odds-on to win the Spanish title this season, he said:

"Barcelona are a worthy champion. (Coach Frank) Rijkaard has done a fantastic job."

Maradona said he was still considering an offer to work with the youth teams at former club Boca Juniors in Argentina.

"Professional soccer doesn't interest me but junior categories do," he said.



THE LEGEND CONTINUES: Diego Maradona gives a thumbs up during a press conference in Madrid on Tuesday. Maradona is in the Spanish capital for personal trip.

PHOTO: AFP