

Talha, Enamul busy on the sidelines

SPORTS REPORTER from Durham

Paceman Talha Zubair and left-arm spinner Enamul Haque might have little to do as far as the second Test was concerned. But the two young cricketers, who are scheduled to return home without featuring in any of the two Tests, enjoyed a different kind of festival at the hall of Riverside ground.

Both were guests in a food festival on Thursday, where as many as fifteen Bangladeshi curry shops, mostly located in Durham, took part. Famous Bangladeshi chef Tommy Mia also attended the festival. Former England captain Mike Gatting and David Gower were two of the judges.

FRENCH OPEN Franco-Belgian women's final

AFP, Paris

Former champions Mary Pierce and Justine Henin-Hardenne will contest the first-ever Franco-Belgian French Open women's singles final after both recorded easy victories in Thursday's semifinals.

2000 champion Pierce defeated Russian Elena Likhovtseva 6-1, 6-1 in just 58 minutes.

Earlier Henin-Hardenne, the winner in 2003, cruised past another Russian, Nadia Petrova, 6-2, 6-3 in 1hr 08min.

Agrani, BRTC split points

SPORTS REPORTER

Agrani Bank and BRTC shared points when they drew their First Division Football League match goalless at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

It was BRTC's second successive draw after losing the first two games while the first for Agrani, who also made a similar start but won 6-1 in the previous round.



I MYSELF HAVE TO LEAD FROM THE FRONT: A grim-faced Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore leads his charges to an indoor practice session at Durham on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Red-hot Sheikh Russel

Russel-10, Fakirerpool-0

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra set a new Premiership record when they brushed aside Youngmen's Club Fakirerpool 10-0 in the Premier Bank Premier Football League yesterday.

Last year's runners-up Russel, determined to wipe out memories of a solitary goal defeat to Farashganj in their league opener, were boosted by four goals from Yusuf Ali and a brace each from captain Egrir Mohammed and substitute Bulbul at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Abahani's 8-0 defeat of East End in 1996 was the biggest win in the Premier League since its inception in 1992 but Brothers Union's 15-0 victory in 1984 against Dilkusha in the old First Division still hold the Senior Division record. Brothers had also won 9-0 against Dilkusha in 1981.

The second round game, however, was anything but a one-sided affair as the scoreline suggested.

Youngmen's, who put on a spirited display against Abahani on their Premier League return before going down 2-1, created ample scoring chances after Yusuf had given Russel a seventh minute lead.

But Rajan split two easy chances inside ten minutes before Youngmen's striker Robin's shot from a corner was saved by Russel defender Mishu from the goalline.

But Abu Yusuf's boys did not take too long to spot the vulnerable right side of the Youngmen's defence and eight out of ten goals were created from the flank.

Not only did the entire defence collapse but also, Youngmen's goalkeeper Nayan was responsible for conceding half the goals, failing to stop shots at his near post.

Russel had to wait a further 21

minutes to double the lead when Moroccan forward Rachid anticipated a weak clearance inside the box and coolly placed a right-footer into the back of the net.

Moroccan midfielder Egrir scored twice before the break, in the 34 and 41 minutes, with long range shots that should have been stopped by custodian Nayan.

Coming to the second half 4-0

down, Youngmen's still showed some enthusiasm but it soon fizzled out as Russel opened the floodgate. It was Tanvir who took the limelight, the indefatigable left winger exposing the rival defence to create four goals.

Bulbul, who replaced Rachid at the break, neatly placed the ball at the far corner after Tanvir set him up in the 54th minute while Yusuf

slotted the ball into an open net three minutes later following hard work by Tanvir again.

Tanvir's quickly taken corner then inspired substitute midfielder Nayan find the mark from an acute angle, making it 7-0 in the 68th minute.

Diminutive striker Yusuf, who

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A midfield tussle between the players of Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra and Youngmen's Club Fakirerpool during their Premier Football League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Thursday.

PHOTO: STAR

Trying to put on a brave face

Cricket

AL-AMIN from Chester-le-Street

"It might be another short match practice but England will be as ruthless as they can against Bangladesh when the match starts here on Friday."

It was exactly what a Sky Sports reporter was trying to beam across the world while standing in front of the camera with the Riverside ground behind him.

And in the middle of the ground Bangladesh paceman Tapash Baisya was going through a fitness test. But even if he passes the fitness test he knows that it is going to be the toughest challenge the Tigers are going to face at the Riverside ground.

Coach Dav Whatmore has already said that he was not expecting any better treatment from an unchanged England side, which won the first Test at Lord's on the third morning.

The Bangladesh coach also said that he was not surprised the manner in which the Tigers lost the first Test.

"Playing at Lord's was always difficult and considering the strength of the opponents and the bowling that they have I think it was the toughest challenge for Bangladesh. So, I was not surprised at all," said Whatmore.

"But we have worked in some of the technical aspects of the batsmen and hope that the boys will show some fight although I know it will be difficult," said Whatmore ahead of the second Test.

Like England the weather also promises not to be so kind with tons of cloud still hovering above the ground. And the groundsman only uncovered the wicket today.

"It is difficult to bat on this kind of surface. But we have to fight and show that we are mentally prepared for it," said the Bangladesh coach.

Skipper Habibul Basher also put up a brave face against the adversity.

"We played badly at Lord's and we need to improve both on our batting and bowling here. It is very tough for a batsman because he will get only one chance but a bowler can still come back strongly after a bad spell," said Basher adding that they have worked a lot on how to spend more time on the wicket.

Basher said that he did not expect people to say good things after a bad match and claimed that they were in this kind of situation for so many occasions.

"But we did not expect that bad situation that we are in now."

However, he wants to make it simple and don't want to try too many things.

"Our target is to bat at least a day

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Mushfiqur twists his ankle

AL-AMIN from Chester-le-Street

Bangladesh suffered an injury blow on Thursday when young Mushfiqur Rahim twisted his left ankle while coming down the stairs at Redworth Hall Hotel.

The 16-year-old suffered the freakish injury in the morning when he was coming down from his room to join the others at the breakfast table.

He was sitting with a grim face when team physio Paul Close said that the injury looked worse than expected.

"It looks more than a minor injury with the match starting tomorrow. He was definitely very unlucky coming down the stairs and falling awkwardly," said the Close.

"We had an X-ray an hour ago and we will know the extent of the injury in two or three hours."

The teenager was not in a mood to speak as he knows that it would be tough to recover before the match.

"I've got injured at the same place after the first practice match and at the moment it looks bad," said Mushfiqur as he slowly walked into the team bus with everybody trying to console him.

This is the second time a Bangladeshi cricketer suffered such an injury after paceman Mashrafebin-Mortuza twisted his ankle at Blomfontaine before the 2003 World Cup match against West Indies.

Latif begs to differ

Cricket

AL-AMIN from Durham

When a team is not performing all sorts of problems creep in from here and there and it was more acute with the Bangladesh cricket team.

The cricketers are not only ones facing a confidence crisis after their demoralising defeat at Lord's it was also affecting the team management since the Tigers arrived in Durham on Monday afternoon.

Team manager MA Latif is usually a bundle of energy but he also looked uncomfortable with the state of affairs and blamed the Lord's debacle on insufficient training.

"To be frank he (Dav Whatmore) was totally focused on the training of his boys even before coming here. He knows the English conditions better than anybody else. I always insisted in Dhaka to do some extra training with the batsmen there. But it never happened," said the Bangladesh manager at Redworth Hall Hotel on Wednesday.

"I also did not find any reason for him to go with the Bangladesh team to New Delhi for the Duleep Trophy. It seemed to me that there were other things on his mind rather than the game itself," said Latif without elaborating.

Whatmore was linked with the Indian job at that time after John Wright decided to quit.

Latif is also not happy with

Whatmore spending time attending frequent interviews.

"When England went straight to training after their victory before lunch on the third day our team enjoyed breaks. There was a brainstorming session the following day but again the much needed training did not take place," observed Latif.

The team also failed to do any outdoor training at Durham and the boys of Whatmore were forced to train indoors on Wednesday due to inclement weather.

"When we were losing wickets one after another at Lord's we desperately needed the coach and t

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Hands-off our Test status

Cricket

ARCHITECT DR NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

Cricket has long lost its legacy as a gentleman's game.

So much so that its governing body the ICC has been compelled to frame a twelve thousand-plus worded "Code of Conduct for Players and Team Officials". While we should ponder a petition to include within its gamut former players who commentate and thereby earn their living from ICC matches, it is not far to see why such a code was necessary.

Trevor Marshallsea wrote (in <smh.com.au>) on May 31 that "Richie Benaud has added his respected (acknowledgement withheld) voice to calls to kick Bangladesh out of top-level cricket following their first-Test thrashing in England."

Kick? Is that the sort of vibes the journo got from the former Australian skipper? Has not other

team ever been thrashed before? Have not the Australians been thrashed before, in cricket, too? Regrettable that after 15 years of Test cricket brilliance and decades as commentator this cricket elder has gotten entangled in minnows bashing.

Benaud's howl was immediately endorsed in The Times by 'Dennis the Menace' of world cricket Shane Warne. This gifted spinner was banned from international cricket for twelve months in February 2003 by the Australian Cricket Board for using an illegal drug. The truncated penalty was lenient; inappropriate too as he continued with everything in cricket except playing. Case in point: Indians Md. Azharuddin and Ajay Jadeja.

Out-of-dope Warne wrote: "The worst aspect is that I cannot see any light on the horizon for Bangladesh. I have not seen anything to suggest that they might be even a moderate team in the years ahead." One wonders if Warne is taking up spinning yarns or astrology. Years ahead, huh!

All this is perhaps because since being awarded Test status in

November 2000, Bangladesh have only won one of its three dozen matches. So what? So many times have we been told that winning was not important. What hypocrisy? But we achieved in little over four years what once took New Zealand 26 years (1930-1956). Did anyone call for New Zealand's axing from cricket's premier league then? Ours could have been even earlier had Inzamam-ul-Haq not stood up to save his team's grace at Multan.

Then we have yet another talented but controversial cricketer, Pakistan's Javed Miandad who has downloaded the Aussie ring tone. Nicknamed "The Street Fighter," because of his fighting talent on and off the ground this Miandad is known for both his on-field and off-field skirmishes. His suggestion that Bangladesh should stop playing Tests until they improve their performance is outrageous and illogical. However well one does in a mock, the actual exam is a different ball game.

Jumping on the BBB (Bangladesh Bashing Bandwagon) is Ian Botham, arguably England's most charismatic

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WI-Pak 2nd Test from today

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

The last time Pakistan won a Test match in the Caribbean, Salman Butt -- the youngest member of the likely playing XI -- was not even four, and that says enough about the challenge that Inzamamul Haq and his side face at Sabina Park, Jamaica against a rejuvenated West Indies when the second and final Test begins here on Friday.

Mere weeks after being trounced by South Africa, Shivnarine Chanderpaul and his embattled crew administered a drubbing of their own in Barbados, and the dent to the Pakistani psyche would have been far worse but for Shahid Afridi's rage against the dying light on the fourth day.

Unfortunately for Pakistan, most of the fighting spirit in Bridgetown was confined to the dressing room

and the showers -- if leaks from the dressing room are to be believed. It was a sad state of affairs for a team that had accomplished wonders in India by dint of sheer hard work and a refreshingly united approach.

Deprived of the services of Inzamam, to suspension, and Yousuf Youhana -- back home tending to his ailing father -- the Pakistani batting was a shambles on a shirtfront at the Kensington Oval, a surface where the incomparable Brian Lara caressed and bludgeoned his way to 178 from just 172 balls.

After that debacle, Yasir Hameed and Bazid Khan will make way as Inzamam returns, along with Shoaib Malik, who has served out a ridiculously light punishment for throwing a domestic game.

Pakistan were undone in the first Test by the slingshots of Fidel Edwards -- whose subsequent breakdown has seen him replaced by Tino Best -- and the seemingly innocuous off-spin of Chris Gayle,

and also by their own refusal to pick Shoaib Akhtar.

On a placid pitch where only extreme pace looked likely to breach a batsman's defences, neither the tireless Navedul Hasan nor the gangly Shabbir Ahmed look remotely like running through a side, and neither offered even a smidgen of the intimidating air that Akhtar brings with him. He may have days when he's a liability, but as Matthew Hayden and Darren Lehmann -- both know a bit about the art of batting -- would testify, he can be frightening when in the mood.

The bowling travails were worsened by the contempt with which Lara treated Danish Kaneria. Before the tour, Inzamam had talked of Kaneria being his trump card, but Lara -- who has pulverised as great a spinner as Muttiah Muralitharan -- quickly set about showing that it's one thing to talk the talk, and quite another to walk it.

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Lara Windies' best cricketer

CRICINFO, undated

Brian Lara has been named West Indies Players' Association's cricketer-of-the-year for the second time in a row, at the WIPA 2004 awards function held at the Jamaica Pegasus hotel on Wednesday.

Lara, who has been in terrific form in the last 12 months, has amassed 1178 runs in 12 Tests at 58.9 with three centuries, apart from his mindboggling 400 in Antigua against England.

Lara, who topped the ICC Test rankings, also won the Test player-of-the-year award and a special prize for reclaiming the Test record.

While, Chris Gayle was named the one-day player-of-the-year for his all-round performance, and Dwayne Bravo won the award for the emerging player-of-the-year.

Devon Smith, the Grenadian opener, was the first-class cricketer-of-the-year. Xavier Marshall bagged the youth cricketer-of-the-year award.

What to WATCH

STAR Sports

Sultan Azlan Shah Cup hockey
South Africa v South Korea
Live at 2 pm
Australia v India
Live at 4 pm
Malaysia v Pakistan
Live at 6 pm
England v Bangladesh
Second Test, live at 8 pm
Sportsline
Live at 11 pm

TEN Sports

French Open tennis
Men's singles semifinals
Live at 5 pm
West Indies v Paikisdan
Second Test, Day One
Live at 9 pm

ESPN

Sportscentre
Live at 8.30 pm

DAY'S EVENT

Premier Football League
Abahani v Dhaka Wanderers (5 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium