

BRAZIL	4
ARGENTINA	1

Fans love the Tigers

Cricket

AL-AMIN from Canterbury

Habibul Bashar's men have the uncanny ability to keep everyone guessing and when in recent clashes against world champions Australia, it has been even more evident. Just take the example of their last game of the NatWest series at St. Lawrence ground in Canterbury yesterday.

The Tigers were reduced to 19-3 and then saw half their wickets tumbling with 75 runs on the board. It might have given an indication of a quick demise like their collapse in the second match against Australia at Manchester.

But then came the spectacular fightback that saw Bangladesh eventually finish with a fighting total of 250-8. Interestingly it was exactly

the score Bangladesh had chased down at Cardiff merely 12 days ago for a magnificent 5-wicket win against Australia.

Although the match had only reached the halfway mark when Khaled Mahmud was caught off the final delivery of Gillespie, it was a scene to behold in the stands.

The reaction from the Bangladeshi supporters was as if their beloved team has just completed a memorable victory.

"If there is one team that should win the game it should be Bangladesh. We were absolutely delighted with the way they fought back," remarked an elated Mahtab, member of an enthusiastic group of few hundred who moved around the ground beating drums and carrying a big puppet tiger.

It was also amazing the way the home supporters backed them. "I'm a white Bangladeshi and

love them," said an English fan in his 40s.

Some enthusiastic home fans even joined the ceaseless parade and chanted "Bangladesh, Bangladesh."

The rivalry between England and Australia is nothing new and after the ugly episode involving Matthew Hayden and Simon Jones in the last game it has poured gasoline in a fire.

All eyes were fixed on Hayden when Australia came out to field with some kids waving the sponsors flag at the entrance of the ground. Hayden, who had earlier expressed his disgust at such reception before entering the grounds, slipped past the cordon with jeers from the stand.

B'DESH V AUS SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the Australian innings against Bangladesh in the ninth and final match in the league phase of the one-day triangular NatWest Series at Canterbury on Thursday:

BANGLADESH				
Omar c Gilchrist b Gillespie	0			
Nafees c Gilchrist b Watson	75			
Imran b Lee	0			
Ashraf b Lee	7			
Bashar c Gilchrist b Watson	30			
Aftab c Gilchrist b Kasprovicz	7			
Mashud not out	71			
Rafique c Gilchrist b Watson	15			
Mahmud c Ponting b Gillespie	22			
Extras: (lb-9, nb-6, w-8)	23			
Total: (For 8 wks in 50 overs)	250			
Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-9, 3-19, 4-57, 5-75, 6-169, 7-193, 8-250				
Did not bat: Mortuza, Baisya				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Lee	10	0	62	2
Gillespie	9	0	49	2
Watson	10	0	43	3
Kasprovicz	9	0	46	1
Symonds	10	0	36	0
Clarke	2	1	5	0

AUSTRALIA: Gilchrist, Hayden, Ponting, Martyn, Symonds, Hussey, Clarke, Watson, Lee, Gillespie, Kasprovicz.
Toss: Australia.
Umpires: Aleem Dar (Pakistan) and Jeremy Lloyds (England).

Win or get out for Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

The Premier Bank Premier Football League resumes today with Abahani pitted against Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra in a crucial match.

The last game of the seventh round will kick off at 5 pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium and Abahani can kiss their title hopes goodbye if they fail to pick up full points against last year's sensational runners-up.

Russel, sixth in the ten-team table with two wins and two draws, virtually have no chance but the Sky Blues, who are just ahead with 11 points, can still threaten the other contenders with a victory.

Abahani, who finished third in the previous season, have 11 points with three victories and two draws. Another win will bring them within three points of leaders Mohammedan but without suspended Joy and Ibrahim, it would be difficult against a rejuvenated Russel.

Captain Joy, who does the job of holding the midfield together and Ghanaian striker Ibrahim, Abahani's top scorer with four goals, both received their third yellow cards to begin a one-match ban.

Abahani were desperate to register their third and final foreign recruit, Ghana's central defender Osie Neil, last night not only to make up for the absence of the two stalwarts but also to strengthen a suspect defence that has conceded at least one goal in each of their six matches. Provided Neil's international transfer clearance arrived in time, he will make his Dhaka debut today.

Striker Tipu and midfielder Parvez are the likely ones to get a

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It's raining at Wimbledon

AFP, London

Persistent rain prevented play in the women's semifinals at Wimbledon on Thursday.

First on the schedule at 1200 GMT had been top seed Lindsay Davenport of the United States against France's Amelie Mauresmo followed by titleholder Maria Sharapova against former champion Venus Williams of the United States.

But the covers were pulled on shortly beforehand and at 1400 GMT there was still no sign of them being removed as the rain continued.

Brazilliant!

REUTERS, Frankfurt



Brazil scored a dazzling 4-1 win over arch-rivals Argentina to add the Confederations Cup to their World Cup and Copa America titles on Wednesday.

Their biggest win over Argentina for 37 years also avenged a 3-1 defeat in Buenos Aires in a World Cup qualifier three weeks ago and left little doubt that Brazil will be the team to beat in next year's World Cup final.

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira said: "Argentina v Brazil are always great matches. Argentina always have good teams but we

were good in defence and attack tonight and I think we deserved to win this title."

Two outstanding goals from Adriano steered Brazil to an unforgettable victory, the first blistering left-foot shot in the 11th minute after he appeared to lose control of the ball.

His second, a powerful header from a Cicinho cross after evading his marker in the 63rd minute, made him the tournament's top scorer with five goals. He was also named Player of the Tournament afterwards. Kaka, firing home in the 16th minute after an audacious drag-back and sweetly-struck curler, and Ronaldinho, with a simple tap-in again after a Cicinho cross in the 47th minute, scored the other goals

as Parreira celebrated his 100th match as Brazil coach in style.

Ronaldinho nearly got on the score-sheet with a 20-metre shot that cannoned off the crossbar after 58 minutes and Adriano was only centimetres away from forcing home the ball for his hat-trick a minute from time.

Brazil were irresistible, although Argentina, who played extra time against Mexico in the semi-finals on Sunday, were below their best and looked tired almost from the start.

It was left to substitute Pablo Aimar to score a consolation goal for Argentina with a brave diving header after 65 minutes, while Brazil had keeper Dida to thank for some important saves.

The only sour note in an other-

wise sporting game came when Ronaldinho and Fabricio Coloccini were booked in the 28th minute after Ronaldinho jabbed an elbow at the Argentine after he kicked the Brazilian skipper.

Apart from that, it was a fitting finale to a superb tournament that saw 56 goals scored in 16 matches and augurs well for next year's World Cup.

Brazil, who coped with the cold night air, emulated France by winning the Cup for the second time following their previous success in the inaugural tournament in 1997.

After two weeks of hot weather, the match was played on a chilly night as a thunderstorm raged around the Waldstadion, the pitch and spectators protected from the rain and lightning with the roof

covers in place. However, one gaping rip in one of the canvas sections of the roof allowed rain water to cascade down on to photographers and fans by one of the corner flags.

The stadium announcer issued instructions at halftime for spectators to remain in their seats for safety's sake.

But the main danger facing Argentina was not the weather but the Brazilian attack.

Almost from the start Brazil looked lively, inventive and full of running, with Ronaldinho unlocking Argentina's defence with two jinking runs in the opening minutes that unsettled the defenders marking him.

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PHOTO: AFP

NAFEES ARRIVES: Bangladesh opener Shahriar Nafees pulls one for four on way to scoring his maiden one-day half-century during their NatWest Series match against Australia at Canterbury on Thursday.

We're on the up: Bashar

Cricket

AFP, Canterbury

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar has labelled his side's tour of England a success and now wants his players to be given the chance to develop their skills in county cricket.

Bangladesh were soundly twice beaten by an innings in their two Tests against England and failed to qualify for Saturday's triangular one-day international NatWest Series final, also featuring Australia.

But amidst some heavy defeats Bangladesh pulled off one of the all-time great cricket upsets when they beat world champions Australia by five wickets in the June 18 tri-series match in Cardiff.

Meanwhile the likes of batsman Mohammad Ashraf, all-rounder Aftab Ahmed, opener Javed Omar and pace bowler Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza have all shone at various

stages during the past two months. Bashar on Wednesday said: "I am very pleased with the way we have played in the one-day series."

"We didn't start well against England at The Oval (a 10-wicket loss) but came back against Australia at Cardiff. In the last couple of games we could have done a little better but we are showing improvement."

"We are becoming more competitive. In the last three games we have put ourselves in a position where we had a platform to make a big score but did not carry it through. That shows our improvement."

"It has been a hard series for us but when we go back home I think we can do a lot better against Sri Lanka in September."

"The one area we are always lacking in consistency but it's good to see that Javed Omar and Mohammad Ashraf have been scoring runs consistently," Bashar added.

"Sometimes when we are in a good position we just lose our way. We also need to bowl more line and length."

"But it's been good to have Mortuza bowling again after an injury and hopefully in the next series he will do even better."

Ashraf's brilliant run-a-ball hundred set up the victory against Australia and he followed that up with 94 against England at Trent Bridge and 58 against the Australians in Manchester on Saturday.

It was proof that consistency was at last being added to the talent that saw Ashraf become the youngest player to score a Test hundred when, as a 16-year-old, he reached three figures against Sri Lanka in Colombo in 2001.

"The consistency of 'Ashy' (Ashraf) has pleased me," Bashar said. "He has been playing for a while, he started very young at 17. I know him very well. He has been batting like this since he started."

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PHOTOS: AFP

BEHOLD! (R) Adriano unleashes a blinder that gives Argentine custodian Lux (L) no chance as Brazil open the scoring at the Waldstadion in Frankfurt on Wednesday. A Brazilian fan (bottom) is understandably delighted.

PREVIEW: MEN'S SINGLES SEMIFINALS

Hewitt fired up for a Federer challenge



AFP, London

Lleyton Hewitt aims to shoot down Roger Federer's reputation as the world's greatest player in Friday's Wimbledon semifinal showdown using ammunition supplied by the All England Club.

The Australian, the champion in 2002, is furious that he was seeded at three instead of two which would have been in line with his world ranking.

Instead that honour was handed to America's Andy Roddick, the 2004 runner-up, who faces Swedish 12th seed Thomas Johansson in the other semifinal.

"It's a bit strange that the world number one and number two are playing in the semifinals," said Hewitt.

"I would definitely like it to have been the final. If you knock out the

best player, then you will have plenty of confidence going into the final on Sunday.

"It's a strange situation. I don't know how many times it would have happened that the two top ranked players would be playing in the semi-final of a Grand Slam."

On paper, Hewitt has a much stiffer test than Roddick.

The 24-year-old Australian has lost his last seven matches against Federer with his last win coming in the Davis Cup semifinals two years ago, coming back from two sets down.

Since then, it has been all Federer.

The Swiss number one defeated Hewitt in the quarterfinals here in 2004 and has also got the better of him in the finals at the US Open, the Masters Cup and Indian Wells without dropping a set.

"I'm not sure what the key will be against Roger," said Hewitt.

"I haven't won the last few, so I will have to try and find something

extra in the next couple of days. He's the best player in the world for a reason and has taken the game to another level.

"I've been losing to him in the last two years when he has dominated everybody else. He's pretty confident on Centre Court which he has made his own."

While Hewitt was seeing off Spanish serve-and-volleyer Feliciano Lopez 7-5, 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) to reach his second Wimbledon semifinal, Federer was defeating the big-hitting Chilean Fernando Gonzalez 7-5, 6-2, 7-6 (7/2) to record his 34th successive win on grass.

The world number one has not lost on the surface since a first round defeat to Mario Ancic here in 2002; in that time, he has collected two Wimbledon titles as well as a hat-trick of wins in Halle.

But despite his record against the Australian, Federer is cautious.

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Bring on the World Cup

REUTERS, Frankfurt

Brazil will defend the World Cup next year as clear favourites after they crushed Argentina 4-1 in the Confederations Cup final on Wednesday, according to coach Carlos Alberto Parreira.

Parreira said Brazil had not been favourites for many years and he contrasted the team's current form with the way they scraped into the 2002 finals, only to win the title.

"We are going in as an absolute favourite," Parreira said.

"We will have to work on it. We must ensure the role of favourite does not affect us."

Unlike Argentina, Brazil are still not certain of a place in the 2006 finals in Germany, but need only three points from their final three South American qualifiers.

Parreira said he was happy to have won the Confederations Cup, but even more delighted to have tried out different strategies in their five matches in Germany, recovering from a 1-0 group stage loss to Mexico.

"We had the chance to test players. It's not just a title for us," Parreira said.

"We were defending well and very fast touching the ball. If we play that way we will be successful."

Parreira also offered his thoughts on the leading challengers Brazil could face, assuming they return to Germany next year.

"The home team will have a wonderful World Cup. I fancy Holland. The Czech Republic are

strong. England and Portugal have improved a lot," he said.

Parreira also rated Argentina as one of the top teams, with little currently separating the two South American powerhouses despite Wednesday's result.

Argentina coach Jose Pekerman insisted the loss was no cause for panic.

"Let's not get desperate," Pekerman said, adding his side had never given up and had created chances to score.

"Reaching the final shows that our competitive level was good enough, but we possibly faced the best team in the world in the final," Pekerman said.

Back to painting

AFP, Frankfurt

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira announced on Wednesday he will not stay on in charge of the national side after the 2006 World Cup finals.

The 62-year-old told a Brazilian website that no matter what happened at the finals - for which Brazil need three more points from their last three qualifiers to be assured that they defend their title in Germany - he would be stepping down.

"I will not be staying on with the national team no matter what happens after the 2006 World Cup

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What to WATCH

STAR Sports

Wimbledon Championships

Men's Singles Semifinals

Live at 5 pm

DAY'S EVENT

Premier Football League

Abahani v Sheikh Russel (5 pm)

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium