

Let's take it from here

Cricket

RABEED IMAM

Some eight weeks ago, the Bangladesh team landed at London's Heathrow Airport understandably without the buzz that usually surrounds the arrival of a touring team.

Of course the odd TV crew had turned up, presumably more out of a sense of duty rather than interest, and there were a few *Deshi* faces assembled, courtesy of an initiative by the High Commission, to greet the Tigers. That was as 'high profile' as the welcome part got and the entry could not conjure up enough weight to sneak into the country's top newspapers.

Given the British media's mood preceding the series, the reception was hardly surprising. If ever a touring team had been made to feel unwelcome in England, it was Bangladesh and ex-cricketers-turned columnists, cricket writers,

experts were dishing out pages full of intense dislike for the newest Test nation. One wonders where they got the time and energy as in their very own words the season did not start before the Ashes and yet they were prepared to attack the Tigers.

Then the Australian great Richie Benaud, one of the most respected commentators, let fly his opinion that Bangladesh should be kicked out of the Test family and compatriot Shane Warne, a living legend, followed suit although what business they had in dissecting Bangladesh's cricket even before a single ball had been bowled in the series is anybody's guess.

So Bangladesh knew they had to confront enemies on and off the field, a task they did not quite get a hang of until Day Two of the second and final Test. But after the two-and-a-quarter-day surrender at Lord's, the daredevil 82 not out from Aftab Ahmed provided England with the first real glimpse into the ability of a side keen to impress.

With the ignominy of a two-day

finish hanging over them, Bangladesh played their natural game, the uninhibited game. Suddenly Hoggard, Harmison, Jones, Flintoff were no longer the irresistible force and the belief was back. Significantly, the weather had also changed at Durham when Bangladesh were scoring at almost five-an-over. The sun had come out and the pitch had lost all its seaming trickery. The best period to play cricket in England was just beginning and the Bangladesh players must have wondered why they had been invited at the wrong time. The answer, if you are Bangladesh prepared to get raw deals.

"We have to accept it if the cricket authorities of a country invite us at their preferred time. We are still not in a position to choose or call for changes in schedules. We are the ones asking for tours, it is not the other way round," said a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh took the confidence from Durham into

the NatWest tri-series and enjoyed their fare share of moments of absolute dominance over both England and Australia, none more than the now legendary magical five-wicket triumph against the world champions at Sophia Gardens in Cardiff. And after another fine display to round the trip off at Canterbury where they first fought back and then pushed Australia all the way, the Tigers have ensured that a few things will thankfully not revisit our cricket again.

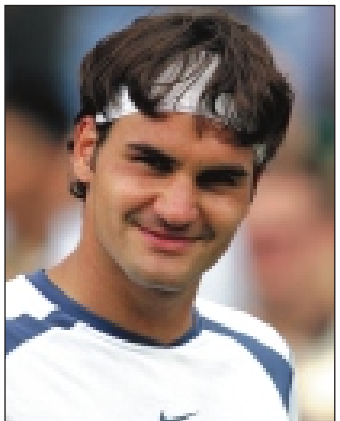
Opposing teams will no longer go into ODIs with Bangladesh with the slightest feeling of eventuality. Our Test status, so often a topic of disgust which bordered on hatred at times in the international media, will not be questioned with half the ferocity of the recent past. Rest assured about it. For indication, just go back a couple of days and re-run what the ICC president had said to a murmuring quarry about Bangladesh's Test

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Federer storms into final

AFP, London

Roger Federer ruthlessly destroyed Lleyton Hewitt 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) in a breathtaking Centre Court semi-final demolition to move just one win



ROGER FEDERER

away from a third successive Wimbledon title on Friday.

The 23-year-old world number

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Faruque's consistency goal

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY

After an eventful eight-week England tour, the Bangladesh cricket team fly home tomorrow morning bringing the memory of a famous one-day victory against world champions Australia.

But the Tigers' inspirational coach Dav Whatmore, who is still mourning the death of his father, captain Habibul Bashar, Khaled Mashud and Javed Omar will however not be on the flight.

The senior trio were given permission by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to enjoy some time off. Both Bashar and Mashud go to America while Javed will visit Europe along with his family.

But for left-handed opener Shahriar Nafees Ahmed, who has been named Bangladesh A team captain, Nafees Iqbal, Tushar Imran and Aftab Ahmed, they only have eleven days to relax before returning

to England with the second-string Bangladesh side.

The Bangladesh A team will leave on July 15 to play five three-day and four limited-overs games against different English county selections.

With the Tigers' next assignment coming up against Sri Lanka in September, it is feared that some young players will be fatigued before the first one-dayer on September 1. Those Bangladesh A team players will hardly get a week to recover once they return on August 20.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed, however, saw nothing wrong with the scheduling and said the England tour by the second-string national side would be beneficial in the long run.

"If we are focusing on the future I must say the tour will serve us well because I believe that our young players can gain a great deal of experience while in England," said Faruque.

Despite the historic triumph against Australia, the chief selector was concerned with the poor performance

in the Tests.

"I think we played our best one-day series against two of the world's best teams but let's not forget that we had a bad Test series against the second ranked side (England).

"Some of our players showed at least in the second innings of the second Test that they have the potential to play in the longer version," he explained.

But Faruque was keen to see consistency in both versions of the game.

"I think our best achievement in the one-day series was our consistency. Now we should try to keep it up in Sri Lanka. The players are the only ones capable of finding out how to become consistent in Test cricket," he said.

"While I think the victory against the Australians was very satisfying considering our current state of affairs

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Queen without a crown

WIMBLEDON

AFP, London

Maria Sharapova, at 18-years-old, has lost her Wimbledon crown, but she has vowed to be back better and stronger than before.

The Russian's love affair with grasscourts came to an abrupt end at the hands of Venus Williams in the gathering Centre Court gloom.

It brought to an end a tremendous 22-match unbeaten streak on the surface which took in back-to-back titles at Birmingham and last year's stunning title triumph over Williams' younger sister Serena.

But it will have done little to dull the glitter that has catapulted the statuesque blond to super stardom in the space of the last 12 months.

Already she is turning to the future.

"I guess there are many more years to come," she said after absorbing the dismay of her defeat to Williams.

"I think I need to be stronger. The stronger I get, the bigger my serve will be, the easier it will be for me to hold my serve and get more free points.

"I know with hard work and practice and repetition it will get

bigger and stronger and more accurate."

Sharapova had looked in imperious form in her five previous games leading up to the match with Williams, seven years her senior, and she had a 2-0 winning head-to-head record against the American 2000 and 2001 Wimbledon winner.

But she insisted that she had not been guilty of over confidence against a player whose career had been in a deep tailspin over the last year in contrast to her own rapid rise to the top.

"I was ready for a tough match. It's normal. It was a semifinal," she said.

"It was just one of those days where she played a great match and I don't think I played my best tennis." "I don't really feel tired right now. Maybe I'm mentally tired."

The defeat also put on ice Sharapova's ambition to become the first Russian to be ranked world No.1.

She came within one win of doing so last month, but Lindsay Davenport held on and the Russian's failure to match her title triumph of last year means that she will lose ranking points here while Davenport will not having once again won through to the semi-finals.

Sharapova will now turn her attentions to the hardcourt tournaments in North America and the buildup to the US Open at Flushing Meadow, where she lost in the third round last year.

And there is also her booming personal endorsements market with her high profile name being used for everything from perfumes to mobile phones and from postal stamps to top of the line fashion.

She may have lost her crown, but Sharapova still rules over a multi-million dollar business empire.



PHOTO: STAR

Abahani's Farhad (C) and Sheikh Russel's Moroccan midfielder Mohammad are engaged in an aerial tussle during their Premier Football League clash at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Walking not a good habit

AFP, Canterbury

To walk or not to walk, one of cricket's most enduring questions, was given a new spin here Thursday when Adam Gilchrist gave himself out in Australia's NatWest Series victory against Bangladesh.

The wicketkeeper surprised captain and non-striker Ricky Ponting when he exited after a ball from Tapash Baisya flew to Khaled Mahmud at first slip.

However, television replays confirmed the ball had hit a footmark and ballooned to Mahmud with Gilchrist's bat hitting the pitch only. Gilchrist had made a rapid 45 when he departed.

But Australia's innings did stutter following the dynamic left-hander's exit and the incident raised questions about what might happen if Gilchrist continued to walk, the practice where a batsman gives himself out if he knows he's hit the ball, during the upcoming Ashes Tests.

Meanwhile a clearly surprised Ponting was still trying to make sense of his vice-captain's actions after Australia's six-wicket win.

"I was at the non striker's end and I didn't think he hit it either. I was actually going to yell out to him," Ponting told reporters.

"I turned to the umpire straight away and looked at him and we both had strange looks on our faces but Adam thought he had hit it.

"He hit the ground behind where the ball pitched but said he felt something on the edge of his bat.

"He turned around and saw it balloon to first slip and put two and two together and thought that he was out caught at first slip so he trudged off. The replays have shown he missed it by quite a distance."

But Ponting insisted he had no qualms about Gilchrist's conduct. "No, not if he thought he hit it.

"He has made it pretty clear throughout his career that if he thinks he has hit a ball he is going to walk and that is exactly what happened today.

"It was probably as much my fault as anyone's. I saw him take a few steps off. I probably could have intervened but if I had done that,

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WOMEN'S FINAL TODAY Davenport takes her place

AFP, London

Top seed Lindsay Davenport needed just two games on Friday to see off the challenge of France's Amelie Mauresmo and reach her first Wimbledon final in five years.

The American won the rain-hit tie 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 and goes on to play compatriot Venus Williams in Saturday's final.

The Davenport-Mauresmo semifinal had been suspended due to rain late Thursday at 5-3 to Davenport in the third set and with Mauresmo serving.

The third seed duly held serve to love to get to 5-4, but it was all to no avail as Davenport comfortably served out to reach the final, Mauresmo netting an easy volley at the net on match point.

"There was a lot of tension and

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Abahani stay alive

SPORTS REPORTER



Senior Division Football League

Depleted Abahani pulled off a much-deserved victory to keep their title hopes alive in the Premier Football League when they inflicted 2-0 defeat on Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The result meant the Sky Blues leapfrogged Muktiyoddha and Farashganj to third spot with 14 points from seven matches, three adrift of leaders Mohammedan Sporting Club. Defending champions Brothers Union are in second position with 16 points.

It was a must-win situation for the popular Dhanmondi-based club who also went to the game without three key players -- custodian Nizam, tireless midfielder Joy and striker Ibrahim.

However Shahajuddin Tipu celebrated his place in the starting eleven to give Abahani a 1-0 first half lead before his bald headed partner Ariful Kabir Farhad added the other after the breather.

But scoreline did not reflect Abahani's struggle not only against last year's runners-up but also a muddy ground. They had wait until the 32nd minute before finding the target when national striker Tipu capitalized against the run of play.

Receiving the ball from Lajuk, Tipu raced into the box and dribbled past Aminul before unleashing a trademark angular left-footer which romped home kissing the far post.

Before that Russel, who enjoyed 70 per cent possession, wasted two good chances that fell to Tanveer, who failed to connect on Rachid and Majid crosses with only goalkeeper Anwarul in front of him.

The story was the same in the second period with Russel dominat-

ing but their strikers lacking ideas combined with resolute defending by Abahani centre-back Prodip.

Farhad then wrapped up the points in the 77th minute when he cleverly sprang the offside trap from a Parvez chip and then dodged past the advancing Biplob to finish the job with a left-footed placing shot.

Russel, already out of contention have eight points from seven matches.

Yellow cards: Endem and Parvez (Abahani), Deen Mohammad and Rachid (Russel).

TEAMS

ABAHANI: Anwarul, Prodip, Shipon, Shawkat, Lajuk, Wali, Ujjal, Endem, Parvez, Farhad (Zahed) and Tipu.

SHEIKH RUSSEL: Biplob, Deen Mohammad, Zahirul, Aminul (Mishu), Yousuf, Tanveer (Yousuf), Mohammad, Sharif, Maruf (Hanif), Rachid and Majid.

Referee: Mansoor Azaad.

Badda earn full points

SPORTS REPORTER

Badda Jagaroni Sangsadd beat bottom-side Dhanmondi Club 1-0 in the First Division Football League at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Kamol struck the all-important goal in the 54th minute.

Second-placed Badda pushed their collection to 20 points from ten matches while Dhanmondi remained on four points from same number of outings.

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PHOTO: AP

PICTURE SAYS IT ALL: Maria Sharapova of Russia and her American conqueror Venus Williams walk off the court after their epic Wimbledon semifinal on Thursday.