

School soccer

SPORTS REPORTER

Dolaipar High, Ali Ahmed High, Khilgaon Govt High and Segunbagicha High moved into the group semifinals in the Pran-Cola School Football Tournament after beating their respective rivals at different city venues yesterday.

Dolaipar blanked Rahamatullah Model High 4-0 and Segunbagicha beat Siddheshwari Boys' High 2-0 at the Birsheshthra Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur.

Ali Ahmed High managed a solitary goal victory over Shah Noori Model High at the same venue where Khilgaon Govt. beat Titas Gas High by same margin.

At the Dhanmondi Club ground, Bir Shreshtha Noor Mohammad Rifles Public beat Islambagh Ashraf Ali High 2-0, Rajdhani High beat Enam Children High 1-0.

At the Mirpur National Bangla High School, South Bridge beat Shaheed Abu Taleb High 1-0, Maniknagar Model High thrashed Moni Kanon High 3-0.

IAS drew 1-1 with Senapalli High and Kamarpada High School held Uttar Khan High 1-1 at the Uttara Armed Police ground.



PHOTO: STAR

Young Bangladesh paceman Syed Rasel having his breakfast at the Taj Samudra Hotel in Colombo on Saturday.

A left-arm solution?



AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

Syed Rasel has always dreamed of winning a national cap and after two reasonably good performances against Sri Lanka, many believe that the left-arm pacer has come to stay.

The new kid on the block, who has not only got a smooth run-up and action, but also capable moving the ball both ways. The only thing he needs to work on is his speed, which can make him the next left-arm paceman after now selector Golam Nowsher Prince.

It was no surprise when he walked into the national team after claiming 21 first-class wickets including a seven-wicket haul against Kent for the Bangladesh A on their recent tour of England.

His arrival on the senior team also ended the selectors' long wait for a bowler who could add some variety to the attack.

The 21-year-old from Jhikargacha, Jessore, feels that he has the ability to cope with the pressure at the international level but admitted that there are always areas to improve on.

"I have realised after playing two

one-dayers that there is no alternative to hard work at this level. There is a gulf of difference between domestic and international circuit," a soft-spoken Rasel told at the team's Taj Samudra Hotel over breakfast on Saturday.

"Accuracy is very important. I did not struggle to adjust to the conditions here, which is very familiar to me. But I was able to move the ball more in the first match than the second one because of the wicket. I stuck to the basics and tried to land the ball in the right areas," said Rasel, who took 2-42 on debut and captured 1-49 in the second match.

His figures at the Premadasa Stadium, where the home side amassed 295-5, was most economical among the three pacers and not far behind the two spinners, who gave away 47 runs each.

In his first spell, Rasel returned with 7-1-30-0 and was the only bowler to have a maiden in the match.

"I was not bowling for wickets actually. I think I bowled well but the Sri Lankan players have more experience. They played better and you cannot restrict shots from a guy like Sanath Jayasuriya. They never miss a loose ball, which is the main difference between us and them. Jayasuriya even can smack a good ball. That is

why I have to bowl at the right spot.

"Dav (Whatmore) told me that the Lankans are very strong square of the wicket. So I was bowling on the off-middle line. Still, I got hit when the ball swung a bit."

Rasel, who made his domestic cricket debut for Abahani and played for Biman, learned the tricks from his Khulna Division teammate and skipper Monjurul Islam, another left-arm pacer who has lost his place in the national side.

His international wicket was his idol Chaminda Vaas, Sri Lanka's leading pace bowler.

"I could have sent back Upul Tharanga had he not been dropped at slip early (at the Sinhalese Cricket Club ground). But I was very pleased to dismiss Vaas for my maiden one-day wicket. I want to have a chat with him about reverse swing and how to develop a stock-ball, which swings in to the right-handers," said the eldest of two brothers and a sister, whose career best first class figure is 8-48 against Barisal and best in a match is 11 wickets against Dhaka.

Rasel, also selected for the Test series, said that he was not afraid of new challenges and was now hoping to earn his first Test cap on this trip.

Bashar returns to see sick mum

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar will return home after the third and final one-dayer against Sri Lanka on Sunday to be by his ailing mother.

Bashar's mother Rizia Begum, 60, suffered a heart attack a couple of days ago in Kushtia. She is now being treated at the NICVD (National Institute for Cardio Vascular Diseases).

She is expected to undergo an angiogram on Monday and Bashar was expected to be with her at the time.

The 32-year-old was granted compassionate leave for a week and is expected to re-join the team before the first Test start on September 12.

Farashganj win by a whisker

SPORTS REPORTER

A first-half strike by Walid helped Farashganj Sporting Club get away with a solitary goal victory over relegation-bound Youngmens Club in the Premier Bank Premier Division Football League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The win pushed the old city club's collection to 22 points from 17 matches to remain in the sixth position while Youngmens were glued to 12 points from same number of outings.

Walid netted the all-important goal in the 39th minute when he guided a Felix shot into the net from a handshake distance.

Farashganj had recorded a 2-1 victory in the first-leg match against the same opponents.

Cute handball

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Rifles and Bangladesh Police recorded convincing wins against their respective rivals in the Cute Premier Division Handball League at the outer stadium handball court yesterday.

Rifles registered a 34-12 victory against Old Ideals after leading the first half 20-7.

Police handed Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club a 33-18 defeat after dominating the first-half 17-8.

Her biggest match



REUTERS, New York

With more than a billion people at home in India following her every move at the US Open, Sania Mirza knows what it is like to carry the weight of expectation on her shoulders.

Having become the first Indian woman to reach the fourth round of a Grand Slam event, the 18-year-old has the chance to make an even bigger name for herself on Sunday when she takes on top seed Maria Sharapova of Russia.

"I don't think I'll be intimidated but, you know, it's obviously a very big match for me," said Mirza, who has never met Sharapova on or off the court.

"I have nothing to lose if I'm going to play her. There's obviously no pressure on me. I don't think a lot of people expect me to win."

Mirza hit the headlines in January when she reached the third round of the Australian Open, losing to eventual champion Serena Williams.

"I think when I played Serena in Australia I was a bit nervous, to be honest," she said.

"Actually, that was the beginning of everything to happen. It was just that I woke up and I couldn't sleep the night before because I was going to play her."

Having ended last year ranked 206, Mirza arrived at Flushing Meadows as the world number 42 thanks to a run of form which included winning her first WTA Tour title in her home town of Hyderabad.

"I guess I'm just playing the best tennis I ever have," she said.

"I worked on a few weaknesses

that I thought I had, especially my fitness. I was injured for about almost three months this year. Apart from that I think I've had a great year."

Despite her huge popularity, Mirza has been criticised by some people in India for baring flesh in her tennis gear.

The 18-year-old said she was no

different to anyone else.

"No Muslim is perfect and no human being is perfect," she said.

"I guess I'm not dressing the way Islam states but I guess we all make mistakes and that's why Islam has forgiveness."

The responsibility of being the standard-bearer for Indian tennis,

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PHOTO: AFP

India's Sania Mirza pumps her fist upon winning a point during her US Open engagement against Marion Bartoli of France at Flushing Meadows on Friday.

Injury dogged Tigers



AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

Since Bangladesh landed in Sri Lanka, it has been a tale of injuries. Leading fast bowler Mashrafe bin Mortuza could bowl only six deliveries before breaking down in the

Tigers' lone practice match. Another paceman Nazmul Hossain was carried off the ground during the second one-dayer after suffering a cramp.

The latest and surely not the least in the long list of injury is top-order batsman Rajin Saleh.

While there was good news for Mashrafe, Rajin's tour was actually

over before it began after a fracture was detected in his lower back.

A CT scan done on Thursday confirmed that the former Bangladesh vice-captain has a fracture in his first lumbar vertebrae.

Rajin, who scored 53 in the practice game, was feeling bad.

"It's disappointing. I picked up an injury during our victory against India (in December, 2004). It seemed nothing serious as I continued to play. I felt pain during fielding but a massage from the physio was enough to keep me going. I never thought it would be so serious," Rajin said.

He is expected to leave the Sri Lankan capital in the early hours of Monday at the end of the one-day series along with Khaled Mahmud, Abdur Razzak and Nazmul Hossain.

Bangladesh cricket team's physio Paul Close informed on Saturday that the Sylhet batsman, who is an excellent fielder as well, might have been carrying an old injury that only got worse last week.

"He complained about that after arriving in Sri Lanka. The scan can

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