

Rana the 'pool tsar'

Records galore but none electronic

Swimming

SPORTS REPORTER

Rubel Rana established himself as the top swimmer of the country when the Bangladesh Navy aquanaut hauled seven gold medals in the Keya Cosmetics 21st National Swimming Championships which concluded on Tuesday.

On the final day of the four-day meet at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur, Rubel bagged three gold medals including setting a new national record in 100m backstroke.

Having set a new SAF mark in the 50m backstroke on the previous day, he clocked 1:01.96 seconds to touch the block way ahead of Bangladesh Army's Mohammed Wasilul and BKSP lad Rabiul Alam in the day's first event. The old national record was set in 1:02.70 seconds.

Rubel went on to add the 4x100m medley relay and the 400m individual medley relay medals to his tally before

signing off with almost half of his team's collection of gold.

His teammate Jewel Ahmed was the second best and his four gold medals inclusive of the 100m freestyle gold on the final day helped Bangladesh Navy emerge as champions with 16 gold, four silver and four bronze. They were followed by BJMC (9-13-3), BKSP (7-8-13), Bangladesh Army (5-14-8) and Bangladesh Ansar (5-3-8), the only other teams to win any gold.

Three more old national records were shattered in the final day's ten events with Sabura Khatun clinching the 100m backstroke gold in 1:19.74 seconds, almost one second faster than the previous national mark.

Sabura, who helped BJMC finish runners-up, was the most prolific swimmer of the meet with nine medals (5-3-1). The Kushtia swimmer also broke five national records in the pool and was cheered by the presence of national cricket captain Habibul Bashar, who visited the pool to inspire swimmers from his hometown.

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PHOTO: STAR

NICE TO SEE A BIG HOME FAN: Bangladesh cricket captain Habibul Bashar (R) congratulates ace swimmer Sabura Khatun after she won yet another gold in the National Swimming Championships on Tuesday. Both Bashar and Sabura hail from Kushtia.

India agree to play Test in Karachi

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) got a shot in the arm when India's visiting Foreign Minister Natwar Singh expressed no reservations regarding India playing a Test match in Karachi early next year.

"It was not a formal but social gathering but I found out a little time to discuss cricket. I was told by Natwar that the Indian government has no reservations about India playing a Test in Karachi," Shaharyar Khan told PTI from Islamabad.

"I think it is a big development and although the official confirmation has to come from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), I am now quite certain that India would play in Karachi," the PCB supremo said.

Shaharayar Khan has now played a decisive role on more than one occasion in convincing Indian decision-makers to play in Karachi.

In 2004, Shaharyar convinced the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to allow his team to play the series opening one-dayer in the port city of Karachi that proved to be a high scoring fixture.

"Actually Natwar said the decision has to be taken by the BCCI

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Freddie of Oz



AFP, Melbourne

England's Andrew Flintoff may have expected a cool reception when he arrived down under after humbling Australia's once mighty cricket team -- instead he set off a bout of "Freddie fever."

The all-rounder who spearheaded England's first Ashes win in 16 years has been hailed as a hero in Australia's second city of Melbourne, which bills itself as the sports capital of the world.

He got a standing ovation simply for

bringing on drinks for the International Cricket Council World XI in a warm-up match on Sunday. Then he received rapturous applause at a civic reception a day later.

Talkback radio callers have even paid him the ultimate accolade for a Briton -- saying they wish he had been born in Australia so he could wear the national team's famous baggy green cap.

Indian batting great Rahul Dravid saw the Freddie phenomenon first hand when he arrived in Melbourne on the same 5:30am flight as Flintoff on Friday, and was totally ignored by a large media throng intent on grilling the Englishman.

Dravid got the message and jokingly

arrived wearing a Flintoff mask at a press conference to publicise the Super Series beginning Wednesday, which pits Australia against a star-studded lineup of international cricketers.

Another Flintoff mask turned up at the Melbourne function, this one carried by a female fan who had scrawled GOD across her idol's face.

Craig Gill, the leader of England's "Barmy Army" of supporters, said no Briton had received such a warm welcome in Australia since The Beatles.

"I've not seen anything like it," he said.

"Okay, we've got this great rivalry but the Aussies know class when they see it -- and Freddie's got loads of it."

The fact that Flintoff likes a beer does him no harm in Australian eyes.

The public read reports from London of his all-night Ashes victory celebration with amusement, recalling former Australian batsman David Boon's 1989 feat of drinking 52 "tinies" on a flight to London.

The sportsmanship shown when Flintoff put a comforting arm around Aussie paceman Brett Lee's shoulder after England's victory at Edgbaston was also appreciated by Australians, many of whom cringe at their own team's tactics of sledging and "mental disintegration."

Flintoff said he had been pleasantly surprised by his welcome.

"I wasn't quite sure what to expect but the people I've spoken to have been great, congratulating not just myself but England on a great performance," he told reporters.

"I've had a few people coming up and shaking my hand and saying well done. I went with the family around the streets of Melbourne and people were doing, like, a double-take more than anything."

But Gill had a message for Australians casting covetous eyes at the burly Lancastrian.

"You can't have him -- he's ours."

Dalmiya refutes leak charge

PTI, New Delhi

Former Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) president Jagmohan Dalmiya Monday refuted allegations that he had leaked coach Greg Chappell's sensational e-mail, saying it was hard to comprehend how he could have gained any advantage by releasing it to the press.

Dalmiya said he was open for a thorough investigation into the case and also charged his detractors like Raj Singh Dungarpur and IS Bindra with following a one-point anti-Dalmiya agenda.

"If at all it was meant to serve any purpose, it should have come out on September 21 or 22 before the election. But it was published on 23rd. It is foolish (to suggest that I leaked it)," he told a private news channel.

"There is a difference between release and leak. In my position I will come up with release and statements and not leaks."

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U-15 squad for India tour

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Tuesday announced a 14-member under-15 team to visit India this month.

The team will leave for India on October 13 and return on October 28.

TEAM

Mohammad Ali Hossain (Captain), Mohammad Jabid Hossain (Vice Captain), Mamun Islam, Ahmed Abdus Sazzad, Mohammad Furkan, Mahrab Ashraf, Ashraf Aziz, Nazmul Hoque, Jewel Rana, Mominul Hoque, Zahid Ahmed, Safiqul Islam, Mohammad Alamgir Hossain and Nur Hossain.

Officials: Mohammad Abdul Hadi (head coach) and Attabul Islam (assistant coach).

Cricket's great experiment

Aus-ICC World XI first ODI today



AFP, Melbourne

The Australian and World XI teams enter the world of the great unknown over the next fortnight as the ancient sport of cricket makes greater use of technology to get tricky decisions right.

The Super Series of three one-dayers -- the first starting here on Wednesday -- and next week's six-day Test match at the Sydney Cricket Ground will be played under the ICC's experimental conditions.

The field umpires will be able to refer all decisions, including lbws and edged catches, to the television (or third) umpire.

A super-sub rule newly introduced for one-day internationals, in which a player on each team can be replaced soccer-style at any time during the match, will apply for the one-dayers.

Australian skipper Ricky Ponting emerged from an hour-long captains' meeting Tuesday with match referee Ranjan Madugalle, saying he expected more hold-ups in the games but was optimistic that the experiment could eventually prove beneficial to cricket's future.

"I don't think anyone is going to really know about how this will go," Ponting told a match-eve press conference.

"It's being done on a trial basis over the next four games... I've just walked out of the match referee's meeting and it's certainly going to be different."

"There are a lot of things the umpires are going to be looking at and trialling, but as far as the players are concerned all we can do is play the game the same way and let the umpires and third umpires look after all those decisions."

"There's going to be more hold-ups in the game, but the whole idea of this is to try and have better decisions made out on the field, so we'll see how it

goes."

Ponting, who expects his Australian side to be "ultra competitive" despite losing the Ashes to England last month, said his main concern was the amount of playing time that could be lost to the third-umpire decisions.

South African Shaun Pollock, skipper of the World XI, was keen to give the trials a fair go by playing the Super Series in the right spirit.

"There is a time where technology needs to be tried and that's what is going to happen in this series and after this we have a reference point where we can refer back to," he told his press conference.

"I think it's important that we take it in that spirit."

"If there are too many stoppages and hiccups and things don't seem to be running smoothly then I'm sure they will be put aside."

"But it is the opportunity to try it

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Emarat score school title

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The vive and enthusiasm among the school-goers might not be as profound

as it was in 70s when the annual championship involving schools was very popular. But there was light at the end of the tunnel during the final of the Pran-Cola School Tournament final between Emarat Hossain Adarsha High and Residential Model High.

Imran Uddin might be only 14. But his winning goal in the second half for Emarat was a testimony of raw skill, that the country's famed booter Kazi Salahuddin acknowledged after the final.

"I'm really excited because this is the real platform to find out the future footballers. We should hold such event regularly," said Salahuddin, who himself was a product of school football.

The 'big-bowl' was almost empty but the cheers of young supporters from both schools and constant beating of drums reminded the nostalgic of the days of Kishore football in the 80s.

Imran dazzled past four rival defenders from mid-pitch before unleashing a right-footer and his 40th minute strike was enough for Emarat to clinch their maiden title.

For Residential Model it was final heartbreak for the second successive year. The popular Dhaka school also

finished runners-up when the school football tournament was re-introduced last year.

Shahedul Alam of Emarat was however the real hero as the slim-built attacking midfielder remained a constant threat to the rivals with his brilliant dribbling. He also produced some good opportunities for his forwards. Later he was adjudged man-of-the-final as well as the tournament's best player by former national player turned coach Shafiqul Islam Manik.

"I always try to do something like Arman Mia and Ronaldo because they are my heroes. We have gone through tremendous time in last two months during this tournament,"

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PHOTO: STAR

The players of Emarat Hossain Adarsha School pose for photograph after their 1-0 victory against Residential Model High School in the Pran-Cola school tournament final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Tuesday.

What to
WATCH

SET Max
Super Series
Australia vs World XI
First ODI
Live at 10:00 am