

CCL comes back

SPORTS REPORTER



The GrameenPhone Corporate Cricket League (CCL) resumes today after a long recess of three weeks. The resumption of the season's curtain-raiser also brings good news for cricket lovers in the capital as the organisers have decided to hold the remaining games of the 50-overs contests including the semifinals and the November 17 final in the city.

But there might be a small problem for players and fans alike to get to the ground on time with Dhaka being on red alert on the advent of the Saarc leaders.

Bangladesh Biman will meet Orion Group at Dhaka University's Jagannath Hall ground and a victory will almost guarantee a semifinal berth for the national airline outfit from Group A.

In another Group A match at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium, Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar-led Acme Laboratories face even a tougher task of entering into the last four when they take on Jamuna Bank in a must-win game. Both Acme and Jamuna Bank are locked on three points each from as many matches.

Star-studded Beximco are the other team in the Group A who are comfortably placed on five points from three games. They will take on a weak Metro Real Estate on Thursday at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

Although Beximco is the team set to enter the last four from the group, it will only be confirmed after the Biman-Acme match on November 11. Ispahani face a pointless Bangla Cat in a Group B fixture at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium. But there will be no high stake for both sides as far as the race for the last four is concerned from the group. Ispahani has so far earned three points from as many games.

Epyllion and Gazi Tank dominated the group with five points each and the semifinal berths will be

confirmed after the match between Araf Apparels and Gazi Tank to be held on Thursday at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium. Araf secured three points from as many outings.

The CCL, which was supposed to be completed in October, suffered an unscheduled break because of rain interventions. It also upset the whole domestic calendar pushing the National League and the Premier Division League for delayed starts.



Members of the MM Ispahani team do some stretching as part of their training at the Dhanmondi Club ground on Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR

To make up for the lost time the tournament committee, which is desperate to avoid any further delay, has decided to hold the remaining matches in Dhaka and has brought some changes in playing conditions.

If any of the fourth and fifth round matches could not be completed on the scheduled day due to rain or bad weather then the matches will be held on the following day. And if the match is not completed after that it will be

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Bashar moving?

SPORTS REPORTER

With the inter-club players' transfer five days away, speculation and drama over who is going where started flying in the cricket arena.

A few have already made up their minds well in advance and Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar was the subject of the biggest sensation on Tuesday.

It was learnt that Abahani almost lured the most successful Bangladesh batsman. Although Bashar declined to make any comment about the latest development, he admitted that he had been in talks with Abahani officials. But in a late night twist his present club Mohammedan attempted to convince the 33-year-old to stay back.

Bashar had earlier looked set for another year with Mohammedan but apparently decided to change his mind over the payment of outstanding arrears.

Meanwhile, ace batsman Mohammad Ashraful was relishing the opportunity to represent newcomers Sonargaon Cricketers in the coveted league, which kicks off across the country from December 9.

"Honestly speaking, I have decided to switch from Bangladesh Biman mainly because of the financial rewards. So, that's why I had no hesitation to accept an offer to play for Sonargaon Cricketers. I've already received half of my appearance fee," said Ashraful without disclosing the figure.

"It'll be a great experience to bring an unknown team to the spotlight. I'm confident that Sonargaon will make their presence felt because we have number of good cricketers," added the stylish right-hander.

It was learnt that Ashraful is going to be the highest paid cricketer of the three-day tour that begins on November 14.

Besides, the new boys of the top league have already signed up star performers like left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique and dashing batsman Al Shahrir.

NFL DRAW TOMORROW

Telecasting in trouble

SPORTS REPORTER

The draw of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League will be held tomorrow, just six days ahead of the final round of the country's premier competition starts.

Ex-national footballers are expected to grace the draw to be held at the Hotel Purbani.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), however, was yet to confirm live telecast of the 10-team finals from the venues outside the capital. State-run Bangladesh Television has only confirmed that it will telecast matches live from Dhaka.

"We are worried because live telecast is crucial. The sponsors always stress on it for maximum coverage and it is a part of the deal. But BTV has refused to telecast the matches from the outside venues because of security reasons," BFF deputy general secretary and NFL tournament committee chairman Manzoor Hossain Malu said yesterday.

"We have discussed this with Mohammed Hanif, the DG of BTV, but he has told us that they won't risk damaging expensive equipment. In the previous four National Leagues, the BFF had taken all types of security measures to keep the crew and the equipment safe and there were no accidents. I don't know why they are not interested this time," said Malu.

The first-leg matches of the final round will be held in Khulna,

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Raza to seize the chance

SPORTS REPORTER

Hailed as a batting prodigy on his Test debut at the age of 14-years and 227 days, Hasan Raza is keen to resurrect his stumbling international career against England.

The 23-year old right-hander was hyped up as a batting sensation when he debuted against Zimbabwe at Faisalabad in October 1996.

Nine years down the line from his 27-run debut, Raza has played just five Tests and 16 one-day internationals but is back in the Pakistan squad for the first two of the three-Test series against England after an absence of three years.

"It has been hard for me to be on the sidelines all these years. If I get a chance to play against England, I hope to make it the turning point of my career," he said on Tuesday.

Visitors slip to tour defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

REUTERS, Lahore

England's preparations for the first Test against Pakistan suffered another blow on Tuesday when they lost a three-day tour match to a Pakistan A side by six wickets.

Already facing the possible absence of injured captain Michael Vaughan for the series opener starting in Multan on Saturday, England were unable to prevent the home team from overhauling a victory target of 245 with ease.

Captain Hasan Raza, who struck an unbeaten 71, shared a fourth-wicket stand of 129 with Shahid Yousuf, who made 57, before Pakistan A reached 246 for four in 52.2 overs with more than a session to spare.

All-rounder Andrew Flintoff's return of three for 67 will have done little to lift the gloom in the England camp where serious doubts remain over the availability of Vaughan for the opening Test.

Vaughan twisted his right knee

while going for a third run on Monday and results of a scan have been sent to medical specialists in London.

England doctor Peter Gregory has said Vaughan's chances of being fit for the Multan Test are slim and that, should the scan reveal torn cartilage, he would almost certainly need an operation.

"We are still not sure about Vaughan," said England coach Duncan Fletcher.

"We have sent his reports by e-mail to medical experts in England and, hopefully, we should get a firm answer by tonight on his condition."

Pakistan A, resuming on their overnight score of 31 for one, suffered an early blow when opener Imran Farhat was forced to retire hurt on 24 after being struck on the fingers by fast bowler Flintoff.

However, nightwatchman Shahid Nazir established a good platform for the home side with a brisk 43 from just 31 balls before being bowled by Flintoff, who also

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Pakistan A's Hasan Raza, who made a match-winning 71 not out, plays here defensively on the third and final day of a practice match against England in Lahore on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Now it's Dravid's turn

SPORTS REPORTER

AFP, Rajkot

India lost at Ahmedabad by five wickets after resting star batsman Sachin Tendulkar and frontline bowlers Irfan Pathan and Harbhajan Singh. It was a move described as "cocky" by former Sri Lankan captain Arjuna Ranatunga.

"It took the flexibility theory to dangerous terrain," Ranatunga wrote in his column for the Press Trust of India. "It was akin to pushing an automobile onto the road without gas."

"Besides, to us it appeared India were cocky," Dravid and Chappell insisted the rotation policy will not be abandoned.

"You don't always find yourself in such a situation when you can experiment with the team against a very good opponent who will be coming at you all guns blazing," said Dravid.

"So when we got the opportunity we wanted to capitalise on that."

"That does not mean we are not playing to win. We would have liked to win this series 7-0, and now we want to win 6-1."

"But we also won't mind if the final

result of the series is 4-3, if the boys put up a performance like the way they did at Ahmedabad."

Sri Lanka won the day-night game after India piled up a challenging 295-8 on the back of opener Gautam Gambhir's century on his first appearance in the series and Dravid's fluent unbeaten 103.

The inexperienced bowling, however, could not contain the Sri Lankans with Sreesanth going for 0-56, Rudra Pratap Singh 1-54 and Jai Prakash Yadav 0-44 on a dew-laden outfield that made it difficult for bowlers to grip the ball.

Chappell, keen to build a team for the 2007 World Cup in the Caribbean, said young players will not learn sitting on the sidelines.

"If we keep playing with a winning combination every time we take the field we won't know what our bench strength is," he said.

"And we just don't want to wake up one fine morning and find ourselves in an awkward situation"

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India superstar Sachin Tendulkar balances a ball on his bat during a practice session at Rajkot on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

England wait on Vaughan

SPORTS REPORTER

AFP, Lahore

England coach Duncan Fletcher said a verdict on skipper Michael Vaughan's knee injury is expected late Tuesday after a final analysis of the scan report back home.

"We have received the reports (of scans) on Tuesday afternoon and the medical staff in England are analysing it. Hopefully, we will get their opinion later tonight," Fletcher told reporters.

Vaughan's chances of playing in the first Test against Pakistan, starting at Multan on Saturday, are rated only "remote" after he twisted his right knee in the tour match against Pakistan A on Monday.

Fletcher said team management did discuss replacements for Vaughan, who could miss the entire three Tests if he has torn a muscle, but no decision has been made.

Batsmen Owais Shah and Robert Key were two likely replacements but both have been ruled out due to

injuries, said Fletcher. Marcus Trescothick will take over the captaincy in case Vaughan is ruled out.

England's problems further compounded Tuesday when they suffered an embarrassing six wicket defeat against Pakistan 'A' in their second tour match. The tourists

their captain Hasan Raza (71 not out) and Shahid Yousuf (57) pulled off the win which badly hurt England's build up for the Test.

England won the opening tour match against Patron's XI at Rawalpindi last week.

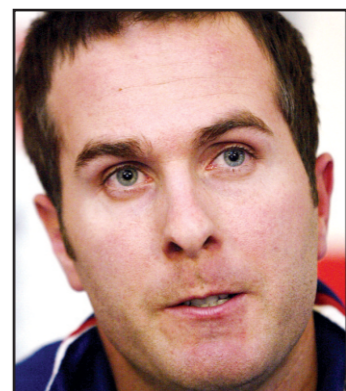
Fletcher hoped team morale would not dip if Vaughan was ruled out.

"Such things have happened before and, hopefully, players would lift the intensity required for Test matches," said Fletcher, a former Zimbabwe captain who took over coaching England in 2000.

"It's difficult to answer whether he would play the first Test. Medical staff are careful to give predictions and they are waiting for a response from England. They would have a look and give us their decision Tuesday night."

Fletcher described the tour-match defeat as "not ideal."

"(The defeat) was not ideal but we have quality players and I hope they would lift themselves to the level required for Test cricket."



MICHAEL VAUGHAN

failed to defend a target of 245 as Pakistan 'A' led from the front by

Mystery ball up his sleeves

SPORTS REPORTER

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan's fast rising leg-spinner Danish Kaneria started the mind games ahead of Saturday's first Test against England, saying he had a mystery delivery for English batsmen.

"I have developed a mystery delivery and hope it will confuse the English batsmen," said Kaneria, who is tipped to lead Pakistan's spin attack in the three-match series.

The first Test starts at Multan on November 12.

"I am a student of the game so I try to learn new things every day and this new delivery is the result of my hard work and learning process," said the 24-year-old.

Pakistan have kept their selection plans secret amid suggestions that the home team will enter the first Test with two spinners.

Besides Kaneria, Pakistan have veteran leg-spinner Mushtaq Ahmed in their squad of 16 for the first two Tests.

"Pakistan's plans, however, have not been a worry for England."

lot of pressure through spin, but it's good to know that we've faced their spinners before," said Michael Vaughan, referring to experience facing the two during the English domestic season.

Kaneria took 32 wickets for Essex while Mushtaq took an impressive 80 for Sussex in the last county season.

"I know they have faced us before but playing spinners in county cricket and playing them on subcontinent pitches are totally different," said Kaneria.

Since making his Test debut against England at Faisalabad in 2000,

Kaneria has made great strides.

The lanky spinner, after bamboozling the hapless Bangladeshis in 2002 and 2003, took an impressive 15 wickets in three Tests against Australia in Australia last year.

That included 7-188 at Sydney, which not only earned him praise from the legendary Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne but also some useful tips.

Kaneria then played key roles in Pakistan's two 1-1 series draws in India and the West Indies earlier this year.

"My role is to take wickets and I am happy that I am fulfilling my role. Now I gear up for England and want to play a lead role in Pakistan's wins," he said.

Kaneria took 19 wickets in three India Tests, including seven wickets in Pakistan's series levelling win at Bangalore.

He now has 132 wickets in 28 Tests. Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq acknowledged Kaneria's hard work and progress.

"Kaneria has become our trump card. I hope he will deliver for us in the England series," said Inzamamul Haq.



DANISH KANERIA



Did U Know?

Andrew Hall (4/23) of South Africa produced his career-best bowling performance in the fifth ODI against New Zealand on November 6, surpassing his 3 for 29 against Zimbabwe at Johannesburg on February 25, 2005.



Stephen Fleming

(New Zealand cricket captain)

"We offer no excuses, we were soundly beaten. They played extremely well, it was a massive series for them and they were very desperate. That's what got them home in the tight games."

After his side lost the five-ODI series 4-0 against South Africa.



DD Sports

India vs Sri Lanka
Sixth ODI
Live at 9:30 am

ESPN

English Premier Football League
Aston Villa vs Liverpool
Repeat at 4:00 pm
Sportscentre
Live at 8:30 pm



GP Corporate Cricket League
Jamuna Bank vs Acme Lab
Venue: DCS
Bangla Cat vs MM Ispahani
Venue: FCS
Biman vs Orion Group
Venue: JHG

Walsh to help sorry Windies

CRICINFO, undated

Not long after West Indies' heavy loss to Australia in the first Test on November 6, among the first words heard in a dejected dressing room were those of encouragement from Courtney Walsh, the former West Indian captain.

Walsh was asked by coach Bennett King to lift the gloom with his presence and his support.

"I was happy to have the chance to go to talk with the team," said Walsh, now in Australia on a coaching and speaking tour.

"It's easier for someone who is not playing to try to talk to them rather than someone who is playing and I just tried to encourage them."

Walsh pledged to help wherever possible during the two weeks he has left in Australia. He even hoped to find a space in his schedule that would allow him to come to Melbourne, where the West Indies start a three-day match against Victoria on November 11, to "talk to them, to watch them bowl, to join them in the nets".

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--Sports Editor