

Almost semifinals

Tushar cracks 102

SPORTS REPORTER



The semifinal line-up of the Grameen-Phone Corporate Cricket League was all but confirmed after Epyllion and Acme won their respective group matches at different city venues yesterday.

Dashing Bangladesh batsman Tushar Imran slammed the second ton of the competition as Epyllion confirmed their berth with a 52-run victory over Ispahani in their last Group B encounter at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium securing nine points from five matches.

The outcome also ensured Gazi Tanks' ticket to the last four with seven points. All that remains is who will be the group champions after today's match between Gazi and lowly Security Air Express.

Acme were poised to enter the last four from Group A after a convincing 91-run victory over Biman in a low-scoring match at the BKSP.

Beximco, Acme and Biman have seven points each but only an unlikely upset in the game between Beximco and Jamuna Bank can bring out the

calculators.

If Beximco win their last match as expected then Acme will qualify because of Friday's head-to-head success against the national flag carrier side.

The day's other match between two newcomers, Metro Real Estate and Orion Group at the Dhaka University's Jagannath Hall ground saw the former post a three-wicket win.

EPYLLION-ISPAHANI

Tushar Imran hammered 102 and his national mate Shahriar Nafees chipped in with a blistering 70 as Epyllion amassed a challenging total of 264-7 in their share of 50 overs.

The right-hander whacked eight fours and four sixes off 105 balls. His century followed Al Shahriar's superb 147 against Orion in Khulna earlier last month. Nafees' 72-ball knock featured 12 boundaries.

Off-spinner Fahim Muntasir was the most successful Ispahani bowler picking up three wickets for 33 runs.

National opener Nafees Iqbal scored 62 off 88 deliveries and Rezaul Karim made an 84-ball 61 however in the end Ispahani were restricted to 212-8.

Pace sensation Shahadat Hossain Rajib and spinner Nabil Samad picked up three wickets each.

ACME-BIMAN

Acme put up a feeble total of 195-5 after captain Habibul Bashar decided to bat. But it was more than enough as Biman suffered a spectacular collapse.

Opener Nasiruddin Faruque (36), Javed Omar (37) and Enamul Haque Sr (35) were the only notable scorers for Acme while pacer Mushfiqur Rahman and left-arm spinner Saifullah Jem picked up two wickets each for Biman.

Left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique finished with figures of 3-6 in 5.5 overs as Biman were bundled out for 104 in 33.4 overs.

METRO REAL-ORION

Arif Reza scored 90 and Maruf Reza was 59 not out as Metro Real Estate enjoyed a successful run chase to register their first victory in the competition.

Metro scored 270-7 in 49.2 overs in reply to Orion's 269 all out in 49.2 overs.

Sakil Haider made 69 and Tareq Ahmed 53 for Orion.

Final five to be revealed



REUTERS, London

The last pieces of the 2006 World Cup jigsaw will slot into place over the next few days when the identities of the final five qualifiers are decided.

Three European berths are still open and will be filled by either Spain or Slovakia, Norway or the Czech Republic and Switzerland or Turkey.

The other two qualifiers will be Uruguay or Australia, who clash in one intercontinental playoff and Trinidad & Tobago or Bahrain who clash in the other.

The first legs of all five playoffs take place on Saturday with the return legs next Wednesday, Nov. 16.

Twenty seven qualifiers, including hosts Germany, are already confirmed in the draw for the finals which takes place in Leipzig on Dec. 9.

But the expectation and excitement surrounding the playoffs was best summed up by coach Dusan

Galis who is hoping to guide Slovakia into the World Cup for the first time since the nation became independent 12 years ago.

Galis, whose side face a huge obstacle in overcoming Spain, said all he is interested in is winning the two-legged tie.

"I'm not interested in anything else. Having a good feeling from a good performance and losing with honour -- I will not be satisfied with anything like that," said Galis.

"We have gone this far, so we are able to make the last step."

Slovakia though have a tough task ahead of them against the Spanish who last failed to qualify for the World Cup when it was staged in West Germany in 1974.

Slovakia finished seven points behind Portugal in European Group Three, although only lost once in 12 matches.

Although Spain had a disappointing campaign in Group Seven and finished two points adrift of Serbia & Montenegro, they went through their 10 matches unbeaten.

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PHOTO: AFP

BAD LUCK! Sri Lanka's Tillakratne Dilshan holds pieces of his bat that broke during a practice session at Vadodra. The tourists play India in the seventh and final one-day international today.

India, Lanka battle for final time



PTI, Vadodra

Having outplayed the visitors right through the series, India will be eager to continue to stamp their domination over Sri Lanka and finish the seven-match rubber on a rousing note in the final one-dayer here today.

Everything has gone well for the home team, including the experimentation of resting some key players and asking rookies to stand up and be counted, while almost nothing has clicked for the islanders who would be equally anxious to prevent another drubbing from India before returning home.

India are going into the last clash with a commanding 5-1 lead in the series that has seen the two teams traverse across the length of the country from Mohali in the north to Pune in the south-west.

Another victory tomorrow will be the ideal boost for the hosts before the best-of-five series against South Africa commencing in a few days.

The high point of the series for India has been the way the youngsters in the team have come up with superb displays when needed. A prime example of this newfound confidence in the newcomers was the way Lucknow-based left arm pacer Rudra Pratap Singh performed at Rajkot in the previous tie on a pitch that was largely expected to help the batsman.

R P Singh's four-wicket haul, which earned him the man of the match, must have done wonders for his morale. So too have been the key roles performed earlier in the series by other youngsters like Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Suresh Raina and Venugopal Rao, who has given way to senior Mohammed Kaif on the latter's return from injury.

The Indian strategies took the

visiting Sri Lankans by surprise quite early on in the series and the team were now on track for becoming a "very good" outfit, coach Greg Chappell said today.

"We took them by surprise quite early on from which they struggled to recover. Yes, the first two games (at Nagpur and Mohali) were very important," Chappell told a media conference on the eve of the final match.

"We are not yet a great team, but we are on the way to become a very good outfit. But we can't afford to relax. You don't know what's lurking round the corner in the form of an injury or lack of form," he said.

Chappell said as the series concludes they have many options for each position and the dilemma was rather whom to leave out.

"When we sit down to select the squad for the series against South Africa we are in a good situation."

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Did U Know?

Indian paceman Rudra Pratap Singh became the first bowler to capture 4 wickets in an innings at the Madhavrao Scindia cricket ground in Rajkot on Wednesday. He surpassed the previous best figures at this venue -- 3 for 22 -- by Winston Benjamin of West Indies also against Sri Lanka on October 19, 1989.



TEN Sports

Pakistan vs England
First Test, Day One
Live at 10:20 am

DD Sports

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

SuperSport

England vs Argentina
Friendly Int'l Soccer
Live at 10:30 pm

UAE vs Brazil
Friendly Int'l Soccer
Live at 11:15 pm

Portugal vs Croatia
Friendly Int'l Soccer
Live at 3:00 am (Sunday)



Maria Sharapova

(Russian tennis star)
"I grew a few centimeters this year and I'm still getting used to my height."



GrameenPhone Cricket League

Security Air Express v Gazi Tanks

Venue: DCS

Araf Apparels v Bangla Cat

Venue: FCS

Jumuna Bank v Beximco

Venue: BKSP



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq and his England stand-in Marcus Trescothick pose with the trophy during a photo session at the Multan Cricket Stadium on the eve of the first Test.

FIRST TEST FROM TODAY

Vaughan-less England take on Pakistan



REUTERS, Multan

England must quickly come to terms with the absence of Ashes-winning captain Michael Vaughan when the first Test against Pakistan begins here today.

The touring side's plans suffered a huge setback when Vaughan's knee injury ruled him out on Thursday, handing the Test captaincy to Marcus Trescothick for only the second time.

The inspirational Yorkshireman will be badly missed in a country where England have won just two out of 21 Tests.

Trescothick's only other experience as Test captain also came as a result of Vaughan's knee which sidelined him for last year's Test against New Zealand at Lord's.

The stand-in skipper believes the team's form over the last 18 months, they have won 12 out of 14 Tests, will help them get over the loss of such a key player.

"We are all up for the challenge," said Trescothick, who feels England have prepared well despite the loss of Vaughan and defeat in the Lahore tour match.

"We have to switch on for the Test. We have to be mentally up to it and we have to adapt ourselves to the different challenges thrown at us in the series."

With Vaughan's replacement, the 20-year-old Essex opening batsman Alistair Cook still to join the team, England are expected to give the vital number three berth to either Ian Bell or Paul Collingwood.

The batting remains a major concern for England as they have managed totals of just 256 for nine, 112, 126 and 256 in their two warm-up games. Trescothick's century in Rawalpindi was

the only century so far by an England batsman.

The last time England toured Pakistan in 2000 they surprised the hosts with a Test win in Karachi in an exciting finish in fading light.

This time, however, Pakistan under former England player and high-profile coach Woolmer and captain Inzamamul Haq, appear better prepared for their homeseries.

"The preparations have been very good and smooth and I think we covered all our bases," Woolmer said.

"It should be an interesting series."

"Vaughan's absence will either leave the England players upset and not in a

position to play to true form or it will bring them together and they will be harder to beat," he added.

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq said: "Even if they had not lost the tour match or their captain I would have thought we would go into the Test with equal chances.

"But I am confident about our chances given the way we have prepared and how we have played in our last few series."

Inzamam highlighted leg-spinner Danish Kaneria as their key player. "He has bowled well in the last two years and he has won

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Cruciani for less 'parota-mangsha'

SPORTS REPORTER

There will be no 'parota-mangsha' or 'mach-bhat' for the footballers when they start their final-phase preparation today for the SAFF Football Championship.

This was the message the national booters received from their Argentine coach Diego Cruciani when they reported for the residential camp at the BFF House yesterday.

Nearly half of the 24-member squad could not report at the BFF House because of the city being wrapped in a security blanket for the Saarc Summit.

Players from the city, Narayan-ganj and Chittagong were present but those who come from the northern part of the capital including captain Arif Khan Joy and Rajani Kanta Barman, went straight to BKSP. The squad will reside at the Savar sports institute for the next 21 days before flying to

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Foreigners start to come

SPORTS REPORTER

Kenyan batsman Steve Tikolo arrived in Dhaka on Thursday night to play for Beximco in the ongoing GrameenPhone Corporate Cricket League.

The right-hander, who is no stranger to local cricket after enjoying a purple patch with Moha-mmedan Sporting Club, practised with star-studded Beximco at the BKSP yesterday.

Also Pakistani international Zahoor Elahi will boost Gazi Tanks while his younger brother Selim Elahi is likely to play for Acme and their compatriot pacer Yasir Arafat for Epyllion.

But Acme is trying to lure a star Indian batsman.

"A high official of Acme is now in India and is trying to confirm a big name," said Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar without naming the player.

The tournament committee has allowed only one foreign player for semifinal and final matches.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh football coach Diego Cruciani talks to players who reported at the BFF Bhaban yesterday to join the national camp.

named the counties player of the year. Left-arm spinner Sajeeva Weerakoon

three-day practice match in Bangalore from November 26.

SQUAD

Marvan Atapattu (capt), Chaminda Vaas (vice-capt), Mahela Jayawardene, Kumar Sangakkara, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Upul Tharanga, Thilan Samaraweera, Farveez Maharoof, Dilhara Fernando, Muttiah Muralitharan, Avishka Gunawardene, Lasith Malinga, Malinga Bandara, Sajeeva Weerakoon and Chamara Kapugedara.



SANATH JAYASURIYA

and teenage middle-order batsman Chamara Kapugedara are the new faces in the touring team.

Sri Lanka's first Test series in India since 1997 begins in the southern metropolis of Chennai on December 2, followed by the second Test in New Delhi from Dec 10 and the third in Kanpur from Dec 18.

The Sri Lankan team return home after Saturday's final one-dayer for a two-week break before starting the Test tour with a

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-- Sports Editor