



Did U Know?

The 1000th goal in the FIFA World Cup was scored by Renssenbrink, a Netherlander in 1978.

What to WATCH

ESPN
Football Crazy
Live at 5:00 pm
Sportscentre
Live at 8:30 pm
STAR Sports
Australia vs South Africa
Second Test, Day Five
Live at 5:30 am (Friday)



Younis Khan
(Pakistan cricket vice-captain)
"I think (Sourav) Ganguly is a terrific player. India won a lot of matches under his captaincy, which can never be overlooked. His return will surely add experience to the team."

DAY'S EVENT

Fifth Nitol-Tata Nat'l Football League (Super Six)
Brothers Union vs Multijodha (4:00 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu Nat'l Stadium

WOMEN'S ASIA CUP Lanka beat Pakistan

Pakistan's women cricketers fought hard against Sri Lanka but lost by a narrow 14-run margin in the opening match of the Asia Cup at the National Stadium on Wednesday. Chasing 179 to win, Pakistan needed 15 off the last over but lost their last wicket off the second ball. Sri Lanka now meet India on Thursday. All teams will play each other twice with the top two teams going through to the final on January 4.

Sri Lanka, who lost to India in the two-team first Asia Cup in 2003, recovered from 120-6 to post a healthy 178-9 in their allotted 50 overs with Dumila Dedunu top-scoring with 52. Dedunu hit seven boundaries but it was the seventh wicket stand of 39 between Inoka Galagedera (25) and Praba Udawatte (22 not out) that helped Sri Lanka set a challenging target. The Pakistani bowlers also conceded 24 wickets.

Pakistani leg-spinner Urooj Fatima chipped in with 3-40. Sri Lankan left-arm spinner Suwini de Alwis (4-24) and captain Shikala Sinwardene (3-32) then had Pakistan tottering on 88-6, but a seventh wicket stand of 66 nearly won the match for the home team.

Kanta Jallil (36) and Sana Mir (23) took the fight to the Sri Lankan bowlers before their stand was broken by Suwini.

Taskin Qadeer top-scored for the home team with 42.

Only families were allowed to watch the match, while players of both teams followed a strict Islamic dress code of baggy trousers and long shirts unlike skirts employed by some teams at international level.

Pakistan is hosting its first major international women's event after the government of the Islamic nation initiated national championships for women in cricket and football and allowed a mixed marathon early this year.

Abahani's escape act

SPORTS REPORTER



An 84th minute penalty converted by centre-back Pradeep Kumar Poddar bailed out 10-man Abahani with a 1-0 win over Bangladesh Army in yesterday's Super Six match of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League.

However, the slim victory at the Bangabandhu National Stadium all but confirmed Abahani's place in the semifinals as they took solo lead in the six-team table with seven points. With two more matches in hand, Army stuck to their previous collection of three points.

Title aspirants Abahani bombarded the rivals' goal with a series of attacks but failed to penetrate an eight-pack defence before a handball by Army defender Anwar in the penalty box gave the sky-blues the opportunity to seal three points.

Former national booter Pradeep kept his cool and drilled a low drive from the spot into goalkeeper

Monirul's left hand post to separate the two sides.

Abahani played the last half of the second session with ten men after Ghanaian forward Audu Ibrahim was sent off for poking in the eye of Anwar with his finger in the 68th minute.

The start of the match was delayed by half an hour as Abahani failed to reach the venue on time because of traffic-jam and road-blocks due to the rally organised by Jamaat-e-Islami at the adjacent Paltan Maidan.

Abahani rushed early blood and even before the match was one-minute old, Parvez fired a sitter over the bar when he was left unmarked in the danger zone. It took the sky-blues another 24 minutes to break a dogged Army backline and again, Parvez sent his shot wide of the mark. On a rare counter attack, Army came close to snatch the lead from a goalmouth melee but Abahani custodian Nizam held his fort when Atiq released a powerful drive.

Despite dominating the show with Ndem and Egir Mohammed

taking hold in the middle, frustration gripped sky-blues as Cameroonian midfielder Ndem placed his shot wide of an open net in the 39th minute. In the injury time, Ibrahim's rising left-footer skimmed the upright after Monirul pulled off a superb save to defy Tipu's placing shot from point-blank range.

The introduction of Farhad and Ujjal -- back from national duty -- after the break piled on the pressure but Egir's header on a right-side chip by Obaidur went inches wide of the sidebar before Army keeper Monirul's reflex denied the Moroccan's top-of-the-box shot during a corner. Monirul, also the Army skipper, was adjudged man-of-the-match.

Army finally gave up six minutes from time when Anwar, under pressure to clear a combined Abahani raid, handled the ball just inside their area after his shot

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SKY-BLUES' ONLY BLEMISH: Abahani's Ghanaian forward Ibrahim (C), who was red-carded, takes a shy at the Army post during their Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Wednesday.

Afro-Asian 'A' cricket postponed

SPORTS REPORTER

The Afro-Asian A-team cricket tournament scheduled to be held in Chittagong next month has been postponed.

The development committee of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) took the decision on Tuesday following unwillingness of the some major teams to take part in the first-ever tournament of the second-string sides of the two continents.

"Our president (Ali Asghar) who is also the chairman of the committee announced the postponement of the tournament. We hope that the meet will be re-arranged within a short time," said Mahbubul Anam, general secretary of the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

South Africa and Pakistan withdrew from the six-nation meet from the very beginning, but finally withdrawals of India and Zimbabwe forced the organisers to postpone the idea.

Aussies take control

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

Australia took charge of the second cricket Test against South Africa Wednesday after bowlers Brett Lee and Andrew Symonds gave them a crucial innings lead at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

The Australians bowled the Proteas out for 311 to seize a 44-run advantage. They increased that to a 154-run advantage with eight wickets intact by the close of the third day, putting them in the box seats to take a series lead after the first Perth Test was drawn.

Lee was at his thunderous best with two big wickets Wednesday, including the coveted scalp of cricket's top-rated batsman Jacques Kallis.

Symonds, whose position in the team is under threat before next week's final Sydney Test after a poor run of scores, made his mark with a 16-ball spell of 3-7 with his medium-pacers.

At stumps with two days to play, Australia had advanced to 110 for two with Matthew Hayden on 45 and Brad Hodge 17.

South Africa entered the pivotal third day comfortably placed on 169

for two. But they lost eight wickets for 142 to be all out just before tea in reply to Australia's 355.

Lee, bowling with venom, made two big breakthroughs before lunch with the wickets of Kallis and Perth Test hero Jacques Rudolph.

Kallis fell to a brilliant piece of fast bowling for 23. Lee set him by crumpling a short-pitched ball into his helmet and followed up with a yorker to scuttle him next ball.

Lee got through Rudolph's defences just before lunch, bowling him with his first delivery of the second new ball for 13, and finished with 3-92 off 28 overs.

Rudolph had occupied the crease for over seven hours with his unconquered 102 to save South Africa from defeat in last week's first Test.

Symonds whooped with delight as he removed Mark Boucher (23), Herschelle Gibbs (94) and Shaun Pollock (9) in a terrific spell in the middle session.

The all-rounder trapped Boucher leg before wicket and bowled Gibbs off his glove just six short of his 15th Test century. He then secured another lbw decision against Pollock to finish with 3-50 off 20 overs.

Gibbs toiled for 347 minutes and faced 234 balls with 15 boundaries

before he was cruelly denied his hundred. He received a standing ovation as he left the arena.

"It's disappointing. I was trying to keep my end up as long as I could and at the same time play my natural game which they didn't make it too easy for me," Gibbs said.

"We didn't get enough partnerships together, like they did in their first innings, and that is the key as far as putting up a total."

Test cricket's leading wicket-taker Shane Warne claimed the wicket of Ashwell Prince for the third time in the series, for six, and bowled Nicky Boje for 12 to capture 2-62 off 21 overs. He now has 653 Test wickets.

Fellow leg-spinner Stuart MacGill wrapped up the Proteas' innings with the wicket of Andre Nel, looting a catch to Mike Hussey for 14.

Australia, buoyed by their psychological innings lead and with the Proteas facing the prospect of batting last on the wearing drop-in pitch, began bullishly.

Test newcomer Phil Jaques put on 53 for the opening wicket with Hayden before he fell leg before wicket to Nel for 28.

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JFA CUP Tangail enter final round

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A 44th minute strike from Liton Miah took hosts Tangail to the final round of the Second JFA Cup football tournament yesterday.

Tangail emerged group champions with the solitary goal victory over Gazipur in the final at the local stadium. Sathkira, Gaibandha, Bagerhat, Rangamati and Dhaka earlier confirmed their places in the eight-team finals.

Hosts Kurigram meet BKSP in the zonal final today while the Chandpur zone qualifiers kick off on December 31.

Moniruzzaman mauls B Boys

SPORTS REPORTER

Moniruzzaman produced a whirlwind performance at the City Club ground as Young Pegasus crushed Bangladesh Boys by 191 runs yesterday to maintain their all-win record in the First Division Cricket League.

Moniruzzaman smote six fours and as many sixes to score an explosive 27-ball 72 to power Pegasus to a mammoth total of 339-7 in the stipulated 50 overs. Sharifullah added 58 off 70 balls and Imrul chipped in with a run-a-ball 56.

Chasing an improbable target, Bangladesh Boys were bundled out for 148 in 34.4 overs with Nahidur Rahman making 51.

At the Dhaka University ground, Gazi Tank (163) registered their seventh win when they snatched an exciting nine-run victory over Prantik Krira Chakra (154) while Uttara Sporting Club (221) beat Jatrabari Krira Chakra (185) by 36 runs at the Jagannath Hall ground.

Gul in Pak A squad

AFP, Lahore

Fast bowler Umar Gul was included in a 12-man Pakistan 'A' squad to face India in a tour game, the Pakistan Cricket Board said on Tuesday.

The 21-year-old paceman from Peshawar played the last of his five Tests against India at Lahore last year, but since then was sidelined with a back problem.

India, who arrive on January 5, are scheduled to play three Tests and five one-day games on their second tour of Pakistan in two years.

They open the tour with a three-day game in Lahore on January 7. Gul took five wickets in Pakistan's nine-wicket win in the second Test in Lahore last year before a stress fracture of the back forced him to pull out of international cricket.

Although he regained full fitness he was not given a chance in Pakistan's home series against England which Pakistan won early this month.

Batsman Hasan Raza, who failed in the two Tests against England, was retained as Pakistan A captain in a team that includes seven Test cricketers.

SQUAD

Hasan Raza (captain), Imran Farhat, Mohammad Wasim, Faisal Iqbal, Asim Kamal, Bazid Khan, Zulqarnain Haider, Mansoor Amjad, Mohammad Irshad, Umar Gul, Rao Iftikhar, Yasir Arafat.

India split tour party

Ganguly, Sehwag to join team in Pakistan

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

India's cricket chiefs have ordered the national team to leave in two batches for next month's Pakistan tour to enable the entire squad to gain match practice.

Twelve of the 16 players, led by captain Rahul Dravid and coach Greg Chappell, will depart for Lahore on January 5 and take part in the three-day practice match there from January 7-9.

Four others, including former captain Sourav Ganguly, will stay back and play the next round of Ranji Trophy first-class matches from January 3-6, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India Niranjan Shah said.

Ganguly, spinner Anil Kumble, opening batsman Virender Sehwag and reserve wicketkeeper Parthiv Patel will join the rest of the tourists on January 7, six days before the first Test begins in Lahore on January 13. "The decision to split the team

was taken after consulting Dravid and Chappell," said Shah on Wednesday.

"We needed only 12 players for the practice match in Lahore and the other four would have sat out doing



SOURAV GANGULY

nothing. At least now everyone will be occupied.

"We thought it would do them good to have match practice before

the tough series," Shah said.

India are due to play three Tests and five one-dayers on the seven-week tour of Pakistan, the third contest between the arch-rivals in the last two years.

India's chief selector Kiran More on Monday criticised Ganguly for skipping two Ranji Trophy games after being dropped for the third Test against Sri Lanka earlier this month.

That was a day after the 33-year-old left-hander's recall to the squad and 10 days after his abrupt axing caused uproar in the cricket-mad nation.

Ganguly has not played a competitive game since the second Test against Sri Lanka in New Delhi two weeks ago in which he made 40 and 39 in India's 188-run victory.

Shah said Ganguly had spoken to More on the phone on Tuesday and told him prior family commitments had prevented him from playing.

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'Focus on your cricket'

AFP/REUTERS, Wellington

The Sri Lankan cricketers returned to New Zealand Wednesday, with captain Marvan Atapattu urging his players to focus on the one-day series starting Saturday and not to be distracted by the anniversary of the tsunami that devastated parts of their country a year ago.

Sri Lanka and New Zealand will resurrect the remaining four internationals in a five-match one-day series that was aborted when the Sri Lankans returned to their stricken country after the first game a year ago.

"In terms of cricket I would rather think we get on with the game now and play to our potential, than thinking about it too much," Atapattu said.

He said things were slowly improving in Sri Lanka "with the help of so many countries, so many



MARVAN ATAPATTU

people to get our country back in shape and we are so grateful for them. We are getting there."

Sri Lanka arrived in New Zealand after a below-par effort in India. They were thrashed 6-1 in the one-day series and then lost the three-match Test series 2-0.

"We are very keen to put things right considering the fact that we haven't had a good last month in India," Atapattu said.

He said the Sri Lankans had a lot of one-day cricket ahead with a series in Australia coming up, and he served a warning to New Zealand that "we've got to play to our best sooner rather than later."

Atapattu noted that history was

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PHOTO: AFP

CAN YOU HEAR ME? Australia all-rounder Andrew Symonds shouts for joy after dismissing South Africa's Mark Boucher on the third day of the second Test at MCG on Wednesday.

Symonds' self belief

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

Under-siege all-rounder Andrew Symonds says he must trust his instincts to fight for his Test career after starring with the ball for Australia against South Africa in the second cricket Test here Wednesday.

Symonds, whose position in the team is under threat before next week's final Sydney Test after a woeful run of scores, made his mark with a 16-ball spell of 3-7 with his medium-pacers as South Africa conceded a 44-run innings deficit.

He whooped with delight as he removed Mark Boucher (23), Herschelle Gibbs (94) and Shaun Pollock (9) in a terrific spell in the middle session.

Symonds wants to be known as a batting all-rounder but has been

plagued with low scores during his four Test appearances this summer. He scored one and nine against the West Indies and 13, 25 and a first-ball duck against South Africa.

He is hoping his bowling form will carry through to his batting should he bat again at number six in Australia's second innings in Melbourne.

"I play my best cricket when I'm really not thinking about it, when I'm just reacting on instinct, and that's what I've got to get out there and do tomorrow, to trust myself and be instinctive," Symonds said Wednesday.

"Hopefully, I won't have the nerves when I walk out to the middle and can step into the first half-volley and whack it down the ground for four."

"It's more a mindset thing with me. I play my best cricket when I am positive, and maybe I have to start putting the pressure back on to the bowler, show him a bit more intent

that I am going to push along a bit." Symonds' three wickets came at a crucial time in the hard-fought match.

"It was an important time of the game and to be contributing in that way it would have made me feel good even if I was scoring runs. It was a great relief," Symonds said.

"Hopefully, I can draw some confidence from my bowling and flow through to my batting here."

"I am a batting all-rounder, my batting is much better than my bowling, but today I had a job to do, and the previous day, and I thought I carried it out quite well."

Symonds, an exceptional one-day player, has had a fitful time in Tests, averaging just 11.22 in nine innings and taking 2-170 before Wednesday's three-wicket haul.