



Did U Know?

Ricky Ponting is the only batsman in the world to have scored hundreds in each innings on the 100th Test appearance.



Wasim Akram
(Former Pakistan cricket captain)
"Cricketers like Sachin (Tendulkar) come once in a lifetime and I am privileged he played in my time."

What to WATCH

TEN Sports

India vs Pakistan
First Test, Day One
Live at 10:45 am (Friday)

ESPN

Australia vs Sri Lanka
First ODI
Live at 9:15 am (Friday)

Mirpur Stadium set for Jan 20 cricket debut

SPORTS REPORTER

The Sher-e-Bangla Mirpur National Stadium will make its debut as a cricket venue with a First Division Cricket League match between Bangladesh Boys and Surjo Torun on January 20.

The pitch and outfield in the game's new home are almost match-ready but there it still needs some fine tunings to hold international matches.

It is expected that the venue will host its first international match during Sri Lanka's tour of

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A worrying lay-off

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

A gruelling ten-month long season over, tired footballers started to return home for a deserved vacation not knowing when exactly they would kick the ball again in a competitive game.

The final of the National Football League on Sunday brought an end to the 2005 football season with the top clubs playing about 40 matches during this period. While hundreds of footballers would be idly waiting to know their future and gain weight in the process, only a handful of players would be fortunate to return to action for national duty very soon.

Although the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) promises the next domestic tournament in March or April, the national camp is expected to begin as soon as Argentine coach Andres Cruciani returns to Dhaka. The coach and trainer Ariel Colman are expected on January 23.

It would provide about 30 booters an opportunity to stay fit and prepare for the coming assignments, two Asian Cup qualifying matches in February and March and the newly introduced AFC Challenge Cup at home also in March.

"We want to start preparation as soon as Cruciani is back and we want to run it as long as we have fund,"

National Team Management Committee (NTMC) chairman Kazi Salahuddin told The Daily Star Sport on Monday.

"If there is no competition to keep the players busy and fit, they should remain under the coach and the trainer. We are paying them 6,000 dollars per month. Why should we pay them if we don't get the utility?" opined Salahuddin.

"If the federation backs us, I prefer non-stop camping," he added.

When asked about fatigues of long-term camps, the BFF vice-president said that there is no scope of professionals becoming tired.

"In Europe, they are playing for 12 months with minimum rest. The leagues would end hardly a month before the World Cup. A good coach knows how to keep the fatigue off, like Jose Mourinho of Chelsea. See how his charges are playing for the past one and a half years.

"I have full faith in our coach and I think the technical aspects should be left to the coaching staff and the management committee. We will sit with the federation after the Eid vacation to discuss this," added the former national captain.

Defending Cruciani, who was criticised from different quarters following Bangladesh's meek surrender to India in the SAFF Championship final in Pakistan last month,

Salahuddin said that he was not frustrated at all with the result.

"It can happen and that is why football is still exciting. Brazil are always favourites. The number of quality footballers they produce, they should have not even needed a coach. But have they won every World Cup? This is the thrill of football."

The few top players might get the facilities during off-season, but for the rest, future looks grave.

The BFF, which is expected to launch the Professional League in September, may stage a very short-term Premier League this season due to unavailability of the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The National Sports Council, which has nearly completed the renovation work of the structure, now wants to remove the soil from the ground and build a new drainage system for the premier venue in the country.

"If we agree to their proposal now, it would take five to six months," informed BFF general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal.

"If the clubs agree to play the Dhaka League at the Kamlapur Stadium, we can release the ground after the Challenge Cup and hold the Pro-League here in time. In that case there would be no other tournaments this year. The problem is

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PHOTO: AFP

JOINING THE PARTY: Sourav Ganguly (L) and Anil Kumble having a chat outside the pavilion during the third day of the warm-up match between India and Pakistan A at the Bagh-e-Jinnah Stadium. The two arrived in Pakistan on Monday.

Tour opener drawn

AFP, Lahore

India's openers showed their class Monday as they drew with Pakistan A in their only practice match before Friday's first Test against Pakistan.

Openers Gautam Gambhir (28) and Waseem Jaffer (35) remained unbeaten as India scored 72 without loss after Pakistan A put up 358-9 declared in their first innings on the third and last day at Bagh-e-Jinnah stadium on Monday.

The tourists, who have had problems with their top order in recent matches, saw Gambhir and Jaffer follow their 81-run stand in the first innings with another sedate partnership of 72.

Gambhir, who looks the favourite to retain his spot with the more experienced Virender Sehwag in the first Test, hit five boundaries while a confident-looking Jaffer hit six.

Pakistan A resumed their first innings at 212-4 but lost Test hopeful Asim Kamal for the addition of just 14 runs.

Kamal, who was not included in the 15-man Pakistan squad announced for the first Test on Monday, mistimed a hook off paceman Pratap Singh and was caught behind by Mahendra Dhoni for 14.

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Ton-up Farhat for first Test

Cricket

AFP, Lahore

Forgotten opener Imran Farhat Monday found himself back in the Pakistan squad for this week's first Test against India after scoring a century in a side match against the tourists.

"We have maintained consistency and have recalled Farhat in the squad. He has shown good form and deserved a place, otherwise it's a winning combination of the England series last month," Pakistan chief selector Wasim Bari told AFP.

The 15-member squad is only for the first of three Tests, starting here from Friday. The second Test is at Faisalabad and the third in Karachi.

The 23-year-old played the last of his 15 Tests in December 2004 in Melbourne against Australia before losing his place due to poor batting form. He has scored 841 runs while his run tally in 21 one-day internationals is 686.

Farhat hit a brilliant 107 on Sunday, the second day of Pakistan A's three-day match against India at the Bagh-e-Jinnah ground in Lahore.

Farhat's father-in-law Mohammad Ilyas, also a former Pakistan Test player, had blamed coach Bob Woolmer for his axing, but Bari said

form and merit were the only criteria for a place in the Pakistan team.

"Farhat has shown his form so he is back, there are no other things which keep a player out of the team. Captain Inzamam-ul-Haq, Woolmer and the selection committee are doing their work honestly and results prove that," he said.

Pakistan beat England 2-0 in three-Tests and 3-2 in the five-match one-day series at home last month.

Another opener, Yasir Hameed, was ruled out of the squad due to typhoid, said Bari.

Farhat was delighted at his comeback saying he knew he needed to score runs to try to win back his place.

"But I was never disappointed during the last year because such up and downs come in your career," said Farhat, who scored a match-winning century against India at Lahore in 2004.

He also hit 250 in a domestic match early this month to send a timely reminder to the selectors.

All-rounder Abdul Razzaq was also included in the squad after he recovered from a chest infection and high fever which hospitalised him late last month.

Another all-rounder, Shahid Afridi, also regained his place after he was banned from Pakistan's

final Test against England in Lahore for damaging the pitch during the second Test at Faisalabad.

However fit again Umer Gul, who took five wickets against India at Lahore two years ago, failed to get into the squad.

PAKISTAN SQUAD

Inzamam-ul-Haq (capt), Salman Butt, Shoaib Malik, Imran Farhat, Younis Khan, Mohammad Yousuf, Abdul Razzaq, Shahid Afridi, Kamran Akmal, Mohammad Sami, Danish Kaneria, Arshad Khan, Shoaib Akhtar, Rana Naved-ul-Hasan, Mohammad Asif.

'Interim ZC not a solution'

REUTERS, London

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Monday urged the new Zimbabwe board to resolve as soon as possible the crisis threatening the country's survival in international cricket.

Zimbabwe's cricketers suspended an indefinite strike on Saturday, the day after the country's Government dissolved the governing board and appointed an interim committee to run the game.

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'New Akhtar' is the key

Cricket

AFP, Lahore

If Pakistan's cricket board were asked two months ago whether fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar was an asset or a liability, they would have groped for an answer.

It needed just one home Test series against Ashes-winning England to find the answer, as the 30-year-old answered his critics in dramatic style.

The paceman was warned that it would be a make-or-break series for him when Michael Vaughan's Englishmen came for a three-Test series in November.

Akhtar had not played Test cricket for more than 10 months due to fitness problems but he rose to the occasion, taking 17 wickets on placid tracks to play a major role in the 2-0 series victory.

Pakistan are now pinning their hopes on the "new Akhtar" to tame a strong Indian batting line-up in the three-Test series which starts here on Friday.

Captain Inzamamul Haq says if Akhtar stays fit, he will cause India serious problems.

"If Shoaib remains fit, which I am sure he will, and maintains the same form, I think he will be too hot to handle for the Indians," he said.

Akhtar is talented, but temperamental. He looks the strongest in the team, but is injury prone. He has the speed to unsettle the world's best batsmen when on song, but looks pedestrian when he lacks control.

The 30-year-old is Pakistan's most glamorous player but many observers feel he has yet to do justice to his potential even after playing 39 Tests and 129 one-dayers.

The 'Rawalpindi Express' has taken 161 wickets in Tests and 199 in one-dayers, but is yet to prove a consistent match-winner and is known as much for his mood-swings as his skill.

He has breached the 100mph barrier but has had brushes with authorities and is often accused of feigning injuries. He has also been reported for a suspect bowling action.

Encouraging news for Pakistan is that Akhtar has promised to be at his best against the Indians, against whom he managed just seven wickets in three Tests in the last home series in 2004.

"You only need to hear the name of India to get motivation," he said in a recent interview.

"It's not revenge as people are saying, but unfinished business against India. I still regret I could not live up to expectations when India came here."

The Pakistani skipper said Akhtar's performance would be crucial in deciding the outcome of the series.

"Shoaib is probably the most improved bowler in terms of fitness, approach, attitude and discipline. He inspires other pacemen to do better," said Inzamam.



PHOTO: AFP

FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE: Australian batsman Damien Martyn (L) hooks a bouncer by South African paceman Shaun Pollock during their Twenty20 match at the Gabba on Monday.

Damien destroys South Africa

Cricket

CRICINFO, Brisbane

Australia completely dominated the first home Twenty20 international against South Africa on Monday, with a superb batting display, dynamic fielding and brilliant catching. South Africa, who were never realistically in the game, fell 95 runs short in what was an utterly convincing and breathless performance.

In front of a record crowd of 38,894 at the Gabba, the most for any sporting event at the ground, the home fans were treated to an electrifying performance from the home side, with all three facets of their game seemingly in perfect order for the upcoming one-day series. Batting first, on a deliciously flat pitch, Australia romped along. Damien Martyn - so often a calm, controlled batsman, combined his usual elegance with a flurry of belligerent shots; cutting deftly, pulling powerfully and launching five huge sixes into a raucous crowd.

While Martyn was making hay, South Africa let themselves down woefully in the field, dropping crucial chances at vital times; errors that cost them the match. After Ponting's murderous cameo of 27, which included two huge sixes, in came Symonds and mayhem ensued. Few can match Symonds for his power, or dare-devil attitude - or indeed his brilliance - as he battered South Africa's bowlers all over Brisbane.

With Martyn falling just four short of a brilliant hundred, the final over really demonstrated Symonds' style: smashing Monde Zondeki for six over long-on, a glorious four over cover followed by another six over long-on. It was vicious, brilliant batting.

South Africa's chase of 210 was always likely to be a tall-order, but not an impossible one. However, their fate was sealed quickly by a rampant Australia who snaffled three wickets in the first five overs. Graeme Smith batted with his usual dogmatic force, punching three boundaries, and Mark Boucher threatened briefly with 29 from 21 balls. Both were to fall, and not so much due to tight bowling as outrageously slick fielding and catching.

Mick Lewis took a superb, full-length catch in the deep to dismiss Shaun Pollock who had threatened to make a list of the ever-increasing run-rate. Then, he who can do no wrong at the moment - Ricky Ponting - shielded at one stump to run out Jacques Kallis for 15. It was breathless, dazzling cricket, and South Africa's tail folded limply: truly rabbits-in-the-headlights stuff.

While South Africa fumbled catches and missed run-outs in their fielding effort, Australia were positively gazelle-like in theirs. A crushing, powerful batting display - aptly demonstrating that they have all

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