

MSC-DOHS face off today

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club will seek revenge as well as giving a last shot to the title race when they take on holders Old DOHS in a crucial Super Six match of the Aktel Premier Cricket League today.

Table-toppers DOHS go into the game at BKSP with a four-point lead but a defeat will complicate things for Akram Khan's men who lost to Sonargaon Cricketers -- the remaining contenders for the coveted trophy -- in the previous round. A win on the other hand, will all but seal the championship for DOHS.

However, Mohammedan, who lost the first-leg battle by three runs in a tight finish at the Fatullah Stadium, can not afford a loss. With three rounds to go, Habibul Bashar and Co are joint second with newcomers Sonargaon on 18 points.

Sonargaon, who have won all their matches since Mohammad Ashraf's takeover as captain, face bottom-table Brothers Union at the Fatullah Stadium knowing that winning the remaining matches will open up a chance for them to clinch the title on debut if DOHS slip up today. Sonargaon, however, will be without Indian cricketer Sridharan Sriram, their hero in the victory against DOHS with an unbeaten 93. The Indian international, who has returned home for commitment in domestic cricket, will be replaced by his compatriot Manvinder Singh Visla.

At the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium, first-leg's surprise pack Victoria Sporting Club meet Bangladesh Biman. Both sides are level on 16 points with virtually no hope in the title chase.

SUPER SIXTABLE

Teams	M	W	L	Pts
DOHS	13	11	2	22
MSC	13	9	4	18
Sonargaon	13	9	4	18
Victoria	13	8	5	16
Biman	13	8	5	16
BU	13	6	7	12

Dhaka Bank to sponsor U-19s

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officially announced on Sunday that Dhaka Bank Limited will sponsor the national Under-19 team for one year.

It was the biggest financial deal for the youth team following their recent success, which makes many believe that the Mushfiqur Rahim-led side can make history in the ICC U-19 World Cup to be held in Sri Lanka from February 5 to 19.

"We came forward because we believe the U-19 cricket team has the potential to do something memorable for the nation," said Fazlur Rashid, deputy managing director of Dhaka Bank, at a press conference at a local hotel yesterday.

Bangladesh U-19s will leave for Colombo today to take part in the 16-team meet.

BCB general secretary Mahbul Anam also pinned high hopes on the team and said that the board will try to give the sponsors maximum exposure.

"Actually, we have got a good team as a result of our countrywide talent hunting programmes in the last four years. We are very much hopeful about the team," said the bearded organiser.

Captain Mushfiqur Rahim said that it would be an encouraging

SEE PAGE 13 COL 7

New year new hopes for Bashar



SPORTS REPORTER

Habibul Bashar wants to make a fresh start in the New Year after getting an extension as national captain for another three series.

As a captain, Bashar has had some memorable outcomes in the last year: Test and one-day series victories against Zimbabwe at home and the famous Cardiff triumph against Australia.

But the 33-year old Tigers skipper was still upset the way they had finished the international calendar last year.

"Still I couldn't understand why we played so badly in Sri Lanka after a great victory against Australia. Our main challenge will be to bounce back from the painful memories of our last tour when we will take on the same opponents at

home," said the most successful Bangladesh batsman.

Bashar was surprised as nobody had informed him about his extension. "I couldn't read the newspapers today as I spent the morning with national team's physio Paul Close to discuss about my shoulder pain. However, it was expected that the board would be extending my tenure," he added.

He, however, attended the selection meeting on Saturday morning to finalise the 20-member probables for the two Tests and three one-dayers against Sri Lanka in February-March.

"There was hardly any scope to make too many changes in the team. We were looking for a young batting all-rounder like Farhad Reza but no one was really that impressive. I don't think there was any new outstanding performer in the domestic competitions to claim a place in the national," said Bashar.

The most experienced campaigner of the country was very excited for talented Alok Kapali's recall for showing consistency and the return of his pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who is fully fit after missing the entire series in Sri Lanka due to back pain.

"It is always exciting to see a player like Kapali in the national team. There is no doubt about his talent. On the other hand, it is very much encouraging that Mashrafe is back because his presence matters most in the team."

Although chief selector Faruque Ahmed had expressed his frustration over the performance of the national players in local competitions, Bashar was not ready to accept the claim.

"I don't see any reason to be frustrated with the national players' performance. We might not have been up to the mark in the Premier League but most of us had

SEE PAGE 13 COL 3

Gilchrist ton takes Australia to final



AFP, Perth

Adam Gilchrist burst back to his swashbuckling best here Sunday, blasting 116 runs as Australia crushed Sri Lanka by six wickets and wrapped up a berth in the finals of the triangular series limited-overs competition.

In a devastating display of power and technique, Gilchrist, revelling in his role as acting captain and playing in front of his home crowd, feasted on the Sri Lankan bowling and smashed his way out of a form slump with four sixes and 10 boundaries.

His stunning century, which came up in only 99 balls, in partnership with fellow opener Simon

Katich, carried Australia to 237-4 off 41 overs in reply to Sri Lanka's pedestrian 233-8 off 50.

Gilchrist had not reached 50 in his last seven one-day innings and his relief was obvious as he punched the air and ran towards his teammates in the dressing rooms in celebration.

When he finally fell, caught and bowled by veteran spinner Muttiah Muralitharan, Australia had lost their first wicket with 191 runs on the board.

Katich took the backseat in the partnership but still clocked up his second successive half-century finishing with 82 off 110 balls before he was bowled by Chaminda Vaas.

It was a formidable display by the Australians, who are now guaranteed a place in the best of three finals series, even though they

failed to collect a bonus point by not winning inside 40 overs.

Australia now have 18 points after six matches -- nine points clear of Sri Lanka who have also played six.

South Africa, who play Sri Lanka in Perth on Tuesday, have eight points from just four matches.

The Sri Lankans never looked in the hunt on Sunday and it was obvious from the outset that the Australians meant business.

At one point Gilchrist humiliated super-sub Akalanka Gangam taking 20 runs off what was to be his only over.

The Sri Lankans had earlier crashed to 27-3 in the 11th over of their innings and were only saved from disaster by a four-wicket partnership of 121 off 156 balls between Mahela Jayawardene and

SEE PAGE 13 COL 2



PHOTO: AFP

Australian opener Adam Gilchrist bows to the home fans after his scintillating century against Sri Lanka in Perth on Sunday.

Hingis, Bhupathi mixed doubles champs

AFP, Melbourne

Martina Hingis added another Grand Slam trophy to her collection Sunday when she teamed with India's Mahesh Bhupathi to win the Australian Open mixed doubles final.

It was a triumphant return to top class tennis for the Swiss star after a three-year injury layoff, with the mixed doubles victory following her impressive comeback to the singles which saw her make the quarterfinals.

Hingis and Bhupathi, who were a wildcard entry and not seeded, overwhelmed sixth seeds Daniel Nestor of Canada and Russia's Elena Likhovtseva 6-3, 6-3 in 1hr05 mins.

It was Hingis's 15th Grand Slam title and her first in mixed doubles.

She has also won five singles Grand Slams and nine women's doubles. Bhupathi is a doubles specialist and it was his ninth Grand Slam title, with six of them in the mixed event and three in the men's doubles.

7-star Federer



AFP, Melbourne

An emotional Roger Federer won his seventh Grand Slam final and his second Australian Open title with a commanding four-set victory over unseeded Cypriot Marcos Baghdatis here Sunday.

The Swiss world number one fought back from dropping the opening set against the charismatic 54th-ranked star to claim a 5-7, 7-5, 6-0, 6-2 victory in 2hr46min. It means he remains unbeaten in all the Grand Slam finals he has contested since his first success at 2003 Wimbledon.

Federer became the first player to win three successive Grand Slams since Pete Sampras won at the 1994 Australian Open. The Swiss went into this year's Open having won last year's Wimbledon

and US Open.

He now joins other tennis greats John McEnroe, John Newcombe and Mats Wilander with seven major titles and is closing in on all-time leader Sampras with 14.

Federer was lost for words at the presentation and sobbed soon after receiving the trophy from his idol Rod Laver.

"I hope you know how much this means to me," he said, wiping away tears as the crowd roared its approval.

"I guess it's all coming out now. God, I've had some hard speeches but this one is a little rough right now."

"Last but not least I would like to thank Rod Laver..." and Federer trailed off in tears before a non-plussed Laver standing nearby.

"It's very emotional winning a Grand Slam, especially here in Australia," he added later.

It was the 24-year-old's 35th title

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1

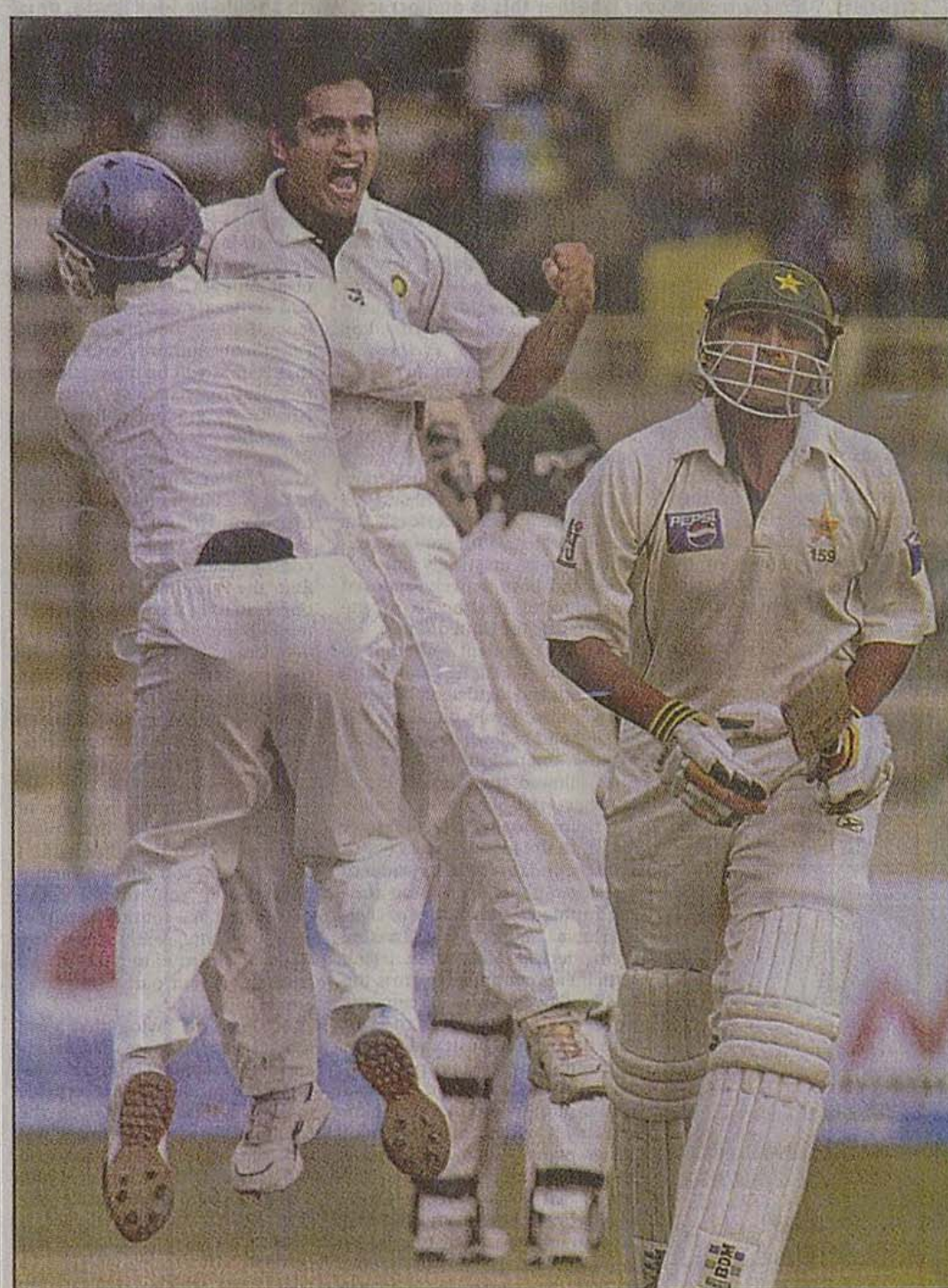
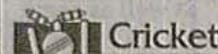


PHOTO: AFP

HATTRICK HERO: Indian swing-sensation Irfan Pathan (C) is the toast of his teammates after he dismisses Pakistan batsman Younis Khan (R), his second of three victims of successive deliveries in the very first over of the third Test in Karachi on Sunday.

Pakistan fight back after Pathan hattrick



AFP, Karachi

Kamran Akmal smashed 113 to rescue Pakistan after Indian seamer Irfan Pathan had grabbed a hattrick in a dramatic start to the final Test here on Sunday.

The gutsy wicket-keeper's fourth Test hundred helped Pakistan recover from a disastrous 39-6 within the first hour to reach 245 in their first innings.

The seaming wicket at the National Stadium did not spare the Indians either, who were 74-4 in reply at stumps and waging a grim struggle for survival at the crease.

Akmal was once more in the thick of the action, taking catches off Indian captain Rahul Dravid (three) and Virender Sehwag (five).

India lost two wickets at 56 when Venkatesh Laxman (19) was bowled by a huge in-cutter from Mohammad Asif and Sachin Tendulkar (23) also had his stumps shattered by Abdul Razzaq.

Former captain Sourav Ganguly (nine) and Yuvraj Singh (seven) were at the crease when time ran out with 11 overs still remaining to be bowled.

The rattle of wickets contrasted sharply with the high-scoring draws in the first two Tests in Lahore and Faisalabad which produced 2,791 runs and saw only 36 of the possible 80 wickets fall.

Pakistan, given first strike by Dravid, were rocked by Pathan's three-in-a-row trick in the first over of the match.

The left-arm seamer had Salman Butt caught at first slip off the fourth delivery, trapped stand-in captain Younis Khan leg-before with the fifth and clean bowled Mohammad Yousuf off the sixth.

Pathan finished with five for 61, while fellow left-arm seamers

Rudra Pratap Singh and Zaheer Khan shared the remaining five wickets as Pakistan's innings lasted less than five hours.

Akmal put on 115 for the seventh wicket with Razzaq (45) and 82 for the eighth with Shoaib Akhtar, who was last man out for a pugnacious 45.

Akmal, who survived a botched stumping by his Indian counterpart Mahendra Dhoni when he was on 80, hit 18 boundaries in a brilliant counter-attack.

Pakistan, already without skipper Inzamam-ul Haq for the decisive Test because of a back injury, aided the Indians by some reckless

strokes.

Faisal Iqbal, who replaced Inzamam, fell leg-before to Zaheer for five to make it 31-4 in the sixth over.

Zaheer then bowled the dangerous Shahid Afridi for 10 as the batsman attempted to loft a good-length ball for six.

Pakistan slumped from 37-5 to 39-6 as opener Imran Farhat edged a wild heave off Singh and gave Dhoni an easy catch.

Left-hander Farhat, drafted in place of Shoaib Malik who is mourning the death last week of his father, made 22.

Razzaq and Akmal then put their heads down to help Pakistan surpass their lowest Test score of 53 against Australia in Sharjah in 2002.

The 21-year-old Pathan joined Harbhajan Singh as the only Indian bowlers to claim the coveted hattrick in Test cricket. Off-spinner Singh achieved the feat against Australia in Kolkata in 2001.

Pathan's feat was the 36th instance of a Test hattrick but the first time it has happened in the opening over of the match.

Three bowlers, Thomas

SEE PAGE 13 COL 6

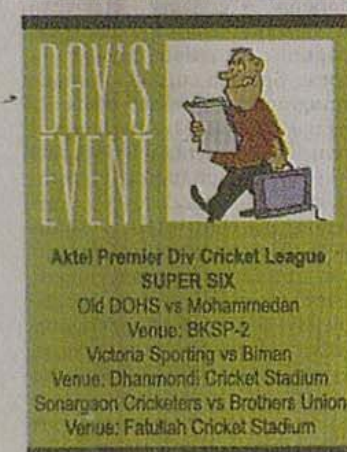


TEN Sports

India vs Pakistan
Third Test, Day Two
Live at 11:00 am

ESPN

Sportscentre
Live at 9:30 pm



Aktel Premier Div Cricket League

SUPER SIX

Old DOHS vs Mohammedan

Venue: BKSP-2

Victoria Sporting vs Biman

Venue: Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium

Sonargaon Cricketers vs Brothers Union

Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium

'I won't bet against him'



AFP, Melbourne

Tennis great Rod Laver says he won't be betting against Roger Federer becoming the all-time Grand Slam winner.

The Australian 11-times Grand Slam singles champion, who presented the Australian Open trophy to a tearful Federer on Sunday, said tennis was lucky to have the Swiss star as its champion.

Asked if the seven-time Grand Slam winner could overhaul American Pete Sampras' 14 major titles, Laver said: "Well, it's certainly amazing how well he plays in the finals. I wouldn't bet against him."

Laver, 67, one of the revered figures of tennis as the only man to have won two Grand Slams of all four majors in 1962 and 1969, met Federer for the first time during the

Open here and was greatly impressed with him.

"Oh, yeah, I think so. Not only the way he speaks, he speaks so well about the game and enjoys it, but that his game speaks a tremendous amount," Laver told reporters Sunday.



ROD LAVER

"You can see he's enjoying the game and playing just as he sees it

and plays beautifully. It's a credit to tennis that Roger's in it."

Laver, who was stripped of five years' of Grand Slam tennis in his prime when he left the amateurs to play professional, said time was on Federer's side to overhaul Sampras.

"I think age is not really an issue when you're looking at someone like Roger," he said of the 24-year-old Swiss.

"He could be 31, 32 and be winning matches if he desires it there."

Laver drooled over Federer's tennis talent which has kept him at the top of tennis rankings for almost two years.

"He's got so much talent," he said. Many experts rate the 'Rockhampton Rocket' the greatest tennis player of all. His final years spanned the pre-Open era when contract professionals were barred from traditional championships.

Laver took up where he left off when he was able to return to the major tournaments in 1968 and won 31 consecutive matches at Wimbledon between 1961 and 1970.