



Did U Know?

Irfan Pathan's hat-trick in the third and final Test is now the fifth against Pakistan and the seventh on Pakistan soil.



Mutiah Muralitharan (Sri Lankan spin wizard)

"Every time I bowl they shout it from the grounds, every time I go near the boundary line they say things, that means they are not accepting me." After being taunted by the Australian crowds.



TEN Sports
India vs Pakistan
First ODI
Live at 10:30 am
ESPN
South Africa vs Sri Lanka
12th ODI
Live at 5:00 am (Tuesday)

'Tendulkar will make Moin eat his words'

PTI, London

Former Indian wicketkeeper-batsman Farooq Engineer and retired England captain Nasser Hussain have ridiculed suggestion that Sachin Tendulkar was on the decline.

The two former cricketers insisted that India's world record holder for most Test and ODI hundreds was still at his peak and could not be written off as yet.

"Sachin has reached his peak but certainly he is not on the decline," Engineer, who scored 2611 runs and effected 82 dismissals in 46 Tests for India, said.

Moin Khan, former Pakistan wicketkeeper, had said in his recent column that Tendulkar's skills were on a decline and that his reflexes had slowed down with age, making him apprehensive against express fast bowling.

Engineer said Tendulkar "will bounce back and make Moin Khan eat his words. Experience will only make him better."

Hussain also warned against writing off Tendulkar.

"Watch out any one who writes off Tendulkar," Hussain told. "Sachin is one of the greatest batsmen ever to have played the game. Though he is idolised as a demi-God in India, he is human and he may have a lean period. He deserves credit for what he has done," he said.

Junior tennis final rounds from today

SPORTS REPORTER

The final phase of the Dhaka Bank 20th International Junior Tennis Championship will begin today at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna.

The draw was held yesterday after four players each in boys' and girls' group qualified for the final rounds. In the qualifiers, which began on Saturday, 32 players took part in each group.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman officially inaugurated the meet yesterday afternoon. Abdul Hai Sarkar, founding chairman of sponsors Dhaka Bank, was present as special guest.

Whatmore to exploit home advantage

Tigers' preparation for SL begins

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The national cricketers started their preparation on Sunday with a hope to put on a better performance than last year against Sri Lanka during the coming home series.

After an absorbing four-month domestic duty Habibul Bashar's men had a fitness training on the first day under coach Dav Whatmore and his aides at the indoor facilities of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Whatmore was looking forward to making the most of home advantage to come back from the poor showings against Marvan Atapattu's men in September last year.

"The objectives remain the same. We have to start thinking about the World Cup and we still need to find out our final squad for that competition. This is also a very important series for Bangladesh. Against Sri Lanka in our home conditions, we are really looking forward to doing something better than we did in Colombo in 2005," said Whatmore on the objective of this camp.

It was the first time that the Australian has got the chance to see his boys in action during a full domestic season and he believes that it will definitely make an impact.

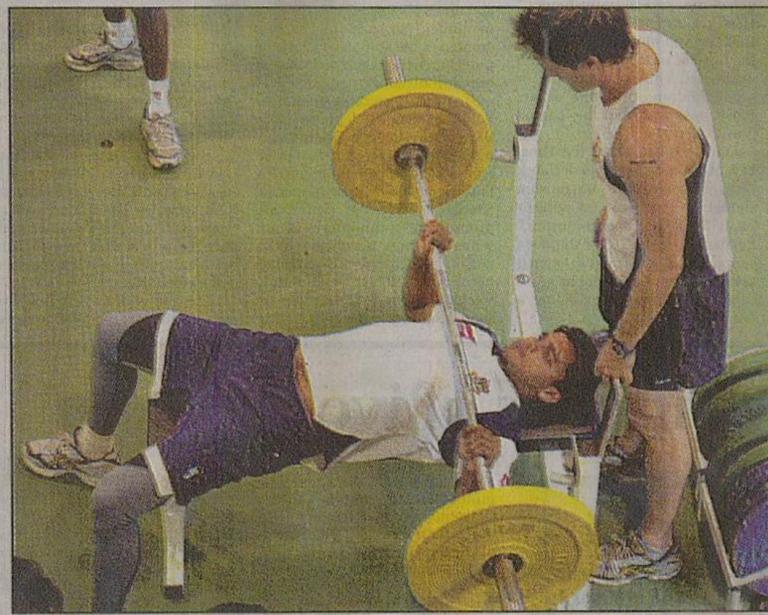
"Most of the questions we have had before were about indifferent forms of the batsmen and that's fair enough. It's a fair question. This build-up has been different in that sense. We have had a lot of domestic cricket. Some could have done better and others have done pretty well but they have played cricket, they've played a lot of competitions and games leading up to the Sri Lanka series."

playing international cricket has given us an opportunity to play a lot of domestic cricket," he explained.

Although many were concerned about national players' performance in the local leagues, Whatmore however was little bothered.

"Sometimes performances can be very good when you come in with a lot of form and sometimes you don't come into it with a lot of form. But you know as well as I do that in my time there have been a

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Bangladesh's premier fast bowler Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza does weightlifting at the indoor facilities of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur during the first day's training of the national cricket team on Sunday.

Ganguly gets on well with Dravid

PTI, New Delhi

Sourav Ganguly Sunday said he shared an "outstanding" relationship with Rahul Dravid and respected his judgements and ploys as the captain of the side.

"We have been playing for 10-years together and we have an outstanding relationship between both of us and I have tried to help him in whatever way I can," he said.

"But one must remember that he is the captain. He has thought about certain things before the series and he should be allowed to do that and just as other players at any stage I felt that his ploy could be good for the team," he told NDTV.

Asked about reports that Dravid did not want to upset coach Greg Chappell by including him in the one-day squad, Ganguly said he was not aware of such issues.

The former captain also said he was confident of making a comeback to the one-day fold before the World Cup.

"With so much of runs behind me in one-day cricket and successes in the last 10 years, probably one of the best after Sachin Tendulkar, obviously my expectations will be to

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Inzy boost for Pakistan

First ODI against India today

Cricket

AFP, Peshawar

Buoyant Pakistan will be at full strength when captain Inzamamul Haq returns for Monday's opening one-day international against India after his recovery from a back injury.

"I am fully fit and will play in the match," declared Inzamam ahead of the five-match series after missing Pakistan's 341-run win in the third and final Test in Karachi last week.

If Pakistan, who clinched the three-Test series 1-0, win the limited-overs series they could secure second spot in the International Cricket Council (ICC) one-day rankings behind world champions Australia.

Pakistan's series win against India would lift them to a second position from their current third, provided South Africa fail to win the ongoing tri-series against Australia and Sri Lanka.

"I don't take all these rankings into account but to achieve that we have to play well in all the departments of the game," said Inzamam.

Pakistan have won eight of their last 10 one-day matches against India with Inzamam as captain.

The home team start as favourites before a sell-out crowd of 15,000 at the Arbab Niaz Stadium for the first international cricket match in this northwestern border city for two years.

Foreign teams, including England last year, refused to play in Peshawar over security fears due to the city's close proximity with war-torn Afghanistan.

Inzamam said Pakistan had gained confidence after the Test series win.

"Pakistan has a very slight edge after the Test victory, but one-day cricket is very different so we have to perform on the day," he said.

India may miss off-spinner Harbhajan Singh who injured a finger while fielding as a substitute in the Karachi Test.

"We might not risk him if the problem doesn't settle," said Dravid, under whom India beat Sri Lanka 6-1 and drew 2-2 to South Africa in one-day series last year.

Dravid hoped the criticism his team received for losing the final

Test would not affect their performance in the one-day series.

"We know the reactions are always extreme, whether you win or lose," he said. "At this level you are well equipped to take all this in your stride and don't let it affect the performance."

"We know it's an important series for the future so we will give it our best."

TEAMS

INDIA (from): Rahul Dravid (captain), Virender Sehwag, Sachin Tendulkar, Gautam Gambhir, Yuvraj Singh, Mohammad Kaif, Suresh Raina, Mahendra Dhoni, Irfan Pathan, Ajit Agarkar, Zaheer Khan, Rudra Pratap Singh, Sri Sreesanth, Murali Kartik, Harbhajan Singh.

PAKISTAN (from): Inzamamul Haq (captain), Younis Khan, Salman Butt, Imran Farhat, Shahid Afridi, Shoaib Malik, Mohammad Yousuf, Faisal Iqbal, Kamran Akmal, Abdul Razzaq, Navedul Hasan, Shoaib Akhtar, Umer Gul, Arshad Khan, Yasir Arafat, Mohammad Asif.

Umpires: Simon Taufel and Asad Rauf.

Bangladesh tame Kiwis

ICC U19 CRICKET WORLD CUP SRI LANKA 2006

SPORTS REPORTER

Favourites Bangladesh brightened their chances to reach the Super League phase of the ICC Under-19 World Cup for the first time when they pulled off a three-wicket victory against New Zealand in one of the four matches on the opening day in Colombo yesterday.

All Bangladesh will have to do now is to beat ICC associate members Uganda convincingly to advance to the Cup stage from Group A, also involving holders Pakistan.

Mehrab Hossain Jr was the hero with a brilliant all-round performance that helped the junior Tigers avenge their heart-breaking defeat against the same opponents in the last tournament at home.

Mehrab's occasional left-arm spin saw the man-of-the-match return with a haul of 4-29 before he hit an unbeaten 38 to steer Bangladesh victory after being reduced to 78-5 while chasing New Zealand's 175 at the P Saravanamuttu Stadium.

New Zealand opening pair Todd Astle (44) and Martin Gupthill (28)

made a good start putting on 57 after Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim invited them to bat first. But they had little answer once the slow bowlers, one of the strongest departments of the Bangladesh team, took charge.

New Zealand were well placed to set a fighting total at 140-5 but Mehrob and fellow left-arm spinner Sohrwardi Shuvo ripped through their tail, dismissing the last five batsmen for 35 runs.

Shuvo claimed three wickets for 36 while Nabil Samad, another left-arm slow bowler, produced the most economic figure conceding 18 runs from eight overs.

Bangladesh, however, fell in big trouble as their formidable top order including dashing Tamim Iqbal (3), Raqibul Hasan (18), Mehdi Hasan (0), dependable Sakib Al Hasan (13) and Shamsur Rahman (30) departed with the scoreboard reading 78.

But Mehrob received good support from the tail including a 45-run sixth wicket stand with skipper Rahim, the only Test player in the squad, to coast to 176-7 with more than a dozen overs to spare.

Rahim made 26 off 47 balls, Shuvo added a 31-ball 18 and Sirajullah Khadem was not out with 10 runs.

Tigercricket.com adds:

"Mehrob was brilliant. He held the innings together after we lost Shamsur and Raqibul, two set batsmen, in the space of two overs. He took no unnecessary risks and played on singles and twos," said Bangladesh team's assistant coach Nazmul Abedin Fahim over phone from Colombo.

Fahim also informed that the wicket at the P Sara had remained under cover throughout Saturday and the night before because of rain.

"It had a lot of moisture and grass and there was good bounce and seam movement. It was more like New Zealand conditions and their opening bowlers Bennett and Southee really bowled well. We lost the first three wickets to them but it would not have been a surprise if they had taken more wickets in their opening spell," added Fahim.

Bangladesh will play their next group match against Pakistan on February 8.

In the day's other matches, Australia (316-9) rode on Tom Cooper's 104 to outclass South Africa (141) by 175 runs, Zimbabwe (215-7) thrashed Ireland (97) by 118 runs and hosts Sri Lanka (187-6) managed a four-wicket victory against Scotland (186).

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Frustrating for nat'l cricketers

SPORTS REPORTER

While top cricketers of the country get ready for international action after a four-month gap, the fact that bothered many was that most of them failed to impress during the domestic season.

Although there is a gulf of difference between domestic and international standards, any notable performance at any level can only do one thing: give one a boost ahead of a tough task. Also, top international cricketers are expected to show their class at domestic level, which was not the case in the recently concluded Premier Cricket League.

Much to the disappointment, there were only three national players in the top ten batsmen's list and all of them found their places at the bottom.

The top-ten bowling list also has three from the national squad but Abdur Razzak being on top saved a few blushes.

A non-regular in the national team, left-arm spinner Razzak bagged highest 40 wickets, having played all 16 games for champions Old DOHS. Senior spinner Mohammed Rafique and his fellow Sonargaon Cricketers pacesman Tapash Baisya are in the middle of the table with 27 victims each.

As usual, the best three batsmen were foreigners with Steve Tikolo leading the table. The Kenyan ace, a regular face in the local scene as well as a consistent performer, produced 867 runs including nine half-centuries in his 16 matches for DOHS. He was followed by Brothers Union's Pakistani recruit Rashed Hanif (696 runs) and Mohammedan's Indian, player

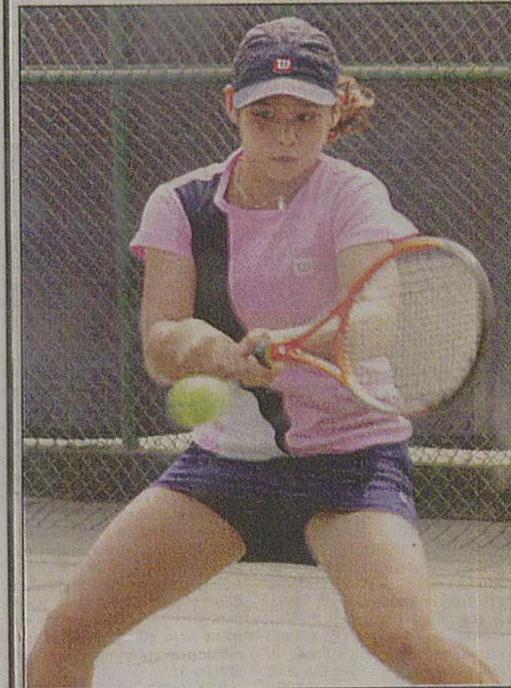
Sandeep Sharma (615). Tikolo was well supported by DOHS captain Akram Khan (532 runs) and Manjarul Islam, the national all-rounder who notched 485 runs.

Biman's national opener Javed Omar got into the list after scoring a hundred and 85 in the last two matches, finishing with 509 runs while star batsman Mohammad Ashraf, the Sonargaon skipper, finished ten with 481 runs.

Jaffar Quraishi was the only player to write his name on both tables, the Pakistani all-rounder finishing with 530 runs and 32 wickets.

The top local batsman was Al Shahriar, who smashed six fifties to aggregate 562 runs. However, it was unfortunate for the former international to regain a national call despite his late flurry.

SEE PAGE 13 COL 1



Beatrice Gumulya of Indonesia makes a backhand return against Ulina Suchkova of Russia during their International Junior Tennis Tournament engagement at Ramna on Sunday.

Hingis fails in final

Tennis

AFP, Tokyo

Elena Dementieva dashed any hopes of a comeback victory for Martina Hingis by beating the four-time champion to win the singles title at the Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament on Sunday.

The Russian second seed, playing her first final in five appearances here, chalked up a 6-2, 6-0 win over the Swiss former world number one to post her biggest career title.

"I feel extremely happy. I didn't expect to beat Martina. She's always been my favourite player and after this even more. This is my fifth time in Tokyo and I was trying so hard and I'm very, very happy to finally win this tournament," said Dementieva.

"I never had a 6-0 in the final, only against me, so this is the first time actually I had such a score, but it was a very good game and the score doesn't tell the whole story."

"I was trying to play aggressively, trying to play my game. I had a feeling like I had nothing to lose. I didn't feel any pressure before the match. I just played aggressively and solidly today," added Dementieva.

Neither could hold her serve in the first three games with Dementieva breaking the first and

third games. The Russian hit a couple of good returns to pull off another break in the seventh before serving out for the set.

Hingis, who never faced a single break point in beating defending champion Maria Sharapova in the semi-finals, hit two double faults before losing the first game of the second set, and never recovered from the deficit.

Dementieva saved three break points in the following game and then her fine service return and a Swiss double fault gave another chance to the Russian, whose deep return gave her a 3-0 lead.

Dementieva was never really in danger afterwards, comfortably scoring another break in the fifth game to finish off a struggling Hingis with a forehand winner on her first match point.

It was Dementieva's first victory since winning at Hasselt in 2004 and a fifth overall, also winning in Amelia Island, Bali and Shanghai in 2003.

With the victory, which brought her the 196,900-dollar first prize, Dementieva managed to stop Hingis from making a record fifth victory following triumphs in 1997, 1999, 2000 and 2002.

The 24-year-old Sydney Olympic silver medalist, ranked ninth in the world, also took the lead in her win-loss record against Hingis at three wins against two defeats.



Pakistan wicketkeeper-batsman Kamran Akmal honing his batting skills during a practice session at the Arbab Niaz Stadium in Peshawar on Sunday.

'Sachin will bounce back'

Cricket

PTI/CRICINFO, Peshawar

Indian captain Rahul Dravid on Sunday backed Sachin Tendulkar to bounce back from his form slump and also expressed confidence in his side to rise to the challenge of facing Pakistan in the one-day series beginning here on Monday.

Seeking to put up a bold face, the Indian captain said there was no "extra pressure" on his team to perform well in one-dayers in the wake of the defeat in the Test series.

"We are under no extra pressure. It's the normal pressure or anxiety to perform well which is good. We know Pakistan's recent performance against us -- eight wins in 10 matches -- has been good. But statistics don't count much as in one-day cricket the team that performs well on that day will win," Dravid said at a pre-match press conference.

"We do respect the Pakistan team but we also have a young, good side. We are here to play good

cricket, learn a few things along the way. It is sort of a learning curve that will serve us well in the future," the Indian captain said.

Dravid said Tendulkar, who has triggered off a debate following his recent form slump, will definitely

cheeky headlines like "Endulkar" and "Goneguly?", he spoke about the on-field pressures cricketers regularly endure: "Players like Tendulkar and (Sourav) Ganguly have achieved so much because they have handled the pressures both on and off the field.

"It's not only about scoring runs or getting wickets, but also about how you react to criticism and come out stronger. I think Tendulkar and Ganguly are masters at it. We hope Tendulkar will bounce back here. Thankfully we haven't been reading much of the criticism or seeing much of it on television. Having played for so long, one expects it and gets used to it.

"When we do not do well there are brickbats and there are praises sky-high when we do well. It's all in the extremes and all of us know how to handle these vagaries," said Dravid.

The Indian captain said that Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag had done well in opening the innings and the play would be continued though the team had the other option of using Gautam Gambhir in the slot.



SACHIN TENDULKAR

bounce back in the one-day series. Dravid wasn't too perturbed by the media backlash after the 341-run defeat in the third Test and said they had come to expect such "extreme reactions". Asked about