

National soccer from July 15

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has decided to start the National Football Championship from July 15 across the country.

Interested District Sports Associations (DSAs), services and universities have been asked to confirm their participation by May 31.

Besides, the districts who want to host the zonal round and final round have been requested to submit their letter of interest.

WI forget to win: Greg

CRICINFO, undated

Greg Chappell, the Indian coach, says West Indies have forgotten how to win, but he refuses to write them off for the remainder of the one-day series. Speaking after India won the first one-day International in thrilling fashion with one ball remaining at Sabina Park on Thursday, Chappell said West Indies boasted quality players who could be competitive.

"In a two-horse race, it's a 50-50 bet. All the rankings tell you is what you've done in recent times. It doesn't tell you about the class and the quality of the team, and the West Indian side has got some class," he said.

"There are some very talented players in that team. They have just forgotten how to win at the moment and that takes a bit of practice and they have not had as much practice as we have had."

West Indies coasted to an easy 5-0 series success over Zimbabwe, they had won only three of their previous 23 ODIs.

"We don't underrate them at all. There are a lot of class players in that side, and through history, they have been hard to beat in the West Indies so we don't underrate them at all," Chappell said. "We see them as a side that could very quickly turn it around. They've got a lot of good athletes, they bowl well, they have got some real talent in their batting line-up."

Kaif told not to change

CRICINFO, undated

A couple of days before the first one-day international, as the Indian team went through their paces at different parts of Kingston's Chedwin Park, Mohammad Kaif and Ian Frazer were involved in an animated session on the concrete pitch at a remote corner of the ground.

With the help of balls of different colours, shapes and material, team trainer Frazer delivered some fast short-pitched stuff on the jagged surface. Kaif decided to battle the pace and uneven bounce with a slightly open, two-eyed stance.

Frazer would have none of it: "Go back to your original stance," he hollered.

And everytime Kaif veered even slightly to open out, Frazer kept urging him to change it. "Focus on the ball, don't panic," Frazer continued.

"When you wait for the ball to come to you, you have more time than you think. Watch the ball carefully, but don't glare at it."

Frazer later understood why Kaif was changing his stance. "It's just one of those things batsmen try to do from time to time," Frazer told CricInfo.

"I told him that it wasn't the stance that was preventing him from scoring runs. It was the same original stance that helped him score so many runs, there is no reason why he shouldn't be scoring again without resorting to a new stance." In the first one-day at Kingston, the new-found confidence, for the first half of the innings at least, was there for all to see.

Nowotny the key

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unpaid loyalty bonus due to him when he signed a contract extension in 2002. The case was finally settled 'amicably' in 2005.

The defender has had his knee operated on four times during his career.

Germany are due to go on Sunday to a training camp in Switzerland and stay there till the end of May.

Aside from Costa Rica Germany's other group rivals are Poland and Ecuador.

Bitterness drives

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Inter team-mates Javier Zanetti, Walter Samuel and Cristian Gonzalez feel after they failed to make Pekerman's final cut and he insists he will try to console them.

"I haven't spoken with Zanetti," he said. "I will talk with him and my other team-mates."

"It is hard for a player not to be included in the World Cup list."



PHOTO: AFP

Switzerland's Martina Hingis plays a backhand return during the 4th round of the Rome Masters WTA event against Flavia Pennetta of Italy on Friday.

Venus up against Martina



Tennis

AFP, Rome

Former champions Venus Williams and Martina Hingis set up a grudge battle at the Rome Masters Friday as both advanced into semifinal spots.

Williams rallied to win nine of the last ten games in overcoming Jelena Jankovic 5-7, 6-4, 6-1.

Hingis won the 500th match of her career as she trounced Italy's last hope, Flavia Pennetta, 6-3, 6-1.

Hingis beat Williams in the Swiss player's teenaged debut in 1998, with the American returning the favour in the semis a year later.

Williams will aim for her first final since last July in California when she plays Hingis for the 21st time.

The Wimbledon champion won their last meeting a fortnight ago in the Warsaw third round to level the series at 10 wins apiece.

She has also won five of their last six and seven of their last nine meetings, although the Swiss Miss won the only time they clashed in a Grand Slam final, at the US Open in 1997.

Williams dropped the first set to her 21-year-old Serbia and Montenegro opponent who also had three chances to take a 5-3 lead in the second but after breaking for 4-all, Williams went on the rampage.

Eng selectors in Harmison dilemma

AFP, London

Whether or not to bring back fast bowler Stephen Harmison will be the central issue confronting England's selectors ahead of Sunday's squad announcement for the second Test against Sri Lanka at Edgbaston starting on May 25.

So far this season the selectors have been bold, handing a debut at Lord's to the raw but quick Sajid Mahmood in preference to the steadier, and still uncapped, Jon Lewis.

But in Harmison's case the selection trio of chairman David Graveney, coach Duncan Fletcher and former England off-spinner Geoff Miller face an issue of fitness not tactics.

The situation is complicated further by the fact that the two concluding matches of the Sri Lanka series, at Edgbaston and Trent Bridge, are back-to-back.

And, although they won't say so publicly for fear of being branded disrespectful to their current opponents, one of England's major goals this season is to ensure all their key players are fully fit ahead of the defence of the Ashes in Australia starting in November and next year's World Cup in the West Indies.

"There is a lot of cricket ahead of us and if we rush him (Harmison) and there is a problem, we're only going to have to rest him again later on -- we have to make sure everyone is fully fit when they come back and play for us," Fletcher said earlier this week.

POSSIBLE SQUAD

Marcus Trescothick, Andrew Strauss, Alastair Cook, Kevin Pietersen, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff (captain), Geraint Jones, Liam Plunkett, Sajid Mahmood, Matthew Hoggard, Monty Panesar, Ian Bell, Stephen Harmison.

Narail toy with

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Madrasa beat Balaia High School of Chapainawabganj.

Chandpali Mersha Secondary School of Bagerhat defeated Dumuria NGC and NCK Secondary School of Khulna 3-1 at the Narail Stadium.

"It is hard for a player not to be included in the World Cup list."

"It was tough to play last night (three sets) and then again in the afternoon," said the American, 1999 Rome champion. "I didn't have much time to recover."

"But in the third, I drew encouragement from my father (and coach). He kept telling me to go for it."

Former US Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova broke the spell of a spirited qualifier with nothing to lose to set up an all-Russian semi-final against Dinara Safina, who extended her dream clay run 6-1, 6-1 over off-the-boil compatriot Elena Dementieva.

The 19-year-old sister of Marat Safin, winner of four career titles and world ranked 19th, hopes her form holds up for two more matches this weekend.

"I want to continue this dream, why stop now," she said after winning her sixth career match at the tournament.

"I played a good match, it was solid. Maybe I was a little nervous in the last game, but I went for it anyway."

Safina, with 18 winners, claimed victory on her second match point, breaking Dementieva.

Russians are creating their own revolution on the WTA Tour so far this season, claiming titles at all five of the elite Tier I events in 2006, with two trophies from Nadia Petrova and one each from Dementieva, Maria Sharapova and Kuznetsova.

Oprandi, playing in only her second WTA-level tournament, forced the vastly more experienced Kuznetsova to save a match point in the ninth game of the final set.

"Her game looked like magic," admitted a worried 2004 Grand Slam champion. "The ball bounced where I never expected it."

"I focussed as hard as I could, I'd never played her and she has a good game."

Oprandi, who sports the only known double lip-piercing in the women's game, only obtained her Italian passport recently thanks to

Pigs out, Brazil in!

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and sponsors.

The high level of global interest in the Brazilians has nevertheless assured the organisers of a healthy profit with sponsorship deals, ticket sales and the distribution of television rights more than matching the hefty outlay.

The 55,000 tickets for the team's 14 training sessions, going for \$16 apiece, were all snapped up within two days, with many reportedly being resold on the black market for up to six times the original price.

More than 100 countries have meanwhile bought the rights to broadcast the training sessions with Brazilian television even arranging for several live transmissions.

Eight hundred media workers have been accredited for the training camp with more than half coming from Brazil.

In a further indication of the glamour surrounding the team, the hotel where they are staying is auctioning off the chance to sleep in the players' bedrooms, sadly only after they have vacated them.

The small road leading up to the stadium is meanwhile being transformed into a 'party mile' of drinks

The Messi-ah?

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Despite his tender years and the expectation on his young shoulders, his first 10 appearances in La Liga reaped nine goals and his display at Mallorca showed what a precocious talent he is.

Arriving into the action with just a quarter of the contest remaining, he found the net twice but also spooned over an open goal in between to remind onlookers of his fallibility.

He has been part of the Barca set-up since 2000, after his family relocated to Spain the previous year.

And he has learned the club philosophy, graduating from the youth ranks to form an almost telepathic link with Ronaldinho in a side which makes the Harlem Globetrotters appear reserved.

Messi continues to show just what a special talent he is," said coach Frank Rijkaard.

"He is still very young but is already crucial to the team."

Being the junior partner is a familiar position for the boy known as Leo to his team-mates, averaging more than a goal a game for the

reserves as a 16-year-old and subsequently making his first-team debut in October 2004 at local rivals Espanyol, to become the third youngest player to represent the club.

The Argentinian teenage prodigy has recently extended his contract with Barcelona for the second time in three months so that it will now run until 2014 rather than 2010.

If time allows his talent to bloom as it might, he will be playing in his third World Cup that very year - and he will still not have reached what ought to be his prime.

He appears a must for Argentina's squad for Germany this summer, a more than capable deputy for playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme and a general wild card selection.

Messi would certainly add fresh ideas to Pekerman's plans and how much he achieves between now and June with Barcelona, and indeed how heavy his legs are as a consequence, will perhaps dictate what imprint he leaves on the biggest stage.

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