



Did U Know?

Cycling made its first appearance in the Olympics in 1896.



Tom Moody

(Sri Lanka cricket coach)
"A lot of water has gone down the bridge since then. We are not the same team that visited India last time. We are now a better, stronger unit."



ESPN

Sportscenter India
Live at 8:30 pm

Akram wishes Flintoff well

AFP, Karachi

Andrew Flintoff faces a difficult time as England captain in next month's Ashes in Australia, his long-time friend and former Pakistan cricket great Wasim Akram said Monday.

Australia, raring to avenge their last year's Ashes defeat in England, start as huge favourites to clinch back the coveted urn in the Ashes starting with the first Test in Brisbane from November 23.

"The choice of Flintoff as captain is good but I fear he will be leading a losing team in the forthcoming Ashes. The Australians are going to crush England and only an extraordinary performance can avert the outcome," Wasim told AFP.

Wasim, who tipped Flintoff to be a world class all-rounder when both lined up for English county Lancashire in late 1990s, hoped his former teammate could mature as a captain.

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Bradman Museum losing appeal to young generation

AFP, Sydney

The Bradman Museum, established to honour Australia's greatest cricketer Don Bradman, is facing dwindling visitor numbers and may have to be reinvented for a generation more familiar with Shane Warne and Ricky Ponting, reports said Monday.

Situated in Bowral, an hour's drive southwest of Sydney where Bradman lived his early years, the museum is experiencing a decline in income since the 2001 death of Bradman, aged 92.

"Business has been difficult since Sir Donald died," Richard Mulvaney, the museum's founding director, told the Sydney Morning Herald Monday.

"It's directly attributable to the decline of the tourism industry in regional Australia. The tradition of the Australian family hopping into the car on a Sunday and going out for a collective outing is becoming a rare thing."

In its heyday, in the late 1990s, 85,000 cricket lovers visited the museum every year, but that has fallen to about 40,000 per year.

Mulvaney stepped down from his position last week after 17 years and a new board -- chaired by the former New South Wales state premier John Fahey -- is reinventing the museum for a generation more familiar with the exploits of contemporary Australian greats Warne and Ponting.

In 52 Test matches, Bradman amassed 6,996 runs at a career average of 99.94, which has never been eclipsed.

Declare it Black Monday

AL-AMIN

Anybody who watched the different private TV channels on Monday airing footage of country's ace shooter Asif Hossain limping off the CMM's Court with marks of police brutality vivid on different parts of his body, would recoil in shock and horror.

It's a shame for a nation where a national icon was first beaten up in the corridor of the National Shooting Complex in Gulshan and then picked off to the nearest police station for another round of merciless beating with every conceivable object before being sent to the court of justice on charges of 'assaulting the protectors of the law'.

But the events that transpired in the shooting complex at around 1pm, where the demure and self-effacing Asif along with 29 other shooters were training for the next

Asiad in Doha, belies the police version of the holocaust sparked following a row between a guard of the complex and the driver of a high police official.

It was learnt from eyewitnesses that Asif along with other shooters were trying to save the complex's guard from the police wrath when the law enforcers swung their batons on to the athletes. The police led by a sub-inspector were so furious that they even entered the dormitory of the shooters and when they left they took away five people including Asif and Shoaib, whose forehead was still bleeding when he was released on bail along with Asif in the afternoon.

Police brutality against sports personality in the country is nothing new. Last April our insane police made international headlines when they beat sports journalists during the second Test in

Chittagong against world champions Australia.

But the cruelty of the latest incident belies every civic norm in a 'so called' democratic country.

* We not only strongly condemn the heinous acts, but also call to the sports fraternity to declare October 2, 2006 as Black Monday.

* We also demand outright rejection of the police version on the incident. Besides, from our previous bitter experience we want to reject any 'police inquiry'. We strongly feel that the time has come for a judicial inquiry into the barbarism.

After the Second World War, every Chinese wanted to be an athlete because they believed it would give them an opportunity to fly their national flag above the rest of the world. They believed that winning something for their country was equal to being a

martyr in a war.

Asif Hossain Khan has not only won a Commonwealth shooting gold for a country where sporting achievements are few and far between. He is also a national hero by his own right. And any insult to a hero of a nation is a disgrace for the whole nation.

Asif was preparing himself for the Doha Games. Upon release from the custody, he was stammering that his Asiad assignment was all but over.

So, it is about time that the culprits were brought to justice. Because if incidents like these become commonplace, we might not have another athlete waving the Red and Green on a sporting field again!



PHOTO: AFP
Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar (R) and coach Dav Whatmore take questions during a press conference in New Delhi on Monday.

Abahani amble into final



SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani stormed into the final of the Shah Sports Club Cup Hockey Tournament with a convincing 2-0 win over Mariner Youngs Club in the first semifinal yesterday.

Musa Mia and Moududur Rahman Shuva sealed Abahani's victory with first half goals at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium as the defending champions maintained their all-win record in the eight-team meet.

Abahani will take on the winners of today's semifinal between Mohammedan Sporting Club and Usha Kirra Chakra in Thursday's final.

Mariners rushed early blood in an entertaining match when Shishu earned a penalty corner after nine minutes. The Mariners forward, however, shot the ball wide from close after Sohel's effort on the penalty corner beat Abahani keeper Bappi.

With Musa and Russell Mahmud Jimmy working hard, the sky-blues took control in the midfield and began to slice the rival defence with Shuva and Sumon threatening to score. Sumon was denied a clean hit to goal by inspired defending from Meraj but the pressure told in the 16th minute when Abahani won their only penalty corner.

Issa Mia's powerful hit was blocked by Mariners goalie Jahangir but a lurking Musa made most of the rebound, coolly chipping the ball over the helpless keeper to separate the two sides.

Jimmy's dashing run down the middle then enabled Abahani to double the lead nine minutes later. Sumon, who got the ball from Jimmy, struck the sidebar with a fierce hit but national striker Shuva was in the right position to intercept the ball and fire home.

Mariners sparked either side of the break but their brief domination was not enough to unsettle a disciplined Abahani backline and their veteran national custodian Bappi,

who brilliantly thwarted efforts from Chandan and Rahul during penalty corners just before the short hooter.

Mariners wasted a golden chance early into the second half when they won a penalty stroke after Sohel was fouled by Khokon inside the area. But Chandan failed to bring Mariners back into the game as his low hit from the spot

was parried by a diving Bappi.

Abahani enjoyed superior position in the rest of the game but Jimmy failed to score from a hand-shaking distance while Sumon, set by Jimmy in the dying moment, mishit his chance.



PHOTO: STAR

Abahani's Russell Mahmud Jimmy (L) tries to get the better of Mariner Youngs Club's Chandan during their semifinal match of the Shah Sports Club Cup Hockey Tournament at the Maulana Bhashani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Nobody cares!



AFP, New Delhi

With Australia and England concentrating on the Ashes and the rest nervously awaiting the World Cup next March, is anyone really interested in winning the Champions Trophy?

The International Cricket Council's biennial tournament, which starts in India on Saturday, is regarded by the sport's governing body as the second-biggest event after the World Cup.

After all, the limited-overs jamboree features all the 10 Test-playing nations for the only time outside the World Cup.

Yet its importance has been diluted by the much-availed Ashes contest which begins less than three weeks after the tournament ends on November 5 and the all-important World Cup in the Caribbean.

The rivals have made polite noises of how much it means to win the Champions Trophy to gain a psychological advantage ahead of the World Cup.

But few can hide their lack of enthusiasm for an event that is clearly ill-timed and does not have the charisma of a World Cup or bilateral series like the Ashes.

Australian captain Ricky Ponting stressed the tournament, coming at the start of the new season, will give his team useful practice for the Ashes battle.

England's chairman of selectors David Graveney stressed the trip to India was not wasted -- it will help to judge the fitness of key players like captain Andrew Flintoff and fast bowler Steve Harmison for the trip to Australia.

"The Champions Trophy is a good thing for us to be involved in because it gives us a chance to test the players out," Graveney told reporters while announcing the Ashes squad in London last month.

The unpredictable nature of limited-overs cricket ensures there is no guarantee that whichever team wins the tournament will also be favourites to take the World Cup.

Australia have never won the Champions Trophy but they remain the team to beat in both versions of the game and have underlined their supremacy by winning the last two World Cups in 1999 and 2003.

The West Indies, on the other hand, have been reduced to playing in the qualifying round of the Champions Trophy despite being its defending champions, having won the 2004 event in England.

Brian Lara's men were not among the top six teams on April 1 that gained direct entry into the tournament. They

will battle with Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh for the remaining two spots in the main event.

The six teams that avoided the qualifying round were Australia, South Africa, India, Pakistan, England and New Zealand.

The ICC, which hopes to raise 65 million dollars from the tournament for its development programme, chose to put a spin on the event by dedicating it to the 'spirit of cricket'.

It also resolved to use the tournament to 'help raise awareness of the impact of HIV and AIDS on people throughout the cricket-playing world,' according to ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed.

The lofty ideals impressed few, least of all the host nation, whose vast cricket-crazy audiences drive the sport's finances.

Indian cricket chiefs, who need no excuse to organise lucrative one-day tournaments anywhere in the world, are clearly reluctant hosts of an event that raises money mainly for the ICC.

"The effort is ours but the money goes to the ICC. Frankly, this tournament is of no use to us," one official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"We would have been better off organising our own series."

Hopefully, the cricket on the field will dispel the pessimism off it.

BCCI eyes ICC's global rights

AFP, New Delhi

India's cricket chiefs said on Monday they will bid to secure the International Cricket Council's (ICC) global media and marketing rights for the next eight years.

"Yes, we will make a bid for the ICC rights," the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Niranjan Shah told AFP, confirming local media reports on the extraordinary proposal.

"We have successfully sold our own rights and I am confident we can do well with the global rights also. We have informed the ICC of our intention."

The ICC's current 550-million dollar deal for seven years with Global Cricket Corporation, a venture owned by Rupert Murdoch's News International, expires after the 2007 World Cup in the Caribbean.

The new deal till 2015 covers 18 ICC tournament, including two World Cups, three Champions Trophies and the first two Twenty20 World Championships.

Other events include the ICC Trophy for associate members and the under-19 World Cups.

The new bid is expected to cost over a billion dollars.

The BCCI, one of the richest cricket boards in the world, secured a whopping 612 million dollars for its own marketing rights for the next four years from Mumbai-based Nimbus Corporation.

Five of the ICC's six official sponsors advertise mainly in India whose large cricket-loving population is a sponsors' dream.

India is due to host the 2011 World Cup -- which forms part of the new agreement -- jointly with its South Asian neighbours Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

The 2015 World Cup will be hosted by Australia and New Zealand.

ICC spokesman Brian Murgatroyd admitted the BCCI would be within its rights to make a bid for the global rights.

"As far as I know, there is nothing in the ICC that prevents a member board from bidding for its rights," said Murgatroyd.

"If there isn't anything in the BCCI constitution that prevents them from bidding, then it is fine."

"But the BCCI will be treated like any other bidder. The process will take its course."

The Dubai-based ICC last month began talks with marketing and TV companies for the new rights.

Sanath sounds a caution

AFP, New Delhi

Sri Lankan batsman Sanath Jayasuriya on Monday sounded a warning to bowlers ahead of the Champions Trophy in India, saying he was confident of finishing the tournament on an impressive note.

"There are no fitness problems now and the confidence is back after the England tour," said Jayasuriya, 37.

The aggressive left-handed opener played a vital role in his team's 5-0 series victory in England in July, scoring 322 runs with two centuries.

Jayasuriya, who came out of Test retirement after the home series against Pakistan in April, had been plagued with injuries in recent years before bouncing back in style against England.

"It is not easy to come back from injuries," said Jayasuriya, the only Sri Lankan to have completed 10,000 runs in one-day internationals.

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Can Tigers do it now?



AFP, New Delhi

Bangladesh will have to strive to improve their dismal Champions Trophy record in the upcoming edition.

After hosting the inaugural championship in 1998 without participating in it, Bangladesh lost all their five matches in the next three editions without a fight.

An eight-wicket drubbing by England at Nairobi in 2000 is their narrowest defeat in defending a total, while a 138-run loss to the West Indies in England in 2004 is the better of two efforts while chasing.

But Bangladesh have now tasted victory against some top sides and

would be hoping to produce another shock win to make it past the qualifiers, in which they are pitted against two former world champions.

They have to defeat either Sri Lanka or the West Indies apart from Zimbabwe to make it as one of the two teams advancing to the tournament proper.

Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore, a former Australian Test cricketer, felt the team had the ability to win the required two matches.

"I think we have a good chance of winning two out of three matches," said Whatmore, who had the satisfaction of seeing Bangladesh thrash Kenya 3-0 in an away series earlier this year.

"We are going to work extremely hard and will leave no stone unturned to achieve the desired result in the Champions Trophy," said Whatmore. "This team is a lot different from those of the past."

Whatmore was happy at the way

youngsters were being encouraged with 20-year-old opener Shahriar Nafees named deputy to captain Habibul Bashar and uncapped batsman Mehrib Hossain included in the squad.

"We have tried out some young players and that has enabled the team to become a lot more flexible in its ability," said Whatmore, who has been with the team since 2003.

Bangladesh, having the benefit of exposure and confidence after shock wins over world champions Australia and neighbours India in one-day games over the last two seasons, have improved their record in recent matches.

They blanked Kenya and also figured in a keenly fought series in Zimbabwe which they lost 2-3, but still lack consistency and have also had some injury worries in the run-

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Trophy gets star cast



AFP, New Delhi

The triumphant return of Sachin Tendulkar may not be to the taste of non-Indian bowlers, but millions of cricket fans who prayed for his recovery will look to the master batsman to set the Champions Trophy ablaze.

India's batting had lost much of its flair, flamboyance and fire in the absence of Tendulkar, who was out

for nearly five months following shoulder surgery.

India breathed a sigh of relief when the 33-year-old smashed a hundred and then a half-century in the recent triangular one-day series in Kuala Lumpur to prove that all was well with form and fitness.

It was feared that the Champions Trophy, which starts on Saturday, would lose much of its flavour with so many prominent players out of action.

But Australian fast bowler Glenn McGrath, England all-rounder Andrew Flintoff, South Africans Jacques Kallis and Graeme Smith, and Pakistan's paceman Shoaib

Akhtar are also all back to add relish to the tournament.

The trophy provides ample opportunity for most teams to assess the fitness of key players before major assignments, like the Ashes in Australia next month and the 2007 World Cup in the Caribbean.

McGrath, Tendulkar, Kallis and Akhtar have each played a couple of matches ahead of the real action involving all 10-Test playing nations.

Tendulkar and McGrath needed just one tournament in Kuala

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PHOTO: AFP
Indian star Sachin Tendulkar (R) speaks to captain Rahul Dravid (L) as Sourav Ganguly walks past during their second match of the NKP Slave Challenger Trophy in Chennai on Monday.