



Did U Know?

Argentina produced the biggest win in the FIFA 2006 World Cup with their 6-0 victory over Serbia and Montenegro in the first round.



Sepp Blatter

(FIFA president)

"History will say it was a mistake for the FIFA president not to award the Italians the World Cup, and it was indeed an error on my part."

King upbeat on World Cup

BBC ONLINE, undated

Coach Bennett King insists West Indies can become the first ever host team to win the World Cup.

But he admits there is still work to do to prevent Australia from winning a third successive title.

"We've been winning games against really good opposition, which gives the players confidence. We've just got to maintain that consistency," said King.

"The limited-overs format at the moment suits us better. With that in mind, we're optimistic."

West Indies, who open the World Cup against Pakistan in Jamaica on 13 March, beat Australia during the group stages of the ICC Champions Trophy.

They lost to Ricky Ponting's side in the final of the tournament in India in November and have since endured a difficult tour of Pakistan.

But they return to India for a four-match series later this month in good heart.

"The limited-overs format is an interesting game. Anyone on their given day, if they have a good day, can win," King told the West Indies Cricket Board website.

"If a side has a below par game, they can lose. What we've got to make sure of is that we don't have a lot of bad games."

Pakistan draw tour match

AFP, Kimberley

Off-field drama overshadowed the action on the field as the match between the touring Pakistanis and the Rest of South Africa ended in a tame draw at the De Beers Diamond Oval Monday.

While coach Bob Woolmer said injured fast bowler Umar Gul would be assessed Wednesday after suffering an ankle injury which restricted him to three overs in the Rest's innings, it was announced in Pakistan that controversial fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar would be joining the team as cover for Gul.

Akhtar will join fellow fast bowler Mohammad Asif in South Africa after both men had bans for drug use overturned by a Pakistani tribunal.

Captain Inzamamul Haq again did not appear on the field because of a chest infection, while it was reported in Pakistan that star batsman Mohammad Yousuf might not play in the three-Test series against South Africa, starting at Centurion Thursday.

Yousuf was due to join the side in South Africa after returning from hajj in Saudi Arabia but this was reportedly delayed because his wife, who is expecting a baby, had suffered complications.

On the field, the Rest's captain Morne van Wyk and left-hander Arno Jacobs made centuries in a fifth wicket stand of 188, enabling the South African side to make 383 and bat until shortly before tea on the final day.

BRIEF SCORES

PAKISTAN: First innings 485-9 declared and second innings 96.

REST OF SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 383.

Result: Match drawn.

BCB may name WC probables today



Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed categorically said yesterday that the selection panel thinks there is no 'automatic choice' for the national team rather selection has always been on the basis of players' performance.

The former national skipper was not willing to single out any player before making the comment but understandably, his fingers were pointed towards veteran wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud who has recently told that he never understood why he should not still be an automatic choice for the Tigers.

"I don't want to single out any player but one thing is clear that we don't think anybody's place is guaranteed (in the side) because the choice has to be backed by performance. Experience could

be a factor but should not be the only criteria to pick up someone," said Faruque while talking about the World Cup probables.

The national selectors finalised Bangladesh's 30-member probables for the World Cup yesterday and Bangladesh Cricket Board is expected to disclose the list today.

All the 23 cricketers except injured opener Nafis Iqbal currently under contract with the board are almost confirmed to be included in the list besides few discarded internationals and promising cricketers like Nadif Chowdhury, who got a national call during the recent home series against Scotland but has yet to make international debut.

"We have submitted the list to the board today. The board will release it but I can say that we tried to blend experience and youth in the list considering their recent performance," the chief selector said.

The long list would be reduced to half before mid-February when the Tigers return home from Zimbabwe.

Fit-again seamer cum useful late-order batsman Mohammad Sharif is not only expected to be included in the list but he also received special attention for touring Zimbabwe and thus the Caribbean for the World Cup as the selectors are seriously thinking about adding a paceman.

Dollar Mahmud was also under consideration but Sharif, a brilliant user of the old ball and a hard-hitting batsman, had a strong support due to impressive domestic performance in recent times. Hard-hitting opener Zunaed Siddique, who hogged the spotlight following his splendid performance in the recently concluded Twenty20 Premier League, is likely to be the only fresh inclusion.

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Serious cricket from today

SPORTS REPORTER



Under threats of political turmoil and bad weather, the main event of the Premier Cricket League -- the 50-overs competition -- gets underway today with defending champions Old DOHS taking on Young Pegasus in one of three opening day's matches at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Last year's runners-up Sonargaon Cricketers' face Parlex Sporting Club at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium while Victoria Sporting Club meet Indira Road Krira Chakra at BKSP in other outings.

In the other first-round fixture

tomorrow, Mohammedan are pitted against Kalabagan (FCS), Biman play Abahani (BKSP) and Brothers meet City Club (DCS).

The Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM), guardian of the most coveted domestic competition, sat with the club representatives yesterday to mainly discuss whether it would be possible to arrange matches during blockade or other agitation programmes.

"We have decided to start the league on schedule but will meet the political parties within two days to get clearance about holding matches. Sonargaon, Mohamme-dan, Biman, Abahani and City agreed to play during blockade on condition of clearance while rest of the clubs were against playing. DOHS are the only

team not to clear their position," informed CCDM chairman Khondokar Jamiluddin.

He expressed his helplessness over the weather condition, especially the dense fog that has covered the country for the past few days. Every team will have to settle for curtailed-over affairs if the weather remains like this but Jamil assured that there would be no complaints about the ball like the Twenty20 competition.

"We are going to use the ball (red) used in India's Ranji Trophy matches. We have shown it to different club officials and experts like former national skipper Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu. We will use Kookaburra in the Super-League," he informed.

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PHOTO: AFP

Former West Indies cricketer Wes Hall (C) addresses the media as fellow fast bowler Joel Garner (L) and CEO of Barbados Tourism Authority Stuart Layne look on at a press conference in New Delhi on Tuesday.

Sreesanth just did it

CRICINFO, undated

Indian fast bowler Sreesanth revealed the story behind the famous impromptu dance after he had hit Andre Nel for a six during the first Test in Johannesburg.

"It just happened. I myself wondered when I saw it (later on TV). My brother and friends had e-mailed me about it." Recalling the incident, Sreesanth said: "As soon as I walked in to bat, Nel said 'I can smell blood. You do not have the guts.' Showing his emblem on the shirt, Nel said 'I am playing for this. You are a scared fellow, rabbit. I will get you next ball'."

"Before delivering the next ball, Nel had also asked Mark Boucher to stay back and had also moved the short leg fielder. I being a fast bowler myself, knew Nel was going to bowl a bouncer. I just took my chance and prayed to God. I stepped out to connect the ball which flew over the ropes."

Sreesanth said he was very lucky to get some valuable tips from great fast bowlers like Wasim Akram and Allan Donald during the South African tour. Sreesanth said he had a session with Akram, who had advised him on how to use the reverse swing. "Akram has told me some small points. It was really helpful. It was nice of him." Sharing an interesting coincidence, Sreesanth said: "This year on January 1, I had a session with Akram while last year the same day I had a session

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B. LEAGUE TRANSFER TRAIL

Brothers' Faisal surprise



Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Brothers Union sprung a surprise when they had Mohammedan's Faisal Mahmud training with the club yesterday, the opening day of their camp for the inaugural Professional Football League.

Neighbours Mohammedan Sporting Club had claimed earlier that the out-of-favour national midfielder will stay with them but Brothers manager Amer Khan confirmed that they have secured Faisal's contract.

"Actually, we had him signed before Eidul Azha but decided to keep it a secret due to unavoidable reasons," the former Brothers midfielder said hinting at club rivalries over transfers.

Like Faisal, Abahani goalkeeper Nizam Majumder whose signing was also kept a secret, trained at Brothers' Gopibagh ground under supervision of coach Wajed Gazi. A total of 17 players attended the session.

"Yes, Gazi bhui was there but he has yet to become our coach officially," added Amer.

Veteran coach Gazi has also been linked with B. League side Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra and he has yet to decide which team he will choose in the end.

"It might take one or two days," said the Oranges manager adding that former national fullback Masud

Rana has been named Brothers captain.

Like Brothers, local giants and reportedly this season's highest budgeted team Abahani have also been waiting to get the green signal from Argentine coach Diego Cruciani.

Abahani, who were due to begin their training today, has deferred the start due to the political situation.

"In this situation, players could not reach the club. We will decide a new date, which would be within a couple of days, according to new programmes given by the political parties," told sky-blues manager Satyajit Das Rupu.

"Cruciani is not in Buenos Aires now. The last time we had talked, he all but ensured to join us. We are just waiting for a 'yes' from him. It could be one or two days," Rupu said about the recent past Bangladesh national coach who is expected to bring four Argentine booters with him.

Abahani will start their camp under long-serving coach Amlesh Sen.

Muktijoddha, who have also finalised their squad like Abahani and Brothers but for foreign recruits, will start training very shortly.

"The decision will be taken in our tomorrow's meeting. I hope it would be within two days," informed coach Abu Yusuf last night.

Good news for Yuvraj

CRICINFO, undated

Yuvraj Singh, expected to be out of action till the World Cup, could make a return of sorts as early as the home one-day series against West Indies. Yuvraj, who has been training in Mumbai in the Bandra Kurla Complex, at the same time as the finals of the Vijay Hazare Trophy, the zonal under-19 tournament, could make a comeback as soon as the second half of the four-ODI home series against West Indies.

"He is in the final phase of rehabilitation. He is doing light fielding, functional agility, netting," Mithun Joshi, sports physiotherapist and son of the board's medical expert Dr. Anant Joshi, wrote in a report to the Board of Control for Cricket in India. "It is likely he will be able to return to light Twenty20 style match play by the 19th of this month. He could be with the team for the preparation for the West Indies series and be available to play in the latter part of the one-day series against Sri Lanka."

Yuvraj had recently practiced against a bowling machine, and was doing light exercises. He has been out of cricket since the middle of the Champions Trophy, when he tore a ligament in the knee in a pre-match training session at Mohali, while playing kho-kho, a traditional Indian game, as part of warm ups.

"There was never any pain," an audibly elated Yuvraj told Cricinfo

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Dilip blames batsmen

PTI, Mumbai

Chief cricket selector Dilip Vengsarkar has singled out the batsmen as the major reason for India's disastrous showing in South Africa where they lost both the one-day and Test series.

"The batting really collapsed. I think that was our strong point, but they really messed it up. That's what I feel," Vengsarkar told the media on his arrival from South Africa in the wee hours here on Tuesday.

India lost the one-dayers 4-0 and the Tests 2-1.

Following the reversal, a complete shake-up is expected in the team for the upcoming home one-day series against West Indies and Sri Lanka.

Vengsarkar, however, was less forthcoming when asked about the likely composition.

"As I said, I really don't know what will happen now. We (the national selectors) meet on the 10th" to pick the team for the first two ODIs against the West Indies and also the World Cup probables, the former India captain said.

On the decision to play seamer Munaf Patel ahead of off-spinner Harbhajan Singh in the third Test at Cape Town, Vengsarkar said, "in hindsight you can say many things in which I really do not believe in."

Rain decides NZ-SL series

BBC ONLINE, undated

New Zealand and Sri Lanka had to settle for a 2-2 draw in their one-day series after the deciding game in Hamilton was abandoned without a ball being bowled.

Home skipper Stephen Fleming won the toss and put Sri Lanka in but rain then arrived to prevent any play.

The game will be recognised, however, as Sri Lankan Sanath Jayasuriya's world record 375th one-day appearance, one more than India's Sachin Tendulkar.

And it will also count as the 100th of umpire Billy Bowden.

New Zealand now head for Australia where they will take part in a triangular series, also involving England, while Sri Lanka will play four games in India next month.

Sri Lanka coach Tom Moody was satisfied with his team's campaign, which saw them come from behind to level both the Test and one-day series -- and claim a 1-1 draw in the Twenty20 games.

"We've had a challenging series, we've enjoyed every bit of it and we can walk away with our heads held high," he said.

"It was nice in the Test series to bounce back after losing the first game, which is always a tough thing to do, the guys showed some character there."

"The one-day series has been a bit of a mixed bag, we played some good cricket and also some poor cricket."

"Overall I'm pleased, it would have been nice to have played this fifth game as I felt we were building some momentum, and New Zealand were not really hitting their straps."

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Fitness main problem

BFF announces Olympic squad



Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday reduced its 33-member preliminary squad to 25 for next February's Olympic pre-qualifiers against Hong Kong.

The Bangladesh under-23 team will host Hong Kong on February 7 and play the away game a week later.

Fitness seems to be the main problem for technical adviser Abu Yusuf, who cannot act as coach due to his club commitment.

The Muktijoddha coach and former national defender mentioned yesterday that he was happy with the squad because it is the best possible team he could gather.

"There has been no league for one year and it is impossible to know the players' real condition unless we play a match. It is also difficult to have a full fit team after just a few day's camp," Yusuf told yesterday.

"As our footballers do not play round the year, every coach has to

start from the beginning. In the next three weeks, we will focus on fitness training to strengthen their power and speed.

"We also have to take care of the basics," he said of his inexperienced bunch adding that he prefers one session practice a day.

"I will give pressure in one session so that they have enough recovery time."

Among the 25 footballers, only fullback Waly Faisal and forwards Emily and Ujjal have the experience of playing for the national team for more than one year.

Two out of four goalkeepers, Shakil and Tarek, have represented the under-23 team apart from being part of experimental national sides in the last stage of the Asian Cup qualifiers in addition to Zahed Parvez, Zahid Hossain and Ariful Islam.

"Yes, there are a few ones with international experience and it would be handy for us. I have no idea of Hong Kong's standard but if I take the results of the national team who lost to them in both their Asian Cup qualifying matches, it would be

tough," he commented.

When asked about his rather inexperienced assistant, Saiful Bari Titu who is the assistant coach of the U-23s, Yusuf said that he had full confidence on him.

"At this level, he has less experience but as a national player, we can rely on him. Also, he has been involved in club coaching for long time."

The BFF has decided to give the 25 footballers all the facilities enjoyed by the national team including monthly salary of Tk 10,000. If Bangladesh beat Hong Kong to reach the qualifying rounds, the facilities are expected to be continued.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Shakil, Tarek, Himel, Zia; **defenders:** Ariful, Sunny, Arafat Rony, Ramjan, Jahir, Saikat, Waly, Ripon Khan, Aminul Islam; **midfielders:** Zahed Parvez, Sharif, Komol, Zahid Hossain, Nasir, Maruf, Aurup, Mamun; **forwards:** Emily, Ujjal, Ridon and Robin.



PHOTO: AFP

Australian batsman Cameron White makes room to cut one through the off-side as England wicketkeeper Paul Nixon looks on during their Twenty20 international at the SCG on Tuesday.

Aussies keep winning



Cricket

REUTERS, Sydney

Australia inflicted more misery on England with a record-breaking 77-run victory in their one-off Twenty20 match on Tuesday.

Despite missing almost half the team that humiliated England 5-0 in the Ashes Test series, Australia racked up a world-record total to leave the visitors without a win in any form of the game since arriving down under more than two months ago.

Australia's batsmen went on the rampage, piling up 221 for five to eclipse the previous international record of 214 for five they set against New Zealand in Auckland in 2005.

England replied with 144 for nine, narrowly avoiding the heaviest defeat in the short history of Twenty20 internationals.

"We wanted to win and play as well as we could but it was just a bit of fun," Australia captain Ricky Ponting told a news conference.

"I enjoy playing this form of the game but it's best played when there's not a lot riding on it."



PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardena (L) and his New Zealand counterpart Stephen Fleming hold up the shared ODI series trophy after the fifth ODI between the sides was abandoned at Seddon Park in Hamilton on Tuesday.

The home team belted 15 fours and 14 sixes, Adam Gilchrist (48) and Ponting (47) sharing a 69-run partnership for the second wicket off 29 balls.

Man-of-the-match Cameron White (40 not out) and Andrew Symonds (39 not out) also added an unbroken 66 in less than six overs.

Gilchrist, who scored a hundred off 57 balls in the Test series, bludgeoned two fours and five sixes including three maximums in a row off James Anderson.

The England paceman conceded 64 runs in his four overs.

"We went out there to win tonight and it's disappointing we lost but sometimes you just have to accept you're playing against a powerful team," said England skipper Michael Vaughan.

"That was some of the best hitting you'll ever see, some of their sixes were clearing the ropes by 40 yards. When you're playing the best team in the world in their own backyard, you have to expect it's going to be hard...and once they made 221 it was always going to be tough."

Ponting smacked three fours and two sixes while opener Matthew Hayden made a brisk 20 and the versatile Mike Hussey chipped in with 18.

Spinner Monty Panesar was the best of England's bowlers, dismissing Gilchrist and Hussey in a four-over spell that cost 40 runs.

England's hopes of winning

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