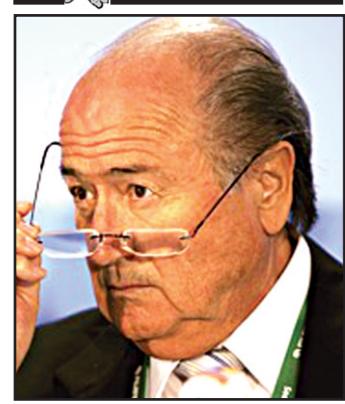




Did U Know?

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 Morné 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



SPORTS REPORTER

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

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, Mohamman-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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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.

PHOTO: AFP

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 with

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.

"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 Faisal 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.

Muktijuddha, 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.

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.

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

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 Kuria 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 West Indies, or for the 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."

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 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 Muktiyoddha 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 days' camp," Yusuf told yesterday.

"As out 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.

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

Among the 25 footballers, only fullback Wali 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.