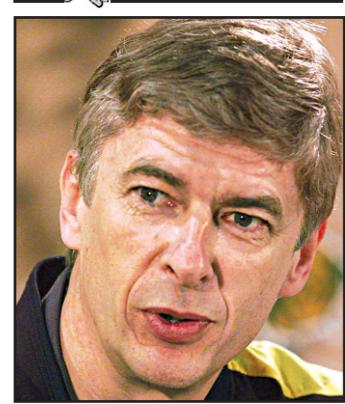




Did U Know?

Portugal coach Luiz Felipe Scolari became the first coach to win 12 successive FIFA World Cup games after winning seven games with his native Brazil en route to claiming the trophy in 2002 and a further five games that helped Portugal reach the semifinals in 2006.



Arsene Wenger
(Arsenal manager)
"I do not believe he is dead as a football player. He has good stamina, he never had great pace and players with that last a long time."

On David Beckham.

What to WATCH
ESPN
South Africa v Pakistan
First Test, Day 5
Live at 2:30 pm
Sportscenter India
Live at 9:30 pm
Commonwealth Bank Series
New Zealand v England
Third ODI
Live at 5:00 am (Tuesday)
STAR Sports
Australian Open
Men's/Women's First Rd
Live at 6:00 am

Ponting firm on KP issue

PTI, Melbourne

Australian captain Ricky Ponting has sought to defend his team's action in the wake of criticism that none of his players rushed to check on Kevin Pietersen's well-being when he was struck in the ribs by a Glenn McGrath delivery.

Pietersen was struck in the ribs during England's tri-series outing here on Friday and a scan later revealed a broken rib, ruling him out of the remainder of the one-day competition.

An indignant Ponting said his players thought it was an innocuous blow at the time and pointed out that they had rushed to Andrew Strauss when he was hit by a Brett Lee delivery in the Sydney Test.

"We saw with Strauss in Sydney the other day, all of us rushed to him there," Ponting said.

"We just thought it was a knock in the ribs and it didn't look real serious -- it wasn't like a head blow or anything like that," he was quoted as saying in the Australian media.

Wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist said: "A couple of guys asked him if he was all right as they went past and he couldn't talk."

Contrasting wins for old foes

SPORTS REPORTER

Arafat Sunny pulled pacer Sirajullah Khadem for a six in the last over to take Mohammad Sporting Club to an exciting two-wicket victory over City Club in the Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

While the Motijheel outfit fought hard to secure their second successive win, their traditional rivals Abahani maintained their winning run when they dispatched Victoria Sporting Club by five wickets at BKSP.

In the day's other match, Biman recovered from their first round defeat when they registered a 53-run win against Brothers Union at the Fazlul Haq Cricket Stadium.

MOHAMMEDAN-CITY

The result definitely portrays a thrilling match at Mirpur when Mohammadan lost eight wickets to chase down City Club's total of 172 with just four balls to spare, thanks

to a useful all-round performance by out-of-favour Tapash Baisya.

It was poor cricket all around not only because of mediocre performances but also due to dubious umpiring, especially the way Shakwatur Rahman ruled out some City Club appeals in the afternoon.

What seemed to be an easy task for Mohammadan got complicated as Tareq Aziz did not let go without a fight when the right-arm paceman scalped the first three Mohammadan batsmen including danger man Aftab Ahmed. In-form Aftab skied the ball to give the national cricketer a simple return catch with the scoreboard reading 48-2 in the 11th over.

They lost two more wickets in quick succession before wicketkeeper Sahagir Hossain joined captain Habibul Bashar to steady the ship with a 46-run association for the sixth wicket.

When Bashar was bowled by left-arm spinner Zakir Hossain for 30 off 62 balls, Mohammadan were 46 runs short of target. Man-of-the-match Tapash struggled in the middle but his 57-ball 23 and a 34-

run partnership with Sahagir (32 off 53 deliveries) for the seventh wicket ensured victory.

But it could have been a different story had City skipper Shahriar Nafees managed to dislodge the stumps at the non-striking end to send Sakib Al Hasan (13) back with Mohammadan on 59-4.

National vice-captain Nafees had not only earlier missed another chance at mid-on to let Zunaed Siddique (26) off the hook but also should be held responsible for his team's poor fielding effort in defense of a fragile total.

The left-hander also continued lean-patch with the bat in the domestic scene scoring only one after City Club were sent in. Mustafizur Rahman top scored with 46 off 70 balls.

Tapash was the pick of Mohammadan attack with four wickets for 38.

ABAHANI-VICTORIA

Victoria surprisingly opted to bat against all odds, defying the early morning conditions, and the

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PHOTO: STAR

Slim lead for Pakistan

Cricket

AFP, Centurion

Left-arm spinner Paul Harris took three wickets as Pakistan struggled to set a defendable target on the fourth day of the first Test against South Africa at Centurion Park Sunday.

Pakistan were 243 for seven at tea, an overall lead of 139.

Harris (three for 46) and seamer Shaun Pollock (two for 32) kept the Pakistan batsmen under pressure and reduced the tourists to 199 for seven with all their recognised batsmen dismissed.

South Africa took the second new ball 11 runs later but there was a flurry of scoring from tailenders Navedul Hasan and Shahid Nazir, with Nazir playing some audacious shots against the fast bowlers to make a career-best 31 not out in an unbroken eighth wicket partnership of 44.

Harris at one stage conceded only six runs in nine overs as Pakistan found it difficult to score during the afternoon.

Playing in his second Test, Harris made a breakthrough shortly before lunch when he had Imran Farhat caught at silly mid-off for 68.

He followed up with the wickets of Faisal Iqbal, who drove a catch to cover, and Kamran Akmal, who tried to break the shackles imposed by Harris. Akmal hit two successive fours off the spin bowler but then top-edged a sweep to short fine leg.

Pollock claimed the crucial wicket of Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq with the help of a diving catch by AB de Villiers at midwicket. Inzamam made 35.

South Africa dropped four catches, with wicketkeeper Mark Boucher the culprit twice.

The left-handed Farhat, who survived a difficult chance to gully when he had seven Saturday, took most of the morning to advance from his overnight 41 but he was lucky to survive. Without adding to his score, he edged Makhaya Ntini to Jacques Kallis at second slip, with the ball reaching the fielder on the half-volley.

On 47 Farhat was dropped by Boucher off Ntini when Boucher dived in front of first slip Graeme Smith.

Farhat was almost strokeless against the fast bowlers but was more adventurous against the spin of Harris. But it was Harris who claimed his wicket when he stretched forward and the ball went straight from his bat to De Villiers.

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PHOTO: AFP

South Africa paceman Shaun Pollock celebrates after picking up Pakistan batsman Younis Khan on the fourth day of the first Test in Centurion on Sunday.

Best back with vigour

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Focus is the buzzword for Tino Best during the 2007 season. The West Indies fast bowler has bounced back with an impressive start to the new regional season after the disappointment of last year.

"The selectors gave me the confidence, I just need to focus," he told Midweek Sport. "As long as the Lord gives me the strength to focus and I don't get into any foolish trouble ... I know I have a short fuse, I know I have to focus and concentrate."

Best, 25, has quickly made up for lost time after spending most of last season on the sidelines. His four-wicket haul, generated with genuine pace that caused Trinidad and Tobago's batsmen discomfort in the Caribbean Series match at the North Stars Club last weekend, went a long way in helping Barbados to a come-from-behind victory.

It was his first game for Barbados since he was dropped after his only match last season, and his performance won him many admirers. There are some who still aren't impressed, but Best isn't bothered by his detractors.

"They don't get to me. Some people tell me I am a Ferrari without control. If they tell me I am a Ferrari, that is a top car. If I am a Ferrari without control, all I need is a steering wheel."

"This game has shown me again how to get wickets. It slipped a bit, doubting yourself but the confidence is back there. I've got to remain humble. That is the most important thing for any sportsman, just remain humble, do the right

things, keep it simple."

Best concedes that he was under some pressure in the second innings after he was wicketless on the opening day. But the advice of Wayne Daniel, the former West Indies fast bowler, helped put him on the right path.

"I was under a bit of pressure," he added. "Barbados has got a lot of quality bowlers. I don't mean bowlers who are just bowling. We've got guys who are wicket-takers. I must command Wayne Daniel. After the first innings, he called me. He even came into the dressing-room and spoke to me for about 45 minutes. He spoke to me about my action. Once I got my action in place properly, things worked out for me."

After losing his place in the Barbados team, Best was in and out of the West Indies A squad, but he never gave up hope of returning to the regional arena. His goals for the remainder of the season are simple -- to bowl fast and put the ball in the right areas.

"Once I bowl well, I think my team will win," he said. "I know I am a wicket-taker. Once I get one, I know I have the ability to bowl out a side by myself. I've just turned 25. When you have something like 170 odd first-class wickets in about 50 games, I don't think anything is slipping by."

Yuvraj eyes last 2 ODIs

CRICINFO, undated

Yuvraj Singh, the Indian middle-order batsman, has targeted the last two one-dayers against West Indies to stage his international comeback, three months after he tore a ligament in the knee while training in Mohali. He was named in the provisional 30-member World Cup squad on Saturday.

"I would like to play the last two ODIs against the West Indies or the matches against Sri Lanka," Yuvraj said. "It's important for me to play a few games before the World Cup. But I can't give a timeframe."

Yuvraj said he would be training with the Indian team at Nagpur on January 17 and 18 before proceeding to Kolkata to play three Twenty20 games for his employers Indian Airlines.

"I played a game (50-over match with the Mumbai Under-19 probables) after two and a half months," he said. "I wanted to field first for five overs and then bat, and did so for 25 to 30 overs. I felt really good."

Yuvraj also underwent a test by the Primus RS (Rehabilitation System) machine at the Saifee Hospital in Mumbai in the presence of Dr. Anant Joshi, the Indian cricket board physician, his son Dr Mithun Joshi and Andrew Leipus, the former Indian team physio.

Anant Joshi described the outcome of the test as very satisfactory and added that it was important that Yuvraj's return began at the lower level and not a first-class game straightforward. "It gave us an objective report of the rehab process while the physical test done at the CCI (two days ago) was a subjective analysis," he said.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Woolmer quizzed

PTI, Karachi

The uneasy relationship between Pakistan Cricket Board and Bob Woolmer was highlighted again on Sunday with some of its officials questioning the authority of the foreign coach.

Sources in the board said PCB was not happy at Woolmer's repeated insistence that the suppliers of the team clothing and kits should get their material and work done in his adopted country, South Africa.

Sources said when Slazenger, the official suppliers of kits, informed the board that Woolmer was insisting that they get their stuff made in South Africa, the PCB officials reacted strongly.

Slazenger were told in clear terms they will follow orders of the Board and not Woolmer's as he has no authority to interfere in such matters, they said.

Woolmer, a former England batsman, is now settled in Cape Town in South Africa and there have been allegations during his tenure as Pakistan coach since 2004 that he is keen to promote South Africa in every possible manner.

Since he took over as coach, the two trainers and the physiotherapist with the senior team and National Cricket Academy were all hired from South Africa. A couple

Abahani's B. League prep begins

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani began their training camp yesterday for the inaugural Professional Football League -- the B. League -- which kicks off on February 15.

On the opening day of their preparation, the popular Dharmondi outfit held a one-hour practice session at their club ground following a mild mafil.

With Argentine coach Diego Cruciani, who was at the helm of the Bangladesh national football team for more than a year before being relieved in August last year, yet to give his green signal, veteran Amlesh Sen was in charge of the squad.

Cruciani is expected to arrive

with four Argentine booters but he has yet to ensure a date.

Only Shahajuddin Tipu missed the sky-blues' first day's training as the former national striker had to attend his sick child.

Meanwhile, Muktijoddha Sangsod who like Abahani failed to win a major trophy in the last season, will kick off training at the Army Stadium tomorrow under Abu Yusuf.

Yusuf, who is also looking after the national Olympic squad (under-23), will have one foreign player -- Dr. Charles Ghansah -- in the camp.

Muktijoddha's official practice venue is the Uttara Police Battalion ground but the Reds are expected to use the Army Stadium also.

Mohammedan, who after a poor start closed the previous season with the prestigious National

League title, have yet to find a permanent ground, one of the basic requirements for the Pro League.

The black and whites, the first team to start practice this season, have eyes on three grounds -- Dhaka University, Rajarbagh Police Lines and the BDR ground -- but the officials have yet to secure any.

Mohammedan initially opted to have Sylhet as their home venue but finally backed out and decided to have the Bangabandhu National Stadium as their home ground like Abahani, Muktijoddha, Brothers, Arambagh, Rahmatganj and Sheikh Russel. The other team from the capital -- Farashganj -- will be based in Ringmaster.

Khulna Abahani, Chittagong Abahani and Mohammedan Sylhet DSA are the remaining teams outside of Dhaka.

Aussies roll over Kiwis

Cricket

AFP, Hobart

Australia produced some brilliant fielding as they thrashed New Zealand by 105 runs to remain unbeaten in the triangular one-day series on Sunday.

New Zealand were boosted by a Shane Bond hat-trick and Ross Taylor's 84 before a late collapse when chasing the home side's 289 for eight at Bellerive Oval.

The Kiwis were right in contention when Taylor and Peter Fulton (37) were together, before losing their last seven wickets for just 23 runs to finish on 184.

Man-of-the-match Andrew Symonds warned Australia could still get better.

"I suppose you'd have to say

that we're having a fairly good run, but we're not satisfied by any means," Symonds said.

"We still see this as a very important process because we've still got the World Cup coming up ... we're building our whole summer around to hopefully being in a World Cup final.

Bond went for 22 in the 48th over before claiming New Zealand's second ever one-day international hat-trick in the final over.

The paceman removed White