

First Div begins on Feb 10

SPORTS REPORTER

A new look First Division cricket league will begin on February 10. After Young Pegasus B and Mariners Youngs Club were restored into this season's competition, the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) decided to split the 20-team league into two groups.

Four top teams from each group will qualify to the eight-team super league while the bottom two from each group will fight it out in the relegation league. Points from the initial stage will carry over to the next round of games.

Young Pegasus B (also known as Baridhara) and Mariners withdrew their court case with the CCDM regarding two matches and as a result, their demotion to the Second Division was stopped.

Meanwhile, the players' transfers will begin on January 24 and conclude on January 26.

Agrani Bank and Orient Sporting Club are the clubs who were relegated from the Premier League last season while BKSP and Sadharan Bima are the promoted sides from Second Division.

Group A - Agrani Bank, BKSP, Eskaton, Mariners, Bangladesh Boys, Wanderers, Uttara Sporting, Rupali Bank, Azad Sporting and Dhanmondi.

Group B - Orient, Kathalbagan, CCS, Lalmatia, Jatrabari, Sadharan Bima, Gazi Tank, Surjo Tarun, Young Pegasus B and Prantik.

Reds kick

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coach Abu Yusuf to go for a shot at the title.

Yusuf, who is also looking after the national under-23 team, informed that although they began at the Police Lines ground, the team will switch to the Friend's Club ground in the same vicinity from today.

"We did a little running and less practice because all the officials were present to see the players. Full-fledged practice will start tomorrow," told Yusuf yesterday.

Charles Ghansah was the only foreign import at the session that missed Rajani and second-choice goalkeeper Titumir.

"Rajani has yet to return from India while Titumir has to attend his sick child," added the former national centre-back.

Striker Saifur Rahman Moni, who spent most of the last season at bench due to a knee injury, will lead Muktiyoddha this year.

Maria struggles

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times, I can adjust. It just feels really like going back home."

And she likes the way she is playing.

"I played very well. I think sometimes really the first game was almost key. I was very nervous."

Elsewhere in the women's draw, emerging Serb star Ana Ivanovic beat American Vania King 6-2, 6-0 and India's Sania Mirza downed Ukrainian Olga Savchuk 6-3, 7-5.

Local hopes Samantha Stosur and Alicia Molik also posted victories, while Japan's Aiko Nakamura upset Eleni Daniilidou of Greece, seeded 32.

Spalletti pens

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Spalletti's Roma started slowly but worked their way up the table to finish fifth. They were lifted to second following the verdicts in Italy's match-fixing scandal.

This season Roma are second in Serie A and appear to be Inter Milan's only genuine challengers for the title, although they are lagging nine points behind.

Last December, Spalletti guided Roma into the knockout phase of the Champions League for the first time in their history -- a feat the club never achieved even under Capello.

Nadal shows

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Andy Murray missed a chance to inflict a rare straight sets white-wash as he cruised effortlessly into the second round.

The top-ranked British player, seeded 15, crushed hapless Spaniard Alberto Martin, 6-0, 6-0, 6-1 in just 70 minutes.

Murray smacked his racquet in irritation when he missed a chance of becoming the first player to win all sets to love at the Australian Open in over 30 years.

The 19-year-old Scot broke Martin's service eight times and the Spaniard brought an ironic cheer from the crowd when he finally held service in the penultimate game of the match.

Russian third seed Nikolay Davydenko strolled to a straight sets victory over Argentine Sergio Roitman to set up a match with Gilles Muller of Luxembourg.

Calderon

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signed a contract with another club before talking to Real Madrid and I think this is a bad thing," the Italian said.

"It's not just Fabio Capello who is saying this. The whole club has seen that at this moment we can't count on him."



Banned South African player Herschelle Gibbs (R) talks to teammates at the end of the final day's play of the first Test against Pakistan at Centurion on Monday.

Smith blames fans

AFP, Centurion

South African cricket captain Graeme Smith Monday accused Pakistan supporters of racial abuse and said his team were angry about the incidents which led to batsman Herschelle Gibbs being summoned to two separate disciplinary hearings.

Gibbs was appearing before International Cricket Council match referee Chris Broad after South Africa completed a seven-wicket win in the first Test against Pakistan Monday, following a complaint by the Pakistan Cricket Board.

Television viewers heard Gibbs making insulting remarks about Pakistan supporters when a stump microphone picked up what he said to teammates in the centre of the field.

He is also due to appear before a Cricket South Africa disciplinary commissioner Tuesday in connection with the same incident.

Smith said he could not condone Gibbs's action but he made strong comments about the circumstances which led to the incident.

"There's a lot of anger," he said. "There was quite a lot of racial abuse from the Pakistan fans towards our players and I think that provoked a lot of what happened."

"There was a particular incident where I went down and got security

to move guys away from (boundary fielder) Paul Harris. Herschelle was down at third man and I was coping a lot of abuse and I think even racial abuse."

"For me going forward the worrying thing is that Pakistan always have a large support base around the world. Security needs to be looked at."

"There was an incident where Makhaya (Ntini) was hit on the head by a Pakistan flag going up the stairs. The guys were provoked and that is why they are angry but we understand that what Herschelle did was wrong."

Smith said the television company responsible for the stump mike were to blame for allowing Gibbs's comments to be broadcast. "I think the television companies are actually in breach of their contracts with the stump mikes being on during overs."

"I think they're only meant to be on when the ball is about to be bowled. The television companies need to answer for that. That is disappointing but I guess, you know, they were on."

Cricket South Africa chief executive Gerald Majola said he understood that in terms of the complaint from the Pakistan team management, Gibbs would be charged with "using language that is obscene, offensive or of a seriously insulting nature to another player, referee, team official or spectator."

He said CSA had charged Gibbs with contravening a clause in the body's code of conduct relating to verbal abuse or conduct "on the basis of race, religion, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin." The hearing will be conducted by former judge Mervyn King.

Majola said in a statement: "CSA has investigated the matter and we have heard the remarks made by Herschelle Gibbs in response to verbal abuse directed by a number of Pakistan supporters at Paul Harris while he was fielding on the boundary."

"Herschelle says these remarks were for the ears only of his teammates in his proximity, and were directed in general terms at that section of the crowd that had verbally abused Paul Harris. He has apologised if he has caused offence to anyone."

Majola said the action was taken in terms of CSA regulations which stemmed from the International Cricket Council's anti-racism policy.

"CSA will continue to enforce these regulations rigidly, and we make a special plea to spectators to support their teams in the right spirit of the game," said Majola.

It was reported from Pakistan that Saleem Altaf, the PCB director of cricket, had confirmed that a complaint had been made. Altaf said both the Pakistan and South African boards had copies of tapes of the remarks.

Lloyd again WI manager

PTI, Port of Spain

Former captain Clive Lloyd has been reappointed manager of the West Indies cricket team during its tour of India for the four-match one-day international series starting Sunday.

Lloyd, chairman of West Indies Cricket Board's cricket committee, had travelled with the squad as an adviser for the Champions Trophy in October. He will succeed Tony Howard, who has been appointed WICB's chief cricket operations officer.

Besides, Barbados coach Hendy Springer will join West Indies as a temporary assistant coach to Bennett King, WICB cricket operations officer Derrick Nicholas said.

King's regular deputy, David Moore, was not available for the one-day series against India, starting in Nagpur on January 21.

The West Indies team leaves for the tour from Antigua on Wednesday.

Gibbs banned

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Gibbs maintained he was guilty of a Level 1 offence, which refers to the use of "...language that is obscene, offensive or insulting and/or the making of an obscene gesture."

However, in finding Gibbs guilty of the Level 3 offence, Broad said: "I took into account the mitigating circumstances that the players were provoked by unruly spectators."

"However the remark was racially offensive, the player admitted saying it and on that basis I am content that the level of the charge and the resulting punishment is appropriate."

"Cricket has a zero tolerance of racism, as has been illustrated by the introduction last year of an amended ICC Anti-Racism Code, and this decision is an illustration of that fact." Gibbs has a right of appeal within 24 hours of the verdict.

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Nadir Shah

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hosts Kenya will battle for a place in the February 7 final. The two finalists will also get berths in the Twenty20 World Cup to be held in South Africa later this year.

Nadir feels that it would be a great experience for him.

"I am familiar to home conditions. Now the experience to stand in matches abroad will help me gain more knowledge. Also, if I do well, it will be a plus point for Bangladeshi umpires," told Nadir, who departs for the Kenyan capital on January 26.

Australia's controversial umpire Darrell Hair is also on the list.

Ash, Mashud

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they were found guilty of making derogatory remarks on their teammates to the media.

Veteran wicketkeeper Mashud has been fined 50 percent match-fee of an ODI and Ashrafal has been fined 15 percent match-fee of an ODI. Aftab has been cautioned verbally.

English skipper pleased at win

Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

England captain Michael Vaughan was pleased with his team's performance, particularly in the field, after they finally won a match in Australia.

England held their nerve to beat New Zealand by three wickets with one ball to spare, having made life difficult for themselves with the bat.

Vaughan said: "We squeezed them well on the field, Jimmy Anderson really set the tone with his opening spell."

"Chasing 205 on that kind of wicket was always going to be quite difficult."

Vaughan defended England's slow start with the bat, which meant Andrew Flintoff (72 not out off 75 balls) had to take the attack to the bowlers as soon as he came in at number six.

The skipper said: "We have to understand the position we are in one-day cricket."

"We have to go back to basics a little bit and set up platforms for us to win. Now hopefully we can move on to Brisbane and win that game (against Australia on Friday) as well."

Unsurprisingly, Vaughan was

quick to praise Flintoff, whose spell of 2-37 along with his batting made him the obvious choice for man of the match.

"Freddie has had an outstanding game," said Vaughan. "We have seen a guy that can win us games and that's great for us to have."

Flintoff said the earlier batsmen had not put too much pressure on him to score fast.

"The (required) run rate never got too much," he said.

"When I went to the crease it was 5.5 and it got up to just under seven which is achievable. We had a few wickets in hand."

"One thing I've wanted to do for a long time is finish a game. Today (Tuesday) was the perfect opportunity."

Paul Nixon, who put on 60 with Flintoff, said: "It is a huge win for the guys. They have worked so hard."

"We played positively in the field and bowled well and Freddie stuck to his guns to see it through brilliantly."

"When you want it so much it is important you see it through. A lot of fans have waited a long time for this."

"It is all about being positive and upbeat. If you keep doing the right things in practice they come out in the middle."

Jones's England days are over?

Cricket

AFP, Hobart

While most of his teammates prepare for the upcoming World Cup, dumped English wicketkeeper Geraint Jones will see out the summer playing as a batsman for his old side in Australian grade cricket.

Overlooked by England's selectors for both their triangular one-day series team and 30-man provisional World Cup squad, despite initially being their preferred Test wicketkeeper as they sought to retain the Ashes, it seems Jones's international career is over.

Just two months after arriving in Australia full of hope of being part of a successful Ashes defence and a World Cup campaign in the West Indies, the Queensland-raised Jones has agreed to play for his former grade cricket side, Beenleigh-Logan, in Brisbane.

Jones, who will make his unexpected comeback for Beenleigh-Logan against Northern Suburbs the day after England tackles Australia in Brisbane in a one-day international, said he wanted to maintain his fitness for the upcoming county season with Kent.

"The opportunity was there for me to play some cricket here after the Ashes so I'm pleased to be able to get some playing time with Beenleigh ahead of the coming summer with Kent," Jones said in a statement.

"The club has got itself in a position to possibly win a trophy this season so hopefully I can help out."

"It's nice to be back where I started and good to catch up with some familiar faces."

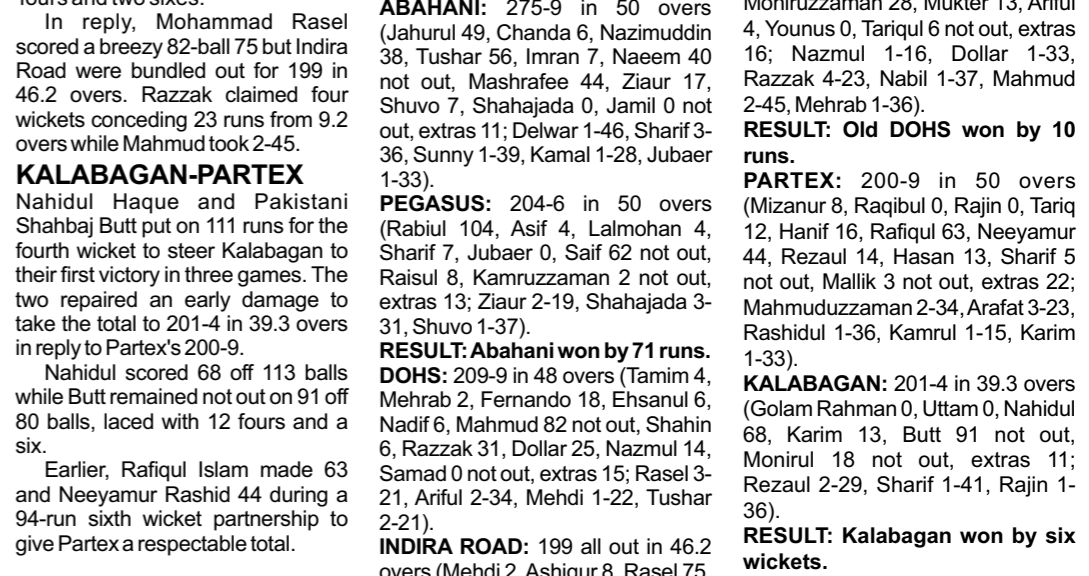
The well-travelled Jones played with Beenleigh-Logan before moving to England in 2002, where his career took off and he won Test selection, culminating in his key role in England's historic 2005 Ashes triumph.

England's next game is against Australia in Brisbane on Friday but Vaughan said he was unlikely to play.

"If I am honest, at the minute it is extremely doubtful," Vaughan told the BBC.

"I've not had a hamstring injury before and it is new to me in that I don't know how they react overnight or what it will be like getting on a plane."

Vaughan, 32, has only just returned to the England fold after two operations on his right knee.



In-form American star James Blake (R) shakes hands with Carlos Moya of Spain after their first round match at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Tuesday.

England refuse 6th Ashes Test

BBC ONLINE, undated

Australia's plan to have six Tests in their next home Ashes series looks like being scuppered by England's reluctance to agree to such a schedule.

The Aussies want an extra match in Hobart, along with Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Sydney and Melbourne.

But England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive David Collier said: "We're not in favour of that."

"Unless the Future Tours Programme is reduced, we don't see a possibility of extending to six Test matches."

The FTP is the framework provided by the International Cricket Council which creates a loose schedule for Test nations to organise tours against each other.

The biennial Ashes contest has featured five Test matches since 1997, when there were six, and next will still be five when England next host in 2009.

England coach Duncan Fletcher is also against lengthening the series because of the risks of player burn-out.

"Somewhere along the line, we've got to have a break. To introduce more cricket is just going to complicate the issue as far as England are concerned," he said.

"We play these long Test series -- five against the Aussies, four against West Indies, four or five against South Africa -- when most sides are playing against each other for three Tests."

"They can have those breaks while we struggle to get them."

Vaughan to undergo scans

REUTERS, Sydney

England captain Michael Vaughan could miss his team's next tri-series match against Australia after straining his left hamstring on Tuesday.

Vaughan suffered the injury while fielding in England's three-wicket win over New Zealand in Hobart.

He was able to bat, scoring 17 off 29 balls, but needed the help of a runner and was later ordered to undergo a scan.

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Flintoff leads from front

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In the 45th over, Flintoff just cleared New Zealand fieldsman Ross Taylor on the mid-wicket boundary from the bowling of Daniel Vettori.

With the game in the balance, Taylor was in a few metres from the fence and got a hand to the ball as he retreated, but it went for four.

In the 47th over, Flintoff was caught at mid-on from the bowling of Mark Gillespie, only for square-leg umpire Steve Davis to rule the waist-high full toss a no-ball.

The tight bowling of young Kiwi spinner Jeetan Patel, who took 2-34 and also fielded brilliantly, forced England to work hard for the win.

Earlier, seamer James Anderson took four wickets to give England an excellent chance of breaking their two-month drought.

The English enjoyed the absence of their nemesis Australians and stifled the Kiwis, who began their innings intending to capitalise on the fragile mindset of their opponents.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the triangular one-day series match between New Zealand and England at Bellerive

Oval on Tuesday:
NEW ZEALAND
McCullum c Vaughan b Anderson 16
Astle b Collingwood 45
Fleming b Anderson 12
Taylor c Vaughan b Anderson 1
Fulton c Vaughan b Flintoff 27
McMillan c and b Collingwood 22
Vettori lbw b Panesar 11
Franklin c Collingwood b Flintoff 20
Bond not out 22
Gillespie b Anderson 10
Extras: (w-10, lb-9) 19

Total: (For nine wkts in 50 overs) 205
Fall of wickets: 1-26, 2-61, 3-67, 4-97, 5-127, 6-144, 7-146, 8-185.

Bowler O M R W
Lewis 9 0 51 0
Anderson 10 0 42 4
Flintoff 10 2 37 2
Panesar 10 0 36 1
Collingwood 10 1 25 2
Dalrymple 1 0 5 0

ENGLAND
Strauss lbw b Franklin 28
Vaughan c Taylor b Vaughan 17
Bell lbw b Patel 45
Joyce run out 5
Collingwood c Taylor b Patel 10
Flintoff not out 72
Nixon run out 15
Dalrymple c Patel b Gillespie 1
Lewis not out 2

Extras: (b-1, w-2, nb-8) 11
Total: (For seven wkts in 49.5 overs) 206
Fall of wickets: 1-39, 2-62, 3-79, 4-98, 5-138, 6-198, 7-201

Bowler O M R W
Franklin 9 1 34 2
Bond 8 0 29 0
Gillespie 6 0 40 1
Astle 2 0 4 0
Patel 10 1 34 2
Vettori 10 0 42 0
McMillan 4.5 0 22 0

Result: England won by three wickets.
Man-of-the-match: Andrew Flintoff.
Toss: New Zealand
Umpires: Asad Rauf (PAK) and Steve Davis (AUS)
TV Umpire: Daryl Harper (AUS)
Match referee: Ranjan Madugalle (SRI)

STANDINGS
Standings in the triangular one-day series after England beat New Zealand here on Tuesday (played, won, lost, bonus points, points):

Team P W L BP Pts
Australia 2 2 0 1 9
England 2 1 1 0 4
N Zealand 2 0 2 0 0

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Ronaldo surplus

FROM PAGE 20

whether it will be now or in June."

Ronaldo has only started three league matches under Capello this season, scoring once, but appears to be another victim of last week's decision to blood youngsters in the side.

He missed Sunday's 1-0 win over Real Zaragoza with an injury.

Press reports have linked the Brazilian with moves to Italy, Saudi Arabia and the United States.

Johansson

FROM PAGE 20

"I was saddened by certain comments made by Mr Platini when he was questioned on the reasons behind my candidature, my physical condition for this post and the fact that I don't live in Nyon (UEFA headquarters)."

"I'm fit, in good health, I have a positive outlook and have been boosted by the support I've received," the Swede added.

Sania sizzles