

No Rangamati venue for B. League!

SPORTS REPORTER

Farashganj Sporting Club finally decided to back out of their decision to have their home venue outside Dhaka in the inaugural Professional Football League.

The old-Dhaka outfit, who settled Rangamati as their home ground, yesterday informed the B. League officials that they will stay in the capital and make the Bangabandhu National Stadium their home like the remaining seven Dhaka clubs.

Earlier, Mohammedan and Rahmatganj also revised their decisions to have homer grounds at Sylhet and Narshingdi respectively.

The B. League officials, however, have yet to get the papers.

Rangamati Stadium would have made an attractive venue for the travellers due to the hill station's tourism value and also had fine facilities but a last-moment inclusion would confine the professional league to four venues -- Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet and Khulna.

A three-member committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), meanwhile, has submitted its report on all the five venues including Rangamati to federation high-ups.

It was learned that, apart from Dhaka and Rangamati, the remaining venues still need renovation works. The Khulna Stadium has a portion of the gallery abandoned for years, galleries at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong are still under renovation while the Sylhet Stadium dressing rooms need up gradation.

Media facilities lack at most stadiums as the common problem for venues outside Dhaka is lack of spacious press box, especially in Khulna.

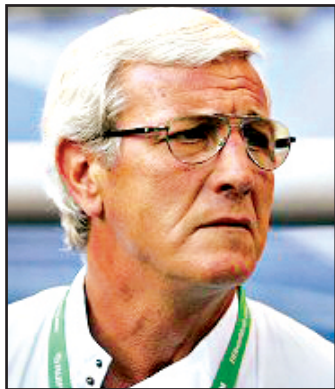


Did U Know?

Italian goalkeeper Buffon was named best goalkeeper after producing 27 saves for his country while Switzerland's Pascal Zuberbuehler came out with a clean sheet from 4 matches in the FIFA 2006 World Cup.

What to WATCH

SET Max
India v West Indies
First ODI
Live at 9:30 am
ESPN
Australia v New Zealand
Commonwealth Bank Series
Fifth ODI
Live at 9:15 am
South Africa v Pakistan
Second Test, Day Three
(2nd & 3rd Session)
Live at 5:00 pm
English Premier Football League
Arsenal v Man United
Live at 9:55 pm
Primera Liga
Barcelona v Gimnastic
Live at 12:00 am (Monday)
Mallorca v Real Madrid
Live at 2:00 am (Monday)
STAR Sports
Australian Open
Men's/Women's 4th Round
Live at 6:00 am
English Premier Football League
Wigan v Everton
Live at 7:25 pm



Marcello Lippi

(Italy's World Cup winning coach) "When anyone thinks of Juve, they think of Del Piero. He is one of the few real symbols of Italian football"



Mohammedan middle-order batsman Sakib Al Hasan forces one off the back foot during his sparkling knock of 81 in their Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League match against Victoria at BKSP yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Sachin won't open India-West Indies first ODI today



AFP, Nagpur

Specialist opener Sachin Tendulkar will bat in the middle order in the first one-dayer against the West Indies here on Sunday as India attempt to find a winning combination ahead of the World Cup.

"Tendulkar will bat in the middle order tomorrow," India captain Rahul Dravid told reporters here on Saturday.

"The middle overs in the World Cup will be crucial and who is better to play that role for us than Tendulkar. He is an option that we need to explore in the middle order."

Tendulkar is the world's highest scorer in one-day internationals with 14,537 runs and 40 centuries.

"We realise that finding a good middle-order batsman is harder than finding someone to open. Our best players need to play in that position (middle order)," said Dravid.

Sick Canada forfeit match in Kenya

AFP, Mombasa

The third match of the one-day international cricket series between hosts Kenya and Canada was called off Saturday after five Canadian players were taken ill with dehydration and stomach ailments, officials said.

Kenyan cricket officials said the Canadian team management had informed them Friday that they could not raise a team for the match at the Mombasa Sports Club grounds.

Batsmen Ashish Bagai and Sunil Dhaniram were forced to seek treatment in hospital after suffering heat problems during their opening match against Scotland on Thursday and things were made worse when three other players including skipper John Davidson and their manager Mike Henri were also taken ill.

Cricket Kenya chairman Samir Inamdar said he was disappointed that the match was not played, adding the matter had been referred to the International Cricket Council to make the final decision.

Kenya is likely to be awarded the match points on a walkover basis. This would mean Canada, which narrowly lost their opening match against Scotland, would be left with no points in the three-nation tournament.

India, who won just two of their last 10 one-dayers, are struggling to return to winning ways ahead of the World Cup, to be held in the West Indies in March and April.

They play four matches against the West Indies and then as many against Sri Lanka at home next month.

The poor performance forced the selectors to drop opener Virender Sehwag and all-rounder Irfan Pathan for the first two games against the West Indies.

The focus will be on former captain Sourav Ganguly, returning to the one-day side after 16 months. He will open the innings with Gautam Gambhir in Sunday's match.

West Indies captain Brian Lara said his team would try to maintain their recent supremacy over India.

"We have a psychological advantage and we just want to continue with it," said Lara, whose side won six of their last seven matches against India.

The West Indies, who reached the Champions Trophy final in India

in November, are now without injured batsman Ramnaresh Sarwan and fast bowler Corey Collymore.

"We have a couple of players who are new to one-day cricket and a few who are making a comeback. The series will give them an opportunity to press their claims," said Lara.

The remaining three one-dayers will be played in Cuttack (January 24), Chennai (Jan 27) and Vadodara (Jan 31).

TEAMS

INDIA: Gautam Gambhir, Sourav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid (capt), Sachin Tendulkar, Dinesh Karthik, Suresh Raina, Mahendra Singh Dhoni (wk), Harbhajan Singh, Ajit Agarkar, Zaheer Khan, Sreesanth.

WEST INDIES: Chris Gayle, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Lendl Simmons, Marlon Samuels, Brian Lara (capt), Runako Morton, Dinesh Ramdin (wk), Dwayne Smith, Dave Mohammed, Ian Bradshaw, Jerome Taylor.



PHOTO: AFP

India captain Rahul Dravid (L) is followed closely by deputy Sachin Tendulkar during a training session at the Vidarbha Cricket Association Stadium in Nagpur on Saturday.

Mohammedan recover Sonargaon join Abahani atop

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammedan Sporting Club rode on explosive youngsters Junaid Siddiquee and Sakib Al Hasan to return to winning ways in the Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League yesterday while a remarkable spell by promising all-rounder Marshall Ayub after Mohammad Ashrafur fireworks put Sonargaon Cricketers on top of the table with Abahani after four rounds.

Mohammedan recovered from the previous-round loss to Bangladesh Biman with a comfortable 57-run win over Victoria Sporting Club at BKSP while Sonargaon maintained their unbeaten run when the last year's runners-up snatched a nine-run victory against Biman at the Fatullah Stadium.

Bottom-table Brothers Union's agonies extended when they crashed to their fourth successive defeat, at the hands of newcomers Young Pegasus, at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

Abahani and Sonargaon have maximum eight points, closely followed by Mohammedan and Old DOHS on six with three wins each.

A second win saw Pegasus get

level with Victoria, Biman and Kalabagan on four points. Brothers and Indira Road remain without points, behind City Club and Partex who have two.

MOHAMMEDAN-VICTORIA

The match began with the two teams level on two wins but as it progressed, Twenty20 champions Mohammedan established their authority after being put into bat.

Victoria enjoyed brief success, removing opener Imtiaz Hossain, Indian Sandeep Sharma and in-form Aftab Ahmed cheaply but man-of-the-match Junaid's usual flamboyancy raced the scoreboard without pressure as Mohammedan rattled 283 for seven in 50 overs.

The left-hander, who smashed 15 boundaries in a 79-ball 87 before being run out, found an equally combative partner in Sakib during an 84-run stand for the fourth wicket in just 13 overs.

Sakib, fresh from his 53 not out in a losing concern against Biman, cracked five fours and one six in his 81 off 76 balls. The national cricketer was caught by substitute fielder Farhad at midwicket off rival skipper Sabbir Khan.

Captain Habibul Bashar chipped in with a fine 39 while Tapash Baisya's quickfire 27 came

off 20 balls featuring three sixes as Mohammedan virtually batted Victoria out of the game.

Imrul Kayes kept Victoria in the game with a sparkling 94 off 118 balls but the opener, who hit 11 fours and a six, got little support. He shared 57 for the opening stand with Nasiruddin Faruque (15 off 30 balls) and exactly 100 with Mahmudullah Riyadh (52 off 63 balls) for the fourth wicket.

Imrul was bowled by left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny in the 42nd over and the asking run-rate -- 89 from the final eight overs -- proved too much as the Victoria innings folded for 226 with three overs remaining.

Aftab made up for his poor batting with the first three Victoria wickets in his bag for just 24 runs while Tapash also took three including the scalp of Riyadh.

SONARGAON-BIMAN

After last round's impressive performance against Mohammedan, Biman looked like ending Sonargaon's winning streak too, but fell just short. In reply to Sonargaon's modest 237 all out, the national airliners lost their way when Marshall grabbed three wickets in a deadly seven-over spell.

Comfortably placed at 145-4,

Biman lost five wickets in the last 15 overs to reach 228-9 as Marshall removed top scorer Mosharrif (70 off 111 balls), Sajjad Kadir (22) and Syed Rasel to leave Mushfiqur Rahman stranded. Mushfiqur, who kept Biman alive with a superb run-a-ball 68 featuring four fours and two sixes, was the last man out in the penultimate ball.

Earlier, the inserted Sonargaon batting was dominated by veterans for a change. While Al Shahriar's 60 off 80 balls offered a good start, Ashrafur gave it momentum, the captain and man-of-the-match putting on display his brilliant batsmanship in a matured 65 off 54 balls.

Having hit half a dozen fours and two sixes, Ashrafur was bowled by spinner Murad Khan, whose 5-54 went down the drains in the end. Marshall contributed a cameo 13-ball 19.

PEGASUS-BROTHERS

In another close match, Lal Mohon led a youthful Pegasus from the front to a 10-run victory against Brothers. The burly Pegasus captain, who contributed 21 runs in his side's 238-8 after being asked to bat, changed the complexion of the game coming in as the seventh

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GM Zia in 2nd place

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman shared the second position with six others in the 5th Parsvnath International Open Chess Tournament in New Delhi after eight rounds on Saturday.

On 6.5 points, Zia was half a point behind joint-leaders GM Alexie Dreev of Russia, Egyptian GM Adly Ahmed and G Rohit of India.

In the eighth round, Zia beat local player Saptarshi Roy at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium.

GM Niaz Murshed, IM Enamul Hossain Rajib and IM Abdullah Al Rakib were level on six points while other Bangladeshis, FM Sheikh Nasir, Mohammed Javed and Sohail Chowdhury have so far earned 5.5 points.

In other matches, Rajib beat IM Mahmood Lodhi, Niaz beat Shyam, Rakib drew with IM Saptarshi Chowdhury, Nasir beat Russell, Javed beat Mehar, Taibur beat Harsha, Sohail beat Fenil, Lavlu beat Sharma and Liza beat Menon.

Bond on for Perth return

INTERNET, undated

New Zealand pace bowler Shane Bond has been earmarked for a Commonwealth Bank Series return against Australia in Perth in eight days' time.

Bond will miss his side's matches against Australia in Sydney and England in Adelaide after sustaining a back injury during the defeat to the latter in Hobart.

Team manager Lindsay Crocker confirmed recent scans had not found any significant problems, but said the double header at the WACA would be the earliest date for the 31-year-old's comeback.

Crocker said: "It's proved normal, so that's good. That really discounts all the major difficulties so there is nothing major going on."

"What we need to do now is give him some light training and tonight and tomorrow we'll assess how he goes with that."

"He's fine in his movements, he's OK in the field, but it's just when he ups the ante with the ball. I must stress, there's nothing major going on."

All-rounder Jacob Oram joins the squad in time for the Adelaide match, with seamer Kyle Mills likely to travel to the west coast.

BKSP tennis

SPORTS REPORTER

Sidhu and Sitaram of India, Max of Great Britain and Kim of South Korea past the qualifying rounds of the boys' singles in the 5th BKSP International Junior Tennis Championships at BKSP yesterday.

In the girls' singles, Holland's Demie and Belgian player Lotte also won their respective matches.

Bangladesh Tennis Federation president AMM Nasiruddin will officially declare the meet open today.



AFP, Port Elizabeth

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq put his side in control on the second day of the second Test against South Africa at St George's Park on Saturday.

Inzamam made an unbeaten 92 as Pakistan took a first innings lead of 141. Then he held a diving catch at first slip to dismiss opposing captain Graeme Smith off Mohammad Asif as South Africa reached 25 for one in their second innings at tea, still 116 behind.

Inzamam's heroics overshadowed South African fast bowler Makhaya Ntini's 300th Test wicket, with Pakistan adding 99 runs after Ntini reached the milestone by dismissing Mohammad Sami, who was the seventh man out.

There was a setback for Pakistan, however, when fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar did not take the field at the start of the South African innings.

Shoaib, who was earlier seen in television pictures in an apparent verbal altercation with Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer, was said to have gone for a scan on a left hamstring injury.

Inzamam batted at number eight after being off the field for much of South Africa's dismal first innings of 124 after being hit in the left shoulder by a ball during fielding practice before the start of play Friday.

The Pakistan captain came out to bat at the start of play Saturday with his team tottering at 135 for six. Sami helped him add 31 for the seventh wicket and Inzamam skillfully farmed the strike to the frustration of the South African bowlers.

Inzamam was at his best in a last wicket stand of 74 with Mohammad Asif, the best partnership of the match, with Asif having to face only nine balls out of 61 before lunch as Inzamam seemed easily to be able to score off the fifth or sixth balls of

overs.

Asif eventually faced 29 balls out of 122, the last of which uprooted his off stump as Ntini finished with six for 59.

Ntini, 29, earlier took his milestone wicket when he had Mohammad Sami caught behind off an inside edge. He became the 21st

bowler in Tests and the third South African to reach the mark.

He unveiled a tee-shirt which proclaimed, "Mdingi Express 300" with the nickname coming from the Eastern Cape village in which he was born. It completed Ntini's

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PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq plays a hook shot during his unbeaten 92 on the second day of the second Test against South Africa in Port Elizabeth on Saturday.

Shoaib surprised



INTERNET, undated

A quiet return was never to be expected but maybe such a successful one wasn't either.

Shoaib Akhtar, who returned to his first Test in almost a year by taking 4 for 36 as South Africa were bowled out for 124 on the first day of the second Test at Port Elizabeth, was evidently surprised by it himself.

"I thought it would take me the whole Test match to get back into it," he said.

The surprise emanated in part from just playing a Test again, something Shoaib thought might never happen again, after a year racked by initially by injuries and subsequently by the doping crisis, which saw him banned and then reinstated to international cricket.

Controversies, he said, had been the story of his life.

"If you asked me the same question [about his career] a few months ago I wouldn't have had an

answer that I would play cricket ever again," he said.

Shoaib was banned from playing cricket twice before, for chucking before testing positive in October for the banned anabolic steroid, Nandrolone, stalled his career once again.

Shoaib was, however, quick to acknowledge the contributions of all the other bowlers in the attack; Danish Kaneria, Mohammad Asif

and Mohammad Sami shared the rest of the wickets as Pakistan, in bowling out South Africa for their lowest-ever total against them, put on a vastly improved performance from the first Test.

"We worked in partnerships and every bowling spell brought a wicket," he said.

But they couldn't drive home their advantage, as the South

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