

KABADDI WORLD CUP Bangladesh exit from semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh bowed out of the second Kabaddi World Cup when they crashed to a 48-22 defeat to hosts and defending champions India in the semifinal yesterday morning.

Undisputed kabaddi kings India, in a repeat of the first World Cup final, were pitted against Iran in the final last night at the Karnala Sports Academy in Panvel, near Mumbai.

Bangladesh, who won all their group matches, moved into the semis with a 30-15 win against Nepal in the quarterfinals on Thursday. Asiad and South Asian Games bronze medallists Bangladesh also took exit from the last four in 2005, losing to Iran.

Iran beat Japan 43-14 in the other semi.

Pakistan, one of the game's powerhouses, did not participate in the event due to visa problems.

In the other quarterfinals, India beat Malaysia 68-21, Iran beat Thailand 34-4 and Japan beat Sri Lanka 31-20.

Eleven Stars win

GAIBANDHA CORRESPONDENT

Eleven Stars defeated Notun Bangla Krira Chakra by 33 runs in the Second Division Cricket League at the Gaibandha Stadium yesterday.

Eleven Stars elected to bat after winning the toss and scored 127-9 in the stipulated 25 overs.

In reply Notun Bangla were skittled out for 94.



Did U Know?

Zinedine Zidane became the fourth player to score three goals in the history of the World Cup final (two in 1998, one in 2006).



Roger Federer

(World number one tennis star)

"Winning matches is the best thing, but to break records that's something you never dream of, it's fantastic and I hope I can keep it up."

After reaching a record-equaling seventh successive Grand Slam final with a straight sets victory over Andy Roddick at the Australian Open.



NEO Sports

India v West Indies
Third ODI (D/N)
Live at 3:00 pm

ESPN

South Africa v Pakistan
Third Test, Day Two
Live at 2:30 pm
FA Cup

Bristol City v Middlesbrough

Live at 9:30 pm

Primera Liga

Villarreal v Real Madrid

Live at 2:55 am (Sunday)

STAR Sports

Australian Open

Women's Singles & Men's

Doubles Finals

Live at 8:00 am

FA Cup

Luton Town v Blackburn Rovers

Live at 6:25 pm

Birmingham City v Reading

Live at 8:55 pm

Man United v Portsmouth

Live at 11:10 pm



PHOTO: STAR

Victoria's Pakistani import Jaffer Quraishi hits out on the on-side during his swashbuckling 79 against Partex in the Kai-Altech Premier League at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Nitol-Tata to rescue BFF?



Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) may find it hard to meet its expectation of sponsorship money for the B. League -- the inaugural Professional Football League -- which kicks off on February 15.

The BFF's initial target was earning about 2.5-crore taka from a major sponsor and five co-sponsors but with less than three weeks to go, it has yet to confirm a penny.

The federation has a marketing agent, India-based Leisure Sports Management, but it looked odd for the game's governing body in the country to sleep over the issue and entirely depend on the foreign organisation.

The league was scheduled to start last year but has been delayed

due to political situation and club pressures. Now it seems that the federation, which did not make any move to attract sponsors, itself is trying to make 'sponsorship' an issue to further defer it.

The officials of Leisure have arrived and even after two days, have yet to say anything about progress.

It was learned that most of the big corporate houses have showed their disinterest for sponsoring in football mainly due to the incompetence of BFF officials.

"We cannot rely on the BFF because they have really not told us about the pros and cons of league. We also do not know what's the future of it, whether the federation would run it next year or not," said an ad-firm official who handles a big corporate house.

He added that his client is not interested to make a big deal but might go for a small amount.

It seems that the BFF, which at the present does not even have a tournament committee, has had not made a presentation plan to lure sponsors.

However, Nitol-Tata, who sponsored the National Football League for three consecutive years before not renewing the contract, might salvage the BFF from its blunders.

It was learned that the Leisure management has talked with Nitol-Tata high-ups as a priority for their past involvement and the organisation has agreed to be the major sponsor but for a much lower amount than the federation had expected.

Sources said that Nitol-Tata is prepared to spend about Tk 60-70 lakh and if the BFF agrees, it would make the deal within a couple of days.

The BFF expects 1.25-crore from the major sponsor and Tk 25 lakh each from the co-sponsors.

Women's cricket starts today

UNB, Dhaka

With a view to form a national women's cricket team, the first-ever Women's Cricket Championship rolls into field today.

Dhaka meet Ansar and VDP in one of the opening day's matches at Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium where Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president and Agriculture secretary M Abdull Aziz will formally inaugurate the meet.

Narayanganj face Khulna while Bhola meet Jahangirnagar University in the other matches.

Ten teams, split into two groups, will take part in the 10-day limited-overs meet.

Two top teams from each group will play in the semifinals billed for February 3 while the final is slated for February 5.

Group A comprises Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Narayanganj and Ansar and VDP while Bhola, Rajshahi, Bogra, Rangamati and Jahangirnagar University filled complete Group B.

"Our object is to build a national women's team. We will pick 30 players from the tournament for better training," said Hamida Begum, member secretary of BCB's women's wing while addressing a press conference at the National Sports Council conference room yesterday.

The budget of the championship has been estimated at Tk 8 lakh with each team receiving Tk 40,000 as participation money.

Chairperson of BCB's women's wing Fahima Hossain and senior vice chairperson Ferdous Ara also spoke on the occasion.

U-18 tennis in Rajshahi from tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,

Rajshahi

The Grameenphone International Junior (under-18) Tennis Championships will begin at the Zafar Imam Tennis Complex here tomorrow.

About 126 players, including 46 girls, from 22 countries are expected to participate in the Group-3 competition in a bid to secure international ratings, tournament director Mohammad Khasru told at a press conference yesterday.

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) is holding the meet under the auspices of the Bangladesh Tennis Federation.

The highest number of players -- 32 boys and 18 girls -- are from India, followed by 12 boys and six from South Africa and 12 boys and five girls from the Chinese Taipei. Hosts Bangladesh have 20 entries including four girls.

Other participating countries are Korea, Japan, Philippines, England, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Kuwait, Czech Republic, Germany, Hong Kong, Jordan, Sri Lanka, Netherlands and Romania.

In the singles competition, the 36 top ITF point-holding players including favourites Peng Hsien-Yin of Chinese Taipei and Sofia Mulseph of Thailand will directly play in the main draw.

The tournament will conclude on February 4.

Contenders march on

SPORTS REPORTER



Last year's runners-up Sonargaon Cricketers bounced back from a disappointing defeat in the previous round to trounce Young Pegasus by eight wickets in the sixth round of the Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Title aspirants Mohammedan also made an easy sail to follow unbeaten Abahani in the table along with Sonargaon when they clinched a 96-run victory over Indira Road Krira Chakra at BKSP.

Fresh from a six-wicket success against Sonargaon in the fifth round, Victoria kept their winning run but not before facing a tough resistance from newcomers Partex Sporting Club on way to 14-run win in a high scoring match at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

SONARGAON-PEGASUS

Seamer all-rounder Mohammad Sharif could not play the first match after the good news of his return to the national team due to cold but

saw his side Sonargaon Cricketers strongly recover from their first defeat in the competition.

Discarded opener Al Shahriar fell nine runs short of what would have been his first hundred in the meet but his 172-run opening stand with Mehrab Hossain Opee helped Sonargaon score 183-2 in 40.3 overs in reply to promotees Pegasus' 181.

Man-of-the-match Shahriar smote thirteen boundaries in his 135-ball knock while Mehrab smashed eight fours and a six on way to a 95-ball 69.

Earlier, coin-favoured Pegasus thrived on Saif Mahmud's 59 off 98 balls to put up a moderate total after a top-order collapse initiated by rival new ball pair Mahbulul Alam and Ashiqur Rahman, both picking up two wickets each.

MOHAMMEDAN-INDIRA

Mohammedan missed skipper Habibul Bashar from a stomach upset but it could not affect their performance at all.

Man-of-the-match Faisal Hossain led a brilliant middle order surge with a 74-ball 67 that featured six boundaries as Mohammedan

piled up 276-9 in the stipulated 50 overs. Wicketkeeper Sahagir Hossain and in-form Sakib Al Hasan chipped in with 41 and 40 runs respectively. Stand-in skipper Aftab Ahmed hit a run-a-ball 28 that produced three fours and two sixes.

Left-arm pacemen Manjurul Islam caused an early damage to wrap up Indira Road, which decided to field first after winning the toss, for 180 in 44.5 overs despite a 110-ball 56 by opener Ashiqur Rahman.

Manjurul picked up three for 20 in seven overs while Hasibul Hossain was pick of the attack claiming four wickets conceding 44 runs in 6.5 overs.

VICTORIA-PARTEX

There was a battle between two Pakistani imports at Dhanmondi where Rashed Hanif's blazing 77-ball 97 went in vain as Partex gave up their brilliant chase of 296 to win after folding for 281 with nine balls to spare.

Rashed and Rafiqul Islam (60 off 61 balls) put on 94 for the fourth wicket stand to give Partex a platform but the tail failed to complete the task.

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India rest key men

Lara might play 3rd ODI today



Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Favourite is a position the Indian cricket team does not like being in, but by resting four key players for the third ODI against West Indies at Chennai on Saturday, the management has sent the message across that they're confident of clinching the series.

Sourav Ganguly, Zaheer Khan, Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Harbhajan Singh will not play -- Gautam Gambhir and Robin Uthappa will open -- and there is the likelihood that Yuvraj Singh will return after a lengthy injury lay-off.

Early last year, India were nearing the point where their World cup

aspirations seemed quite grounded. As it stands now, matters have changed a little. Both Greg Chappell and Rahul Dravid have clearly identified batting as the area of concern.

Saturday's match holds plenty for India's young guns, namely Gambhir, Uthappa, and Suresh Raina, back in the side after a disastrous past few months that have yielded just 183 runs at 15.25 from 15 games. Uthappa has plenty to prove ahead of the World Cup.

In recent times, Gambhir has shown few signs of being 25 and saddled with the pressure of filling Sachin Tendulkar's shoes, and his innings at Nagpur was one to derive positives from. With Virender Sehwag struggling, India needs a

leadoff man with unmistakable aggressive intent, and Gambhir and Uthappa -- riding on a successful Ranji Trophy season -- must prove that they can do the job. Dinesh Karthik gets the chance to impress behind the stumps, and his batting performances recently have shown he's got the stomach for a fight. Yuvraj had a lengthy stint in the nets, and looked good. He's been analysed by the medical staff, and Dravid sounded confident when talking of his chances. His form is crucial to India's World Cup chances, and flexibility in the field here will be a boon.

Every team has its flaws -- just ask the English -- but India's bowling, for so long the flaw, has been its

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PHOTO: AFP

Indian superstar Sachin Tendulkar (2nd R) follows Harbhajan Singh in a running drill during a training session at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Friday.

Astle retires suddenly



Cricket

AFP, Wellington

Veteran batsman Nathan Astle announced his retirement on Friday, shocking his New Zealand teammates and further weakening their fragile batting line-up just weeks away from the World Cup.

The 35-year-old, New Zealand's second most prolific one-day scorer behind skipper Stephen Fleming, said he was struggling with motivation for the tournament after patchy form in recent seasons.

"I have been fighting this day for about eight months," Astle said in a statement.

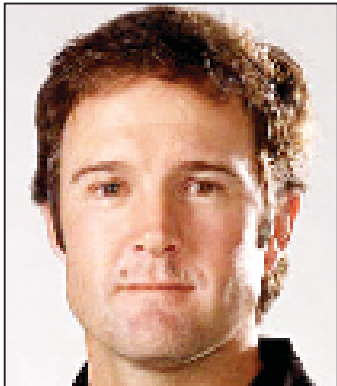
"I so desperately wanted to go to my fourth World Cup, but deep down inside I knew that I was lacking motivation and the enjoyment levels were just not there," he said.

He said his enthusiasm first

flattered last year but he soldiered on because of a desire to play in his fourth World Cup. But a month ago "it really started to hit home that this was no longer the place for me".

Coach John Bracewell said the decision came out of the blue, describing Astle as a "great player and a great team player".

"It was a bit of a shock to all of us



NATHAN ASTLE

and quite disruptive to our plans but I respect his decision," he said referring to New Zealand's build-up for the World Cup starting in March.

"Timing's never great this close to a big tournament and Nathan was going to be a serious part of that because of his experience and the younger players he was assisting to mentor."

The aggressive right-hander has been crucial to New Zealand's one-day success, scoring 16 centuries in 223 internationals, accumulating 7,090 runs at an average of 34.92.

In 81 Tests he scored 4,702 test runs, including 11 centuries at an average of 37.02.

Astle scored the world's fastest Test double century against England in Christchurch in 2002, thumping 222 off 153 balls.

Starting his first class career as a medium pace bowler, he ended with 51 Test wickets and 99 one-day scalps.

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PHOTO: COURTESY

Moroccan footballers (L-R) Burdif Mohammed, Touati Younes, Ighir Mohammed, Saad Abdul Fettah and Khoubbachi Mohammed, who will play for Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra in the coming Professional Football League, pose for a photograph on their arrival at the Zia International Airport yesterday morning.