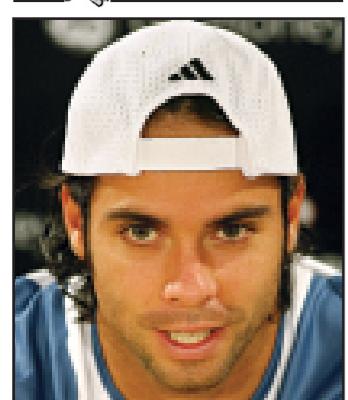




Did U Know?

Jacob Oram of New Zealand scored unbeaten 101 in the triangular one-day series match against Australia in Perth on January 28. It was his maiden century.



Fernando Gonzalez

(Chilean tennis star)

"I'm at a good level, I'm still improving and I can still improve further. It's been a very positive tournament for me."

After losing the Australian Open singles final.

What to WATCH

NEO Sports

India v West Indies

Fourth ODI

Live at 9:30 am (Wednesday)

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Live at 8:30 pm

English Premier Football League

West Ham v Liverpool

Live at 1:30 am (Wednesday)

STAR Sports

New Zealand v England

Ninth ODI, CB Series

Live at 10:30 am

English Premier Football League

Reading v Wigan

Live at 1:55 am (Wednesday)

U23's draw in practice match

SPORTS REPORTER

The national under-23 football team drew 2-2 in a preparation match against Mohammedan Sporting Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Zahid Parvez and Mohammad Zahid scored for the under-23 while Mithu and Santu found the net for Mohammedan.

The Under-23 side are preparing for home and away Olympic pre-qualifying matches against Hong Kong, scheduled for February 7 and 14.

'Irfan gets his rhythm back'

PTI, Vadodara

Indian cricket team's biomechanical expert Ian Fraser Monday expressed satisfaction over Irfan Pathan's current form, saying the left-handed paceman had found his natural rhythm back.

"Irfan seems to have got his bowling rhythm back. The break from international cricket and the fact that he has bowled close to 70 overs for Baroda in the Ranji Trophy seems to have stood him in good stead," he said.

Fraser assessed Pathan, who joined the squad as its 16th member for the fourth and final one-dayer against the West Indies, and Munaf Patel, who is nursing an ankle injury, after their net session at the IPCL ground.

Pathan was recalled midway through the South African tour for his poor form and was asked to play domestic matches to regain his rhythm.

Fraser said "the best way to get back into form would be to go back and bowl in a natural manner which he did today."

"His run-up looked fluent and his action also was smooth. There was fluidity in his motion," he told reporters after the team's optional practice session attended only by skipper Rahul Dravid and opener

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Tigers leave tomorrow

Bashar keen on Zimbabwe challenge

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar promised to make full use of the opportunity of international cricket against Zimbabwe during their four-match ODI series although there was an increasing debate about the necessity of the tour given the fact that it will mean that the players will miss a chunk of the competitive domestic season at home.

A 15-member Bangladesh team will leave Dhaka tomorrow morning for Zimbabwe to play four one-day internationals against their southern African opponents as part of the World Cup preparation. The matches are scheduled for February 4, 6, 9 and 10 at the Harare Sports Club ground.

"I want to put aside all the debate surrounding the tour and my main objective is to make full use of the opportunity we have been given ahead of the World Cup," said Bashar, who was very successful last year with 18 one-day wins out of 28 matches, yesterday.

Considering the current strength of the Zimbabwe team many thought that it would far better for the players to continue to participate in the ongoing Premier Division Cricket League but Bashar categorically said that it would be a big boost for his boys if they could beat Zimbabwe away from home.

"We won the last series against them by a 5-0 margin at home but I must say they are much better team

in their own conditions. I think it's a big challenge for us to erase the disappointing memories of our last tour," he pointed out referring to the heartbreaking 3-2 defeat they suffered in the last series in Harare in July-August last year.

Although the series has been considered as World Cup preparation, the 33-year old Bangladeshi skipper didn't want to concentrate too much on the issue rather stress-



HABIBUL BASHAR

ing that his main objective is to ensure Bangladesh's current supremacy over their Southern African opponents.

"Many might have thought that anything other than victory in Zimbabwe means it would be a setback for us ahead of the World Cup but I consider the whole thing in a different way. I think it's a mission for us to rectify the mistakes we made during the last trip. After a 5-0 victory at home I said that we have done only

half the job; mission will be accomplished if we can now beat them in their own den," he said.

Bangladesh named the squad last Thursday but the players have not yet been able to practice as they completed their league program only on Monday.

"We have a get together today (Monday). I think it's not a big issue not being able to practice together because all the players have plenty of match practice which is a big advantage for us," he informed.

Bashar was not fully satisfied with the national players performance in the league but he hopes that they will show their true character in the international arena.

"I think Sakib (Sakib Al Hasan) was exceptional, otherwise most of our batsmen has shown a lack of consistency in the competition. But the good news is that some of our key batsmen have finally got some runs," he said adding that his personal target is to make a big score.

Bashar declared himself highly satisfied with the squad and the changes from the previous team, which brought back some old guards like seamer all-rounder Mohammad Sharif and paceman Tapash Baisya.

"It's really a good team because everybody can get a place in the playing eleven. I think performers dominated the squad this time. But I want to make one thing clear; I am not in favour of giving equal opportunity to all the selected players in the tour because I want to go in with my best side to win all the matches," he explained.



Sonargaon's Sri Lankan recruit Saman Jayantha forces one off his back foot during his century as Indira Road wicketkeeper Hamdiul Islam looks on during their Kai-Altech Premier Division match at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Muktijoddha signal title ambitions

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

While Dhaka giants Muktijoddha Sangsads have their eyes set firmly on the title, Chittagong Mohammedan only want to impress as far as possible in the first-ever Professional Football League that is scheduled to kick off on mid-February.

Both the clubs expressed their desires during their presentations at the BFF Bhaban yesterday.

"Our main target is to become champion and our players are eagerly waiting to prove their mettle in the competition," said Muktijoddha captain Saifur Rahman Moni.

Coach Mohammad Abu Yusuf also echoed his skipper sentiment. "We want to become the country's best team as we have built a strong side by signing quality local players," said Yusuf, also coach of the National U-23 team, adding that they began their camp from January 15.

Muktijoddha officials informed the press that they would soon bring three Nigerian players to enhance the team's strength. They are Ebob (forward), Obinna Obeche (attacking midfielder) and Jeremy Luandane (defensive midfielder).

Chittagong Mohammedan who was the first team yesterday, exchanged views with the reporters on the day were head coach Nazrul Islam Ledu said that their main target is to play good football in the competition.

Earlier Brothers Union, Arambagh, Sheikh Russell, Farashgani, Khulna Abahani and Rahmatganj exchanged their views with the media.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



Muktijoddha (L) and Chittagong Mohammedan footballers display their new jerseys for the B. League during a presentation ceremony at the BFF Bhaban yesterday.

Run riot in women's cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

A scintillating hundred by Ayesha Akhter guided Dhaka to a massive 278-run victory over Narayanganj in the First Women Cricket Championship at the Kalabagan Krira Chakra ground yesterday.

Ayesha smashed a 90-ball 114 that featured 14 fours and a six as Dhaka piled up 334-2 in their stipulated 30 overs. Dhaka then shot out Narayanganj for 56 runs in 11.3 overs to record their second win.

At the Nabin Sangha ground, Salma hit a hurricane hundred as Khulna outclassed Chittagong by 207 runs.

Salma smote 16 fours and four sixes during her 45-ball 104 as Khulna amassed 276-3 in 30 overs. In reply, Chittagong were bundled out for 69 in 23.3 overs. This was the third victory for Khulna.

At the Dhanmondi Women's Complex, Rangamati earned a comfortable 83-run victory over Bogra. Bogra were all out for 64 in 17.1 overs in reply to Rangamati's 147-6 in the stipulated 30 overs.

There were two more centuries on the day but the Sri Lankan right-hander's proved the only successful one as he put on an unbeaten 161 runs in a second wicket stand with opener Mehrab Hossain (71) as Rangamati scored 196-1 in 35.2 overs in reply to Indira's 195-9 to follow the league leader Abahani with 12 points after the seventh round.

Away at the BKSP, Mahbubul Karim's valiant century went in vain as Victoria Sporting Club rode on Mahmudullah Riyad's brilliant all-round performance to record a comfortable 83-run victory against Kalabagan Krira Chakra to secure

their fifth win in seven outings.

Out-of-favour Rajin Saleh finally returned amongst runs with an unbeaten hundred but his effort was not good enough to salvage Partex Sporting Club from slipping to a two-wicket defeat against Pegasus in the clash of the promoted at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

SONARGAON-INDIRA

Ashiqur Rahman and Obaidul Haque equally shared six wickets as Indira Road managed to score 195-9 after deciding to bat first thanks to a 77-ball 51 by Sumon Barua.

New ball bowler Ashiqur tore apart the top order and completed his ten-over quota with 3-32 while Obaidul picked up three wickets for 24 runs in six overs.

Pacer Sajidul Islam gave Indira Road an early breakthrough removing Al-Shahriar (16) but only paved the way for Jayantha and Mehrab to put their bowling to the sword.

Jayantha, the veteran of 17 one-day internationals, smote seven fours and five sixes during his 98-ball 100 while Mehrab hammered nine boundaries in his 94-ball 71.

VICTORIA-KALABAGAN

Victoria thrived on two half centuries by inform opener Nasiruddin Faruque and Mahmudullah Riyad to put up a challenging total of 262-6 after being sent into bat first.

Faruque hit 61 off 94 balls with four hits to the fence while man-of-the-match Riyad clobbered eight boundaries and a six during his sparkling 56-ball 78 and Hasanuzzaman chipped in with an unbroken 41 off 38 balls with two sixes.

Mahbubul Karim stood tall in the chase of the challenging total but didn't get the support he required as Kalabagan were bundled out for 179 in 42.2 overs.

The number three batsman returned to the dressing room as last man out after scoring a 118-ball 108 that featured nine fours and three sixes.

PEGASUS-PARTEX

Pegasus registered their third victory despite Rajin Saleh's unbeaten 112 as they scored 244-8 in 49.4 overs in reply to Partex's 240-7.

Rajin smashed 12 fours and a six

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

Jayantha inspires Sonargaon

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Ashraf did not get a chance to exercise his last opportunity to bat before flying out to Zimbabwe as Saman Jayantha's blazing hundred ensured Sonargaon Cricketers romped to an emphatic nine-wicket victory against Indira Road in the Kai-Altech Premier Division Cricket League at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

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Meanwhile, the BCCI was yet to