

All set to launch 3rd JFA Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

With the view to hunt talents, the 3rd JFA Cup Under-15 Football Championship kicks off tomorrow across the country with the qualifying rounds.

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) organises the tournament with financial help from Japan Football Association (JFA), which will provide US dollars 25,000 (Tk 17,37,200) for the third edition, informed tournament committee chairman Abdur Rahim at a press conference at the BFF Bhaban yesterday.

A total of 58 teams, 57 districts and BKSP, will take part in the knockout first phase where eight venues -- Comilla, Mymensingh, Khulna, Sirajganj, Shariatpur, Narail, Manikganj, Natore -- will be used.

The eight zonal champions, split into two groups, will compete in the round-robin final phase, expected to start in Dhaka on February 24.

Teams will receive Tk 9,000 participation money in the first phase and the winners of each round a bonus of Tk 4,000.

Each of the eight finalists will receive Tk 25,000 and the last four an additional Tk 5,000 each.

The BFF, which has an estimated budget of Tk 19 lakh, will give the hosting districts Tk 30,000 each.

Opening day's matches: Faridpur v Rajbari (Manikganj), Sherpur v Jamalpur (Mymensingh), Feni v Laxmipur (Comilla), Naogaon v Bogra (Sirajganj), Bagerhat v Jessore (Khulna) and Dinajpur v Panchagrah (Natore).

Lanka bank on 'X factor'

AFP, New Delhi

Sri Lanka will rely on unpredictable fast bowler Lasith Malinga to rattle India in the one-day series starting this week, vice-captain Kumar Sangakkara said on Monday.

The 23-year-old Malinga has claimed 71 wickets in 21 Tests and scalped 37 victims in 25 one-dayers with his unusual round-arm slinging action that batsmen find difficult to read.

Sangakkara said Malinga would be Sri Lanka's main weapon in the four matches against India in the absence of stalwarts Chaminda Vaas and Muttiah Muralidaran, who were rested ahead of the World Cup.

"Malinga has brought that X-factor into the side, that bit of unpredictability," Sangakkara said ahead of the first match at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Thursday.

"He bowls at 150 kmph-plus (95 miles) regularly. He is very accurate and has got a very positive attitude.

"That rubs off on all the guys in the team and when we play with him we tend to be a bit more aggressive, a bit more positive, follow him along.

"We have got an all-round pace attack. We've got a good balance, got guys who bowl fast and guys who bowl line and length."

The four-match series will be the last for the rivals before the World Cup opens in the Caribbean on March 13.

Both India and Sri Lanka are drawn in Group B of the World Cup preliminary league along with Bangladesh and first-timers Bermuda.

Sangakkara, a brilliant batsman-wicketkeeper, dismissed suggestions that Vaas and Muralidaran should have taken part in the India series to warm up for the World Cup.

"They have played for such a long time for Sri Lanka and I don't think four more matches would make a difference as long as they put in hours of practice and prepare well," he said.

Breaking records

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make players available for national age group teams by picking up the talents from the competition.

The BCB has brought change in the format as there would be only one age-group (under-16) unlike the previous occasions. "We have decided to go with one age-group to avoid controversy over age," informed Jamil.

The game development committee emphasised on improvement of the grounds that remain a big problem and it has allotted a big chunk of money (Tk 25 lakh) to upgrade the grounds through BCB's grounds committee.

As per a three-year contract, the Standard Chartered Bank will provide Tk 5 lakh for the second year out of the total Tk 1.27-crore budget.

"At Standard Chartered we believe prioritising long-term grassroots development is the way to go. We are indeed delighted to lead this grassroots level development in partnership with Bangladesh Cricket Board," said Shah Masud Imam, head of corporate affairs of the bank.



Scotland's Gavin Hamilton blocks the ball during their ICC World Cricket League match against Bermuda at the Rauraka Sports Club in Nairobi on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

All-round Scots dump Kenya

AFP, Nairobi

Scotland capped a solid all-round performance with the ball and bat to post an emphatic 77-run victory over hosts Kenya to reach Wednesday's final of the ICC World Cricket League division one tournament.

Beaten in two previous meetings, openers David Watts and Majid Haq got Scotland off to a flying start when they punished the Kenyan pace bowling attack of Thomas Odooyo and Peter Ongondo.

Enjoying a wicket that favours batting, Watts (58) and Haq (71) put on 103 for the first wicket.

It was only the spin of young Hiren Varaiya and Steve Tikolo (3-46) that put the breaks on the well-

oiled Scottish side that progressed to 254-8 in their 50 overs.

Thomas Odooyo was the only batsman to take the game to the Scottish spinners as Kenya capitulated to 177 all out -- the first time that they have lost a match in the tournament.

They will now need to beat Canada on Monday to make sure of their place in the final.

Canada kept their hopes alive when they defeated Ireland by six wickets at the Nairobi Jeffreys club.

Canada, inspired by a brilliant 122 from Ashish Bagai went on to upset Ireland who had made 308 -- the highest score of the tournament -- after being put to bat first.

Ryan ten Doeschate scored an unbeaten 110 to lead the Netherlands to an emphatic eight-wicket victory over winless Bermuda.

Brazil out

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chances to shine under Dunga.

They will have a major role to play on Tuesday after Ronaldinho was ruled out of contention for the game because of a calf injury.

The Portuguese are currently fourth in their Euro 2008 qualifying group after a mediocre start to the campaign and, with Finland, Poland, Belgium and Serbia to overcome, there is no guarantee the 2004 runners-up will even reach the tournament this time.

Scolari hopes the chance to play against Brazil will give invaluable experience to youngsters like Joao Moutinho of Sporting Lisbon and FC Porto's Raul Meireles and help revitalise the team for their forthcoming European qualifiers.

"This will be a great game for us to gain experience, to grow and acquire confidence," Scolari said. "Our core group of players is already settled. One or two of my picks are youngsters, but most of the squad has been together for a few years now."

Speed foresees trouble at WC

AFP, Dubai

Chief executive Malcolm Speed says the International Cricket Council (ICC) took on a sizeable task by agreeing to stage the World Cup on nine different Caribbean islands and has called for understanding when problems arise.

"There will be logistical problems, everyone knows that," Speed told Reuters at the Dubai Desert Classic golf tournament. There will be times when for one reason or another the arrangements are criticised in the media.

"I think we need to bear in mind the size of the undertaking of playing a major sporting event in nine countries. Each country is different to each other, they do very little together but have all come together to host this World Cup."

Speed acknowledged transportation would be a major issue during the March 13-April 28 tournament in Jamaica, Barbados,

Guyana, Trinidad & Tobago, Antigua, Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent and St Kitts and Nevis.

"The issue of getting people to the next country are difficult but there are people who have been working on it for several years now and we hope to have very few problems," said the 58-year-old Australian.

"Players and officials will be going on charter flights so that should not be a problem. There will be problems for spectators as it is difficult to get about the Caribbean on normal commercial flights."

Speed, who will attend the ICC's final pre-World Cup board meeting in Trinidad on Friday, was hopeful the cricket facilities would be in good working order in the West Indies.

"It seems all the venues are on track, the grounds will be excellent," he said. "They are working very hard to get the pitches and the playing fields up to standard."

"I am quite confident the work that's gone into the planning for the venues has been outstanding and

that anyone who goes to these venues will be very impressed with what they see."

The World Cup was first staged in England in 1975 but Speed said the forthcoming tournament would be different to the previous eight editions.

"I think it will be a unique World Cup," he said. "We are playing in nine countries who have put in a lot of work while the governments have provided exceptionally good support."

On the playing side, Speed said that even though England's stock had slumped after a string of poor Test and one-day performances in Australia, they will have been given a lift by Friday's 92-run victory over the world champions in Sydney.

"It was good to see England win a game a couple of days ago, hopefully that's a sign they will bounce back and be in contention at the World Cup," said Speed.

"If they can get a bit of momentum early, have a couple of wins, who knows what could happen?"

pened in 1995 when a Genoa fan was stabbed to death before a game against AC Milan.

Acid test

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Sonargaon and slip further down the table.

In the other match today, Bangladesh Biman face Super League contenders Young Pegasus at the Sher-e-Bangla Mirpur Stadium with both sides in a tight-rope situation for a berth in the upper tier.

In tomorrow's tenth round matches, Abahani meet Kalabagan (BKSP), Brothers Union play Partex (Dhanmondi) and City Club are pitted against Indira Road (Fatullah).

11 teams for B. League

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) will go ahead to organise the inaugural Professional Football League with 11 clubs after Sylhet's absence confirmed.

Sylhet DSA, which backed out of their decision to participate in the B. League, were given a few days to reconsider but failed yesterday's deadline to notify the BFF about their latest situation.

"We contacted them at last and they have said that it would not be possible for them to play," told BFF general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal after yesterday's executive committee meeting.

The BFF will honour the B. League tournament committee's recommendation of not to invite any new team for the league, which is scheduled to start on February 15.

The meeting, however, was adjourned till today as there was no development over the other agenda of B. League sponsors.

Aziz for more

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Ali Asif Khan as team operations manager for the four-match series in Zimbabwe replacing former national skipper Khaled Mahmud.

Asked whether it was wise to send as many as four BCB officials to Zimbabwe as observers when there was the need of someone who could provide information for media from the southern African nation, which virtually showed zero tolerance to international broadcasting and news agencies for quite some time, Aziz said: "Personally I am against the move but you know it was an executive committee decision. There was no scope for me to say no against the decision because I don't want to interfere and take decision on whim."

Although the board president apparently looked not at ease with his explanation, he however got a volunteer in his vice-president Shah Nurul Kabir Shaheen, who stunned the audience by proclaiming that the media manager was not taken for the trip because the captain did not want it.

"Team captain (Habibul Bashar) made a recommendation to not send any media manager for trips outside India or Pakistan," said Shaheen.

Not only that, Shaheen, a former BNP lawmaker, and joint-secretary Rafiqul Islam Babu made a desperate yet futile effort to keep their caring president away from the reporters.

United dismiss

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low cross that Scholes tapped-in on the goal-line.

Such was United's dominance that Ferguson felt able to take off Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney, but that didn't stop the visitors making it four after 77 minutes.

Louis Saha slipped a pass through to Giggs and the Welsh winger kept his composure to beat Robinson with a fine finish.

The only disappointment for United came when, having used all their substitutes, van der Sar suffered a nose injury that forced John O'Shea to go in goal for the last five minutes.

Habibul

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score 260, praised his bowlers' effort for the first game victory.

"260 is always a good score but the bowlers also played a good part as they were in good form especially when it came to the power plays," he said.

On the other hand Zimbabwe skipper Prosper Utseya said that they were under pressure to win today's second game to give themselves a chance of clinching the series.

"We would have to try and pick ourselves up from the way we played on Sunday and the match on Tuesday is very important and we have to do our best," said the off-spinner.

C'Ron better

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"Barcelona would hugely enjoy having Cristiano in their team because he would complement Ronaldinho perfectly - they have different characteristics.

"For Cristiano, the Barcelona climate would be important - most days are sunny and it's hardly ever cold like England.

"That gives a player all the motivation he needs to train and play."

Scolari feels Barca rather than Real Madrid where Ronaldo would be linking up with former United team-mate Ruud van Nistelrooy is the more attractive option.

"Cristiano needs to move somewhere where the team is an integral part of the club - not somewhere where the system is based on individual 'heroes' or 'stars'.

"Moving to a club where there are four or five 'stars' who do their own thing is unworkable," said the Brazilian.

Ronaldo scored his 15th goal of the campaign in the Premiership leaders 4-0 win over Tottenham on Sunday.

Nielsen new Aussie coach

AFP, Melbourne

Tim Nielsen will become coach of Australia's Test and one-day cricket team when John Buchanan retires after next month's World Cup, Cricket Australia said Monday.

Nielsen, 38, is head coach at the Centre of Excellence in Brisbane, which includes managing the respected Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) men's cricket programme.

He took over that role in 2005 after spending three years assisting Buchanan in the coaching of the Australian team.

Nielsen, a former wicketkeeper-batsman for South Australia, will begin work in his new role after the World Cup, Cricket Australia said.

Nielsen was appointed a week after former Australian Test player Tom Moody, the highly regarded coach of Sri Lanka, announced he was not interested in the position.

"I'm incredibly proud, honoured and excited to have been offered this opportunity," Nielsen said in a statement.

"Moving forward, this job represents a great opportunity to work with a fine group of players who are an excellent cricket team.

"Over the coming period there will be some transition in the playing group and I look forward to working with the exciting emerging talent in this country as well as the established members of the squad.

"Filling John Buchanan's shoes will be a big job. John is a leading light in cricket coaching globally and his record speaks for itself.

"I've been privileged to be a member of his support staff and the benefits I'll inherit in terms of the structure around the playing group have largely come around due to John's hard work.

"John will continue to be a regular sounding board for me in the role."

Cricket Australia chief executive James Sutherland said the fact that



TIM NIELSEN

an appointment had been made from within the coaching system reflected the quality of the game's high performance programmes.

"His relationships with our established players and rising stars are excellent and I know the playing group is looking forward to working with him when John Buchanan retires after the World Cup," Sutherland said.

Buchanan endorsed Nielsen's appointment, saying his former assistant had a huge desire for the Australian team to continue to move forward.

Vaughan available today

AFP, Brisbane

England skipper Michael Vaughan has declared himself available for Tuesday's crucial triangular series one-day international with New Zealand in Brisbane.

The winner of the match will play Australia in the tri-series finals and Vaughan's availability is another boost to an England side rejuvenated by Friday's shock win over the host nation.

Vaughan, on the comeback trail after a long layoff following knee surgery, has missed England's past five matches after straining his hamstring earlier in the series.

"I got through everything, batting in the nets and fielding okay so I will be available," Vaughan said here on Monday.

"We have tested it really well over the last four or five days and I have done all that was required, so that is pleasing."

Vaughan said the confidence of the English was high after Friday's win -- their first against Australia on

the entire tour.

The 32-year-old said it was important they maintained that much-improved form, adding that the game was a virtual semifinal.

"You get a lot of confidence from winning games of cricket, especially against the No. 1 team in the world," Vaughan said.

"There's no point in producing a performance to get us back into the competition on Friday and letting it slip on Tuesday.

"It will be a real test of how far we have come with that victory because it is a pressure game, a semifinal to get into the finals."

Vaughan is set to partner the in-form Ed Joyce at the top of the order, with Mal Loye expected to drop out.

Seamer Jon Lewis, who was in good form before an ankle injury, could also return to further strengthen the England side.

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming said there was no doubt the English were a more confident unit after their latest win, but said his side were ready for the challenge.

"They'll be buoyant after that

"This is an outstanding appointment for Australian cricket, the team and the coaching profession," Buchanan said in a statement.

"Tim has demonstrated throughout his time in the state system, as assistant coach to the national team and head coach in the institute programme, his dedication, desire and enthusiasm for the game.

"He also has a huge desire for the team to keep improving. Each system he's been involved with has prospered. He is an ideal man, together with the Australian captain, to take the Australian team into the future."

Australian captain Ricky Ponting said it was important that the new coach had a deep understanding of the players.

"Tim was an outstanding assistant coach with the national team and has led a very successful programme at the Centre of Excellence," Ponting said.

"One of the most important things to have as a coach is a deep understanding of any individual player and their techniques.

"Tim has worked with most of the young talent in the country at the Centre of Excellence and is well placed to guide that young talent.

"On a personal level I'm delighted, having played against Tim and having worked with him when he was assistant coach. We have an excellent working relationship and I'm looking forward to the challenges that lie ahead."

and up for Tuesday," Fleming said in Melbourne on Sunday.

"We're pretty confident playing against them as well.

"It's a semifinal-type scenario where one slip-up you're on your way home, which we don't want to do."

Fleming dismissed suggestions the confidence of his own side would have been dented by a third successive narrow loss to the Australians on Sunday.

He said they simply had to keep doing the things that were working well against Australia.

"We've had three of these come down to the last over or all but the last over," he said.

"We've bounced back pretty well. We've had to do it in the last three games.

"We've got to play well, and we've got to respect the little things that got us into a position to compete here (Melbourne)."

With a berth in the finals up for grabs, the Kiwis are reconsidering their plan to rest injury-plagued speedster Shane Bond in Tuesday's game.

Mumbai clinch Ranji Trophy

AFP, Mumbai

Mumbai rode on a rare domestic appearance by superstar Sachin Tendulkar to win India's premier first-class tournament for the Ranji Trophy here on Monday.

Mumbai defeated Sourav Ganguly's Bengal by 132 runs on the fourth day of the five-day final at the Wankhede Stadium to win the tournament for a record 37th time.

The final, sandwiched between India's home one-day series against the West Indies and Sri Lanka prior to the World Cup, allowed international stars to play the important first-class game.

Mumbai were boosted by the return of Tendulkar, Zaheer Khan, Ajit Agarkar and Ramesh Powar, while Ganguly turned out for Bengal.

Tendulkar, playing only his seventh Ranji Trophy match in the last 10 years, walked in with Mumbai struggling at 14-2 on the opening day and scored a fluent 105.

He then made 43 in the second innings to help set Bengal a stiff fourth-innings target of 472.

Bengal finished at 339 in the second innings, with Ganguly making 90 after being clean bowled first ball by Zaheer in the first.

Second ODI

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the opening game.

The team management, however, has made only one change in the 12-man squad, bringing Tapash Baisya in place of Mohammad Sharif, who was not in the starting line-up on Sunday.

Bangladesh squad (from): Habibul Bashar (captain), Shahriar Nafees, Mehrab Hossain, Aftab Ahmed, Sakib Al Hasan, Mohammad Ashraful, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammad Rafique, Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza, Abdur Razzak, Shahadat Hossain and Tapash Baisya.

It's been a Ponting

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almost providing a fairytale ending but despite polling in six of the 10 Tests, his surprising lack of any three-vote games meant he was denied the Test award. He topped Australia's wicket tally with 49 dismissals and Stuart Clark, who claimed 47, capped off his impressive debut year with third place.

In the ODI arena, Ponting's 968 runs were enough to earn him his first title since 2002. Australia warmed up for their World Cup defence with their first Champions Trophy win but despite Ponting's disappointing form in that tournament, his outstanding finish to last year's VB Series and his excellent efforts in the current CB Series pushed him over the line ahead of Symonds and the third-placed Michael Clarke.

Ponting's two centuries in his last two games -- 111 against New Zealand at Perth and 104 against

England at Melbourne -- wrapped up the prize.

Ponting was famously annoyed last year by a tongue-in-cheek segment in which Phil Tufnell mocked the Australians for "dropping the Ashes".

But this year, Tufnell's return effort went down slightly better. "I suppose you want me to eat humble pie but I prefer doughnuts because that's what we bloody served up to you all summer," Tufnell said. "I've got a little tip for you -- don't upset Ricky Ponting. He turns into a run-machine and every time he smashed us for four he saw my face on that ball. During the Test series you had four players retire. We had four players retire as well -- they just don't know it yet."

Bhola make

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festive mood with more than a 1,000 fans encouraging their sides loudly.

"It was really like a dream come true," said champions team skipper Mina Khatun Mona while her opposition captain Irine Sultana also echoed the same sentiment.

The women wing of the Bangladesh Cricket Board successfully organised the tournament with a view to form a national women's cricket team.

A total of 10 teams split into two groups took part in the limited-overs meet.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KHULNA: 111 all out in 28 overs (Salma 49 not out, Suklara 14, extras 18; Pinki 2/17, Shoheli 2/