

## Natore, Chittagong in zonal finals

SPORTS REPORTER

Mostafizur Rahman and Wahid Murad both slammed hattricks as Chittagong brushed aside Laxmipur 11-0 in the zonal semifinal of the 3rd JFA Cup qualifying round at Comilla yesterday.

Jobel struck twice while Sekander, Rubel and Mohon added the rest for the winners, who will take on winners of today's second semifinal between hosts Comilla and Habiganj in the final on February 15.

In another match, hosts Natore ousted Panchagarh 2-0 to set a final clash against Gaibandha.

Meanwhile, five zonal finals will be held today at Narail, Manikganj, Mymensingh, Khulna and Shariatpur.

## Proteas put pressure on Australians

CRICINFO, undated

South Africa can become the first team to topple Australia from the top spot in the ICC's ODI rankings if they beat Pakistan in the final one-dayer at Johannesburg and if Australia lose the upcoming Chappell-Hadlee series in New Zealand. Australia have been ranked No 1 since the current rankings were introduced in 2002.

South Africa are currently on 127 points, three behind Australia. If they beat Pakistan on Wednesday they will move up to 128. They have hit excellent one-day form since failing to make the finals of the tri-series in Australia in 2005-06, with home series wins over Australia, Zimbabwe and India and qualifying for the semifinals of the Champions Trophy.

If Australia do lose the Chappell-Hadlee series, for which they have rested several regulars, they will drop down to second place and New Zealand will move up to third. England remain at seventh place despite beating Australia 2-0 in the CB Series finals. India could slip from fifth to sixth if they lose the remaining two ODIs of the ongoing series against Sri Lanka.

## Ronaldo enjoys

FROM PAGE 20

power and technique. He just needs a little time."

AC Milan's win lifted them up to seventh and boosted their chances of finishing among the Champions League places, leaving them just two points behind fourth-placed Empoli.

The top two in Serie A go directly into the Champions League, while the teams finishing third and fourth go into the third and final qualifying round, which is played over two legs.

Ronaldo is ineligible for AC Milan's Champions League matches this season as he has already played in the competition for Real Madrid.

## The Keeper

FROM PAGE 17

test. The most important thing was that we bounced back from the back foot on several occasions. The conditions in Harare was also tough," said Bashar, who made his career best 78 in the first match.

One of selectors Golam Nawsher Prince, who accompanied the team in Harare, heaped praise on Mushfiqur and said he was impressed by the way the Bogra lad was gradually improving his performance.

"He (Mushfiqur) served the team his best when it was needed most in two difficult situations. We changed his batting order twice and thankfully he served the team purposes. He also improved his keeping as he missed only one stumping chance in the entire series. I am really impressed by his gradual improvement," said the former national paceman.

Also team physio Paul Close informed the reporters that he was confident about the fitness of Mohammad Rafique and Mohammad Sharif.

Rafique badly bruised his nose during the second game while Sharif had suffered a thigh strain in the third match.

## Mashrafee

FROM PAGE 17

situations," he said.

"The team never lost confidence which impressed me most," he added.

While Mashrafee returned with a relief there was a different kind of dissatisfaction in the mind of Aftab Ahmed as the dashing right-hander missed a golden opportunity to make his maiden one-day hundred in the fourth game which Bangladesh won by one wicket.

"It is really frustrating that I missed the chance only for eight runs. But in the end I am happy that we won the series and that my innings played a role behind the last game victory," said the Chittagongian, who tried to pull pacer Anthony Ireland only to be struck on the pads to be ruled out leg before wicket.



PHOTO: STAR

Azman (C), son of late Monem Munna, prays during a milad mahfil at the Abahani tent yesterday to mark the second death anniversary of the legendary footballer.

# A tribute to Munna

SPORTS REPORTER

Azman takes after his father in many ways. Not only via facial resemblance but also in his quiet disposition and unceasing love for football. The 10-year-old's characteristic reminds one easily of his father who became a living legend.

Death has done the father – Monem Munna – and the family apart but his child grows under the shadow of one of the greatest footballers of the country.

Azman did not have the chance to see Munna in action – which gripped his fans and oppositions alike – because he was too young when his father had retired from the game. However, kicking a ball at the Abahani ground whenever he gets time has become his favourite pastime. He wants to make it a passion by becoming a footballer.

"I love football and I want to become a footballer," that was all the shy child could say yesterday, shortly after a discussion and a milad mahfil – rather casually organised – at the Abahani tent in Dhanmondi on the second death anniversary of Munna.

It would be a great challenge because Munna was not just another player.

The untimely departure of Munna, who breathed his last at a hospital bed two years ago at the age of 39 following critical kidney ailments, sent the

whole sports fraternity into deep mourning.

As national captain, he led the nation to its first trophy in a foreign football tournament in 1995 in Myanmar. He is also known as the 'last superstar' of local football, having had the ability to attract big crowds on his own.

A central defender, he became a household names during his 12-year stint with Abahani apart from gracing the grounds of neighbouring Kolkata, where he donned the East Bengal shirt from 1991-93.

Having decided to hang up the famous sky-blue shirt and put an end to a glorious career in 1997, the one-time highest paid footballer in the country became Abahani manager before kidney related complications cut his life short.

While remembering the legendary footballer, Abahani director Harunur Rashid announced that the club will dedicate their new youth programme to Munna.

"We don't want to remember a great player like him just at these commemorative programmes. We have a duty towards him and we want to create opportunities for kids like Azman to be groomed as footballers. We want to name our youth camp after Munna and hope that his playing day colleagues will come forward to help," Harund said.

Munna's child day hero

Ashrafuddin Chunnun termed him as 'a complete man' who won millions of hearts at home and abroad.

Dewan Shafail Arefin Tutul mentioned that Munna was a talented, brave and honest organiser who would have filled a void in the area.

"Munna chose to work for the club in spite of his illness because the decline of football in the country hurt him. If we want to pay tribute to him, we should at least uplift the condition of the game," said Mubashar Hossain adding that works on the book on Munna's life will be completed very soon.

Former national striker Sheikh Mohammed Aslam, Kazi Nabil, Ahmed Sajjadul Alam, Mohammed Jahangir and other Abahani officials, former Bangladesh Football Federation member Moajjem Hossain and the football team management and current booters were present.

Munna's wife Yasmin Monem Suravi, who goes through a painful situation of observing the anniversaries of their marriage and her husband's death on the same day, and their daughter Dania were also present.

At his hometown in Narayanganj, Munna Smriti Sangsad and local Sonali Oit also observed the day organising different programmes.

## Ex-cricketers hail Sehwag inclusion

PTI, New Delhi

Former cricketers today welcomed the "bold move" to include an out-of-form Virender Sehwag in India's World Cup squad, saying the swashbuckling batsman had match-winning abilities and could not be ignored for such a big event. Many of the players also felt that Sehwag would be more effective as an opener as he could capitalise on the field restrictions and "change the complexion of the game" in the first 15 overs.

Former Indian stumper and chairman of the selection committee, Kiran More said Sehwag may not be in the best of form at the moment but it was necessary to have him in the team considering his past record.

"Sehwag is a very useful player. He is not in the best of form but you take such players for the big events. There are no surprises in the squad. It should have been a tough call for the selectors to leave out Ramesh Powar", More said.

More also approved the decision to include youngsters Robin Uthappa and Dinesh Karthik in the 15-member squad.

"Both of them have been around for a while now. They will be a surprise element for the opposition. Robin has done well, has some solid performances to back him. Dinesh did outstandingly on the South Africa tour", he said.

"The balance is good, with seven batsmen and seven bowlers and two wicketkeepers" he said.

The former wicketkeeper felt that fielding would be crucial for the team when they launch their World Cup campaign in the Caribbean in March-April.

## Pakistan name WC side today

REUTERS, Karachi

Pakistan will announce its 15-man World Cup squad on Tuesday after being assured by the International Cricket Council (ICC) it can seek replacements for any injured players, an official said.

Chief selector Wasim Bari, who will return from South Africa after consultations with captain Inzamam-ul-Haq and coach Bob Woolmer, will name the squad despite fitness problems with leading bowlers.

"We have spoken to the ICC and they have said if any of our selected players are not cleared fit we can seek a replacement from the technical committee before the World Cup," Saleem Altaf, director of cricket operations, told Reuters on Monday.

Pakistan is facing fitness issues with four of its leading pacers: Shoaib Akhtar, Umar Gul, Shabbir Ahmed and Mohammad Sami.

Shoaib, Gul and Shabbir were forced to return home from South Africa due to their injury problems while Sami is still with the team struggling with a back twinge.

Shoaib has also complained of a new knee problem and Altaf said if he was not fit he would not go to the World Cup.

## Cannavaro

FROM PAGE 20

After next weekend's home match with Real Betis, Madrid have two Champions League games against Bayern Munich, local derbies with Atletico Madrid and Getafe, plus a trip to bitter rivals Barcelona in their following five fixtures.

Cannavaro said: "We are going to face many strong teams and we shall see at the end of this month if Madrid are strong or not."

## Ronnie puts

FROM PAGE 20

line after his side slipping into the relegation zone following a 2-0 defeat at home to Espanyol.

Levante moved out of the drop zone after they followed up last weekend's 1-0 victory at Real Madrid with a 2-1 win over Recreativo Huelva, now signing Salva Ballesta scoring both goals to take his tally to three in two games.

## Mancini points

FROM PAGE 20

"A Sunday of silence? Not for me. I was insulted for 45 minutes from the Sampdoria fans behind the goal," he complained.

"Whenever I come back here, they have it in for me. Right now, when everybody is talking about violence, I feel even more depressed after being abused for 45 minutes.

"I don't know why they do it. In 1999, in an Italian Cup match, they even threw bathroom taps at me, just because I was playing for Bologna, a team they hate."

There were no reports of trouble at the 10 games, but five Inter fans who travelled to Verona were arrested for carrying flares.

Security was very tight at the Sicilian derby between Messina and Catania, despite the match being played behind closed doors.

Around 200 Messina fans turned up at the stadium, but only to cheer their team in the hope they could be heard by the players inside.

# All's well that ends well



AFP, Perth

England relinquished the Ashes in embarrassing fashion, but regained their dignity in unexpected circumstances by snatching the tri-series one-day title at the end of their turbulent Australian tour.

At one stage it appeared England would go through their entire three-month visit without a win over the home side amid calls for coach Duncan Fletcher's head.

Yet the English regrouped after hitting rock bottom with successive one-day innings of 120 and 110 in Adelaide, winning their last four tri-series matches, including three straight victories over the Australians, to reach the finals and then claim the trophy.

It was a fairytale end to what had been a horrific tour and finally vindicated stand-in captain Andrew Flintoff's repeated claims about the character of his side.

Especially given that by the end of the tri-series they were without star batsman Kevin Pietersen, captain Michael Vaughan and seamers James Anderson and Jon Lewis, all because of injury.

"Maybe sides might look at us in a different light now," Flintoff said.

"We've taken a few knocks on this trip, and at times we've deserved some criticism, but in one-day cricket you can do some unbelievable things if you get on a roll.

"It has been an amazing turn-

around. Two weeks is a long time in cricket, but to come from where we have done to win this trophy shows what we can do.

"We will take a lot of spirit into the World Cup after this."

The attrition rate for the English during the tour was staggering, with spinner Ashley Giles also returning home during the Tests to be with his ill wife and Chris Tremlett another late injury casualty.

The trend was set early with troubled opener Marcus Trescothick ruled out because of a stress-related illness.

England appeared well short of match practice after the Champions Trophy in India and had no answer for a fired-up Australian side in the first Test at the Gabba, the home side winning by 277 runs in a hint of the carnage to come.

The English were under pressure for selection decisions, having plumped for Giles over the promising Monty Panesar and wicketkeeper Geraint Jones over the more accomplished Chris Read.

Over the series, both would be proven to be poor decisions that undermined England's Ashes prospects.

Although Panesar won a belated call up for the third Perth Test, the damage had been done and even the spinner's eight wickets couldn't stop Australia regaining the coveted urn.

Despite the unfailing support of the Barby Army, the English were abysmal in the fourth Test, losing by an innings and 99 runs in under three days.

Australia then completed the first Ashes clean sweep since 1920-21 when another England batting collapse handed them a 10-wicket win in Sydney.

Some positives were Pietersen's belligerent batting, Alastair Cook's third Test century, Matthew Hoggard's lion-hearted bowling, Panesar's impressive form when promoted and Ian Bell showing enough to suggest he had matured as a No.3 batsman.

It was more of the same during the tri-series, with England looking well out of it.

England at least beat New Zealand in Hobart on January 16 to finally notch their first win on a tour that started in early November.

When they were routed twice in as many games in Adelaide, the local media suggested they give up and go home and, with a mounting injury list and Vaughan struggling with his fitness, there seemed no way back.

Flintoff had been thrust back into the captaincy, and somehow England regrouped.

Needing upset wins in their last two qualifying matches to reach the finals, England claimed successive victories before going on to win the tournament.

That unexpected late surge, led by a resurgent Paul Collingwood and previously unheralded swing bowler Liam Plunkett, finally eased the pressure of a testing tour and gave them momentum heading towards the World Cup.

# Press praise highly



AFP, London

The British press on Monday euphorically set their sights firmly on the World Cup, due to begin in a matter of weeks, after England ended what was looking like a disastrous tour of Australia by claiming the triangular one-day series.

In an emphatic 34-run victory over Australia in the second final at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Sunday, England managed a miraculous resurrection, after suffering their first 5-0 Ashes whitewash in 85 years earlier in the tour, and struggled to even win a one-day international last month.

England, led by Paul Collingwood's third successive man-of-the-match performance, made 246 for eight after winning the toss and electing to bat, and then emerging swing bowler Liam Plunkett starred with the ball as Australia struggled to 152 from eight from 27 overs in reply.

"What a turnaround," the Guardian daily gushed.

"From the horrors ... less than three weeks ago, when they made 120 against New Zealand and 110 against Australia, an England team with little on-day pedigree have cobbled together purpose and

spirit."

"They will go into the World Cup believing themselves dark horses and deserve their optimism," the paper declared in its match report.

The Daily Mail was similarly effusive in its praise, asking "Who could possibly say now that they have no chance in the World Cup" while headlining its match report: "Risen from the Ashes".

"No, this does not make up for the Ashes, but it is a damned good consolation prize ... it will be England, rather than the defending champions and favourites, who go to the West Indies for the World Cup in the better frame of mind."

"Truly amazing."

The Daily Telegraph tackled the issue from a wider perspective, writing: "The beauty -- and the cruelty -- of cricket is that whole matches, series and even careers can change direction in the blink of an eye."

"Teams' fortunes can go up as well as down, as England have just discovered."

"England may have started this tour like lambs but they finished it like lions ... The Ashes campaign may have turned to dust, but the past 10 days have done much to restore faith in the national team."

According to The Sun, Britain's best-read daily newspaper, England's winter in Australia was

"the story of how a cricket team went from an embarrassing rabble into beating the world champions three times in a row."

"And England managed the transformation with a brilliant mixture of determination, skill, determination and a refusal to be humiliated any more."

The effect of the tournament victory was not lost in The Independent's match report, meanwhile, which asked rhetorically: "Who would have imagined England winning this Tri-nations tournament a fortnight ago ...?"

## Australians under tax scrutiny

PTI, Melbourne

Australia's top cricketers including Shane Warne are being investigated for apparent tax evasion due to their alleged failure to disclose overseas earnings.

Warne and other international cricketers have allegedly failed to declare hundreds of thousands of British pounds managed in offshore accounts, a local TV report said on Monday.

The investigation is being led by the Australian Tax Office.

The players, however, are unlikely to face criminal charges.

Investigators believe a big part of their English playing and endorsement earnings were in offshore trusts managed by tax haven specialist Philip Eglishaw, the report said.

The players seemed to have not been advised that their English income should be declared and taxed in Australia.

## ICC probing

FROM PAGE 17

Nagpur. "We will leave no stone unturned in the investigation."

He stressed that no timeframe had been fixed by the ICC in which to complete the probe.

Nagpur police officer Amitesh Kumar told reporters that Samuels had five conversations with the suspected bookmaker, identified in the calls as Mukesh Kochar, from his hotel room in Nagpur ahead of the January 21 match.

Kumar said there was no evidence money had changed hands and he had only brought it to the notice of cricket authorities because it was a violation of the ICC's code of conduct, which bars players from dealing with bookmakers.

Samuels has admitted he has known Kochar for the past six years but did not believe he was a bookmaker. The Dubai-based Kochar told the Indian media he was not a bookie and that Samuels was like "a son" to him.

Cricknet was embroiled in a match-fixing scandal in 2000 when New Delhi police tapped conversations between former South African captain Hansie Cronje and an Indian bookmaker during a Test and one-day series in India.

Cronje and two other former captains, Mohammad Azharuddin of India and Salim Malik of Pakistan, were banned for life.

The latest controversy comes a month before cricket's showpiece event, the World Cup, begins in the Caribbean on March 13.