

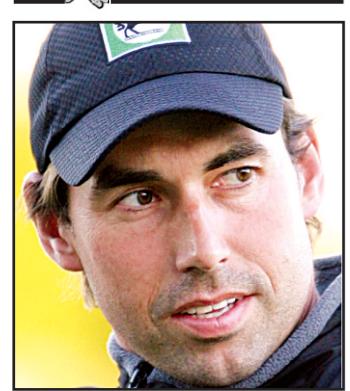


A combo of pictures show (from L-R) Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar and his deputy Shahriar Nafees sharing a light moment while the four selected pacemen Tapash Baishya, Syed Rasel, Mashrafe Mortaza and Shahadat Hossain pose for photos as young tyke Mushfiqur Rahim receives his father's blessing before their departure for the West Indies from the Zia International Airport yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Did U Know?



Stephen Fleming
(New Zealand cricket captain)
"It was an amazing day, great for the game and great for us to get across the line in a big-scoring match."
After winning the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy against Australia on Sunday.



TEN Sports
UEFA Champions League
Real Madrid v Bayern Munich
Live at 12:30 am (Wednesday)

ESPN
New Zealand v Australia
Third ODI, Chappell Hadlee Trophy
Live at 7:00 am
Football Focus
Live at 6:00 pm
Sportscenter India
Live at 9:00 pm

NCL 7th round from today

SPORTS REPORTER
Rajshahi host Sylhet when the 7th round of the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea National Cricket League begins today at different venues across the country.

Discarded national wicket-keeper Khaled Mashud is likely to play the match for Rajshahi who lead the first-class competition's table with 26 points while Sylhet have secured 14 points.

Second-placed Dhaka, two points shy of the leaders, will meet Chittagong at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium, Chittagong have 16 points.

The other match between Barisal and bottom-placed Khulna will take place at Khulna Stadium. Khulna are two points adrift of their regional rivals who collected 14 points after all the sixth round matches failed to produce any result.

Forget experiments

SPORTS REPORTER

ICC Cricket World Cup WEST INDIES 2007
The Bangladesh cricket team left Dhaka yesterday morning for West Indies to take part in next month's Cricket World Cup with the promise of a Tiger-like return from the game's showpiece event.

"We are confident that we can return home with something to cheer," captain Habibul Bashar told reporters at the lounge of the Zia International Airport repeating that their target is to play the second round in the mega show.

With stopovers in Dubai and London, the strenuous journey ends at Antigua on early Wednesday morning (Bangladesh time).

"We are going to play the World Cup on the back of impressive performances in recent times but we are very aware of the fact that the whole world will sit up and take notice if we can achieve something in such a big tournament," said the Tigers skipper, asking for the blessings of the countrymen.

It will be the Tigers' second visit in Caribbean after they toured the country in 2004 playing a full series and therein also lies a source of inspiration for the team, especially for individuals like Bashar and Mohammad Rafique as both made names in a drawn Test match.

"We have had a very good tour of the West Indies but this will be another ball game because the approach will be totally different in the World Cup," explained Bashar.

Bangladesh, who have been pencilled in Group B alongside India, Sri Lanka and Bermuda, will get more than three weeks in the Caribbean before starting their main campaign.

It would give an opportunity for the team think-tank to get the real

picture about the playing eleven as Dav Whatmore's charges will play a triangular series involving Antigua & Barbuda and Canada before featuring in two build-up games against New Zealand (March 6) and Scotland (March 8).

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed, who also accompanied the team, however hinted that there was hardly any chance of experimenting in the practice matches.

"There is hardly any chance to go for an experiment in the build-up matches because we want to provide enough opportunity for the boys who ultimately play in the main event. Actually we have a team in our mind," informed the former national skipper.

Bashar also echoed the sentiment. "I think it is not difficult to guess what would be our team in the World Cup if one considered our combinations in the last few

matches," he added.

The 34-year old Bangladesh skipper also informed that he has some plan with few players in the event. "We will bring few changes in my strategy, like I will try to use Rafique after 20 overs which was not case in the recent past."

There was an excitement especially among the players who are going to play their maiden World Cup although the officials looked to be silent from their part.

SQUAD

Habibul Bashar (captain), Shahriar Nafees, Tamim Iqbal, Aftab Ahmed, Sakib Al Hasan, Mohammad Ashraful, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), Mohammad Rafique, Abdur Razzaq, Mashrafe-bin-Mortaza, Shahadat Hossain, Tapash Baisya, Syed Rasel, Rajin Saleh and Javed Omar.

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B. League on schedule

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) officially announced yesterday that the B. League – the inaugural Professional Football League – will begin on schedule on March 2.

BFF general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal at a press briefing confirmed that although the start of the 11-team competition has been deferred time and again, there would be no further delay this time.

The latest previous date of launching the tournament was February 15, which was put back after requests from a few teams and BFF's marketing agency Leisure Sports Management of India, which has yet to finalise any sponsorship deal.

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LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Udayan Kindergarten outplayed Rising Sun High School by 150 runs in the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School Cricket Tournament at the Uttara Friends Club ground yesterday.

Shahadat smashed unbeaten 70 and Parvez 59 as Udayan piled up 360 in 44.4 overs. Rising Sun were all out for 210 in 38.5 overs.

Natun Jurain KM Mainuddin School also recorded an emphatic victory when dumped Faridabad High School by 149 runs at the East End Club ground. Jurain scored 72 as Natun Jurain made 232 in 42.4 overs while Faridabad skittled out

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Australia: Invincible no more

AFP, Sydney

Injuries and a spectacular form lapse have the once-mighty Australians looking vulnerable favourites for next month's World Cup.

The defending champions looked to have amassed a convincing case for a hat-trick of World Cup titles in the Caribbean with a first-ever victory in last November's ICC Champions Trophy in India and stringing together six consecutive wins over England and New Zealand in last month's home tri-series.

Yet a 92-run defeat to dislodged England in Sydney on February 2 triggered an astonishing fall from grace for the Australians. Shahadat smashed unbeaten 70 and Parvez 59 as Udayan piled up 360 in 44.4 overs. Rising Sun were all out for 210 in 38.5 overs.

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all-rounder Andrew Symonds included in the 15-man squad although he may not be able to play his first match until three matches in because of recent surgery to re-attach a torn bicep muscle.

Strike fast bowler Brett Lee rates himself a '50-50' chance of playing after sustaining a serious angle ligament injury in training ahead of the opening Chappell-Hadlee Trophy game.

Cricket Australia say the key paceman's availability for the World Cup won't be known until later this week, although he does not need surgery.

Of long-lasting bowlers Lee has the ninth best bowling average ever behind such greats as Dennis Lillee, Richard Hadlee and Michael Holding and until recently only one bowler in one-day history (New Zealand's Shane Bond) has a better strike rate of balls per wicket.

With Symonds already in the squad in the hope he will recover from his injury, Australia cannot afford to carry another unfit player in Lee to the West Indies.

That would leave the defending champions with only 12 available for the start of competition, with vice-captain Adam Gilchrist due to arrive late (paternity leave) and doubts lingering over Ponting (back) and batsman Michael Clarke (hip).

Ponting had cortisone injections last week to reduce inflammation caused by bone spurs on his spine and was left out of the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy series to give him

some rest.

Clarke is another injury concern after he returned home early from New Zealand for treatment on a hip complaint he has been carrying since the tri-series finals.

Clearly, momentum is not with the Australian team going into the World Cup.

Should Lee not make it, Australia will look to erratic quick Shaun Tait to be his like-for-like replacement with his searing pace.

Tait was preferred to Ashes bowling hero Stuart Clark in the original squad announcement, but Lee's misfortune may yet open the way for a late call-up for Clark.

"I don't think we are taking a risk at all," chairman of selectors Andrew Hilditch said of Tait, who has played just three one-day internationals, taking three wickets.

Selectors also found room for back-up wicket-keepers-batsmen Brad Haddin, with Gilchrist gaining permission to travel three days later than the rest of the squad as his wife is expecting their third child.

But if the Australians can somehow recapture their form and get over their injury problems they have plenty of match-winners in Ponting, Gilchrist, Michael Hussey, Symonds, Clarke and retiring fast bowler Glenn McGrath to again be the World Cup champions.

South Africa: Fielding may make difference

AFP, undated

Jonty Rhodes, once hailed as the world's best fielder, could be South Africa's secret weapon at the 2007 World Cup.

Since being appointed fielding coach six months ago, Rhodes has lifted the standard of South Africa's fielding to exceptional heights.

The involvement of Rhodes, who played in South Africa's previous four World Cups, is one reason why coach Mickey Arthur believes his team have left nothing to chance in their preparation.

South Africans have become used to being disappointed at the World Cup but Arthur believes 2007 could be different.

Each of South Africa's World Cup campaigns has ended in heartbreak, starting with a farcical end to the 1992 semifinal against England in Sydney when a tough but manageable target of 22 off 13 balls became an impossible 21 off one ball after a short rain break.

ing fielding, together with a long batting line-up packed with hard-hitting all-rounders.

The lack of a high-quality spinner is a concern but Arthur is confident that a seam-based attack can prosper in the Caribbean.

With five Super Eight matches – three in Guyana and two in Grenada – scheduled to be played on new pitches, Arthur has been gathering as much intelligence as he can. "Our information is that they will not be dissimilar to the pitches we have in South Africa," he says. "If that is the case, it will suit our bowling attack."

Shaun Pollock and Makhaya Ntini, who will share the new ball for South Africa, have played a crucial role in putting pressure on opponents by taking early wickets.

Depending on conditions, they will be followed by two of strike bowler Andre Nel and swing bowlers Andrew Hall and Charl Langeveld, with left-arm spinner Robin Peterson only likely to play if the pitch offers exceptional help to spinners.

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