

Symonds gives Australia boost

AFP, Sydney

Injured all-rounder Andrew Symonds has boosted Australia's World Cup cricket hopes by saying he could be available before the pool match against South Africa, reports said Thursday.

March 24, when Australia will play the new world number one team, was initially considered an optimistic return date for Symonds after he ruptured his biceps tendon in a one-day match against England last month.

But an assessment by a specialist last Friday has given Symonds hope that he could ease his way back into the side for a match against the Netherlands on March 18.

"I've been trying to get a bit of strength and bulk back into the muscle and I'm ahead of schedule," Symonds told The Sydney Morning Herald Thursday.

"I'm allowed to have a bat at the end of this week. I'm allowed to hit some tennis balls."

"I reckon, hopefully, I'll take part against South Africa. If not then a bat before that. But we just have to wait and see how it progresses."

Symonds said he was aware a premature return could permanently weaken his shoulder.

"It goes again, that will mean I can't throw like I used to," he said. "That's what we're trying to steer clear of, because hopefully I'll be playing a bit longer next season."

Captain Ricky Ponting said he was prepared to step in and stop Symonds risking further injury by playing prematurely at the World Cup.

Ponting is buoyed by Symonds' progress, but remains wary of risking long-term damage by snatching at a short-term jackpot.

"The only thing that is going to be hard is restraining him a little bit and making sure he doesn't get too far ahead of himself and do too much too early," Ponting told the Daily Telegraph before Wednesday's team departure for the Caribbean.

ICC's war against doping

AFP, Dubai

The International Cricket Council (ICC) will step up its battle against doping by target-testing players at the World Cup.

The game's governing body decided to take the extra steps after Pakistan pace duo Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif both tested positive for banned substances last year.

However, their bans were overturned and they were allowed to resume their careers.

Ironically, both men were withdrawn from the Pakistan World Cup squad on Thursday with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) insisting the decision was taken because the duo were injured.

"These target tests will be in addition to the ICC's commitment to randomly test four players -- two from each side -- in 17 of the tournament's 51 matches and may take place at any time from March 2 onwards, the start of the tournament's support period ahead of the warm-up matches," said an ICC statement on Thursday.

The ICC's decision to target test has been taken in the wake of Pakistan players Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif testing positive for banned substances last year.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) withdrew the two players from the ICC Champions Trophy in October as a result of those findings, which came about following internal tests prior to the tournament.

Cup format

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tied regardless of the number of wickets which have fallen. Each match comprises two sessions of 3-1/2 hours each with a 45-minute interval. First session 0930 - 1300, interval 1300 - 1345, second session 1345 - 1715.

If the start is delayed or play is suspended, the match can be extended by a maximum 30 minutes.

KEY INNOVATIONS

Powerplay -- Fielding restrictions when only two fielders are allowed outside the 30-metre circle surrounding the wicket with at least two in catching positions will be applied in three blocks totalling 20 overs.

The first powerplay of 10 overs automatically comes into force at the start of an innings. The fielding captain must then nominate two five-over spells when restrictions will apply.

Bowl-out -- Cricket's equivalent of soccer's penalty shootout if the semifinals or final end in a tie. Bowlers from opposing teams take turns to bowl at a set of three stumps. The team with the most hits after five deliveries each is the winner.

Full marks to Sylhet

SPORTS REPORTER



Sylhet spun to their second overall win in the Ispahani

Mirzapore Tea 8th National Cricket League yesterday but the remaining two matches ended in draws on the final day of the four-dayers.

Despite the 56-run victory, Sylhet stayed second from bottom in the six-team table but Dhaka, who enjoyed first-innings lead against table-toppers Rajshahi, closed in the gap.

Rajshahi extended their collection to 34 points while Dhaka are two points adrift with Chittagong, after their draw against Barisal, are a distant third (22 points).

Barisal and Khulna are level on 20 points and Khulna on 14.

SYLHET-KHULNA

Set to score 212 in the fourth innings, Khulna who resumed on 87-5, were bundled out for 155 at the Khulna Divisional Stadium.

The hosts lost three wickets in the space of eight runs to crash to 114-8 and never recovered despite Jamaluddin Babu's lone battle during a 152-ball 58.

Man-of-the-match Golam

Mawla was the peak of the spin trio with 3-17 from 13.5 overs.

DHAKA-RAJSHAHI

At Fatullah Stadium, Dhaka seemed to be satisfied with four points by virtue of first-innings lead as they did not go all out. The hosts, who began resumed the day on 203-7 with a handsome 268-run lead, ignored a declaration as stand-in captain Sajjad Kadir inched towards his second hundred of the match.

But man-of-the-match Sajjad remained not out on 91 as Dhaka were all out for 319, setting an improbable 384-run victory target for Rajshahi, who reached 81 for one in their second innings at close.

CHITTAGONG-BARISAL

The high scoring match at Chittagong Divisional Stadium ended in a dull draw as Chittagong, who scored a record 622-8 dec. in their first innings, rattled 222-3 at close of play in their second essay with Nazimuddin hammering exactly 100 not out in 131 deliveries. Opener Gazi Salahuddin, who made 165 in the first innings, made 74 in the second to win the man-of-the-match award.

Earlier, Barisal who were overnight 418-8, finished their first innings on 486.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SYLHET: 284 and 181.

KHULNA: 254 and 155 all out in 70.5 overs (Manirul 1, Imrul 1, Hasan 18, Nahidul 22, Manzurul 23, Jamaluddin 58, Fahim 10, extras 10, Rezaul 2-9, Sharif 1-27, Samad 1-38, Mawla 3-017, Kapali 2-50).

RESULT: Sylhet won by 56 runs.

DHAKA: 357 and 319 all out in 120 overs (Uttam 7, Rashedul 28, Anwar 54, Shamsur 36, Riyad 1, Shariful 39, Sajjad 91 n.o., Arafat 2, Rashedul 14, Talha 0, Azim 16, extras 31; Shahajada 1-36, Sumon 4-95, Mahbub 2-29, Naim 3-63).

Rajshahi: 292 and 81-1 in 21 overs (Zunaid 31, Rafiqul 23 n.o., Forhad 27 n.o., Talha 1-21).

RESULT: Match drawn.

CHITTAGONG: 622-8 dec and 222-3 (Salahuddin 74, Nafees 0, Nazim 100 n.o., Ehsanul 6, Faisal 29 n.o., extras 13, Ariful 1-35, Arman 1-65, Humayun 1-48).

BARISAL: 486 all out in 156.2 overs (Imran 177, Hannan 43, Raquib 11, Nayeem 10, Ali Arman 20, Raisul 0, Arafat 132, Humayun 12, Ariful 18, Shahin 33, tarigul 2 n.o., extras 28, Alamgir 1-53, Ashiqur 1-62, Sabbir 6-157, Ehsanul 1-61, Sunny 1-57, Ehsanul 1-71).

RESULT: Match drawn.

LOCAL SNIPS

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's International Masters Enamul Hossain Rajib and Abdullah Al Rakib were trailing joint leaders GM Tigran Petrosian (Armenia) and GM Darmen Sadvakasov (Kazakhstan) by one point after Thursday's fifth round in the Kolkata Open '07 Grandmaster Chess Tournament.

Rajib drew with India's Sethuraman while Rakib beat Indian IM Deep Sengupta at the Gorky Sadan to extend their collections to 3.5 points.

Fellow Bangladeshis Shakil and Debaraj won their matches against Indian opponents but GM Niaz Marshud, GM Ziaur Rahman and FM Mehdiz hasan Parag all lost their boards.

NATIONAL TT

Hasib and Bappi of Narail lifted the boys' doubles title in the Palic 28th National Table Tennis Championships when they outplayed fellow Narail pair Biplob and Rubel 11-5, 11-9, 11-7, 11-6 in the final at the Wooden floor Gymnasium.

Binam, meanwhile, prevented an all-ansars final in the mixed-doubles when Hamlet and Tumpa beat Mahbub and Rumi 4-3 in the semifinals. In the final, the Binam duo will face Ansars' Mostafa and Saleha, who eliminated teammates Munna and Soma 4-2 in the other semi.

TENNIS

Top-seed Malaysia recovered from the shock of a defeat to hosts Bangladesh in the previous round when they blanked Jordan 3-0 in the Junior Davis Cup Asia/Oceania zone pre-qualifiers at the Ramma Tennis Complex.

Singapore defeated Pakistan 2-1 in the other match.

In the Junior Fed Cup pre-qualifiers, Bangladesh suffered their second defeat when they crashed 3-0 to Singapore. Pakistan also lost their second game, conceding 2-0 to Sri Lanka.

DIVI CRICKET

Sadharan Bima and Orient Sporting Club collected full points in the Kai-Altech First Division Cricket League.

Orient handed Surjo Torun a seven-run defeat at the Dhamondi Cricket Stadium. In reply to Orient's 191-8 in the 43-over-a-side match, Surjo Torun skittled out for 183 in 42.1 overs.

In another rain-affected match at BKSP, Bima (203-4 in 35 overs), defeated CCS (172) by 31 runs.

405-RUN WIN

Kalatia High School achieved the record one-day total at any level in domestic cricket when they amassed 524-9 on their way to a 405-run win against Udayan High School at Kalindi ground. Sony scored 150 off 70 balls while Anzu made 104 for the winners, who bowled out their opponents for 119.

In other matches, Natun Jurain KM Mainuddin School beat Rajabari School by eight runs, Fairy's Faair International School beat Rising Sun School by six wickets while Rupnagar Adarsha School beat Shreshtha Munshi Abdur Rouf Rifles School by four wickets.

Result: Bangladesh won by 13 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Shakib Al Hasan.

Toss: Canada.

Umpires: R. Koertzen (RSA) and R. Dill (BER)

Match Referee: C. Lloyd.

AFP, London

England all-rounder Ravi Bopara has extended his contract with Essex through to the end of the 2009 season.

Bopara made his one-day international debut in the recent Commonwealth Bank Series in Australia when he played his part in an emphatic group stage victory over the hosts in Sydney.

And the 21-year-old will on Friday travel with England's one-day squad for the World Cup in West Indies.

"I didn't quite know what was going to be happening with my career a couple of months ago when I wasn't involved with England," Bopara told Essex's official website.

"But, since I've been involved with them, it's just made me want to stay with Essex forever."

"Hopefully I'll be playing for England more and more but I'm ready to stay at Essex for the rest of my career. This is where I love playing and where I always want to play."

Bopara scored 806 runs at 38.38 in the County Championship last season and took 19 wickets at 47.47. He was also a key figure in his county's NatWest Pro40 title success.

Secret of Sachin's

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order for India in recent times but remains the team's vice captain.

"This Indian side is giving me a very good feel," he said.

"Getting the right momentum will be a crucial factor. The team which can adapt to (the) wickets quickly will go ahead in the race."

India won the tournament in 1983 and were beaten finalists in South Africa in 2003.

They are in Group B with 1996 champions Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Bermuda.

Watch out for Nafees

AFP, New Delhi

Shahriar Nafees is not a big name in the world of cricket, but Ricky Ponting's all-conquering Australians will not easily forget left-handed opener.

Nafees treated the Australian attack in the opening home Test last year as if he was playing against a mediocre side, scoring a blistering 138 with 19 fours in a superb display of aggressive batting.

The attractive stroke-maker is the first Bangladeshi to score four centuries in one-day internationals and is expected to play a big role in his team's World Cup campaign in the Caribbean.

If he provides a brisk start, his team could give a scare or two to big teams. Bangladesh need to win at least two matches in Group B, comprising India, Sri Lanka and debutants Bermuda, to make it to the next round.

They have good middle-order batsmen in skipper Habibul Bashar, Aftab Ahmed and Mohammad Ashraful, but need fireworks from the openers to boost their chances.

Nafees has the shots to dominate any attack on his day, although he has been playing international cricket for only two years.

He has already shown it against Australia. His controlled aggression saw his team post 355 on the first day itself, an achievement of sort 75 against them in a tri-series match at Canterbury in 2005.

Nafees was 19 when he made his one-day and Test debuts in 2005. He initially struggled to capitalise on good starts, but learnt and improved with every match.

He solved half of Bangladesh's problems of finding an effective pair of openers with his consistency, especially last year.

Nafees looked a more confident batsman after his Test heroics against Zimbabwe at home last year in his team's 5-0 sweep, Bangladesh's first in one-day internationals.

Nafees was nominated for the International Cricket Council's "Emerging Player of the Year" award last year following his impressive show in Tests and one-dayers.

He was also named his country's "Cricket of the Year" in 2006, but his real test will be in the Caribbean.

His Test century against

sition's opening average balloons to 41.97.

And all too often he is not there with his career restricted by a series of crippling leg and back injuries.

The frustration tells.

"I want to play every game if I can, and hopefully I can get myself ready to do that," he said to the countdown to the World Cup.

"It (the pace) is still there," he said. "I don't think I've lost any pace from what I had. As I play more I'll get stronger and be able to maintain it."

Since his international debut five years ago, Bond has only been available for 59 OD