

Mahbub regains Nat'l TT title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Ansar swept concluding day's both events of the Palolic 28th National Table Tennis Championships yesterday at the Woodenfloor Gymnasium.

Khondokar Mahbub Billah regained the men's singles title when he came from behind to beat Biman's Edison 5-11, 11-9, 11-8, 11-7, 11-7 in the final. In the semifinal, Mahbub ousted his elder brother and outgoing champion Mostafa Billah.

Moumita Alam Rumi won an all-Ansars final to lift the women's singles title, beating her teammate Saleha 13-11, 4-11, 11-8, 13-11, 4-11, 11-6.

Adviser for LGRD and Cooperatives M Anwarul Iqbal distributed trophies as the chief guest. Managing Director of tournament sponsor Palolic Developers Ltd Khondakar Hasan Monir was present as special guest.

Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation also honoured ex-national champions, giving them crests.

Meanwhile, the federation has selected 18 players from 12 to 14 years groups for long-term training.

Debaraj shocks GM Oliver

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Grand Master Niaz Murshed and International Master Abdullah Al Rakib were level on four points after the 6th round of the Kolkata Open 07 Grandmasters Chess Tournament on Friday.

IM Enamul Hossain Rajib followed his compatriot pair with 3.5 points when he lost to Gopal of India.

GM Ziaur Rahman and FM Mehdi Hasan Parag had three points each.

Debaraj Chatterjee extended his collection to two points when he upset French GM Renent Oliver in a sixth round match.

In other matches, Niaz beat Wikramaditya, Zia defeated Sourav Kardeker and Parag beat Sai Krishna. Rakib drew with Tejas Baker and Shakil lost to WGM Nisha Mohta.

'Dravid picked Sehwa'

PTI, New Delhi

An out of form Virender Sehwa was selected in India's World Cup cricket squad only because captain Rahul Dravid insisted on his inclusion, chief selector Dilip Vengsarkar has disclosed.

Vengsarkar said the selectors had initially decided to leave out Sehwa but Dravid insisted on having the hard-hitting batsman in the ranks and they eventually agreed.

"I would always back the captain. When I was leading India, I never got the team I wanted and I didn't want Rahul to go through the same. He insisted on having Sehwa and that made the difference," he told Karan Thapar in CNN-IBN's "Devil's Advocate", to be telecast on Sunday.

Vengsarkar admitted Sehwa did not feature in the initial scheme of things for his prolonged run-drought but enjoyed backing from some quarters in the team.

"It was a bit of gamble (to have him in the side)...But I think he has done extremely well in the past. Besides, he has won a lot of matches for India. We are hoping that he would do well in the World Cup," he added.

Since taking over from Kiran More, Vengsarkar's tenure so far has seen return of the old guards and the former India captain insisted experience could not be done away with.

"It's important to have fresh legs in the field but the fact of the matter is that you need to win also. And for that you need experience," he explained.

Chappell's last

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internationals with results indicating an upward swing in the team's fortunes.

Of the 18 Tests, India have won seven and lost four with seven drawn. Of the 59 one-dayers, the team has won 31, lost 25 with three games ending in no-results.

"No one can convince me that Chappell has not done a good job so far," said former captain and respected TV commentator Ravi Shastri, who was part of the BCCI panel that interviewed the Australian in 2005.

"But will the BCCI retain him? Your guess is as good as mine."

Chappell, one of the finest batsmen of the modern era, retired in 1984 with 7,110 runs from 87 Tests at an average of 53.86 and 24 centuries, including two in his first and last matches.

He also scored 2,331 runs in 74 one-dayers and even though elder brother Ian Chappell was regarded a better captain, Greg won 21 of his 48 Tests as Australian skipper and lost only 13.



PHOTO: STAR

Singles champions Mahbub Billah (L) and Moumita Alam Rumi (R) pose with their national trophies with table tennis legend and Ansars official Zobera Rahman Linu at the WoodenFloor Gymnasium yesterday.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

The players' transfer for the 2007 Senior Division Football League will be held in the city from March 15-17.

During this period, the footballers will have to collect their tokens for Tk 400 and clearance certificate for Tk 100. The proceedings will be held from 5.30-8.30 pm at the Metropolis Football League Committee office at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

WOMEN'S CHESS

The Aromatic Gold National Women's Chess Championship will begin today at the Chess Federation hall-room. The numbers draw was held yesterday. A total of 12 players including defending champion and WIM Rani Hamid are participating in the meet.

SCHOOLS CRICKET

Nawabpur Government High

School put Scholars School under pile of runs to record a 333-run victory in the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School Cricket Tournament at the East End Club ground.

Khaja Khair smashed 95 off 76 balls as the winners amassed 420 in 47 overs and then Kurban Ali claimed five wickets for 36 to wrap up their opponents for 87 in 16.2 overs.

Our Gaibandha correspondent adds: South Kamarjani High School (158-7) defeated Gaibandha Police Line School (153-10) by three wickets at Gaibandha Stadium.

EXIM BANK HANDBALL

Scholastica won both their matches when they earned a hard-fought 12-10 victory over Dhaka Residential Model College and then defeated Notre Dame College by 12-5 in the Exim Bank inter-college men's handball competition.

In other matches, Dhaka

Imperial College beat Notre Dame College 19-10, Mirpur Government Bangla College outplayed RK Chowdhury Degree College 10-1 and Bir Sheshthra Abdur Rouf Rifles College beat BAF Shaheen College 17-9.

WC QUIZ

Grameenphone and Transcom Electronics will jointly organise the World Cup Quiz Competition 2007. An agreement was signed between the two corporate houses yesterday. The SMS quiz competition, which begins on February 26, will continue till the end of the Cricket World Cup. The highest correct SMS sender will win a ticket to watch the World Cup final match in the West Indies. There would be other attractive prizes too.

Johnston eyes win

AFF, Dublin

Trent Johnston has endured many things in his cricket life -- streakers on the pitch, armed robbers chased by police in the middle of a game and even suffering a broken elbow on his debut.

But nothing will come closer the challenge of leading out Ireland for their World Cup debut in the Caribbean.

The 32-year-old fast bowler dreamed of playing for his native Australia as a youngster growing up in New South Wales.

In grade cricket, he topped the wicket-taking lists for two seasons but was unable to translate that promise into consistent form for NSW for whom he made his debut in 1998.

He took just six wickets in five games and fell out with the authorities in Sydney.

However, Johnston was still a force in grade cricket, famously taking a hatrick in a game in 1999-2000 with one of his victims' former Australian Test opener Michael Slater.

He made his debut for Ireland in the 2004 C&G Trophy and was in charge at the recent dismal World Cricket League in Kenya where they won just one of five matches and finished second-bottom of the six-team competition.

Johnston believes Ireland has a good future in international cricket, but there are problems.

"Lack of exposure, lack of professionalism -- having said this Adi (coach Adrian Birrell) has brought the Irish squad to a new level. When I say lack of professionalism, I mean outside the team," said the skipper. The cure?

"Get more senior players involved in development. Something like Scotland has, they have four senior team players assigned to one area and they develop that area, this is where it starts -- grass roots."

Johnston has personal things to prove in the Caribbean. In seven one-dayers for Ireland, he has taken just two wickets at an average of 140 and his 114 runs with a highest score of 45.

United conquer

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Rauf will umpire England's opening World Cup match against New Zealand on 16 March.

Peter Parker and Billy Doctrove

will stand in their second group game against Canada two days later, with Parker and Koertzen appointed for England v Kenya on 24 March.

lition of Botham's middle stump (which contained the miniature TV camera) by McMillan, or some of Healy's catches behind the wicket, or Mushtaq's gooly to defeat Hick and Wasim Akram's wicked in-swinging to bowl Lewis in the final. Perversely, as in 1987, neither host nation won through to the final. Seriously stunned in 1987 by their loss to Australia in the semifinal at Lahore, Pakistan somehow lifted themselves in the 1992 tournament after having won only one of their first five matches. Handicapped by the absence through injury of their outstanding fast bowler, Waqar Younis, they were spurred on by their rarefied captain, Imran Khan. As far as bowling strategy went they played aggressively throughout -- and with the bat too, once the disciplined foundation had been laid. There was satisfaction in seeing the best two teams in the final, and, for the rare objective onlooker, a slight sadness that only one of them could triumph. For a month, the World Cup not only generated large profits but stirred many hearts and touched countless nerve-ends around the cricket world. Source: *CricInfo*

Then Scholes was red carded for swinging at (and missing) Alonso before O'Shea had the final say.

AFF, Sydney



Australian batsman Michael Clarke says he may have to bat in pain during the cricket World Cup because of a troublesome hip injury, reports here said Saturday.

The New South Wales right-hander has spent the past fortnight having treatment on a sore hip, which forced him home early from last month's Chappell-Hadlee one-day series in New Zealand.

"I've had a couple of batting sessions and I haven't been getting anywhere near as much pain, I should say," Clarke told the Daily Telegraph.

"So I'm feeling good. Fingers crossed. But I haven't done too much running, so I'll have to do a bit

of running over the next couple of days and see how it pulls up. But I'm pretty confident it's going to be fine."

Clarke is crucial to Australia's plans, particularly as the world champions, on a five-match losing streak, will be without all-rounder Andrew Symonds (torn bicep) for the first month and most likely opener Matthew Hayden (broken toe) for the two practice matches in St Vincent in the Caribbean.

Clarke, 25, plays a key role at number four, where his responsibilities will range from steadying the side after the loss of early wickets to maintaining a high tempo if Australia unleashes an early offensive.

His form was patchy through the home tri-series against England and New Zealand, and a more consistent campaign will be needed on the slow Caribbean

injuries kept Chigumbura sidelined through most of 2005 but he came back to pass the 1,000 runs mark in 53 ODIs and he has an average of just over 25. He has top scored 77 twice.

In trying to model himself on Chris Cairns of New Zealand and on England's Freddie Flintoff, Chigumbura has tried to hone the art of controlled power, even though he looks so slight.

"I have always been a naturally aggressive player, though I have often been inhibited by a bad team situation," he said.

"But I try not to be just a slogger. I use technique instead to get the ball back mainly over the bowler or the off-side field.

"I used to just lash out, but I have now learned that it doesn't pay. I would get out early too often and that was bad for the team, especially

AFF, Harare



For a batsman to smash seven sixes in short order off Bangladesh in his last innings and then remark that he hopes to

play more big innings against Australia, Elton Chigumbura is a Zimbabwean to be reckoned with. His maximum boundaries off Habibul Bashar's team on their recent tour were all over the bowler's head or were still rising when they passed over mid-on, disappearing high into the stands.

Chigumbura's talents were spotted early on.

He secured a Zimbabwe Cricket Union scholarship to one of Harare's top high schools Churchill, where his skills were nurtured.

During the Under-19 Cup finals in 2004, he struck a maiden half-century off Australia in only his sixth

international match; with the ball he took four wickets in a seven-wicket victory by Zimbabwe's youngsters over the mighty Aussies.

He's one of only four Kenyan players to have passed the 400-run mark for his country in World Cup matches and has signalled a comeback.

Ravindu Shah is not only a gifted batsman but the right-hander has a knack for scoring runs on the big competitive stage and he relishes a return to the World Cup, eight years after featuring in the run-getters list headed by the current Indian skipper Rahul Dravid in the 1999 World Cup in England.

Only three months ago, the 34-year-old star batsman was not sure whether he would be fit enough to play cricket let alone be selected for his third World Cup appearance after being sidelined for over two years with a serious knee injury.

Shah puts his strengths down to a positive mind and dedication to the game that kept him going through the hard times.

"I get inspired by new chal-

lenges," said Shah, who signalled his return to international cricket during the one-day triangular series in Mombasa in January.

"I am hungry to score runs again at the top," he added.

Shah made an unbeaten 113 for his maiden ODI century against Scotland as Kenya also made a winning return in the series where minnows Canada were also involved.

A regular opener for Kenya, Shah has dropped a place down to third place in the batting order since his return and is likely to partner skipper Steve Tikolo to add more depth in the middle in the Caribbean.

Since making his breakthrough in 1998, Shah's strokeplay has over the years oozed with class. He has scored 1425 runs in the 53 matches he has featured averaging 27.94.

That included a brilliant 46 against Australia in the Super Six stage of the 2003 World Cup at Kingsmead.

Shah said he was disappointed about the lack of international exposure for Kenyans, saying that players like him are passing the

prime of the lives having played so few internationals compared to other players from the Test-playing nations.

"When you compare the Australians on how much they have played and how much we have played there is a big difference," he said.

"By the time this players reach 35, 34 or 33 they would have played nearly 300 to 400 ODIs but when you look at the Kenyan team we started at the same time 10 years ago and we have played between 60 to 70 matches. I believe we still have a lot of cricket in us," he told AFP.

Shah, who toured the West Indies with the Kenya team in 2004, said he expected tough and challenging conditions in the Caribbean but believes the Kenyans have an advantage to have an insider in Roger Harper, the former West Indies allrounder as coach.

Cricket runs deep in the Shah family. Ravindu's father played school and club cricket as his two elder brothers -- one of whom went on to play for EastAfrica.

Following the matches may not get what they expected.

"What the world expects is much more than cricket," he said. "They expect passion, they expect excitement."

"They expect good security, hassle-free travel, and very little trouble to get into the venue, along with the social events around the cricket, with the region's indigenous music being the mainstay."

Warner also bemoaned there was not even a village to promote the island's very popular and colourful Carnival, or a calypso tent only days after the end of T and T's annual Carnival celebrations.

"The world expects to see other things as well, but will their expectations be fulfilled?"

Warner, a native of Trinidad and Tobago, also listed a number of organisational shortcomings, and warned that the world expected the Caribbean to fail at hosting the event.

"They expect us in the Caribbean to fail," he told a symposium in Trinidad for Caribbean sports correspondents.

"They already know that we will fail on the field. They have already predicted that. They also want us to fail off the field."

"One bad experience can make the whole event go sour. We need to be on guard. What the world expects is to see a flaw in our organisation to say: I told you so, those natives can't do it."

"CWC 2007 was thrust upon us. Some of the islands should not be hosting matches. Their monies should have been spent to make life better for their people."

Warner expressed concern that the thousands of visitors who will be in the Caribbean and the millions

of running over the next couple of days and see how it pulls up. But I'm pretty confident it's going to be fine."

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