

Tharanga ton goes in vain

AFP, Bridgetown

Upul Tharanga hit a majestic century but couldn't stop Sri Lanka from slipping to an 18-run defeat against New Zealand in their final World Cup warm-up on Friday.

Chasing a victory target of 286, Tharanga hit 10 fours and two sixes in his 106 off 112 balls.

New Zealand desperately needed victory after suffering an embarrassing two-wicket defeat to Bangladesh on Tuesday but they were a far more formidable outfit against Sri Lanka.

Lou Vincent (70) and skipper Stephen Fleming (65) shared an opening stand of 131 in 24 overs for New Zealand, with Peter Fulton adding 58.

The Black Caps were able to consolidate the start given them by their openers with the later batsmen adding 78 off the final 10 overs.

Sanath Jayasuriya and Chaminda Vaas were rested by Sri Lanka while off-spinner Daniel Vettori was kept on the sidelines by New Zealand.

Most worrying for Sri Lanka was the poor form of master spinner Muttiah Muralidaran who conceded 64 runs off his 10 overs for the return of just one wicket.

That was Ross Taylor who was out for 30.

BRIEF SCORES

NEW ZEALAND: 285-8 in 50 overs (Vincent 70, Fleming 65, Fulton 59, Malina 2-26)

SRI LANKA: 267 all out in 48.2 overs (Tharanga 106, Silva 40, Oram 2-26)

Result: New Zealand won by 18 runs.



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan batsman Younis Khan miscues a sweep shot as South Africa wicketkeeper Mark Boucher (R) looks on during their WC warm-up match at the UWI ground in Port-of-Spain on Friday.

'Watch out for Tait'

AFP, Kingstown



Australia captain Ricky Ponting believes fast bowler Shaun Tait can be the reigning champions' ace card during the World Cup.

Tait took four for 33 in Australia's five-wicket win against arch-rivals England in the teams' final warm-up match ahead of the start of the first Caribbean World Cup on Tuesday.

"Today (Friday) he showed everybody just how effective he can be -- and it's not the first time he's done that.

"If he gets everything right and bowls the way he can bowl he's not only a wicket-taker but a very good container throughout the middle of the innings.

"For Shaun, whose relatively new to international cricket, to take four wickets against England is something that will help him out throughout this tournament."

Tait too was understandably pleased with his haul.

"To take 'four' was probably just what I needed," he said.

"I've been a little bit disappointed with some of the games I've played for Australia in the last few weeks but today (Friday) I was quite happy. But whether I am the spearhead is another story."

"One of my strengths is swinging it with the new ball and I suppose Ricky wants me to open up at the start and jag a wicket. If I can do that, I've done my job."

But Ponting kept his bowlers and the media guessing by saying Australia hadn't settled on an attack to face Scotland in their first

last two wickets as Australia, World Cup winners in 1999 and 2003, bowled England out for 197.

"I sat down and had a bit of chat with Shaun about how he can be best used," Ponting explained.

"Today (Friday) he showed everybody just how effective he can be -- and it's not the first time he's done that.

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Group A match in St Kitts on Wednesday.

"We've got a bit of talking to do, a bit of discussion. We've got a few ways we could go."

Another player making a strong bid for a starting place was all-rounder Shane Watson, who made 55 in an opening stand of 140 with Adam Gilchrist (72).

Although Matthew Hayden (broken toe), if fit, is set to resume his successful first-wicket partnership with fellow left-hander Gilchrist against Scotland, Ponting said a place could yet be found for Watson even though the Queenslander had a talent for opening.

"I think his game is best suited to the top of the order. He drives the ball down the ground and cuts it and pulls it as good as anybody going around."

"At the same time, he's a strong guy so if we can get him in during the right situations, with wickets in hand towards the end of the innings he can clear the rope for us as well."

Ponting, one of the world's leading batsmen only made two (against Zimbabwe) and seven in Australia's two warm-up matches but said he was unconcerned by his own form.

"Hopefully, when the bigger games come round, I can get some runs. I'm not too concerned."

India crush

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And the left-arm struck when Watson cut to Pietersen at backward point.

Five balls later 140 for one became 140 for two when Gilchrist's glance off Sajid Mahmood was well caught by diving keeper Paul Nixon.

But it was all too late for England.

After Vaughan won the toss, Irish-born left-hander Ed Joyce (five) was plumb lbw to a rapid inswinging yorker from fast bowler Tait.

But, from six for one, Vaughan and Bell fought back.

Vaughan's hamstring injury, which meant he only played three matches during his side's victorious tri-series campaign in Australia, did not appear to trouble him when running between wickets.

However, although England coach Duncan Fletcher had said Vaughan would field for "20-30 overs", the skipper left the field after 17.

Result: Australia won by 5 wickets.

David still backing Sehwag

AFP, Daniel Town

India captain Rahul Dravid insisted he still had confidence in struggling Virender Sehwag despite the dashing opener suffering another miserable failure with the bat.

Sehwag was out for nought as India completed an easy nine-wicket win over India in their final World Cup warm-up here on Friday, a performance which will have his critics sharpening their knives for a man who has made just 273 runs in his last 15 one-dayers.

"He missed out and we would like him to get more runs," said Dravid.

"He's a player who has done well here in the past. Virender will have a big role to play here in the tournament and hopefully he will fire and be a dangerous cricketer."

But Dravid, who has consistently stood by Sehwag, added that India would not be afraid to use other options at the World Cup.

"We have the option of four guys who can open the batting. Sourav Ganguly, Sehwag, Robin Uthappa and Sachin Tendulkar -- they have all opened the batting, and some have done it for longer than others," he said.

"We have the options, and we just have to see who is in form, who is playing well, what the combination of the team is, and what the pitches are like before we decide what is the best combination for the side at the time."

"It's nice to have some flexibility and people who can bat in various positions for us, but our plans have always been dependent on what is the situation."

Platini backs

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The new UEFA president added: "We need to eradicate violence in stadiums, by removing people that don't belong there."

"I don't have the means to do this, but I do, however, have the means to convince people who do have the means to do something about it."

The planned measure comes in a bid to eradicate the kinds of violence which saw an Italian policeman die during a Serie A derby game between Palermo and Catania and also recent clashes between fans and police in both the French and German leagues.

A long way

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history which has dictated that no host country has ever won a World Cup.

The way in which the tournament has been set up means it will be a major shock if the world's leading eight Test nations don't make it through to the second phase Super Eights where points won against fellow qualifiers will be carried through.

By including two minnows per qualifying group, the ICC risks some dreadful mismatches to add to the bad publicity the tournament has already received for hugely inflated hotel prices, a consequence of staging it in the Caribbean during the height of the tourist season.

Rates of 500 US dollars a night are not uncommon for the most ordinary of hotels.

There are also concerns regarding the long-term viability of expensive new stadia that have been built.

Around 260 million dollars has been spent on either building new venues or refurbishing existing ones at 12 different sites.

The World Cup officially opens in Jamaica on Sunday with hosts West Indies meeting Pakistan in the first game on Tuesday.

Result: Pakistan won by seven wickets.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Kalatia High School thrived on two half-centuries by Sunny and Sabbir to secure a massive 125-run win over Rupnagar Adarsha High School in the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School tournament yesterday.

Sunny smashed 65 and Sabbir chipped in with 56 as Kalatia piled up 273 in 43.5 overs at the Dhupkhola Jagannath University ground. In reply, Rupnagar Adarsha were all out for 148 in 38.3 overs.

In the other matches, West End High School (165-4) thrashed National Bank Public School (163-10) by six wickets at the Kalindi Cricket ground and Khilaq Government High School (173-6) defeated Mohammadi Molla (168-10) by four wickets at the East End Club ground.

Our correspondent adds: Manikganj Government High School shot out Model High School for 30 runs to secure a massive 10-wicket victory at their own ground.

JFA CUP

Shahedul Alam slammed a hattrick as Chittagong outplayed Khulna 7-0 to become Group B champions in the JFA Cup Under-15 Football Championship at the Bangladesh Army Stadium.

Besides Shahedul's four goals, Mohan Paul, Mohammad Syed and Jubel Hossain netted one each for the winners.

In the day's other match, Sirajganj managed a solitary victory over Kishoreganj but still their opponents reached the semifinal. Momin netted the all-important goal.

Chittagong, Kishoreganj and Sirajganj finished with six points

each in Group B but the first two teams booked the last four places with better goal difference.

Group A champions Dhaka will play against Kishoreganj in the first semifinal and Chittagong take on BKSP in the other semifinal tomorrow at the same venue.

NATIONAL WOMEN CHESS

IWM

Rani Hamid and Sharmin Sultanah Shirin maintained their all-win record in the 28th Aromatic National Women's Chess Championship when they won their respective sixth round boards at the federation hall-room yesterday.

Shamima Akter Liza followed the leaders with 4.5 points.

In the sixth round, Rani beat Masuda Begum and Shirin beat Sultana Liza, Liza beat Mahmuda Haque Chowdhury, Nazrana Khan beat Mimi Arjuman, while Kishwara Shajrin beat Farjana Hossain.

FRIENDLY CRICKET

Eastern Bank Limited beat Standard Chartered Bank by seven wickets in a friendly cricket match at the Old DOHS ground yesterday.

EBL reached their target of 184 runs quite comfortably with 31 balls to spare, thanks to an all-round performance from former national player Mahmud Hasan Rana.

Batting first, SCB scored 182 in 35 overs with Chapal (44) and Shabbir (34) taking charge. Rana and Pappa took three wickets each and Talha chipped in with two wickets.

Rana starred with the bat as well as he struck 61 while Toufiq scored 50. Saadulah chipped in with 12. For SCB, Faruque and Touhid took a wicket each.

SCHOOL HANDBALL

Basantek High School dumped

Playen 15-0 in the boy's event of the 16th Bata School Handball tournament at the Dhanmondi Women Sports Complex.

In the other matches, Mirpur Bangla High School defeated Aga Khan School 8-2 and Scholastica beat Wills Little Flower School 10-5.

In the girls' event, Aga Khan edged past Play Pen 2-1, BIS blanked Dhamondi Tutorial 7-0, Bhasanteek High School beat Ispahani Girls School 5-2, Bir Sheshtha Munshi Abdur Rauf Rifles School beat Aga Khan 2-1 and Scholastica beat Playen 6-1.

The semifinals will take place today.

ANNUAL SPORTS

The annual sports of Dr Maleka College held at the Kalabagan Krira Chakra ground.

A total of 120 participants took part in 22 events.

FIRST DIV CRICKET

Abul Hossain hit 84 as Sadharan Bima registered a 22-run win over Orient Sporting Club in the Kait-Altech First Division League at the Dhaka University ground.

Oriental were bundled out for 155 in 39 overs in reply to Bima's 177 in 49.4 overs.

In the day's other matches, Rupali Bank (242-8) defeated Dhamondi Club (211-10) by 31 runs at BKSP while Uttara Sporting Club (197-9) secured an exciting one-wicket victory over Azad Sporting Club (196-9) at the Dhamondi Cricket Stadium.

Hafeez delights Inzy

AFP, Port of Spain



ICC Cricket World Cup

WEST INDIES 2007

Pakistan have found a surprise match-winner in opener Mohammad Hafeez, who played a crucial role in his team's two successive victories in the World Cup warm-up matches.

Hafeez