

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, Malinga 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.

The 24-year-old South Australia quick has only played four one-day internationals since making his debut last month against England in Sydney.

That debut match, where he took two for 68 in 10 overs, revived concerns about Tait's ability to keep the runs down but Ponting was in no doubt the tyro could be both a wicket-taker and a container.

Against England, Tait unsettled captain Michael Vaughan and got rid of the Yorkshire batsman's opening partner Ed Joyce, with a superb inswinging yorker for a nailed-on lbw against the Irish-born left-hander.

"He got the ball reversing and he's certainly going to be a threat," said Vaughan.

Tait then dismissed dangerman Kevin Pietersen before taking the

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.

"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 for' 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

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 he 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."

Dravid 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 even 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.

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 Khilgaon Government High School (173-6) defeated Mohammadpur Government High School (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 hatrick 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 goal 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 Sultana 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 Zakia Sultana, 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 Mahmudul Hasan Rana.

Batting first, SCB scored 182 in 35 overs with Chapal (44) and Shabbir (34) taking charge. Rana and Pappu 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. Saadullah chipped in with 12. For SCB, Faruque and Tuhid took a wicket each.

SCHOOL HANDBALL

Bhasantek High School dumped

Playpen 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 Dhanmondi Tutorial 7-0, Bhasantek High School beat Ispahani Girls School 5-2, Bir Sheshthra Munshi Abdur Rauf Rifles School beat Aga Khan 5-2 and Scholastica beat Playpen 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 Kai-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 Dhanmondi 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 Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

Hafeez delights Inzy

AFP, Port of Spain



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 followed his 61 in the opening practice game against Canada with an attractive 49 in his team's seven-wicket victory over South Africa, promising to solve Pakistan's problems of finding an effective opener.

He put his team on the right track against Graeme Smith's South Africans here on Friday as he shared a 68-run stand for the second wicket with Younis Khan, who top-scored with a stylish 79.

Pakistan skipper Inzamamul Haq was all praise for Hafeez, saying it served the team better whenever a top-order batsman scored at a brisk pace.

"Hafeez is in form and he is the key member of the team. He is now looking forward to the main competition. It always helps when a top-

order batsman scores briskly," said Inzamam.

Pakistan faced no difficulty in surpassing South Africa's modest total of 199, with Younis, Hafeez and Mohammad Yousuf (48 not out) all gaining batting practice ahead of their opening World Cup clash against the West Indies in Jamaica on Tuesday.

Inzamam said the team's confidence was sky-high after two consecutive wins.

"There is a lot of confidence in the team and they are looking forward to the main tournament after morale-boosting performances," he said.

"Yes, people don't have high expectations from Pakistan, so there is less pressure. But at the same time, the team have to come out and perform to the best of their ability."

The Pakistani captain conceded the conditions were difficult for batting in the morning session when the track was wet.

South Africa could manage just 199, with Loots Bosman top-scoring with a solid 53.

"The conditions were difficult for the team that batted first and there was a bit of concern," he said.

When asked whether the pitches in the World Cup would favour sub-continental sides, he said: "It is the quality of cricket and not the state of the wicket that matters."

"Teams have to come out and perform to the best of their ability and adapt to any kind of situation."

Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer said he was satisfied with his team's performances in both warm-up games.

"I think we are fortunate that everyone got the much-needed practice," he said.

"All top six batsmen have got good practice. As far as the win goes, since it was 13-a-side match, we do take it with a pinch of salt. We now need to win the main matches."

He hoped his team would keep the momentum going in the main competition.

"This is the World Cup, a big stage and everyone has to perform. Our team have done well in practice matches, but we have to maintain that intensity and the aggression throughout the tournament," said Woolmer.

SAARC car rally from Mar 15

PTI, New Delhi

About 140 people from the South Asian region will have the experience of a lifetime as they get the opportunity to visit seven member countries of the SAARC, making up about a fifth of the world's population, as part of a unique expedition.

The SAARC Car Rally, which starts on March 15 in Bangladesh, will take participants on a merry journey through India, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka before ending at Male in the Maldives on April 14.

The rally, a brainchild of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who suggested that such an event be conducted in the lead-up to the 14th SAARC summit in New Delhi on April 3 and 4, will cover a distance of over 8,200 km by road through varying terrain and will involve participants from eight countries and around 30 vehicles.

There will also be participants from Afghanistan, to be ratified as the eighth SAARC member at the summit, and its representatives in the rally.

The proposal, brought at the 13th SAARC summit in Dhaka in 2005, was approved by other member countries and will be conducted on the lines of the ASEAN Car Rally held in 2004.

The participants can savour the contrasting terrain that South Asia offers -- be it the hills in Nepal and Bhutan or the beaches of Sri Lanka and the Maldives. The larger countries -- India, Pakistan and Bangladesh -- will have their own ways of attracting tourists.

The motto of the sojourn is 'Connecting People, Strengthening Ties' and it is co-organised by the Ministry of External Affairs, Confederation of Indian Industry, the member states of SAARC and the SAARC Secretariat.

Rumi's 4th death anniversary today

SPORTS REPORTER

The fourth death anniversary of Masud Ahmed Rumi, an eminent sports journalist and freedom fighter, will be observed today.

A milad mahafil and Quran khwani will be held at the Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA) premises.

The renowned sports journalist Rumi died of cardiac arrest on March 11, 2003.

He was 56.

Bookies

FROM PAGE 17 de Villiers and Australia's Michael Clarke will score most runs with odds of 5/1.

Australia's Nathan Bracken is a favourite to take the most wickets with odds of 9/4, followed by West Indies Jerome Taylor and Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga with odds of 7/2.

Oddschecker.com tips Jamaica and St. Lucia with 25/19 as the grounds that will generate most runs followed by Antigua with 17/12.

Punters have not ruled out the three sub-continent powerhouses, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, all former winners of the World Cup, from lifting the Cup, with odds of 9/4.

But are there takers for bets on Canada or Ireland with odds of 2500/1 to lift the trophy?

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fluent 48 not out. He put on 100 for the third wicket with Younis.

"I am delighted that all my batsmen and bowlers have got some good practice. This is an ideal time to enter the main competition," said Pakistan skipper Inzamamul Haq.

"Definitely, the (batting) conditions were not good in the first innings. A few balls did cause some problems. Batting first was difficult."

South Africa were not so fortunate as their batting left a lot to be desired in the second successive match. They managed just 192 against debutants Ireland in their opening game after being reduced to 91-8 at one stage.

They failed to solve their batting problems against Pakistan as only

Earlier, Vaughan went to a 55-ball fifty with seven fours before Bell completed his in 72 balls with five boundaries.

The breakthrough Australia wanted came when Bell, lured down the pitch by Hogg's 'wrong-un', was stumped by Gilchrist to leave England 122 for two in the 26th over before Vaughan cut the former postman to Watson at point.

Australia begin the tournament proper against Scotland in St Kitts on Wednesday in a Group A also featuring South Africa and the Netherlands.

England face fellow Group C heavyweights New Zealand in St Lucia a week Friday before playing Canada and Kenya.

BRIEF SCORES

ENGLAND: 197 all out in 48.3 overs (Vaughan 62, Bell 56; Tait 4-33, Clark 3-16)

AUSTRALIA: 200-5 in 40.5 overs (Gilchrist 72, Watson 55; Panesar 1-16)

Result: Australia won by 5 wickets.

India crush

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for six off Zaheer Khan.

Then Chris Gayle was caught behind for the same score off the first ball of the next over bowled by Ajit Agarkar.

Lara came to the crease and added 39 for the third wicket with Ramnaresh Sarwan, but his dismissal in the 14th over, caught and bowled to Pathan, triggered a catastrophic batting collapse that disappointed the stadium which was half-filled with scores of eager West Indies fans.

The hosts lost their last eight wickets for 29 runs in the space of 71 deliveries.

India have been drawn with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Bermuda in Group B of the World Cup in Trinidad.

West Indies tackle Pakistan, Zimbabwe, and Ireland in Group D to be contested at Sabina Park in the Jamaica capital, Kingston.

BRIEF SCORES

WEST INDIES: 85 all out in 25.5 overs (Lara 22, Patel 4-10, Pathan 3-26)

INDIA: 86-1 in 18.3 overs (Uthappa 35, Karthik 38, Powell 1-22)

Result: India won by nine wickets.

Younis buries pitch fears

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Loots Bosman gave a good account of himself with a solid 53 against the pace-spin combination.

Pakistani seamers Mohammad Sami and Umar Gul, and off-spinners Hafeez and Shoib Malik grabbed two wickets apiece.

South Africa's total owed much of its substance to Bosman, who defied the Pakistani bowlers with a sensible 57-ball knock which included one six and four boundaries.

South Africa's hopes of gaining valuable batting practice ahead of the World Cup suffered a setback when they lost openers Smith and AB de Villiers with just five runs on the board.

They were reeling at 27-3 when Herschelle Gibbs departed after making 11, but Jacques Kallis (29)

and Ashwell Prince (35) steadied the innings with a 66-run stand for the fourth wicket.

Bosman held the innings together after early blows, but South Africa's final total was too small to put pressure on Pakistan.

South Africa are in Group A with Australia, the Netherlands and Scotland, while Pakistan are in Group D with the West Indies, Ireland and Zimbabwe. The top two sides from each group will advance to the next Super Eight stage.

BRIEF SCORES SOUTH AFRICA: 199 all out in 48.3 overs (Bosman 53, Prince 35; Sami 2-13)

PAKISTAN: 200-3 in 44.2 overs (Younis 79 not out, Hafeez 49; Langeveldt 1-21)

Result: Pakistan won by seven wickets.