

NZ win boosts Bangladesh's confidence

AFP, Port of Spain

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar says an upset victory over New Zealand in a recent warm-up match has boosted his team's confidence ahead of the World Cup.

"The boys are confident after that match and we are hoping to provide more upsets along the way," Bashar said here on Tuesday.

Bangladesh pulled off the only stunning victory of the warm-up games last week when they beat Stephen Fleming's Black Caps by two wickets at Bridgetown in Barbados.

They maintained their clean record by hammering non-Test-playing nation Scotland in the second and final practice match, with Bashar leading the way with an unbeaten half-century.

Bangladesh open their Cup campaign against 1983 champions India at the Queen's Park Oval here on Saturday. Other teams in Group B are 1996 winners Sri Lanka and debutants Bermuda.

The top two sides will qualify for the next Super Eight stage.

Bangladesh have defeated both India and Sri Lanka in one-day internationals, but just once. They lacked consistency to beat big sides on regular basis in the past.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



Did U Know?

The first 30 Tests played from 1877-88 were only between England and Australia. The 31st Test in 1889 saw the advent of South Africa being the third nation to play Test cricket.



BTv & SET Max

ICC World Cup 2007
Australia v Scotland
Live at 7:30 pm
Kenya v Canada
Live at 7:30 pm

ESPN

English Premier Football League
Aston Villa v Arsenal
Live at 1:30 am (Thursday)

STAR Sports

English Premier Football League
Man City v Chelsea
Live at 1:55 am (Thursday)



Inzamamul Haq

(Pakistan cricket captain)

"I see that as I'm nearing the end of my cricketing career, I'd like to feel that my responsibility lies in the way that I try and win this Cup for Pakistan."



B League

Rahmatganj v Arambagh (5:00 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

National Cricket League
Day Three (Four-Day)
Rajshahi v Chittagong

Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium
Dhaka v Khulna

Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium



PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan fast bowler Umar Gul is over the moon after taking the wicket of West Indies opener Chris Gayle in the opening World Cup match at Sabina Park in Kingston on Tuesday.

Aussies begin title defence

AFP, Basseterre



against minnows Scotland here on Wednesday.

Plagued by injuries to key players, the two-time defending champions lost five matches in a row last month which meant they were deposed as world number-one by South Africa for the first time since rankings were introduced five years ago.

But the Australians bounced back impressively last week by winning both of their warm-up matches, including a clinical five-wicket win over arch-foes England.

Captain Ricky Ponting stressed his team is in the Caribbean to win.

"We are here to win whoever we play. We want to win every game that we play, and that's the way we train, and we prepare," said Ponting.

Opener Matthew Hayden (toe) and middle-order batsman Michael Clarke (hip) appear to have fully recovered from injuries, while late arrival Adam Gilchrist showed early form in the warm-up match against England with an explosive 72.

In what should be a hugely one-sided contest on Wednesday, Australia can still afford to miss explosive all-rounder Andrew Symonds who is facing a race against time to recover from arm surgery for the crucial Group A match against South Africa on March 24.

The fourth team in the group is the Netherlands. The top two teams will qualify for the next round Super Eights.

Ponting is also confident his team can overcome bowling problems where Shaun Tait will be looked upon to supply the raw pace in the absence of the injured Brett Lee.

"The other day Tait stepped up in the practice game against England and took 4-33 and with the way he bowls, these conditions will be able to help him out at different times so hopefully he can step into Brett's shoes," Ponting said.

"There will be a good opportunity for Mitchell Johnson and Stuart Clark and those guys to put their hand up as well in Brett's absence. I think the beauty of our squad at the moment is our flexibility."

Scotland, who featured in the 1999 World Cup held in England, earned their second chance to play on the biggest stage by winning the ICC Trophy in Ireland in 2005.

Their coach, Peter Drinnen, realises the enormity of the task in hand, but is not ruling out an upset.

"If we can take early wickets, which I'm sure we can with the way we've been bowling, we might set a few nerves jangling and cause the likes of Australia and South Africa a few problems," he said.

"Anything can happen in a one-day match and if we get it together we are going to be very dangerous even against Australia," said the 39-year-old former Queensland wicketkeeper.

Scotland have plenty of experience in their side, with 37-year-old all-rounder Dougie Brown, who played nine one-day internationals for England, and his Warwickshire teammate Navdeep

Poonia, in their ranks.

Pace bowler John Blain and all-rounder Gavin Hamilton, another former England player, are others who can be handy for their team.

The two countries have only met once before with Australia achieving a six-wicket win in the 1999 World Cup.

SQUAD

AUSTRALIA (from): Ricky Ponting (captain), Adam Gilchrist, Nathan Bracken, Michael Clarke, Brad Haddin, Matthew Hayden, Brad Hodge, Brad Hogg, Michael Hussey, Mitchell Johnson, Glenn McGrath, Andrew Symonds, Shaun Tait, Shane Watson, Stuart Clarke

SCOTLAND (from): Craig Wright (captain), John Blain, Dougie Brown, Gavin Hamilton, Majid Haq, Paul Hoffmann, Douglas Lockhart, Ross Lyons, Neil McCallum, Dewald Nel, Navdeep Poonia, Glenn Rogers, Colin Smith, Ryan Watson, Fraser Watts

Umpires: Steve Bucknor (West Indies) and Asoka de Silva (Sri Lanka).

Bookies against Australia and England!

AFP, London

One of Britain's leading bookmakers is hoping anyone other than England or Australia wins the Cricket World Cup.

William Hill has estimated that more than 100 million pounds will be gambled on the World Cup.

"Considering England's recent on-off form it might surprise people that England are our worst result and it is very much a case of anyone but England or Australia," said Hill's spokesman Rupert Adams.

The West Indies are the 8/11 favourites to beat Pakistan in Tuesday's opening match in Jamaica with Pakistan at even money.

Hills have also opened a book on which England player will be the first to score a six, and make Kevin Pietersen their 2/1 favourite.

England open their World Cup campaign against New Zealand, the other Test nation in Group C, at the Beausejour Cricket Ground in St Lucia on Friday.

Reigning champions Australia, going for an unprecedented hat-trick of titles, are 3/1 favourites to win the World Cup with England some way down the list at 9/1.

An Anglo-Australian final is a 12/1 chance, with a clash between Australia and South Africa, currently top of the International Cricket Council's one-day rankings, a 5/1 favourite.

The World Cup final takes place in Barbados on April 28.

World Cup odds (William Hill): 3/1 Australia, 5/1 South Africa, 7/1 Sri Lanka, 7/1 India, 9/1 England, 10/1 Pakistan, 10/1 New Zealand, 100/1 Bangladesh, 250/1 Zimbabwe, 350/1 Kenya, 750/1 Scotland, 750/1 Ireland, 1000/1 Netherlands, 1000/1 Canada, 2000/1 Bermuda.

Spin may turn World Cup

AFP, Gros Islet



Just about the one thing captains at the World Cup seem to be agreed on is that pitches will generally be slow and

assist spin bowlers.

Last week both England skipper Michael Vaughan and Australia captain Ricky Ponting talked up the tournament prospects of their frontline left-arm spinners, Monty Panesar and Brad Hogg respectively.

England are now in St Lucia, where they begin their World Cup programme proper against fellow Group C giants New Zealand at the island's Beausejour ground on Friday.

And according to groundsman Kent Crafton, who has been at Beausejour since the venue opened five years ago, the teams here can look forward to good one-day cricket wickets rather than slow turners.

"One thing we've tried to do is put more compaction into the clay (the base layer of the pitch) to increase the pace and bounce," Crafton told AFP.

"That will aid in the ball probably coming in with some more pace, not expressly, but just a little bit more than normal, which will aid in more runs being scored."

"It will be good wicket, I would not say it will be an exceptionally fast pitch but the ball will come off nicely. We've had very good opening partnerships here."

Another concern is that, with many World Cup matches set to be

played on recently re-laid pitches, batting will get harder as the match progresses.

However, research carried out by Britain's Sunday Times newspaper has said that most games in the Caribbean are won by the team batting second.

Crafton does not believe that the toss will be significant in St Lucia.

"The wicket will not change much from during the morning until the afternoon. I don't believe the toss will matter so much. If it's cloudy, maybe you'd want to bowl first."

The average one-day international score in 16 innings at Beausejour is 244 with Pakistan's 303 for six against West Indies on May 22, 2005 the highest.

Such totals are now considered respectable in this form of cricket where advances in bat technology, shortening of boundaries and changes to field restrictions allied with batsmen more prepared than ever to play shots from the off, has led Australia opener Matthew Hayden to talk of the 500-run barrier being broken.

Caribbean pitches used to be renowned for both pace and bounce, something exploited to the full by the West Indies' fearsome fast bowlers of the 1970s and 1980s.

One of those quickers was Andy Roberts, now a pitch consultant for the World Cup and he said talk of slow pitches being the norm during the tournament was wide of the mark.

"A lot of people will be surprised

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

GP gets closer to cricket's heart

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Tuesday signed a benchmark deal with Grameenphone who will be the title sponsor of the board's National Cricket Academy.

Having run the academy without any sponsor for almost a year, the board made a five-year contract with the cellular company after whom the academy would be called the 'Grameenphone BCB National Cricket Academy'.

"I must congratulate Grameenphone for coming forward for such a good deal because it is not so common that the corporate houses lend their hands for such kind of development activities," said BCB vice-president and chairman of Marketing Committee Aziz Al Kaiser Tito at a press conference at a local hotel yesterday.

"The cellular company has agreed to give the board US dollars 1.5 lakh per year. That means we would receive US\$ 7.5 lakh (about 5.25 crore Taka) in five years. We have signed the deal for the next five years but we hope that it would be renewed in time," he added.

Under the agreement, Grameenphone will provide funds to assist in establishing and operating the academy programmes and each year an Academy Cup will be organised to select young cricketers from different age groups and divisions to nurture them under the programme for one year.

"Grameenphone is expanding its horizon towards nurturing young talents who will pave the way for excellence in the game for the future. We are extremely proud to be associated with the national team and now with this new academy," said Stein Naevdal, chief marketing officer of Grameenphone.

The BCB officials informed that their first target is to build a two-storied building for the academy with all the necessary facilities in Mirpur, home of Bangladesh cricket. The consultant agency, Bashat, official told that they will need around Tk 2.5 crore to prepare the house which would be completed in nine months after completion of tender processes.

Former Bangladesh cricket captain Khaled Mahmud, who is the operations manager of the academy, showed the aims and future programmes of the academy on projection.

"The main objective is to make a bridge in between national team and the under-19 team," he said.

BCB chief executive officer Mahmudur Rahman, Rubaba Dowla Matin, head of marketing of Grameenphone, and ASM Faruque, new chairman of BCB game development committee also spoke on the occasion.

TODAY'S MATCHES		
Team	Time	Venue
Australia v Scotland	7:30 pm	St. Kitts & Nevis
Kenya v Canada	7:30 pm	St. Lucia

Ad



PHOTOS: AFP

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar arrives at their team hotel in Port of Spain on Monday for their World Cup group B matches as Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (R) looks on.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5