

MSC crush Sonargaon

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club took sweet revenge against Sonargaon Cricketers as they clinched the Independence Cup cricket title with a massive 102-run victory at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Well-built opener Rashedul Haque smashed 62 off 71 balls with the help of ten boundaries and a six as Mohammedan, who lost against the same opponents by 52 runs in the Premier League earlier, posted 237 runs before being bowled out in 49.5 overs after deciding to bat first.

Ehsanul Haque was the other notable scorer with a 65-ball 42 that featured three fours. Off-spinner Fahim Muntasir grabbed four wickets for 40 runs.

In reply, Sonargaon made a disastrous start, losing two wickets for 4 runs under the immense heat and ultimately were bundled out for 135 in 33.2 overs.

Al-Shahriar top-scored with 46 off 63 balls that saw ten boundaries.

Out-of-favour pacer Forhad Reza was the most successful Mohammedan bowler picking up three wickets for 26 runs while left-arm pacer Monjurul Islam took two for 26 and Nabil Samad captured two for 25 runs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

MOHAMMEDAN: 237 all out in 49.5 overs (Rashedul 62, Mintu 26, Ehsanul 42, Faisal 22, extras 30; Sunny 2-28, Fahim 4-40, Kapali 2-30).

SONARGAON: 135 all out in 33.2 overs (Al-Shahriar 46, Kapali 29, extras 6; Monjurul 2-26, Nabil 2-25, Forhad 3-26).

Result: Mohammedan won by 102 runs.



PHOTO: STAR

Mohammedan players pose with the Independence Cup trophy after beating Sonargaon Cricketers in the final at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Police evade diplomatic episode

AFP, London



The police chief in charge of the investigation into the murder of Pakistan cricket team coach Bob Woolmer said in an interview published Monday that he let the team leave Jamaica to avoid sparking a "significant diplomatic incident".

Speaking to the Times, the country's deputy police commissioner Mark Shields added that he was working with two Pakistani diplomats to ensure their return to Jamaica if they were needed for further questioning.

Woolmer was found unconscious in his hotel room on March 18, and was declared dead a few hours later. His death came just a day after a stunning loss to cricketing minnows Ireland, knocking Pakistan out of the World Cup.

Holding the Pakistan team in Jamaica "would have caused a

significant diplomatic incident and had an extremely adverse effect on the World Cup," Shields said.

There would have been uproar "if I had started holding people against their will," he added.

Authorities declared members of the Pakistan team in the clear, at least for the time being, and allowed them to leave the island on Saturday, when they flew to London for a stopover on their way home.

The police chief had told reporters in Kingston on Sunday that investigators were carefully looking at images taken by closed circuit cameras in the Pegasus hotel, and were focusing on the 12th floor, where Woolmer was staying.

Shields told The Times that detectives were also looking at records of every door keycard in the hotel to monitor residents' movements. "It's a huge task. But when we do that, we get the time of death."

Pakistan team spokesman Pervez Mir meanwhile told the Daily Mirror details of what three of the team's members -- captain

Inzamamul Haq, caretaker coach Mushtaq Ahmed and manager Talat Ali -- had been asked when they were questioned by police for a second time.

Inzamam was apparently asked why he changed his room in the hotel from the 12th floor to the fifth, a move he made before Woolmer's murder, to which he responded that he wanted to be closer to the team's players.

He was also asked what time he went to bed, but Mir said he did not know what Inzamam's answer was.

Police asked Ali why he changed floors from the 12th after Woolmer's death, to which he responded that he was scared. He was also asked how many times a day he prayed, a question he declined to answer.

Ahmed was meanwhile asked about cuts to his face, which he said he sustained during the team's practice on the morning of the Ireland match.

Exit the Indians

FROM PAGE 17

Ashrafal admitted it had been a challenging run chase.

"It was very difficult to bat as the ball was moving around a lot," said Ashrafal.

"But I knew that if I stayed at the wicket and could score 30 runs that we would win."

Mukuddem grabbed three wickets in his lively opening spell to send Bangladesh reeling at 37-3 in the pressure game, but he lacked support from the other end.

Saqibul sparked celebrations in the Bangladeshi camp when he lofted left-arm spinner Dwayne Leverock over mid-on for the winning four. He put on 59 for the unfinished fourth-wicket stand with Ashrafal.

Left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak earlier bagged three wickets to raise Bangladesh's hopes of posting a crucial win. He finished with 3-20 to help his team restrict Bermuda to a modest total.

Fast bowler Mashrafe Mortaza and left-arm spinner Saqibul each took two wickets to provide valuable support.

Dean Minors top-scored for

Bermuda with 23. Opener Oliver Pitcher made 22 and Lionel Cann smashed 16 off just six balls with one six and two fours. Pitcher was later stretched off the field while attempting to take a catch.

Bashar won a good toss in over-cast conditions and had no hesitation in putting Bermuda in to bat. The move clicked as Mortaza grabbed two early wickets to put the opposition in a spot.

Mortaza struck in his opening over when he had Stephen Overbridge caught by Mohammad Rafique at fine-leg before accounting for Delyone Borden, who was held by Bashar at mid-off.

Bermuda suffered a big setback when they lost David Hemp (nought), the only professional in their ranks. Hemp, who cracked a half-century against India, was caught at Aftab Ahmed at point off left-arm seamer Syed Raseel.

The Cup debutants were reduced to 35-4 in the 11th over when Razzak trapped skipper Irvine Romaine leg-before for 11.

Australia shun Zimbabwe tour

AFP, Sydney

The Australian government Monday hardened its stand against a scheduled cricket tour of troubled Zimbabwe and said it would try to avoid huge fines for breach of contract.

The world champions are due to play three one-day internationals in the Southern African nation in September, but Foreign Minister Alexander Downer made it clear the government wanted to scrap the tour.

"I don't want them to tour Zimbabwe," he told reporters. "I think that is the wrong look."

The regime of President Robert Mugabe has drawn international criticism over its brutal crushing of dissent this month, including the shooting of an activist and the beating of several opposition leaders.

However, Cricket Australia had a contract through the International Cricket Council to play in Zimbabwe and could face fines of up to 1.6 million US dollars if it did not fulfil its commitments, Downersaid.

"We'll sit down with Cricket Australia when they get back and we'll go into all that sort of detail about what the contract says.

"It might be that they are able to get out of the tour on the back of the rising violence in Zimbabwe. We'll have to look at the contract in detail.

"Just simply to breach the contract, that could be expensive but there may be other ways around it."

Downer said the cancellation of the tour would not hurt Mugabe's regime, "in the sense that a lot of them are not interested in or enthusiastic about cricket."

But, he said, "the whole concept of the world's greatest cricket team and the biggest names in world cricket visiting Zimbabwe and giving a blessing to that country is one I feel uncomfortable with."

Gary recalls

FROM PAGE 20

ture in Trinidad.

"They reinvented the game through their style of play with the ball as well as with the bat. The West Indies side of that era was the team everybody wanted to see."

If West Indies were the definitive cricket team, Sobers was the definitive West Indian cricketer.

Fans gone missing

AFP, Bridgetown



When Inzamamul Haq bid a tearful farewell to international one-day cricket, the crowd rose to acclaim the great Pakistani.

The problem was that there were so few people inside the 20,000-capacity Sabina Park in Kingston that Inzamam, had he so desired, could have personally shook the hands of all of them without delaying proceedings.

If the World Cup causes fever, so far, most of the Caribbean is suffering only from a mild skin irritation.

Crowds figures in games not featuring the hosts have been disappointing which is hardly surprising given that some ticket prices for first round matches were as high as 115 dollars in parts of the Caribbean where the average weekly wage is around 150 dollars a week.

Saturday's mouth-watering clash at Warner Park in St Kitts between the world's best sides, Australia and South Africa, created a 671-run festival in glorious sunshine but still the 10,500-capacity Warner Park struggled to bring in the fans.

Reports earlier in the week suggested advance ticket sales of

around 8,000 for the Group A decider.

"Any West Indies team playing here would have filled the stands," Ricky Skerritt, the Sports and Tourism manager for St Kitts, and a former West Indies team manager, told AFP.

"Hosting the Dutch and the Scots did not attract crowds. There was never an expectation that spectators would bombard the stands.

"Most of the games in the 2003 World Cup, when the hosts were not playing, were sparsely attended."

Local people were not convinced.

"They should have scheduled West Indies matches at various venues so that local crowds could fill the stadiums," said taxi driver Nehemia Cooran.

"Who wants to watch Scotland play Holland."

The hosts played all of their three first round matches in Kingston.

However, Charles Wilkins, the head of the local organising committee in St Kitts, said people have to be realistic.

"Prices are high, but for cricket you have to pay," he said.

When Australia crushed Scotland at Warner Park, around 3,000 people came through the turnstiles. In a desperate bid to fill the stands, organisers resorted to handing out 4,000 tickets to local schoolchildren.

"It boils down to the economy. The Australians are better off -- air fares, tickets and other things -- they are here in big numbers," said Neil Delesca, from Durban, as he surveyed the comparatively large number of Aussie supporters in St Kitts on Saturday.

At Gros Islet, in St Lucia, the situation was just as worrying.

At the 20,000-capacity Beausejour Stadium, official figures said that 12,500 people watched England play New Zealand but only 4,300 bothered to see the Black Caps defeat Kenya.

St Lucia's tourist chiefs hope that the picturesque images of the island, being beamed around the world, will attract visitors in the long term.

President of the St Lucia Hotel and Tourism Association, Silvanus Fontenard told the BBC: "We're just hoping that the exposure the country gains from hosting the games will serve us in good stead."

"I guess that is an optimistic position that we have to take at this point and hope that it will bring some benefits in the long term because in the short term clearly there have been more losses than benefits."

Vincent goes home

AFP, St Peter's

New Zealand suffered a second successive injury blow on Sunday when opening batsman Lou Vincent broke his wrist in the nets and was ruled out of the World Cup, it was reported.

Vincent made 101 in the Group C win against Canada at St Lucia, having collected two noughts in the matches with England and Kenya.

He was struck by a ball from speedster Shane Bond during practice on Sunday ahead of the Black Caps opening Super Eights match against the West Indies here on Thursday, the BBC reported.

Hamish Marshall is expected to be called into the squad to replace Vincent.

The injury came on the same day that Chris Martin was given permission to joined the squad in place of fellow seamer Daryl Tuffey who has also been ruled out through injury.

This is our moment

FROM PAGE 17

that Bangladesh's run in this tournament is being labelled as a surprise by some.

"I'm not sure if surprise is the right word. Whenever we had a good win maybe others have said that they are surprised. The Bangladesh team went out there to do as well as it could. It wasn't very long before that we had a good win against New Zealand. So we knew we had the ability within ourselves to cause an upset. Others might think it was a surprise but we quietly in here (pointing to the heart) knew we had a good chance if we played to our ability and had a little bit of luck."

There were so many heroes on this day. Ashrafal, the man of the match, was an epitome of the confidence that runs through the Tigers.

"Whom? No, no," he said when asked whether he was nervous going in with three wickets down. "I thought if I make 30-odd we would win. I have been in similar situations before in Tests and one-dayers so this was nothing new to me. If anything I just backed myself and enjoyed the

challenge. This is for all the wonderful people of my homeland," said Ashrafal who hasn't been dismissed in this World Cup so far.

For Sakib, who celebrated his 20th birthday on Saturday, the day couldn't have come sooner.

"I really wanted to do well today. It was tough in the beginning and I was searching for the ball. But when the edges went in the gaps and I survived a few close calls I just knew that this would be my day," Bangladesh's model of stability and assurance said.

And wasn't this also the perfect time to acknowledge the travelling Bangla Army? The fantastic supporters who have come from all around the globe just to inspire the team have really made a lasting mark.

"I want to say to all of them that they were simply wonderful. I haven't seen anything like this in my career. They have come from Japan, Italy, Denmark, United Kingdom, Canada, and USA; literally from everywhere around the world...I mean I don't have words to express our gratitude. You fans have been a pillar of strength and I am saying this from

the heart. Thank you and we want to continue this journey with you," said Bashar.

The sun had set when the Bangladeshi team returned to their hotel. The lobby was less crowded but a significant presence of journalists, mainly from the Indian media was there to speak to the captain. At this point in time the neighbours too are revelling in Bangladesh's joy.

Applause broke out when the players entered the lobby and that was multinational appreciation, nothing new for the Tigers since March 17.

It feels good to be a Bangladeshi in a foreign land now as we soak in the admiration. Fans have told me that taxi drivers refused to take a fare on learning they were from Bangladesh. In the streets of Port of Spain the Bangladesh players are instantly recognized and cheered and anything or anyone Bangladeshi is admired wholeheartedly.

Never before have so many people of all nationalities, religion, cast and creed won over by purely by cricket power.



PHOTO: COURTESY

PCB in search of new coach

PTI, Karachi

Feeling that Bob Woolmer had nothing new to offer, the Pakistan Cricket Board had already started a hunt for a possible successor to coach Bob Woolmer, well before he was found murdered in his hotel room in Kingston.

A Pakistan Cricket Board source, which spoke on condition of anonymity, dismissed suggestions that the Board had not made up its mind on whether to extend Woolmer's contract, which was to expire in June, and said the search had started for a new foreign coach.

"The ad-hoc committee, when it last met, had decided that mandate should be given to the Director Cricket Operations to start shortlisting candidates to replace Woolmer as everyone felt his utility to the Pakistan team had reached its limit," the official said.

Another well-informed source said that even before Woolmer's death, a senior official of the Board had sought the help of some cricket related persons in England to help Pakistan find a suitable replacement for Woolmer.

"What is clear is that Pakistan were again looking for a foreigner and they had two or three names in mind. Clearly appointing a local coach was an option the Board was not very keen on following," the source said.

The show

FROM PAGE 17

ability to pick ourselves up."

New Zealand are the other team in the last eight with three wins out of three and an extra two points to carry forward.

But they suffered a double blow on Sunday. They had to call up Chris Martin to replace injured seamer Daryl Tuffey while opening batsman Lou Vincent fractured his wrist and has been ruled out.

The Black Caps still have a potent pace-spin attack of Shane Bond, who inadvertently caused Vincent's downfall in the Antigua nets, and Daniel Vettori.

England finished second to the Kiwis in their first round group and take on surprise qualifiers Ireland in their Super Eight opener in Guyana on Friday.

Ironically, Ed Joyce will open the batting for England having switched allegiances from Ireland whom he helped to reach the finals here.

But Ireland insist they are not bitter over losing Joyce.

"We would treat that as an example for young cricketers in Ireland to try and follow," said team manager Robert Torrens.

Last

FROM PAGE 20

Bermuda played a key role in globalising cricket.

"End of the day it is a game," he said.

"It is a job to some, but for these guys who have work to do, they have come here and enjoyed themselves.

"That is all you can ask."