



Did U Know?

Frank Chester, a former England cricketer, lost an arm in the First World War and went on to become a very reputed umpire from 1924-55, a career spanning over three decades and 48 Tests.



Habibul Bashar
(Bangladesh cricket captain)
"Definitely no one will be going for autographs any more."
When asked if the Bangladesh players will hunt for the autographs of the Australian players this time around.

What to WATCH

BTV & SET Max
ICC World Cup 2007
(Super Eights)
Ireland v England
Live at 7:30 pm

DAY'S EVENT
B.League
Abahani v Rahmatganj (4:45 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Ctg Mohammedan v Mohammedan (3:45 pm)
Venue: MAAZ Stadium, Chittagong

India arrive home quietly

AFP, New Delhi

India's World Cup cricketers began returning home early Thursday amid tight security that prevented disgruntled fans from staging any protests over their shock first round exit.

A pack of journalists were the only people to greet batsman Virender Sehwag and wicket-keeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni when they touched down at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi airport just before midnight.

Security personnel whisked both players from the terminal into waiting cars before the media could approach them.

Coach Greg Chappell, batting superstar Sachin Tendulkar, Ajit Agarkar, Munaf Patel and Irfan Pathan arrived in Mumbai a few hours later, where they were greeted by cricket board secretary Niranjan Shah and other officials.

Captain Rahul Dravid and his Bangalore teammates Anil Kumble and Robin Uthappa also arrived home safely.

Former captain Sourav Ganguly was expected to remain in London for a few days. The travel plans of the remaining players were not immediately known.

Indian police, aware of the hostile protesters that greeted Pakistan's team on Wednesday, tightened security at airports and around the players' homes to prevent any incident.

"We want to ensure the players are not hassled," Mumbai's joint commissioner of police, Arup Patnaik, told reporters.

Angry fans had taken to the streets when India were knocked out of the first round at the ongoing World Cup in the Caribbean.

The Indian board has summoned Chappell, Dravid and former captains like Sunil Gavaskar and Kapil Dev for a meeting in Mumbai on April 6 and 7 to discuss the World Cup debacle.

Onus on Joyce

England meet Ireland today

AFP, Georgetown



England hope their in-form and informed batsman Ed Joyce plays a key role in upstaging neighbours Ireland in the World Cup Super Eights here on Friday.

Joyce, who helped Ireland qualify for this World Cup before changing allegiance, has passed useful information on to England as to how to tame Ireland who have upset the calculations by reaching the second round.

"I have told team analyst Mark Garaway a little bit. I know 11 or 12 of the Irish guys pretty well but there are couple who have come in who I haven't seen very much of," said Joyce, who made his England debut against Ireland last year.

"I will be able to help out with a few tips but you have to keep things pretty basic against most teams whether you are playing against Australia or against Ireland so I think we're going to be keeping it pretty simple."

"Ireland play as a unit very well, they field very well, they bowl as a unit and they've got a lot of medium-pacers and spinners who bowl very straight. They bat all the way down

to number 10," said the 28-year-old Joyce.

Ireland, making their World Cup debut, silenced all those who criticised minnows' participation in the event with a three-wicket upset win over former champions Pakistan in their crucial Group D match.

"They tied their match against Zimbabwe before losing to the West Indies -- but still qualified for the Super Eights with three points in as many matches.

Joyce hoped England take the opportunity to peak for tougher matches.

"You want to peak at the right time in these tournaments and we'd like to think we are getting there after the first match," said Joyce, who hit 66 and 75 in England's wins over Canada and Kenya in the first round.

England, who qualified from Group C without carrying two points, know it's important to achieve a win on Friday, to press for a semifinal place.

After Ireland, England face Sri Lanka and Australia in Antigua in the space of four days, a task coach Duncan Fletcher had realised once the team qualified, the first time they cleared the first round since 1996 World Cup.

"We've got to go and win four games starting with that first one. At previous World Cups we've stumbled early on in the tournament and it's important we've gone through to

the Super Eights," Fletcher said.

Irish coach Adrian Birrell disagreed Joyce passing the information would play a lead role.

"I am sure he (Joyce) knows all our players, but we also know their players and other players from all the countries. I think with a lot of video available on all teams it's not a huge advantage, it certainly does help," said Birrell, 47.

"We have played some good cricket, so we must keep the momentum against all teams," stressed Birrell who played first-class cricket for Eastern Province in South Africa and is Irish coach for the last four years.

"We know all the pressure is on England, they need to beat us to get to the semis, you know they are not carrying any points and if they don't pick two against us then they are under pressure."

Birrell said his team likes to play as "underdogs."

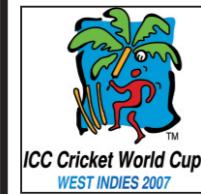
"We are happy to be here, we are the underdogs so we can go and play with freedom and play like we play as underdogs, so we are certainly looking forward to the match on Friday."

"We owe a big thank to Joyce for helping us through to the World

SEE PAGE 22 COL 4

Sponsors pulling out?

AFP, New Delhi



The stunning exits of Pakistan and India from cricket's World Cup has left one of the game's biggest sponsors reviewing its future in the sport and sent the advertising world into a tailspin.

Giants such as Pepsi have had to rethink marketing campaigns centred on the teams, Indian advertisers are demanding cut-price television spots and in Pakistan the ad industry reckons losses will run into millions of dollars.

"We are sunk," said Delhi-based advertising executive Rajmohan Singh.

"No one wants to advertise any more. Is there a World Cup going

on? Where? My figures don't show that."

South Korea's LG Electronics said it was unsure if it would remain a global partner of the International Cricket Council (ICC) when sponsorship contracts are renegotiated later this year.

LG, which jumped on the cricket bandwagon seven years ago to boost sales in the lucrative Indian market, said its priorities had changed.

"Our requirements were different when we signed up with cricket seven years ago," said LG's Indian spokesman Girish Rao.

"Today, we have lot of visibility being the number two brand in the Indian market. But a final decision will be taken by our parent company."

India, the 1983 World Cup winners and 2003 finalists, failed to advance to the 2007 version's

Super Eight round after losing two of their three games in the preliminary stage.

Pakistan, winners in 1992, went out at the hands of minnows Ireland in one of the sport's biggest shocks.

Five ICC sponsors -- LG, Pepsi, Hutch, Hero Honda and Indian Oil -- focus their cricket advertising on India, where passion for the sport is a sponsors' dream.

The ICC has not revealed its new partners after selling global media rights for the next eight years to the Singapore-based ESPN-Star television network for an estimated 1.1 billion dollars.

The deal takes effect after this World Cup and covers 18 ICC tournaments, including the World Cup in 2011 in South Asia and in 2015 in Australia and New Zealand.

SEE PAGE 22 COL 6

Sylhet, Rajshahi on top

SPORTS REPORTER



Rajshahi and Sylhet maintained their winning run in the limited-overs competition of the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea 8th National Cricket League with comfortable second round victories yesterday.

Chittagong, however, registered their maiden win after scoring the first 300-plus total in the six-team fray.

RAJSHAHI-BARISAL
Holders Rajshahi cruised to a six-wicket win over Barisal at BKSP, thanks to a run-a-ball 70 by opener Junaid Siddique and unbeaten half-centuries by Nayeem Islam (52) and Mushfiqur Rahman (57).

Chasing Barisal's modest 216-8 built around fifties by Rokibul Hasan (56) and Ariful Haq (51) after they had opted to bat, Rajshahi rattled 220-4 with nearly seven overs remaining.

After Junaid's early exploits, Nayeem who made a match winning 81 in the previous round, shared 95 runs with Mushfiq for the unbroken fifth wicket. Mushfiq's medium pace earned him two wickets and the man-of-the-match award as well.

CHITTAGONG-KHULNA
Alok Kapali led from the front with a magnificent 114 not out as Sylhet made a difficult chase look easy on way to thrashing Dhaka by five wickets at the Fatullah Stadium.

Man-of-the-match Kapali hit a dozen fours and three sixes in his 125-ball unbroken essay that

SEE PAGE 22 COL 6



PARIAH IN OWN LAND: India pin-up boy Mahendra Singh Dhoni (L) is being escorted by police as he leaves Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP



PHOTO: TIGERCRICKET.COM

NOW LISTEN SKIPPER... Shahadat Hossain (L) shares a joke with Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar (R) and Shahriar Nafees at the swimming pool of the Halcyon Cove resort after practice on Wednesday.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

BKSP finished on top with seven gold medals in the Independence Day Gymnastics competition at the NSC gymnasium yesterday.

Dinajpur came up second with three gold medals while Ansar and VDP took two. Thakurgaon and Vertical Building took one each.

Secretary of National Sports Council Aminul Islam Khan distributed prizes among the winners of the day-long event.

NATIONAL TAEKWONDO CHAMPIONSHIP

Three-hundred athletes will take part in the seventh national senior/junior taekwondo championship which begins today.

Among the participants, hundred female athletes will take part in eight weight standards.

The tournament will conclude on April 1.

INDEPENDENCE DAY TENNIS

The six-day Independence Cup Tennis Competition begins today at the National Tennis Complex.

141 players from Engineers Recreation Centre, Nordic Club, Officers Club, Gulshan Club, British Club, Dhaka Club, Zaffar Imam Tennis Complex, BKSP and National Tennis Complex will take part in the meet.

The event will conclude on April 4.

INDEPENDENCE DAY BADMINTON

Javed and Shapia clinched the men's and women's titles in the NI Khan Independence Cup badminton tournament at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium yesterday.

Javed beat Porosh in the final of the men's event while Shapia defeated Konika. Porosh however had something to cheer about as he, along with Shumon, beat Javed and Goutam in the doubles' final. The two ladies who played the singles final won the doubles title with a win over Nabilha and Elina.

Shelia said analysis of video camera footage had been slow

WOOLMER MURDER

Video may clear case

AFP, Kingston



Detectives probing the murder of Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer said Wednesday that better-than-anticipated security video footage could provide vital clues in the hunt for his killer.

A painstaking operation to transfer hours of footage from well-worn VHS tape into a digital format has been completed, and early results were promising, Jamaica deputy police commissioner Mark Shields said.

"I looked at a few still images myself and I'm satisfied that I can easily identify people," Shields told journalists.

"There were some people in the footage that I'd met in the week after the murder of Bob Woolmer that I could clearly and easily identify."

Woolmer was found strangled in his room at the Pegasus Hotel on March 18, one day after Pakistan were dramatically dumped out of the World Cup in a shock defeat to minnows Ireland.

The killing has sparked one of the most complex murder investigations in Jamaican history and triggered speculation about possible links to match-fixing and illegal betting in cricket.

Around 50 officers are now attempting to track down hundreds of potential witnesses who were either visiting or staying at the Pegasus Hotel in the days leading up to Woolmer's death.

Shields said he was confident Woolmer's killer or killers had left DNA at the crime scene.

"I think it's highly likely," he said.

because of a desire to preserve the integrity of the original film. Parts of the video footage would also require further enhancement, he added.

Several reports have suggested that police had given up hope of gleaned useful information from the security cameras because of poor quality footage.

Detectives were also awaiting the results of toxicology and bodily tissue tests which will help to point to Woolmer's time of death, allowing them to focus their analysis of video footage on a fixed period of time.

On Tuesday Shields announced an international appeal for witnesses to come forward in order to eliminate as many people as possible from the inquiry.

Shields, a former detective of Britain's Scotland Yard police department who last week said Woolmer probably knew his killer, said Wednesday police would continue their investigation from "the inside out."

"We are working from the inside out -- it is those that we know were close to Bob Woolmer, were associates of Bob Woolmer, people who were on the same floor or close to him from the time he returned to the hotel until the time he was murdered."

Pakistan's players, who returned home on Wednesday to be greeted by thousands of angry fans, were tested for DNA and gave fingerprints before they left Jamaica at the weekend.

Shields said he was confident Woolmer's killer or killers had left DNA at the crime scene.

"I think it's highly likely," he said.

Murder linked to al-Qaeda?

PTI, London

Pakistan cricket coach Bob Woolmer's mysterious death took a new twist with a media report here linking his murder to Dawood Ibrahim and al-Qaeda.

A report in 'The Sun' claimed a Pakistan-based bookie was thrown out of Woolmer's room after an altercation with the coach.

The daily quoted sources claiming that the bookie, who had vanished after Woolmer's death on March 18, is an associate of