



HARD WORK IN VAIN: Sheikh Russel's Moroccan midfielder Khoulouba Mohamad kisses the ground to celebrate his goal against Khulna Abahani with his teammates but yesterday at the Bangabandhu National Stadium but the B.League match was abandoned with ten minutes remaining due to lack of floodlights.

Shoaib says he was dropped for injury

PTI, Karachi

Controversial Pakistani speedster Shoaib Akhtar insisted he was dropped from Pakistan's World Cup team due to injury and not because he had flunked a private dope test in London.

Shoaib and his new ball partner Mohammad Asif were ruled out of the World Cup on the day the Pakistan squad was due to fly to the West Indies for the tournament.

The Pakistan Cricket Board said they had fitness problems but speculations have persisted that both had failed private dope tests for which they had gone to London.

Shoaib, however, vehemently denied the allegations. "I was dropped from the team because of my injury. We underwent no private dope tests," Shoaib insisted.

Both Shoaib and Asif had tested positive for Nandrolone last year in October, which saw them being sent back from the ICC Champions Trophy in India.

Initially they were banned by a drugs inquiry tribunal for two and one years respectively, but an appellate committee later upheld their appeals against the bans.

Both were subsequently picked for the World Cup despite doubts over their clearing dope tests as traces of nandrolone remains in an athletes body for upto six months.

Speculations were rife again that both were dropped after failing the private dope tests as the International Cricket Council had made it clear they would be tested as soon as they landed in the Caribbean.

Shoaib, who is training under Mudassar Nazar, the chief coach at the National Cricket Academy in Lahore, said that he had given himself four months to recover from a knee injury.

Lanka may

FROM PAGE 17 below Denmark. Now we are ranked above all the Associates (junior nations) and that is very satisfying."

SQUADS

IRELAND (probable): William Porterfield, Jeremy Bray, Eoin Morgan, Niall O'Brien, Kevin O'Brien, Trent Johnston (captain), Andrew White, Dave Langford-Smith, Andrew Botha, Kyle McCallan, Boyd Rankin.

SRI LANKA (from): Upul Tharanga, Sanath Jayasuriya, Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardene (captain), Chamara Silva, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Russel Arnold, Farveez Maharoof, Chaminda Vaas, Muttiah Muralidaran, Dilhara Fernando, Lasith Malinga, Nuwan Kulasekara, Malinga Bandara, Marvan Atapattu.

Umpires: Billy Doctrove and Mark Benson.



Did U Know?

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

Ricky wants full NZ

AFP, St George's



Australia captain Ricky Ponting expects to face a full-strength New Zealand side on Friday after his team cruised to a seven-wicket win against a Sri Lanka team missing two rested senior bowlers.

The two-time defending champions made light work of chasing down a target of 227 for victory against the highly regarded Sri Lankans here Monday, finishing on 232 for three with 44 balls to spare.

But it was against an attack stripped of Chaminda Vaas and Muttiah Muralidaran, as well as the injured Lasith Malinga, who between them have taken 41 wickets at the tournament so far.

Victory meant Super Eights table-toppers Australia had gone 26 games unbeaten at the World Cup and stretched their winning run at the tournament to 20 matches.

"It doesn't worry me one little bit," said Ponting of the decision to rest Vaas and Muralidaran, who Sri Lanka skipper Mahela Jayawardene subsequently said had a groin problem.

"We'll take a win, any win, against Sri Lanka this close to the finals," added Ponting who made an unbeaten 66 and shared an unbroken stand of 106 with Andrew Symonds (63 not out).

"They obviously had some strategy to rest a couple of their best players. They play Ireland on Wednesday. If they play well, they aren't going to get a lot out of that game anyway so that's for them to worry about not us."

He said he was particularly baffled by Sri Lanka's decision to omit off-spin star Muralidaran, like Vaas a member of the 1996 World Cup-winning team.

"That's one thing, I don't understand. I would have thought it was a good opportunity for him to have a crack at our batsmen. It doesn't worry our batters because we know the way he goes about things. We play him as well as anybody around the world."

New Zealand, like Australia and Sri Lanka, have already booked their semifinal place ahead of the sides' final Super Eights match and are unlikely to face their trans-Tasman rivals again before a possible final match-up.

Asked if he'd expected New Zealand to omit some of their

leading players, Ponting said: "I wouldn't have thought so, not in a game that close to the semifinals."

"They'll want to beat us and we'll want to beat them. They've got a good record against us of late, having won the three games in New Zealand just before we came away."

"These sorts of conditions suit their gameplan. They've got guys who play spin bowling and slower bowling pretty well. They've got guys that take the pace off the ball and cut the ball a lot in their bowling options."

"We'd like to think we can improve in the New Zealand game, win it and go into the semis with a whole lot of momentum behind us."

Ponting was also encouraged by the progress of all-rounder Shane Watson, who has missed Australia's last three games with a calf injury.

"I spoke to the physio and he said Shane has actually been moving quite freely for a while now."

"He evens the balance of our side out very well. It will be a nice little problem to have when he becomes 100 per cent fit again."

Ireland in the big league

AFP, Bridgetown

Ireland's World Cup wins over Pakistan and Bangladesh have earned them a place on the International Cricket Council (ICC) ODI championship table.

Their 74-run win over Bangladesh here on Sunday means they will be on the official rankings list that will be updated after their final Super Eights game, against Sri Lanka on Wednesday.

Ireland graduate from the ICC Associate rankings and joins Kenya as the only non-Test countries in the full ODI championship.

An Associate can be promoted when it has played at least ten one-day internationals and has beaten two Full Members, or has defeated one Full Member and won more than 60% of its games against other Associates.

Having upset Pakistan in their group match, Ireland needed only one more win to take the next step.

In accordance with a previous ICC decision, Ireland has ODI status until 2009, along with the other top Associate Members -- Kenya, Scotland, Netherlands, Canada and Bermuda.

Russel kept

FROM PAGE 17 The league committee has also decided to hasten kick-off time of all matches in Dhaka to 4pm from 4.45pm to avoid such incidents. Today's Brothers-Muktijoddha clash of the titans has been rescheduled for tomorrow.

Pak Academy

FROM PAGE 17 He also associated in an 83-run stand with Nadif Chowdhury (32 off 42 balls) for the fourth wicket.

Earlier, the visitors added 78 runs to their overnight score of 401-6 before being bundled out for 469.

Left-arm spinner Mosharraf Hossain picked up three more wickets on the day to return with figures of 6-127 while skipper Mehrab Hossain took the other wicket to finish with 2-78.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH ACADEMY: 243 and 214 all out in 43.2 overs (Sadat 9, Mehrab 12, Nazimuddin 16, Rokibul 79, Nadif 32, Riyad 2, Sahagir 0, Mosharraf 7, Ziaur 31, Arif 6, Sajidul 0 n.o., extras 20, Atif 5-56, Najaf 4-63, Anwar 1-39).

PAKISTAN ACADEMY: First innings 469 all out in 131 overs (Manzoor 64, Naeem 57, Latif 33, Yusuf 73, Alam 82, Raza 89 n.o., Tanvir 5, Sarfraz 13, extras 36, Mosharraf 6-127, Mehrab 2-78, Riyad 2-100).

Result: Pakistan Academy won by an innings and 12 runs.

Chess prize distribution

SPORTS REPORTER

The prize distribution ceremony of the Mercantile Bank 33rd National Championship, which concluded on Monday, was held at the National Sports Council conference room yesterday.

Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed, Governor of Bangladesh Bank, distributed prizes among the winners as chief guest.

Shah Mohammed Nurul Alam, managing director of sponsors Mercantile Bank, was present as special guest. Bangladesh Chess Federation president Rafiqul Islam and general secretary Jamilur Rahman were also present.

International Master Abdullah Al Rakib, who earned his third and final norm to complete all formalities to become a Grandmaster, won the title.

The championship was rated as a GM tournament for the first time with three GMs taking part.

Malik likely

FROM PAGE 20 said that a decision was imminent.

Though Malik has only played 18 Tests, in a number of different positions in the order, he has been earmarked for leadership by a number of people over the last two years, including late Bob Woolmer. He has, however, become a vital cog in Pakistan's ODI outfit and has been among the most consistent batsmen for Pakistan in that form of the game since 2004.

There is a concern that senior players might not so readily accept a younger player as captain but at least Mohammad Yousof, who said recently he was willing to become captain if it was offered, has sought before to play down those fears. "If the PCB wants to appoint a junior player as the future captain, I absolutely have no issue with it," he told reporters on Monday.

"I have never been greedy. I want to serve my country, whether as captain or as an ordinary player, that's enough honour for me."

Younis Khan was originally in place to take over as captain after Inzamamul Haq's resignation and retirement from ODIs, but he turned down the offer citing the mental strain of taking on one of cricket's toughest jobs.

Hogg delights Ponting

AFP, St George's



Brad Hogg is bowling at the peak of his powers, according to Australia captain Ricky Ponting, who is

elated with the left-arm wrist spinner's form at the World Cup.

Hogg's happy knack of taking important wickets continued against Sri Lanka on Monday when, after a third wicket stand of 140 between skipper Mahela Jayawardene (72) and Chamara Silva (64), the former postman removed both men.

The 36-year-old Western Australian also held his nerve after being attacked early on to finish with an economical two for 35 from his 10 overs.

Hogg, who rose to prominence at the 2003 World Cup after Shane Warne's shock withdrawal for a doping offence, now stands fifth in this tournament's bowling averages with 15 wickets at an average of just over 17 apiece.

This compares well with a haul of 13 at 24 during the whole of the

last edition in southern Africa.

"Right through the middle period I always felt he was going to be our best wicket-taking option which is why I kept him going," Ponting explained after a seven-wicket victory which saw Australia, the only team with a 100 per cent record at this event, stretch its overall World Cup unbeaten run to 26 games.

"He's bowled beautifully through the tournament, bowling as well now as he ever has and he's beating a lot of batsmen with his variations."

"He's taking a lot of wickets with his 'wrong-un' and he's bowling it very well. More importantly, he's probably thinking through his bowling a lot better now than he ever has."

"He's using his variations very well and at the right times which he probably didn't always do."

Hogg provided the spark for a middle-order collapse which saw Sri Lanka, like Australia already qualified for the semifinals, lose four wickets for 16 runs.

"We took those four wickets in next to no time and really slowed down their run-rate and scoring,"

Ponting added.

Left-arm quick Nathan Bracken, rested from the nine-wicket thrashing of minnows Ireland to give Stuart Clark a game, enjoyed success at both ends of the innings on Monday on his way to an impressive return of four for 19.

Australians occupy four of the top seven spots in the World Cup bowling standings.

Fast bowler Glenn McGrath, in his final competition before retirement, heads the list with 20 wickets at 14.15.

The World Cup's all-time leading wicket-taker is now just three short of the tournament record of 23 set by Sri Lanka left-arm seamer Chaminda Vaas, controversially omitted Wednesday, four years ago.

In second place is express quick Shaun Tait, with 16 wickets at 22.12 while Bracken lies seventh having taken 14 wickets at a miserly 13 apiece.

Australia, through to the last four before the Sri Lanka match, and their Super Eights programme against fellow semifinalists New Zealand here Friday.

2010 Asiad to have cricket

AFP, Kuwait

Cricket will be included as a new sport on a 2010 Asian Games card in Guangzhou that features more events than ever before, the head of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) said Tuesday.

The decision to include cricket was taken at the OCA congress here, with heavyweight nations like India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka expected to field their top teams.

"Cricket will be played in 2010, but bodybuilding will be cut from the schedule," OCA chief Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah told AFP.

"India and Pakistan were the drivers. We are discussing with them how we can arrange it."

"Pakistan and India will come with their best teams because it will be a big competition."

The Guangzhou games will feature 42 sports compared to 39 at the last Asiad in Doha in December.

There had been a push within OCA member nations to cut the

number of sports, but plans to dump cue sports and 10-pin bowling, among others, were this week shelved. Instead, more disciplines will be included.

"Although they tried to remove some things like cue sports and bowling, the organisers this week asked for them to be brought back, so Guangzhou will host 42 sports," said the Sheikh, without saying what other events were being considered.

By comparison, the Olympic Games hosts just 28 events, with sports such as kabaddi, sepaktakraw, chess and wushu unique to the Asian Games.

Cricket was last seen at a major multi-sport event in the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur, but was dropped for the next two editions in England and Australia, two major cricketing powers.

The sport made its one and only appearance at the Olympics in Paris in 1900, where in a two-day match

Great Britain -- represented by touring team Devon and Somerset Wanderers -- beat France, whose team mainly consisted of members of the British Embassy.

Its inclusion at Guangzhou follows an announcement late last year that the 2008 South Asian Games in Bangladesh will feature cricket for the first time.

Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 17

The team had no cricket training. There was optional gym work and in the afternoon a bit of beach volleyball. The Tigers went to the Police Ground for a harder grind yesterday.

The injury situation is also looking up. Paceman Syed Rasel is moving around reasonably well and is expected to recover from his ankle sprain before the West Indies match. Mohammad Ashraful has had an X-ray on his dislocated left little finger and waiting the report.



PHOTO: STAR

Dr Salehuddin Ahmed, Governor of Bangladesh Bank, hands over the champion's trophy for the Mercantile Bank 33rd Chess Championship to Abdullah Al Rakib at the National Sports Council on Tuesday.

Australia on a roll

FROM PAGE 20 Kumar Sangakkara fell lbw for nought.

Jayawardene countered, hooking fast bowler Shaun Tait for a six that brought up his fifty in 64 balls, and a century stand with Silva, whose half-century came in 91 deliveries.

But Hogg ended the partnership when Silva top-edged a sweep to Clarke at short fine-leg.

Then 167 for four became 174 for five when Jayawardene was stumped off Hogg by wicketkeeper Gilchrist as he played for turn.

Sri Lanka's last Super Eights match is against surprise package Ireland here Wednesday while Australia's second round programme ends at the National Stadium on Friday against fellow semifinalists New Zealand.

TRALIA V SRI LANKA SCOREBO

FROM PAGE 20

Symonds	3	0	15	0	nb-1	
Clarke	8	0	36	0	-	
AUSTRALIA	R	M	B	4s	6s	
Gilchrist lbw b Arnold	30	65	49	4	0	
Hayden c Dilshan b Arnold	41	56	30	5	2	
Ponting not out	66	116	80	4	1	
Clarke c Dilshan b Bandara	23	38	31	4	0	
Symonds not out	63	66	71	5	2	
Extras: (w-4, nb-5)	9					
Total: (For 3 wickets in 42.4 overs)	232					
Did not bat: Hussey, Hodge, Hogg, Bracken, Tait, McGrath.						
Fall of wickets: 1-76, 2-79, 3-126.						
Bowler	O	M	R	W	NB/W	
Fernando	6	1	36	0	nb-3, w-3	
Maharof	7	0	52	0	nb-1	
Kulasekara	4	0	20	0	nb-1	
Arnold	4	0	20	2	w-1	
Bandara	9.4	0	53	1	-	
Jayasuriya	6	0	32	0	-	
Dilshan	6	0	19	0	-	
Result: Australia won by seven wickets.						
Man-of-the-match: Nathan Bracken.						
Toss: Sri Lanka.						
Umpires: Aleem Dar and B Doctrove.						
Match referee: M Procter.						

Poison theory

FROM PAGE 20

on March 18, just a day after Pakistan's sudden exit from the World Cup, and was pronounced dead after being rushed to hospital.

The post-mortem, conducted by a government pathologist, stated that the death occurred due to asphyxia from manual strangulation. The histology tests will establish the time of death, while the toxicology tests are expected to reveal whether Woolmer was poisoned before being attacked.

There is speculation that he may have been poisoned with aconite, a poison that causes the body's organs to stop functioning and leads to death through asphyxiation within 30 minutes.

Star absences

FROM PAGE 20

We've played some really good cricket right through the tournament," added the Australia skipper.

"Our batting was again very good and another good start gave a platform for the rest of the guys to chip away."

He also praised spinner Brad Hogg who now has 15 wickets in the tournament.

"He used his variations well," said Ponting. "He's a vital wicket-taker."

Australia face New Zealand in their last Super Eights game here on Friday.