

Practice match for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

The national cricketers will play a limited-over practice match today at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium as part of their preparation for this month's three-match one-day series against India.

The 14-member squad mixed up with some other outside players to play the game at the venue where they will play the first two one-dayers on May 10 and 12.

Veteran wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud, Nafis Iqbal, Alok Kapali, Tushar Imran, Rajin Saleh are already practicing with the team while Zunaed Siddique, Nazmus Sadat, Sajedul Islam and Dollar Mahmud are the other players to complete the line up.

Although the Tigers had played enough international and domestic matches for last couple of months, the team think-tank has decided to hold the preparation game mainly to give the players an idea about the pitch.

"There is nothing better than playing matches. I think this preparation match gives the players an idea about the surface in Mirpur," said chief selector Faruque Ahmed.

After first two days intense fitness, fielding and net training, Habibul Bashar's men performed only a light strength session on the third day.



Did U Know?

Saudi Arabia had the best disciplinary record with 5 yellow cards while Portugal suffered worst disciplinary record with 24 yellow and 2 red cards in the FIFA 2006 World Cup in Germany.

What to WATCH

ESPN

Azlan Shah Cup Hockey
Argentina v Australia
Live at 2:00 pm
Malaysia v Canada
Live at 4:00 pm
India v China
Live at 6:00 pm
English Premier Football League
Arsenal v Chelsea
Live at 8:55 pm
STAR Sports
Primera Liga
Real Madrid v Sevilla
Live at 12:55 am (Monday)



Hernan Crespo

(Chelsea's Argentine striker)
"I would like to finish my career here. I know that Chelsea would like me back, but I hope I don't have to leave Milan."
Declaring his intention to stay at Inter Milan.



B.League
Arambagh v Abahani (4:00pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

A benchmark for new era



RICKY PONTING

This is one of the proudest moments of my cricketing life. It is not just that we have made history by claiming an unprecedented third successive World Cup, it's the way we did it that I have found most satisfying.

We planned and executed so well throughout the tournament, dominating with bat and ball, that in the end we did not have a close game during our entire two months in the West Indies.

I believe we have set new standards in the game and while the other teams must now reach that benchmark to challenge us, it is up to Australia's next generation to ensure we can maintain our No.1 position. When there is a benchmark set, that's where everyone has got to get to again.

This is the beginning of a new era in the Australian team. With new coach Tim Nielsen taking over from John Buchanan, who did a

great job over the past seven or eight years, a new structure will be put in place.

But the high expectations will be exactly the same. I found that when I first came into the Australia team more than a decade ago.

As a youngster, you sat back and watched the champion players and how they went about things and learned what you had to do to become part of a successful team.

For me, it was players like Steve and Mark Vaughan, David Boon and Mark Taylor who showed me the way as they moulded Australia into a champion team.

Since that time, we have always had a core of outstanding senior players responsible for some great success.

It will now be up to the next generation to come in and emulate the success of those players who have gone before them. With Glenn McGrath retiring and Adam Gilchrist, Matthew Hayden and Brad Hogg all at very long odds to play in the next World Cup in four years' time, places are going to open up for the next generation.

Helping to guide these new guys will be an exciting time for me. At 32, I certainly hope to be around for the next World Cup and would love to see those given their chance to step up for Australia over the next few seasons continue the great traditions and success of the current team.

It's also going to be a sad time over the next year or two because it has been a great privilege to be part of World Cup campaigns with wonderful players like Glenn, Gilly, Haydos and Hogg.

By the same token, getting younger guys into the team always freshens things up. I know they're going to be very highly skilled players. It will be a matter of managing them and getting to know them.

Most importantly, it will be all about giving them the encouragement and guidance to back themselves and play with freedom.

It's important to let young players know that the skills and talent that have gained them a promotion to the national team are

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PHOTO: AFP

India captain Rahul Dravid (C) is being assisted by Indian physiotherapist John Gloster (R) after being hit by a ball in the face during a net session at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Saturday.

'Leave it to players'



CRICINFO, undated

Ricky Ponting says Australia's players will be able to make up their own minds on whether to tour Zimbabwe in September and the Australian government will pay any fine incurred if the tour is called off. Cricket Australia will investigate the security issues before the trip for three one-day games, but the only way it can avoid a \$2m ICC punishment for not going is if it is not safe.

The Prime Minister John Howard, a strong critic of the regime of the Zimbabwe president Robert Mugabe, said it would be unfair for Cricket Australia to have to pay the fine. "I will be having, and Alexander Downer (the foreign minister)

will be having, further discussions with Cricket Australia because the situation in Zimbabwe has deteriorated very badly," Howard told Australian radio. "In the end, foreign policy decisions have got to be taken by governments and the situation in Zimbabwe is quite unacceptable."

"We would indemnify Cricket Australia for any compensation it might have to pay to the international body. It would not be fair to visit the cost of a foreign policy decision on a sporting body."

Howard said players should be consulted on the issue, but the government would make the final decision on whether the tour should proceed. Ponting had breakfast with Howard at the SCG on Thursday as part of the World Cup-winning squad's welcome home celebrations.

"There are some issues there

and every individual player will be asked what their own views on that are, and they'll have a chance to make up their own mind what they want to do," Ponting told The Australian. "I'm sure every individual player will be asking themselves 'should I or shouldn't I be touring Zimbabwe?'"

Adam Gilchrist also said in the paper "there should always be questions asked". Stuart MacGill pulled out of the tour in 2004 on moral grounds.

Pius Ncube, the Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, who is currently in Australia, called for the series to be cancelled. "My encouragement would be let's boycott and not go there," he said in the Sydney Morning Herald. "In this way we can embarrass and put pressure on this immoral government of Mugabe and his cronies."

Gough backs Strauss



BBC ONLINE, undated

Andrew Strauss is favourite to take over as England captain should Michael Vaughan be ruled out of the first Test against West Indies through injury.

Former England player Darren Gough backed Strauss for the Lord's Test, which starts on May 17.

He told BBC Five Live: "Without a doubt Strauss, as he's done it before and knows what it's all about."

Vaughan broke his finger on Thursday, playing for Yorkshire in an attempt to get more matches under his belt.

The 32-year-old is rated as doubtful for the first Test and could miss the second one, at his county ground Headingley, too as the injury typically takes a month to heal.

Strauss led England last summer when Vaughan and Andrew Flintoff were both injured.

He started with a traumatic 5-0 whitewash against Sri Lanka in the one-day series, but won the Test series against Pakistan 3-0.

However a fit-again Flintoff was preferred to Strauss to lead England during the Ashes series in Australia, where England were trounced 5-0 in the Tests but bounced back to win the one-day CB Series.

But Flintoff was publicly reprimanded and stripped of the vice captaincy during the World Cup in the Caribbean after a drunken episode involving a pedalo.

Gough said: "Unfortunately he (Flintoff) got done for going out and having a drink but that should not stop him being captain of England."

"But I think they will go for Andrew Strauss."

Paul Collingwood is the third name in the frame but he has very little captaincy experience although

he would relish the chance.

He said: "To get mentioned with the captaincy is obviously a great feeling. I've done a few games for Durham a couple of seasons ago."

"I enjoy the challenges of captaincy but, as I've said, hopefully this will be in the future and hopefully Michael Vaughan will be fit."

In an attempt to get fit, Vaughan could use a hyperbaric oxygen chamber to speed up the healing process.

Both Simon Jones and Matthew Hoggard have used the chamber before with varying degrees of success.

Jones failed to recover from an ankle injury which ruled him out of the fifth and final Ashes Test at The Oval in 2005.

But Hoggard did recover from a hand injury in time to face Pakistan at Lord's last summer and took five wickets in the match.

Yorkshire physiotherapist Scott

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PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza draws his wife Sumi's attention to something during a reception awarded to the national team by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) at Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

Dravid struck by bouncer

AFP, Kolkata

Indian captain Rahul Dravid suffered an injury scare here on Saturday, two days before the team's departure for a 23-day tour of Bangladesh.

Dravid was hit on the nose by a bouncer from left-arm paceman Rudra Pratap Singh during practice but an X-ray ruled out a fracture.

The team's administrative manager Surendra Bhawe said Dravid's injury was not serious and that he should recover in the next 48 hours.

"The ball hit the visor of Dravid's helmet. He suffered a nose trauma. It is not serious," he told reporters.

"The X-ray showed bruises and he has been advised 24-hour rest. He should be back in action in the next 48 hours," he added.

The Indian team are slated to leave on Monday for neighbouring Bangladesh for their tour which includes three one-dayers and two Tests. The first one-dayer is on May 10.

India were hit by another injury scare on Wednesday when star batsman Sachin Tendulkar suffered a right ankle sprain.

Tendulkar has since recovered and has been seen taking part in net practice.

India's tour of Bangladesh has assumed significance after Dravid's men lost to the minnows in the recent World Cup, a defeat which eventually led to the team's early ouster from the premier competition.

Riyad keeps hosts in hunt

SPORTS REPORTER

Off-spinner Mahmudullah Riyad took five wickets as Bangladesh Academy fought back on the third day of the first four-day match against Sri Lanka Cricket Academy at the Khulna Divisional Stadium yesterday.

The visitors were bowled out for 349 after having resumed their first innings on the overnight score of 190-2. Even though the hosts cut down on the lead by 52 runs, they still lost a wicket as they ended the day on 37 for one.

Riyad, the lanky off-spinner from Dhaka, took the important wickets of Ian Daniel (82), Nadeera Nawela (70) and then wrapped up the tail picking up the three of the last four wickets to fall. Interestingly, all of those last three wickets were leg-

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BCCI exempts Laxman from camp

PTI, Kolkata

The BCCI has exempted VVS Laxman, who is recovering from gastroenteritis, from attending the Indian team's ongoing cricket conditioning camp here.

"The camp will conclude on Sunday, there is only one day left. So, there is no point in VVS (Laxman) travelling to Kolkata for a day and then again back home,"

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Sheikh Russel scalp Muktijoddha



SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra bounced back into the title race in style when they handed a 2-1 defeat to start-studded Muktijoddha Sangsad in their B. League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Smarting from their 1-0 reverse against Arambagh last week, Russel rode on their Moroccan recruits to snatch full points from the on paper formidable all-Reds.

Ighir Mohamed and Touati Youness struck in the first half with strikes that finally separated the teams as Muktijoddha only managed to grab themselves a consolation via an effort by the ageing Matuir Munna in the second half.

With the outcome Russel improved their tally to 18 points to share the top slot with Muktijoddha, who finished the first-leg campaign remaining at same 18 points from ten games,

although they have played one match less than their opponents.

Russel will play their last first-leg match against Dhaka Abahani.

Moroccan midfielder Ighir drew first blood to put Russel ahead in the 30th minute when he dodged past mercurial defender Rajani after receiving the ball from a chip from his compatriot Bourdif Mohamed to beat the onrushing Mukti custodian Titumir Chowdhury, who dived right but couldn't clutch the bouncing ball.

Russel took full control of the match before the breather as the lanky Moroccan striker Youness headed in Ighir cross from around the penalty spot, although his effort took some help to find the back of the net, bouncing first off the bar and then striking the unfortunate Titumir on the back before trickling in to double Russel's advantage.

Muktijoddha regrouped in the second session to raid the opponents territory and veteran midfielder Matuir Munna pulled one back with a stunning right footer from the left side of the D-boxed by skipper Moni (2-1) in the 69th minute.

But before that Moroccan

Brahim Buzziber was close to reducing the margin in the early minutes of the second half but his header from left-back Titoo's cross just flew over the cross-piece.

In the 74th minute Brahim's long-range shot beat Russel goalkeeper Shakil but defender Aminul salvaged the party with a goaline save by a header.

With just three minutes left before the final whistle Muktijoddha SKC got their last chance to restore parity but Munna from a vintage position failed to connect with a left-flank long throw from substitute forward Enamul Huq.

Yellow cards - Saad, Rikta, Mishu (Russel), Ghansa (Muktijoddha).

TEAMS

RUSSEL: Shakil, Hasan, Bourdif, Mishu, Prodeep, Aminul, Saad, Ighir, Tanveer (Kaiser), Nayan (Rikta) and Youness.

MUKTIJODDHA: Titumir, Rajani, Hasan, Ghansa, Titu, Brahim, Arman (Maruf), Munna, Arman Aziz, Alfaz (Enamul) and Moni (Kanchan).

Referee: Mansoor Azad.



PHOTO: STAR

Sheikh Russel's Moroccan striker Touati Youness (L) battles for ball during the B.League encounter against Muktijoddha at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.