

Gaibandha and Rajshahi win

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Gaibandha and Rajshahi earned full points with identical wins yesterday in the final round of the Western Union National Youth Football Championship here.

Second half goals by Jiban and Hassan helped Gaibandha come from a goal down to beat Jhenaidah 2-1 in the day's first match at the Sathkira Stadium. Kayes put Jhenaidah ahead in the first half.

In another come-from behind win, Shafi and Raju struck in either half as Rajshahi survived a first-minute goal by Sohel to defeat Narayanangj 2-1.

Federer survives a scare

AFP, Hamburg

Roger Federer was made to fight uncomfortably hard to survive his opening round match at the Masters Series and showed few signs during a three-set struggle with Juan Monaco that he is emerging from his dip in form.

Federer, who has failed to win any of his last four tournaments for the first time since becoming world number one more than three years ago, mistimed the ball more than usual and had to save five points to avoid giving a break of serve down in the final set during an unconvincing 6-3, 2-6, 6-4 second round victory.

True, the world number 48 from Argentina has a good clay court record this year, and conditions were difficult, but Federer will need to play better to convince many people that he can prevent Rafael Nadal from winning this title for the first time on Sunday.

The match was played in very cool temperatures - only 11 degrees Centigrade - and with rain beating fiercely on the centre court roof during various stages of the match the atmosphere became very damp and the balls uncomfortably heavy.

"I had to fight to win and it was definitely a hard fought victory," said Federer. "The conditions were difficult but my opponent was good as well.

"Things were not always looking good today and I came out of a few difficult situations. It was not all straightforward.

"It was important to stay focused and hope for the best in the third set and hope to come through."

There were signs that Federer might not be able to win as routinely as expected as early as the second game, when he failed to hang on to a break of serve and needed to break again in the eighth game before he could capture the first set.

Youngsters

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Mehrab, who was dropped from the World Cup squad after being around for a while as a solution for the team's unsettled opening pair, is ready to celebrate a Test call.

"Both of our openers are doing well at the moment. Javed is in a good touch while Shahriar Nafees got a Test hundred in the last series. I wish their success but if I get my opportunity ahead one of them, I will try to grab that with both hands," said Mehrab on his chances to be in the starting lineup.

He considered the Indian attack as 'nothing extraordinary'.

"Their pacers looked pretty ordinary in the ODI series. But in the Tests, they will have a world class spinner in Anil Kumble," added Mehrab.

Benitez cool on

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Liverpool and Chelsea, when the former Real Madrid technical director claimed: "Put shit hanging from a stick in the middle of this passionate crazy stadium, and there are people who will tell you it's a work of art. It's not. It's shit hanging from a stick."

The Liverpool manager responded: "I have known Valdano since my time at Real Madrid and I do not have the best opinion of him. It infuriates me that a person who has the privilege to express himself in the media does not show the minimum respect to an institution like Liverpool."

Hoyzer begins

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Hoyzer told Sport-Bild magazine that he was not scared of serving his sentence in a prison in Berlin.

"I am not anxious, it is more like concern and respect. I would compare it with starting a new job," Hoyzer said.

Most of the matches he admitted fixing were in the German second and third division, although a German Cup match between first division SV Hamburg and third division Paderborn and a Turkish first division match between Ankaragucu and Galatasaray were also affected.

In the most controversial match, Hoyzer awarded amateurs Paderborn two penalties and sent off a Hamburg player to help the minnows recover from two goals down and win the Cup match.

Hoyzer admitted receiving 70,000 euros and a flat-screen television set for fixing matches.

England wait on Flintoff



AFP, London

England are to wait until the morning of the first Test against West Indies before deciding if all-rounder Andrew Flintoff is fit to play at Lord's.

Flintoff has been doubtful for the first Test, which starts on Thursday, after suffering discomfort on his left ankle, operated on twice over the last three years, during Lancashire's drawn championship match with Hampshire over the weekend.

The Lancashire quick did bowl during practice at Lord's on Wednesday.

But afterwards new England coach Peter Moores said it was still too soon to say if Flintoff would be fit for the first Test of a four-match series.

"He's bowled today (Wednesday), two short spells. His ankle is still sore and we are going to have to wait and see," Moores told reporters at Lord's.

"We would like to have know definitely today but we don't so we are going to have wait and see where we are in the morning."

Asked if he was concerned by

the recurrence of Flintoff's ankle problem, Moores said: "You can't control injuries. I've coached for eight years at Sussex, you get injuries.

"You've got to be fair to the player and you've got to be fair to the team. You've got to take both things into consideration. It (the ankle) seems to be getting better. But if he's not fit, he's not fit.

"Maybe the Test match might come a bit too soon, we don't really know at the moment," the former Sussex wicketkeeper added. "What we don't want to do is carry injured men into a game of cricket."

However, the new England coach said that with Flintoff, set for another heavy workload throughout the season, it was important management took a long-term view of his injury.

"We know he's had ankle problems before. We've got a good medical team and they are doing everything they can to check. We wouldn't play him if we thought it (the injury) was going to get worse.

"If it's a wear and tear job then we've got to manage it as we go along. It would be daft of me to predict the future, we've got to plan it. But we don't take one Test match as one Test match. He's an important player for the team, a huge

player.

"We don't want to give painkilling injections to mask things."

If Flintoff does not regain fitness, Moores said batsman Owais Shah -- drafted in as cover for Kevin Pietersen, who has a calf injury -- could be called into the starting XI with England fielding a four-man attack.

"If he (Flintoff), doesn't play, we are more likely to be playing a batter," Moores said.

England, who will be captained by Andrew Strauss after regular skipper Michael Vaughan was forced out with a finger injury, called up Flintoff's fellow Lancashire quick James Anderson into their squad Wednesday.

Anderson will come down to London after playing in Wednesday's morning session of Lancashire's County Championship fixture against Worcestershire at Old Trafford.

He will return to Manchester if not required by England.

Anderson's call-up is part of a scheme introduced by Moores to have a standby player join the squad the night before each Test to provide additional options. The player will be released if not required.

'It's still a murder case'

AFP, Kingston

Jamaican deputy police commissioner Mark Shields said the Bob Woolmer case is being investigated as a murder despite reports the Pakistan cricket coach died of a heart attack.

"As I have said from day one, we will be keeping an open mind and looking at all angles. Please give us more time," Shields told the Jamaica Observer from his hotel room in Cape Town, South Africa.

Woolmer, 58, was found dead in his Kingston hotel room on March 18, the day after cricketing powers Pakistan crashed out of the World Cup in an upset loss to minnows Ireland.

The Jamaican Gleaner newspaper reported Sunday that sources in Scotland Yard, from whom Jamaican police have sought help, said Woolmer's death was caused by heart failure and not murder as reported by the local police.

"Every theory, from weed killer to aconite, has come from the media, not the police," Shields said.

"We maintain that this is an ongoing murder investigation."

Shields is a former Scotland Yard detective who is in South Africa briefing the Woolmer family.

It was reported that British-based pathologist Nat Carey had rubbished the report filed by local pathologist Ere Seshiah that ruled Woolmer had died of asphyxiation due to manual strangulation.

Shields, chief investigator in the Woolmer murder probe, refused to comment on the allegations, saying he would stick by a police statement Sunday that maintained that Woolmer was murdered.

"I can't comment on that as it would be inappropriate at this time," Shields said.

Derrick Smith, the opposition Jamaica Labour spokesman on security, called on Jamaican national security minister Peter Phillips to brief the nation on the Woolmer saga.

"The matter has become a global embarrassment for us," Smith said. "The situation is embarrassing and should be dealt with as a matter of urgency."

No Murali at T20 WC

BBC ONLINE, undated

Muttiah Muralidaran will not play in the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup from 11 September, meaning he will be available for Lancashire's season end.

BBC Sport understands that Muralidaran has just begun his summer in county cricket, and is keen to play as many games for them as possible.

He will play Sri Lanka's two Tests against Bangladesh from late June, but not the one-dayers against the Tigers.

Muralidaran, 35, while focusing on Tests, is not retiring from ODIs.

The Twenty20 World Cup takes place in South Africa, and has its final on 24 September.

It features all 10 Test nations, plus Kenya and Scotland, who qualified by their world rankings just before the World Cup.

Super League

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with Mohammedan and Old DOHS heavily opposing the move.

The second round was supposed to begin today but it has been deferred by one day to prepare the grounds, which became unplayable due to rain.

Tomorrow, Abahani will take on Biman, Mohammedan play Sonargaon and Victoria meet bottom-table Old DOHS, the defending two-time champions who have already crashed out of the title race.

Blatter calls

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Blatter also poured scorn on worries that the World Cup in 2010 would have to be moved from South Africa.

"We are following every stage and everything is going smoothly," he said. "I am confident, FIFA is confident and the only thing that will stop us from holding the World Cup in South Africa would be a natural disaster.

"Plans B and C involve South Africa," he headed.

He said that 40 million dollars would be put into improving refereeing over the next four years, while revealing that a test with four linesmen instead of two would be held at a junior tournament.

On the question of violence in the sport, Blatter seemed to pass the buck a little.

"Security is not an issue for football but one for governments. However, comfort in the stadiums is an affair for football, as has been demonstrated in England.

"Hooligans come and misbehave on the continent because over here there is still the possibility of exploiting and using football."

Malik not nervous



AFP, Lahore

New Pakistan cricket captain Shoaib Malik Wednesday denied he would be nervous as he tries to rebuild his beleaguered side after a disastrous World Cup.

Malik spoke ahead of Pakistan's departure on Wednesday night for Abu Dhabi for a three-match one-day international series against Sri Lanka, the beaten finalists in the tournament in the Caribbean.

"I am not nervous at all," Malik told AFP. "I know the season ahead is difficult but I will live up to the confidence placed in me by the Pakistan Cricket Board and the fans."

"I am confident that all the players will work hard to put the team back on a winning track and forget what happened in the World Cup," added Malik, who has played 18 Tests and 137 one-dayers.

The games against Sri Lanka on May 18, 20 and 22 are Pakistan's first assignment since crashing out

in the first round of the World Cup in March after losing to minnows Ireland.

Coach Bob Woolmer was also found dead at the team hotel in Jamaica the day after the defeat. Jamaican police insist he was murdered despite reports that Woolmer died of a heart attack.

Pakistan's humiliating exit forced burly Inzamamul Haq to relinquish the captaincy and quit one-day cricket. Malik replaced Inzamam as captain after senior player Younis Khan refused to take over.

Pakistan have yet to find a replacement for Woolmer and manager Talat Ali, a former Test opener, will supervise the coaching during the Abu Dhabi series.

The 25-year-old Malik said Pakistan, the 1992 World Cup champions, were determined to forget the last edition of the tournament.

"Whatever happened in the past is now past and the best thing about this current team is that all the senior players are very cooperative and once we win the

morale of the team will go up," he said.

Malik admitted that Pakistan would have to be on top form to win against Sri Lanka, who lost to Australia in a farcical World Cup final.

"Sri Lanka are a formidable team and even without (Muttiah) Muralidaran, (Chaminda) Vaas and (Kumar) Sangakkara (all not in Sri Lanka team due to their county commitments) we will have to beat our best to beat them," he said.

Pakistan would also be tested by their rigorous coming season, he said.

"We have a tough season ahead in which we face South Africa, India and Australia so we must shape up quickly and all the players are experienced and know what it takes to become world's best side," said Malik.

Pakistan feature in the Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa in September before hosting the Proteas in October. They tour India in November-December and then host Australia early next year.

Battle of problem sides

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the second Test at his Headingley home ground starting on May 25.

England have appointed Andrew Strauss, who led the side during their last home season but handed over the reins to Flintoff in Australia, as stand-in captain following the all-rounder's infamous pedalo escapade in the Caribbean although the selectors have said the decision was purely a cricketer's one.

Vaughan, unhappy at being denied a role advising Flintoff in Australia, insisted there was no ulterior motive for his presence at Lord's and that all he wanted to do was assist Strauss.

"If I can help him to settle, to talk to the young players or the bowlers or whatever, it will be a great help to him," Vaughan told The Times.

Test debutant Matt Prior, who played under Moores at Sussex where the England coach was previously the southern county's wicket-keeper, becomes the latest gloveman to try to fill the gap left by Alec Stewart's retirement four years ago.

It may be unfair, but there will be those looking at Prior's performance as much as for what it says about Moores's judgment as it does the player himself.

TEAMS

ENGLAND (from): Andrew Strauss (captain), Alastair Cook, Ian Bell, Kevin Pietersen, Paul Collingwood, Andrew Flintoff, Owais Shah, Matt Prior (wk), Matthew Hoggard, Stephen Harmison, Liam Plunkett, Monty Panesar.

WEST INDIES (from): Chris Gayle, Daren Ganga, Devon Smith,

Ramnaresh Sarwan (capt), Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Runako Morton, Dwayne Bravo, Denesh Ramdin (wk), Daren Powell, Jerome Taylor, Darren Sammy, Corey Collimore, Fidel Edwards, Sylvester Joseph, Ravi Rampaul.

Umpires: Rudi Koertzen and Asad Rauf.

Akhtar ready

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me to make a strong comeback."

He said that he had recovered from his knee injury and a slight hamstring problem. "I am fit now and I have also been consulting with Wasim Akram and Imran Khan on how best to preserve myself and keep myself in top shape for future assignments. They have been of great help."

Test-ing time for Tigers

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second which is much tougher," said Bangladesh's outgoing coach Dav Whatmore.

"They still haven't acquired this skill completely. But it will happen with the help of the four-day games in domestic cricket."

India, fresh from a 2-0 win in the one-dayers, are confident of extending their Test supremacy over Bangladesh, having won all three matches played so far against their neighbours.

"It is obviously going to be difficult for Bangladesh in the series simply because they have not played that much Test cricket," said Indian captain Rahul Dravid.

"We have played a lot of Test cricket and there is a lot of experience. So we expect to do well

against them in both matches.

"Hopefully we can get some good weather and some good wickets and we can do really well."

India are bolstered by the return of senior pros Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Venkatesh Laxman and Anil Kumble, who did not play in the one-dayers.

But seamer Shanthakumaran Sreesanth will miss the series due to an ankle injury and will be replaced in the 15-man squad by left-arm fast bowler Rudra Pratap Singh.

Untested left-armer Rajesh Pawar gives Dravid the luxury picking a third spinner besides Kumble and Ramesh Powar in the hot and humid weather.

The second Test will be played in Dhaka from May 25.

Bradley set for US

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guiding the Americans without an interim tag will come June 2 when the US squad will face China in a friendly at San Jose, California.

That will be the Americans' final test before playing in the North American Gold Cup continental championship, which opens June 7, and the Copa America, the South American championship tournament that begins on July 28.

Sunil Gulati, the US Soccer Federation president, was looking at other people for the job last December when he handed Bradley the interim post saying he wanted to wait until European league seasons ended to consider all possible candidates.

US Soccer appeared close to a deal with former German national team coach Jurgen Klinsmann, but talks failed and Gulati delayed a final decision.

But Bradley, 49, made a strong impression with a 3-0 win with one drawn record on an interim basis, including a 2-0 victory over Mexico in February.

Bradley spent nine seasons as a coach in Major League Soccer, winning a league crown with Chicago in 1998 and setting a mark for coaches with 124 triumphs.

He coached Chivas USA last year, taking the league's worst club from the prior season and turning it into a playoff qualifier.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Vice Chancellor of National University Professor Dr Wakil Ahmed distributes prizes among the winners of the inter-varsity handball and tennis tournament at the Physical Training College ground in Mohammadpur on Tuesday. National University become champions in both men and women group.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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I K Z I S - L C Y W S - F C D I S .
Yesterday's Cryptoquip: IFA "ROBIN HOOD" GUY WERE KNOWN FOR SAUTEING HIS FOOD, WHAT COULD HE BE CALLED? FRYER TUCK.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: Q equals Y