

Gaibandha and Rajshahi win

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathira

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 Jibon and Hassan helped Gaibandha come from a goal down to beat Jhenaidah 2-1 in the day's first match at the Sathira Stadium. Kayses 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 Narayanganj 2-1.

Federer survives a scare

APP, 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 going 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 line-up.

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."

Hoyer begins

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Hoyer 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," Hoyer 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, Hoyer 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.

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

England wait on Flintoff

Cricket

APP, 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.

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 (the 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 at Lord's.

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

"We would like to have known definitely today but we don't so we are going to have wait and see," Moores told reporters at Lord's.

Asked if he was concerned by

MSC first-leg champs

AND CAPORALE BUT MOROCCAN STRIKER YOUNES FAILED TO BEAT BIPLAB AT THE NEAR POST WITH HIS WEAKATTACK.

Russel went for the long ball strategy but Caporale, who won every challenge in the air despite being about six inches shorter, magnificently marked the taller Younes.

Abahani will definitely miss the excellence of the former Monterrey (Mexican first division team) defender if he does not return for the second leg. Caporale will leave for home on May 19 and is expected to let the club know whether he would be available for the later part of the campaign.

The sky-blues had another opportunity to go ahead when a scoop by Ibrahim split the opposition defence in the 37th minute. But Zahed's overhead sidekick was blocked by Zia, who rashed out of his goal to challenge the lone midfielder.

Zia picked up an injury to leave the ground three minutes after the break and his replacement Shakil made a couple of important saves. The substitute shot-stopper kept a deflected freekick by Caporale out for a corner and made the save of the day in the 72nd minute.

Abahani's super-sub Tipu, who came in at the break for Emily, received a gem of a square-pass from Ibrahim who outfoxed three defenders at the left side. But the substitute striker's delay for a fraction of a second just near the six-yard box allowed Shakil to

cover the angle and stop the plating shot from point-blank range.

Russel also fluffed his chances with Younes forcing a fine save by Biplab, who went airborne to hold a spectacular backvolley from the edge of the area while Ighir saw his dipping volley from 20 yards palmed over the bar by the national custodian midway through the second half.

The second leg is expected to begin on May 31.

Yellow cards: Caporale, Ibrahim (Abahani) and Fetah (Russel)

Khokon (Ctg Abahani), Emeka (Mohammedan)

2 goals: Yusuf (Ctg MSC), Enock, Faisal (Brothers), Emily (Abahani), Brahim, Munna (Mukti), Ali Hossain (FSC), Abraham, Mabah (Abahani), Md Ronny (Mohammedan)

PSV offloads Sun

APP, Beijing

Chinese defender Sun Xiang is heading home to Shanghai after Dutch club PSV Eindhoven cut him loose this week.

Football Director Stan Valckx announced on the club website that PSV would not keep the Chinese player, who joined the club from Shanghai Shenhua in January on a six-month loan.

The 25-year-old left back made history when he became the first player from China to play in the European Champions League in PSV's 1-0 win against Arsenal in February.

PSV had the right to sign the Chinese international for a further three seasons, but declined.

Assistant coach Jan Wouters said the Shanghai club were asking too much money for Sun.

"One million euro is not joke," he was quoted as saying by China's Titan Sports Weekly.

TOP SCORERS

Double hattrick: Paul (Mohammedan v Rahmatganj)

Hattricks: Alfaz (Muktiuddha) v Rahmatganj, Junior (Brothers) v Rahmatganj

12 goals: Paul (Mohammedan)

7 goals: Junior (Brothers)

5 goals: Nicodemus (Arambagh), Robin (Farashganj)

4 goals: Moni, Alfaz (Muktiuddha), Younes (Russel), Prashanta (Khulna Abahani)

3 goals: Mamun (Khulna Abahani), Ighir (Russel), Ibrahim (Abahani)

Referee: Mansoor Azad.

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Magpies unveil Big Sam

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Three years ago, and last summer he was interviewed for the England job but lost out to Middlesbrough boss Steve McClaren.

Allardyce - who revealed there was no clause in his contract to release him for England in the future - confirmed he hopes to strengthen the squad this summer, but would also look to bring the famed 'scientific' approach and attention to detail which worked so well at Bolton, to St James' Park.

"I want to get a great team spirit behind the scenes as well as on the pitch, that wins football matches," he said.

"No disrespect to Bolton, a club I love, but this club is massive. I want the players to want to come to Newcastle United and to want to play for the club."

"We will look at structuring behind the scenes, the sort of science and football way I work. We will look at what data and what information we need to start need storing."

"I will get the staff working with me, with maybe one or two additions in the future."

Allardyce added that he was determined to keep strikers Michael Owen and Obafemi Martins at Newcastle.

"The speculation around Michael will be resolved once we get to speak to him," he said. "You wouldn't want to lose your leading goalscorers and there are two fantastic goalscorers we want to keep at the club."

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have scheduled two friendlies against England at the new Wembley on June 1 and against Turkey in Dortmund four days later.

The South Americans hope to field a top level team made up mainly of stars from European soccer in the tournament in Venezuela after their surprise elimination in the quarter-finals of last year's World Cup.

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Already without Manchester City's Micah Richards, who has had calf surgery, McClaren now faces the June 1 friendly with Brazil and the Euro 2008 qualifier in Estonia the following week with his two right-backs unavailable.

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Blatter also pored over 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 added.

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."

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