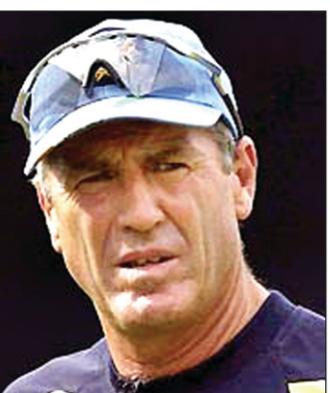




Did U Know?

Hakan Sukur of Turkey scored the fastest goal in the FIFA World Cup history in 2002 when he scored 11 seconds into the match against South Korea.



John Wright
(Former New Zealand captain and India coach)
"I'd like to get involved in New Zealand cricket because it's sort of a bit like unfinished business."

Shut up, says ICC

AFP, Karachi

The head of the International Cricket Council's corruption-busting force said Tuesday that people who linked the death of Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer to match-fixing should now "shut up."

Paul Condon, the chairman of the cricket body's Anti-Corruption and Security Unit (ACSU), also said he was concerned that Jamaican police were so ready to embrace the theory that Woolmer was murdered.

Jamaica police commissioner Lucius Thomas announced Tuesday that Woolmer's death during the World Cup nearly three months ago was from natural causes and that there was no reason to suspect foul play or match-fixing.

"The ICC welcomes the true facts of Bob Woolmer's sad death being made public," Condon said in a statement on the ICC's website.

Condon said the reputation of the World Cup and the game of cricket were both "unnecessarily tarnished as the theories about Woolmer's death became wilder and more bizarre with many of those theories suggesting a link to corruption and match-fixing."

"To those who suggest that corruption is still widespread throughout the game of cricket -- and there have been plenty of people who have peddled such comments to anyone prepared to listen in the aftermath of Bob's unfortunate death -- we have one clear message: put up or shut up," he added.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

BCCI to wait for coach

CRICINFO, undated

A new coach for the Indian cricket team will be appointed after the Ireland and England tours, according to Niranjan Shah, the secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

Speaking to rediff.com, Shah indicated that the BCCI were cautious following the rejection of the post by Graham Ford. The South African had been appointed as coach on Saturday following the BCCI's selection panel interviews with Ford and former English spinner John Emburey.

Shah felt that the team could manage on the tough tour to England without a coach. "The manager Chanda Borse is highly experienced, both as a player and as an administrator, to handle everything. Besides, we're sending Venkatesh Prasad and Robin Singh as bowling and fielding coaches respectively with the squad. There are already many experienced players in the side and they too can always guide and help the younger members of the team."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Rafique more confident

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Ace left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique said that he has gained much-needed self-confidence from the Afro-Asia Cup, which he believes was useful during a tough series in Sri Lanka in June-July.

The 36-year-old stood out for Bangladesh in the tournament, especially his figures of 4-65 in the third game was significant but the veteran was not ready to focus only on individual performance rather he gave credits to all his teammates to lift the Bangladeshi cricket to a different platform.

"Yes, my success in the two matches gave me self-confidence ahead of the Sri Lanka tour but I was not alone, my other colleagues also played good cricket in the tournament. Tamim Iqbal also impressed everybody with his brilliant batting in the Twenty20 match," the experienced campaigner observed.

Although there was much talk about how difficult it is to play in Sri Lanka, a straightforward Rafique found no reason why people are crying 'tough tour'.

"If you play at this level you are bound to play in Australia, New Zealand or any other place with tough condition. The condition in Sri Lanka is difficult but we have to face it. Rather than talking too much about conditions, it is wiser to focus on our own abilities," a simple response from the veteran who is just seven Test wickets shy from becoming the first Bangladeshi to claim hundred wickets in both forms of the game.

The leading Bangladesh wicket-taker was very much confident that this time his side will show much better performance than the previous occasions.

"A number of our cricketers represented the Asia XI because of our recent performance. Still we can't think about results in Test matches but we have the ability to impress everybody that time. All the players are in good touch but individually we should give our best. I think this is a much more confident side," he explained.

Under welcome sunshine there was a lively battle between bowlers and the batsmen as they had the nets in the central wicket with new ball bowlers Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Shahadat exploiting the condi-

tions, giving the top order batting hard times.

The lanky Shahadat, who had tested the vaunted India batting line-up in the first Test at Chittagong, came out with full verve to produce short pitch deliveries in a hostile spell against the openers, especially left-handed Shahriar Nafees who received a bouncer on his shoulder.

But the calmness returned once the spinners joined the action where captain Mohammad Ashraful bowled leg-breaks at least for an hour.

"This time I also focused on my bowling that's why almost everyday I have tried a few overs in the nets. I used to bowl in domestic competitions on regular basis but hardly got the chance in international matches," said the young Tigers skipper.

"I think it would be helpful for our regular bowlers if I could lend my support sometimes, especially in the Test series. But I only take the ball if situation demands, otherwise not," added Ashraful, who got his predecessor Habibul Bashar stumped.

Dashing opener Tamim Iqbal, who recovered from a groin problem, appeared at the nets for the first time since the training had started last Thursday while paceman Shahadat Hossain not only returned to action after three days' rest but also produced some fireworks at the central wicket.

Under welcome sunshine there was a lively battle between bowlers and the batsmen as they had the nets in the central wicket with new ball bowlers Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Shahadat exploiting the condi-

Pakistan's nightmare over

Cricket

AFP, London

Pakistan's captain at the World Cup Inzamamul Haq has spoken of the "nightmare" he and his team endured after Jamaican police

was not murdered," Inzamam wrote in Wednesday's edition of Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper.

"All the boys will feel the same, as I'm sure his family will also. But this verdict will never take away one of the toughest periods in our lives. It was a nightmare," the batsman explained.

"Those final 10 days in the Caribbean were the hardest of my life. We went through hell."

"I don't know what has happened there but I can tell you it wasn't good for the players or for Pakistan cricket."

"It was hard and painful enough to lose a good friend like Bob, as he was a great human being, but to then be caught up in a murder investigation was very, very difficult for all of us."

"And, as captain, I probably felt the pressure most."

"I was one of the few who saw Bob lying in his room and it was very upsetting. We had become close as captain and coach over the three years he had spent with the Pakistan team."

"We felt at times as though people were pointing the finger at us and that was not fair. It was unbelievable, not right."

Inzamam, who has had a two-month break from cricket, retired from one-dayers at the World Cup and the captaincy has since passed to Shoaib Malik.

However, the 37-year-old right-hander remains a Test player and he is looking to extend his impressive record in the five-day game which has so far seen him score 8,813 runs at an average of more than 50 in 119 matches with 25 hundreds -- the 10th highest number of individual centuries in Test history.

"Now I'm mentally focused and feeling refreshed," Inzamam said.

"I'm aware that I need a few runs (21) to pass Javed Miandad to become Pakistan's highest run-scorer, but I'm looking further ahead than that. I want to score at least another thousand Test runs and get to 10,000."

"The summer that Pakistan has coming up later in the year is all the motivation I need, with tough series against South Africa at home, India in India and then Australia at home."

"Hopefully, the selectors will feel that my experience will be useful to the team. Insha Allah."



Veteran left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique in his delivery stride as Shahriar Nafees looks on during practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Bhai Bhai Sangha emerged Second Division League champions when they beat Nabajagaran Sangha 25-18, 15-25, 25-18, 25-16 points in the last league match at the Volleyball Stadium yesterday.

Nabajagaran finished runners-up and Nagar Samaj Kalyan Sangha third in the 6-team fray.

In the first division finale, Azad Sporting Club defeated Madartek Mitali Sangha 3-0 at the same venue to finish runners-up.

First Division champions East End Boys' Mamun was adjudged the best player of the top division while Babu of Bhai Bhai won the best player award of the second division. Each pocketed Tk 15,000 from sponsors National Bank Limited.

OFFICERS' CLUB BRIDGE

Aces Bridge Club lifted the Officers' Club Team Bridge Championship which concluded last Monday.

MA Hannan, chairman of Card Committee, handed over the champions' trophy to the winning captain on conclusion of the five-day meet.

Lara hints at return

Cricket

AFP, London

West Indies legend Brian Lara has hinted at a return to cricket only months after announcing his retirement from the international game.

Lara announced his West Indies retirement following his country's failure to qualify for the semi-finals at the World Cup in the Caribbean.

He had initially planned only to retire from one-day internationals at the end of the tournament but was expected to be part of the ongoing tour of England.

According to The Wisden Cricketer magazine, Lara -- Test cricket's leading all-time run scorer -- wants to return to the game, although it remains unclear for who, and at what level, he intends to play.

"I think I am going to play cricket again. If I go six or eight months without cricket I will lose it and I don't want to lose it yet," said Lara.

Asked if that meant paying for celebrity team Lashings, he replied "No," leaving County cricket or the proposed new Indian breakaway 20-over league as intriguing possibilities.

Lara expected and hoped to be

at Old Trafford, the decline in West Indies cricket has been laid bare so far this summer. Lara insists that West Indies' problems run very deep.

"It's that we don't have a good infrastructure for young guys to develop. West Indies have a great under-15 side. I know a 16-year-old guy in Trinidad who's awesome but I worry for him because of the facilities."

A mediocre Australian cricketer at 17 or 18 will be slapping everyone all over the world five years later. If you don't have facilities and you don't have employment then you have a negative atmosphere."

Lara feels that he fulfilled personal goals, but regrets not seeing the West Indies reach their full potential.

"I've done what I could do so I'm happy with me. As a team, we've not been able to climb out of the doldrums so that will remain on my mind. That does not rest well with me. I leave West Indies cricket with my head held high."

"I've tried my best and I've worked my arse off. Maybe I could have done things differently but I've done things my way -- that's the most important thing."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

BRIAN LARA



Thai world lightweight boxing champion Siriporn Taweesuk poses while leaving a prison in Prathum Thani province on Wednesday.

Punching out of jail

Boxing

AFP, Bangkok

Thai world boxing champion and convicted drugs dealer Siriporn Taweesuk walked out of jail in tears Wednesday after securing early release for winning her title from behind bars.

The 24-year-old, better known by her stage name "Samson," made a final walk through the prison's grounds behind high-security walls to say farewell to her 1,245 fellow inmates.

"I couldn't sleep at all last night," she told reporters. "I feel reborn today."

Siriporn has served more than six years of her 10-year sentence for selling small amounts of narcotics.

She won early release when she beat Japan's Ayaka Miyano at the Klong Prem Central Prison in Bangkok on April 3, 2007 to clinch the World Boxing Council (WBC) female light flyweight title.

Prison authorities agreed to let her out early provided she reports to a parole officer every month

until January 2009.

She will not be moving far away. Siriporn will now become a trainer for 27 boxers at the Women's Correctional Institute for Drug Addicts and will live in the warden's residence just beyond its walls on the outskirts of Bangkok.

"She is free to go anywhere without telling anyone," Thai prisons boss Nathee Chitsawang told reporters.

Siriporn said she was nervous about going into the capital, which has seen dramatic changes with a building boom in recent years.

"I know Bangkok has changed a lot and there are many experiences that I've missed out on, including taking the SkyTrain," she said, referring to the new light rail system.

She said she hopes to box for as long as she can, and then later to open a small restaurant.

She is expected to stage her first defence of the title in Thailand as early as July, WBC representative Choowong Toomkit said.

"I know being champion is difficult, but what more difficult is defending it," she said.

Thailand loves a good fight:

Japanese, Nanako Kikuchi, in the 2005 world straw-weight title bout. Like Siriporn, Wanee was in prison for dealing methamphetamine, or "crazy drug" as it's known in Thai. Unlike Siriporn, Wanee suffered a technical knockout. But the beaten fighter still managed an early exit from prison the following year, when Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej pardoned her, along with three other female prison pugilists.

Before winning her world title, Siriporn harboured quiet hopes of opening up a convenience store after getting out of jail. Like many inmates, she must have worried about the threat of relapse. Now, Siriporn has told the press, her need for speed is gone. It has been replaced by the adrenaline rush of getting in the ring, as the Black Rose, and pummelling other women. A true Thai success story.

Siriporn first learned boxing in her country's sports-mad Corrections Department three years ago in part to protect herself from more aggressive jail-mates. She also took prison courses in cooking, hairdressing and sewing, but none captured her imagination as much as boxing did.

However, Siriporn is not the first Thai to box her way out of jail. Two years ago, fellow inmate Wanee Chaisena faced another