

Biman off to bright start

SPORTS REPORTER

Title contenders Bangladesh Biman began their AB Bank Senior Division Table Tennis League campaign with a straight sets win over Mohammadpur Boys on the opening day of the competition yesterday.

Biman, who lost the crown to debutant Sheikh Russel last season, dropped just one game in the final set when veteran Rochi beat Nabi 11-6, 11-3, 10-12 and 11-8. Earlier, Edison defeated Tuhin 11-5, 11-6 and 11-6 while Manash outplayed Saifur 11-4, 11-2, 11-3.

Armanitola JS blanked Dhaka Marine Youngs Club 3-0 while Brothers Union defeated Engineers Club by an identical margin in other matches at the Woodenfloor Gymnasium.

Holders Sheikh Russel will be in action today.

GM Zia joins Rajib, Nasir

SPORTS REPORTER

In a seesaw battle in the premier group of the Destiny International Rating Chess Tournament, Grand Master Ziaur Rahman joined previous round's joint leaders Enamul Hossain Rajib and Nasir Ahmed atop the table after the fifth round yesterday.

International Master Rajib shared points with FIDE Master Nasir at the federation hall-room to make Zia's way to the top with a win over Abu Sufian Shakir.

All three players, on four points, were closely followed by IM Abdullah Al Rakib on 3.5.

In the primary group, Taherul Islam and Aminul Islam Palash shared the lead with maximum five points.

Aus coaches in SL shortlist

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has short-listed a handful of Australian coaches to take over the national team, officials said Thursday.

"Terry Oliver and Trevor Bayliss are under consideration," a Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) source told AFP.

Local media speculated that a third Australian, former New Zealand coach Steve Rixon, may also be a contender.

Sri Lanka is looking for a replacement for Australian Tom Moody, who quit after a one-day series against Pakistan in Abu Dhabi last month.

A panel consisting of senior officials and former Sri Lankan captains in late May interviewed Oliver, who comes with good recommendations from the Australian state of Queensland.

The final interview with Bayliss, a coach for New South Wales, was set to take place here later Thursday.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Biman's Manash in action against Mohammadpur Boys' Saifur during their Senior Division Table Tennis League engagement at the woodenfloor gymnasium near Paltan Maidan yesterday.

BCCI surprised by Ford snub

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Graham Ford's decision to decline the offer to coach the Indian team came as a surprise to the BCCI, according to its secretary Niranjan Shah.

Speaking to The Hindu, Shah hinted that the South African had not made any demands, the rejection of which perhaps might have influenced the decision.

"I can tell you that he did not make any demands. He neither asked for his own support staff, nor did he ask for a two-year term. He appeared happy with what was given to him. The only doubt was about when he would join the team, not whether. We are extremely disappointed. He could have taken stock of the situation, whatever his problems were, in the beginning, before coming here."

Shah said that the hunt for the new coach of the Indian team will resume in a week's time and that the same seven-member committee will be retained to select the

new coach. He indicated that the team will have the coach by the time the Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa commences in September. "We have more than 80 days to pick a new coach. We should start hunting again in a week's time. There will not be any changes in the committee to select the coach."

He also confirmed that the BCCI had rejected the candidatures of both Dav Whatmore and John Emburey.

Shah stated that the BCCI would approach the task with an 'open mind' and that Indian coaches would be in contention as well. He suggested that the contracts of Venkatesh Prasad, the bowling coach, and Robin Singh, the fielding coach, were extended. But all of the current and former players, who were called up, were in players' attendants. The mentors' programme will begin on June 17.

Turner said that it would be difficult to coach the young players if one doesn't have a playing background. But at the same time, he drew the example of Australia's John Buchanan who was highly successful even though he had little game experience.

Turner acknowledged that educating the schools is the key to develop cricket but he feels that to facilitate this system, it will take some time because Bangladesh are competing against countries who have 150 years of cricket history.

Course not on

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people who play cricket but only around 500 who are living on it -- that is professionally. Here, it is quite diverse in this regard as there are more professional players. It is pretty much a community effort in my country but here it is club-based, divisional, etc," said the top CA official.

Among the current group of coaches who are participating in Level Two, former national player Manjul Islam has caught the Australians' eye.

"He is quite enthusiastic and looks to have a penchant for learning as well as giving it back," said Turner about the left-arm paceman who is active in domestic cricket.

But it was quite baffling to see some of the coaches missing because, it was learned, they opted out. But all of the current and former players, who were called up, were in players' attendants. The mentors' programme will begin on June 17.

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The secret of Aussie success

PTI, Bangalore

The secret of Australia's continued success on the cricket field lay in the fact that the players treated themselves as the second best team in the world, captain Ricky Ponting said today.

When preparing for a match or a tournament, the team considered itself the number two team, which needed to get better, Ponting said.

According to the two-time World Cup winning skipper, "We must never be happy with what we have achieved and try as hard as anybody else." The Australian team did not set itself any targets when it went out on the field as they did not want to put any restrictions on themselves regarding the total.

"We never restrict ourselves because when you put restrictions on yourself, you cannot achieve great things," the Tasmanian said.

The trials and tribulations in Indian cricket did not escape Ponting's attention.

"I don't really know...India is playing under a lot of mental pressure. We must learn how to cope with it." The respect Ponting had for Sachin Tendulkar also came through, as the Mumbai batsman was described as one of the all-time greats.

"He is the best batsman I have seen and I am trying to be as good as him," Ponting was speaking at a function announcing a scheme through which every run that he will score in one-day internationals throughout the year will help get underprivileged children to school.

Rixon refuses Pakistan

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

will review his decision," Ashraf told reporters in Islamabad late Wednesday.

Woolmer's death came as a catastrophic blow to Pakistan's already crisis-hit team, which was knocked out of the World Cup by outsiders Ireland the day before his Australian compatriot Steve Rixon ruled himself out.

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Pakistan are due to shortlist candidates later this week to replace Bob Woolmer, who died at the World Cup in Jamaica in March prompting a police investigation and controversy.

Police this week announced that he died of natural causes, not murder.

Rixon, the former New Zealand coach, told AFP from Sydney that the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) did contact him about the role but he had already made other plans.

"I am grateful that they did make contact but at this point in time I have decided to coach private schools in Australia and am not inclined to take an international assignment," said Rixon, who has also been linked to Sri Lanka.

Whatmore was not immediately available for comment.

PCB chairman Nasim Ashraf mentioned both Whatmore and Rixon earlier this week when asked on television about the criteria for Pakistan's next coach.

Ashraf said he was still certain a suitable coach would be found.

"We will shortlist three to four candidates on Saturday and I hope that anyone who might have fears

and a local coach and a foreigner does not get involved in politics," Ashraf said.

Intikhab Alam, a former Pakistan captain and coach of the team which won the World Cup in 1992, disagreed.

"Politics and infighting are due to weak management," Intikhab said. "Look at what Woolmer did to Pakistan cricket and (Greg) Chappell did to Indian cricket. Total mess."

Chappell quit the India job after Pakistan's archivials also flopped at the World Cup, a decision his elder brother Ian said was prompted by Woolmer's death.

All four South Asian cricket teams are currently looking for a new coach after the tournament in the Caribbean, with India having been snubbed by South Africa's Graham Ford and England's John Emburey.

Sri Lanka bade farewell to their Australian coach Tom Moody on a high note after finishing runners-up to Australia at the World Cup, while Bangladesh said goodbye to Whatmore.

Meanwhile Pakistani batting legend Javed Miandad, who had three spells as coach ending in 2004, was also critical of the selection process.

"If computer know-how is all that matters, then (Microsoft chairman) Bill Gates should have been the best cricket coach in the world," Miandad said.

Tsonga stuns

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surface and you are going to get matches like this, especially over three sets.

"I've had a lot go in my favour over the years, but to his credit he kept going for his shots and they kept coming off."

"I saw a bit of his match against Andy Roddick at the Australian Open and he was a set up there and served for the second set, so I knew how flashy he was." Tsonga, 22, had come into the tournament on the back of two consecutive challenger event wins at Surbiton and Lanzarote, but the big Frenchman had no doubts that this was the best win of his injury-plagued career.

"Everything went fantastic," Tsonga said. "I'm very happy because that's the best result in my career. Hewitt is a very good player on grass so it's fantastic to beat him."

"I was injured for two years with a back problem. I made my comeback in January and I've progressed since."

"I love playing in front of a big crowd for the show. It's unbelievable when there's a big crowd like today."

It all ends on Sunday

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he said. "I could never imagine myself at another club."

"But we didn't manage to come to an agreement and that's it. I don't want to point fingers."

"The circumstances have given me the opportunity to join another team who offered me what I asked from Real Madrid. Fenerbahce made me feel important again."

Carlos, who said his only regret at Madrid was never lifting the King's Cup, said he hoped to bow out on a high.

"I want to win the championship on Sunday and offer the trophy to the supporters before leaving Real Madrid with my head held high."

Real need only beat Mallorca at home on Sunday to ensure their first title in four years.

Carlos has played 370 Spanish league matches and 97 Champions League matches since joining Real.

He won the Champions League

three times and the Spanish title three times as well during his stay in Madrid.

F1 coming

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Sharda Ugra, sports editor of the respected India Today weekly.

"Places in south India like Bangalore or Chennai, where Karthikeyan and other drivers hail from, would have been better venues."

"It's more a business decision than a sporting one. The construction lobby will have a good time."

In the 17-race calendar for 2007, four were allotted to the Asia-Pacific region in Melbourne, Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai and the Fuji Speedway in Japan. Singapore will get a race in 2008 and South Korea in 2010.

Recoba plans

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Massimo Moratti, one of his biggest fans, is prepared to let him leave on a free transfer.

"I spoke to Moratti last week before I left. He is the reason I stayed here so long, but this time we looked each other in the eye and agreed this is the right moment to leave."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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