



PHOTO: STAR

Arambagh's Kenyan defender Thomas Biketi (R) makes a clearance during their B. League match against Farashganj at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Auspicious start for Russel

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Russel comfortably won their opening match of the AB Bank Senior Division Table Tennis League yesterday when the defending champions brushed aside Mohammedpur Boys in straight sets at the Woodenfloor gymnasium.

The star-studded Russel, featuring country's top-ranked players Mahbub and Mostafa -- the Billah brothers -- and former national number one Nasimul Hassan Kachi, did not play on the opening day of the nine-team competition.

Mostafa gave them a solid start beating Tuhin 11-4, 11-4, 11-7 while Mahbub defeated Regan 11-4, 11-1, 11-3 before Kachi wrapped up the show for Russel outplaying Saifur 11-1, 11-1, 11-2.

Birman won their second match in a row when the title chasers blanked Mariners 3-0 with Edison, Pappu and the seasoned Rochi winning their respective matches.

In another match, Shahed, Baban and Rokin helped Wari defeat Brothers Union 3-0.

Day One

FROM PAGE 17
taking place as players waited in the pavilion.

A spokesman for the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said the value of refunding what had been expected to be a sell-out 15,600-crowd was 640,000 pounds but that this would be met by their insurance policy.

The match is now set to resume on Saturday at 1000 GMT.

England have already won the series, going 2-0 up with one to play after their 60-run win in the third Test at Old Trafford completed Monday.

West Indies have won just two of their last 38 Tests.

More than

FROM PAGE 17
Khuna Abahani.

"We would have had the advantage in the race had we not missed numerous chances in that match. We also wasted a penalty in the drawn match against Chittagong Mohammedan," said Rupu shortly after a full training session at the Abahani ground in Dhanmondi.

With Abul scoring both the goals in their 2-1 win against Chittagong Mohammedan last week, the national midfielder will press for a place but has to convince the management that he is better than Ujjal, Khoubache, Zahed Parvez or untested Nigerian player Obi Mikel John, whose international transfer certificate was due to arrive last night.

"The attitude is very important. We have to be aggressive in front of the goal. We have created chances but failed to translate them into goals," said coach Amalesh Sen explaining Abahani's main problem.

"I feel that the confidence has been regained and if our players manage to keep the opposition under pressure, we will not feel the absence of Caporale, who was outstanding," told Amalesh.

"Mohammedan have been playing well but relies too much on Paul's goal scoring ability. But half of his dozen goals came in just one match. That tells us that he is not consistent and nothing to worry about really," the ex-national midfielder added.

Vaughan backs Panesar

Cricket

AFP, Chester-Le-Street

England captain Michael Vaughan has told Monty Panesar to carry on appealing, saying any attempt to curb the left-arm spinner's natural enthusiasm risked diminishing one of modern cricket's leading characters.

The exuberant Panesar took 10 for 187 in England's 60-run third Test win against West Indies at Old Trafford, which gave the hosts an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the four-match series.

Panesar, whose haul meant he was the first England spinner to take 10 wickets in a Test for a decade, has been his side's leading bowler this series with 17 wickets at under 21 apiece and has been Vaughan's 'go-to' player when his quicks have proved expensive.

On the final day at Old Trafford, umpire Aleem Dar who told the Northamptonshire slow bowler to observe cricket etiquette by appealing to him first before charging down the pitch to celebrate a wicket spoke to Panesar.

Under the International Cricket Council's Code of Conduct, players risked being fined or even suspended for excessive appealing.

But Vaughan, speaking on the eve of the fourth and final Test which starts at Riverside here Friday, insisted he had no problems with

Panesar's conduct.

"We're in a position of maybe taking characters out of the game," Vaughan told reporters at Riverside here Thursday. "We all love Monty Panesar -- he appeals, he celebrates with a high-five, he misses the odd high-five and he's brilliant for the game."

"We don't want to see that taken away," Vaughan stressed. "Now if it gets too much and he's appealing every ball, yes we'll maybe say something."

"But at the minute he's a young lad bowling brilliantly and entertaining a lot of people. Let him continue," said Vaughan of Panesar, whose enthusiasm and skills have made him something of a cult hero with crowds around the world.

"Monty's very approachable and if you say to him 'just calm it down a little bit' he will do."

Panesar, who has now taken 59 wickets in his 16 Tests at an economical average of under 30 apiece and is now ranked twelfth in the ICC Test bowling rankings, has been the mainstay of a four-man attack in the absence of injured all-rounder Andrew Flintoff.

"It does put quite a lot of pressure on your spinner at some stages but fortunately he is standing up to that pressure tremendously well for a 25-year-old who's not played a huge amount of cricket," Vaughan explained.

"I think he's going to improve pretty quickly, he's certainly a quick learner," said Vaughan.

This match is set to see Matthew Hoggard, Vaughan's Yorkshire colleague, replace Liam Plunkett in the attack after the swing specialist missed the last two Tests with a groin injury sustained in the drawn series opener at Lord's.

Plunkett was particularly wayward at Old Trafford and Vaughan hopes Hoggard, eighth in the ICC rankings, can restore an element of control.

"I'm delighted to have Matthew Hoggard back because I know what consistency he brings and how easy he is to captain," Vaughan said.

England's batsmen have collectively been in fine form this series, scoring eight hundreds in three Tests.

However, opener Andrew Strauss has managed just one century in his last 17 Test innings. "I've been in that position where I've been playing great in the nets but in the middle it hasn't happened for me," said Vaughan.

"He just has to focus ball by ball. One thing you do sometimes when you are struggling for runs is look too far ahead, saying 'I desperately need a hundred'. You go out thinking about the hundred before even getting to ten."

"If you break an innings down, and he gets to five, gets to 10 and knock it down a little step by step he'll be fine. He's got a lot of mental strength and he's a good player."

Happy hunting for Farashganj

SPORTS REPORTER

Farashganj took revenge of their first leg loss to Arambagh when the riversiders recorded a solitary goal victory in yesterday's B. League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The league resumed after a four-day break due to seasonal rain and Farashganj, who suffered a 2-0 defeat in their earlier meeting, settled for a scoreless first half.

Mohammed Robin separated the two sides with a 79th minute strike -- the young striker's sixth league goal -- to also help Farashganj topple Arambagh in the table with their fourth overall win in 13 games.

Arambagh, who have also played 13 matches, stuck to 16 points and slipped to eighth place following their third consecutive defeat in the second leg and overall seventh loss.

BFF will send U-15 booters to Tata

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) will send its under-15 football squad for a month-long training at India's famous Tata Sports Academy.

The 25-member team in addition of coaches Golam Jilani and Bayezid Alam Nipu are expected to leave Dhaka on June 22 for the Jamshedpur academy.

However, it was learned yesterday that five of the players do not have passports. In case the problem cannot be sorted out in time, 20 players will attend the training programme, which will be held under management of Tata with help of Bangladesh Olympic Association.

All the booters have been requested to report to the coaches on June 17 at the BFF Bhaban at 4pm.

Gayle named ODI captain

AFP, Chester-Le-Street

Chris Gayle will captain West Indies in their forthcoming Twenty20 matches and one-day internationals against England, with stand-in Test skipper Daren Ganga omitted from the 14-man squad announced here Friday.

Ganga, who became captain after Ramnaresh Sarwan sustained a tour-ending shoulder injury in the side's record innings and 283 run defeat in the second Test at Headingley, will depart after the fourth and final Test here at Riverside.

Also leaving are fast bowlers Corey Collymore and Jerome Taylor, who both played during the World Cup in the Caribbean, and batsman Sylvester Joseph.

Ganga, who has only played seven one-day internationals in nearly five years, had been reported to be the favourite of the West Indies Cricket Board executive committee to captain the limited-overs side, with the selectors favouring fellow opening batsman Gayle.

SQUAD

Chris Gayle (captain), Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Dwayne Bravo, Fidel Edwards, Runako Morton, Daren Powell, Denesh Ramdin (wicketkeeper), Ravi Rampaul, Darren Sammy, Marlon Samuels, Lendl Simmons, Devon Smith, Dwayne Smith, Austin Richards.

FIXTURES

June 28: 1st Twenty20 v England, The Oval
June 29: 2nd Twenty20 v England, The Oval
July 01: 1st ODI v England, Lord's
July 04: 2nd ODI v England, Edgbaston
July 07: 3rd ODI v England, Trent Bridge
July 10: ODI v Netherlands, Dublin
July 12: ODI v Scotland, Dublin
July 14: ODI v Ireland, Dublin

Vermeulen trial

FROM PAGE 17
told a Harare magistrate that the case could not be heard as the state was deliberating medical reports relating to Vermeulen's mental health.

"The accused is to be remanded (out of custody) to July 11," Zvekare said adding that "the medical affidavit which we were waiting for has been compiled, and we are (still) making final deliberations."

The 28-year-old batsman, who played the last of his eight Test matches in 2004, faces two counts of arson and will face 25 years in prison with hard labour if convicted. Vermeulen is accused of first trying to torch the association's boardroom at the Harare Sports Club ground in October last year and then burning down the pavilion at the training academy the following day.

As part of his defence, Vermeulen has been examined by a psychiatrist.

Another medical report from Australia describing the effects of a serious skull fracture he sustained in January 2004, has also been submitted.

Yuvraj eyes Irish luck

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

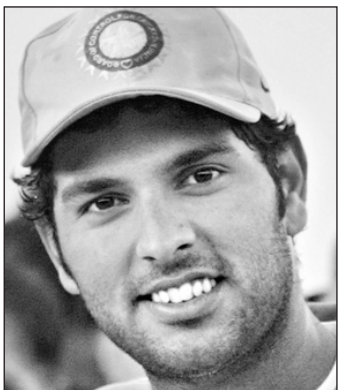
Yuvraj Singh has never been to Ireland but he is confident that it is where India can set the tone for a successful summer and where he can secure a permanent spot in the batting order. India play three one-day internationals against South Africa in Stormont before a taking on England in three Tests and seven ODIs.

"How the tour progresses is very important, so if we can do well against South Africa in Ireland I'm sure we'll play good cricket," he said at the end of day three of a four-day conditioning camp at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in Bangalore. "For the last six or seven years I've been batting in the middle order, but it's been tough finding my place, especially in Tests. It depends where I come to bat. If I come lower down then I have to go for my shots. If I get set up the order then I can settle in and open up later."

"Current form can't be assessed in one or two series. At the World Cup I was in form but unfortunately we didn't go far and in Bangladesh I couldn't get started. In the Afro-Asia Cup I came in lower down, so if I can get a run for a five or six-match series at one spot then you can see how I perform. It's going to be a tough tour so we have to focus on being mentally and physically fit, but I'm confident of doing well."

With his left knee still in a brace after he underwent surgery for a ligament tear before the Champions Trophy, Yuvraj said he didn't feel uncomfortable on the field. "I've been working on it (the knee) three or four times a week, and obviously the brace is a precaution so I have to keep it on until I get properly fit. But when I'm playing a game I go 100% all out."

The focus of the day at the NCA was batting in pairs. Two batsmen went in at a time and had to chase ODIs.



YUVRAJ SINGH

45 runs in eight overs. Robin Uthappa and Gautam Gambhir failed, losing Uthappa in the process. Sourav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid chased it down with ease and made 53 before Ganguly got out. Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Rohit Sharma, batting against the spin of Piyush Chawla and Ramesh

Ireland not at their best

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Ireland have announced a severely depleted 13-man squad for their one-dayers against India and South Africa due to get under way on June 23.

Though it is a wonderful opportunity to showcase Ireland's talent, several of their star players are missing through injury. Andre Botha, Dave Langford-Smith and, most disappointingly of all, Boyd Rankin have all failed to recover from their respective injuries in time, though it is expected they will be fit in time for the quadrangular series in July.

The batting also lacks depth and, to compound their troubles, both Jeremy Bray and Eoin Morgan have declared themselves unavailable while their allrounder, Peter Gillespie, has decided to call it a day.

"There's no doubt we have been badly hit by injuries," Phil Simmons, their coach, said. "Langford-Smith has a side injury, and this type of injury can be very slow to heal. Both Andre Botha (elbow injury) and Boyd Rankin (stress fracture of the fibula), are still two or three weeks away from full fitness, but I'm confident all three will be ready for the quadrangular tournament."

Injuries, though unfortunate, are

part and parcel of the game but it is Morgan's case which is a greater concern, as more and more Ireland players pledge their future to England.

"Morgan has informed me that he isn't available for the ODIs because of his commitments with Middlesex," Simmons said. "He wants to qualify and play for England, and feels that by obtaining a regular place in the Middlesex team is the best way to achieve that."

Bray asked not to be considered for selection for these matches and Gillespie has decided to retire from representative cricket.

"The positive aspect to this is that a number of the younger players in the squad will now get a chance to show me what they are capable of," Simmons said. "They have the opportunity to firmly establish themselves in the squad. I'm already starting to look ahead to the World Cup qualifiers in the UAE in 2009, and the composition of the team."

SQUAD

Trent Johnston (capt), Kenny Carroll, Alex Cusack, Thinus Fourie, Dominick Joyce, Gary Kidd, Kyle McCallan, Kevin O'Brien, Niall O'Brien, William Porterfield, Roger Whelan, Andrew White, Gary Wilson.

The Ford fiasco

Cricket

HARSHA BHOGLE

The problem with the Graham Ford situation is not as much with the refusal as with the timing. The BCCI played itself into a situation where there was no time left for the unforeseen. It suggests either arrogance or lack of planning, but there is no doubt that it is an embarrassment. People can say what they want to the contrary but only the naive will buy it.

If, however, they had followed a process, like Mr Srinivasan's India Cements does so well, they would have interviewed four or five candidates and ranked them. So the moment the first candidate said no, the next would have been ready. Now, we have begun a hectic cycle of cricket with a stopgap arrangement and that cannot be beneficial. There's been a mess-up but, like with all mess-ups, if you don't acknowledge one, and do something about it, the next one will be round the corner. But for some reason the BCCI doesn't like to say "sorry, we goofed".

There is no shame in saying it, indeed those that don't, reveal their real self.

Now, the BCCI has bought time. A truce seems to have been achieved with the players, even if it seems a temporary truce. And a trusted, respected man has been asked to hold the baby till a more permanent candidate emerges. But there are other issues, rather more boring but critical issues! India's captain has asked for three games before the first Test in Australia, a perfectly valid request since India have always struggled with the bounce when they go there after having played in our conditions just before. Instead, the secretary has told the captain that, being professionals, they should be able to adjust with the one they have been provided.

I am flabbergasted. If I was Rahul Dravid I would have bowed and said

"excuse me sir, I play for India. Whose side are you on?" I suspect Dravid is trying harder to win in Australia than the secretary! India are in Australia for more than seventy days and it is difficult to keep the intensity up for so long (talking of which, how come Australia don't come to India for seventy days?). If they lose the first Test, it will be a very, very long tour.

Hopefully that will change. Meanwhile, there are other cricketing matters to look to. Like the future of four good cricketers who find themselves at home while their colleagues play in England. Virender Sehwag, Harbhajan Singh, Munaf Patel and Irfan Pathan can either be hurt and disappointed or look at it very positively since they have a lot of cricket in them still.

I actually believe the selectors have done Patel a good turn by leaving him out. He now has four months in which to become genuinely fit and strong. If he uses these four months well, he will return to the Indian team twice the player he has been. And using these months well means not listening to anybody who tells him anything to the contrary.

He will find people who tell him that he deserved to be in the side, maybe even that he has been sinned against, they will calculate his income lost. Such people will do him harm and the only reason I bring this up is that far too many young Indian cricketers have petty people around them. If Patel accepts the real reason he has been left out, and makes his comeback a challenge, he will play a lot of cricket. Otherwise he will watch a lot.

Pathan too gets the time to work on his rhythm and these four months should be good for him. Very early in life he has seen both success and defeat and he will, with the right attitude, become tougher for it.

So too with Harbhajan who is still a young man but finds himself at the crossroads. I suspect we need to be patient with him and maybe some time away from the limited overs game will do him no harm. He bowled quite well at Chennai in the

Powar, also succeeded as did Yuvraj and Dinesh Karthik.

Sharma, a promising young Mumbai batsman who was included in the 30-member probabilities list for the 2006 Champions Trophy, used his chance to bat with the seniors. He was impressive against the spinners and hustled to make singles into doubles and once lofted Powar to long on where Sreesanth dropped a sitter. "Keep it up!" yelled a jaded spectator sitting alone in the stands.

Yuvraj wasn't confident against spin, often lunging forward and playing around his pad. Was it a worry, given that Monty Panesar, in fantastic form, would bowl a lot against India over the summer? "All of our batsmen play spin well, so I don't see him as a threat. Obviously he is doing very well so we have to look out for him."

Gregory King, the physical trainer, and physio John Gloster were overseeing the camp, the last of three conducted ahead of India's tour of Ireland and England.

Venkatesh Prasad, the bowling coach, stood at square leg and took notes for most of the time.

"It's going well, after just two days. On Friday we had some match practice which went well for all the batsmen and bowlers," said Yuvraj. "We didn't really feel the absence of a coach, as there was a bowling coach and a fielding coach (Robin Singh) and the team is looking really good. Everyone's quite happy with the coaching camp."

Solanki to lead England Lions

AFP, Chester-Le-Street

Vikram Solanki will captain England Lions, the new name for the England A side, against West Indies in a one-day tour match next week, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced Friday.

Worcestershire skipper Solanki will lead the side at his New Road home ground on Thursday with his players looking to remind the selectors of their one-day international credentials.

England face the West Indies in two Twenty20 matches at The Oval, the first on June 28, before taking on the tourists in three full one-day internationals in the first week of July.

Chairman of selectors David Graveney, speaking at the Riverside here Friday, where the first day of the fourth Test between England and West Indies was washed out without a ball being bowled, said: "The selectors will be closely monitoring performances by the England Lions next week and it will provide a further opportunity for players on the fringe of the international side to press their case for selection in our one-day squad for the NatWest Series."

SQUAD

Vikram Solanki (captain), Kabir Ali, James Anderson, Gareth Batty, Tim Bresnan, Stuart Broad, Alex Gidman, William Jefferson, Edmund Joyce, Paul Nixon (wicketkeeper), Owais Shah, Michael Yardy.

Afro Asia Cup and you could see why he is a special cricketer.

Both Harbhajan and Sehwag need to play cricket before the home season begins. It might be a good idea to do a short term contract, if one is still available with a good county in England, to keep themselves match fit so they have something to show before the test series against Pakistan in November.

Indian cricket needs more commitment and some good news. Neither is impossible if the desire awakens. Sadly it has been in a long slumber.

(Popular cricket commentator Harsha Bhogle wrote this piece for www.IndianExpress.com).

Bayliss new SL

FROM PAGE 17

Australian captain Greg Chappell, who quit after the World Cup.

Pakistan's Bob Woolmer died during the World Cup and Dav Whatmore did not renew his contract with Bangladesh in April.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka's new coach Trevor Bayliss Friday said he was hopeful that the island could win the next World Cup.

Bayliss, 44, was picked Thursday night to replace another Australian, Tom Moody, who quit last month to work with Western Australia after having guided Sri Lanka to the World Cup final.

He was picked over fellow Australian Terry Oliver and became the fifth Australian and the first non-international cricket player to coach the Sri Lankans following Dav Whatmore, Bruce Yardley, John Dyson and Moody.

Bayliss played 58 first-class matches for New South Wales as a middle-order batsman from 1985 to 1993 before making his mark as the state coach when he took over from Steve Irwin during the 2004-05 season.