

Ash happy at No. 5

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY from Kandy

If anybody takes Sri Lankan skipper Mahela Jayawardene's recent observations about the batting order of Bangladesh into account and expects it to be reflected in the third and final Test, he is making a mistake.

At least he can be rest assured that Mahela's Bangladesh counterpart Mohammad Ashraful is not going to entertain the concept of 'the best batsmen should bat up the order' when Bangladesh launch their one last challenge to end the first-innings batting blues at Kandy's Asgiriya Stadium today.

After winning the second Test in Colombo inside three days, Mahela questioned why Bangladesh's two top batsmen -- Habibul Bashar and Ashraful -- came to bat at number five and six respectively when the match was all but over following the quick demise of the top-order.

"Habibul and Ashraful are the most experience guys in the top order but surprisingly they came to bat at number five and six when the job had almost been done. No doubt it helped us a lot because the least experienced guys were clueless against our bowlers," the Lankan skipper told the reporters at the Asgiriya Stadium yesterday.

"Team's best batsman should take the responsibility and must show the courage to go up the order to stop early collapses as well shaping the foundation to be more competitive," he said.

"I do agree that in every team

the best batsman should bat at number three or four but I feel comfortable batting at number five. I batted at number six in the last match under special circumstances. And the fact is that I feel comfortable against Murali that's why I think it's better for me to bat at number five. But I'm not afraid of taking the challenge of batting up the order," said Ashraful.

Ashraful is arguably the best batsman in the Bangladesh ranks and it raised a few eyebrows when he batted at number six in the second innings of the second Test.

Although he made a hundred, it was a little too late to avoid yet another innings defeat. The 23-year-old even had expressed his disappointment for running out of partners after young wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim was dismissed shortly after the tea break on the third day and Bangladesh lost their last five wickets in a whisker.

People blamed former Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore for batting Ashraful down the order, but now he can easily take up the challenge with a bigger responsibility on his shoulders. However it seemed Ashraful resorted to a defensive approach against a team he struck three of his four Test hundreds.

"Rajin is good against the new ball that's why he batted at number three. Besides, we thought that there should be someone who can recover the early damage," said Ashraful while defending his decision.

Ashraful however dismissed his counterpart's claim that most of the Bangladeshi players looked

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PHOTO: AFP

ONE LAST CHANCE TO RESTORE SOME PRIDE: Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful (C) stretches along with Tushar Imran during a practice session at the Asgiriya Stadium in Kandy on Tuesday, ahead of the third and final Test against Sri Lanka that starts today.



The first time the United States hosted the Olympic Games was in 1904. It was the third edition of the Games and were held in St. Louis in Missouri.



Ian Botham
(England cricket legend)
"England's level of performance in limited overs cricket is so bad the Eskimos would beat us."
After England lost the one-day international series to West

What to WATCH

TEN Sports

Bangladesh v Sri Lanka

Third Test, Day 1

Live from 11:00 am

ATN Bangla

Abahani v Brothers Union

B.League

Live at 4:30 pm

TEN Sports

Copa America

Second Semifinal

Mexico v Argentina

Live at 6:50 am (Thursday)

DAY'S EVENT

B.League

Abahani v Brothers Union

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Time: 4:30 pm

Murali still a learner

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY from Kandy

Muttiah Muralidaran may have taken 688 wickets but he is not ready to take anything for granted. Be it against Australia or Bangladesh, it's all the same for him. And he was doing just that yesterday at his native Kandy ground with his first coach Sunil Fernando.

Putting up two stumps, Murali had a special bowling session with Fernando for more than half an hour as the champion off-spinner was fine-tuning his body for the third and final Test against Bangladesh that starts here today.

With Australian great Shane Warne's world record of 708 wickets well within his sights, the spin wizard still considers himself as a learner like a newcomer and doesn't think twice to go back to Fernando, who first spotted him as a medium-pacer before transforming him into an off-spinner, for suggestions.

"He talks to me whenever he

feels that he needs some suggestions. He is a very hard working guy. What I felt is he needed to work on his foot movement to get more turn and force the batsmen to give edges. Today he just tried to put more weight on the front foot during the half an hour practice session," said the soft-spoken Fernando, who has been guiding the bowler since his childhood.

"Coach can't change a bowler like Murali, but he is always keen to learn," said the proud coach of a very special player of world cricket.

"My first teacher is here and he has been coaching me since I was only six. I still turn to him because I believe he is still better than anyone else," was the champion off-spinner's say about his yesterday's practice with his first guru.

The Kandy hero is just four wickets shy of claiming hundred wickets at this venue where he has played lot of games besides Test matches.

"Yeah, I have lot of good memories about this ground because I played a lot of Test matches here and some big school games. It

would be nice to get hundred wickets here," he said.

Murali is also looking forward to breaking Warne's record but said that he was not a great follower of records.

"I am very satisfied. I am happy because I am still going on. Yes I am looking forward to the landmark, because I once broke (Courtney) Walsh's record and then Warne's and Warne then took it away from me. Now I have got the chance to take it back. No, I am not a great follower of records because if I can play until the next World Cup then my tally would be five to six hundred wickets in one-day cricket alone," he said, expressing his desire to play the next World Cup.

He was also not ready to compare him with any other spinner including Warne.

"I don't miss Warne because he played for different country and he was altogether a different bowler. I

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PHOTO: AFP

PICK IT IF YOU CAN: Champion Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran sends down a delivery during a practice session at the Asgiriya Stadium in Kandy yesterday.

ACC WOMEN'S CRICKET Bangladesh play UAE today

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh women's cricket team will take on UAE in one of the opening day's matches of the ACC Women's Cricket Tournament at the Institute Perguruan Temenggong Ibrahim ground in Malaysia.

The Bangladesh eves play Singapore and China in their group on July 13 and 15 respectively.

Earlier on Monday, the Bangladesh team reached Kuala Lumpur after playing two preparatory limited-overs matches against Thailand in Bangkok, winning by 90 runs and seven wickets.

Stanford series raises concern

BBC ONLINE, undated

National cricket boards have "genuine concerns" over a 20-million-dollar Twenty20 series planned for West Indies, says the International Cricket Council (ICC).

Texan businessman Allen Stanford, who lives in Antigua, wants Australia, Sri Lanka, India and South Africa to play.

The tournament would take place in June and last a week.

ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed said members want "to ensure their participation in any such event will benefit as many of the game's stakeholders as possible".

The national boards also want ICC's Future Tours Programme for bilateral series, player workload concerns and the current cap on Twenty20 internationals to be taken into consideration.

The event would feature a knock-out event with the winners facing the Stanford Super Stars, an all-West Indies XI comprising the best players from the inter-island Stanford 20/20 tournament.

Stanford has also announced he is giving West Indies cricket \$100m over three years with most of the funding going towards grassroots development.

U-16 trial on July 13, 14

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has called an open trial for selection of the under-16 national football team. The trial will be held at the brothers Union ground in Gopibagh on July 13 and 14 under BFF's age-group coaches.

Interested footballers, born after January 1, 1992, have been asked to report at the ground at 8am with two copies of passport size photographs.

The Bangladesh U-16s will play in the AFC Youth Championship qualifiers to be played in Dubai this October.

Eyes on Emily, Junior

Abahani meet Brothers today



SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani will look to cement their place in the B. League table when they meet Brothers Union in today's crucial match.

ATN Bangla will telecast the match live from the Bangabandhu National Stadium from 4.30pm.

The two sides failed to break the deadlock in their first-leg clash and a draw this time would dent both sides' chances in one of the tightest title races ever in domestic football.

A win will put the sky-blues, who attempt to win their first major title in six seasons, back to the top but Brothers cannot afford any slip from now on.

"We can reach 38 points if we win all our matches," said Brothers manager Amer Khan, whose side have five matches in hand.

"It's tough and other contenders are likely to go beyond that mark. But we want to give it a try to keep

our slim hopes alive," told Amer who rued the loss against Muktijoddha last week.

"That was our chance to make a comeback. We dominated that match but eventually lost following a mistake. The problem is that our bench is not very strong although our main team is fit to play," he added.

The Oranges, who will be looking forward to their first win in three games, will heavily rely on the firepower of Nigerian striker Junior, who has struck two hattricks to share the joint top-scorer's place with Mohammedan's Paul on 14 goals.

Young striker Tapu, who has not played a full match due to fitness problems, is expected to start as Junior's partner with Syed Nayeemuddin, the Gopibagh outfit's Indian coach who is tipped to take over the national team on conclusion of the inaugural professional league, set to stick to a 4-4-2 system.

Rumours have been rife that Brothers are not interested for the championship with their hopes very little and ready to help expectants Abahani and Mohammedan.

"Why should we do that? We still have a chance however small it is. I don't understand why the media, which blasted us for playing allegedly 'fixed-matches' when we won the Premiership, remain silent now as Abahani and Mohammedan are gearing up?" asked Amer. "The teams even submitted a joint letter against Brothers then. Now these teams are not talking against the two."

At the other end of the city at Dhanmondi, Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu was more concerned about his line-up.

"We are expected to make one change in the midfield but the defence and the attack will remain as the last game," said Rupu, whose side recorded two hard-fought wins in the previous outings after a 7-0 demolition of Rahmatganj.

Abahani, on 32 points from 15 ties, put end to their first-leg goal drought with national striker Emily getting back his scoring spree but the scene has also changed in the rear as the team conceded more goals.

Emily has scored seven goals

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Jekyll & Hyde dads

Tennis

AFP, Paris

Where once there were lawsuits and restraining orders, now there are tearful tributes and emotional reconciliations.

There can never have been a better time to be a tennis dad.

Just ask Dr Walter Bartoli and Richard Williams who provided a touching sideshow to the disappointing Wimbledon final their daughters served up on Centre Court on Saturday.

The American, having celebrated wildly as Venus captured a fourth All England Club title, turned to console his French counterpart who had been reduced to tears by daughter Marion's heartfelt public praise.

"My dad has always believed in me, whatever I was doing. If it was tennis or ballet. He has always believed in my capacity to be the best in what I was doing," said Bartoli after her first, humbling Grand Slam final appearance.

"We have reached a Grand Slam final together and it means a lot to me and to him as well. He's a very good tennis coach, a very good doctor and a very good

father."

However, not everyone in France is convinced by the Bartoli partnership with the 22-year-old frozen out of the Fed Cup team this weekend because of objections to the Wimbledon runner-up's desire to have her father with her.

Her relationship with Bartoli senior is far from those which have been typical in women's tennis down the years.

Take the likes of Mirjana Lucic and Jelena Dokic.

Croatian teenager Lucic had the world at her feet when she reached the 1999 Wimbledon semifinals before staging a dramatic night-time escape to the United States to escape her father who she claimed had abused her.

From a career high of 32 in the world, Lucic now stands at 450, and struggling financially, but is still determined to rebuild her career.

Dokic, who has flitted between Australia and Serbia, was once the world number four; now she is 647.

Her career is virtually in cold storage after a series of run-ins with her father Damiir.

In his colourful time, he has been accused of assaulting a cameraman at the Australian Open while he was once ejected from Wimbledon after drunkenly smash-

ing a reporter's telephone.

In his most recent outburst, Damiir, now a fruit and vegetable man in Belgrade, claimed his daughter had been kidnapped by her boyfriend.

"That's complete nonsense," said Dokic. "I don't speak to my father at all any more."

The Dokic family should talk to the Williams clan.

Venus was full of praise for father Richard, mother Oracene as well as sister Serena at the weekend.

"My family has definitely been key, everyone is a huge part of the team," said Williams. "They have all invested in me emotionally."

Justine Henin is also playing happy families having been recently reunited with her father and siblings.

When the 25-year-old celebrated her win over Ana Ivanovic, which sealed her fourth French Open title in June, she dedicated her win to elder brothers David and Thomas as well as younger sister, Sarah.

It was a scene unimaginable 12 months ago.

Henin was still married to Pierre-Yves Hardenne and in the middle of a bitter cold war with her family.

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