

Good start for Dhaka

UNB, Panchagarh

The first-ever Women's Invitational Handball tournament began at the local Pilot High School ground yesterday.

Dhaka were off to a flying start as they dumped Rajshahi 20-11 in the opening match.

Earlier, Deputy Commissioner of Panchagarh Mohammad Hafizuddin formally inaugurated the meet. General secretary of Bangladesh Handball Federation Asaduzzaman Kohinoor was present.

A total of seven teams are taking part in the meet.

ACC, Uttara & Badda win

SPORTS REPORTER

ACC Green snuck home by two wickets in their Third Division Qualifying match against Dhanmondi Cricket Academy at the Uttara Friends Club ground yesterday.

Batting first, DCA were bundled out for 128 runs in the 41st over, with opener Ratnakar top-scoring with 30 and all-rounder Ibrahim smashing 25. ACC reached their target in only 21.4 overs. Raimul took four wickets for DCA.

Uttara Cricket Foundation, Badda Jagrani Sangsad, Mukti Joddha Projanno Command Cricket Academy and Predator Cricket Club won their respective matches on the day.

Yousuf surprised with success

PTI, Multan

Prolific Pakistani batsman Mohammad Yousuf has expressed surprise at his recent run of impressive scores against South Africa as he had been away from cricket for a long time.

Yousuf was omitted from the team for the World Twenty20 Championship in South Africa and returned to the side in the second Test against the Proteas in Lahore.

After scores of 25 and 63 not out in that match, he has had knocks of 53, 117 and 58 not out in the first three one-day internationals which helped Pakistan take a 2-1 lead in the five-match series.

"I never expected this type of success, on making my comeback because I was not able to train properly for this series having been out of action for the last two months," Yousuf said.

U-16 booters

FROM PAGE 21

The lead was short lived as joint table-toppers Uzbekistan equalised two minutes later through Gapparov. A lapse by the Bangladesh goalkeeper gifted the lead to the Central Asians as Shatursurov made it 2-1 in the 73rd minute.

Bangladesh were unfortunate to concede the third goal as Abdullaev made most of a wrong call to score from a seemingly offside position three minutes later.

Sohel then set a goal for substitute Saifuddin who reduced the arrears three minutes from time.

Bangladesh, on three points from four matches, meet Tajikistan on Sunday in their last match.

Megson new

FROM PAGE 24

Gartside insisted that the players would be committed to the new manager.

He said: "We have made decisive decisions over the past few weeks and this is one of them.

"It is not about me, Gary Megson or any other individual. It is all about Bolton surviving in the Premier League.

"We have to be fully focussed on the task ahead to make sure we achieve immediate success.

"I have spoken to the staff and the players and we are all committed to getting behind Gary and turning our fortunes around."

Bolton currently lie bottom of the Premiership, with just five points from 10 games played so far this season.

D'Alessandro

FROM PAGE 24

with the rest of the squad while the club decided on an appropriate sanction.

Zaragoza would not comment on when they would decide on what action to take against D'Alessandro and what form the punishment might be.

D'Alessandro returned to the club on Wednesday evening to train alone.

The incident has led to Spanish media speculation that D'Alessandro, who joined the club in the summer of 2006, would be sold during the winter transfer window after falling foul of Fernandez.

The player also had a highly publicised clash in training last week with his compatriot and fellow Argentine international, Pablo Aimar.

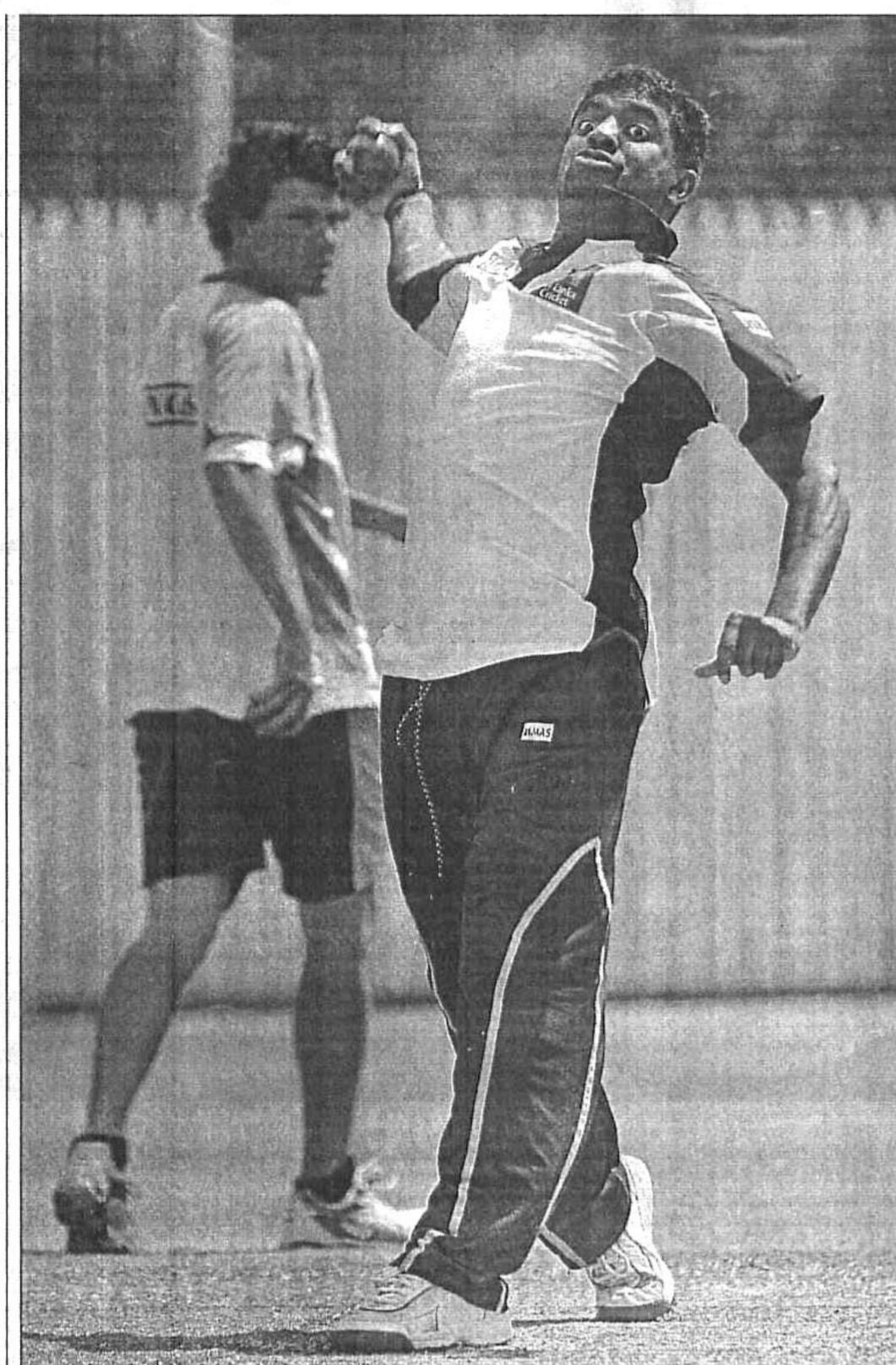


PHOTO: AFP
IN HOSTILE LAND: Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran in his delivery stride during a practices session at the Adelaide Oval yesterday.

Fernando fired up



CRICINFO, Adelaide

Dilhara Fernando has promised that he and his fellow Sri Lankan pace bowlers will give the Australian batsmen "something special" in the two-Test series this November. The side's pace attack, traditionally a weakness, is at its strongest ever and Fernando believes Sri Lanka have their best chance yet to win a Test in Australia.

"I think we have a good pace attack, especially (Lasith) Malinga, myself and Vaasy (Chaminda Vaas)," he said after a practice session in Adelaide ahead of the first warm-up on Saturday. "We've got a good balanced attack so we can give them something special."

"I think we've got good variation -- swing, pace, bounce. We've got everything. This is our best chance to beat Australia, so I think we can beat them."

Kumar Sangakkara, the vice-captain, has an interesting take on how Sri Lanka's fast bowlers have improved: courtesy of a one-day innovation. "The PowerPlay rule coming into one-day cricket has helped us quite a lot in developing a pace attack."

"Earlier we used to (only) play a couple of pacers. I've been in Test matches when we've played one fast bowler when we play at home but now we've got three or four really great bowlers and really good

support bowlers as well to come in. That's where we've been going in the past two years."

Fernando is looking forward to the pacy tracks, and explains that the team has a simple strategy for winning. "Everyone wants to hit the deck hard so I think we can get good pace and bounce and get the wickets. We all know Australians are very good at pulling short balls, so we want to just do the basics, put



DILHARA FERNANDO

the ball in the right area."

When asked if there was anyone in particular he would be targeting, he broke into a broad beam and said: "I just want to target everyone!"

"Earlier we used to (only) play a couple of pacers. I've been in Test matches when we've played one fast bowler when we play at home but now we've got three or four really great bowlers and really good

used to playing against big teams. I think we can do it. With Murali there's a big confidence. I think we can beat them."

Miss Inzy

FROM PAGE 21

November 1 for five one-day internationals and three Test matches.

"Pakistan are no lightweights," he said. "We cannot take them lightly. Pakistan still have several good players like Shahid Afridi, Mohammad Yousuf and Shoaib Malik."

Harbhajan said India's win over Pakistan in the final of the World Twenty20 Championship in South Africa last month will give the hosts the psychological edge.

"We beat Pakistan in the T20 final and we will definitely have an edge over them," the 27-year-old said.

When Pakistan last toured India in 2005, Inzamam's men won the final Test in Bangalore to draw the series 1-1 and beat the hosts 4-2 in the one-dayers.

Ballack confident

FROM PAGE 24

"It is not like a cruciate knee ligament injury when a player knows he'll be back in six months."

"My injury is complicated, but I can reassure you I will do all I can to return as fast as I can."

Ballack injured his ankle in April's Premier League clash with Newcastle and required two operations.

The midfielder has missed seven German internationals as his country became the first side to qualify for next summer's Euro 2008 tournament.

Testy times

FROM PAGE 24

we did could not make up for missing so many chances.

"But if we keep playing like we did here, we will win matches because we will certainly score more next time around if we play like that."

"I still think Liverpool can progress to the next stage. We know now we need to win all three of our final games, there is no more margin for error."

Liverpool will be confident they can beat Besiktas and FC Porto at home but securing three points from a trip to group leaders Marseille in their final match in December represents a daunting task.

Benitez said: "We have to wait to see now what we must do, how the numbers add up. The fact that Porto drew with Marseille in the other group game tonight was a help for us, it certainly improves our options."

Besiktas coach Ertugrul Saglam admitted he was surprised to see Liverpool in their current plight. "We all expected them to be top of the group, not bottom. But they are certainly good enough to win a 45-metre volley after a spineless Kalac punch."

Party's on for Robinho

FROM PAGE 24

Javier Balboa added Real's fourth in injury time.

Robinho responded, we worked well with him. What happened, happened, but he's still a Real Madrid player and that's how I treat him," commented Bernd Schuster on Wednesday night.

After his late return to Madrid last Friday, Schuster dropped Robinho for Saturday's 2-1 loss at Espanyol, the Spanish giants' first defeat of the season and then had a face-to-face meeting with his coach on Monday.

However, Schuster showed the players that he did not hold any grudges by naming him in the starting line-up for Wednesday's crucial encounter with Olympiakos which propelled them to the top of the Champions League Group C.

"Robinho helped us a lot with his contribution (against Olympiakos)," added Schuster.

Robinho is likely to contribute even more to the club in the coming days, this time to the Real coffers.

Club directors are still mulling over what punishment to exact for Robinho's recent indiscretions but figures in the Spanish media suggest that it is likely to be a fine between 3,000 and 4,000 euros.

The episode was particularly embarrassing in the wake of the highly publicized exercise of showing off the Real players getting their copies of the club's Code of Conduct last month.

The code specifically asks players "to pay attention to their public image".

Real sources at the time said that the code had been drawn up so that their players avoided the excesses attributed to Barcelona's Brazilian striker Ronaldinho, a clear swipe at their bitter rivals' star.

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Inzamam to play in first ICL T20 Championship

PTI, New Delhi

Former Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq on Thursday said he would participate in Indian Cricket League's inaugural Twenty20 Championship, starting in Panchkula on November 30.

Inzamam, who will lead one of the six sides in the tournament, said he looked forward to play alongside some great cricketers as well as youngsters.

"It gives me great pleasure to play in the inaugural edition of ICL. I also look forward to playing with promising youngsters from India and elsewhere along with some of the illustrious international players with whom I have shared many exciting moments on the field," he was quoted as saying in a media release from Lahore.

"I look forward to captain one of the ICL teams and hope to use my experience in taking that team to title victory," Inzamam said.

The ICL tournament will be played from November 30 to December 16.

Indian camp at Eden

PTI, Kolkata

Indian team's two-day conditioning camp beginning November 2, ahead of the series against Pakistan was on Thursday shifted to the Eden Gardens with the Board of Control for Cricket in India agreeing to defer a Ranji Trophy match that was clashing with the camp.

The camp was earlier scheduled to be staged at the Calcutta Cricket and Football Club, with the Eden slated to host the Bengal-Hyderabad Ranji Trophy elite division outing from November 3.

"Eden has superb world class facilities including floodlights and indoor practice arrangements which were not there at the CC&FC. We were earlier forced to opt for the CC&FC as Eden was not available.

"But I managed to convince the BCCI that the camp should be held at the Eden so as to give the Indian players the very best of infrastructural support before such an important series," Cricket Association of Bengal president Prasun Mukherjee told PTI.

BCCI admits it

PTI, Kanpur

The Board of Control for Cricket in India Thursday admitted that excessive cricket was causing players' burn-out but said the BCCI was only following the International Cricket Council's calendar.

BCCI vice-president Rajiv Shukla said although burn-out was an issue with cricketers of all countries, Board did not want the Indian players to be exhausted before important matches and was taking steps for the same.

"That is why we have increased our pool of players to 35 from 20 and introduced an additional category 'D' after A, B and C. With the new category, there will be an option for players if they are injured or need to be rested," Shukla said.

"We are trying to have options for all kind of players in the new pool," he told reporters after inspecting the Green Park stadium which will host the India v Pakistan match on November 11.

Jibes don't

FROM PAGE 24

The Spanish keeper is determined not to let Lehmann get to him as he enjoys the chance to play with the Premier League leaders.

"I'll read the papers and listen to what other people say about me and all these things I'll turn crazy. I don't want that," Almunia said.

"When I'm playing well, I honestly don't mind other things. Maybe if I will be playing badly or not too good I would be more worried, but for me life is fantastic and I want to take my chance."

"The goalkeeping position is a difficult one. I will stay positive."

"I've been here almost three years without playing in the league. It's normal for people to assess the situation."

"But I forget the past and now I'm playing so it's not a problem."

Milan ease woes

FROM PAGE 24

and in the 51st minute they were rewarded by the quick thinking of striker Cristiano Lucarelli, back in Italy for the first time since leaving Serie A side Livorno in the summer.

Kalac, proving an able replacement for Dida, was up to saving Brandao's shot a fluffed clearing from Milan defender Massimo Oddo but the ball was deflected into the path of Lucarelli who volleyed it into an empty net.

But Seedor then extinguished Shakhtar's hopes of drawing level when killing off the tie with his own double in the 63rd and 69th minutes.

His first goal, a pinpoint left-footed volley, came off a corner from Pirlo and the second, a fine 45-metre volley after a spineless Kalac punch.