

N'ganj in semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Narayanganj became the last team to confirm a semifinal berth in the Inter-district women's football tournament when they crushed Jessore 4-0 at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex yesterday.

Prolific scorer Sukhi struck a brace while Eeti and Bithi netted one goal apiece for Group D champions Narayanganj, who will face neighbours Rangamati and Khagrachhari.

The first semifinal will be played between Chittagong Hill Tracts neighbours Rangamati and Khagrachhari.

Victory Day sports

SPORTS REPORTER

Eagles Club suffered consecutive defeats in the Total Victory Day basketball tournament when they heavily went down to Bangladesh Police 85-27 at the Shaheed Suhrawardy Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Police led the first half of the embarrassingly one-sided match 44-17. Harun shot 19 points and Mahmudul 14 for Police while Rahat was the peak of the Eagles attack with 15 points.

In another match, Bangladesh Navy comfortably beat Dharmketu Club 63-42.

Rashed led the sailors' charge with a 24-point haul while Lutfar caged 12. For Dharmketu, who trailed 29-11 at the break, Nahid shined with 15 points.

KABADDI Favourites Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Rifles comfortably won the opening day's matches in the Victory Day kabaddi tournament at the Outer Stadium kabaddi court.

Army collected three lonas on way to dump Bangladesh Police 43-14 while BDR routed Bangladesh Jails 60-15 with four lonas.

Earlier, Bangladesh Olympic Association deputy secretary-general and former national footballer Ashrafuddin Ahmed Chunnun declared the meet open.

JUDO

UNB adds: Bangladesh Ansar's Mamiz Pushpa, Dalia Akhter and Minakhter clinched gold in the City Bank Ltd 1st Youth (Under-20) and Victory Day senior judo competition on the opening day at the NSC Gymnasium.

In the women's 70kg+ category, Mamtaz grabbed gold in women's 70kg+ category, Dalia won the -63kg, and Mina claimed the -52 kg gold.

Some 224 judokas including 79 females are competing in the three-day meet.

Earlier, Bangladesh Olympic Association's COO Col (ret'd) M Wali Ullah inaugurated the event.

T20 cricket final today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

Munshiganj Press Club handed a seven-wicket defeat to Munshiganj Municipality yesterday to set a final clash with DC XI in the Twenty20 cricket.

In reply to Municipality's 84-7, Press Club reached the target in 13.4 overs at the local stadium.

The final will be held today at the same venue.

CA ponders

FROM PAGE 17 Tests, which traditionally begin at 11am and finish at 6pm, always span weekends, but suffer from smaller audiences on weekdays when people work. The day games also miss TV's prime ratings periods.

"We are tossing it around and working out the fundamentals," CA chief executive James Sutherland told this newspaper Wednesday night.

"In a realistic sense we don't see any reason why we can't be at least trialling some day-night Test cricket matches -- not necessarily all of them -- before the end of the decade. It could happen sooner, I don't know. We need to explore that and go through a consultative process."

Ronaldo

FROM PAGE 20 Ronaldo had joined training Tuesday for the first time since the European Champions League winners arrived last week.

"I feel fine," he told reporters before working out alone with 30 minutes of light jogging.

Asked about his chances of playing in the final, he said: "I will see, I will be trying."

Rafa relieved

FROM PAGE 20 fortunes in group A.

A 1-0 defeat by Marseille at Anfield in October had left Benitez's side with just one point from their opening three matches.

Since then however they have beaten Besiktas 8-0 and FC Porto 4-1 at home and the equally comfortable nature of this win will send them into the last 16 - and Sunday's showdown with United - in confidence.



PHOTO: STAR

Action from yesterday's inter-district women's football match between Narayanganj and Jessore at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex.

Tait ready to launch

Cricket

AFP, Perth

Tearaway Australian fast bowler Shaun Tait only bowled four overs in Tuesday's Twenty20 international victory over New Zealand. But he may have done enough in the first four balls alone to bowl himself into the side for the first Test against India at the MCG later this month.

Tait claimed wickets with his first and fourth deliveries, bowling short and fast on a lively WACA Ground wicket, and the Australian selectors are sure to consider unleashing Tait and fellow speedster Brett Lee in a dual speed assault on the Indians.

For many years, the Australian team has always featured a spinner, but with Shane Warne retired and Stuart MacGill sidelined by injury, the home side could play Tait and Lee in a four-pronged pace attack against India.

Lee also starred in the Twenty20 match, claiming a wicket with his first ball and generating great pace in taking 17-2 from four overs as Australia went on to thrash New Zealand by 54 runs.

Tait, who has played two Tests, is on the comeback trail after an elbow injury and was coming off a haul of 29-7 in a first-class game for South Australia.

Michael Clarke, who led the Australian team for the first time in the absence of Ricky Ponting on Tuesday, was delighted with the way his quicks bowled against the Black Caps on what he said was a favourable pitch for the fast bowlers.

He wouldn't be drawn on Tait's Test prospects, but clearly believes the idea of two raw fast bowlers has merit.

"It is a very different form of the game but I'd hate to face both of them," Clarke said on Tuesday.

"If they are bowling like that they are going to be tough to face."

"The selectors are going to need to work out conditions and what they feel the best attack is for the Boxing Day Test."

"If guys are performing like that, they are very hard to leave out."

With Stuart Clark carrying the drinks in the Twenty20 match, the depth in Australian fast bowling was highlighted by new Test bowler Mitchell Johnson claiming two wickets and debutant speedster Ashley Noffke picking up three.

Tharanga c Prior b Sidebottom 10 Sangakkara c Prior b Sidebottom 1 M Jayawardene c Collingwood b Panesar 195

Silva c Bopara b Harmison 49 Mubarak c Bell b Harmison 9 P Jayawardene c Prior b Harmison 79

Vaas c Bell b Broad 4 Malinga lbw b Panesar 9 Fernando not out 36 Extras: (b-7, lb-9, w-1, nb-1) 18 Total: (For nine wks decl in 186.5 overs) 548

Did not bat: Muralidaran 177, 5-399, 6-420, 7-425, 8-450, 9-548. Bowler O M R W

Sidebottom 36 4 100 3 Broad 36 5 95 1 Harmison 41.5 9 111 3 Panesar 50 7 151 2 Pietersen 15 0 57 0 Collingwood 1 1 0 0 Bopara 7 2 18 0

ENGLAND: Second innings Cook not out 28 Vaughan not out 28 Extras: (nb-1) 1 Total: (For no loss in 13 overs) 48

To bat: Bell, Pietersen, Collingwood, Bopara, Prior, Sidebottom, Harmison, Broad, Panesar. Bowler O M R W

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ENGLAND: First innings 351 (Cook 81, Vaughan 87, Collingwood 52, Prior 79; Muralidaran 5-116) SRI LANKA: First innings (overnight 379-4)

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Solid start

FROM PAGE 17 and FM Abu Sufian Shakil defeated Mainuddin Ahmed.

Leonine's lone success fell to Abdul Maleq, who defeated Biman's FM Mehdi Hasan Parag.

Destiny 2000, led by IM Enamul Hossain Rajib who beat Indian IM Roktim Bandopadhyay, drew with last year's third Chittagong Mohammedan.

In other matches, Mohakhali Pradip Sangha blanked Sultana Kamal Smiriti Pathagar 4-0, Pritam Priyam Chess Club beat Toyota Motors Chess Club 3.5-0.5, Sonali Bank beat Dhaka University Chess Club 2.5-1.5, Farashganj SC beat Faith Chess Club 2.5-1.5 and Friends Chess Power drew with I2 Soft Solution Ltd.

U-19s continue

FROM PAGE 17 two sixes during his 78-ball 59.

Captain Shuvo chipped in with 49 runs off 41 balls that featured four boundaries while Mahmudul Hasan contributed 44 and Marshall Ayub added 38.

The home team suffered the initial collapse as Rony Talukder (0), Ashraf Aziz (11) and Nasir Hossain (1) fell cheaply with the scoreboard reading 67 in 17.2 overs.

Sachin Parthirana claimed five wickets for 52 runs in 10 overs. Parthirana was adjudged man of the match as he later scored 42 runs.

The next two games will take place at the same venue on December 14 and 15 and then return to Dhaka to play last two games at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium on December 18 and 20.

Asgiriya

FROM PAGE 17 became the leading Test bowler.

Muralidaran, who hails from the hill town of Kandy, also claimed his 700th wicket at the same venue against Bangladesh in July.

Trinity College vice-principal Gladwyn Kanagasabai, however, said no official request had been received from the government.

"We have no plans so far to change the name of the venue," a bemused Kanagasabai told AFP by phone from Kandy.

Asgiriya, a regular Test venue since 1983, is widely acclaimed as one of the most picturesque cricket grounds in the world, having been carved out from the hillsides.

Sri Lanka are in the middle of a three-match Test series with England, with the tourists looking for a series-levelling win after losing the Kandy Test by 88 runs.

PAKISTAN: Second innings Butt c Karthik b Kumble 8 Hameed b Kumble 39

Younis c and b Kumble 0 Iqbal c Sharma b Kumble 51 Misbahul b Yuvraj 37

Akmal b Kumble 0 Yousuf not out 10 Arafat b Yuvraj 0 Sami not out 4

Extras: (b-12, lb-1) 13 Total: (For seven wks in 36 overs) 162

Did not bat: Shoaib Akhtar, Danish Kaneria Fall of wickets: 1-44, 2-44, 3-73, 4-144, 5-144, 6-148, 7-154.

Bowler O M R W Pathan 7 4 30 0 Sharma 6 3 22 0 Kumble 14 2 60 5 Harbhajan 6 1 28 0 Yuvraj 3 0 9 2

Result: Match drawn and India clinched three-Test series 1-0. Man-of-the-match: Sourav Ganguly.

Man-of-the-series: Sourav Ganguly.

Marvan stars for Jets

CRICINFO, undated

The Delhi Jets captain Marvan Atapattu's unbeaten innings guided his side to a six-wicket win over Chennai Superstars. Tamil Kumaran's single-run penultimate over made the 14th match of the tournament tighter than it appeared, but a driven four by Paul Nixon sealed victory with four balls to spare.

Chasing 175, the Jets reached 95 after just ten overs thanks mainly to a 62-run opening stand in a mere five overs. Taufeeq Umar (20 from 16) and Monish Mishra (37 from 20) carved the Superstars' attack with glee but some effective bowling from the part-timers helped swing the momentum back their way. But after the openers fell in one over from Tamil Kumaran, Atapattu shepherded his side along at a good rate. Two further strikes threatened another twist, but Atapattu and Nixon, unbeaten on 18 from 15 balls, got the Jets through. Atapattu scored 64 from 43 balls, with six fours and a pair of sixes.

Earlier, Atapattu decided to give his bowlers first crack at the surface. Ian Harvey and Chris Read, two overseas imports for the Superstars, got good starts but failed to move beyond the 30s. A brief middle-order stutter was picked up by captain R Sathish, who hit 29 from 16, and S Saravanan's 13-ball unbeaten 20.

The Superstars and Jets, bar something extraordinary in the remaining matches, are through to semifinals.

Kumble defends

FROM PAGE 17 win, but play was called off with 13 of the available 48 overs remaining.

"If the weather had held up we would have finished the game. 45 overs were enough," he said. "We gave ourselves a good opportunity."

India declared an hour before tea on 284-6, with Sourav Ganguly making 91 and Dinesh Karthik adding a late 52.

The match seemed destined to peter out into a draw until Kumble struck twice in the same over on two separate occasions to claim Yasir Hameed (39) and Younis Khan (0) and Faisal Iqbal (51) and Kamran Akmal (0).

Kumble also removed opener Salman Butt as Pakistan slumped to 144-5.

"I realised I needed to do that this morning," said Kumble.

"There was no spin, no bounce and no pace off the wicket. The only option was to get people out when the ball kept low."

Left-arm Yuvraj Singh chipped in with the key wicket of Misbahul Haq (37) and Yasir Arafat (0) to set up a real chance of a shock India win before the skies darkened and play was abandoned.

Recall

FROM PAGE 17 and my job now will be to hit the right areas."

From the current squad there was no place for Murali Kartik, the left-arm spinner, but this was expected given the fact that India were only going to take two spinners on a tour of Australia.

With Sreesanth unfit the pace attack is led by Zaheer Khan and backed up by RP Singh, Ishant, Pathan and Pantak.

BFF looks

FROM PAGE 17 trying our best to hold the election in time," he added.

Meanwhile, BFF's acting general secretary Manzoor Hossain Malu confirmed that the procedures of forming the DFAs would continue.

He informed that the last date for the DFA polls have been extended to December 31 for the districts and January 31 for the divisions.

"We want to hold this election according to the previous constitution but even if we have to stick to the FIFA directive and hold the election according to the new statutes, I don't think there would be any legal trouble," hoped the BFF secretary.

So far, only eight DFA bodies have been formed and when asked why the remaining DFAs were not formed despite the procedures had begun in June this year, Malu said that the district organisers have asked for more time.

"It seems that the organisers have suddenly become confused although they looked sure about what to do with the DFAs at the start."

It was learned that the district sports association (DSA) secretaries, who had a meeting with the BFF two days earlier, are reluctant about the DFAs because it will heavily reduce their authority over the game.

In the FIFA directive, government officials or government representatives are not allowed to be any part of the football associations.

WI could upset odds

Cricket

AFP, East London

Chris Gayle's West Indian touring team will attempt to succeed where their predecessors have failed when they take on South Africa over the next seven-and-a-half weeks.

The odds appear to be stacked against the West Indies -- but Gayle has the consolation of knowing that he can hardly do worse than previous sides from the Caribbean that have visited South Africa.

In 1998-99 the West Indies lost all five Tests and were beaten 6-1 in a one-day series, despite having stars like captain Brian Lara, Courtney Walsh and Curtly Ambrose in their side. Five seasons later Lara was again in charge but his team were beaten 3-0 in the Tests, with one drawn, and went down 3-1 in the one-day series.

Gayle promised when his team arrived in South Africa Monday that the hosts would be "in for a fight" despite the West Indies appearing to be weaker than previously.

No successors have yet emerged to emulate Walsh and Ambrose as a new-ball pairing while Lara has retired and fellow batting star Ramnaresh Sarwan, who was named as Lara's successor as captain, is out of the tour with a knee injury.

Gayle himself will miss the opening matches of the tour -- a limited

overs match against a Makhaya Ntini Invitation XI in East London Friday and a Twenty20 international in Port Elizabeth Sunday -- because of a hamstring injury. He hopes to be fit for the first Test starting in Port Elizabeth on December 26.

South Africa will also be without their regular captain, with Graeme Smith advised to rest because of a virus he apparently contracted on a tour of Pakistan during October.

Smith was withdrawn from the Ntini game -- to mark the start of the South African fast bowler's benefit season -- and the first Twenty20 international.

Former captain Shaun Pollock, who was replaced by Smith in 2003, will lead the Proteas Sunday. Smith is expected to return for the Test series.

The declining status of the West Indies team is shown by the fact that

the current tour includes only three Tests, down from five on the first tour and four in 2003-04.

They will also play in five one-day internationals and two Twenty20 internationals, as well as a four-day warm-up match against South Africa in East London next week.

Gayle said in his Cricinfo column after the Zimbabwe tour: "I look forward to us benefiting from the momentum and confidence which the guys have gained with our 3-1 series victory against Zimbabwe."

Gayle said the Zimbabwe victory had been a team effort, although he singled out stand-in captain Dwayne Bravo, emerging batsman Runako Morton, veteran batsman Shivnarine Chanderpaul and fast bowler Jerome Taylor, who picked up two man of the match awards in Zimbabwe.

ITINERARY

December 14: Makhaya Ntini Invitation XI, East London (day-night)
December 16: First Twenty20 International, Port Elizabeth (day-night)
December 19-22: South Africa A, East London
December 26-30: First Test, Port Elizabeth
January 2-6: Second Test, Cape Town
January 10-14: Third Test, Durban
January 18: Second Twenty20 International, Johannesburg (day-night)
January 20: First ODI, Centurion (day)
January 25: Second ODI, Cape Town (day-night)
January 27: Third ODI, Port Elizabeth (day)
February 1: Fourth ODI, Durban (day-night)
February 3: Fifth ODI, Johannesburg (day)

Voices of spring

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

You could have set the clock to it. Just around the time India's cricketers are calling home and asking wives, mothers and other responsible parties to locate their passports, Australia, rather parts of its press-pack, have, in a stirring show of loyalty, already opened the bowling.

A headline early last week set the tone: "Indian money threatens Aussie team". It referred to Cricket Australia's peeved letter to its players inquiring about their MOUs with the Indian Premier League despite being under contract to CA. Etc... isn't "Buck-chasing threatens Aussie team" a more accurate headline?

But hey, come on, the Indian team is going to be touring Australia soon, let's identify the enemy here, shall we? Paint the target nice and big.

Even before the Australian coach has presented his blueprint for annihilation, a section of the press inevitably, but mystifyingly (journalists usually prefer skepticism over cheerleading), steps up to show off its Baggy Green badges.

The day Sachin Tendulkar was ruled out of the Bangalore Test, came another worthy crow: "It's official: India are unfit." (Call that journalism,

mate? That's not a story. A story is something people don't already know).

Anyway, this 'story', smartly linking Robin Singh's leaked fielding report and the recurrence of a knee-injury to Tendulkar, began: "Indian teams have traditionally struggled to get through the rigours of an Australian tour without falling victim to injuries and fatigue..." See, not letting facts get in the way, either. The last time India toured Australia, they were so injured and fatigued (not to mention scared, afraid to play shots and fast bowling) that they finished the series 1-1 and nearly spoilt Steve Waugh's drawn-out, self-indulgent and self-imposed farewell party.

But this is just the drum roll. Bishan Bedi's already been sought out to express his reservations about Harbhajan Singh's action. Any time now, there should be something out on that other Aussie favourite, Sourav Ganguly, that convenient myth about how he comes from a royal family and so he doesn't carry the can... no, sorry, that was the kit bag... or maybe, the drinks tray?

Soon some Aussie fast bowler, perhaps Shaun Tait or Mitchell Johnson, will name his "target". Matthew Hayden will choose to be loquacious about Indian failings or the 'superstar' phenomenon which means they don't play like a team.

Andrew Symonds will resume his principled opposition to Porsche being given to just about anyone. A few former Aussie players will weigh in with astute socio-cultural observations.

Then, and only then, will the Indian tour be ready to begin.

Make no mistake, Australia is a lovely country. The natives are friendly. They know how to stage cricket matches. They even know how to play the game. Nobody has taken cricket to where Australia has, which would be stratospheric. Hell, nobody has taken cricket memorabilia to where they have. (Which would lie somewhere between the realms of opportunistic and tacky).

It's just that this--the weeks before a tour of Australia--is such a nostalgic time, it can make you all dewy-eyed. It has become