

BD-SL U-19 SERIES
2nd match
today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will look to stretch their lead in the five-match limited-overs series against visiting Sri Lanka when the two Under-19 sides face in the second match today at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra.

Bangladesh, fresh from a come-from-behind 3-2 series win in Pakistan, lead 1-0 following their 13-run win in the first match against the Lankans on Wednesday.

The next three matches are scheduled for December 15, 18 and 20 also at the same venue.

Victory Day
sports

SPORTS REPORTER

Four services teams confirmed the semifinals berths of the Victory Day Top-Five volleyball yesterday.

Bangladesh Army, who defeated Water Development Board 3-0 at the Dhaka Volleyball Stadium, will take on Bangladesh Rifles in tomorrow's second semifinal.

The first semi will be played between Bangladesh Air Force and Bangladesh Navy, who beat BDR 3-1.

BASKETBALL
Bangladesh Army booked a semifinal berth in the Total Victory Day basketball tournament outplaying BKSP 97-41 in the first semifinal at the Shaheed Suhrawardy Indoor National Stadium in Mirpur.

Bangladesh Navy were pitted against Josephites in the other semifinal.

TENNIS

UNB adds: The Prestige Bangla Victory Day tennis competition will begin today at the Ramna National Tennis Complex. Fourteen clubs will take part in seven events.

DC XI lift
T20 title

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Munshiganj

DC XI clinched the Twenty20 cricket title defeating Munshiganj Press Club by 14 runs in the final at the local stadium here yesterday.

In reply to DC XI's 106 for six after electing to bat, the local Press Club reached 92 for the loss of six wickets.

Deputy Commissioner Monir Uddin distributed prizes after the final.

Ganguly rues
missed tons

PTI, New Delhi

Batting lower down the order has denied him several centuries, says former India captain Sourav Ganguly, who feels VVS Laxman too has "suffered" in terms of scoring hundreds because of batting at numbers six.

"I have batted lower down the order for a lot of time and Rahul (Dravid) used to bat at number three and Sachin (Tendulkar) came at four. As a result, I had to bat at five or sometimes six and I missed quite a few hundreds because we did not have wicketkeeper-batsmen like Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Dinesh Kaarthick earlier," Ganguly told CNN-IBN.

"These guys support people batting at five or six. But me and (VVS) Laxman suffered in terms of getting hundreds," he added.

Tigers arrive

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Hotel, their address for the next ten days, past breathtaking greenery, lovely single-storey houses and livestock grazing the valleys on both sides of the road like you find in picture books. Adding to the atmosphere was the absence of a siren blowing police or security escort which just would not have fitted with the level of tranquility around.

There was just enough time for the players to get their luggage organised and get into training gear before they headed to Seddon Park which is a 10-minute walk from the hotel. On the way complete strangers came and said hello, inquired about who they were and wished them success.

There was an hour's session at the lush carpet-like turf of Seddon Park under fitness trainer Shane McDermott where the picket fences and green mounds are a throwback to the classical cricket ambience of the past. The players did some stretching and exercises and had a short football game to get rid of the jet lag. Tomorrow serious practice starts with nets scheduled at the same venue in the morning.

The Bangladesh team will play two practice matches against Northern Districts at Seddon Park on December 16 and 18 before returning to the ground on December 23 for a Twenty20 international against the Black Caps in aid of the Cyclone Sidr victims. The practice matches are due to start at 12pm and that's not a surprise as the sun usually sets around 8pm at this time of the year.



Australia captain Ricky Ponting (R) and his New Zealand counterpart Daniel Vettori pose with the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy ahead of the three-match ODI series with the first game at Adelaide today.

Pace troubled 'em: Anil

Cricket

AFP, Bangalore

India captain Anil Kumble revealed Wednesday it was his pace rather than spin that brought his team on the verge of an unlikely win against Pakistan in the third and final Test here before settling for a draw.

"It is good to finish with a five-wicket haul. I never realised that after 25 years I have to bowl medium-pace to get five wickets in Bangalore. My family and friends were there and it was great," he said.

Veteran leg-spinner Kumble took 5-60 with clever variations before Pakistan finished at 162-7 in bad light chasing an improbable 374-run target off 48 overs to salvage a draw on the fifth and final day.

India clinch the series 1-0 after winning the opening Test in New Delhi by six wickets and drawing the next two. It was their first Test series victory at home against Pakistan since 1980.

"It (bowling medium-pace) was planned before I went out. I decided it in the morning. There was no spin or bounce in the pitch and the only way to get batsmen

out was through balls that kept low," said Kumble.

"You had to bowl a bit quicker so that the batsmen didn't have enough time to adjust. Maybe I should have done it in the first innings also."

Kumble defended his decision to bat an hour after the lunch-break before declaring the second innings closed.

"A 1-0 is fine. It was important to win the series. On this pitch the only option to get wickets was when the ball kept low, which means you needed ten balls to keep low and that could happen in 40 overs or in 150 overs," he said.

"I think whenever I declared was the right decision."

The Indian captain said his team had a chance to force victory had the weather not intervened.

"I think 48 overs were enough. If the weather had stayed clear, we would have ended up winning the game," said Kumble. "It's always good to win a Test series be it at home or abroad and to win it against Pakistan is special."

Kumble praised batsmen Sourav Ganguly and Yuvraj Singh for pulling the team out of trouble on the opening day when the hosts were reeling at 61-4.

"We lost two bowlers (Zaheer

Khan and Munaf Patel) and two batsmen (Sachin Tendulkar and Mahendra Singh Dhoni) just before the game and I think Sourav and Yuvraj played brilliantly to take us to safety," he said.

"Sourav is in the form of his life and I hope he carries it on and continues to score in Australia."

Ganguly was named man of the match for scoring 239 and 91. He was also adjudged man of the series. Yuvraj scored a career-best 169 in the first innings.

Pakistan captain Shoaib Malik said the turning point of the series was his team's below-par batting performance in the opening match in New Delhi, where they could not cross the 300-mark.

"We lost the series by playing badly on the third morning at Delhi. Had we scored more runs in the second innings things would have been different," said Malik, who missed the last two Tests due to an ankle injury.

The Pakistani skipper was all praise for Misbahul Haq and Kamran Akmal, who helped their team avoid the follow-on in the last two Tests. Misbah scored two centuries and Akmal one.

"Misbah and Akmal were outstanding in the series," he said.

Hosts win
by 96 runs

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Gaibandha crushed Kurigram by 96 runs in the national under-14 district youth cricket competition at the local stadium yesterday.

Shaon (26), Rafiq (23) and Sagar (21) contributed as the hosts scored 157 all out in 49.2 overs after winning the toss and batting first.

Then they bowled out the visitors for a meagre 61 runs in 31 overs. Salim made 25 while Mamun scored 19.

Rangpur will take, on Lalmonirhat in today's match.

Pritam, Mohakhali
surprise leaders

SPORTS REPORTER

Pritam Prijam Chess Club and Mohakhali Pradip Sangha made most of their weak opponents to share lead in the First Division Chess League after yesterday's second round.

Pritam beat Friends Chess Power 3.5-0.5 while Mohakhali defeated Faith Chess Club 3-1 at the Chess Federation hall room as the joint-leaders pushed their collection to 7.5 points.

Defending champions Biman, who edged last year's runners-up Leonine 2.5-1.5 in a difficult fixture on the opening day, reached six points after a 3.5-0.5 victory against Sonali bank.

Grand Masters Ziur Rahman and Abdullah Al Rakib and FM Abu Sufian Shakil all won for Biman but FM Mehdi Hassan Parag drew with Bank's Somak Palit.

Leonine -- featuring Indian duo GM Neetpal Das and IM Sriram Jha, local GM Niaz Murshed and FM Khondokar Aminul Islam -- recorded their first win, blanking Sultana Kamal Smriti Pathagar 4-0.

In other matches, Destiny 2000 beat Dhaka University 3-1, Chittagong Mohammedan crushed i2 Solution 4-0 and Farashganj defeated Toyota Motors 2.5-1.5.

Sultan slams

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two years and later mishandled foreign coaches like Diego Cruciani of Argentina and India's Syed Nayeemuddin.

Earlier this month, the BFF even failed to sell an aggregate of 20,000 tickets in three charity matches between Abahani and Mohammedan.

The sport's governing body in the country has also failed to hold the leagues or regulation tournaments in 2007 which has threatened the career of the players.

When Sultan was selected president of the federation by his party, he disbanded the elected body of the BFF to come under the wrath of FIFA, which banned the BFF instantly. Only when the elected executive committee was reinstated, the FIFA lifted the suspension.

It was during his tenure that the former football greats resigned en masse from the federation as well as the National Team Management Committee when the BFF chief ignored its recommendations about national team officials and chose a controversial BFF member as manager.

Football outside the capital is all but a dead game due to lack of nourishment from the father organisation which at one stage faced the agitation of footballers in demand of football league.

Although the BFF demands last year's AFC Challenge Cup in Dhaka and Chittagong featuring 16 national teams as a success, it was a tailor-made tournament organised by the AFC.

In the last five years and more, the BFF has failed to stage a single international tournament in Dhaka although Sultan made headlines every year by saying that the Padma-Ganga Cup is coming to the country.

Sultan, who has a tendency of denying his own comments, once told reporters that the political allies of BNP were liberal. However, in his constituency, a women's swimming competition was postponed due to fanatic protests by religious groups.

He, however, managed to ignore similar protests in Dhaka by finally staging women's football.

D/N Tests

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Africa. "We had the lights put on about 4 o'clock and it made it hard," he said. "Unless they change the colour of the ball I think it will be difficult."

Ian Chappell, who played in the day-night Supertests of World Series Cricket 30 years ago, said it was a good idea with one major handicap. "That's the ball," he said. "Until you fix that up, and can play 80 to 85 overs with it, you really can't play. If the ball's not right the integrity of the game becomes a bit of a problem."

Yellow ones were used in the Sheffield Shield competition for the first two seasons and were switched to orange when the players complained they lost them in the background of stadium seats. However, both types scuffed too easily and "behaved differently" to the red balls. The concept was introduced to attract more spectators but was dumped when the crowds were similar.

Ntini hits all horns

Cricket

AFP, Johannesburg

Makhaya Ntini, the cattle herder who became the first black cricketer to be picked for South Africa a decade ago, says his former charges can claim credit for his accuracy between the wickets. "When I was growing up and herding we used to have a competition when if you hit the cow's horns you got points," he recalls. "I never missed."

Now aged 30, Ntini is currently ranked the number two bowler in the world and has an iconic status among South Africa's majority black population which had never previously shown much interest in the game.

In an interview with AFP, Ntini said he yearned to see more black players follow in his footsteps, recalled the highs and lows of his career and spoke of his ambition to break the record for wickets for his country before retiring.

"I believe if it rains today, tomorrow the sun will come out and shine again. That's what drives me."

Ntini came to the attention of scouts as a 15-year-old when his curiosity at the large number of cars parked outside the ground led him to watch and then join in a game of cricket near his home in the rural Eastern Cape province.

"It was by a sheer chance that I became a cricketer, a blessing in

disguise," he said.

"I was with the boys herding cattle and horses when we saw many cars, we went to see what was happening. We were given balls to throw ... and I threw better and faster than the guys that were there and were already selected."

Soon young Makhaya was being packed off to Dale College cricket school, making his first class debut in 1995 for the provincial Border team where he soon attracted interest from national selectors.

He just missed out on selection in December 1997 for the tour to Australia and New Zealand but was called up for an injured teammate and he made his international debut against New Zealand in an ODI in Perth the following month.

"I remember my first victim was (former New Zealand skipper) Stephen Fleming," he said. "What I felt was something you can't explain."

The following year however saw him hit the front-page headlines when he tried and initially convicted of rape.

The decision was finally overturned on appeal although he was only recalled to the national side in 2000.

Ntini is reluctant to rake over the past but said: "In ten years the road will never be smooth."

"There will definitely be potholes and flat tires," he added.

Since then, he has become one of the third South African to take 300 Test wickets after Allan Donald and Shaun Pollock and written his

name in the record books as the first South African to take 10 wickets in a match at Lord's.

"Maybe I will reach Pollock's record (of 416 wickets) before I hang up my boots at 40," said Ntini with a trademark twinkle in his eye.

Before retiring however, Ntini yearns to see more black players break into the Proteas line-up. While several mixed race players such as Herschelle Gibbs and Ashwell Prince are also regulars, Ntini is still the only black player who is an automatic first choice on the team sheet.

While refusing to be drawn on the argument over the pros and cons of racial quotas, Ntini said he didn't want to be an exceptional case.

"There are many Makhaya Ntinis out there and I would love to see more black players coming through," he added. "That is something I would like to change".

To mark his 10 years at the top, Ntini has been granted a benefit by the Border Cricket Board with a 25 over day-night match against the West Indies on Friday the highlight. Ntini's invitational XI will include retired legends such as Jonty Rhodes and current teammates Gibbs, Pollock and Jacques Kallis.

"Makhaya sets an exceptional example both on and off the field and the Board is very delighted to award a benefit season to a legend," said Themba Lupuwana, the Border board's chief executive.

ECB offers Zim money

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chairman Giles Clarke held low-key talks with Peter Chingoka, the chairman of Zimbabwe Cricket, in Johannesburg last week where it is reported that discussions took place about forthcoming tours between the two countries and the ICC World Twenty20 scheduled to take place in England in 2009.

Clarke's visit was very much below the radar and was not reported in the UK media. That it happened at all only emerged when Zimbabwe's Independent newspaper claimed that Clarke had offered to pay ZC 200,000 pounds if it withdrew from the proposed tour to England in 2009.

Fears are growing that the new hard-line approach of the British government towards Zimbabwe in general and those believed to have links to the Mugabe regime in particular could lead to a ban on all Zimbabwe players and officials.

Chingoka himself was barred from entering the UK in October, a major blow to him as he has family in London, but there is no evidence that the government proposes a wider ban. "He has been refused a visa because of the role he plays within ZC as Mugabe's commissar and particularly because of the financial irregularities that have occurred," a source at Westminster told Cricinfo. "There is certainly no blanket visa ban on Zimbabwean sportsmen -- although there have been calls on the government to consider a general sporting boycott."

The Independent reported that Clarke made the financial offer -- ostensibly to go towards development -- in return for Zimbabwe cancelling their 2009 tour and agreeing to postpone England's return trip scheduled for 2012. It appears that Clarke is keen to avoid the almost non-stop issue of England playing Zimbabwe which has dogged the board for several years.

Ray Mali, the acting ICC president, attended the meeting, although an ICC spokesman told

Cricinfo he was there "only in the role of a facilitator".

It has also been rumoured that the ECB may lobby the government in a bid to get Chingoka allowed into the country to attend next June's annual ICC meeting which will be held at Lord's. He was initially barred from travelling last summer but was eventually granted a short-stay visa. It was widely believed the climb-down came after ECB officials asked Richard Caborn, the then sports minister, to use his influence as it was felt Chingoka's absence would have compromised David Morgan's ultimately successful bid to become ICC president.

Chingoka, meanwhile, insisted that ZC would not lobby to be granted visas. "The FTP commits every member to host and be hosted as scheduled," he told the newspaper. "It's our own right to have these tours. Zimbabwe's players must be allowed to participate. We don't need to lobby where we have rights, but the complications being created are for the ICC to resolve."

The lone ranger

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

It has been a day of mixed fortunes for Pankaj Singh. At the very moment, perhaps, when the national selectors were discussing his name for the Australia tour, Pankaj was busy battling it out in Jhalawar, trying to secure for Rajasthan their first-ever victory over Mumbai in the Ranji Trophy. Pankaj couldn't save Rajasthan from losing by two runs -- but he did get the selectors' call.

It was a reward for his performances over the past year and, if it surprised most people, Pankaj himself was confident that the national call was around the corner. "In a way I was expecting this call, especially after my five-wicket haul against a side like Mumbai in the first innings (at Jhalawar)," an excited Pankaj, 22, said.

His height -- he stands 6' 5" in his socks -- and broad shoulders have been his principal assets, along with his work ethic, in purchasing wickets on the flat, unresponsive Indian pitches for the past two years.

Venkatesh Prasad, the Indian bowling coach, felt the same during the bowlers' camp held in Mysore in June, before the England tour, where Pankaj was called at the last minute based on his performances during

the previous Ranji season. "He's a tall and hardworking fast bowler with a good outswinger," was Prasad's assessment at the time.

Pankaj, who took the new ball during the India A tour to Kenya and then against South Africa A at home, runs in hard and delivers with a side-on action. His stock ball is the outswinger that leaves the right-hander at a decent pace, something his colleague Ishant Sharma can make use of; his secret delivery is the disguised in-cutter that he utilises intelligently. "The outswinger came naturally, but my experience during the A-tours this year helped me bring more variety and the inswinger is a work in progress," Pankaj says.

His relative youth would raise expectations of greater pace but for now Pankaj is happy consistently hitting the 135kmph mark, so long as he can pitch it on the right spot. "If he can hit the back-of-the-length and short-of-good-length consistently, that's the priority," Prasad says. In essence he is asking Pankaj to do what he has been doing for Rajasthan for the last two seasons. Pankaj understands that well and is not fretting over the lack of pace. "A good line-and-length is what I want to focus on and as for pace I will definitely increase it with time."

KP Bhaskar, in his first season as Rajasthan's coach, believes Pankaj will have few problems bridging the

gap between domestic and international cricket. "Line and length are his biggest strong points," says Bhaskar, adding that the reason Pankaj is not an all-out fast bowler is because he has to shoulder the burden of the Rajasthan attack almost single-handed.

Prasad says India has never been a nation of fast bowlers in any case and it would be beneficial if Pankaj can focus on the consistency. With Ishant bagging his maiden five-for, and Zaheer Khan and RP Singh returning to the fold, Pankaj will most likely be an understudy to the seniors. If at all he gets a chance, it will be during the two practice games ahead of the first Test on Boxing Day at the MCG.

Pankaj's performances appear to have impressed Dilip Vengsarkar, the chairman of selectors, who met him for the first time during the 2006-07 Deodhar Trophy. Since then, Pankaj says, Vengsarkar has encouraged him to believe in himself. "Work on your basics and concentrate on your strengths," he told me," Pankaj said.

Pankaj's trip to Mysore earlier this year saw him acquire a more positive mindset. "We spoke a lot about mental toughness," Pankaj recalls about his conversations with Prasad and the other bowlers. The ideal tool, apart from height, broad shoulders and a strong work ethic, for that trip to Australia.

Lyon vanquish Rangers

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But midfielder Alex levelled two minutes later before Champions League debutant Ugur Borral grabbed two goals to put the Turks back on course.

Meanwhile, PSV, who needed to beat Inter to have any hope of qualifying, were reduced to 10 men in the 28th minute when Edison Mendez was red-carded for a foul on David Suazo.

The one-man deficit eventually proved decisive with Julio Cruz scoring 18th Champions League career goal in the 64th minute to give Inter top spot.

Roma and Manchester United played out an entertaining 1-1 draw in the Italian capital.

United went ahead on 34 minutes with Spanish defender Gerard Pique heading home Nani's corner. But Roma grabbed a point when Mancini levelled in the 71st minute.

"We're satisfied with the performance but I'm disappointed that in the second half we gave possession away and that's how we gave away the goal," said Ferguson.

Fans of both sides clashed just before kick-off. Groups of supporters threw bottles, chairs and tables at each other as fans packed bars close to the Olympic Stadium.

It was also reported that five English fans and one Italian had been hurt in stabbing incidents but none were believed to be seriously

injured. At the Emirates Stadium, Arsenal were forced to settle for second place in Group H despite finishing with a 2-1 win against Steaua.

Gunnars boss Arsene Wenger was confident his team could survive what could be a tricky next stage.

"We could get a good draw and it could be an interesting last 16," said the Frenchman.

"We knocked Madrid and Juventus out two years ago and everybody is up for it."

First half goals from Abou Diaby and Nicklas Bendtner put the Gunners in control before Dorel Zaharia replied after the break.