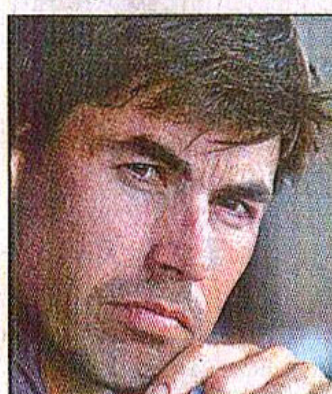




Did U Know?

Arthur Ashe, the African-American tennis player, won the inaugural men's final of the US Open in 1968.



Stephen Fleming

(Former New Zealand cricket captain)

"I felt like a fish out of water. It was all a bit foreign. I was pretty nervous after six weeks without playing so things are pretty green at the moment."

After the Twenty20 charity match against Bangladesh in Hamilton on Sunday.



SAB tv
New Zealand v Bangladesh
First ODI
Live from 5:00am (Wednesday)

STAR Cricket
Australia v India
First Test, Day One
Live from 5:30am (Wednesday)

ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sport News
Live at 8:30pm

Sultan right or wrong?

SPORTS REPORTER

Nine days after SA Sultan's reported resignation as Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president, football's governing body in the country remained in total darkness about the incident.

Questions have already been raised whether Sultan had done the right thing by tendering his resignation to FIFA president Sepp Blatter or not.

Sultan sent his resignation to Blatter on December 15 and copies to National Sports Council chairman General Moeen U Ahmed and AFC president Mohammad bin Hammam on the same day.

Although the BFF officials have kept mum on the issue, stating they have yet to know the 'truth', a vice-president yesterday asked about its legitimacy.

"If it has been done, it was the right way. Any member of the BFF let alone the president should tender resignations to the BFF executive committee only," said senior vice-president Monir Ahmed.

"In fact we have no document

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Slow over-rate costs England

REUTERS, London

England captain Michael Vaughan has been fined 40 percent of his match fee for his side's slow over-rate in the drawn third Test against Sri Lanka, the International Cricket Council said on Monday.

The ICC's code of conduct states that players are fined five percent of their match fees for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time with the captain's punishment double.

Vaughan's side were ruled to be four overs short of its target by match referee Jeff Crowe when time allowances were taken into consideration during the rain-hit match in Galle.

The rest of the squad were fined 20 percent of their match fee.

England lost the three-match series 1-0.

Beware of Tigers: Flemo

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Stephen Fleming has warned New Zealand not to take Bangladesh for granted in the upcoming ODI and Test series. Fleming, the former New Zealand captain, was leading the New Zealand Cricket XI that lost to the Bangladeshis in a charity Twenty20 game in Hamilton.

"If we're tentative, they'll put up a fight," Fleming told the New Zealand Herald after the game. Fleming, who retired from ODIs after the World Cup but is still part of New Zealand's Test team, highlighted the Bangladesh batsmen as the key threat. "They've got good stroke-makers," he said. "There's not a lot of fear in some of their players and on their day they can

come off -- we've seen that in some of the upsets they've caused at World Cups."

Fleming also contrasted the approach of the Bangladesh batsmen with that of New Zealand. "Their batting is probably almost the opposite of where our batting unit is," Fleming admitted. "They seem full of confidence, and they don't really have a lot of fear. The consequence of them playing a bad shot and getting out doesn't seem to be there."

New Zealand's batsmen haven't had a great run of late; Dale Steyn decimated the line-up with 20 wickets in the two Tests in South Africa, and barring one ODI in Port Elizabeth, their batsmen have generally failed to cope. "It feels very tentative with the batting unit -- there's been a lot of focus on it, the performances haven't been

great and with that comes a certain amount of tension."

"Coming into the side, you could feel that, the ways the guys played. We have to get away from that and try and stamp some authority with the willow in hand." The match on Sunday was Fleming's first competitive game after the Tests in South Africa, during which he had dislocated his thumb. Fleming, who made 17, but was not his fluent self, said, "I felt like a fish out of water. It was all a bit foreign. I was pretty nervous after six weeks without playing so things are pretty green at the moment."

Bangladesh, who haven't won an ODI or Test against New Zealand, play the first of the three-match ODI series on Boxing Day in Auckland. The two-Test series, in which Fleming is to play, begins in Dunedin on January 4.

Rasel to return home

SPORTS REPORTER

Injured pace bowler Syed Rasel will return home tomorrow from New Zealand, ending his tour after just half-a-match, as he would not be able to bowl within one month.

The left-arm seamer, who picked an injury during Bangladesh's first warm-up match against State Northern Knights at Seddon Park on December 16, is being sent home to undergo a rehabilitation programme designed by Bangladesh team physio Darryn Lifson.

It was revealed that Rasel suffered a Grade 3 dislocation of the left collarbone and has been suggested to take conservative treatment, which is the best management of the condition.

For further specialist opinion all x-rays and reports were sent to Dr Treffer James in Melbourne, Australia and his advice is awaited.

Uncapped left-arm seamer Sajidul Islam has already joined the party in New Zealand as replacement.

Meanwhile, middle order batsman Rajin Saleh left Dhaka for New Zealand yesterday to join the Tigers for the rest of the tour as back-up for injured Tushar Imran, who sustained a shoulder injury.

The national selectors had decided to send Rajin as insurance for further injuries and avoid possible crisis.

Tushar is certain to miss the first two games of the three-match ODI series as the right-hander is due to appear for a fitness test on December 28, the day Tigers play their second one-day international at McLean Park, Napier.

The one-day series gets underway tomorrow at the Eden Park in Auckland while the third and final match is scheduled for December 31 at the Queenstown Events Centre in Queenstown.

The two-match Test series will start on January 4 and the national selectors will decide on the players who join the Test team within a couple of days.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4



Australian star batsman Matthew Hayden drives a ball during a practice session at the MCG in Melbourne yesterday.

Records beckon Aussies

Indo-Aussie Test series starts tomorrow

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australia are surfing the wave of another long winning run and targeting their 15th consecutive Test victory -- one short of their record -- against India in the opening Boxing Day cricket Test.

Cricket does not get a grander stage than the 100,000-capacity Melbourne Cricket Ground on Boxing Day on one of the biggest days of the Australian sporting calendar.

India go into the MCG showcase on the back of just 48 overs' batting practice in the rain-out lead-up match against Victoria and will run into an Australian side determined to set the tone for the four-Test series from the first ball.

England were smashed by an innings and 99 runs in last year's Boxing Day Test, South Africa went

under by 184 runs in the 2005 MCG match and Australia conquered India by nine wickets in the corresponding Boxing Day Test four years ago.

Australia were last beaten at the MCG by England by 12 runs in a thriller nine years ago. Australia rarely lose at their home of cricket.

Ricky Ponting's team are in the midst of another triumphant run with 14 consecutive victories stretching back two years to their win over South Africa at the MCG.

Australia are just two wins from equalling their run of 16 under former skipper Steve Waugh from October 1999 to February 2001.

Australia's last home series loss was 14 years ago to the West Indies 2-1 and they have been unbeaten in 26 subsequent home series.

India's challenge cannot be more confronting than it is going into the opening match of their series with the world Test champions.

India have won just four Tests in

eight Australian tours, but pushed Steve Waugh's Australians all the way in the drawn 1-1 last series tour here in 2003-04.

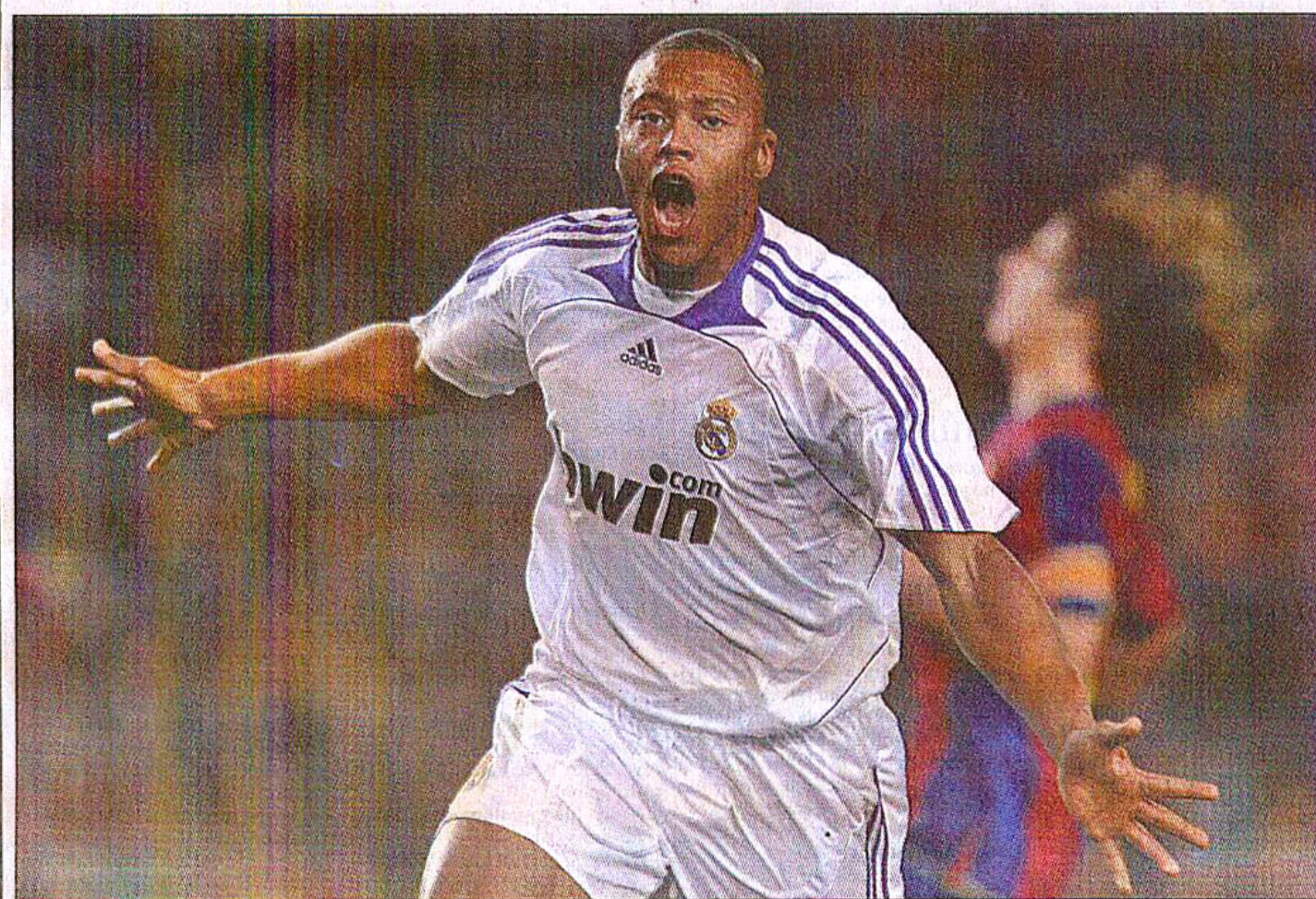
Yet the tourists are upbeat about their chances on the strength of their impressive recent away record -- Test series victories in the West Indies in 2006 after 35 years and then in England in 2007 after 21 years, under Rahul Dravid.

They have the most experienced middle-order quartet in world cricket with Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly and VVS Laxman, weighing in with 32,610 runs gleaned from a total of 442 Tests and with 87 centuries between them.

Ganguly, top-scorer in this month's series against Pakistan with 534 runs in three matches, will make his 100th Test appearance in Melbourne.

"The most important thing is you have to play aggressive cricket

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



THE BEAST HAS SPOKEN: Real Madrid midfielder Julio Baptista is over the moon after scoring a stunning goal during the El Clasico encounter against Barcelona in the Primera Liga at the Nou Camp on Sunday.

'The Beast' devours Barca

AFP, Madrid

Julio Baptista gave Real Madrid coach Bernd Schuster the Christmas present he wanted by getting the only goal in a hard-fought 1-0 win over their bitter rivals Barcelona on Sunday.

The rugged Brazilian striker - nicknamed The Beast - found the net after 36 minutes to bring to an end to Barcelona's 100 per cent home record in their Nou Camp stadium this season, both in La Liga and the Champions League.

"I thought we could have got a second goal. We had two or three good attacks in the second half but, overall, it's a fair result," said Schuster.

Real's triumph puts them firmly in lead of the Spanish championship race and they are now the overwhelming favourites to retain their title.

The 30-time Spanish league winners have 41 points from the 17 games and have extended their lead to seven points over second-placed Barcelona.

"It's good to get the points but nothing's decided yet. Let's wait until the end of the season until we're starting talking about trophies," said the ever-prudent Schuster.

His opposite number Frank Rijkaard was visibly disappointed at the outcome but tried to look on the bright side after the game.

"We were in the game right until the whistle. In fact, until the very last moment I thought we could get a point but they were very well organised at the back."

"However, I have the feeling that we played well, especially in the midfield and also at the back. We didn't give them many chances but we also lost too many balls at important moments," reflected the Dutch coach.

Neither side had many opportunities in a scrappy first 35 minutes in which the biggest scoring threats came from the free kicks of Real

winger Wesley Sneijder. Real's Portuguese international defender Pepe made Barcelona goalkeeper Victor Valdes work hard to deny him after he connected with one of the Dutchman's dead ball efforts after 11 minutes.

Valdes then flapped badly at a Sneijder free kick on 32 minutes but Ruud van Nistelrooy couldn't get his head cleanly to the ball.

At the other end, Real's Iker Casillas once again proved his credentials as one of the best goalkeepers in Europe when he produced two wonderful reaction saves in rapid succession to thwart Ronaldinho and Xavi Hernandez.

Baptista then got the goal which changed the face of a game which generally lived up to its billing as El Clasico in terms of emotion and effort but not technical excellence on this occasion.

Van Nistelrooy saw Baptista darting down the left wing and chipped the ball across, leaving the speedy Brazilian to out pace his markers Carles Puyol and Rafael Marquez before half-volleying the

ball over the head of Valdes.

"That goal came at a difficult moment. After they scored, it was easier for Real to sit back and defend," lamented Rijkaard.

The first 15 minutes of the second half saw both teams charge up and down the field but neither side appeared to have much idea about how to break down two well-organised defences.

Casillas produced two fine saves from Bojan Krkic and Yaya Toure in the final seven minutes of the game but it was the closest the Catalan club came to getting an equaliser.

Barca's increasing desperation also left holes at the back and Pepe had a second chance to get his first La Liga goal in injury time.

Rijkaard gambled with starting Ronaldinho but the two-time former World Player of the Year had little impact and was regularly stopped in his tracks by some good tackling by Real left back Sergio Ramos.

The defeat means that Rijkaard will also have to spend the two-week holiday period having to

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Gilly for clean series

Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

Australia's Adam Gilchrist does not want the Test series against India to feature the verbal clashes that marred recent one-day games in India.

The four-Test series gets underway with the traditional Boxing Day Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Australia's one-day series in India in October was marred by on-field spat.

"Hopefully... the players are not going to go down the route again of

getting too carried away with it," said wicketkeeper Gilchrist.

"It will be hard-fought. They're a team that has said they want to take the challenge up to us in an aggressive manner."

"It all got a bit out of control in the one-day series in India. We want to play hard, aggressive cricket and not go too far with it."

Australia won the seven-match one-day series 4-2 on a tour organised without Test matches.

The two sides last played in Tests in 2004, Australia winning their first series in India for 35 years.

India battled to a 1-1 Test series draw in Australia in 2003/04, against a side missing the injured

Glenn McGrath and with Shane Warne serving a doping ban.

The two bowlers -- who boast 1,271 Test wickets between them -- retired at the end of the Ashes series last January.

With veteran spinner Stuart MacGill ruled out after undergoing wrist surgery, Australia have drafted in one-day specialist Brad Hogg, who could play his first Test since 2003.

Fast bowler Shaun Tait has also been recalled to a 12-man squad after missing last month's 2-0 series victory over Sri Lanka with an elbow injury.

India have an inexperienced

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



Bangladesh Under-19 cricket team members pose for photograph at the Zia International Airport yesterday before their departure for South Africa to play a three-day match and a triangular limited-overs series involving the hosts and India.