

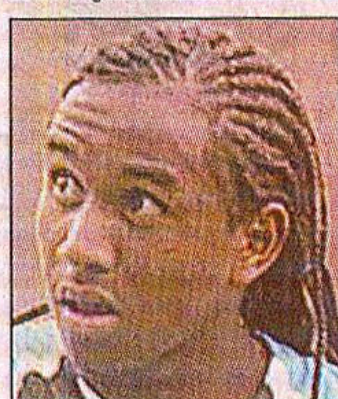
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Did U Know?

Major League Soccer (MLS) was formed on December 17, 1993, fulfilling a promise to FIFA from Alan Rothenberg and the US Soccer Federation to establish a "Division One" professional soccer league in exchange for staging the 1994 FIFA World Cup.



Anderson

(Man United's Brazilian midfielder)
"A player does not show what he is worth in one match. It happens over a period of time and I am sure eventually, the fans will see what I can do."



What to Watch

SAB tv
New Zealand v Bangladesh
Second ODI
Live from 4:00am
STAR Cricket
Australia v India
First Test, Day Four
Live from 5:30am (Saturday)
TEN Sports
South Africa v West Indies
First Test, Day Three
Live from 2:30pm
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sport News
Live at 8:30pm



Nat'l Cricket League
(Round Nine, Day Two)
Chittagong v Dhaka
Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium
Rajshahi v Khulna
Venue: Rajshahi Divisional Stadium
Sylhet v Barisal
Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium, Bogra

Malik begins rehab

CRICINFO, undated

Shoaib Malik, the Pakistan captain, needs a further three weeks to recover fully from the ankle injury that curtailed his tour to India. It also means that he faces a race against time to be fit for Pakistan's next assignment, an ODI series against Zimbabwe, which begins from January 26.

Malik missed the final two Tests against India recently after injuring his ankle during a post-Test warm-up and now begins an injury rehabilitation programme at the National Cricket Academy.

"Doctors have removed the plaster from Shoaib Malik's ankle Thursday and have advised him to undergo a rehabilitation programme for the next three weeks," Ahsan Malik, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) spokesman, told The News.

Malik will be working with Sohail Saleem, the PCB's chief medical officer, and trainer Abdul Saboor. "He (Malik) is feeling much better and is confident of regaining full match fitness ahead of the series against Zimbabwe," Ahsan said.

Another vital player, Mohammad Asif, also begins his comeback from the elbow injury

Siddons warns batters

Cricket

AGENCIES, Napier

Bangladesh coach Jamie Siddons said some of his star batsmen must look to carry on after they are set at the crease ahead of the second one-day international against New Zealand at McLean Park in Napier today.

Tigers lost the plot and then the match in the opening encounter at Eden Park in Hamilton on Wednesday when captain Mohammad Ashraful and Tamim Iqbal's dismissals triggered a middle-order collapse that left them with 201 runs to defend. The hosts reached the target losing four wickets.

"We've got to make sure we get 250 and bat our 50 overs. We've broken a few teams rules and hopefully it won't happen again," Siddons told.

"If you get those sorts of starts you can't afford to fall away that badly."

"(Mohammad) Ashraful and Tamim (Iqbal) seemed to make it look pretty easy but the two guys threw it away," Siddons said.

"The batsmen that were in were probably looking at a 280 target rather than making sure we got 250. The captain has a bit to answer for there."

But aside from the middle and lower order batting failure, Bangladesh also failed with the ball, unable to ruffle a New Zealand

batting lineup struggling for confidence.

Jamie How (88), fighting to secure a regular berth in the team, and Peter Fulton (35) who is returning from injury, spent quality time in the middle before both fell to rash aerial shots.

Bangladesh have never beaten New Zealand in nine encounters, but Ashraful had them in with a chance with a rollicking 70 off 57 balls before falling to an in-judicious shot rather than a quality ball.

"I thought he was pretty outstanding," said New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori.

"It sort of reminded us of some of the world class players going round at the moment in his ability to hit good balls for fours and sixes consistently."

"He's obviously got an amazing eye and is going to be a major threat to us the whole series."

Vettori wants to ram home the advantage over Bangladesh to further lift morale.

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TEAMS

BANGLADESH: Mohammad Ashraful (captain), Zunaed Siddique, Tamim Iqbal, Aftab Ahmed, Shakib Al Hasan, Tushar Imran, Farhad Reza, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Abdur Razzak, Shahadat Hossain.

NEW ZEALAND (likely): Jamie How, Brendon McCullum (wicketkeeper), Peter Fulton, Ross Taylor, Scott Styris, Mathew Sinclair, Jacob Oram, Daniel Vettori (captain), Kyle Mills, Mark Gillespie, Chris Martin.

Fog, bowlers dominate

SPORTS REPORTER

Khulna. Dhaka and Barisal bowled themselves to great positions at the end of the first day's play of their respective ninth round National Cricket League matches across the country yesterday.

All three sides dominated proceedings with the ball but dense fog forced the Rajshahi-Khulna and Barisal-Sylhet encounters back by several hours in the morning.

Rajshahi, at home, were bowled out for only 188 runs in 58.1 overs, thanks to an all-round bowling effort from the visitors. Khulna were 21-2 at the end of day's play.

In Chittagong, Dhaka folded the hosts' first innings for only 98 with Mohammad Sharif and Arafat Sunny starting with the ball. Dhaka were 10 runs behind after they reached 88-2.

At the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra, Sylhet struggled to 149-8 against Barisal in 60 overs of play.

RAJSHAHI-KHULNA

After dense fog delayed the start of play by one and half hours at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium, Khulna's stand-in captain Nahidul Haq sent the hosts to bat.

Fast bowlers Ziaur Rahman, Aslam Khan and Rabiul Islam took two wickets each to vindicate Nahid's decision when Rajshahi fell to 66-4.

Only opener Shakil Haider struck nine fours and a six in his rapidfire 61 off 85 balls but his dismissal, an edge to Sahagir Hossain off Aslam, was the turning point as another batting order collapse began. Off-spinner Jamaluddin Babu snapped three while Fariduddin Masud took one as the hosts slipped to 188 all out.

Rajshahi opening bowler Delwar Hossain tried his best to wrestle back the initiative by picking up both the Khulna wickets.

BARISAL-SYLHET

Except opener Golam Rahman and captain Alok Kapali, none of the Sylhet batsmen could stand up to Barisal's varied bowling attack.

After the 2.5-hour delay,

Barisal's new ball pair Sumon Saha and Arafat Salahuddin held the Sylhet batsman back, sharing five wickets and spinner Monir Hossain moved in to pick two wickets.

Rahman scored 45 off 100 balls with two boundaries while Kapali contributed with a 46-ball 39.

CHITTAGONG-DHAKA

Chittagong Divisional Stadium became the only ground where the match was not delayed but wickets

fell like ninepins there as well.

The host batsmen never looked like getting on top of the Dhaka bowlers as the likes of Mahbubul Alam, Mohammad Sharif, Mosharraf Hossain and Arafat Sunny destroyed Chittagong in the first innings.

Sharif and Sunny took three wickets while Mosharraf and Mahbubul took two each.

SEE PAGE 22 COL 5



PHOTO: STAR

Dhaka left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny, who took three wickets against Chittagong, is about to deliver during their National Cricket League match at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium on Thursday.

'I should've stayed'

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

Sachin Tendulkar's misjudgement to throw away his innings with another impressive century beckoning could be the turning point in India's opening Test against Australia, the batsman admitted Thursday.

The sublime stroke-maker with a record 37 Test hundreds cruised to 62 off 77 balls as his teammates flailed around him, and looked all set for another century in reply to Australia's first innings total of 343.

But Stuart Clark bowled him just when it appeared he was building a big partnership with Sourav Ganguly.

And Tendulkar agreed his dismissal was a turning point, which India may never recover from, in the opening match of the four-Test series.

"I would say so. If we had converted that partnership into a big partnership it can really make a huge difference to the lower batting order and that was an important wicket," Tendulkar said.

"I was disappointed. I knew there was 10 minutes left before tea and the idea was to play out a few balls and I misjudged that. It came a bit slower than I expected off the wicket."

"I went in with a positive frame of mind and I decided if the ball was there I would put it away. The ball came a bit slower than I expected. That was the reason."

The 34-year-old had been in his pomp, caressing drives and cuts for boundaries and "crashed leg-spinners Brad Hogg for a huge six before he chopped a Clark delivery on to his stumps."

Tendulkar, playing in his farewell Melbourne Test, slowly left the arena to sustained applause from the appreciative Australian crowd - and with him went India's chances of overhauling Australia's first innings total.

At stumps on the second day, Australia had built their lead to 179 runs with 10 wickets intact and giving every indication that they will set India an imposing total to chase in the fourth innings on a wearing pitch.

"Yesterday (Wednesday) we were in a good position and today (Thursday) it's not the same for

us," Tendulkar said.

"We definitely should have played better but the match is not over yet and we will continue to fight."

"We will have to get 10 wickets as early as possible and that would be our first target and then we have to win whatever sessions are left in the Test match."

The Australians prize Tendulkar's wicket each time he comes out to bat against them. He has only been bowled four times in the 40 Test innings he has played against Australia since 1991.

"He was batting beautifully and any time he gets out and you see him walking back to the pavilion it's a good moment for the opposition because he's such a great player," Clark said.

"Hopefully, if we can build that pressure on him every time we play him and if we're not getting him out and he's not scoring runs, then we can create that pressure and intensity that's required in Test cricket and he can find ways to get himself out."

Tendulkar has scored 1,921 runs in 22 Test matches against Australia at 53.36, slightly down on his career average of 55.10.

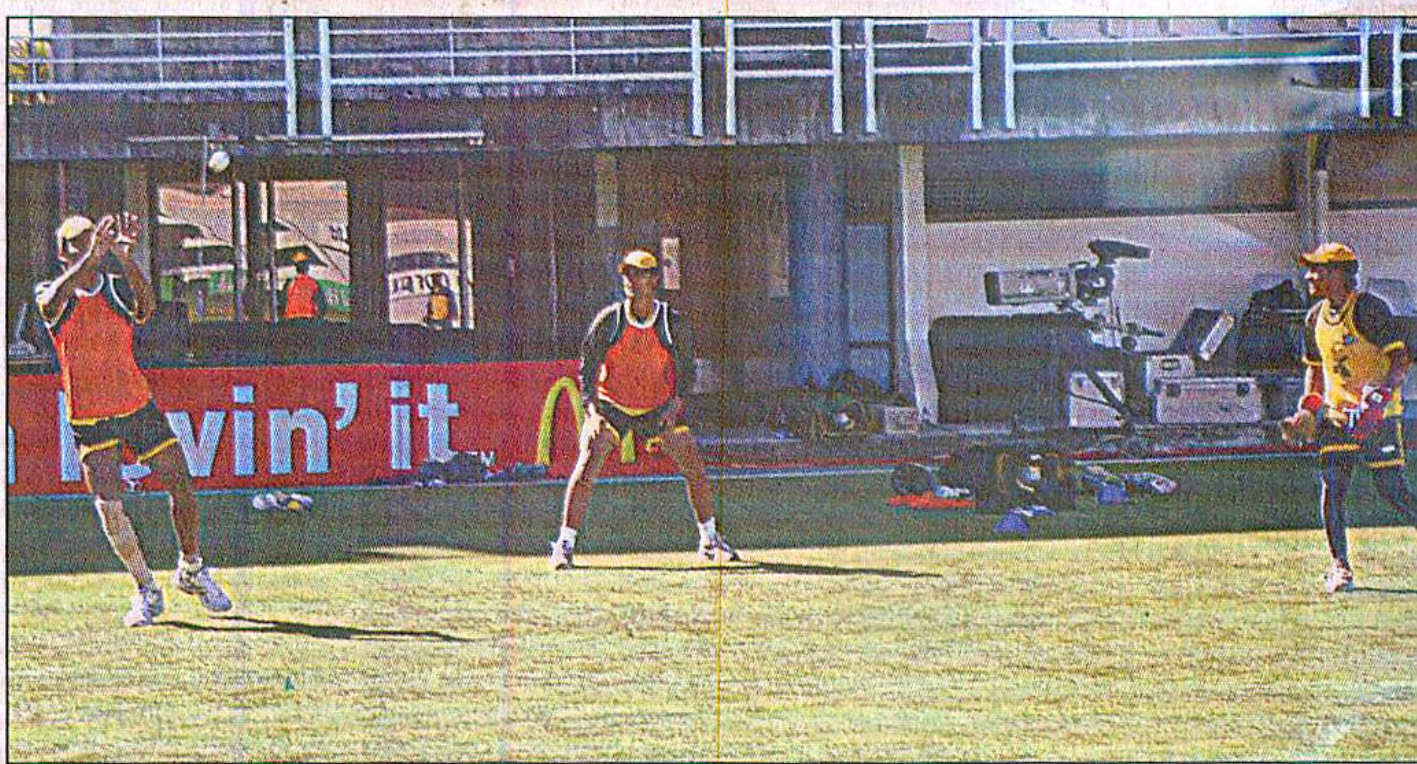


PHOTO: TIGERCRIKET.COM

Bangladesh opener Zunaed Siddique (L) prepares to take catch as wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim (R) and Tamim Iqbal look on during a training session at McLean Park in Napier on Thursday.

Bangladeshi trio to reach NZ Dec 30

SPORTS REPORTER

The three cricketers to join Bangladesh for the Test series in New Zealand will leave Dhaka tomorrow.

The chosen three -- ex-vice captain Habibur Bashar, former vice-captain Shahriar Nafees and left-arm spinner Enamul Haque Jr -- however, will reach New Zealand on December 30 instead of tomorrow due to a revised flight schedule.

The Tigers will play two Tests against the Black Caps in Dunedin and Wellington.

Shuvo slams half-century

SPORTS REPORTER

Captain Suhawardi Shuvo and Rony Talukdar shone on the opening day of Bangladesh under-19s' three-day practice match against their South African counterparts at Sedgus Park in Potchefstroom on Thursday.

Opting to bat first, the visitors reached 226-6 in 60.3 overs with captain Shuvo scoring 68 and Rony hitting 43.

Mahmudul Hasan was unbeaten on 37 after Shuvo was the last man out in the second session.

Wayne Parnell took two wickets while Jonathan Vanders and Andrej Swanepoel took a wicket each.

BRIEF SCORES

BANGLADESH UNDER-19s: First innings 226-6 in 60.3 overs (Rony 43, Mithun 39, Nadimuddin 0, Nasir 8, Marshall 23, Suhawardi 68, Mahmudul 37; Parnell 2-37, Vandiar 1-22, Swanepoel 1-33).

Brett reaches 250 wickets

AFP, Melbourne

Brett Lee's seemingly unstoppable rise to become one of the greats of Australian bowling reached another milestone here Thursday when he joined the 250-club of Test wickets.

The spearhead of the Australian bowling attack following the retirements earlier this year of record-breakers Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath shared top billing with Stuart Clark (4-28) as they helped dismiss India for 196 in the first Test.

Lee, 31, man-of-the-series against Sri Lanka last month, claimed 4-46 and took his 250th Test wicket to become the sixth all-time leading Australian wicket-taker, overtaking Richie Benaud.

"It feels fantastic... when you're nine years of age, you think about playing one Test match or even taking one Test wicket," he said.

"But to think that you're in the 250 club, it's a pretty special moment. I'm a very proud man."

Lee played a major part in helping the Australians seize the momentum with a 179-run lead after the second day's play with 10 wickets and three days left to get a result in the first match of the four-Test series.

The speedster has developed into a model of line and length consistency as he shoulders the responsibility of leading the Australian new-ball attack.

"In our team meetings... we've been talking about being so patient, especially on this MCG (Melbourne) wicket," Lee said.

"It's a very low, slow wicket, so patience is probably what we're after and building up momentum and patience from each end."

Lee would have reached the 250 mark sooner had he not been

SEE PAGE 22 COL 1

Sultan mystery deepens

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president SA Sultan maintained his cunning way of defending himself even after accusing the media of being dishonest and politically motivated.

Sultan, who sparked controversy earlier this month by attacking the country's sports adviser Tapan Chowdhury and the media, regretted his remarks against the sports boss.

In a letter to Tapan Chowdhury, dated December 17, he apologised for hurting the sports adviser but mentioned that he was provoked by questions (from a journalist?) leading to his answers, which Sultan claims as an "inadvertent outburst".

The BFF yesterday revealed the copy of the letter, which seems to be a vain face-saving attempt by Sultan, who had said previously that the sports adviser had no jurisdiction to comment about the football federation.

Sultan, in a letter to the NSC chairman and Army Chief Moeen U Ahmed, complained against the

sports adviser and also mentioned that the 'media cannot be controlled without exchange'. He also accused the media of being politically motivated in the same letter.

Admitting that he chose 'a few wrong words' in his letter to the NSC chairman, Sultan declared in his letter to Tapan: "Instead of journalists, I should have written a few journalists. If something I have said has hurt you and the journalists, I regret it."

Sultan also believed that the letter to the NSC chief was purposefully leaked. He also went as far as requesting the sports adviser to investigate the reasons behind the leak.

"I had to tender my resignation to the FIFA president under those circumstances and also gave a copy to the NSC chairman," were Sultan's last words in the letter.

The BFF president's resignation for 'unavoidable circumstances and personal reasons', however, has been rejected by FIFA.

The BFF also made public the letter it received from FIFA president Sepp Blatter, dated December 17.

Another confusion that arose was that although Blatter referred to Sultan's resignation letter tendered on December 12, the copy

sent to the NSC chairman was dated December 15.

Did Sultan sign two resignation letters? Only he can answer it.

Blatter's letter to Sultan says: "FIFA confirms that the tenure of the current BFF leadership has been extended by FIFA till the roadmap which has been defined by FIFA and AFC last June, comprising the following elements, has been accomplished:

- Democratization of the electoral process by creating football-only elected and independent district and divisional FAs with statutes approved by FIFA.

- Amending and ratifying the BFF statutes along FIFA's principles and standard statutes.

- Organisation of the BFF elections following the agreed timeline, first at district/division level and then at national level by April 30, 2008.

"Any disruption of the latter, either your resignation (or your colleagues'), or the non-respect of the various phases of the roadmap by others especially governmental ones, would be considered as a violation of a FIFA decision with the consequences defined in the Article 14 of the FIFA Statutes."

The Article 14 is all about suspensions.

Day Two Australia's

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

Pacemen Brett Lee and Stuart Clark captured four wickets each to deliver Australia a potential match-winning innings lead over India in the first cricket Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Thursday.

Faltering India conceded a 147-run innings deficit on a wearing drop-in pitch with the opening match of the four-Test series seemingly Australia's to lose over the remaining three days.

At stumps, Australia were on track for their 15th consecutive Test win and were cruising at 32 without loss with Matthew Hayden on 22 and Phil Jaques 10, representing an overall lead of 179 runs with 10 wickets intact.

Late-blooming seamer Clark struck three times in 12 balls in his 4-28 to seize the initiative sparked by the coveted scalp of Sachin Tendulkar and Lee continued his glorious summer to finish with 4-46.

"We've been talking about being patient, especially on this low, slow MCG wicket, so it's about patience and building up momentum from each end," Lee said.

Clark removed Tendulkar just when the 'The Little Master' was in ominous touch and followed up with the dismissals of Yuvraj Singh and Mahendra Dhoni in the same over either side of tea.

Clark, who made his Test debut at the age of 30, has now taken 58 wickets at 19.32 in his 12th Test, while Lee, man-of-the-series against Sri Lanka last month, took his Test tally to 250 wickets.

Tendulkar was in his pomp, caressing drives and cuts for boundaries and crashed leg-spinners Brad Hogg for a huge six before he chopped a Clark delivery on to his stumps for 62 nearing tea.

Tendulkar, playing in his farewell MCG Test, slowly left the arena to sustained applause from the appreciative Australian crowd and with him India's chances disappeared of overhauling Australia's first innings total.

The batting superstar was a delight for the MCG crowd after

India's openers were bogged down by accurate Australian bowling with his 62 coming off 77 balls with eight boundaries and a six.

Singh was out in Clark's final over before tea, edging to Adam Gilchrist for a duck and he removed Dhoni for a duck to complete his over after the resumption.

Hogg, playing in his first Test for

more than four years, chipped in with the wickets of Sourav Ganguly (43) and Harbhajan Singh (2).

Australia's new-ball pair Lee and Mitchell Johnson set the tone by pinning down the Indian openers Wasim Jaffer and Rahul Dravid with just 13 runs coming off the first 14 overs.

SEE PAGE 22 COL 2



PHOTO: AFP

Australia quickie Brett Lee appeals successfully for a caught behind decision of Indian batsman VVS Laxman during the second day of the first Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Thursday.