

WOMEN'S CRICKET
Rajshahi record first victory

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka and Rajshahi won their respective matches of the Meril Women's Divisional cricket tournament in the city yesterday.

Rajshahi bounced back after opening day's defeat to Khulna when they crushed Chittagong by 52 runs at the Dhanmondi Club ground, thanks to Panna Ghosh's brilliant all-round performance.

Panna, who made 87 in Rajshahi's 182 all out in the stipulated 35 overs, later captured four wickets for 20 runs as her side restricted Chittagong to 130 for nine.

Jerin and Fatema made 23 and 22 respectively for the losers.

Dhaka, playing their first match, cruised to a five-wicket victory against Khulna at the Dhaka University ground.

In reply to Khulna's 162-7, Dhaka reached 163-5 with nine balls to spare with Chameli topscoring 35. Earlier, Chameli was the peak of the Dhaka attack with 3-16.

Lawson seeks opinions

AFP, Sydney

Pakistan cricket coach Geoff Lawson said Friday he is seeking advice on the situation in the volatile country before deciding whether to return following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto.

The former Australian fast bowler is at home in Sydney with his family and is scheduled to return to Pakistan in the next two weeks.

Lawson could not say what impact the death of Bhutto, who was killed Thursday in a gun and bomb attack in the northern city of Rawalpindi, would have on his own future with Pakistan cricket.

Lawson is five months into his two-year contract with the Pakistan Cricket Board and has a get-out clause in his deal if he decides not to return.

His family has remained in Australia during his stay in Pakistan, where he is based in Lahore.

"I'm making informal investigations with people I know in Pakistan to get their opinions," Lawson said here.

"I've sent a few emails this morning just to people I know in Pakistan in different areas to get their opinions."

"I'm very open (to what they say) and I'm more likely to take into account what they've got to say rather than any officials. I'm just seeking advice, I'm not pre-judging anything."

Anger over Bhutto's death has triggered violence that has left at least 10 people dead.

The unrest across the country has also cast doubt on Australia's scheduled cricket tour there in March.

Lawson was appointed Pakistan coach in July after the death of Bob Woolmer during the World Cup in the Caribbean.

Clarke counts on reverse swing

CRICINFO, undated

Michael Clarke believes reverse-swing holds the key to wrapping up the first Test as Australia eye a four-day victory at the MCG. Ricky Ponting set India an unlikely 499 to win and the visitors have added the disadvantage of surviving on a slow pitch offering low bounce.

Clarke top scored for Australia with 73 in their 7 for 351 declared and found the late movement and sluggish surface challenging during his 113-ball stay. "At times it was difficult, it's really hard to start your innings," he said. "Once the ball gets a bit older and softer it's difficult to score so you have to be as patient as possible."

Stuart Clark gained significant movement in the first innings and Brett Lee and Mitchell Johnson are also capable of causing swing problems for India, who survived the eight overs before stumps without losing a wicket. "Once the ball gets older reverse-swing will play a part, and all three bowlers are good exponents of it," Clarke said. "When the ball is reverse-swinging it's very hard because you don't know which way it's going. And when the ball gets soft India will find it hard to score."

"I'd like to say India have no chance, but they need 493 runs, so the reality is they can get it. But if we bowl well and hold our chances there's a possibility we could win it [on day four]."

India struggled to 196 in the first innings and Harbhajan Singh blamed India's lack of practice matches for the poor performance. The only lead-up fixture, against Victoria in Melbourne, was washed out and the players face a severe task to save the game.

"We didn't get much time, we didn't get any side game," Harbhajan said of the preparation. "It's totally different conditions for batsmen and bowlers so it takes time for people to adjust on these sorts of wickets. That was the reason we got out in the first innings. The last time we showed our batsmen can bat for long times and if they just play to their potential they can definitely surprise."



Rajshahi's Panna Ghosh, who won the player-of-the-match award for her 87 runs and four wickets, in action during batting against Chittagong in the Meril Women's Divisional Cricket Tournament at the Dhanmondi Cricket Ground yesterday.

India shut out

CRICINFO, undated

Setting targets is one of the great games played by a team in command. Australia have done it a lot under Ricky Ponting and he still doesn't know when a chase is too small. At home, he has not lost a Test and he has become less generous in the size of his declarations over the past couple of years.

The question floating around the MCG throughout the third day was; when would Ponting consider he had enough? He finally called his men off with about 45 minutes remaining and it was a positive step towards the end of a day, when Australia traded aggressive flair for grinding. A four-day victory would extend the turnaround between the Melbourne and Sydney Tests by 24 hours and, when it comes to back-to-back Tests, Australia are wary.

Breaks for the bowlers are almost mandatory, which is why Ponting is so reluctant to enforce the follow-on, and the team's research shows they are more likely

to get injured when there is a short gap between matches. By declaring Ponting has challenged India to bat 98 overs to take the game to the final day while giving his fast men the incentive for a rest on Sunday before the serious training resumes in Sydney.

One huge benefit of the high speed of Australia's scoring is they have so much time to dismiss their opponents, which rules out the need for sporting declarations. When Ponting closes the innings, the opposition has virtually no chance of success unless a miracle can be conjured. He has rarely needed to rush his decision and only once, against South Africa in 2005-06, did it result in a draw.

Australia earned a lead of 506 in Hobart last month before letting Sri Lanka bat for a second time and, against England in 2006-07, Ponting set 648 in Brisbane and 557 in Perth. Each time the home team registered a convincing victory that demoralised their opponents, who had to wait and wait for the misery to end. Second-innings torture has become one of Ponting's most damaging tactics. The pain of a small total can be written off as a

bad display, but hours spent toiling in the field when all influence has been lost are hard to erase.

The body language of the Indians was sluggish in the morning and as a warm day wore on there was not much they could do except wait for Ponting's wave. The declaration could easily have come long before tea, when Australia's advantage was 395, but the hosts remain concerned that one of India's famous four will stir. Instead Ponting went on until the shadows crept over quarter of the field and the lead was 498.

After registering 196 in the first innings, India will consider 350 a triumph. The highest fourth-innings total at Melbourne is 417, which could not prevent England from losing in 1977, and the batsmen's worries about the pitch continue. The bounce is variable and the fast bowlers from both teams have enjoyed reverse-swing created from the rough square. Although Australia missed a breakthrough in their short bowling stint there was only one team comfortable with the position of the match. It is just how Ponting wants it.

Tigers humbled

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We bowled a lot of slower balls which were disappearing as well and 100 off the last ten made it look really bad for us."

"We have two good openers who are doing the job for me everyday. Ashraf has moved up to number three which is a great positive for us if he can hold his spot up there," he said about the positives from the two matches.

"Our opening bowler Rajib (Shahadat Hossain) is turning up to play everyday and doing a great job for us. Razzak had a bad day today but he's normally much more economical than that. Aftab has got a fifty. The 201 the other day was our best score against New Zealand and we would have got past that easily today and that's another positive," he added.

In response to a question whether the experienced players making the same mistakes, the Australian said: "They are probably trying to set up a mark and take the game to the opposition. As long as they are playing the shots they think they can play or they know they can play quite well and not ones they can't play so well, I'm happy. At the moment we are not playing really bad shots but still getting out."

The Tigers will now travel to Queenstown today for the third and final ODI on December 31.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the second one-day international between New Zealand and Bangladesh at the McLean Park in Napier on Friday:

NEW ZEALAND

Howlbw b Razzak 74
McCallum run out (Rahim/Tushar) 35
Fulton c Rahim b Razzak 83
Styris c Tushar b Farhad 41
Taylor not out 34
Oram c Iqbal b Mashrafe 55
Extras: (lb-1, w-12) 13
Total: (For 5 wickets in 50 overs) 335
Did not bat: Sinclair, Mills, Vettori, Gillespie, Martin
Fall of wickets: 1-82, 2-147, 3-229, 4-246, 5-335

Bowler O M R W
Mashrafe 10 1 66 1
Shahadat 8 0 52 0
Razzak 10 0 75 2
Farhad 9 0 69 1
Shakib 10 0 55 0
Tushar 3 0 17 0

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SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the third day of the first Test between Australia and India at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Friday:

AUSTRALIA: First innings 343 (Hayden 124, Jacques 66; Kumble 5-84, Zaheer 4-94)
INDIA: First innings 196 (Tendulkar 62, Ganguly 43; Clark 4-28, Lee 4-46)
AUSTRALIA: Second innings (overnight 32-0)
Jacques c and b Kumble 51
Hayden c Ganguly b Harbhajan 47

Ansars, Rajshahi win easy

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi and Bangladesh Ansar won the opening day's matches of the Pepsi 18th National Women's Volleyball Championship by straight sets yesterday.

Rajshahi blanked Gazipur 3-0 at the Volleyball Stadium while Ansars beat Pabna by the same margin.

Khurshid Irfan Chowdhury, general manager of Transcom Beverages Ltd, declared the six-team event open.

Yuvraj in trouble

AFP, Melbourne

Indian batsman Yuvraj Singh has been charged with showing dissent towards an umpiring decision during the first cricket Test against Australia, Cricket Australia said Friday.

Yuvraj lingered at the crease and showed his disappointment at umpire Billy Bowden's decision to give him out caught behind off the bowling of Stuart Clark for a duck just before tea on day two.

The batsman will face a hearing with match referee Mike Proctor after Friday's third day's play at the Melbourne Cricket Ground, a Cricket Australia spokesman said.

Yuvraj faces a fine if he is found guilty at the hearing.

Zaheer gets Wasim help

PTI, Melbourne

Zaheer Khan was roundly booed by Indian supporters at the MCG for the flurry of no-balls but apparently there was a reason to it.

Zaheer was working on the bowling tips by the Pakistani legend Wasim Akram who had asked him to completely redo his bowling style for the present tour of Australia.

Akram had advised Zaheer to understand that his method of swinging the delivery, as he did so brilliantly in England this summer, would not work in Australia.

"It wouldn't help if he was to just come and release the delivery in Australia as he did in England. There is a different method to obtaining swing in this part of the world," Akram said.

Zaheer was asked to run in quicker than he normally does and instead of just releasing the ball, he should look to hit the deck on Australian pitches.

Zaheer worked on the advice and turned in a brilliant performance at the MCG in both the innings, never mind there were a dozen no-balls in Australia's second innings.

Even though he grabbed just a wicket in Australia's second innings, he troubled all Australian batsmen as he had done during his four-wicket haul in the first innings.

Indian fans

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from," an Indian supporter, who did not wish to be named, was quoted as saying.

However, when CA officials and police investigated the incident at the old Bay 13 section, they did not find any offended fan.

CA spokesman Peter Young said no action can be taken against those involved in the chant because it was not reported to the police or security.

"Police have confirmed the chant took place and conducted extensive interviews with both Indian and Australian supporters and they did not find anyone who was offended," Young said.

"But we urge anyone who considers the comments to be racist to report them to police and security staff. Racism is in the eye of the beholder," he said.

Milon brings

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the game today.

Chittagong gathered only four bonus points but Dhaka were far ahead with seven.

BARISAL-SYLHET

Overnight on 149-8, the Sylhet tail added 34 runs with handy Rezaul Haque contributing 32 off 90 balls.

But the day was too short for much action, other than a quickfire 70 off 88 balls from Barisal batsman Hannan Sarkar.

Hannan smashed thirteen fours and a six in his knock as Barisal moved to 118-2 at the end of day's play.

Barisal are on four points while Sylhet have none.

BRIEF SCORES

RAJSHAH: First innings 188 all out and second innings 62-2 in 12 overs (Jahurul 39*, Shakil 14, Farhad 4, Saqlain 1*, Robul 2-8).

KHULNA: First innings 151-9 dec in 52.5 overs (Nazmus 11, Imrul 48, Mostafizur 1, Jamal Babu 29, Nahidul 29, Sahagir 19, Farid 4, Ziaur 1, Robul 0, Murad 3*, Aslam 0*, Farhad 4-13, Delwar 3-38, Nayeem 1-4, Saqlain 1-45).

CHITTAGONG: First innings 98 all out and second innings 26-3 in 14 overs (Mahbubul 4, Mazhar 1, Yasin 1, Masum 14*, Nazimuddin 2*, Mosharraf 1-2, Arafat 1-6).

DHAKA: First innings 316 all out in 114.4 overs (Arman 33, Mehrab 2, Anwar 38, Shamsur 35, Nadif 23, Mahmudullah 48, Mosharraf 4, Nazmul 95*, Sharif 0, Arafat 7, Mahbubul 2; Tareq 5-89, Yasin 3-63, Sajju 2-53).

SYLHET: First innings 183 all out in 73.1 overs (Imtiaz 25, Sadiqur 0, Golam Rahman 45, Alok 39, Sharifullah 12, Golam Mabud 5, Ejaz 8, Nabil 5, Rashedur 10, Rezaul 32, Rinku 0*, Monir 3-35, Arafat 3-48, Sumon 2-52, Hannan 1-15).

BARISAL: First innings 118-2 in 36 overs (Humayun 0, Hannan 70, Nasiruddin 35*, Raquibul 6*, Alok 1-14, Rashedur 1-46).

'Hard to repeat 2001'

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

Spin bowler Harbhajan Singh says he has shouldered unrealistic expectations since his career-high achievements during India's famed home series win over Australia in 2001.

The finger-spinner made the comments after putting in his best bowling performance in Australia with 3-101 off 26 overs during the third day of the first Test here Friday.

Harbhajan's performance on Friday made him only the fourth Indian bowler to pass 250 Test wickets.

He now has 251 wickets and lies fourth all-time in Indian cricket behind teammate Anil Kumble (591), Kapil Dev (434) and Bishan Bedi (266).

India have to defy Test history and score 493 more runs to beat Australia over the two remaining days of the Boxing Day Test.

Harbhajan's Test career high point was his 32 wickets at 17.03 in

the three-match home series against Australia in 2001, a remarkable feat he says he has struggled to repeat during his career.

"From the time I took those 32 wickets, whenever I didn't get wickets, people expected me to do the same thing, it's not easy to do things like that."

It happens once or twice in a lifetime," the 27-year-old said.

"It's good to have expectations but you can't really do anything about it, you just go and try to bowl well for my team."

"I've played enough cricket now and I know in the tough conditions how to handle things. I was very raw when I came in to play in 2001; I was young and all over the place."

"There wasn't that much responsibility for me then and things have now changed and there is a lot of responsibility not just in bowling and batting, but also off the field."

Harbhajan captured the big wickets of Matthew Hayden (47), Ricky Ponting (3) and Adam Gilchrist (35) to make Friday a special day.

Harbhajan claimed his 250th

wicket with the dismissal of world cricket's No.1 rated batsman Ponting for the sixth time.

"There's no doubt that Ricky Ponting is a very good player, but I have some sort of success against him, I don't know how and why," he said.

"It's always good to get good batsmen out and I'm very happy to get his wicket again and it was my 250th Test wicket and that means a lot in getting a great player out."

Harbhajan won't discount India's hopes of overturning cricket history and winning the first MCG Test.

"Obviously, it's a stiff target, but I won't say it's not achievable," he said. "With the kind of batting lineup we have, if we play to our potential anything can happen in cricket and this is a good wicket to bat on."

"I'm sure our batsmen are looking forward to going out and showing some character tomorrow."

"We're here to win the series, we're not looking to draw this match and we'll try our best to win this game. We're going to give it our best shot."

Zim tour in doubt

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

The immediate fate of Zimbabwe's tour to Pakistan hangs in delicate balance following the assassination of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, an incident that has sparked violence throughout the country.

Zimbabwe are due to arrive in Pakistan on January 12 and are scheduled to play two warm-up matches as well as a series of five ODIs, beginning January 26. But that schedule was thrown into doubt following yesterday's suicide attack which killed Bhutto shortly after an election campaign rally in Rawalpindi. Since then, the main urban centres of Pakistan - including Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad - have witnessed heavy rioting and violence.

Understandably, given the proximity of the incident, no decision has been taken yet. The nation is in official mourning for three days, a stance echoed by Nasim Ashraf, chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB). "This is a huge national tragedy and a time of mourning for the whole country. I feel it is not appropriate to talk about cricket just now. We will look at the situation in 2-3 days," Ashraf told Cricinfo.

Another senior board official said the Zimbabwe board had not been in touch yet. "Nobody from the Zimbabwe board has yet got in touch with us about the situation," the official told Cricinfo. When asked specifically whether the tour would go ahead, he said, "As of this immediate moment, it is on. But ultimately your guess is as good as mine."

Zimbabwe play their first ODI in Hyderabad, another city particu-

larly badly hit by a night of rioting; they are also scheduled to spend considerable time in Karachi, before playing in Multan, Faisalabad and Sheikhupura.

Clouding the matter further is the fate of the general elections, which were scheduled to be held on January 8, days before the tourists arrive. In the aftermath of the assassination, there are suggestions they may be postponed. In either case, however, reports are warning that further violence in coming days may be inevitable, extending a year of already tremendous political tumult in the country.

Australia, who are due to tour Pakistan in March, have adopted a wait-and-see policy. They are due to send a security delegation to the country in February, after which they will decide on the tour.



West Indies players gather to swap high-fives after the fall of South Africa wicketkeeper Mark Boucher's (not in picture) wicket on the third day of the first Test at St George's Park in Port Elizabeth yesterday.

Revival with ball

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Look at the third day's play in isolation and you have an interesting contest: Australia 351 for 7, a good score but not necessarily a match-winning one. It would still be Australia's day but India would end it upbeat, hoping to mop up the tail in the first hour tomorrow. They would have taken heart from their effort and looked to sustain the fight on the next day.

Test matches mean nothing without context. A tepid crowd watched a game being set up, fully aware of the possibilities ahead. There was no guesswork going on. Almost double the number turned up for the opening day, one where Australia managed 337 for 9. Only 14 more runs were scored today for two less wickets but the day but there was hardly any buzz; just 35,000-odd people waiting for the declaration.

It may sound preposterous to praise the Indian bowlers on such a day but they showed the stomach for a fight, a quality that had served them well on the opening day. Zaheer Khan ran in with purpose, RP Singh came with a bit more fire, Harbhajan Singh slowed it down a bit and Anil Kumble refused to waver. On the hottest day of their trip, after their batsmen had let

them down, they showed the sort of defiance the batsmen could have done with.

Zaheer's run to the wicket has rarely been quicker. It was clear that he was desperate to make a point, so eager that he overstepped once too often. The in-cutter to castle Andrew Symonds was a cracker - he had almost finished his celebration before he realised it was a no-ball - and the intensity of his appealing told you about a strike bowler wanting to create inroads. He generated some lethal reverse-swing and changed his angle often enough to keep the batsmen guessing. He had displayed a similar zeal in the second innings at Nottingham, a match that he turned with a couple of fiery spells.

What hurt India, for the second time in three days, was Australia's urge to get a move on. It's not only the strength they summoned to smash fours and sixes but also the stealth to grab quick runs. They have been stronger and faster than the Indians. Nowhere were their batsmen's approach more evident than when Symonds was bowled. Turning back to see his stumps shattered, he seemed to be heading towards the pavilion before realising it was a no-ball. One would have expected him to look up at the heavens, instead he was furiously calling his partner for a

run. Score first, thank later. India's sloppy fielding wasn't going to help - they were always going to struggle in such big arenas - but they would be heartened by Harbhajan Singh's improvement. He didn't extract much spin from the surface but slowed his pace and worked his angles. He is still far from being a threatening force but will take a few positives to Sydney, where the surface might suit him more.

He also reminded everyone about this being only his second Test in Australia. "It takes time to adjust to the conditions in Australia," Harbhajan said of his poor first-innings effort. "These pitches have some extra bounce, something we're not used to in India. I think we bowled well today. As a bowling unit, we've been bowling well."

Harbhajan's responses to a few critical questions summed up the bowlers' day. "We're here to win the series and are not going to try and draw the game." When provoked - "Don't you think the series might be gone before India acclimatise to the conditions?" - he turned combative. "We won't lose the series. By the time we return to India, let me show you we're here to win."

It is a stubbornness that will serve India's batsmen well. The Test may be gone but there's plenty to be gained over the next couple of days.