



Did U Know?

China has spent 40 billion dollars on infrastructure development as Beijing prepares to woo the world with the Olympic Games in August.



Fabio Capello

(England football manager)
"I believe in order to play for England you need to be a great player but you need to be playing well as well."



What to Watch

SAB tv

New Zealand v England
First ODI
Live from 7:00am
ESPN

English Premier Football League
Aston Villa v Newcastle United
Live from 8:40pm
Everton v Reading
Live from 8:55pm
STAR Sports

English Premier Football League
Derby County v Tottenham
Live from 8:55pm
Primera Liga
Murcia v Villarreal
Live from 1:00am (Sunday)
Sevilla v Barcelona
Live from 3:00am (Sunday)

Gambhir's top confidence

PTI, Brisbane

Having emerged as a major threat to Australia and Sri Lanka in the on-going cricket tri-series, India's young number three batsman Gautam Gambhir has thrown down the gauntlet to the hosts ahead of their Sunday clash.

Gambhir blasted a century off just 99 balls against Sri Lanka when the Indians were in doldrums at 83 for 4 to serve out a warning that Australia could no longer treat the opening duo of Sachin Tendulkar and dashing batsman Virender Sehwag as principal threats to their ambitions.

"The plan is simple, see the ball, hit the ball and play in the 'V'. The conditions here give a batsman full value for his strokes though (admittedly) you need a lot of courage and determination," said Gambhir, who is the lone centurion for India in the series so far.

"There is a lot of talk that when you come to Australia you play on the back foot all the times. But if you ask me, the plan should be to meet the ball on the front foot."

"It's difficult to get on to the front foot when you are facing genuine quick bowlers like Brett Lee or Mitchell Johnson but there is very little chance when you are sitting on the back foot," he added.

Unlike most of his teammates, SEE PAGE 18 COL 7

Nat'l badminton

SPORTS REPORTER

Title chasers Parash and Enayet both won their respective men's singles matches in the Islami Bank 28th National Badminton Championships yesterday.

Parash outplayed Gani 21-4, 21-10 while Enayet defeated Momen 21-12, 21-10 at the Woodenfloor Gymnasium.

A total of 17 men's singles matches were decided on the day. In women's singles, Elina ousted Rozina 21-8, 21-8.

Abahani make final MSC bow out of their own tournament

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani buried a wretched start to the Protiti Pharma Victory Day Club Cup when they knocked out archrivals Mohammedan Sporting Club yesterday to reach the final of the year's first tournament.

Mehdi Hassan Ujjal's sublime second-half goal helped the sky-blues edge tournament hosts Mohammedan 1-0 in the second semifinal before a 15,000-strong holiday crowd at the Bangabandhu National Stadium to set a clash against Arambagh in tomorrow's final.

The two sides had met in one final previously, in the Federation Cup in 2000, with Abahani winning the title.

Amalash Sen's B. League champions Abahani, who lost 1-0 to Senior Division side Badda Jaganani in the tournament opener but won the rest of the group games in style, started brightly despite missing key striker Emily and attacking midfielder Abul, both suspended following two bookings each.

On the other hand, the black and whites who came to the game on the back of a controversial group match against Arambagh,

hardly impressed with five guest players in the starting lineup.

Dubbed 'unsporting' by the tournament committee, Mohammedan's 3-1 victory against Arambagh was scratched and both the teams were punished.

And Shafiqul Islam Manik's boys, probably the most inexperienced team fielded ever by the popular club, were lucky to survive a barrage of rival attacks in the first 45 minutes.

Abahani's guest striker Robin got plenty of chances to separate the two sides but his efforts in the 12 and 18 minutes went wide. Siraji fired a rebound just over Shakil's bar as Abahani began to get behind the five-man Mohammedan backline with almost every move.

Ujjal then sent a crossfield pass to Zahed Parvez at the right flank and the winger's low shot to the far post from ten yards, which certainly looked set to beat goalkeeper Shakil, was intercepted by centre-back and Mohammedan captain Biplab on the half hour.

With Abahani enjoying superior ball possession, Mohammedan midfielders were chasing shadows and whenever they won back the ball, miss passes marred their chances to go ahead.

Fullback Kamal, however, put

Biplab to the test in the 37th minute but the Abahani custodian gripped a powerful centre in his second attempt, denying a lurking Charles Figo a shot at goal.

Figo threatened to score against run of play a couple of minutes later but his solo down the left was wasted as his low cross ran across the face of the goal harmlessly.

Abahani had two more chances in the rest of the entertaining first half but Shakil palmed away the ball off Tipu's feet on one while Ujjal and Zahed both failed to make most of the rebound.

Robin once again failed to utilise a through by skipper Joy when the youngster fired the ball wide of the far post on the brink of halftime.

Mohammedan made one change at the break but even before they settled, Ujjal struck a superb goal in the 50th minute.

The attacking midfielder himself initiated the move and was in the right position when Zahed drilled a square pass through a forest of legs from the right. Under pressure from two defenders, Ujjal chipped the ball over Shakil and into the net off the far post.

The Mohammedan defence was one man short at that moment as Jewel Rana was nursing a hamstring injury outside the pitch and

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Abahani's Ujjal (2nd from right) hurdles Mohammedan 'keeper Shakil (R) after chipping the ball for the match-winner as defender Arif (L) watches helplessly during their semifinal of the Victory Day Club Cup tournament at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Bracken cleans up SL

AFP, Sydney



competition here Friday.

The home side made 253 for six after winning the toss and electing to bat and the Sri Lankans were never in the hunt after losing two early wickets, making a paltry 125.

It was the first time the sides had met in a one-day international since Australia's win in last year's World Cup final and although Kumar Sangakkara offered some brief hope in the run chase with a sparkling 42

from 41 balls, once he fell the tourists collapsed dramatically.

Sangakkara was in peak form, taking 16 runs off one Brett Lee over, but was trapped lbw by a delivery that jugged back off the pitch and into his pads from impressive swing bowler Nathan Bracken.

The Sri Lankans were then 74 for four and when Chamara Silva (7) and Chamara Kapugedera (0) went quickly, they had lost three wickets for 10 runs in just 14 balls and never recovered.

Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene admitted his top order batsmen simply didn't do enough.

"We lost too many wickets up front and we are very disappointed with the performance," he said.

"We haven't been very consistent with our one-day form and

we've been talking about it quite a bit.

"We thought we were getting back into it, but today (Friday) was a very disappointing day."

"Against these guys you have to play A-grade cricket."

Australian captain Ricky Ponting said he always felt confident after his team's innings.

"I thought 250 batting first on that wicket was a pretty good total and our batsmen adapted really well," he said.

"Michael Clarke played a really sensible knock, not taking too many risks and making sure he was there at the end."

"I knew our bowlers would be able to take the pace off the ball and use the seam on the ball and Nathan Bracken did a great job of doing that."

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PHOTO: AFP

Australian paceman Nathan Bracken (2nd from R) is the toast of his teammates after completing a five-wicket haul against Sri Lanka at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday.

Force with England First ODI today

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

England go into their one-day cricket series against New Zealand starting on Saturday on a high here after victories in two Twenty20 matches left New Zealand's confidence in tatters.

There has been a huge swing in form for both sides since New Zealand thrashed England by six wickets with nine overs to spare in their World Cup pool match 11 months ago.

It was performances such as that which underscored New Zealand's world third ranking, but both sides have since gone through a period of rebuilding and there is little doubt the new look English

unit appears much stronger.

In the Twenty20 matches -- in which England won the first by 32 runs and the second by 50 -- the tourists produced superior batting and tighter bowling while exposing New Zealand's all-round inadequacies.

To add to New Zealand's woes their one bright hope, teenager Tim Southee, has been pulled out of the one-day squad with the selectors wanting him to go to Malaysia instead for the under-19 World Cup tournament.

Injured captain Daniel Vettori and all-rounder Jacob Oram are likely to return, though neither are fully fit.

Vettori missed the Twenty20 thrashings because of an ankle injury and the joint is still swollen, but he is anxious to be back in the

side.

"They (England) played well and out-performed us in all three facets of the game and we've got to find a way to match them and the 50-over game is something we've done quite well at over the years," Vettori said.

"I want to be out there leading the team, I'll push myself towards playing. I don't like missing these games, I want to be out there trying to contribute."

Oram, who pulled a hamstring in the first Twenty20 game, may return only as a batsman as his power hitting is a vital weapon in the New Zealand armoury.

A final decision on whether the pair will be made on Saturday morning just hours before the first one-day international is to start.

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Tigers begin training today

SPORTS REPORTER

The 17-member Bangladesh cricket team will begin practice today at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium ahead of their home series against South Africa.

All members of the team, except the reserves, have taken a few days' break following a week-long training camp where they played six practice matches at the same ground.

Only opener Zunaed Siddiqui showed some consistency in the matches, hitting two half-centuries while other batsmen struggled to find form.

South Africa team will arrive here on February 14 to play three ODIs and two Tests.

The hosts will face the Proteas first in the two-Test series, beginning from February 22 at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium while the second Test will be held at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium on Feb 29.

The first one-day international between the two sides will also be held at the Chittagong venue on March 9, the second and the third matches on March 12 and 14 in Dhaka.

CCDM to reward winners of 2000 to 2007

SPORTS REPORTER

The trophy awarding ceremony of the Dhaka Metropolitan Cricket Leagues -- Premier division, first division, second division, third division and third division qualifying -- from 2000 to 2007 seasons will be held at Hotel Sheraton on Saturday.

As no trophies were awarded to the winners from the seven seasons, Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) decided to hand over the trophies to the clubs that finished first and second in Dhaka Metropolitan Cricket Leagues.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had already increased grants and prize money substantially for the clubs this season.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Maj Gen Sina Ibn Jamali will be the chief guest at the function.

CCDM has invited officials and representatives from the trophy-winning clubs and the sponsors of the leagues to be present on the occasion.

Rohit accepts challenge

PTI, Melbourne

India's tri-series squad is packed with rookies but promising middle order batsman Rohit Sharma refuses that the absence of seniors is putting extra pressure on the youngsters.

Sharma admitted that a few youngsters in the side, including him, were in the squad at the expense of some well-known seniors such as Rahul Dravid and Sourav Ganguly, but they were taking it as a challenge to make themselves counted.

"I wouldn't say it's pressure. It's more of a challenge for us youngsters to do well," Sharma said.

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Shuvo wants World Cup Under-19s leave for KL today

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Captain Suhawardi Shuvo has pledged that all efforts will be towards winning the ICC Under-19 World Cup in a bid to bring home glory for the country where Bangladesh clinched their biggest triumph to date.

"We'll give extra efforts as our target will be to bring the World Cup," said Shuvo yesterday during a press conference at a local hotel. The 15-member team leaves Dhaka for Kuala Lumpur tonight to play the biennial competition in Malaysia that begins on February 17.

When asked to elaborate on his plans of clinching the trophy, Shuvo said he would take it one win

at a time.

"We don't know much about our (Group D) opponents Ireland and Bermuda, and we have the confidence to beat teams like England although they are definitely a good team," said the left-arm spinner and middle-order batsman from Rajshahi.

He however added that England became Bangladesh's bane in the

SQUAD

Suhawardi Shuvo (captain), Dollar Mahmud, Rubel Hossain, Syed Gulam Kibria, Rony Talukder, Mahmudul Hasan Limon (vice-captain), Nasir Hossain Nasir, KM Shakil, Mohammad Nadimuddin Mintu, Mithun Ali, Saikat Ali, Amit Majumder, Ashiqul Islam, Shuvashish Roy, Ashraf Hossain.

2006 event, even though the under-19 squad then convincingly beat the Englishmen at home before that tournament in Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh are pencilled in group D, where they play the first two matches against Bermuda and Ireland on February 18 and 20 at Bayuams Oval. Then they face England at the Royal Selangor Club two days later.

He said that their spinners are going to play a vital role in winning matches, as they have done in recent times.

Recently, Bangladesh beat West Indies 2-1 and whitewashed Nepal 3-0. Earlier, they were runners-up in the triangular series in South Africa and had a good outing in Pakistan.

His coach Nazmul Abedin SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

ELEPHANTS TRAMPLED, HOSTS DUMPED Pharaohs & Lions prevail

AFP, Accra



GHANA 2008

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final decided on penalties but this meeting two years on was a far more clear-cut affair.

Ahmed Fathy started the rout with Amr Zaky extending the champions' lead in the 62nd minute before Kader Keita reduced the tally for the Ivorians a minute later.

Zaky restored Egypt's two-goal cushion in the 67th minute with Mohamed Aboutrika completing the unscripted demolition in stoppage time.

Egypt's keeper Essam El Hadry, who produced a series of fine saves, said: "I'm the happiest man in the world."

"We are delighted with the performance and the result," added Egypt assistant coach Shawki Gharib.

"This was a repeat of our 2006 final and on Sunday we will have

another repeat against Cameroon, who we beat in our group."

The Ivorians coach Gerard Gili insisted the first-half loss of first-choice goalkeeper Boubacar Barry through injury did not adversely affect the fortunes of his team.

"The exit of my goalkeeper was not the reason we lost, his absence only meant I lost a chance to make another substitution. We simply had an off day. We did not expect to lose by such a wide margin but the Egyptians played well and pulled it off."

The last back-to-back winners of the trophy were Cameroon who earlier gate-crashed Ghana's party when substitute Alan Nkong, playing in only his second international, produced the only goal of a tense sometimes scrappy semifinal in Accra.

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PHOTO: AFP

Cameroon striker Alain Nkong (L) scores the winning goal past Ghana goalkeeper Richard Kingson during their semifinal of the African Cup of Nations in Accra stadium on Thursday.