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BCB announces Ireland tour schedule

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) released the itinerary of the home series against Ireland and Indo-Bangladesh Bangla Games yesterday. Ireland, scheduled to arrive here on March 15, will play three-match ODI series, first of which is on March 18.

The second match of the series will be on March 20 and the final one-dayer two days later, all at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Before that, the visiting Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) team will play three Twenty20 matches against the Combined Divisional Team of Bangladesh in the Indo-Bangladesh Bangla Games.

The first match between the two sides will be held on February 23 at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra, the second at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium on February 24 and the last match on February 26 at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.



NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE: Arambagh coach Kazi Jolly (L) imparts some tips to his charges at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. The lightweight Motijheel outfit will be up against giants Abahani in the final of the Protti Pharma Victory Day Football Tournament at the Big Bowl today.

Giants versus pretenders Abahani-Arambagh final today

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Favourites Abahani will have momentum behind them as they look to secure the Protti Pharma Victory Day Club Cup tournament with a win over underdogs Arambagh in the final today.

The match between the Dhanmondi-based giants and their Motijheel counterparts will take place at the Bangabandhu National Stadium with kick-off scheduled for 4:15 pm.

Having fallen to a surprise defeat in their opening game of the tournament to Badda Jagarani, Abahani have looked stronger with every passing game and reached the final by overturning arch-rivals and tournament hosts Mohammedan with a virtuoso performance.

Attacking midfielder Ujjal starred in that game, but the utility player could find himself in the bench with two stars set to return

for the final. "Both Emily and Abul are set to come back into the team (both sat out the semifinal to prevent suspension)," confirmed club captain Arif Khan Joy - a sign that could only bode well for Abahani.

"Our greatest strength is the depth we have in the squad. We can play well even without some of our first choice players, as we showed against Mohammedan."

"And if we can maintain the good rhythm that we have struck, then I am sure of a positive outcome," said the shaven-headed midfielder.

As regards surprise package Arambagh in the final, Joy assured that his team was not taking the underdogs lightly.

"A final is a final. We go into it hoping to play our best. Since they have come this far, they are also a good side."

Coach Satyajit Das Rupu also echoed his captain's comments. "Since the loss to Badda, the only way we have gone is up. We

started on a low but we want to make up for it by ending on a high," said Rupu.

For their part, Arambagh are revelling in the lack of pressure, maintaining that they are well groomed to spring an upset.

They will have their work cut out though as guest midfielder Rezaul Karim Liton, who scored in the semifinal victory, will be unavailable.

Despite that fact, coach Kazi Jolly seemed confident that they would provide an able opponent for the local giants.

He said, "We have done well throughout the whole tournament and we want to go into the final hoping to play to the best of our abilities. If we can do that than I shall not rule out an upset."

Captain Akram Hossain, similarly unfazed, said, "True that Abahani are a big and famous team and they have played together for a long time but our greatest strength is in our teamwork. We may not

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'Give us runs to bowl at'

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

For a team like Bangladesh, there is little to bank on home advantage and it's mainly because of their vulnerable batting condition.

One cannot give a guaranty of the Tiger's improved batting even in familiar conditions from the wretched show in New Zealand when they will get involved in a two-match Test and three-match one-day series against South Africa later this month.

The South African batsmen are believed to be weak against left-arm spinners and ace Mohammad Rafique and his young teammates believe that they have a good chance to exploit the 'slow and turning' nature of the home wickets.

But they have one pre-condition for a good outcome from the series against the Proteas: A good enough total to defend.

"It is quite possible to bowl South Africa out twice in this kind of conditions as we (spinners) will get assistance from the pitch. But first of all, we have to put up some runs on the

board. If our batsmen can managed some runs then it would be really a fantastic series for us," said Rafique while talking to the reporters yesterday during the first day's practice at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

The 37-year-old left-arm spinner reconfirmed his retirement from international cricket after the series against South Africa and expressed optimism of saying goodbye with 100 wickets in both version of the game, as the first Bangladeshi.

"I am hopeful of completing it (the record) in the first Test. We have to do something special in the first Test because the South Africans hardly have any knowledge about the conditions at Mirpur. If we can give our hundred per cent then anything can happen in Mirpur," said Rafique, who is now six wickets shy from the hundred wicket-haul in Tests.

Rafique also explained the reason behind his decision to quit the international cricket after the series.

"It may be possible for me to continue international cricket for another year but it will stop players like Rubel (Mosharraf Hossain) to explore into international cricket. I also have an offer from dada (Sourav

Ganguly) to play IPL but it didn't play any role to take the decision because there is nothing confirmed," he added.

Young left-arm spinner Enamul Haque also sounded positive like his senior fellow in the upcoming series considering the fact that the South African batsmen are uncomfortable against the left-armers.

"I think we have a good chance to do something better in the series because it is possible to bowl South Africa out twice here. But we must ensure one thing that we put up at least 300 runs on the board," said Enamul.

"You saw how they (South African batsman) struggled against our spinners in the World Cup match in Guyana and it's because of the slow and turning wicket here. The South Africans will face almost the same conditions here," he added.

Abdur Razzak however was cautious about the advantage of the condition rather he emphasized on team effort to show something special in the series after disastrous tours to Sri Lanka and New Zealand.

"Normally our spinners do well and definitely the home conditions will favour us. But it's not always right to think that the spinners will get preference from slow and turning wicket. Sometimes, the opposite thing can also happen," he observed.

"Every match will be a total team game and all of us will have to work hard. If we can put up a good score then it would be easier for our bowlers to dominate the opponents," said Razzak.

South Africa will arrive in Dhaka on February 14 on a month-long trip and launch the campaign with a three-day warm-up match starting from February 17 at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.



SHAPING UP FOR A LAST HURRAH! Ace left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique bowls in the nets while captain Mohammad Ashraful (C) and injured opener Tamim Iqbal look on during Bangladesh cricket team's training at the indoors of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Rafique had earlier announced that the home series against South Africa later this month would be his final appearance for the national team.

ITF finals today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Top-ranked I-Ta Chen of Chinese Taipei will face Canadian Kelsey Stevenson in the boys' singles final, while second ranking Malaysian Jawairiah Noordin will take on Lisa Whybourn of Great Britain in the girls' final in the Grameenphone International Junior Tennis Championship at Zafar Imam Tennis Complex in Rajshahi yesterday.

In the semifinals, I-Ta Chen thrashed New Zealand's Riki McLachlan 6-1, 6-2 while Stevenson defeated Chinese Yi-Chen Li 6-2, 6-2 in boys' singles.

In the girls' singles, Jawairiah Noordin beat Chinese Zi Yang 6-1, 6-4 and ninth seed England's Lisa Whybourn beat fifth-seeded Russian Anna Morgina 6-3, 6-2.

Did U Know?

In Ancient Greek culture, the god, Apollo, was regarded as the inventor and guardian of the sport of boxing.



Gautam Gambhir

(India batsman)
"He's a legend -- he's the greatest batsman India has ever produced." On Sachin Tendulkar.



STAR Sports

Australia v India
CB Series, 4th ODI
Live from 9:15am

Primera Liga
Real Madrid v Valladolid
Live from 12:00am (Monday)
Valencia v Betis
Live from 2:00am (Monday)

ESPN
English Premier Football League
Man United v Man City
Live from 7:25pm
Chelsea v Liverpool
Live from 9:55pm



V-Day Club Cup Football Final
Abahani v Arambagh (4-15pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

MCG will suit hosts

CRICINFO, undated

Ricky Ponting says Australia will carry their momentum into Sunday's game against India in Melbourne after his side demolished Sri Lanka by 128 runs at the SCG. India are coming off two wash-outs in Brisbane, whereas Australia enjoyed using a two-paced pitch on Friday.

With further low bounce
SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

'Indians scare Aussies'

AFP, Melbourne



Indians here Saturday.

As he did during the fourth Test in Adelaide, which ended in a draw as Australia won the series 2-1, Sehwag said the home side was frightened of losing to the Indians.

The two sides renew their at times hostile rivalry at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday in a tri-series one-day international.

Their previous tri-series match was washed out just when it was poised for an exciting conclusion,

with Australia struggling at 51 for three chasing India's 194 in Brisbane last Sunday.

Sehwag said here Saturday that the Australians knew India were the greatest threat to their undisputed status as the best side in the world, again pointing to his team's shock win in the third Test as proof the gap was narrowing.

He said the Indians were confident they would have won out in Brisbane if rain had not intervened and were out to make a statement in Sunday's game.

"They know India is the only team that can beat them, so we are preparing hard for that and hopefully we'll do well," he said.

"We've prepared ourselves for Sunday's big game and if we beat Australia then maybe we're through to the finals."

"Nobody else beats them here,

so that's why maybe they are scared and a little worried about the Indian team.

"This team has the potential to beat Australia in Australia, so it's a big game for us, Australia on Sunday."

India have to buck the recent trend to win Sunday's game. They have won just four of their last 25 one-day internationals against Australia, with 17 losses and four no-results.

The ledger is even more lopsided in Australia, with India having won just two matches against the home side since 1986.

The Australians have won 15 of their last 17 home matches against India, with just one Indian win.

Despite that poor record, Sehwag said the young Indian squad was full of potential and capable of an upset.



Rina Chakma of Ansar and VDP aims at the target during the 70m Olympic round event of the third National Archery Championships at the Paltan Maidan adjacent to the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Dravid, Ganguly missed: Lee

PTI, Melbourne

Australian speedster Brett Lee reckons that the young Indian cricket team was struggling to find its feet in the absence of experienced batsmen like Rahul Dravid and Sourav Ganguly.

"It's always tougher for younger guys to come through immediately. (Rahul) Dravid and (Sourav) Ganguly played a lot of cricket this summer and were there since the start. The new guys would take some time to find their feet," Lee said.

"Though they are quality players, they have their work cut out," he said referring to India's none-too-impressive show in the previous two one-day matches.

The Australian speedster singled out his side's bowling as a key factor in Sunday's match against India.

"We are bowling collectively good. I took a fiver in Brisbane, Nathan (Bracken) did it in Sydney. Johnson is proving to be a good back up. (James) Hopes, (Brad) Hogg, (Andrew) Symonds and (Michael) Clarke, we think we have good options in this area," Lee said.

Lee also said that he stood as good a chance of picking wickets in one-dayers as he did in Tests.

"In ODIs, the batsmen look to score and it generally means more chances of picking up wickets. In Tests, you got to be more patient."

"Variations is the key word. You bowl slower, bouncer, seam, try new things basically all the time," he added.

Rakib sinks another Russian GM

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Abdullah Al Rakib beat Russian International Master Alexey Ivanov in a seventh round game in the International Chess Festival in Moscow on Friday.

Rakib improved his tally to 4.5 points while International Master Enamul Hossain Rajib drew with his compatriot FIDE Master Sheikh Nasir to secure 3.5 points.

In the eighth round games Rakib plays GM Alexander Areshchenko of Ukraine, Rajib plays FM Boris Onopriychuk of Russia and Nasir take on IM Sergey Sergienko of Russia.

Ansar take archery crown

SPORTS REPORTER

Ansar & VDP clinched the National Archery Championship at the Paltan Maidan yesterday.

In the 70m Olympic round, Sajjad Hossain and Rina Chakma won the men's and women's respective sections while as a team, Ansar clinched the title.

Secretary of the President's Secretariat Sirajul Islam distributed prizes among the winners. Chairman of Bangladesh Archery Federation Maj Gen Mohammad Sadiq Hossain Rumi was also present on the occasion.

NZ bounce back

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

In a stunning reversal of form, New Zealand thrashed England in their opening one-day cricket international by six wickets and with 20 overs to spare at Westpac Stadium here Saturday.

The win came just days after England outplayed New Zealand in all departments in two Twenty20 matches.

Given an extra 30 overs, New Zealand lost the toss but from then on won everything in a morale-boosting performance.

England, opting to bat first, were all out for 130 in the 50th over and New Zealand knocked off the target with the loss of four wickets in 30 overs.

Bolstered by the return of captain Daniel Vettori and Jacob Oram, New Zealand showed no sign of the

fragility evident when they spent the two shorter matches firmly on the back foot.

"We understood that we had to respond Saturday and put in a good performance and whether we won or not was beside the point. But we came out and won, and won well, and it's a very happy dressing room," Vettori said.

England captain Paul Collingwood pinpointed his side's problem as simply not enough runs on the board.

"Where we fell down tonight, let's be honest, was with the bat. We were struggling to find the ones and twos even," he said.

"If we got up towards 200 runs it would have been a defensible total. New Zealand bowled well and fielded exceptionally well."

New Zealand started on Saturday by keeping England opens Alastair Cook and Phil Mustard pinned down -- the first boundary from Mustard came only

in the seventh over -- and the run rate seldom rose above three.

After Chris Martin made the initial breakthrough bowling Cook for 11 in the 10th over, the wickets fell at regular intervals.

Martin bowled Ian Bell for five, Oram bowled dangerous Kevin Pietersen for six and Scott Styris bowled Mustard for 31 to have England at four for 67 by the 22nd over.

England didn't help their cause with three run-outs before off-spinner Jeevan Patel cleaned up the tail to finish with two for 14 while Martin and Styris both took two for 22.

While the England batsmen played as if the slow pitch held demons, Jesse Ryder and Brendon McCullum played three overs with caution and then launched into the run chase.

A six from Ryder and a four from McCullum lifted New Zealand to 18

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6

Shahrukh wants Gilly

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

Adam Gilchrist has quickly become the centre of a private bidding war in the Indian Premier League with even Sourav Ganguly chasing his signature.

Bollywood megastar Shahrukh Khan, who bought the Kolkata franchise (one of eight for sale) for more than \$A85 million last month, told former Indian captain Ganguly, who will skipper the Kolkata team, to try to personally sign up Gilchrist and allow him to share in the riches on offer in the lucrative Twenty20 competition, starting on April 18.

The Australian vice-captain has yet to be told by Cricket Australia that he is allowed to play in the IPL because there technically is a two-

year moratorium from when a player retires.

However, Indian Premier League organisers claim Gilchrist has received a clearance to play in the inaugural Twenty20 tournament in April.

"Gilchrist will play. He has already got a no objection certificate from the Australian board," IPL chairman Lalit Modi said.

Modi said the Indian board had given the IPL governing body the powers to do away with the rules on the two-year "cooling off" period for recently-retired players.

The league, expected to feature many of the game's top players, is an effort to counter an unofficial Indian Twenty20 league which began late last year.

Gilchrist's manager Steve Atkinson is in India this weekend discussing several issues to do with the IPL.

He may earn more in 44 days' work in the IPL than he would in a full year of international action.

It's believed the franchises have already drawn up their wish lists and Gilchrist heads most fields.

The soon-to-retire Gilchrist is one of up to 11 Australian players to have signed an expression of interest in the IPL, but is likely to be the only incumbent available because of Australia's commitments in Pakistan and the West Indies when the tournament is on.

CA and the BCCI remain at loggerheads over the right to use Australian players to promote Indian sponsors.

CA has two sponsors with global protection Travelax and Foster's Group which forbids Australian players spruiking rival brands.

However the BCCI continues to argue that global protection does not extend to domestic competi-