

Isinbayeva sets new pole vault world mark

AFP, Donetsk

Olympic champion Yelena Isinbayeva of Russia set a new world indoor record in the women's pole vault here on Saturday as she cleared the mark of fourmetres 95 centimetres.

Her vault beat the previous mark of 4.93m which she set last year at the same venue.

This was the third consecutive year in which 25-year-old Isinbayeva, who has leaped 5.02 outdoors, broke the indoor mark in Donetsk.

"I'm very happy to start an Olympic season with a world record in my first competition," said Isinbayeva, who won in Donetsk for the fifth consecutive year.

In her first competition since October 3, Isinbayeva began her competition with first attempt clearances at 4.67m and 4.77m, the latter enough to seal the victory.

She need three tries at 4.87m, and after a pair of misses at 4.94m, she gamblled and had the bar raised to 4.95m.

Russian Yuliya Golubchikova finished second with a 4.72 clearance, with Monica Pyrek of Poland third (4.67).

Wenger blames the pitch

INTERNET, undated

Arsenal boss Arsene Wenger labelled the Old Trafford pitch "a disgrace" in the wake of his side's FA Cup exit on Saturday.

Wenger was furious at the state of the playing surface which he felt hindered his side during the 4-0 fifth-round defeat.

"The groundsman had as bad a day as us," he said.

"You will see us in a different shape when we come back and a different pitch.

"The pitch is a disgrace. You have players worth 20-25 million pounds and you cannot play a pass without it bouncing."

Wenger did concede the Gunners had been second best but he believes they can rediscover their form against AC Milan in the Champions League on Wednesday.

He said: "It is difficult to find any positives from the performance, apart from the fact we do not have any more injuries.

"Even before the sending off we never looked like we could come back.

"It was difficult. We did not seem to have the physical resources that were needed.

"We were not up to our level. We need to pick ourselves up quickly because we have a massive game on Wednesday and need to be at our best against Milan."

SL Pakistan's

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the West Indies in April-May before a home series against India in July.

Australia are due to tour Pakistan for three Tests, five one-day internationals and a Twenty20 match in March-April.

But Australian cricket officials have told their Pakistani counterparts that they have received security advice against touring Pakistan because of political unrest and violence.

Australia have not toured Pakistan since 1998. They forced Pakistan to play at neutral venues in Sri Lanka and Sharjah in 2002, a year after the 9/11 attacks on the United States sparked security fears in South Asia.

Pakistan have ruled out playing the latest series at neutral venues or relocating it to Australia.

Maldini gets

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He twice played in major finals but lost out on penalties to Brazil in the 1994 World Cup final and suffered an extra-time defeat at the hands of France in the 2000 European Championships final.

But there have been many more good days than bad in the more than 8,400 days since he made his first-team debut for Milan on January 20, 1985 at Udinese.

He certainly won't be adding another Serie A title to his collection this season, not with Milan 21 points behind leaders and bitter city rivals Inter, but he can still dream about lifting an unprecedented sixth Champions League crown in May.

That would be the perfect way to cap an amazing career.

Cup magic

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out Premier League Birmingham in the third round, shocked the crowd just moments before half-time when Michael Collins struck from 12 yards.

Lampard then settled Chelsea's nerves in the 60th minute before Salomon Kalou put the result beyond doubt.

Ricke Lambert's deflected free-kick six minutes from time was good enough for Bristol Rovers to see off Southampton.



Poojashree's double crown

SPORTS REPORTER

Poojashree Venkatesh of India lifted double crown in the Dhaka Bank 22nd Bangladesh International Junior Tennis Championships yesterday when she won both the girls' singles and doubles titles.

Poojashree recorded a hard-fought 6-0, 5-7, 6-3 win in the singles final against China's Zhao Di before winning the doubles final pairing with Malaysian Norordin against British duo Whybourn and Sian 6-0, 7-5 at the National Tennis Complex in Rama.

Bangladesh will feature in the boys' doubles final today as local boy Ranjan Ram and Taipei's Lin eliminated Indonesian pair Sonny and Hutaarak 6-4, 6-4 in the semi-finals yesterday.

They will face Indian pair Manju and Ahuja, who got walk-over against semifinalists McCollum of Britain and Georgia's Sergi, in the afternoon.

The boys' singles final between Ronak Manuja of India and Chen I-Ta of Taipei will be played this morning.

Captain defends

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he should not have been included in the side.

Furious with the pacer's sluggish fielding, the former India captain said he had no problems with Munaf as a bowler but felt the pacer could neither really bat, nor did he give his best in the field.

In such a situation, leg-spinner Piyush Chawla or all-rounder Praveen Kumar, who can bat a bit, would have been a better choice as the fourth bowler, Gavaskar said.

"If he is among the three regular bowlers, it's okay but Munaf does not deserve a place as the fourth bowler. Because he cannot bat, he is useless as a fielder and in one-day cricket you need to do well in at least two aspects," Gavaskar said.

LOCAL SNIPS

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School Cricket Championship here yesterday.

Having scored 164 all out, Shahabullah School restricted their opposition to 80 runs. Shaon top-scored with 40 for the winners.

POLICE TENNIS

Narayanganj correspondent: Shahjalal Raj clinched the men's singles title in the Police Super Cup tennis tournament defeating Sohrab Hossain in yesterday's final at the local Police Lines tennis court. The doubles title went to Sajjad Ali and Sohrab Hossain who defeated Selim-Towfiq pair.

Rector of Police Staff College AKM Mahfuzul Haque distributed trophies among the winners.

Murali averts

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available almost immediately.

"It took me about 10 minutes to get to St Vincent's by car and Muralidaran was getting there as I arrived," he said.

At the hospital, Folty repositioned the tooth and splinted it but did not give any drugs to the player for that would have forced the player sit out of the remainder of the match.

Muralidaran eventually returned to ground and hit a six as well before getting out.

"He struck me as a very polite and humble person," Folty said. "We chatted light-heartedly, but obviously he was there for a reason."

Mohammedan

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when they snatched a three-wicket win over BKSP (146-9) with three balls remaining at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

In Group-B, Surjo Torun and Victoria Sporting Club shared lead with maximum six points by maintaining their winning spree.

Shamsur Rahman struck an unbeaten 50 off 43 balls in Torun's seven-wicket victory as they reached 108-3 in reply to Sonargaon Cricketers' paltry 107 all out at the BKSP.

Victoria downed Partex by six wickets in a high scoring afternoon match at the DCS, thank to Ehsanul Haq's season's best.

Victoria skipper Ehsanul, who came to the wicket with his side reeling at 10-2 while chasing Partex's 152-7, smashed ten fours and one six in his 82 off 48 balls to lead his side to 154-4 with eight deliveries to spare.

"They were given plenty of options, even to the extent of taking the players off."

"It is the behaviour of the referee is precisely the question I would like to put but until we receive the referee's report I cannot make a comment or a judgement."

"It is not an easy decision to take (taking the players off or abandoning the match)."

"I will wait for the referee's report and that of the league delegate who was there and the League Committee will study both of them on Thursday."

I'm in a bit of a rut: Ricky Ponting

JENNY THOMPSON

Captain Ricky Ponting has brushed aside suggestions that off-field distractions centring on Australian participation in the Indian Premier League (IPL) has led to his current slump in form.

Ponting has been vocally supporting the move and wants Cricket Australia to allow its contracted players to appear in the tournament, but he does not believe that such matters, which also include the in-doubt tour of Pakistan, are impacting his performance.

Ponting made 10 in Adelaide against India on Sunday and averages 10.60 in five matches of this year's CB Series. "I'm in a little bit of a bad run at the moment but it's not because I've got other things on my mind," Ponting said. "You have your ups and downs and I'm in a bit of a rut, but I'm working hard so hopefully the runs will start to come in the next couple of games."

He was however unimpressed by his team's batting and was sure the World Cup champions could improve greatly on their recent form.

"We are not batting very well, but

we are doing enough to win some games," he said.

"Once again tonight our bowlers held us up and we were pretty sharp in the field and came away with a bonus point win."

"We haven't played our best cricket yet, but we are still on top of the table and are winning games of cricket, which is a good sign."

He admitted it was hard to tell the batsmen to knuckle down given his own form but did so in a meeting before the game. Yet while Michael Clarke made the sole fifty, Ponting could only attribute the collective dip to coincidence. "It's really unusual for our team to have two or three of those guys [batsmen] in a slump but we're not that concerned about it because we are winning games. If those sorts of things on our minds it would be affecting the whole team. Right at the moment the bowlers have just been a bit too good for the batsmen."

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"We are not batting very well, but

it's cricket time, it's cricket time."

One player with no such concerns having announced his international retirement is Adam Gilchrist. On Sunday night he may have scored 15 [albeit on the back of a century at the WACA on Friday] but having quit, his wicketkeeping was freer than ever and he took four catches and a stumping.

"If he keeps doing what he's done in the last couple of weeks I'm happy for him to keep going on a little bit longer," Ponting said with a smile, and later even compared Gilchrist to Glenn McGrath in the 2007 World Cup, where the bowler ended up as player of the tournament in his farewell ODI series.

"He [McGrath] felt that all the worry was gone. He just wanted to enjoy every game for what it was and Gilly is feeling a little bit the same now, just really enjoying his cricket and that's showing through."

Australia may not be playing their best cricket but Ponting finds it satisfying that they are still winning games. What also pleases them is their four days off to rest and recover - Brett Lee included after he missed this game to recharge - before their next match against Sri Lanka on Friday.

"The [McGrath] result is an assistant editor at Cricinfo)

Favourites' fine start

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relying in Group B in Kuala Lumpur.

Tanmoy Srivastava led India's charge with an unbeaten 83 after openers Taruwar Kohli (40) and Shreavats Goswami (58) had laid a solid platform with a first-wicket stand of 100 by the 22nd over.

Papua New Guinea, who do not have a turf wicket at home, fought hard to reach 81-5 before India grabbed the next five wickets for four runs.

Left-arm spinner Iqbal Abdulla claimed 3-2 in three overs while Pardeep Sangwan, Ajitesh Arsal and skipper Virat Kohli took two wickets each.

Australian captain Michael Hill smashed seven boundaries and 12 sixes in a blistering 124 off 71 balls that lifted his team to 312 all out against Namibia in Group C in Penang.

The Aussies, who were comfortably placed at 276-4 in the 40th over, lost the last six wickets for 36 runs with Ya France and Ashley von Rooy claiming three wickets each.

The total, however, proved too much for the inexperienced Namibians, who were bowled out for 163 with Steven Smith finishing with four wickets.

England, meanwhile, dismissed Ireland for 109 in a group D match in Kuala Lumpur with Steven Finn claiming 3-21 and James Harris 3-40.

Group A: Australia beat Namibia by 149 runs in Penang.

Group B: Ireland 109 all out in 48 overs (Dougherty 34; Finn 3-21, Harris 3-40).

Group C: Namibia 163 all out in 31 overs (Botha 56, Westhuizen 48; Smith 4-41).

Group D: Papua New Guinea by 195 runs in Kuala Lumpur.

England 109 all out in 48 overs (Hill 124, Crammer 40; France 3-31, Van Roon 3-25).

Namibia: 163 all out in 31 overs (Botha 56, Westhuizen 48; Smith 4-41).

Result: Australia beat Namibia by 149 runs in Penang.

Group D: Ireland 109 all out in 48 overs (Dougherty 34; Finn 3-21, Harris 3-40).

England 110-0 in 15.5 overs (Taylor 52 not out, Godleman 38).

Result: England beat Ireland by 10 wickets in Kuala Lumpur.

MONDAY'S MATCHES

Group A: New Zealand v Zimbabwe

Group B: West Indies v South Africa

Group C: Sri Lanka v Nepal

Group D: Bangladesh v Bermuda

Ferguson

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session with a spot of solo 'head-tennis'.

"My players were incensed by Nani late in the game and rightly so," he said. "Nani was very good today but what he did was not needed.

"It was a