



PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIDDER

BACK TO BUSINESS: Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful (R) leads his team in a fitness drill at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday. Bangladesh will play the first ODI of the three-match series against South Africa at this venue on Friday.

Mashrafe to bounce back Arthur aims at clean sweep

CU CORRESPONDENT

WARID Cricket Series

Bangladesh vice-captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza hoped on a turn around in his own fortunes in the upcoming one-day series against South Africa starting on March 9.

The spearhead of the Tigers attack went wicketless in the two-match Test series, when his new-ball partner Shahadat Hossain hogged the headlines.

The man known as the 'Narail Express', known for his voracious side, appeared passive in the field and was also fruitless with the bat.

"I am practicing hard to come back in the ODI series and I hope I will be able to bowl well," said Mashrafe yesterday.

Bangladesh, who lost the second Test by an innings and 205 runs, had a three-hour long training session at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium.

However, five players including the new faces for the ODI series Nazimuddin, Dhiman Ghosh, Rokibul Hassan and Mosharraf Hossain Rubel -- didn't join the practice; the other player being Forhad Reza. The five took off from

the capital last evening.

South Africa coach Mickey Arthur, who led his one-day side to practice after the hosts had finished at noon, said that his side would be wary of Bangladesh in the one-dayers as they were very much capable of upsetting top teams on their day. They proved this when they beat the Proteas in a Super 8s match in last year's World Cup held in West Indies.

"Bangladesh are a dangerous one-day outfit. They played very well during that World Cup game. We don't like losing to any team and every defeat hurts us. So that (defeat) will keep us on our toes in the one-dayers," he said.

Arthur also revealed that all-rounder Vernon Philander had been ruled out of the upcoming series due to a hamstring injury.

"He is out of action for a few days but we have not asked for a replacement," he said.

AFP adds: Arthur also hoped to topple Australia from the top of the one-day charts by winning all their ODIs against Bangladesh.

Australia are currently the best one-day side with 127 points, ahead of South Africa on decimal points.

But if the Proteas beat

Bangladesh 3-0 in their upcoming series of internationals starting here on Sunday, they will become world number ones. They will however remain in second spot if Bangladesh win even a single game.

Arthur told reporters: "It surely gives us another kind of motivation. It is nice to be ranked the top side in the world."

However, he said the side would not be blinded by rankings alone as the priority was to build a winning team ahead of the upcoming assignments.

"We take a lot of pride in the rankings. We were the number one side when the year-end rankings were calculated in April last year. But having said that, it is not the be all and end all," he added.

"We have a lot of young guys coming in. We want to give these youngsters an opportunity ahead of the tour of England, the ICC Champions trophy and, of course, the Australian tour at the end of the year."

"We want to find out about different players, see who can come in and take over from (retired bowler) Shaun Pollock, (and) find a batsman at the number seven spot."



Did U Know?

Tracy Caulkins is the only swimmer ever man or woman, to own American records in every stroke.



Talk Turkey



Mahendra Singh Dhoni

(India's one-day cricket captain)
"Performance is one thing, performing back to back is something else. People may call him a sitting elephant, but he's the best. He never said a word, and wanted to let his bat do the talking."
On Sachin Tendulkar.



What to Watch

SAB tv
New Zealand v England
First Test, Day Three
Live from 3:30am (Friday)

ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sport News
Live at 8:30pm

STAR Sports
Bangalore Open
Second Round
Live from 5:30pm

T20 cricket takes off

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Prakhar-Jati Twenty20 cricket tournament, organized by the local district sports association, was launched in Pabna Stadium yesterday.

Pabna were bowled out for 112 runs to which Ishwardi replied to win by 5 wickets in 17.3 over.

Major Mostafizur Rahman inaugurated the tournament as the chief guest. ADC Shajahan Ali, residential adviser of Square Group Md Dabir Uddin, Square plant director Golam Rabbani were also present on the occasion.

Bhangura and Athoria face each other in the second day's game today.

Yusuf gets 4-month contract

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) gave Abu Yusuf a four-month contract as national football coach and the freedom to select his players.

BFF president SA Sultan, while introducing the former national footballer as the new coach till June this year at a press conference yesterday, told that Yusuf will have 100 percent freedom while choosing the players.

When asked about the duties of the selection committee, BFF acting general secretary Manzoor Hossain Malu, who was also present, said it was actually an "advisory committee" which helped in selection.

However, there had been a lot of controversies last year when the BFF named its selection committee, a rare example in the football world.

"They will give some logistic support," Sultan explained the role of the selectors.

Yusuf will get Tk 55,000 per month, informed Malu adding that he will get facilities like the foreign coaches.

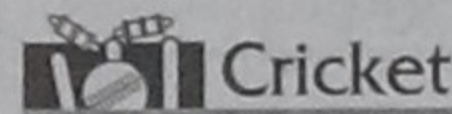
In fact, it's not true as the new coach would be given accommodation and food when needed -- most probably only during the residential camps -- and he will not get a round-the-clock vehicle for personal use.

Yusuf, who will be assisted by Golam Rabbani Chhoton, seemed to be happy with all that.

He repeated his wish to pick inform players and considered the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

MSC escape weather scare



SPORTS REPORTER

Inclement weather cost defending champions Abahani one point in the Premier Cricket League after the second attempt to hold their match yesterday failed but archrivals Mohammedan were lucky enough to avoid a washout.

Mohammedan seemed to bury a wretched start to the season by winning their second consecutive match when they handed Partex SC a six-wicket defeat at the Fatullah Stadium, where a 33-overs match was played despite heavy overcast rain.

Mohammedan were originally scheduled to play the match at BKSP but a venue change by the organisers came as a blessing.

Both the matches were revised after a washout on Tuesday and Abahani were pitted against BKSP at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium. Abahani and debutant BKSP both won one point each according to bylaws.

Mohammedan, who had lost all their group matches in the Twenty20 League, won rather convincingly as undefeated half-centuries by Imrul Kayes and Faisal Hossain guided them to 170 with three overs remaining in reply to Partex's 168-8 in the allotted 33 overs.

Kayes, who lost his opening partner Rashedul Haque in the second over with just one run on board, anchored at one end with

wickets falling regularly.

After Nadimuddin, Rokibul Hasan and Indian recruit Ajit Chandela fell cheaply, Kayes repaired the damage pairing with Faisal. The two left-handers added 91 runs for the unbroken fifth wicket.

Kayes hammered six fours in his 81-ball 66 while Faisal produced an entertaining run-a-ball 52 not out laced with four fours and two overboundaries.

Kayes was adjudged man of the match for batting throughout the innings.

Earlier, skipper Manjural Islam elected to field and the left-arm pacer led from front taking two wickets for 27. Fellow new-ball bowler Tapash Baisya also chipped in with 2-30.

Partex, however, put on a decent total as Tariq Ahmed (30 off 46 balls) and Pakistani all-rounder Rashed Hanif (68 off 84 balls) helped the siderecover from a precarious start.

Coming together at 12-3, the two shared in a significant 83-run partnership for the fourth wicket. Anifal Haque contributed 29 off 28 deliveries in the latter part of the innings.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PARTEX: 168-7 in 33 overs (Tariq 30, Hanif 68, Anifal 29, extras 14, Manju 2-27, Tapash 2-30, Shuvo 1-28).

MOHAMMEDAN: 170-4 in 30 overs (Kayes 66*, Nadimuddin 10, Rokibul 16, Faisal 52*, extras 16, Dipojjal 1-32, Tariqul 1-24).
Result: Mohammedan win by six wickets.

Sachin back on top

CRICINFO, undated

Sachin Tendulkar has replaced Ricky Ponting as the top-ranked ODI batsman as per the latest ICC player rankings. His elevation comes on the back of successive match-winning knocks of 117 not out and 91 in the finals of the CB Series against Australia.

Tendulkar, with 777 rating points, is seven points ahead of Ponting, who had a poor run in the CB Series, scoring 191 runs from 10 matches at 19.10. Graeme Smith the South Africa captain, is at third place. Meanwhile, Mahendra Singh Dhoni has climbed to 10th place, three points below the ninth-placed Herschelle Gibbs.

India's title triumph has put them on fourth place in the ICC ODI Championship -- New Zealand were ahead when the rankings were calculated beyond the decimal point, while Australia, with a rating of 127, are still the best one-day side, ahead of South Africa on decimal points.

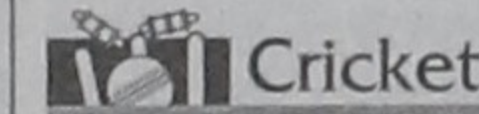
South Africa can overtake Australia if they sweep their upcoming three-match ODI series against Bangladesh, but they will remain in second spot if Bangladesh manages a single win.

TOP 10 ODI BATSMEN

Rank	Name	Rating
1	Sachin Tendulkar	777
2	Ricky Ponting	770
3	Graeme Smith	753
4	Mohammad Yousuf	752
5	Matthew Hayden	740
6	Adam Gilchrist	738
7	Michael Hussey	736
8	Kevin Pietersen	735

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Honours even on Day 1



AFP, Hamilton

The prized wicket of New Zealand's big-hitter Brendon McCullum just before stumps gave England a slight edge on the opening day of the first cricket Test here Wednesday.

New Zealand ended the day at 282 for six after an 86-run partnership between McCullum and Ross Taylor had lifted them out of a middle-order hole.

After winning the toss and electing to bat, New Zealand never fully exploited a wicket which offered the potential for a run-fest.

Recalled opener Jamie How topped scored with 92, easily surpassing his previous Test score of 37, but was unable to push on for a maiden Test century.

Ross Taylor, also on the comeback trail, was unbeaten on 54 at the close with Daniel Vettori on four.

However Stephen Fleming, the former New Zealand captain and now playing his final series before retirement, posted a commanding 41 before falling to an exceptional catch by Alastair Cook.

The left-hander had slashed at Ryan Sidebottom for Cook to take a one-handed catch diving to his right in the gully.

Opener Mathew Bell went for 19, also caught by Cook. Mathew Sinclair was caught and bowled by Paul Collingwood for eight and allrounder Jacob Oram was out for 10.

With Oram's dismissal, the third batsman caught by Cook, New Zealand were starting to founder at

five for 191 and it was McCullum who turned the innings around.

The big-hitter who has been enjoying a golden season belting England into submission in the recent one-day series, was not prepared to slow down to suit the Test match atmosphere.

He raced to his half-century at a run-a-ball pace, with five fours and

two sixes.

He brought up his 50 with a six and a four off Matthew Hoggard and Taylor drove the England medium pacer to the boundary for his 50 in the same over.

But McCullum only lasted two more deliveries before unnecessarily, although characteristically,

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



PHOTO: INTERNET
New Zealand opener Jamie How flicks the ball on way to a solid 92 on the opening day of the first Test against England in Hamilton yesterday.

Champs Gunned down Delight for Fenerbahce

AFP, Paris



Arsenal produced perhaps one of their finest performances under Arsene Wenger on Tuesday to dethrone AC Milan, beating the Champions League holders 2-0 on the night and on aggregate in their last 16 second leg clash.

Arsenal's great Premiership rivals Manchester United - who had started a run of four matches without a win for the Gunners prior to Tuesday - also eased through with a 1-0 victory at home to six-time French champions Lyon thanks to Portuguese wizard Cristiano Ronaldo's 30th goal in 30 matches this term.

Turkish side Fenerbahce also produced an outstanding away performance as they made the last eight for the first time, beating Spanish outfit Sevilla in a penalty shootout after the match ended 5-5 on aggregate (3-2 to Sevilla on the night).

That ended the hosts dreams of a third successive European crown having won the last two UEFA Cups.

Spanish pride was saved by Barcelona, who downed Arsenal in the 2006 Champions League final, as they beat Celtic 1-0 in Barcelona thanks to an early goal by Xavi for a 4-2 aggregate win.

It was Arsenal, though, who really

pulled out all the stops to become the first English side to beat AC Milan at the San Siro and complete a full house as it were having already beaten Inter Milan there before.

Late goals by Cesc Fabregas and Emmanuel Adebayor - his first ever Champions League goal - saw the Gunners into the last eight and understandably left manager Arsene Wenger with a smile like a Cheshire Cat.

"We produced the match we wanted to," said the Frenchman.

"I am very proud. It is wonderful for a young team to knockout such a side as AC Milan."

"It is good for the future of the team, but also for the individual players."

AC Milan handler Carlo Ancelotti may be staring at an empty trophy cabinet - save the largely ceremonial European Super Cup and World Club Cup - for this season with his side out of contention for Serie A and out of the Italian Cup but the former hardman Milan and Italy midfielder was adamant about where he would be next season.

"I don't think so," he replied when asked if he would be under pressure to leave.

"We've won so many trophies lately that this defeat is nothing compared to what we won so I will go on."

He certainly got unequivocal support from the president of the club and former Italian Prime

Minister Silvio Berlusconi as to whether Ancelotti would be there next term.

"Definitely!"

Sir Alex Ferguson has certainly known some lean times, though, they are now a distant memory as they came in his early days at Manchester United but thanks to Ronaldo his dreams of a second Champions League trophy remain alive.

And the Scotsman was happy to join in the praise of the Portuguese star.

"It is fantastic. It takes a rare player to do that (30 goals in 30 games) and it is a great contribution."

"There was no target set for him at the beginning of the season, but that is what we look for in our young squad."

"Ten wins in 10 Champions League home matches is a marvelous achievement, and I would put that down to apart from the players that the pitch has improved."

Fenerbahce showed that perhaps their poor away form in European competition is a thing of the past with a display that warmed the heart of their coach and Brazilian legend Zico.

"We played with great courage and gave a good account of ourselves away from home in a ferocious atmosphere," said Zico, who moved to Turkey following his stewardship of Japan which ended after the 2006 World Cup.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4



PHOTO: AFP
Arsenal star Cesc Fabregas (L) shoots to score the opening goal as Milan midfielder Gennaro Ivan Gattuso looks on during their Champions League encounter at the San Siro on Tuesday.