

Gazi Tank, Orient on track

SPORTS REPORTER

Gazi Tank and Orient Sporting Club looked set to book Premiership berths with comfortable wins but Brothers Union's chances to return were heavily dashed when they slumped to their third consecutive defeat in the First Division Cricket superleague yesterday.

Half-centuries by Sanjay (51) and Adil (50) helped Gazi Tank (219-9) maintain their winning run with a 63-run defeat of Bangladesh Boys (156-9) at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Rupali Bank (234) snatched a one-run victory against Brothers (233-9) at the BKSP to extend miseries of the former giants from Gopibagh.

Orient (212-5), meanwhile, handed a five-wicket defeat to CCS (207-9) at Fatullah Stadium while Azad Sporting Club (271-7) crushed Indira Road KC (199-6) by 72 runs.

S Africans set to miss IPL's start

PTI, Kanpur

Not ready to let their domestic tournaments suffer because of the Indian Premier League (IPL), Cricket South Africa has instructed its players to return home to play the semifinal and final of the Standard Bank Pro20 tournament before competing in the IPL.

Accordingly, Graeme Smith and his colleagues will return home after the third and final Test against India to play in the domestic tournament, which means they are set to miss the first week's action in the IPL which gets underway on April 18.

"The players will be returning home to play in the semifinals and final of the tournaments. The semifinals are scheduled on April 18 and 19 and the final is on April 25," South African team's media manager Michael Owen-Smith told PTI here today.

Incidentally, Graeme Smith, Jacques Kallis, Ashwell Prince, Mark Boucher, Makhaya Ntini, Morne Morkel, AB de Villiers and Dale Steyn were originally allowed to stay back after the Kanpur Test.

But realising that their absence would rob the tournament of its sheen, Cricket South Africa has instructed them to return home to complete domestic assignments.

"However, players whose team fails to make it to the final would be available to IPL immediately after the semifinal," Owen-Smith added.

Media could boycott IPL

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

The inaugural Indian Premier League (IPL) was facing a media boycott on Thursday after the influential Indian Newspaper Society joined calls for "offending" accreditation conditions to be lifted.

The Indian media has protested loudly over the IPL's decision to ban websites from covering matches and to prohibit international and local news agencies from supplying photographs to online clients.

"The accreditation terms failed to address the issues of intellectual property rights belonging to media as well as issues of press freedom," INS president Bahubali Shah said in a statement.

"The Indian Newspaper Society hopes a serious attempt will be made by the Indian Premier League to remove offending terms and conditions for media accreditation."

"In the absence of remedial action by the Indian Premier League, members of the Indian

Newspaper Society will be forced to take an adverse view on the question of coverage of IPL matches."

The Twenty20 competition, promoted by the Board of Control for Cricket in India and featuring stars from around the world, opens April 18. The deadline for accreditation was Thursday.

The London-based International News Media Coalition called the accreditation terms "a serious and unprecedented curtailment of the freedom of the press to fully report events of public interest."

The NMC focuses on the threat from excessive controls on the flow of news to the public, and is supported by newspapers, agencies and press freedom bodies around the world.

The Hindu, a leading broadsheet, attacked the IPL's policies in a scathing editorial.

"Greed and arrogance and a total lack of common sense seem to be driving the IPL along a path of confrontation, which will surely bring on a media boycott," the daily predicted.

The IPL tournament lines up eight teams bought by franchisees who selected their players via a

multi-million dollar auction last month.

The tournament marks the first time that international cricketers will put aside national allegiances to play for privately-owned and city-based teams.

Top cricketers have been offered huge pay packets to take part in the 44-day, 59-match extravaganza across cricket-mad India.

Moves by sports organisers to curb media rights have largely failed in the past.

FIFA tried imposing similar restrictions on photo coverage of the 2006 World Cup but backed down under a threat of a worldwide boycott.

In September last year, organisers of the Rugby World Cup settled at the last minute after a long dispute over media rights.

Two months later, global news agencies boycotted the coverage of the first Test between Sri Lanka and Australia in Brisbane after Cricket Australia imposed similar restrictions.

A compromise was reached after the match to allow the agencies to cover the second Test in Hobart.

Liza, Tanima tied on top

SPORTS REPORTER

Former national women's champion WFM Tanima Parveen shared lead with Shamima Akhter Liza after end of the sixth round of the Prime Bank 3rd Women's International Rating chess tournament at Cox's Bazar yesterday.

The two contenders had five points each with national champion WIM Rani Hamid and Indian player Pallabi Roy at second place with 3.5 points.

In the sixth round at the Hotel Media International, Liza beat Nazrana Khan Eva while Tanima defeated Zakia Sultana.

The seventh and final round will be held today.

Sidebottom's yearning

AFP, London

England bowler Ryan Sidebottom admits he would love the chance to play in the Indian Premier League.

The star-studded Twenty20 tournament, which begins later this month, has captured the imagination of cricket fans across the world.

India's Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Australian legends Shane Warne and Adam Gilchrist are among the household names taking part, but the England and Wales Cricket Board insist no centrally-contracted players would be allowed to play.

Despite the ECB's stance Sidebottom, the star of England's recent Test series win in New Zealand, is keen to get a taste of the new league.

"If there is a window for the IPL then I would love to play in it, of course," he told BBC Radio Five Live.

"It's down to England and I'm contracted to them. The calendar is very hectic and to play for England you represent your country and I'm concentrating on that."

England batsman Alastair Cook also believes the IPL is good for the development of the game and is convinced his country will eventually let stars like Sidebottom and Kevin Pietersen play in the competition.

India get

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"We have to play good cricket whatever the conditions. I have always said that pitch, toss and weather have to be taken out of equation. The surface here is dry and will assist spinners as the match goes on," he said.

"Bowlers need to exploit the conditions. I think we have the ability to take 20 wickets and put runs on the board. We are prepared to do that in this Test."

TEAMS

SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme Smith (captain), Neil McKenzie, Hashim Amla, Jacques Kallis, AB de Villiers, Ashwell Prince, Mark Boucher, Paul Harris, Morne Morkel, Dale Steyn, Makhaya Ntini, Robin Peterson, Jean-Paul Duminy, Monde Zondeki.

INDIA (from): Anil Kumble (captain), Virender Sehwag, Wasim Jaffer, Rahul Dravid, Venkatesh Laxman, Sourav Ganguly, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Irfan Pathan, Harbhajan Singh, Shanthakumaran Sreesanth, Munaf Patel, Mohammad Kaif, Yuvraj Singh, Piyush Chawla, Ramesh Powar, Ishant Sharma.

Ruud returns

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games, seven points ahead of nearest rivals Villarreal with seven matches left. Barcelona are third but also have 59 points.

Van Nistelrooy had arthroscopic surgery at a clinic in the Netherlands on March 19 in a bid to stop inflammation in the problematic ankle joint.

He had played sparingly since injuring the ankle in a league match against Almeria on February 2.

The injury put the brakes on Van Nistelrooy's scoring spree after hitting 11 league goals during the first half of the season and four goals during the Champions League group stage at the end of last year.

He has not found the net in any competition since January 20. Van Nistelrooy signed a one-year contract extension in January with Real Madrid which will keep him at the club through to 2010.

He joined Real from Manchester United in July 2006 on an initial three-year contract believed to be worth 15 million euros (23.5 million US dollars).

Milan confident

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brought back to Milan.

"I confirm that for Sheva the door is open and Ancelotti appreciates him a lot, as much as he does Ronaldinho but maybe neither will come," added Galliani.

"However, both players are still under contract and so we can't do anything. We want them and we're sure that if they move from London and Barcelona it will be to come to Milan - you can bank on that."

Milan won the Club World Cup in December but are languishing down in fifth place in Serie A and were knocked out of the defence of their Champions League title in the first knock-out round.

'Adjustment is key'

Cricket

AFP, Kanpur

South Africa captain Graeme Smith said Thursday his team had the batsmen to scorch India's spin threat in the third and final Test here.

"There's a lot of speculation over wickets throughout the series. It's just a question of adapting to the surface. There were talks about the pitch in Chennai also, but we adapted well there," Smith said on the eve of the match.

South Africa lead 1-0 following their crushing win by an innings and 90 runs in the second Test in Ahmedabad. The opening match ended in a draw in Chennai.

It will be no surprise if India name three spinners in the playing eleven in a bid to square the series on a pitch expected to help slow bowlers.

Indian spinners Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh have so far failed to keep pressure on South

Africa, who posted 540 and 331-5 in Chennai and 494-7 declared in Ahmedabad.

AB de Villiers was named man of the match for his unbeaten 217 in Ahmedabad. Jacques Kallis, Neil McKenzie and Hashim Amla also have scored centuries.

"It's all about playing to our potential. It's about maintaining our focus and executing our plans. Hopefully, we adapt to the wicket here. I am sure we are the better prepared team going into this Test," said Smith.

"I think the track, as it looks now, opens up more possibilities for all bowlers. That's encouraging for us. We have got more variety, more pace. We have played a lot more determined cricket in this series."

South Africa need only a draw here to clinch their second Test series in India, their only success coming under Hansie Cronje in 2000.

India have lost just two home Test series in the last two decades, their other defeat coming against Australia in 2004.

"Only two teams have beaten India in India in the last 20 years and that proves how tough the tour is. We have won in Pakistan (in 2007) and then in Bangladesh (this year)," said Smith.

"We are well prepared to go into this Test and hope to play the same brand of cricket. I think we are more confident going into this match."

"We are the team under less pressure. India are the team with more question marks, in terms of selection and injuries. They are also 1-0 down. The important thing for us is to maintain our standards."

The hosts are struggling to find a winning combination after their bowlers' below-par performances in the last two Tests.

Paceman Ishant Sharma has regained fitness after missing the first two matches due to finger and toe injuries, while skipper Kumble is yet to recover completely from a groin strain.

It will be known only Friday morning whether Kumble is fit for the match.

Gayle will prefer Australia Tests

Cricket

REUTERS, Port of Spain

West Indies captain Chris Gayle said on Wednesday he was more than likely to play in the opening Test with Australia next month even though it clashes with the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Gayle and fellow West Indies batsmen Ramnaresh Sarwan and Shivnarine Chanderpaul have signed up with teams in the IPL which begins on April 18.

With the Twenty20 competition running during the first two Tests against Australia there were doubts over whether the trio would return from the multi-million dollar IPL. Gayle will earn an 800,000 dollars annual fee with his team Kolkata.

"We haven't discussed anything but we know the rules already, you have to get permission from your board, so obviously it is more than likely you have to come back and play," Gayle told reporters.

"I don't know about the other two," he added when asked about the intentions of Chanderpaul and Sarwan.

Gayle had declined to confirm his availability for the Australia games but the West Indies Cricket

Board (WICB) said the players would only be given permission to play in the tournament up to the start of the Australia tour.

The final of the IPL will be on June 1 -- the second day of the second Test between West Indies and Australia in Antigua.

Gayle's side play Sri Lanka at the Queen's Park Oval in the first of three one-dayers on Thursday. They meet at the Oval again on Saturday before the final match in St. Lucia on April 15.

West Indies beat Sri Lanka in last week's second Test to level the two-Test series 1-1.

Indo-Pak series

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board for indiscipline," the source said.

Shoaib's comments came after he was banned for five years by the Pakistan Cricket Board for several violations of discipline. He has filed an appeal against the ban, which will be heard by a tribunal headed by a former Lahore High Court judge.

Under the ICC Code of Conduct, a player who fails to report an approach to fix games or underperform to his captain, team manager, board or ACSU can be banned for one to five years.

Make betting legal: Bindra

REUTERS, Mumbai

Senior Indian cricket board official Indrajit Bindra has called for the government to legalise betting in the country to help rid match-fixing and corruption in the sport.

"When you regulate betting and the government controls it, you have better control and supervision over match-fixing," Bindra told Reuters on Thursday. "Have everything above the surface, that's better."

India, which is the financial powerhouse of the sport, has been at the centre of several match-fixing and illegal gambling scandals after several prominent players were named in an Indian federal police investigation into match-fixing in 2000.

In 2007, West Indies batsman Marlon Samuels faced an investigation from his national board over alleged links with a bookmaker during a one-day tour of India.

Rogers moves to Victoria

AFP, Melbourne

Australian Test opening batsman Chris Rogers said Thursday he would be playing for Victoria in interstate cricket next season after leaving Western Australia.

Rogers, 30, who made his Test debut against India in Perth last January scoring four and 15, said he was leaving WA because he needed a change.

"I'm delighted to be joining Victoria and this move creates an exciting new chapter in my cricket career," Rogers said in a statement.

"The decision to leave the WACA and my home town of Perth was not one I made lightly."

"Equally, I'm looking forward to a fresh start with Victoria. They've proved they're a quality side in making each of the three interstate finals and I'm really keen to make a strong contribution to the top order, and more generally within the squad."

Arsenal should

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"For a few months now Theo has been on fire. Theo is very quick and is playing some good football," Adebayor said. "Playing up front alongside him is brilliant."

Gunnars defender Kolo Toure added: "Theo is a good player and is improving every time. I think Theo is going to be one of the best players in England."

Barcelona ride

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international will miss the semifinal first leg in two weeks time.

With a long list of injuries, Rijkaard will be hoping that Gabi Milito will have recovered from his groin problem in time for the visit by United.

Lionel Messi, who has been out for five weeks with a torn left thigh muscle, could also be back by then, which will give Rijkaard the chance to drop the lack-lustre Henry who was booed by a vocal section of Barca fans in the dying minutes.

Nevertheless the victory will ease the pressure a little on Rijkaard and Barca's under-fire president Joan Laporta.

"I don't think too many people can complain if we are in the Champions League semifinals," commented Laporta after the game.

Barca now face Manchester United in the Champions League semifinals, the tenth time they have reached this stage of Europe's top club competition, with the first leg being in the Nou Camp on April 23.

The English Premiership champions beat Roma 1-0 on Wednesday to go through 3-0 on aggregate. This season's Champions League final will be in Moscow on May 21.

Cricket

REUTERS, London

Cricket returns to Lord's on Thursday only days after the ground was enveloped in snow to open a season that will show if England can mount a credible challenge to Australia next year.

With rain predicted for the rest of the week, the four-day match between MCC and county champions Sussex may be largely spent dodging April showers. No member of the England team that defeated New Zealand 2-1 in March is playing.

The Kiwis return this month for a three-Test series starting at Lord's on May 15, followed by the altogether sterner challenge of a South Africa side who have just completed a crushing innings victory over India.

New Zealand are a well-drilled side who generally punch above their weight, as their victory in the first Test against England this year demonstrated.

Their bowling, headed by captain Daniel Vettori who is the best orthodox spinner in the world, will be competent and there is much interest in 19-year-old all-rounder Tim Southee.

Daggers out for Henry

Football

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona fans were celebrating progress to the Champions League semifinals on Thursday, but simultaneously wondering whether French superstar Thierry Henry has a future at the club.

Henry's hapless display in the Catalan 1-0 win over Schalke 04, for a 2-0 aggregate win over the German club, has prompted the possibility that the much-heralded Frenchman could be off-loaded during the summer.

With Lionel Messi almost recovered from injury and Mexican teenager Giovanni dos Santos also waiting in the wings, some believe Wednesday's tie might have been Henry's last start for the Spanish giants.

"The picture of Henry leaning on the post while Yaya Toure calmly scored the goal has drawn many comments and none of them positive. He shouldn't have been just another spectator," reflected the sports daily El Mundo Deportivo.

Henry was the only Barcelona man to get a zero rating from another Spanish sports daily Marca in their player-by-player rankings.

Henry cost Barca 23.5 million

The mainstream Spanish daily newspaper La Vanguardia gave its own withering assessment of the former Arsenal striker's contribution to Barcelona's victory, which earned them the right to fight with Manchester United for a place in the final on May 21.

"Until the 49th minute, if someone had said he was actually in London, you would have believed them. Then he had a clear chance but sent it over. After that there were complaints, protests but little more."

"The jeering was justified," added La Vanguardia, reflecting on the reception Henry received from many in the 72,000 crowd as he trotted off the pitch after being substituted in injury time.

Henry admitted last month, in an interview in Spain that his form has been not as good as he expected although spectators last night would have been far more damning.

He also added at the time that he has not been happy for much of his time in Spain because he has rarely seen his daughter Tea since his divorce from English model Claire Merry in September 2007.

His high-profile divorce broadly coincided with his move to Barcelona.

Henry cost Barca 23.5 million

euros last summer when they signed him from English Premiership side Arsenal.

However, despite having a contract until 2011, many believe Barcelona would now be happy to cut their losses and sell Henry in a cut-price deal.

Earlier this week, the magazine France Football assessed that Henry was the fifth biggest earning player in world football with a current income of 16.8 million euros, approximately half of which would come from his Barca salary.

A bit of basic arithmetic suggests that Barca would more-or-less recoup their shortfall on his transfer in saved wages.

If Henry is set to leave Barca then the question then arises, where would he go?

Last month, he ruled out a return to England, although pundits and fans alike have learned to treat his words with caution after his long-term pledges of allegiance to Arsenal in the summer of 2006 proved to be hollow.

No club in his native France, not even perennial champions Lyon, could afford his current salary demands but Italy may still be a viable destination for the fashion-conscious Frenchman.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	DOWN
1 Uppity sort	1 Long story
5 Actor	2 — and void
8 "Gosh darn!" (cocktail)	3 Exam format
12 Emancipation	4 Malicious
13 Shack	5 Intone
14 Wan	6 Ginormous
15 Dressy garb	7 — impossible
17 Newman or McCartney	8 "South Pacific" song
18 The whole enchilada	9 Birthright
19 Inseparable	10 Crony
20 Frothy matter	11 "South Park" kid
21 Make marginalia	12 Cheer
22 Susan of "L.A. Law"	20 Vest
23 Station	21 Popcorn brand
26 Please	22 Desecrate
30 Ellipse	23 Homer's "Phoebey"
31 Comic	24 Longoria
32 Screenwriter	25 Mendes
33 Corridor	26 Crony
35 Turns the soil	26 Festive
36 Sweet potato	27 "But — forever!"
	28 A small number
	29 "O! course"
	31 Predicament
	32 Existed
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