



Did U Know?

The red card and yellow card system was first introduced to the FIFA World Cup finals in 1970 in Mexico.



Avram Grant
(Chelsea manager)
"Gerrard is a great player and a great person. For me, he is the player of the year in England, and maybe in Europe, because of the influence he has on the team."
On Liverpool skipper Steven Gerrard.



TEN Sports
UEFA Champions League
Liverpool v Chelsea
Live from 12:00am (Wednesday)
SET Max
Indian Premier League
Deccan Chargers v Delhi Daredevils
Live from 7:30pm
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

Women cricketers play friendly today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Women's cricket team, now preparing for the Women's Asia Cup in Sri Lanka, will play a practice match against the Private Cricket Academies Mixed Eleven at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex today.

The 50-over-a-side match will start at 9:00 am.

The Women's cricket team will leave for Sri Lanka on April 26 for their first-ever participation in the regional meet beginning in the first week of May.

BRAC BANK CLUB CUP High-scoring draw give Usha top spot

SPORTS REPORTER

Usha Krira Chakra made a huge turnaround to hold Abahani 3-3 in the last group match of the Brac Bank Club Cup hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium yesterday.

The old Dhaka outfit came from 3-0 down to draw the match and finish as group B champions by virtue of better goal difference to meet Sonali Bank in the second semifinal tomorrow at the same venue.

The match's outcome set an early clash between the two traditional rivals Abahani and Mohammedan Sporting Club in the first semifinal of the season's curtain-raiser.

Back to the day's second match and national forward Russel Mahmud Jimmy drew first blood to put Abahani ahead in the 10th minute via a field goal.

Moududur Rahman Shuvo however gave the smattering of Sky Blue supporters a good breather as he struck two more field goals in the 30th and 34th minutes to ensure a 3-0 lead.

Usha regrouped in the second-half to change the whole scenario by scoring two goals within a minute as Zahidul Islam Rajan pulled one back with a field goal.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

Negatively positive

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY

Last month Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) gladly accepted an offer from its Pakistani counterpart to fill up the gap left by world champions Australia's postponement of their scheduled series over security fears.

But now surely none of the officials can dare look back on the happenings of the tour. The reason simply is that the superfluous cricket only brought unnecessary pain for the country's cricket lovers.

The series may have had a positive impact on the players' pockets, but Bangladesh's cricket was the ultimate loser as the critics were presented with another opportunity to make their voices louder against the Tigers.

Optimists, mostly within the national setup, would point to Shabbir Al Hasan's hundred, the Tigers reaching 285 while chasing 309 and scoring 200 thrice in the

series as the upshot.

But as the mantra goes, cricket is a team sport and as a team Mohammad Ashraful's men have hardly shown any improvement from their last trip to Pakistan five years back, rather it has added insult to injury following their recent wretched run against the world's top-ranked sides.

If their performance in the five-match one-day series was pathetic then their effort in the lone Twenty20 international was beyond anybody's expectation.

There is no debate that the main problem behind Bangladesh team's poor showing is their senseless batting but in the just-concluded series bowling and fielding seemed to have caught the batsmen's fever.

Fielding is one area where any team can be consistent if they have the drive to get it better. For a team like Bangladesh, this department is much more important than any other top side.

Like a specialist bowling coach the team has a dedicated fielding coach in Mohammad Salahuddin,

who has the reputation of a hard-working individual, but the question is that what we actually got from his efforts. The answer, simply, is: nothing. The standard of fielding has been going down day by day.

The authority should find the answers where the problems actually lie. But apparently it appears that the 'friendly' attitude of the mentors towards their charges simply backfired on the team.

The players started to feel the comfort once Shaun Williams, the national game development manager, was given the job of the national team in the tour of Sri Lanka in June-July last year after the departure of Dav Whatmore. And his presence only helped the boys to find 'positives' even from the worst possible performance and this kind of attitude has continued even under Jamie Siddons.

Being positive is a good approach but it doesn't necessarily mean that you try to find positives in everything, especially from the performance in Pakistan last week.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Hail Ashraful!

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

"We played competitive cricket in Pakistan". This statement came from none other than the captain, Mohammad Ashraful upon the Bangladesh team's arrival at the Zia International Airport from Karachi yesterday.

Fans may have been suffering from unbearable pain after watching their team being whitewashed in the five-match ODI series, especially the way they surrendered so meekly, and the manner in which they lost the one-off Twenty20 game against Pakistan, but the Tigers skipper still has ample positive words under his belt to say.

Before leaving the country, Ashraful talked about winning one or two games in the series but on Monday, he said that their main target was to score 200 runs consistently.

So the results were immaterial for them and thus the defeats of 152

runs, seven wickets, 23 runs, seven wickets, 150 runs in the one-day matches and 102-run loss in the Twenty20 match were nothing more than some figures only.

Coach Jamie Siddons had some disappointment over the last match's performance, although the Australian didn't forget to remind his same old information about the gap between his side and the top-ranked opponents.

But his skipper was not an unhappy man with the outcome of the series.

"I think our performance was much better than our previous two series against New Zealand and South Africa. I believe if we were competitive in the series if we considered our performance in the last two series. You know we have a long-term plan towards the World Cup of 2011," explained the ace batsman.

"We had the target of scoring 200 runs consistently in the series and we achieved it thrice which I think is a big success for us. It could have been a much better series for us if we did not lose the last ODI

that badly," he said adding that he couldn't remember the last time when they scored 200 in three games against any top team.

Ashraful was also not totally dissatisfied with his own performance despite his lean run of 30, 9, 22, 16, 4 in the one-day series and said that he is not under pressure.

"My performance was not too bad in the series as I got starts in most of the matches. You must have luck for a big score," said Ashraful, when asked about his poor performance.

Young Shabbir Al Hasan, who made a superb hundred in the series, however came up with a realistic explanation about his team's performance in the series.

"Actually the team's morale is down after defeats one after another against the top sides which was the main reason behind our bad performance and we have to get out from this situation," said the young left-hander.

Vice-captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza also echoed his sentiment.



PHOTO: STAR

Abahani's Moududur Rahman Shuvo scores (L) against Usha Krira Chakra during their Brac Bank Club Cup hockey tournament clash at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium yesterday.

Who to support?

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

New arrivals usually have teething problems, and one of the concerns after the first two days of the Indian Premier League centred on the people who will ultimately make or break this competition: the fans.

Observers at Bangalore on Friday and Mohali on Saturday discerned an identity problem. What to do when the two most explosive innings -- Brendon McCullum's 158 and Mike Hussey's 114 -- are being played by batsmen who are not simply playing for the away team but are not even Indian? After all, sustained passion for a home side you have never watched before -- who have never even existed! -- is always going to be tricky when it's the opposition who is providing most of the entertainment. The third game at Delhi on Sunday told us little: the visitors, Rajasthan Royals,

put up so little fight that only the arch-chauvinist would have left the Feroz Shah Kotla satisfied.

This evening, though, things changed. First Eden Gardens overcame the awkwardness of cricketus interruptus (the floodlights went out for 20 minutes just as the climax was approaching) to celebrate wildly as the Kolkata Knight Riders made it two wins out of two. Then, from the moment the Mumbai Indians' Luke Ronchi scythed the Bangalore Royal Challengers' Praveen Kumar over point for four off the second ball of the evening match, we were left in little doubt: the locals had come to the Wankhede to watch a Mumbai victory first and a cricket match second. Well, one out of two is bad.

The absence of Sachin Tendulkar might have thrown the Mumbaiers off course, although they had their fix when the Little Master milled around on the outfield before the game got under way. Instead, as the Mumbai innings developed, they chanted for "Robin" (Uthappa of

Karnataka) and "Bhaji" (their new captain Harbhajan Singh, from the Punjab). And they went positively berserk as Shaun Pollock creamed R Vinay Kumar over extra cover for four and six in successive balls with that languid swing of his. The run-out of Sanath Jayasuriya was greeted with silence.

The Mumbai cricket fan has always prided himself on his knowledge of the game. It looks as if that might extend to knowing how to support a team. The impression given so far by the organisers has been in danger of patronising the Indian public: lay on enough fireworks and dancing girls, make the players adopt threatening poses on billboards, promise a cavalcade of sixes -- do all that and the man on the street will fill out eight venues for 59 matches in 44 days.

But even the Indian cricket fan has his saturation point and it is far more likely to be reached if he feels a lack of connection with events on the pitch. Well, it hasn't been

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



PHOTO: STAR

WELL, THEY WERE COMPETITIVE: National players Shabbir Al Hasan (R), Tamim Iqbal (C) and Mahmudullah Riyad wait after they arrived at the Zia International Airport in Dhaka yesterday.

Academy dream gets rolling

SPORTS REPORTER

General Moeen U Ahmed will lay the foundation stone of GP-BCB National Cricket Academy's building of at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur on Wednesday.

Gen Moeen, also the National Sports Council chairman, will be the chief guest at the ceremony.

The country's leading mobile phone company, Grameenphone, bagged the title sponsors' rights of the National Cricket Academy back in March 2007 for five years and promised to pay about 5.25 crore Taka during this period.

But it took Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) more than a year to just host a ceremony to mark the works' inauguration.

Twin tons sink NCA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Two brilliant tons by Ahmed Shehzad and Khalid Latif helped Pakistan earn an easy eight-wicket win against Bangladesh in the Grameenphone Academy Cup at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

They built a rock-solid unbeaten 174-run partnership to see their team overcome home side's challenging 243 quite comfortably with six over to spare.

Shehzad retired hurt after scoring exactly 100 in as many balls leaving Pakistan Cricket Academy at a good position at 200, before Khalid Latif (105*) completed the job without any trouble with Azhar Ali (19*).

Latif, whose previous scores in the tournament were 84 not out, 51 and 17, came up with a nice century this time too. His 115-ball unbeaten 105 came in 139 minutes with the help of 10 fours and four sixes.

At the onset, the GP-BCB NCA boys were looking for a success against the PCA in this tournament. And they appeared in purpose while being put into bat first by their opponents.

Opener Shamsur Rahman scored a brilliant 79 off 124 balls, complemented by Farhad Hossain (19 off 56 balls), Mushfiqur Rahim (25 off 38 balls), Mehrab Hossain (36 not out off 41 balls) and Nasir Hossain (27 off 28 balls).

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Boucher Bangalore hero



CRICINFO, undated

In a match dominated by South African stars, the batting efforts of Mark Boucher and Jacques Kallis edged the all-round contribution of Shaun Pollock, as Bangalore Royal Challengers recovered from Friday's mauling to register their first win of the Indian Premier League (IPL) on Sunday.

Set a challenging 166 by the Mumbai Indians, Bangalore rode on an unbeaten 39 from Boucher, and his 55-run stand with Kallis sealed a five-wicket win with two balls to spare.

The absence of Sachin Tendulkar would have been a huge downer for the crowd at the Wankhede Stadium, but none of them could complain about the quality of action. The bounce on the pitch kept the bowlers inter-

ested, and the batsmen on their toes -- one of them, Mumbai's Dominic Thornely, was so surprised by a Zaheer Khan bouncer that he copped a blow above the eye which required 15 stitches. Robin Uthappa and Pollock were the two major contributors for Mumbai, with Sanath Jayasuriya chipping in with a cameo at the start.

A target of 166 suggested a close finish, and that's exactly how it panned out. Bangalore had contributions from all their batsmen, though none of the top five stayed through the chase. Shivnarine Chanderpaul bluffed a few before getting a painful blow on the knee, while Rahul Dravid alternated between the sublime -- with glorious straight- and extra-cover drives -- and the tentative -- five runs from 14 balls off Pollock. Ross Taylor and Virat Kohli both made 23 in identical fashion, but when Kohli fell, the match hung in the balance, with 60 needed from 39 balls.

While Kallis played a typically patient hand, Boucher put in the decisive knock which turned the

match Bangalore's way. Striking the ball freely and cleanly, he ensured the asking-rate never climbed beyond ten, and got the boundaries so regularly that the pressure slowly moved to the home team. Harbhajan Singh, the Mumbai captain, was creamed through point in the 15th over, while Jayasuriya was clubbed for a straight six. When Nehra was pulled for four and blasted out of the ground for the biggest six of the game in successive balls, the requirement had suddenly come down to 11 from 12 balls, after which the result was never in doubt.

Mumbai's innings was built largely around Uthappa's 48, which held the innings together, and a whirlwind 12-ball 28 from Pollock which turned an average total into a substantial one. The absence of Tendulkar was felt at the top of the order, as Luke Ronchi, his replacement as opener, lasted just ten balls before falling to an outstanding catch by Kohli. Jayasuriya gave every indication of making up for Tendulkar's absence, creaming

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



PHOTO: STAR

Pakistan Cricket Academy batsman Ahmed Shehzad sets himself to hit out during his century against National Cricket Academy during their Grameenphone Academy Cup match at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

2-week training for cricketers

SPORTS REPORTER

Seven national cricketers are taking part in a coaching camp which began at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium's Indoor Centre yesterday.

Habibul Bashar, Khaled Mashud, Javed Omar, Rajin Saleh, Tuskar Imran and Alok Kapali and GP-BCB National Cricket Academy's Musharraf Hossain Rubel, Sahagor Hossain, Jahurul Islam and Nasiruddin Faruque have been called up for the two-week camp that will run up to May 4. These players are not involved in any form of cricket at the moment.

The comprehensive training and rehabilitation programme includes four hours of nets, fielding sessions, gym and recovery.

The camp will be run by former national coach Osman Khan alongside BCB coaches Minhajul Abedin and Dipu Roy Chowdhury.

Bashar lauded the initiative, saying: "There are three bowling machines and three coaches are there to help you all the time. It is enjoyable training with the other cricketers also. You don't get this atmosphere and this kind of facilities in club training," added Bashar.

Razzak flies out Apr 26

SPORTS REPORTER

Left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak is all set to fly off to Bangalore to play in the Indian Premier League on April 26, pending visa procedures.

"If I get my visa and all other papers in time, I will go on April 26," said Razzak, who will appear for the Bangalore Royal Challengers in the eight-team Twenty20 competition. The IPL franchise had earlier asked Razzak to travel to Bangalore directly from Karachi but travel documents held Razzak back.

Mohammedan Sporting Club, Razzak's Premier League club for the season, gave Razzak the green signal to appear for Bangalore. He has also said that the popular Motijheel outfit has not asked for a refund.

"Mohammedan have not asked me to give back any money," informed the left-arm spinner who was acquired by Bangalore for US\$50,000.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

The Group B matches of the Exim Bank Women's National Handball Championship will begin in Bagerhat on April 25.

Ten teams have so far confirmed their participation in the zonal phase, it was announced yesterday.

The Group C matches will be held in Panchagarh from April 30 and the Group D matches in Bandarban from May 8.

The final round of the championship will begin on June 11 at the Mirpur Indoor Stadium in Dhaka.

DIV II CRICKET

Farshaganj Sporting Club recorded a comprehensive 72-run victory over Prantik Krira Chakra in Second Division Cricket League at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Opting to bat first, Farshaganj rode on Atiqur's solid 82 off 110 balls to post a score of 260 in 49.3 overs. Atiqur found good support from Zulfiqar, who chipped in with 37. For Prantik, Manzur took three wickets.

In reply, Manzur's club were bowled out for only 188 in 38.1 overs. Faisal Kabir picked up three wickets.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5