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Rain drowns preparation

SPORTS REPORTER

Rain played spoilsport in Bangladesh football team's preparation for the SAFF Football Championship as their first practice game was abandoned following a downpour in Bangkok yesterday.

Coach Abu Yousuf took the opportunity of two practice matches to correct his charges' mistakes and find the right combination but it was dented in the first game as their match against Bangkok Glass Club went on for only 15 minutes before heavy rain stopped play.

Bangladesh team will play their second and final practice match against BEC Tero Sasana FC tomorrow in the Thai capital before flying off to Colombo on the same night.

BEC Tero Sasana FC is a professional football club who finished runners-up in the inaugural Asian Champions League competition in 2003 and finished third in the Thai Premier League last season and recently provided eight players to the country's national football team.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



The French Open is the only Grand Slam tennis tournament played on clay courts. On clay, the ball bounces much higher than on other surfaces so players have to hit the ball at shoulder level.



John Dyson
(West Indies cricket coach)
"It has made us realise that they are human, they are not superhuman. They are just human and they can falter."
About Australia.



STAR Cricket

French Open
Second Round
Live from 3:00pm
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

Younis much sought after down under

AFP, Sydney

Pakistan batsman Younis Khan has been offered a contract by Australian domestic side South Australia, their coach Mark Sorell said Wednesday.

The 30-year-old star was considering the offer, Sorell said, adding it would not affect his national duties with Pakistan.

"Younis is currently one of the world's best batsmen. Recruiting him is an important step in our recruiting strategy and an opportunity that presents itself as too good to miss," Sorell said.

The news follows reports that Younis, who has played 58 Tests and 167 one-day internationals for Pakistan, was set to follow in the footsteps of countrymen Majid Khan, Imran Khan and Sadiq Mohammad and play in Australia.

"Younis is a great player and... we have no objection to him playing for an Australian side when our national team is not playing," Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Nasim Ashraf said last week.



PHOTO: STAR

YOU SHOULD GRAB IT: Dollar Mahmud (R), a fresh recruit in the Tigers squad for next month's tri-series, makes a desperate attempt to take a sharp catch while Rokibul Hasan yells during the national team's first training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Mumbai end on a high

CRICINFO, undated



Mumbai rounded off their Indian Premier League campaign with a comfortable win over the Bangalore Royal Challengers in a match reduced to 18-overs-a-side by rain at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore yesterday. Sanath Jayasuriya and Sachin Tendulkar weren't troubled by the damp conditions and added 96 in 69 balls after Dilhara Fernando restricted Bangalore to 122 with controlled spells of bowling that fetched him four wickets.

While Mumbai's three seamers - Shaun Pollock, Ashish Nehra and Fernando - troubled the Bangalore batsmen with varying line and length, Bangalore's bowlers, except Dale Steyn, caused no discomfort to Mumbai's in-form openers. Rahul Dravid chose to open with Anil Kumble, like he did in the previous game, and was made to pay as Jayasuriya lofted the bowler for a four over his head

off the second ball.

In any opening partnership that features Jayasuriya, the other batsman will have to play second fiddle and Tendulkar did just that as Jayasuriya went on the attack. However both the batsmen were shaken by Steyn's pace and ability to seam the ball both ways. In his first over - that went for one run - Steyn cut one in to Jayasuriya, then had him miss a pull with a ball that stayed low and followed it with an away delivery that Jayasuriya nearly edged to the keeper. But the inability of the other bowlers to get the right length undid Steyn's efforts.

The short ball was used effectively by Mumbai's bowlers to keep the runs in check but similar deliveries by Bangalore's bowlers went for fours and sixes off Jayasuriya's bat. R Vinay Kumar was hit for successive sixes and fours to midwicket and fine leg in an over that cost 16 runs. In contrast, for Mumbai, Pollock and Nehra set up Shreevats Goswami for Fernando's taking with back-of-length deliveries that jumped up at him. And though Mark Boucher countered bouncers from the two with ease, he appeared off-guard for one by

Fernando and ended up lobbing it to Robin Uthappa at mid-on.

In Mumbai's last match, Fernando had a nightmare final over where he conceded 15 runs to hand the Rajasthan Royals their 11th win of the tournament. But he had no hangover of that game today as he took three wickets for three runs in his first two overs. Later, when Tendulkar kept faith in him and gave him the final over, Fernando responded by conceding only seven and picking up a fourth wicket.

Bangalore were hindered not only by the slow outfield, that converted certain boundaries into threes and twos, but also by Mumbai's fielders, who contained runs by running hard and diving across the ground. The last three overs - which went for 30 runs - allowed Bangalore to go past 100 but it was never going to be enough to stop Jayasuriya and Tendulkar from sealing an easy win.

SCORES IN BRIEF
BANGALORE ROYAL CHALLENGERS: 122 for 9 in 18 overs (Boucher 15, Goswami 20, Dravid 11, White 26, Akhil 5, Kumar 8, Vinay 23; Nehra 1-21, Fernando 4-18, Smith

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

National Cricket Narayanganj meet Dhaka in final

SPORTS REPORTER

An all-round show from Moniruzzaman came in handy for Narayanganj in their five-run semifinal victory over Rangpur in the 28th National Cricket Championship in Sylhet yesterday.

They face Dhaka in the final at the same venue today. Back to the second semifinal and in a rain-affected match that was reduced to 20-overs-a-side, Rangpur restricted Narayanganj to 97-8 with Monir playing patiently for 23 off 54 balls that contained a boundary and a six. He found support from Abdullah (22) and Rony (15).

But Monir's contribution with the ball was more important as it helped skittle out Rangpur for only 92 runs in the stipulated 20 overs. Monir took two wickets for 18 runs while Humayun also picked up two scalps.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 14-member Under-17 development squad to play against Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) Under 17 team.

The selected players are Mominul Haque (captain), Anjum Ahmed, Ashikul Alam, Shumya Sarkar, Anamul Haque, Inamul Hossain, Asif Ahmed, Zakaria Masud, Abul Hassan, Sohag Reza, Nurul Hasan, Shaker Ahmed, Nur Hossain and Mubassir Khan.

The players are asked to report at the BKSPO on May 30.

PIONEER LEAGUE

UNB adds: Nawabpur earned a massive 8-1 victory over Lutfor Rahman Football Academy in a Central Zone match of the Dhaka City Corporation Pioneer Football League at the Basabo Tarun Sangha ground yesterday.

Masud Rana and Mehabub struck hat-tricks while Raju and Anik netted one goal apiece.

In a North Zone match, Tongi Krira Chakra crushed East Maniknagar 7-0 at the Mohakhali T&T ground.

Rubel, Rashed, Amir, Kamal, Sagar, Bashir and Hazrat Ali scored one goal each for Tongi.

In an East Zone match, East End Club (Junior) beat Titu Smriti Sangas 3-2 at the Jagannath University ground in Dhupkhola. Asif, Shaheen and Dila scored for the winners, while Rajon and Ziaur Rahman netted for the losers.

At the Mohammedpur Eidgah Maidan, Mukta Jibon Football Club defeated GBHB 2-0 in a South Zone match. Selim and Mizan scored for the winners, both in the second-half.

BEACH VOLLEYBALL

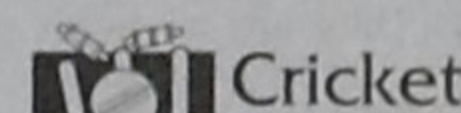
India and Nepal Police are set to play the men's final of the International Beach Volleyball tournament after winning their respective semifinal matches in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

India defeated Bangladesh Rifles 21-19, 21-13 in the first semifinal while Nepal Police secured a 21-15, 21-17 victory over Bangladesh Navy in the second semifinal.

India also moved into the women's final with a 21-16, 21-5 victory over Abahani in the second semifinal but Nepal Police failed to make it a double when they lost to Indonesia in the first semifinal 21-7, 21-6.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

'Bat out the overs'



SPORTS REPORTER

If the mantra in the last two international series was 'team rules', it is most likely to be 'bat out 50 overs' before and during the upcoming tri-series.

It may be nothing new but Bangladesh coach Jamie Siddons has categorically outlined the importance of staying at the crease for the length of fifty overs. During an orientation at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday before the Tigers' first training session ahead of the approaching tri-series, the Australian coach put forward statistics which basically spoke for itself.

Out of 177 ODIs played so far, Bangladesh have batted out 50 overs for only 56 times and gone on to win 19 of those matches while they have averaged 230-240 runs whenever they batted out the entire length of a one-day innings.

"The importance of batting for 50 overs was put in front of us (in the orientation). Our focus in this series will be to do exactly that and

get around 230 runs each time," said captain Mohammad Ashraful. Ashraful also mentioned the story on the other side of the coin.

"But when we have failed to play the fifty overs, we have struggled to score and averaged around 150 per innings," he said.

But another piece of information that was alarming was the Tigers' poor record of batting steadily against stronger opposition. They have so far batted 50 overs in 33 per cent of their matches against the big opponents. Siddons emphasised that the tri-series would be very important in the context of their recent poor showing in Pakistan during which they were thrashed 5-0.

Siddons also singled out Ashraful's match-winning hundred against Australia in Cardiff, Shahriar Nafees's 138 against the likes of Shane Warne and Brett Lee at Fatullah and Shahadat Hossain's seven-for against South Africa more recently to highlight the importance of individual performances. He stressed on the need of individuals' best performance on the day, underscoring that when the Tigers' best efforts are aggre-

gated, they are actually quite good.

But why this now? Two months ago, Siddons had more time for a team performance in which he sweated upon the need of batsmen doing the job for the team: not going over the top and basically, batting to keep wickets intact. Maybe his new tune of batting out fifty overs is similar but his sudden departure from the infamous 'team rules' will confuse many. Now, the results matter and while the batsmen have been misfiring for quite sometime, they are asked to score more freely in the form of taking inspiration from their best showing.

After the orientation, Ashraful's men took part in fitness drills but found respite as there was no bleep test.

The entire squad trained except left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak, who returns home today from Bangalore after his side's last match of the Indian Premier League.

The tri-series involving India, Pakistan and hosts Bangladesh begin on June 8 with Bangladesh taking on Pakistan in the first match in Mirpur.

King Marsh subdues Royals

CRICINFO, undated



Rajasthan Royals may have ended the league stage on top, but it will be the Kings XI Punjab who head into the semifinals full of confidence after triumphing by 41 runs in a dead-rubber top-of-the-table clash in Mohali.

Shane Warne rested himself for the game, and there was not much the Rajasthan Royals' captain-cum-coach could do watching from the dugout as Punjab's top order knocked them out of the contest. Shaun Marsh led the way with a 69-ball 115 and James Hopes' 51 provided him support in a century stand before Yuvraj Singh finally found his rhythm with a blistering 49. Without Warne, Rajasthan looked insipid in the field, and a weakened attack with-

out him and Sohail Tanvir, the tournament's best bowler, leaked away too many short and wide deliveries.

Marsh teed off the blocks. Shane Watson had taken over the captaincy, but Marsh started by spanking two wide deliveries off him for boundaries through the off side. The cut, pull and the lofted straight drive were seen aplenty as Marsh began his assault to go past Gautam Gambhir as the tournament's leading run-getter.

At the other end, Hopes got the occasional boundary while letting his partner take most of the strike, and he had to take some evasive action as Marsh blasted one off Watson that went right under his legs. The Powerplay overs fetched 51, but there was no respite for Rajasthan as Pankaj Singh was taken for 17 in the seventh: Marsh clobbering one over midwicket, before lacing the next through extra cover.

Marsh took a single off Dinesh

Salunkhe's first ball to become the tournament's leading run-scorer, and a rank bad ball was blasted through midwicket to bring up his fifty. At 88 for 0 after ten overs, the Mohali crowd were set for a treat from their batsmen, and Hopes shifted gears as Punjab looked to build an imposing score. He got three boundaries off Siddharth Trivedi in the 11th over, and Yusuf Pathan's offspin was slogged into the stands en route to his fifty, which came 30 deliveries.

Next it was Marsh's turn; Yusuf was flat-batted over long-on for four before the Western Australian stepped down the track for to send one sailing over long-on. Yusuf got a breakthrough as Hopes holed on to deep midwicket and the two quiet overs that followed were the brief lull before Yuvraj Singh came out storming and landed the knockout blow.

By then Marsh was marching towards his hundred, and he hit a

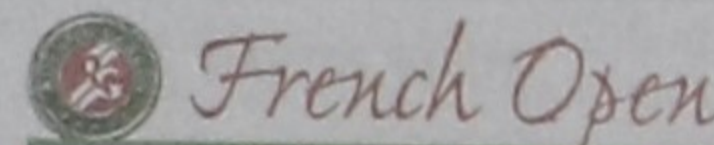
SEE PAGE 18 COL 6



PHOTO: AFP

Russian top seed Maria Sharapova makes a forehand return to compatriot Evgeniya Rodina during their French Open first round match at Roland Garros in Paris on Wednesday. Sharapova scraped through to the second round with a 6-1, 3-6, 6-6 win.

Maria escapes early exit



AFP, Paris

Maria Sharapova almost became the first women's top seed in French Open history to lose in the opening round on Wednesday as Rafael Nadal showed her the way to master a Roland Garros sandstorm.

As a vicious swirling wind, which turned the famous claycourts here into a dustbowl, replaced the torrential downpours of the previous day, Russian golden girl Sharapova toiled for two and a half hours before squeezing past teenage compatriot, and world number 104, Evgeniya Rodina 6-1, 3-6, 6-6.

Sharapova, who needs a French Open title to complete a career Grand Slam, served up 17 double faults and twice had to serve to stay in the match.

"It's dry and you've got sand

blowing in your face. So it feels like a hardcourt, but then you feel like you're in a desert," said the world number one who was a semifinalist there in 2007.

"Apart from eating and breathing sand, it was great." Sharapova will take on American qualifier Bethanie Mattek for a place in the last 32.

Triple men's champion Nadal comfortably extended his perfect Roland Garros record as he took a step closer to emulating Bjorn Borg as the only four-in-a-row winner.

The 21-year-old Spaniard notched up his 22nd win in 22 matches and his 109th win in his last 111 claycourt career outings with a 7-5, 6-3, 6-1 opening round victory over Brazilian qualifier Thomaz Bellucci.

The second seed, who has defeated Roger Federer in the last two finals, will now face French qualifier Nicolas Pietrangeli for a place in the last 32.

Third seed Novak Djokovic, the

Australian Open champion, wasted no time in reaching the third round with a 6-1, 6-1, 6-3 win over Miguel-Angel Jaen of Spain.

He will play the winner of the tie between Wayne Odesnik of the United States and Lee Hyung-Taik of South Korea for a place in the fourth round.

Spain's Juan Carlos Ferrero, the 2003 champion and 23rd seed, was a first round casualty when he pulled out injured against Brazil's Marcos Daniel.

The Spaniard, who had never lost his opener in his eight previous visits, won the first set 7-6 (7/5) and was 2-2 in the second when he called it quits with a thigh injury.

"It's a bit of a strange problem, because scans and X-rays didn't show anything. But when I start playing it hurts," said Ferrero.

Daniel, the world 79, will take on Austria's Jurgen Melzer for a place in the last 32.

Australia's 25th seed Lleyton

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8



PHOTO: STAR

Abahani forward Musa Mia (C) leaves a host of Sonali Bank players in his wake during their Green Delta Insurance Premier Hockey Super League match at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium yesterday. Abahani won 5-3.