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SAFF squad draw with Bek Toro

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national football team shared a goalless draw with Bek Toro Sasana FC in their final warm-up match in Bangkok before leaving the Thailand capital for Colombo last night.

Bek Toro, two-time Thai league champions and runners-up of the inaugural AFC Champions League in 2003, dominated the show but captain Aminul Haque was in tremendous form at the Bangladesh goal, foiling a series of rival raids.

Bangladesh, who played the match as part of their SAFF Football Championship preparation, created two great chances but striker Emily and substitute midfielder Faisal Mahmud fluffed their efforts.

Team manager Sheikh Mohammed Aslam informed the Bangladesh Football Federation over phone that the management including coach Abu Yusuf was happy to draw the match against a

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Usha's Pakistani forward Tarik Aziz (R) loses the ball to a Sonali Bank player during their Premier Hockey Super League match at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Rajasthan in final

CRICINFO, undated



This was Shane Watson's match. Imposing himself on the first semifinal, he boosted Rajasthan Royals with an electric fifty before rattling Delhi Daredevils' top order with an outstanding opening spell. Shane Watson had complained about being deprived of home advantage but his side adjusted perfectly to the conditions at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday, putting on a show that illustrated exactly why they have been the stand-out team in the competition.

Delhi were like a side struck with stage fright. Their bowlers were rattled by a brand of unconventional strokeplay - even the peerless Glenn McGrath went wicketless for 38 runs - before their batsmen succumbed against a disciplined attack. Virender Sehwag decision to field may come under scrutiny but Rajasthan's ruthless efficiency might have steered them to the final either way. The farcical end to the match - when Mohammad Asif took an age

to get his bat into the crease - summed it up.

Delhi have their fielders to thank for avoiding further embarrassment but their effort was put in the shade by some acrobatic catching by Rajasthan. Shikhar Dhawan pulled off a diving catch to dismiss Graeme Smith but it was Tauwar Kohli's peach of a dive, throwing himself to the right of cover to latch on to a Gautam Gambhir slash, that will stick in the mind.

The scorecard may indicate a

SCORES IN BRIEF

RAJASTHAN ROYALS: 192 for 9 in 20 overs (Smith 25, Asnodkar 39, Tanvir 5, Watson 52, Kaif 12, Pathan 45, Jadeja 7, Rawat 2, Trivedi 1 not out, Asif 1-32, Mahesh 2-50, Maharoo 3-34, Mishra 2-37)

DELHI DAREDEVILS: 87 all out in 16.1 overs (Gambhir 11, Sehwag 3, Dhawan 5, Dilshan 33, Karthik 10, Maharoo 6, Mishra 2, Mahesh 3, Asif 3, McGrath 4 not out, Watson 3-10, Patel 3-17, Trivedi 1-20, Warne 2-21)

Result: Rajasthan Royals won by 105 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Shane Watson.

Umpires: BF Bowden (New Zealand) and RE Koertzen (South Africa)

Toss: Delhi Daredevils

hopelessly one-sided contest but Rajasthan had their shaky moments. Losing the toss meant facing up to Glenn McGrath and Mohammad Asif on a juicy pitch and three quick wickets for Farveez Maharoof pushed them from 65 for no loss to 76 for 3.

Smith, who was aided by a runner once his hamstring injury resurfaced, and Swapnil Asnodkar, who broke a window pane at fine leg with an audacious pull, provided the early impetus but the innings could have easily lost its way with Maharoo, utilising the bounce and movement on the surface, luring the top order into looses strokes.

Watson's arrival put the innings back on track. From the moment he took 21 off the 11th over, with two ferocious pulls for six, only one team bossed the contest. With the high straight back-lift that's been the feature of his batting in the tournament, Watson swung through midwicket and square leg. He targeted specific bowlers and went through with shots even if he wasn't to the pitch of the ball, allowing the timing to take care of the rest.

Amit Mishra, the legspinner, teased with his flight and loop but

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'Better than money'

SPORTS REPORTER



The incomparable experience of sharing a dugout with the best players of the world and training with them easily surmounts the boredom that Abdur Razzak felt during his stint with the Bangalore Royal Challengers during the Twenty20 Indian Premier League.

"I have always known players like (Rahul) Dravid, (Anil) Kumble and (Jaques) Kallis as opponents but having worked with them, I saw their attitude towards cricket and how mentally tough they are," said Razzak, who returned to Dhaka on Thursday, while speaking to the Daily Star last evening.

"Now I know how they play and how they approach cricket. Although there was no special rapport, all my teammates were simply fantastic towards me and I loved every moment of it although I didn't get to play much," added Razzak.

The left-arm spinner played only one match in the tournament, that too against red-hot Rajasthan franchise when Graeme Smith smashed him for 29 runs from only two overs. Clearly, it was not the dream IPL debut but Razzak's grasp of cricketing knowledge took a giant stride. For instance, his talk about bowling in Tests with great leg-spinner and India captain Anil Kumble would take him a long way.

"Anil was very helpful when I

asked him about bowling in Test matches. He told me that given my bowling approach, it is very important to use variations within my line and length. Actually, captains would want a breakthrough from me so without using variations, wickets are hard to come by. You can only expect such wise words from someone like Kumble. Coach Venkatesh Prasad was also a great help," said Razzak who has ambitions of making the No 1 spinner's spot his own.

One of the cheaper players at \$50,000, Razzak said that the money was not as important as the experience was.

"People might laugh when I say that gaining experience in this way is more important than the money, although it was a driving factor," said the Khulna-born spinner.

But while he gained so much in India, Razzak missed the entire Premier Cricket Super League for Mohammedan Sporting Club and he realises that he did miss a lot of cricket.

"I missed the Dhaka league and

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ABDUR RAZZAK

Usha closing in on title

SPORTS REPORTER

Krishna Kumar's hatrick went down the drains as Sonali Bank lost 6-3 to Usha Krira Chakra, who came on the verge of sealing their third consecutive Premiership hockey title yesterday.

Leaders Usha survived a scare on way to their 11th win in as many matches as Pakistani duo Akhter Ali and Tarik Aziz each scored a brace to shrug off the bankers' tremendous fightback with three second half goals after yesterday's Green Delta Premier Hockey League Super 5 match was locked 3-3 at the break.

From their remaining two matches Usha -- who are on 33 points -- need just one victory to win the championship.

Even a draw against their fellow defending joint-champions Abahani in the league finale would suffice or if Abahani drop points in any of their three games, Usha will have their hands on the crown.

Usha looked like runaway victors after scoring three goals inside 18 minutes at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium. Akhter opened the scoring from a penalty corner in the sixth minute and the Pakistani centre-half doubled the lead ten minutes later from a penalty stroke.

Maksud Alam Habul made it 3-0 a couple of minutes later but Krishna turned the table in a ten-minute burst with three field goals.

Krishna's treble came in the 24, 27 and 34 minutes as Bank runners-up of this year's Club Cup tournament, threatened to stage an upset.

Following 17 minutes of tight battle after resumption, Aziz shot Usha ahead from a penalty corner but Bank, who suffered a 5-3 loss to Abahani two days earlier, wasted great chances to take the match beyond their opposition.

They pressed hard but squandered four penalty corners inside five minutes, allowing Usha to get a grip and win the match with goals from Imran Ahmed Sohail and Aziz in the 60 and 62 minutes.

After two consecutive Super League defeats, Sonali remained on 19 points from 11 outings.

Abahani will take on Ajax in today's lone match.

Australia 70/1 at lunch

AFF, St John's

Australia emerged from a painstakingly slow start to reach 70 for one in their first innings before lunch in the second Test against West Indies on Friday.

At the interval, Simon Katich on 24 and Ricky Ponting on 28 were the not out batsmen, after Australia chose to bat on a hard, true Vivian Richards Cricket Ground pitch.

Katich and fellow opener Phil Jaques gave Australia a solid start, when they batted circumspectly through the first hour-and-a-half, after a brief rain shower just delayed the start by 15 minutes.

Australia may have been breathing a sigh of relief, and West Indies may have been grieving, when Fidel Edwards slid on the fresh pitch when he was about to deliver his first ball of the Test.

Fortunately for West Indies, it was a false alarm, and Edwards recovered to continue his opening

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Time to focus on planning

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Having weathered the early storm, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) will now have to focus on setting programmes for future.

The newly elected executive committee is just over a month old and during this period, it had to complete to major tasks: starting the transfer for this season's professional football league in a bid to roll football to the ground and taking care of the national team's final preparation for next month's SAFF Football Championship.

The BFF, led by its president Kazi Salahuddin, had to convince the clubs to go for an early transfer although the league is set to start in the latter part of the year -- probably

in September -- and reconfirm Prime Bank as sponsors of the B. League.

Also, there had been clouds over final selection of the SAFF squad as many felt the presence of experience in the side in a bid to strengthen the campaign to regain glory in the regional football meet.

This was also solved by the National Team Management Committee, headed by BFF vice-president Badal Roy, although the team have already left without much conviction.

The BFF has named heads of its standing committees but most of them, still incomplete, have not been in full operation.

Now comes the need of thinking about the infrastructure and a lot of planning before going into work.

BFF president Salahuddin had promised after winning the election that he would come out with

his future plans after one month or so and his critics would not give him much time before pressing him to show his hands.

It is not only felt here that the BFF has to come out with its programmes but also, chiefs of world and Asian football governing bodies have also asked for the same.

In a meeting with AFC president Mohamed Bin Hammam earlier this month, Salahuddin reportedly discussed his planning and received another invitation to return there for further talks.

The AFC is expected to help the BFF in making a calendar for the next three-four years as well as assisting in implementing other ideas.

The AFC has also promised to give professional training to the BFF staff and Salahuddin will have to take immediate action to

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Did U Know?

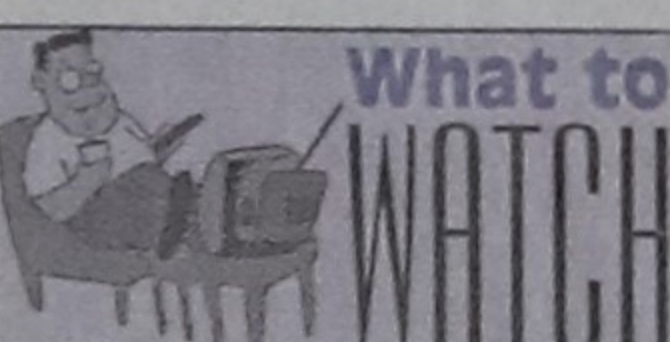
The French Open was held for the first time at Roland Garros in 1928.



Tim Nielsen

(Australia cricket coach)

"Test cricket is definitely about talent ... but in the end it is the ability to execute your skills and reproduce them over and over again."



What to WATCH

STAR Sports
French Open Tennis
Third Round
Live from 3:00pm

TEN Sports
West Indies v Australia
Second Test, Day Two
Live from 8:00pm

SET MAX
Indian Premier League
Kings XI Punjab v Chennai Super Kings
Second Semifinal in Mumbai
Live from 8:30 pm

IPL's England tour called off

INTERNET, undated

The first match between IPL sides to be staged in England has been called off because of a lack of television coverage. Manoj Badale, one of the backers of Twenty20 cricket in India, planned to bring Rajasthan Royals and Kolkata Knight Riders to the Brit Oval on July 15 and 16. Sky, however, is covering NatWest Pro40 matches on both days and the ECB's contract with the broadcaster prohibits its companies from televising the charity event.

Players including Shane Warne and Shane Watson were lined up and would have attracted a bigger crowd than at either of the Pro40 matches at Worcester and Chelmsford, but the ECB's contract with Sky is such that it could not drop coverage of these matches for a more glitzy event.

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India one-day captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (R) leaves after attending a team selection meeting for tri-series in Bangladesh and Asia Cup in Pakistan in Mumbai yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



FIFA president Joseph Sepp Blatter gestures while addressing delegates at the 58th FIFA Congress in Sydney yesterday.

FIFA endorses '6+5' quota

Football

AFF, Sydney

Sepp Blatter is convinced Europe will come on board and agree with his foreign player quota for club teams after an overwhelming endorsement by the FIFA Congress here Friday.

The Congress gave the FIFA president and his executive committee sweeping support to explore the controversial system of six home-grown players and a maximum of five foreigners, known as 'six plus five'.

Only this week the European Commission rejected Blatter's call for a curb on the number of foreign players aimed at protecting the identity of national teams, warning it would contravene EU labour rules.

But Blatter, armed with a 155 to five vote support from the floor of the Congress, has been emboldened to press on.

He said he would meet next week with the chairman of the

European parliament Hans-Gert Poettering in Brussels to get his views on the issue.

"Why should we be afraid when I have been given the opportunity to speak with the chairman of the European parliament to explore it," Blatter said after the 58th FIFA Congress.

"Why should we be afraid to explore our views in the movement of football of one billion people?"

"And now with the resolution made by the FIFA Congress we have good arguments to convince those in Europe that they should look at the solidarity. We are looking for solidarity not confrontation."

"We have the support of people like (Franz) Beckenbauer, (Johann) Cruyff, Michel Platini, Pele, all the great names of football and it shall not be possible to convince them?"

"I'm sure it will be done."

English Football Association (FA) chief executive Brian Barwick is not so sure and warned FIFA the quota plan faces huge hurdles.

"Certainly, we can understand the general principle of a further

exploration, but we are keen proponents of things staying within domestic and international law," Barwick told reporters here.

"What I am trying to do is state a principle here that European law at the moment is pretty exacting on these issues and unless those type of hurdles can be overcome there are still issues to take forward."

"So further exploration, yes, but where it will end up, who knows?"

England, which had three teams in the semifinals of this year's European Champions League in Manchester United, Chelsea and Liverpool, will likely feel the brunt of FIFA's plans.

The resolution enables Blatter and his UEFA counterpart, Platini, to explore all possible means within current laws to ensure the system is met.

Blatter is seeking the quota amid fears about the number of foreign players switching nationalities to play for different national teams, along with the competitiveness of club competitions.

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