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Yao Ming returns this week

REUTERS, Beijing

China's Yao Ming is likely to play his first competitive game since having surgery on his foot in March at this week's Stankovic Cup pre-Beijing Olympic basketball tournament, local media reported on Tuesday.

The 7ft-6in (2.28m) Houston Rockets centre, whose NBA season was ended by a stress fracture, returned to China to join the national squad for training last month but played no part in two warm-up games against Australia in Jiangsu.

"Yao will definitely go to the Stankovic Cup in Hangzhou, and the chance of him playing is very high," Hu Jiashi, vice chief of Chinese Basketball Association (CBA), told Oriental Sports Daily.

Yao said last month it was 50-50 whether he would play in the four-nation tournament.

China will play Serbia on Thursday, Angola on Saturday and Russia on Sunday in the round-robin tournament.

Angola, one of China's opening-round group opponents at

PCB bans Asif

AFP, Lahore

The Pakistan Cricket Board on Tuesday suspended fast bowler Mohammad Asif from all competition until an inquiry is completed by India, where he tested positive for a banned substance.

"We have suspended Asif from all cricket -- neither can he be involved in any cricket-related activity nor can he hold any office relating to cricket," the board's chief operating officer Shafiq Naghmi told a news conference.

The Indian Premier League on Monday named Asif as the player who tested positive during the Twenty20 competition held from April to June.

"The inquiry will be conducted by the IPL doping tribunal and whatever decision they take against Asif, we would back it," said Naghmi.

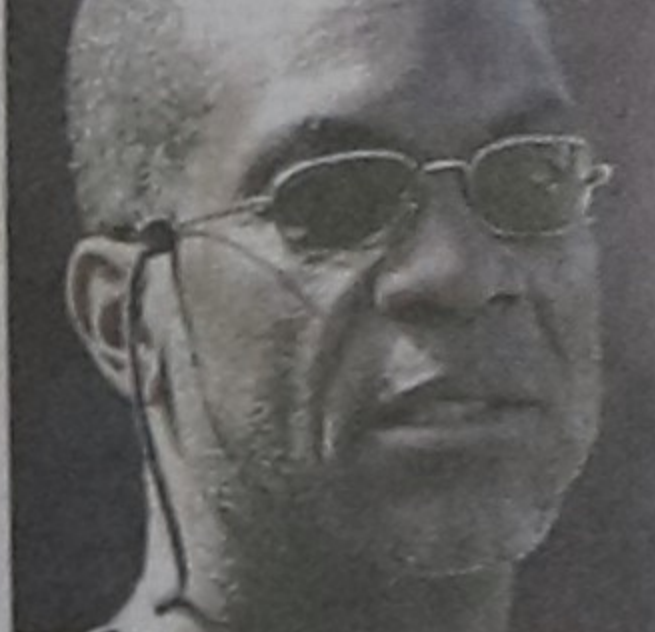


Did U Know?

England's Ian Bell became the seventh batsman and the first Englishman to score 199 in a Test innings.



Talk Turkey



Michael Holding

(Former West Indies fast bowler) "I look at Test cricket like life. You're going to have some fantastic days and some dull days; that's what life's all about."

While giving his opinion of a slow fourth morning at Lord's in which South Africa made 54 runs in 28 overs.



What to Watch

ESPN Sportscentre Live from 8:30pm

Akhtar back for Pakistan

Cricket

AFP, Lahore

The Pakistan Cricket Board on Tuesday included fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar in the provisional 30-man squad for the Champions Trophy, but dropped Mohammad Asif amid new drugs allegations.

A Pakistani court earlier this month said the 32-year-old Akhtar was free to play cricket again after suspending an 18-month ban imposed on him by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for indiscipline.

"We have shown a big heart by including Akhtar as it is in the larger interest of the game," said the PCB's chief operating officer while announcing the squad in a press conference.

Pakistan had to delay the announcement after Akhtar was asked to pay a seven million rupee

(162,000 dollars) fine, which was imposed by an appellate tribunal last month along with the ban -- that replaced an original five-year ban imposed earlier this year.

Akhtar's lawyer Monday assured that the paceman will pay the fine once his appeal against his latest ban is decided.

Akhtar was in April banned for five years over a series of discipline violations, including public criticism of the PCB on excluding him from a list of 15 contracted players.

He was already on two years' probation for hitting Asif with a bat days before the Twenty20 World Championship in South Africa last September.

Asif was in the preliminary squad until his name was announced by the Indian Premier League as dope offender on Monday.

He also faces an internal PCB inquiry after he was seized at Dubai airport last month on charges of

possessing opium. He was detained for 19 days before the Gulf police said the quantity of drug was "insignificant" and deported him.

A PCB doping tribunal banned Akhtar for two years and Asif for one year. However the bans were overturned on appeals.

Besides losing Asif, Pakistan also suffered a crucial blow when ace batsman Mohammad Yousuf pulled out of the Champions Trophy saying he would not play any cricket in the holy month of Ramadan to focus on prayers.

Naghmi said all the 30 players will undergo dope tests on July 19 and 20 to avoid any further doping controversy.

Pakistan hosts the biennial Champions Trophy from

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

BFF expects good harvest

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation's ongoing under-18 coaching camp would be helpful in a bid to start competitions in the districts, said federation vice-president Badal Roy.

The BFF has involved its 14 coaches to run camps (one coach per district for two weeks) with a view to cover all the districts inside two months.

The short-term programme was launched at the beginning of this month and the coaches have almost completed their assignments at respective districts.

"We have yet to get any full report from a district as most of the

campers have either just concluded or on the verge of completion. But the feedback we are getting from most of the places is satisfactory," Badal told the Daily Star yesterday.

"We started this programme because we felt that irregular football at districts for some years and total absence of the game in the last one and half years would result in a scarcity of players.

"If we want to start the district leagues altogether, this scarcity will become larger. So we wanted to have some young players ready because most of them became rusty due to lack of action," said the former national forward, who is also the chairman of the National Team Management Committee.

"This will increase the flow of players as we called about 80 to 100

footballers to trial from all upazilas and clubs from each district."

The coaches mainly provided basic training to 25 players at the camps and the BFF is looking forward to take care of the extraordinary ones under its wing centrally.

"We will go for higher training in the second phase with 50-100 players. This has already created some interest in the districts," informed Badal.

"Due to shortage of fund, we had to run camp for one session. But local organisers and ex-players have come forward to arrange that the players get two sessions.

"We have heard from Tangail, where Jobair Nipu is in charge, that they have found five to six players including one outstanding

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

India eye series win

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Anil Kumble, India's Test captain, has brushed off suggestions that the team may be distracted by the approaching milestone for Sachin Tendulkar, who needs 172 runs to surpass Brian Lara as the leading run-scorer in Tests. Kumble insisted the team's focus was on a series win.

"We always feel proud that one of our teammates is going to cross a landmark," Kumble said. "Every time when there is an achievement, it's not for the individual only but also for the team."

"But, the most important factor is that we go there and ensure a series victory. That will be on top of everybody's mind," Kumble said. "I am sure that at some point of time, Sachin will cross the mark. It will be a huge achievement not just for him but also for Indian cricket. Sachin is confident. He has come back fully fit from groin injury. He is really fresh in mind and really confident."

Although India lost to Sri Lanka in the Asia Cup final recently, Kumble was confident of the Test team's prospects. "As a Test team we have really performed well, in that sense, we are pretty confident," he said. "In Test cricket, we have done exceptionally well in the last year or so. We have been consistent. I am sure we will be able to put up a good show and ensure a series win."

The umpire review system, where players can challenge the decision of the on-field umpires, will be tested for the first time during the series. "We are going to have a chat about it once we reach

Sri Lanka with the officials," Kumble said. "We will see how it goes."

"From whatever I gather, it is the captain who takes the call," he said.

"It all depends on what kind of a situation you are in. If it is a low decision, then what is important is what the wicketkeeper or the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



India star Sachin Tendulkar leaves the team bus upon the team's arrival at Colombo on Tuesday.

Hashim secures draw

Cricket

AFP, London

Hashim Amla became the sixth batsman in the match to score a century as he saw South Africa to the safety of a draw against England in the first Test at Lord's here Monday.

The Proteas, following-on, were 393 for three, a lead of 47, when captain Graeme Smith and England counterpart Michael Vaughan agreed a draw with a minimum of 19 overs left in the opening match of this four-Test series.

Amla as 104 not out and first innings centurion Ashwell Prince

nine not out as, for the sixth successive match since Australia's victory in 2005, a Lord's Test ended in stalemate.

South Africa kept England in the field for nearly 11-and-a-half hours in their second innings alone and several members of the hosts' attack looked tired men come the finish -- a concerning sight with just a three-day break before the second Test starts at Headingley on Friday.

There was also a worrying moment for England when paceman Stuart Broad appeared to turn his ankle in a foothold after tea.

Proteas opener Neil McKenzie was the biggest thorn in England's side on Monday while making 138 in nine hours and 14 minutes at the

crease which saw him face 446 balls with 16 boundaries.

Monty Panesar had taken four for 74 as South Africa were bowled out for 247 in their first innings.

But it was a different story for the left-arm spinner second time around as his 60 overs, the most he'd ever bowled in a Test innings, failed to yield a wicket.

Amla, 88 not out at tea, completed his fifth hundred in 26 Tests and first against England with his 14th boundary, an elegant late-cut four off medium-pacer Paul Collingwood, in 231 balls.

It was also the 25-year-old's third hundred in three first-class matches this tour after his 172 and 161 in warm-up fixtures against

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6



Talented Indian chess player Mohona Sen Gupta makes a move during the 10th Standard Chartered School Chess Tournament at the Chess Federation Hallroom yesterday.

New format for Premier League?

SPORTS REPORTER

If the new chairman of Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) chief has his way, the country's most coveted domestic one-day competition would become a two-day affair.

According to Golam Mohammed Alamgir's scheme, a two-day format would be re-introduced as the Premier League with each 90 overs being played on each day. He also hoped that the top six teams will participate in a competition called the CCDM Cup.

"We'll implement this (new format) in the Premier Division so that we can groom many longer version players," Alamgir said after his introductory meeting with club representatives.

Seventy-two clubs of Premier, First, Second and Third Division were present in the meeting held at the Bangabandhu National Stadium conference room.

CCDM member and the immediate past CCDM chairman Gazi Ashraf Hossain was also present.

The newly appointed CCDM chairman said they would increase annual donation to the clubs, which could be around Tk 10 lakh

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

Booters blamed in BFF probe report

SPORTS REPORTER

A three-member probe committee headed by Harunur Rashid blamed the national footballers for the failure of the national team in the fifth SAFF Championship.

One of the favourites Bangladesh, winless in the regional competition, failed to make the semifinals after two draws and a defeat in Sri Lanka.

The investigation report was handed over yesterday to Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin but both parties refused to comment.

"I received the report but have yet to open it. Give me two days' time to go through it," said Salahuddin.

"I think the BFF president should be the right person to tell about the report," said BFF member and ex-general secretary Harunur Rashid, who and his fellow committee members Sirajul Islam Bachchu and Anwarul Hoque Helal took the job on June 18.

"We have interviewed 11 persons and went through three written reports to come to a conclusion," added Harun.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Mohona takes girls' title

Chess

SPORTS REPORTER

Indian players dominated the girls' competition of the 10th Standard Chartered School Chess tournament by clinching the top five positions at the National Sports Council (NSC) conference room yesterday.

Mohona Sengupta, a student of Binodini Girls High School in Kolkata, became unbeaten champion as she drew her seventh and last round board against compatriot Diotima Dutta Gupta of Vidyabahroty Girls High School, who finished third.

She grabbed six points to dethrone her compatriot Shaati Majumder of Indira Gandhi Memorial School, who finished runner-up with same points.

"I am happy but it is nothing new as I am used to winning trophies. I clinched different age-level trophies and became state champion and

also had achievements in Asiad," said a delighted Mohona.

"I started to play chess at the age of six but I hardly had any interest in the game rather my passion is in dance and music. But my family wanted me to play chess seriously and now I am also serious to achieve something at the highest level," she added.

Arna Sarkar of Kolkata Methodist School secured fourth position and Shiny Das of Tripura finished fifth while sixth slot went to Yeon Sarkar of Central Girls High School while Sabikun Nahar of Vikarunnesha School and Collage finished seventh.

In the other seventh round games, Shaati drew with Arna, Sabikun beat Reshma, Shiny beat Protiba and Yeon beat Gulfsha.

Meanwhile, Abhropratim Manna of Kolkata maintained solo lead with maximum eight points in Class VI to X Group. Abdullah Al Saif of Quality Educational School followed him with seven points.

Aditya Chakraborty and Sayan Majumder of India kept their joint

lead in the points table with 7.5 points each in group KG to V.

The ninth and last round games of KG to V and VI to X Groups boys will be held today.

Bangladesh A face Foxes

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A team meet Leicestershire in the third three-day match today at the Grace Road, Leicester.

The second string Bangladesh side's previous two rain-affected 3-dayers against England Under-19s and Warwickshire ended in draws.

The visitors will play fourth match against Derbyshire on July 21-23 and the fifth three-day match against a South African

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



Two tourists walk past the Olympic 'Fuwa' mascots as they race for their flight at the new international airport in Beijing on Tuesday.

A swift fall

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan fast bowler Mohammad Asif has gone from bright new hope to fallen star in the space of just two years and his latest troubles could spell the end of his career.

The 25-year-old paceman was on Monday identified as the player who failed a drugs test during the April-June Indian Premier League and now faces a lengthy ban from the game.

It may prove to be the last twist in a career which was tainted by a first doping row in 2006, a fight with fellow paceman Shoaib Akhtar in September last year and a 19-day detention in Dubai on charges of possessing an illegal drug last month.

Former captain Wasim Akram said Asif is another example of a career which has spiralled out of control.

"Boys like Asif come from small towns and they are unable to handle the fame and money so they get distracted and I'm disappointed at the fate such a talented bowler has met," said Wasim.

There has never been any doubt over Asif's talents with the ball.

When he dismissed legendary Indian batsman Sachin Tendulkar during his match and series-winning seven-wicket haul in Karachi in January 2006, he was instantly compared with Australian master quick Glenn McGrath.

Asif followed it up with 17 wickets to help Pakistan beat Sri Lanka 2-0 two months later.

Nominated as one of the International Cricket Council's emerging players of 2006, he was hailed as the "bowler of this generation" by none other than legendary Pakistani all-rounder Imran Khan.

Asif hails from a village called Machikar, near Sheikhpura, a small town in central Punjab which also produced medium fast bowler Rana Navedul Hasan.

He caught the selectors' eye with a burst of 7-35 for Sialkot in a first-class match in 2005 and was handed a ticket to Australia with

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5