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Perfect ten

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

If wealth of cricketing experience was something that could have been deposited in banks, the cricketers from India and Sri Lanka would have formed the creamy layer of a Forbes list and their congregation at Colombo for the three-Test series would be akin to that corporate thing they have in Davos in January every year.

Seven of the 11 active members in the 100-Test club are here and that includes the top four longest-serving present-day cricketers. Sachin Tendulkar, Sanath Jayasuriya, Muttiah Muralidaran and Anil Kumble made their Test debuts in the late 80s or early 90s - that's an era with which no other international team, besides India and Lanka, has any remote connection with. West Indies with 1994 debutant Shivnarine Chandepaul in their side comes close, but that's all.

Jayasuriya might have retired from Tests, but going by his recent T20 and ODI form, many here say a presidential intervention - and we aren't talking about a cricket board official here - is on the cards, one that could see him wear the flannels again.

Add a few more 30-plus players such as Sourav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid, VVS Laxman, Mahela Jayawardene and Kumara Sangakkara to the names of Tendulkar and Jayasuriya and we have seven batsmen with more than 5000 Test runs. As for the aggregate run-count of these batting stal-

warts, it's an incredible 55,035.

What makes that number looks less intimidating is the fact that these batting stalwarts will be against the likes of Murali, Kumble and Chaminda Vaas - three bowlers with a Test wicket pool of 1686. Seven plus three is always 10 and, in this case, it's pretty much a 'Perfect 10'. Include 29-year-old Virender Sehwag to this list of those on the wrong side 30 and there's the look of a Dream XI to it - a World XI selected by someone with a bias against pacers.

After being on a 44-day diet of T20 'happy meals' and the subsequent morsels of hastily cooked one-day mini-meals, the craving for the longer version has intensified. With the Test series starting in a week's time - July 23 - things look promising glancing at the ingredients in the kitchen and the master chefs at hand. The cooking range is set at low flame as a mouth-watering three-course spread is planned for the next month.

It's been a long wait for the 'old school' to savour this incredible indulgence. Injuries to aging bodies and scissor-hand selectors with flippancy youth policies were the two factors that ensured that this 'Perfect 10' didn't quite happen when India met Sri Lanka in the recent times.

During Lanka's 2005-06 trip to India, Jayasuriya, Vaas and Ganguly were missing from action. Earlier, in 2001, when India toured Lanka, missing on the flight to Colombo were Tendulkar and Kumble.

While the rest of the world has lost patience with its elders, India and Lanka, reluctantly at times, have persisted with their seniors.

Cynics might want to dub this as a battle between two Dads' armies, or even a senior citizens convention, but that would just mean they didn't get an invitation to Jayasuriya's 39th birthday bash the other day in Karachi, where he compiled a 88-ball 130.

Even if one does a real needle-in-the-haystack kind of search, it will be tough to find a series where record-breakers will so frequently brush shoulders, where every other bat versus ball contest is a high-profile face-off with several layers of intrigue. The 55,035 vs 1686 is a kind of contest that has never happened before and the chances of it happening in the near future aren't very bright either.

India coach Gary Kirsten relishes these great duels from the dressing room and stresses the importance of the series. "It doesn't matter if they have faced each other several times, since these guys might be facing each other for perhaps the last time in a Test series. And it is important for these greats to score over each other in their last outing," he says.

Call it great timing or twist of fate, Tendulkar wouldn't have found a better series to overtake Brian Lara and be the highest run-getter in the history of Test cricket. Just 171 runs away, Tendulkar is expected to bring Test cricket back in the news by reaching the milestone in this series.

With his old mates around on a serene island, and with the first and third Tests being played at the SSC - a venue that's is about 150 years, have persisted with their seniors.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 3



India fast bowler Ishant Sharma bowls in the nets during a practice session at the Sinhalese Sports Club Ground in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

BCB polls in October?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) election looks a reality after the National Sports Council (NSC) asked the cricket's governing body to send councillors' list.

NSC secretary Akbar Hussain confirmed yesterday that his organisation has sent a letter to the board on Monday seeking the name of its councillors.

"We have not given the BCB a deadline but we hope they would send the list within a reasonable time. If there is any delay, we will consider fixing a timeframe for them," Akbar told reporters yesterday.

NSC chairman and Army Chief Moeen U Ahmed has already wished to see elections completed in all remaining federations by October this year and it is expected that the much-awaited polls of the BCB, being run by an ad-hoc committee, would take place in the second or third week of October.

The organisers have already come alive in anticipation and it has been learned that they are going to doors at clubs and affiliated organisations in a bid to become councillors.

Like their football counterparts, two high-profile panels are also set to compete in the BCB elections.

Manna takes chess crown

SPORTS REPORTER

Kolkata's Abhropratim Manna became the unbeaten champion of the Class VI to X group of the Standard Chartered 10th School Chess Tournament at the NSC Tower yesterday.

A student of Don Bosco School, Manna took 8.5 points while runner-up Abdullah Al Saif finished with 7.5 points. The two top players drew their final round game.

Another Indian Sayan Mazumder, who studies in Indra Gandhi School, took the title of the KG to V group with 8.5 points.

Governor of Bangladesh Bank Dr Salehuddin Ahmed distributed prizes among the winners. Standard Chartered managing director (originating & client coverage) Ahmed Ali Shah and Bangladesh Olympic Association CEO and director Col (ret'd) Md Wali Ullah were also present on the occasion.

Bangladesh play Malaysia for fifth place

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh stayed alive for a high fifth place finish in the 6th Asia Cup Youth Hockey Championship when they defeated Singapore 3-1 in the tie-breakers in their first play-off match in Hyderabad, India yesterday.

Chandan, Nannu and John converted penalties for Bangladesh in the shootout after the match

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Focus on FIFA projects

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) high-ups yesterday briefed Sri Lankan football official Crysantha Perera about the ongoing projects under FIFA funds.

FIFA development officer Manilal Fernando was due to make the trip but had to cancel the tour due to the death of his mother in law.

Perera, who is CEO of Football Federation of Sri Lanka and also the assistant to Manilal, had a meeting with BFF president Kazi Salahuddin and other top officials at the BFF Bhaban.

BFF member Anwarul Hoque Helal, the ex-general secretary who

is looking after the projects including the artificial turf to be built under the Goal project, told that the visit is mainly to take feedback of the projects to FIFA.

"We have discussed about our second Goal project (the artificial turf at the ground adjacent to the BFF Bhaban) and the academy in Barisal under the tsunami fund," informed Helal.

"The local consultants will visit the venue today and give a review on which a proposed budget would be made."

"We have already got the estimate for the Barisal academy but I have asked the consultants to consider revising it as I feel it is too high."

"The consultants have mentioned that the soil at the venue in Barisal is not rich, which is the

reason behind the high cost. However, as they have not done a soil test, I think there is scope for go over it again," Helal said adding that Manilal is likely to visit Dhaka soon to officially hand over 3,000 footballs donated by the FIFA to the National Sports Council (NSC).

The BFF built its headquarters (BFF Bhaban) under the first Goal project and the second one was on the verge of being cancelled due to lack of a piece of land when NSC chairman general Moeen U Ahmed, also the Chief of the Army Staff, had stepped in to provide the Balur Math (the ground adjacent to the BFF Bhaban) for the cause.

The NSC also provided the land in Barisal for the academy for which the BFF will get 2.5 lakh dollars from the FIFA.

'A tough challenge'

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene said on Wednesday his team was keen to renew the rivalry with India in a three-Test series starting here next week.

"Personally, I have a couple of milestones against India. I made my Test debut against them and also scored my first Test double-century against them. It's a pretty good team for me to play against," said Jayawardene.

"We thoroughly enjoy playing India at home or away. It's always been a tough challenge. There is good rivalry with our neighbours."

Jayawardene, who made his Test

debut in 1997 against India, hit 242 against them during the Asian Test championship match in 1999.

The Sri Lankan captain, with 7,478 runs in 95 Tests, said the series would be closely contested as both the teams had quality players.

"Every time we have played them, there has been good cricket as both the teams have some quality players. I am sure the public will have a great series to watch," he said.

Sri Lanka last hosted India for a Test series in 2001, winning 2-1 after a close contest. The tourists were without key spinner Anil Kumble and batsman Sachin Tendulkar, who were injured.

Tendulkar is now just 172 short of breaking retired West Indies

captain Brian Lara's world record of 11,953 Test runs.

"We are going to treat Sachin in the same manner as anybody else in the Indian camp. It will be a great milestone if he achieves it, but our focus will be on winning the series," said Jayawardene.

India captain Kumble was confident of his team's good show in Sri Lanka, saying they would like to maintain the consistency.

"We have done well in the lead-up to the Test series. In the last one year or so we have been consistent with our performances. That's something we will take forward," said Kumble.

India's bowling attack will be at full strength with the return of left-arm seamer Zaheer Khan, who has

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Leicester in command

SPORTS REPORTER

A four-man Bangladesh A pace attack failed to break down Leicestershire's batting lineup on the first day of their three-day at the county's Grace Road ground yesterday.

Pacemen Sajidul Islam, Nazmul Hossain, Rubel Hossain and Dollar Mahmud could only remove three batsmen as the hosts, who chose to bat first, scored 216 for three in 56 overs at tea.

Nazmul got the initial breakthrough, getting rid of opener Greg Smith (35) after he had shared a 70-run stand with Matthew Boyce (26), who was dismissed by Rubel just two runs later.

Former South Africa batsman Boeta Dippenaar (35) was caught by Nayeem Islam off left-armer Sajid with the score on 119.

An unbeaten 97-run stand between James Taylor (50) and Jim Allenby (55) held the A team back when umpires Trevor Jesty and David Millns called for tea.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak takes a catch during a rare outdoor training session on a rainy day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Air will be cleaner

APP, Beijing



New Beijing driving restrictions starting this weekend will help provide clean air for Olympic athletes competing at next month's Games, the organising committee said Wednesday.

Poor air quality in China's capital remains a major concern, with a thick industrial haze still cloaking Beijing on most days less than a month before the August 8-24 Games kicks off.

Beginning on Sunday, Beijing will order more than one million cars off the road in a scheme to curb traffic congestion and remove the biggest source of air pollution - the city's 3.3 million vehicles.

"We are not 100 percent satisfied with the air quality at the moment," said Sun Weide, spokesman for the Beijing Olympic organising committee. "So that's why we have the contingency plans (such as the car ban)."

"The contingency measures are very important to ensure clean air for athletes during the Games."

Sun said air quality had improved in Beijing steadily over the past nine years as part of a 140 billion yuan (20 billion dollar) environmental clean-up launched in 1998 that included more than 200 measures.

All air quality indicators were now at acceptable international standards except for particulate matter, the fine dust particles that irritate the respiratory organs and mainly originate from car exhaust, he said.

The International Organising

Committee had previously urged Beijing organisers to take contingency measures, including the car ban, shutting down polluting industries and closing building sites during the Games to improve air quality.

However, IOC head Jacques Rogge warned last year that poor air quality remained an issue and could result in the suspension of some Olympic events.

Sun said more than one million

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



PHOTO: AFP

A fan rides his Olympic decorated rickshaw near the National Stadium 'Bird's Nest' in Beijing on Wednesday.



Did U Know?

The shortest person to play tennis at Wimbledon was Gem Hoahing who was just 49.



Rahul Dravid

(Star India cricketer)
"Had I been 21, I would easily have cracked this."
Wishing Twenty20 had existed earlier as he is now 35.