

Saved by the gold

Huang Xu was a relieved man as China won gold in the men's artistic gymnastics event. Huang had promised to throw himself off a high-rise building if his team didn't win a medal in Beijing. The host nation finished well clear of the rest of the field and Huang said: "Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to stay here. I also won't worry about the grey hair I have after four years of worry and nightmares about winning the gold medal."



THREE IN THREE: The Chinese pair of Wang Xin (R) and Chen Roulin sets off for a perfect landing to win the gold in the women's 10m synchronised platform diving at the National Aquatics Centre in Beijing yesterday. It was the hosts' third gold in diving.



Did U Know?

The Olympic mascot is an animal or human figure that represents the cultural heritage of the host nation.



PT Usha

(Indian track & field legend) "Abhinav has shown the world that an Indian can also stand on the podium. It is a total result of his hard work and his family support."



On Abhinav Bindra who won the men's 10m Air Rifle shooting gold medal in the Beijing Olympic Games on Monday.

Challenge Cup final today

THE-AFC.COM, New Delhi

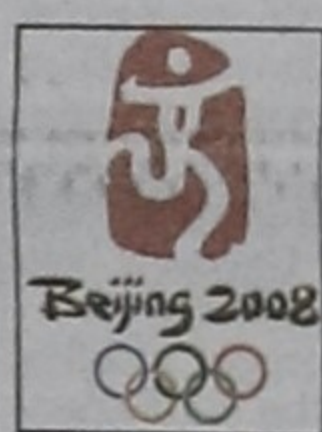
India coach Bob Houghton believes the short break and a change in venue will work in his team's favour when they take on defending champions Tajikistan in the final of the AFC Challenge Cup today.

The showpiece clash, which kicks off at 7.30pm (Bangladesh time), was originally scheduled to be played on August 11 at the

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China continue to shine

AFP, Beijing



Wang Xin gave herself a sixteenth birthday present to remember with an Olympic gold medal in the women's synchronised 10-metre platform competition on Tuesday as China claimed their third straight win in the diving pool.

Along with her 15-year-old partner Chen Roulin, Wang, who turned 16 on Monday, saw the hosts continue their dominance in the Water Cube's diving pool after victories in the men's synchronised 10m platform on Monday and the women's three-metre synchronised springboard on Sunday.

With short haircuts and baby-faced features, the two schoolgirls look barely old enough to be allowed out unaccompanied in China's capital city, let alone able to dominate an Olympic diving event.

"It is a very happy day for me, my friends gave me a lot of presents for my birthday and now my dive partner has given me friendship and a gold medal," said Wang.

The teenagers have their daily scheduled planned meticulously by coaches who have drilled them to treat every competition the same even an Olympics.

"We have a whole programme planned for us which includes what time we get up and when we train," said Wang.

"This is all decided by our coaches, we were told we shouldn't give too much focus on the Olympics, just treat it like any other competition and be relaxed."

But when the pair were asked by a Chinese journalist about their matching boy-like haircuts, Wang swiftly clarified their appearance for him.

"I can assure you, we are still girls," she replied sharply.

Despite their tender years, their technical diving dominated the field and continued China's bid for a clean-sweep as they now have three gold medals from the eight diving events.

Wang changed her name from the Chinese for 'weakness' recently, but the pair have forged into a strong partnership after barely a year together.

Chen won the gold at the 2007 World Championships in Melbourne with her former partner Jia Tong before teaming up with

Wang in 2007 and the duo have already won several titles including the World Cup in February this year.

Chinese divers have now dominated the women's synchronised 10m platform event since it was introduced at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

In Beijing, Wang and Chen led from the first of the five dives, building a huge lead to finish nearly 30 points ahead of silver medalists Briony Cole and Melissa Wu of Australia.

The Chinese claimed the gold with 363.54 points, Australia's Cole and Wu took silver with 335.16 and Mexico's Paola Espinosa and Tatiana Ortiz grabbed bronze with 330.06.

Having picked up a single perfect 10 score from the nine judges for both their first and second dives - the only two full-mark scores awarded in the competition - the Chinese were never threatened.

The Australian pair of Wu and Cole, who won silver in front of their home crowd at the 2007 World Championships, moved into second place after the third round and retained their grip on that position from there on in.

In love, and in sync

CHINA DAILY

They began their matches at the same time, had similar scorelines and finished their matches just two seconds apart.

The magic of love, indeed. China's top badminton couple Lin Dan and Xie Xingfang began their singles title quests in similar imperious fashion yesterday.

Both matches started minutes after 7pm, and both raced to early leads - Lin against Hong Kong's Ng Wei, and Xie against Belarus' Olga Konon.

The couple quickly finished their first games, both winning by 21-16.

In the second game, Lin got a little behind Xie at first, but caught up quickly.

They reached match points at the same time and wrapped up the match just two seconds apart, Lin taking out Ng 21-13 and Xie beating Konon 21-15.

While everyone at the courtside enjoyed this magic moment, Lin said he was too focused on his match to notice his girlfriend, who was practically meters away from him.

"No! No! I didn't know about her game," he waved away the question from reporters. "Oh, it was not who drew up the schedule! Ask the technical staff," said Xie, laughing.

Even their answers were identical.

FEDERATION CUP Remaining matches at BNS, Gazipur

SPORTS REPORTER

The Citycell Federation Cup will resume next Sunday at two venues, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) announced yesterday.

The second phase of the competition was postponed for a week due to incessant rain as the only venue -- the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS) -- became unplayable after ten matches.

After a meeting with the clubs, the BFF got the nod to use one more venue -- the Gazipur Stadium -- to avoid further delay. However, the top five B. League clubs will play their matches in the capital, confirmed tournament coordinator and BFF member Fazlur Rahman Babul.

"We will hold one match per day and the match in Dhaka will start at 6pm. The Gazipur match will kick off at 4.30pm," told Babul.

"We will provide logistic support to the clubs who will travel to Gazipur."

"All the clubs were present in the meeting and agreed to our propositions but they have refused to play the semifinals and the final after the Eidul Fitr. So these matches will be played during the month of Ramjan," added Babul.

Nafees out, Nazim in Tigers leave for Down Under tonight

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) was forced to make an eleventh hour change in the 15-member squad for the Australia tour as Shahriar Nafees opted out of the trip to focus on his studies.

Nazimuddin will now fly with the team tonight after midnight as the national selectors have decided to replace left-handed opening batsman Nafees, a BBA student of the Dhaka University, with the right-hander from Chittagong.

"I have already lost one and half years of my studies because of the busy international schedule. That's why I have decided to complete it this time. I am already three semesters behind from my classmates and I always give importance of my academic career," said Nafees, who made the request in a letter to the board yesterday.

"It was not an easy decision for me and I don't think I could have

taken the decision before the selection of the team. Actually it would be very difficult for me to complete my exam in future if I skip it this time because we have a number of series after the Australia tour," he replied when asked whether it was possible for him to take the decision earlier.

Chief selector Rafiqul Alam also emphasised on the academic career.

"I think it's very important for anybody to complete his academic exams. We have been informed that he opted out due to the sudden announcement of his university exam schedules. May be he could have requested it earlier to the board," said Rafiqul.

On the other hand, Nazimuddin was initially dropped from the squad as the selectors thought that he had got enough chance but failed to perform up to the mark.

"We have no choice other than picking up Nazimuddin. No other opener is available as Zunaed Siddiqui is also out of form. Also Nazim's performance in England with the A team was not that bad,"

explained Rafiq.

Mohammad Ashraful's men will play five practice matches before going into the three-match one-day series against the world's number one team.

Rafiq said that the team management will decide on Tamim Iqbal's opening partner after watching the performance of Mehrab Hossain and Nazimuddin in the warm ups.

"The selection is wide open now," said the former national cricketer.

The one-day matches are scheduled for August 30, September 3 and 6 in Darwin.

SQUAD

Mohammad Ashraful (captain), Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (vice-captain), Nazimuddin, Tamim Iqbal, Rokibul Hasan, Shakib Al Hasan, Alok Kapali, Dhiman Ghosh (wicketkeeper), Mahmudullah Riyad, Abdur Razzak, Shahadat Hossain, Forhad Reza, Mehrab Hossain, Nazmul Hossain and Dollar Mahmud.

One Mendis fells India

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

India, reflecting on their Test series loss to Sri Lanka, have reason to believe they were beaten not so much by their hosts as by unorthodox spinner Ajantha Mendis, who remained an unfathomable mystery.

The 23-year-old army officer badly bruised India's batting pride during his team's 2-1 victory in the series that ended here on Monday, capturing 26 wickets.

It was the best by any bowler in a debut three-Test series, surpassing Englishman Alec Bedser's 24-wicket haul against India at home in 1946.

Sri Lanka kept up non-stop pressure on the clueless Indian batsmen, with Mendis showcasing his variations from one end and wily veteran off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran (21 wickets) providing valuable support from the other.

In the event India choked

despite having quality middle-order batsmen in Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly and Venkatesh Laxman, who could manage just three half-centuries between them.

"Mendis was the main difference in the series. It was not easy to pick runs when Mendis and Murali are bowling together. The pressure they created made it tough for us," said Indian skipper Anil Kumble.

Mendis was in the news even before he had bowled his first ball in Test cricket, having done remarkably well in eight one-day internationals since making his debut in the West Indies early this year.

He destroyed India in the first match he played against them, grabbing six wickets for just 13 runs in a magical spell to fire his team to an emphatic victory in the Asia Cup final in Karachi last month.

Mendis is not a big turner of the ball like retired Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne or Muralidaran, but the key to his success is the way he grips the ball

with his fingers and flicks it to bowl a variety of deliveries.

"It's important to have someone like Mendis. He creates opportunities, adds pressure and picks up wickets," said Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene.

"He has surprised a lot of us. It's an advantage to have a guy like him to back Murali and (Chaminda) Vaas. That's where we had lacked somebody, that strike option apart from those two guys."

Mendis was instrumental in ruining the Indian batsmen's reputation for playing spin better than pace as he overshadowed even Muralidaran, the world's leading wicket-taker with 756 Test scalps.

Tendulkar, who was 172 short of breaking retired West Indies captain Brian Lara's world record of 11,953 Test runs before the series, could manage just 95 in six innings without a half-century.

Laxman impressed only in patches as he scored 215 runs, while Dravid made 148 and Ganguly 96.

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KP sets sights on Ashes

Cricket

AFP, London

New England captain Kevin Pietersen looked ahead to next year's Ashes series against Australia after his team beat South Africa by six wickets on the fifth day of the fourth and final Test at The Oval Monday.

"If we play like we played this week we're going to beat Australia," he said. But he warned: "It's going to take a lot to do it. This is a one-off, it's a very exciting stage, but the most important thing is to turn up to every Test match like we did this week."

Pietersen said a key was to get

the structure of the team right and make sure players knew their roles long before the Australians arrived. In the meantime there were tough tours coming up to India and the West Indies.

He said he wanted to continue with a policy of picking five bowlers, with all-rounder Andrew Flintoff at number six in the batting order.

"It's the way I definitely want to play cricket in the future," he said. Pietersen said the England players had been "brilliant" in the way they approached the Oval Test and he had special praise for recalled fast bowler Steve Harmison.

"He is huge for us. I'm definitely going to get the best out of Steve." He had even spoken to Harmison

about reconsidering his decision to retire from one-day international cricket.

South African captain Graeme Smith praised England for the way they had played but admitted that his team had not been on top of their game after clinching the series in the third Test at Edgbaston.

"The emotion we felt after Edgbaston was always going to be difficult to re-invent," he said. "We'd play well for an hour and then lose our way a bit. Even though we almost got ourselves back into the game a few times we were just lacking that oomph we had in the other games."

South Africa's 2-1 series win put them in second place in the official Test rankings behind Australia.

South Africa tour Australia at the end of the year and Smith said a successful tour there would be a

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CHAMPIONS TROPHY Rawalpindi excluded

AGENCIES, undated

Rawalpindi has been dropped as the third city for next month's Champions Trophy, according to a provisional International Cricket Council (ICC) schedule sent to member boards.

A copy of the schedule released to Reuters said the eight-nation tournament scheduled over September 12-28 will now be restricted to Lahore and Karachi.

The event was due to start on September 11, the anniversary of the devastating terrorist attacks on America in 2001.

ICC chief executive Haroon Lorgat told reporters on Monday that Rawalpindi might be dropped for security reasons because it had not been used during the Asia Cup.

"That didn't provide us with the opportunity to test the security arrangements. We will explore whether we would only use Karachi and Lahore," he said during a visit to Pakistan by an ICC task force.

Australia, India, Pakistan and West Indies will play in Group A and New Zealand, South Africa, England and Sri Lanka in Group B.



ICC chief executive Haroon Lorgat (L) and ICC taskforce personnel visit the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Monday.