

Monfils stuns Nadal

Tennis

AFP, Doha

Rafael Nadal made a miserable start to the first season he has ever begun as world number one, losing in the Qatar Open quarterfinals to Gael Monfils in less than an hour and a half on Thursday.

But although the Wimbledon, French Open and Olympic champion was not at his best, he certainly did enough to have survived against most other players apart from the superbly informed Monfils.

The 22-year-old Frenchman reminded everyone during his 6-4, 6-4 win that he was tipped as a future world number one himself and that he still has the speed of foot, the weight of shot, the passion, and enough time left to achieve that goal.

It did though raise questions as to whether or not Nadal - who was also beaten by Andy Murray in an exhibition tournament in Abu Dhabi on Sunday - might have had his off-season preparation affected by the troublesome knee injuries which caused him to miss the last two events of 2008.

But he insisted that he had no worries over his form.

"There's no damage to my confidence," said Nadal.

"I knew before the match that the beginning of the season was not going to be easy because, although I have had more rest than other players, I have also had more time outside of competition than others.

"So it is a little bit more difficult to come back fast to my rhythm. I have had two matches here and five altogether, so I leave here with positive feelings when I go to Australia."

Nadal began by trying to impose a few more attacking patterns on the rallies than usual, but was soon forced back into defence by Monfils's ability to make counter-attacks, often with sudden strident hits down the lines.

The Spaniard then settled into rhythms more similar to his clay court rallying from behind the baseline, mixed in with a few forays forward, and looked likely to prosper from the cumulative pressure as the scores remained level.

But though he started to have some success with this, he was often discomforted by the unexpectedness of Monfils' attacks, and played two indifferent games at the end of each set which cost him the match.

At the end, the world number 13 leapt with joy back on to the court to take the crowd's enthusiastic applause, while Nadal departed virtually unheralded.

"That feels fantastic," said Monfils, who now has a semifinal with Andy Roddick.

If he wins he will emulate his achievement of three years ago, when he reached the final here, playing a good match against Roger Federer.

Nadal's best moments came after he went a break down at 3-1 - the result of two outrageous down-the-line winners by Monfils - and was able to repair the damage with the help of an erratic game by Monfils.

The top seed then got to love-30 on Monfils service immediately afterwards and had he won either of the next two points might well have broken serve and gone on to win the first set.

But Monfils produced good first serve to set up a winning

forehand drive approach and then an ace.

He was then full of bounce and zest in the next game, finishing it with a powerful drive straight to Nadal's body as the Spaniard gambled at the net, eliciting a defensive volley into the net tape.

The second set saw Nadal played near to his best to avoid going 1-3 down again, but he never made headway against the forceful and well-placed Monfils serves, often choosing to receive the first serve from 12 feet back in order to get safely into the rallies.

A signal of the end came when, serving at 4-5, and with the court mostly open, Nadal put a drop shot into the net on the first point.

He then served a double fault on the second and made two forced errors from forehand topspin drives on the last two points, with Monfils attacking energetically.

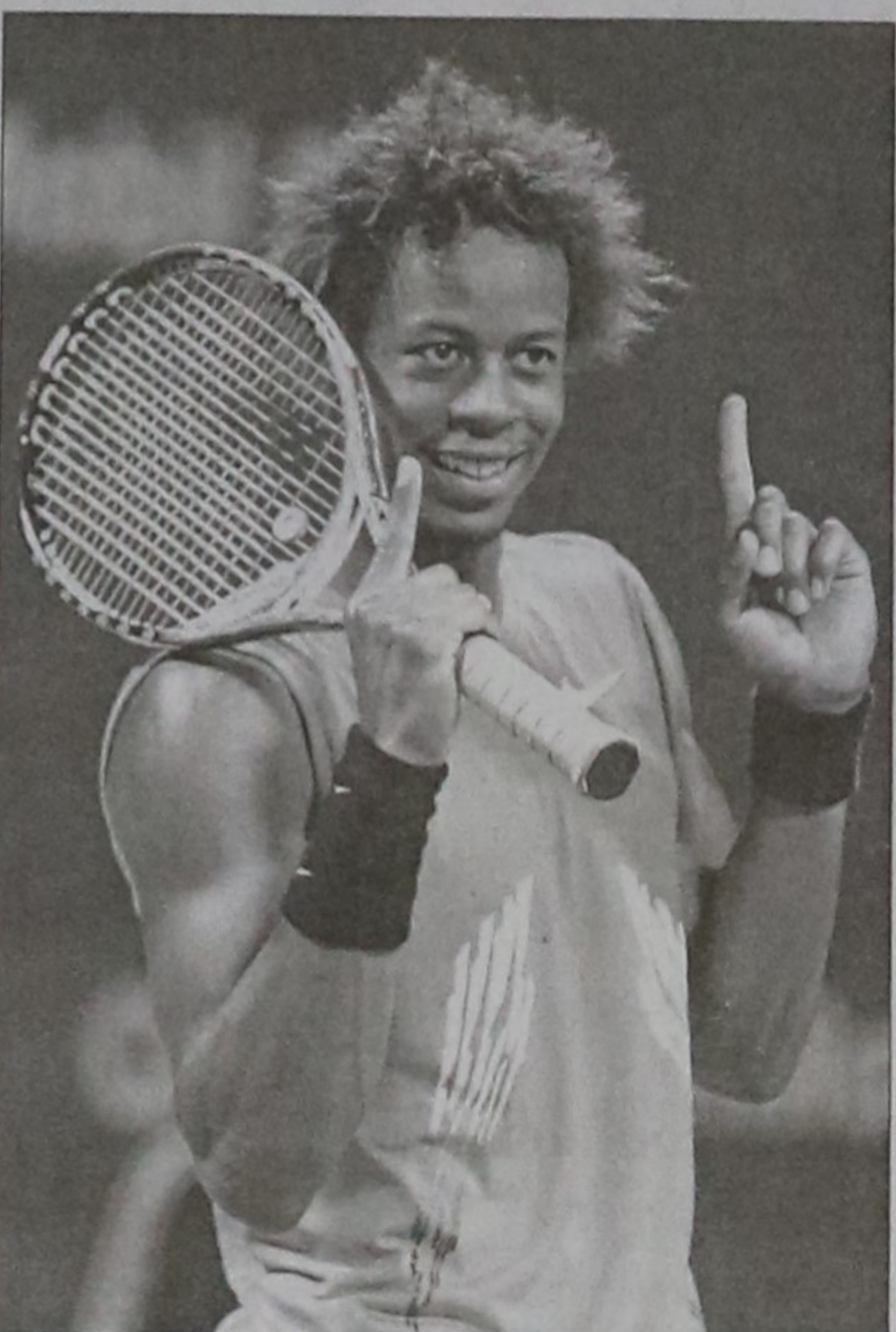


PHOTO: AFP

French starlet Gael Monfils is over the moon after defeating world number one Rafael Nadal of Spain during their Qatar Open quarterfinals in Doha on Thursday.

ITF U-14 TENNIS Team to leave for Malaysia today

SPORTS REPORTER

A five-member Bangladesh tennis team will leave Dhaka for Malaysia today to take part in the Group-2 competition of ITF Under-14 Asian Championships.

Sixteen teams will compete in the 12-day meet which begins today in Kuching, Sarawak.

GMG Airlines will sponsor the airfare of the team.

It can be mentioned that the players were prepared by coach Mazharul Islam Pimon, who died in a road accident on January 6. Rehana Begum Seema replaced the coach.

The squad: Rustam Ali, Jamil Bhuiyan, Esam Sami Laskar, Feruz Mobashwera and Rehana Begum Seema (coach).

'It all started in India'

PTI, London

The signs of a strained relationship between the then captain Kevin Pietersen and sacked coach Peter Moores were evident towards the end of the tour of India, England's new skipper Andrew Strauss revealed here today.

"Towards the back end of the India tour, there were signs that Kevin Pietersen and Peter Moores were not getting on well as they possibly could do," Strauss told newsmen here this evening, in his first interaction after taking over the captaincy reigns.

"When we returned to India to play the two Tests, we were concentrating on the two Test matches in two weeks after the Mumbai terror attacks. There were certain signs that indicated that their relations were strained," he said.

Asked whether he felt that the situation was so bad that both the captain and the coach had to go, Strauss said, "I have never been consulted on the issue. You need a captain and a coach in good working relationship and support each other." Describing Pietersen as a world-class quality player, Strauss said he has already spoken to him twice and he was quite supportive of him.

Rushed into the hot seat at a tumultuous time, Strauss said the timing was not ideal but he was confident and had full backing of his predecessor.

Strauss waits on dual role

CRICINFO, undated

Andrew Strauss could find out Friday whether he has been entrusted with the leadership of England's one-day team, having been unveiled as the new Test captain at a press conference at Lord's on Thursday.

Strauss was the standout choice to succeed Kevin Pietersen in the longer form of the game, but admitted that the situation regarding the one-day job remained "in a state of flux". He has not been a part of England's ODI set-up since being dropped during their ill-fated World Cup campaign in the Caribbean two years ago.

"Strauss hasn't played for a while but that's not to say he's not capable," England's national selector, Geoff Miller, told the BBC. "We've got to have the discussion, it's a difficult decision as there is no obvious case for who should be one-day captain."

In 78 ODIs to date, Strauss averages 31.98 with a strike-rate of 75.82 runs per hundred balls, which compares favourably to the record of his former captain, Michael Vaughan, who averaged 27.15 from 86 matches, with a strike-rate of 68.39, as well as the current ODI opener, Ian Bell, whose average (35.47) is higher, but whose strike rate (72.36) is lower. Strauss has two ODI centuries to his name, with a highest score of 152 against Bangladesh in 2005.

The other alternative would be to revert to the split captaincy format, with Paul Collingwood the likeliest choice to resume the role he relinquished in favour of Pietersen back in August.

Catch the Spirit

FROM PAGE 17 The Catch the Spirit activities in Bangladesh will include, free match access for selected school children, on-field cricket demonstration from young players, HIV/AIDS awareness-raising activities, catch the Spirit flag signing and stakeholder interaction.

No place for Hayden

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Matthew Hayden is clinging to his international career after being told he is not in Australia's limited-overs plans. Hayden, who had an awful Test summer of 149 runs at 16.55, was omitted as the selectors looked to players who could be part of the World Twenty20 in England in June and the 2011 World Cup.

Despite his poor returns since overcoming a long-term heel injury, Hayden has won team support to push on to the Ashes. However, Andrew Hilditch, the chairman of selectors, has softened his stance by refusing to say Hayden is a certainty for the series in South Africa starting next month.

"We are moving on," Hilditch said of the decision in Sydney. "There is no doubt our advance plans were for Matthew to go through to the Ashes. That would be our ideal outcome. We've got to sit down as a panel to make a decision whether it's still the way to go."

Hayden said he would take his time while deciding what to do next. "My immediate future is to go back home to my family and the people that love me the most and just enjoy this time, to take guard again," Hayden told the Australian. "It's been a pretty long last four months. I am going to take the time to get my mind around what the future does hold."

However, Hayden said he would play out the summer and would continue with Queensland. "When you are short of runs you have to start asking questions and they [the selectors] do that better than anyone," he said. "For my mind it's as simple as being committed to playing out the summer and then taking the time to either get back on the horse or make a decision not to. It's as clear cut as that."

Hilditch said Hayden was "not particularly happy" when told of his sacking. "I have no idea what he's going to do," Hilditch said. "My feeling is he will go and play for Queensland and make sure he gets on the South African tour."

Hayden scored 31 and 39 in the third Test victory and will have to wait until early February to learn whether he remains part of the five-day squad. Twenty20 engagements fit

most of domestic calendar this month but there is a round of Sheffield Shield games before the end will be finalised.

Hilditch dropping Hayden from the one-day squads not linked to his performances over the past months. "This would have been the decision whatever Matthew was doing in Test cricket," Hilditch said. "It's unfortunate for Matthew but it wasn't an easy thing to tell him."

The 1.0 of Hayden's 161 one-day matches came in final loss to India in the CB Series last March. Scored 6133 runs, with his best being the Australian record 181 against New Zealand in 2007, as a star of the following World Cup success, averaging 659 runs at 73.22. He was also part of the 2003 victory in South Africa.

Australia will play Twenty20 games against South Africa in Melbourne on Sunday and Brisbane on Tuesday before the five-match one-day international series begins at the MCG on Friday. David Warner, the New South Wales batsman has been called in to the squad while Ryan Harris, the Queensland allrounder, is another new face.

Michael Clarke will miss the shorter games due to a thumb injury to his right thumb, which sustained during the first Test in Perth. It is hopeful of being fit for the ODI campaign. Mitchell Johnson has been rested until the third CB Series fixture due to his heavy workload since the India tour.

Meanwhile, Western Australia wicketkeeper Luke Ronchi has joined Australia's squad for Sunday's Twenty20 international against South Africa at the MCG. Ronchi comes in as standby for first-choice wicketkeeper Brad Haddin, whose heavy workload is being monitored by the team management.

TWENTY20 SQUAD

Ricky Ponting (capt), Michael Hussey, David Hussey, Ben Hilfenhaus, James Hopes, Nathan Bracken, Brad Haddin (wk), Shaun Marsh, Shaun Tait, David Warner, Ryan Harris, Cameron White, Nathan Hauritz.

ONE-DAY SQUAD

Ricky Ponting (capt), Michael Clarke, Brad Haddin (wk), James Hopes, Nathan Bracken, Shaun Marsh, Michael Hussey, David Hussey, Nathan Hauritz, Ben Hilfenhaus, Cameron White, Shaun Tait, Peter Siddle.

No escape for Pietersen

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can't just go through his career taking people on," he said. "As England captain, you need savvy, to be streetwise and politically astute. You have to choose the right time to pick your fights, and this was not the right time."

Hussain said Pietersen had also erred by not cutting short his holiday.

"You can't just sit on safari in South Africa and issue ultimatums to the board about the England cricket captaincy. It is far too important for that."

Another former captain, Michael Atherton, said he had always expected Pietersen's reign to end in tears.

"Nobody has come out of this well," argued Atherton, now the cricket correspondent of The Times. "The ECB's judgment in appointing

Moore as quickly as they did will be questioned. So will Pietersen's judgment in how he has dealt with Moores."

Allan Lamb, like Pietersen a South Africa-born batsman who played for England, said the row had made English cricket look ridiculous.

"We are a laughing stock at the moment, we are a total shambles... and Pietersen is to blame for that."

Ex-England batsman Graham Thorpe said Pietersen's headstrong character had proved his downfall and questioned whether the batsman could continue to play for England.

"The way he has gone about this has been counter-productive, and he has presented England with a massive problem," Thorpe said.

"However good you are, you can't create this kind of

situation as people will start asking which side you are on - the team's or your own?"

There was greater sympathy for Pietersen from two of the legends of the English game, Ian Botham and Geoff Boycott.

Both said the "chainless wonders" at the ECB should be blamed "for the farce that has turned English cricket into a laughing stock."

Boycott said he would understand if Pietersen decided to turn his back on English cricket and take the money on offer in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

"The ECB knew what they were getting with KP, but he has put the executive committee's noses out of joint with his demands," Boycott said. "Their egos have got in the way of common sense. I wouldn't blame him if he played every year in the IPL."

Lanka to split Pakistan tour

AFP, Karachi

Sri Lanka's national cricket team will tour Pakistan in two segments, playing three one-dayers from January 18 and then returning in February for a two-Test series, a top official said Thursday.

Sri Lanka agreed to tour Pakistan after India cancelled a much-anticipated January-February series here due to simmering political tensions between the two countries over the Mumbai attacks.

"Sri Lanka Cricket has agreed to split the tour and they will be arriving on January 18 for three one-day internationals," Pakistan Cricket Board chief operating officer Salim Altaf told AFP.

The three one-dayers will be played in Karachi on January 21, in Lahore on January 24 and in Faisalabad on January 27.

Altaf said the Sri Lankan squad would then return to Pakistan in mid-February for two Tests in Karachi and Lahore.

"The final dates for the Tests will be announced later," Altaf said.

Sri Lanka's tour had come into question after the country's sports minister Gani Lokuje disbanded the interim national cricket board and sacked its chairman Arjuna Ranatunga.

But Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapakse later gave the green light for the tour, making the team the first to play a Test in Pakistan since South Africa played here in October 2007.

Australia postponed a tour of Pakistan in March last year citing security fears due to a wave of suicide attacks across the country.

Utseya

FROM PAGE 17 years ago and playing against Sri Lanka and the best spinners in the world have given us a lot of confidence," said the Zimbabwe skipper.

He was also excited with their performance in the lone three-day practice match which they won by 195 runs against the BCB-GP National Academy team in Bogra.

"The three-day match gave our batsmen the opportunity to spend some time at the wicket and get used to the conditions. I am happy with the preparations as the batsmen and the bowlers performed and it was especially good for some of the new players," he said. Utseya also believes that the wicket is total different in Mirpur from the one in Bogra.

"The wicket from what I have seen is a lot different from Bogra. The Bogra pitch had grass but here the grass has been cut. I expect the ball to skid on the bat here," he observed.

Smith puts off elbow surgery

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Graeme Smith, the South African captain, has decided to delay surgery for a tennis elbow injury until after the home series against Australia, beginning on February 26.

Smith returned home after the 2-1 Test series win in Australia because the elbow injury ruled him out of the following one-day contest. He will see a surgeon on Saturday to assess the problem and discuss treatment plans.

"I'll wait and see what he says. Actually I know what has to be done. My elbow will require an operation at some stage. The big problem is that the international schedule is very busy," Smith was quoted as saying on news24.co.za. "I will need 8-12 weeks to recover from the surgery and there has never been any time. As a result I'll keep on playing with the injury until it becomes unbearable," Smith said he will try to play a couple of local Twenty20 games to regain match-fitness.

Smith first suffered the injury during the Indian Premier League in April, where he was playing for the Rajasthan Royals, and it also forced him to miss the last three ODIs in England in August.

Smith has been getting his own blood injected into the tear in his elbow in order to ease the injury and will continue treatment in order to play against Australia. He also broke his hand after getting hit by a short ball during the third Test in Sydney. His estimated recovery time for that injury was six weeks.

Despite the broken hand and the tennis elbow, Smith walked out to bat at No. 11 with South Africa needing to negotiate 8.2 overs in order to draw the final Test. He batted through the pain but was the last man out with minutes left in the match.

South Africa's series victory was their first in Australia and Smith expected their opponents to regroup. "Australia are hurting, and they are going to come back hard at us," he said. "I imagine Stuart Clark will be back, and they always have a very strong batting line-up."

Brothers' costly draw

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Manju failed to meet the rebound.

Henry forced a fine save by Piru before Arambagh equalised on the stroke of half-time from a rare counter attack when Sayeed Hossain Surat toe-poked a high ball by Moudud from mid-pitch.

Brothers enjoyed superior ball possession throughout the entire second half but their forwards, including Kenyan substitute Nicodemus who has joined the Gopibagh giants from Arambagh during the mid-season transfer window, hurried their efforts.

Matiur Munna, however, came close to score in the 53rd minute but the national skipper failed to keep his backvolley

from six yards under the bar following a Liton corner.

Arambagh could have pulled off a stunner but young substitute Turjo, who broke the rival defence two minutes from time, delayed his shot to allow the opposition to recover. In the injury time, Brothers goalie Zia choked on a low drive by Nayan but no Arambagh player was near to take the rebound.

The dying moments saw a desperate Brothers rush the rival goal but Henry headed Munna's long centre over the bar while Abdullah Parvez shot a 20-yard freekick into the wall in the last shot of play.

TEAMS
BROTHERS: Zia, Shuvra, Ariful, Shakil, Zahid, Mishu,

Surprised Tait now eyes Tests

CRICINFO, undated

A surprised Shaun Tait has looked to the future after being picked in Australia's limited-overs squads by saying a return to Test action is "not out of the question". Tait has been hit by hamstring injuries this season, forcing him out of one-day and four-day games, but he said he was in good shape for the Twenty20 matches in Melbourne on Sunday and Brisbane on Tuesday.

"My body's the main factor for me," Tait said in the Australian. "It feels pretty good at the moment. If I can maintain it and bowl well then [Test selection is] not out of the question."

Tait, who was picked in the Twenty20 and one-day squads, had tendonitis and a slight tear in his hamstring in December, but he came back to take three wickets against New South Wales on Tuesday. Andrew Hilditch, the chairman of selectors, said Tait had gained a full medical clearance and felt it was better for him to be travelling with Australia than spending time on the domestic Twenty20 circuit.

Cameron White is another bowler to return to the national squad following four Tests against India last year, when the team tried to turn him in to a frontline spinner.

Rikto, Monwar, Liton (Parvez), Manju (Nicodemus) and Henry.

Arambagh: Piru, Tutul, Nadir, Akram, Shahjada, Moudud, Moloy, Kaba, Nayan, Tabith (Turjo) and Surat (Parvez).

TOP SCORERS

11 goals: Alfaz (Russel)
10 goals: Emily (Abahani), Emeka (Abahani)
9 goals: Bukola (Mohammedan), Idris (RMFS)
7 goals: Robin (Mohammedan)
6 goals: Henry (Brothers)
5 goals: Youness (Russel), Raphael (Ctg MSC), Sakawat Rony (Ctg Abahani)
4 goals: Enamul (Farashganj), Divine (Brothers), Nasir (Mohammedan), Mithun (Ctg Abahani)
3 goals: Mehdi (Khulna Abahani), Zahid (Brothers), Nicodemus (Arambagh), Johnson (Farashganj), Towhidul, Ridon (Ctg MSC), Monwar (Russel)
2 goals: Hapuz (MSC), Oniya, Manju, Tazem, Liton (Brothers), Kanchan (Muktijoddha), Ibrahim (Abahani), Nayan (Arambagh), Zakir, Francis (Rahmatganj), Tanvir (Khulna Abahani), Walid (Muktijoddha), Kabir (Farashganj), Bulbul, Omani, Mobarak (Russel)

POINTS TABLE								
Teams	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts	
Abahani	13	9	2	2	26	6	29	
Russel	13	8	3	2	28	13	27	
Brothers	13	7	5	1	22	11	26	
Mohammedan	12	7	4	1	26	7	25	
Ctg MSC	13	5	5	3	14	9	20	
Farashganj	12	4	4	4	12	13	17	
Rahmatganj	12	4	2	6	13	17	14	
Ctg Abahani	13	3	4	6	10	16	13	
Arambagh	13	2	5	6	10	17	11	
Muktijoddha	13	2	2	9	5	28	8	
Khulna Abahani	13	1	0	12	8	37	3	

Tigers cautiously

FROM PAGE 17 But we have now Nayeem Islam who showed his potential and I hope that it will not be a big problem," hoped the Bangladesh skipper.

In the just concluded Test series against Sri Lanka, the consistent failure of the top order batsmen and poor fielding was the real concern for the Bangladesh team and they have to overcome these problems if they want to show their mettle in the limited-over competition.

"It just putting more experienced players at the top. I am pretty confident that they will do the job. The Test team is a lot of different, a lot of new faces. They haven't played a lot of matches. I am confident our top four will do a lot better than we do in Test cricket," said Siddons expressing his optimism over his brittle top order batting.

"There is a concentration problem in Test cricket. Our guys don't do that well. We need to get better. In one-day cricket they should be switched on. It's only 50 overs,"

Both coach and captain said that they have to ensure their best performance in all three departments to win the match no matter who are the opponents.

"We need to bat well, bowl well and field well to win the match no matter who is the opponent," Ashraful said.

TEAMS

BANGLADESH (from): Tamim Iqbal, Zunaed Siddiqui, Mohammad Ashraful (captain), Rokibul Hassan, Shakib Al Hasan, Mehrab Hossain, Nayeem Islam, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Mahbul Alam, Nazmul Hossain, Rubel Hossain and Enamul Haque.

ZIMBABWE (from): Prosper Utseya (captain), Elton Chigumbura, Graeme Cremer, Keith Dabengwa, Hamilton Masakadza, Stuart Matsikenyeri, Christopher Mpofu, Tawanda Mupfema, Forster Mutizwa, Raymond Price, Edward Rainsford, Vusumuzi Sibanda, Tatenda Taibu (wicketkeeper), Malcolm Waller and Sean Williams.

Big names

FROM PAGE 17

form player in Mahmudullah Riyad while retaining most of the other players from last season. Surjo Tarun, who finished inside the top six last season, have confirmed that they have gone for Zunaed Siddiqui and Rajin Saleh from the pool while adding Anisur Rahman, Hannan Sarkar and Gazi Salahuddin. They have also retained Khaled Mashud it seems but were among those who lost top players to the ICL. Habibul Bashar and Mohammad Sharif.

Among the seventeen pool players, Tigers wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim has not decided on a club while Syed Rasel is out injured for almost another couple of months.

Teams like Victoria, City Club, last season's surprise package BKS, last-minute survivors Young Pegasus and newcomers Cricket Coaching School have gone for mid-level teams, according to sources.

The club transfers of the twelve Premier and twenty First Division clubs that begin at 3pm in the BCB offices of the Big Bowl today, will conclude on January 12.