

Time to move on and build on near glory

MOHAMMAD ISAM

After a tumultuous four weeks, the Sri Lankan team spent some quiet time yesterday at a private farm on the outskirts of Dhaka. A welcome break from the clamour of the Tests and particularly of the one-day tournament no doubt, when you consider what the islanders had to go through to have a statistically successful time in Bangladesh.

They whitewashed the hosts in the two-match Test series and lifted the Grameenphone Tri-nation Cup. On Friday Sri Lanka celebrated like they would have done had they won the World Cup final against Australia two years ago. Their pace attack in the shorter version looks settled without the experienced Chaminda Vaas and the emergence of Tillekeratne Dilshan as a Test match batsman must be a real boost. But in the space of 26 days, one of the powerhouses of world cricket was made to sweat, cringe and give up hope against Bangladesh.

To start with, their board president Arjuna Ranatunga lost his job and then a

week later, Mahela Jayawardene and company watched in awe as a bunch of youngsters chased the uncatchable. Nothing over 418 has ever been touched in the fourth innings but the Tigers went for broke. They fell short but any team who have 500-plus to chase in the fourth innings will look at how Bangladesh went for it: over by over, session by session. And they say we can't play Test cricket. But the inevitable had to happen in Chittagong. And why not? The Tigers' top-order looks like the who's who of Sisimpur viewers.

All the form batsmen in the country are picked nowadays which makes it tight in all. Mashrafe Bin Mortaza mans the pace attack on his own with cameos and short screams from Shahadat Hossain and Mahbubul Alam but on the flat, slow and uninspiring Chittagong wicket, nothing worked. What should have been a home advantage turned out to be a hoax as the wicket was slower than the roller that trends on it.

Bangladesh lost, Sri Lanka took the series and breathed easy.

Just when everything went to plan, Bangladesh lost to Zimbabwe. They were to blame of course. They gave away too many runs in the last seven overs, ran

themselves out and batted like millionaires. And they were given the treatment by all and sundry. Conveniently, the ICC were in town and were asked if they would snatch the Test status away from Bangladesh. They never said yes, to their credit, but as it happens: one win justifies the Test status while a loss wants to take it all away.

The Tigers did what was not expected of them. They beat Sri Lanka and turned the tables upside down. Shakib Al Hasan cut, drove, hacked and scooped his way to a brilliant, match-winning knock after Mashrafe inspired Rubel Hossain's four-wicket haul.

The Narail Express can now be called the Bangladesh Express. He takes wickets, saves follow-on targets, inspires the youngsters and makes everyone laugh in the process. You are not a Tiger until Mashrafe has scolded you. The glowing tribute from the visiting captain sums it up. In a world full of headline-grabbing 100 miles an hour pacemen, Mashrafe does everything that is actually needed from a pace spearhead. He has come a long way from the injuries and speed-gun hunting and if this form continues, he will

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PHOTO: STAR

Brothers Union striker Henry (L) bears down on goal during their B. League match against Muktijoddha at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.



The Boston Celtics have won 16 NBA Championships, more than any other team in the NBA.



Sir Alex Ferguson
(Man United manager)
"I find it hard to get my head around it to be honest. It's amazing but football is football and sometimes you get shocks and surprises and I think it's surprised everyone." On Manchester City's bid for AC Milan midfielder Kaka.



STAR Cricket
Australia v South Africa
Second ODI
Live from 5:00am
ESPN
English Premier League
West Ham v Fulham
Live at 7:25pm
Tottenham v Portsmouth
Live from 9:55pm
STAR Sports
Primera Liga
Almeria v Atletico Madrid
Live from 2:00am (Monday)



Citycell B. League
Abahani v Arambagh
Venue: Bangabandhu Natl Stadium
Time: 4:00pm

Siam takes the lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Ikramul Haque Siam maintained winning run in the 29th National Sub-Junior Chess Championships by winning

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Barisal nearly there

SPORTS REPORTER



Barisal started celebrating clinching the title of the 10th National Cricket League one-day competition when they managed a

three-run victory in the penultimate round against Chittagong at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The match ended in a chaos, which forced the issue to be settled through D/L method. With Barisal required to score three runs from last two balls, Abul Bashar hit Rezaul Karim towards third man but few spectators entered the ground, which then left no choice for the umpires to decide on D/L method as the scores were level on 260.

With the outcome, Barisal, who are also in advantageous position in head-to-head against their nearest rivals Rajshahi, raised their tally to 14 points and take on Dhaka in the last round on January 19 while Rajshahi, who defeated Sylhet by three wickets, followed them two points behind and meet Khulna in the last match.

Barisal began to celebrate in anticipation that even if they lost the final match and Rajshahi won against Khulna, they still would be champions by virtue of the head-to-head

advantage. However, the question remained what if the run-rate came into deciding the winners. The Bangladesh Cricket Board officials concerned last night could not confirm on which basis the title would be decided.

In the day's other match, Khulna registered a five-wicket victory against bottom-side Dhaka.

BARISAL-CHITTAGONG

Rony Talukdar and Imran Ahmed got off a good start in reply to Chittagong's challenging total of 260 as the pair added 45 runs in the opening stand and then Nasir Hossain and Raisul Islam struck half-centuries to steady the ship.

But it was Abul Bashar's unbeaten cameo knock of a 37-ball 39 that ensured Barisal's seventh success in nine matches. Bashar earlier also took two wickets for 31 runs in 6 overs to be adjudged man of the match.

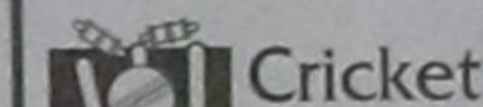
Barisal scored 260 for 8 in 49.4 overs before a few spectators entered into the ground to stop the match.

Chittagong rode on Arman Hossain's 53 and number eight Sajjadul Haq's quickfire 24-ball 31 to put up a fighting total of 260 for eight in stipulated 50 overs.

Arman made 53 off 88 deliveries that saw three fours and a six while another opener

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Aussies under pressure Second ODI against SA today



CRICINFO, undated

A committed South African chase provided serious excitement at the start of the five-game series against Australia as the visitors sneaked to a three-wicket success in Melbourne on Friday. After the home side posted a confident 271 for eight, Johan Botha's men recovered from being 90 for three and 221 for seven to end their sequence of three defeats in a row.

If the Proteas win the second one-day international in Hobart today it will leave Australia needing to take the final matches to claim the series. Australia have threatened their opponents regularly during the home summer, but the number of times they have let them escape has become a major concern. Ricky Ponting's men have to eliminate those crucial lapses if they want to be a high-performing outfit.

22-year-old opener David Warner is back after leaving the team briefly when Michael Clarke was passed fit prematurely from a nagging thumb injury. Warner, who has played two Twenty20s and no first-class matches, will open with Shaun Marsh, allowing Michael Hussey to head back to the middle-order. Off-spinner Nathan Hauritz has travelled the country with the team over the past week without playing, but is likely to get an opportunity at the Bellerive Oval, where Tasmania have used three spinners at times this season. James Hopes, who had 51 for nought off 10 overs in Melbourne, looks like the vulnerable one.

Dale Steyn seemed to have some problems with a shoulder while fielding in Melbourne and the South Africans are intent on rotating their bowlers, so it won't take much for Steyn to go and Makhaya Ntini to come in. AB de Villiers is still waiting to return from his bruised hip and if he is cleared Vaughn van Jaarsveld -- he dropped two catches, took one and was run out for 4 on debut -- could make way. Neil McKenzie, who played his first ODI for five years, would normally be squeezed out, but he showed some form with a valuable 63.

Ponting heads back to his home state knowing he needs

a big performance to show his fresh team how to recover from tight defeats. Ponting now lives in Sydney, but he remains a huge figure in Hobart and has 208 runs in six ODIs at the ground. Following a difficult summer in the Test team, he now faces another tricky encounter against a formidable opponent.

Albie Morkel, the older brother of Morkel, stole the match -- and the show -- from Australia in Melbourne with a calm and brutal 40 from 18 deliveries. Hitting confidently straight down the ground, he also worked the strike and was unflustered as he and Botha sealed the win. A man who can

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PHOTO: INTERNET

South Africa fast bowler Makhaya Ntini (L) shares a light moment with teammate Lonwabo Tsotsobe during a training session at the Bellerive Oval in Hobart yesterday.

WOMEN'S NCL Rajshahi, Khulna win

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi managed a one-run win over Barisal while Khulna beat Chittagong by six wickets in the Women's National Cricket League yesterday.

Batting first, bottom of the table Barisal bowled out Rajshahi for just 129 with seamer Fahima taking six wickets. Rajshahi were lucky to win as they conceded 50 extras when they bowled but successfully defended the small total, bowling out Barisal for 128 in the 50th over.

In the other match, Khulna (118-4) rode on Salma's 56 to beat Chittagong (117).

Clarke to miss rest of SA series

BBC ONLINE, undated

Australia batsman Michael Clarke will miss the rest of their one-day international series with South Africa, in order to rest his injured thumb.

Clarke played through the pain to score 19 and take 1-29 in Friday's first one-dayer, which the Proteas narrowly won.

He aims to return when the ODI series with New Zealand begins on February 1.

David Warner, who stood in for Clarke during both Twenty20 internationals, has been called up for Sunday's second ODI against South Africa in Hobart.

Team physio Alex Kountouris explained: "When Michael arrived in Melbourne on Wednesday, it was evident that after one week's rest he

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Brothers struggle to a draw

SPORTS REPORTER



Citycell B. LEAGUE

Brothers Union were virtually out of the B League title race after they were held to a goalless draw by relegation-bound Muktijoddha Sangsad Krira Chakra at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The Gopibagh outfit failed to bounce back from their shocking 3-1 defeat at the hands of Mohammedan Sporting Club in the previous match as they even went out of business against ten-men Muktijoddha.

With the day's outcome, Brothers Union stayed in fourth place in the league table by securing 27 points from 15 matches while Abahani Limited dominated the table with 32 points and Sheikh Russel followed them with 30 and Dhaka Mohammedan at 28.

Muktijoddha played the last 35 minutes with ten players when Walid Khan got the marching orders after receiving his second yellow card but still Brothers failed to break the deadlock to keep their hopes alive in the title race.

On the other hand struggling Muktijoddha

Sangsad faces relegation with nine points from 14 matches, just ahead of Khulna Abahani which bagged only three points from 15 outings.

It was however Muktijoddha's Nigerian goalkeeper James Paul who foiled several attempts of their opponents.

The first half was evenly poised as both the teams created few chances.

In the early fifth minute, Paul brilliantly punched away a Zahid Hossain's shot while in the 20th minute Muktijoddha got their first opportunity to take the lead but onrushing Kanchan's shot deflected from the crosspiece.

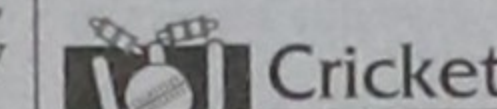
After the breather Muktijoddha took a defensive strategy once they lost Walid who was shown the red card for fouling defender Shuvro but Brothers could not find their rhythm to secure full points.

Nigerian Henry Quae headed on a Shakil cross but once again James Paul made a diving save to bring the frustration in the Brothers tent while the custodian also foiled another attempt from Zahid in the 71st minute.

League leaders Dhaka Abahani meet with Arambagh Krira Sangha in today's match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

India may stick to winning unit

Tour of Sri Lanka



CRICINFO, undated

As the selectors prepare to pick the Indian team for their first assignment in 2009 -- five one-day internationals and a Twenty20 in Sri Lanka -- they know that they do not need to make many changes to an ODI outfit which has had a fine year under Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

They recovered from the occasional bump, in the Bangladesh tri-series and the Asia Cup, to win in Sri Lanka -- after the Test team was mauled -- and entertained thoughts of a 7-0 win over England before the terror attacks in Mumbai cut short the series. The highlight of

the year, though, was the first ODI assignment of 2008 -- the tri-series win in Australia.

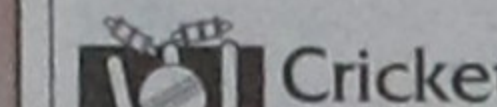
The two big questions are whether the performers in the Ranji Trophy will get a look-in, and whether the selectors will look at this series as an opportunity to test the form and fitness of players who could be important for the full tour of New Zealand in March.

Even if the answers to both questions are affirmative, the winning combination will not be tampered with too much. India last played international cricket on December 23, so the chances of resting key players are remote.

If one eye is already on the New Zealand tour, it could be worth testing Sreesanth's form and fitness in Sri Lanka. He played only one

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Keeping No. 1 place is tougher: Sehwag



CRICINFO, undated

As the race to become the No. 1 Test team heats up, Virender Sehwag -- who on Friday won the Cricinfo's Test Batting Performance of the Year award in a ceremony in Delhi -- believes it is going to be no easy task for India or South Africa to knock Australia off the top spot.

"I think it's going to be difficult to become the number one side because we still have Australia and South Africa ahead of us. And as the saying goes, sustaining your place at the top is always more difficult than reaching there," Sehwag said. "As of now, if we win the series against New Zealand, we might have a chance to become the number one. But once you get there, you have to make sure that you don't lose a match and a series. So it will be quite difficult to sustain. But we are ready for the challenge."

Sehwag, who won his award for the

unbeaten 201 against Sri Lanka last year, said though he had scored two triple-centuries in his Test career, he would rate the particular innings in Galle as his best.

"So many people ask me which one is my best knock and I point to this one. I carried my bat through to emulate Sunil Gavaskar", he said. "Both my triple centuries in Pakistan and Chennai came on good tracks and I could feel on both occasions that the opposition simply didn't have it in them to get me out. But here we were losing wickets regularly and still I managed to stay not out."

On that occasion, he was facing Sri Lanka's spin duo of Muttiah Muralidaran and Ajantha Mendis, and he said the former proved to be the bigger threat, even as the other batsmen struggled against Mendis. "To be honest, during the Sri Lanka tour, I was more worried about Murali and his doosra," he said.

"During that knock, I was picking Mendis' deliveries off the hand and got to know which

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