



Did U Know?

Algeria -- who won the gold medal at the 2007 Pan African Games -- is the first Arab volleyball team to participate in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.



Serena Williams

(American tennis star)
"I'm glad to be number one again and hopefully I can hold onto it this time."
After reclaiming the top place with victory in the Australian Open.



NEO Cricket

Sri Lanka v India
Third ODI
Live from 3:00pm
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm



Citycell B. League
Muktijoddha v Rahmatganj
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka
Time: 4:30pm

VDP, Ansars zonal champs

SPORTS REPORTER

Amraching Barma slammed a hat-trick as Bangladesh Ansars became zonal champions in the First Citycell National Women's Football Championship with a 6-0 victory over hosts Rangamati in the Kaptai zone final yesterday.

Kabina Chakma, Sui Nu Marma and Nubai Ching Marma netted one each for the winners.

Both teams qualified for the final round.

VDP emerged Brahmaputra zone champions when they beat Narayanang 1-0 at the Jamalpur Stadium. Salma netted the match-winning goal in the 64th minute.

Both VDP and Narayanang moved into the finals.

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BOA to honour sponsors

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) will accord a reception today to its sponsors and the organisations who have supported the sports federations in recent time.

BOA president and Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed will be present at the reception to be held at the NSCTower at 11am.

The 36 corporate houses who have provided about Tk 20 lakh to BOA and the 20 banks that have endorsed about Tk 3.5 crore to the federations, will be honoured on the occasion, informed BOA.

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Abahani almost there

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani remained on course for their second successive B. League title when they crushed Brothers Union 3-0 yesterday to take an unassailable lead in the points table.

Emeka Christian struck a brace and Abul Hossain scored his second league goal as the defending champions also took sweet revenge of a 2-0 defeat to Brothers in the first leg.

Amalesh Sen's league leaders now have 44 points after 14 wins from 18 games and they need just one point from their last two games to seal the championship.

Even if the Sky-Blues lose both their matches, they would remain atop and set play-offs for the title, only if nearest rivals Sheikh Russel and Mohammedan -- now trailing by nine points -- win their remaining three matches.

The match between the table-toppers and the fourth-placed side at the Bangabandhu National Stadium attracted a very scanty crowd but Abahani began brighter against the Oranges, who failed to keep their promise to put the fellow giants to the test.

Abahani won four corners in the first ten minutes and Nigerian midfielder Emeka, now joint top scorer with Russel's Alfaz, came close twice to open the scoring. However, the 14-goal

marksman failed to control a centre by Emily inside the box and saw his scorching first-time volley on an Ibrahim cross shielded by rival defender Mishu from the face of the goal.

Brothers, who have now suffered their third loss to remain on 28 points, raised hopes from a counter attack by Aurup at the right wing but Abahani's Ghanaian centre-back Samad cleared the low cross for a corner before it could reach a rushing Henry Quaye.

Emeka was then denied by Zia's superb save at the near post on the half hour after the Nigerian headed Ibrahim's looping cross from close.

The pressure told in the 35th minute with the indefatigable Ibrahim initiating the move in the middle. The Ghanaian lost possession but won it back to send the ball to Waly Faisal, who escaped down the left, crossed the ball waist high for Emeka to storm into the box with long strides and stab a header into the far post.

Abahani went into the break with a two-goal cushion as Abul beat an offside trap, latched on to a through by Ibrahim down the middle and drove a right-footer into the roof of the net from 15 yards in the stoppage time. It was the midfielder's first goal of the league at their home ground after he had scored against Farashganj in Narshingdi in their second match.

With the championship bout against Russel just three days away, the Sky-Blues did not push hard for a third goal and coach Amalesh pulled

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PHOTO: STAR

Abahani's Nigerian midfielder Emeka shoots past Brothers goalkeeper Shakil (C) for his second goal as Joy (L) looks on during their Citycell B. League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Lanka must win today

India want the series now

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene is looking for a consistent all-round performance from his team in the crucial third one-day international against India here on Tuesday.

It is a must-win tie after the home team lost the first two games of the five-match series but Jayawardene said his side were capable of raising their performance.

"We have been in this situation before. You don't have to tell the boys (to raise performance) because they understand the situation. They understand the mistakes they had made," Jayawardene told reporters on Monday.

"We have to be a bit more consistent with our all-round game. That's one area we have to focus on, especially when you are playing against a good team. You can't keep making mistakes."

The Sri Lankan captain said his team needed to put more pressure on in-form India who had

won their last seven one-dayers, including five against England at home last year.

"Their confidence is pretty high because they have been consistent in the last six months. That's something probably where we lack. If we put more pressure on them, I think we can ask them a few questions," he said.

"We know that if we lose this match, we lose the series. The next three games are very crucial for us."

Jayawardene hoped his openers would give a solid start, especially Tillakaratne Dilshan who had managed just eight runs in two matches.

"Both the openers (Sanath Jayasuriya and Dilshan) are capable of batting according to the situation," he said.

"Dilshan went for a few shots which did not come off, but at the same time he can bat for a long period and can get a big hundred which he showed in Pakistan. We know the talent they have got."

Dilshan smashed a career-best 137 not out in Lahore last month to help his side win a

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PHOTO: AFP

Indian stalwarts Sachin Tendulkar (L) and Virender Sehwag brush up on their slip catching during a training session at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

Phelps sorry for pot

Swimming

NEW YORK TIMES

The Olympic swimming star Michael Phelps quickly acknowledged his poor judgment after a photograph showing him inhaling from a marijuana pipe was published Sunday in a British newspaper. Although his admission is unlikely to affect his swimming eligibility, it could affect the millions of dollars he has secured in endorsement deals.

In a statement released Sunday by his marketing agency, Octagon, Phelps, who won a record eight gold medals at the Beijing Olympics, did not challenge the legitimacy of the photograph published by the tabloid News of the World.

"I engaged in behaviour which was regrettable and demonstrated bad judgment," Phelps said. "I'm 23 years old and despite the successes I've had in the pool, I acted in a youthful and inappropriate way, not in a manner people have come to expect from me. For this, I am sorry. I promise my fans and the public it will not happen again."

This is not the first time Phelps has been compelled to

issue a public apology for his behaviour. In 2004, a few months removed from winning six gold medals and two silvers at the Athens Olympics, Phelps, then 19, pleaded guilty to a drunken driving charge.

But the stakes are higher now. Phelps was honoured as the Associated Press male athlete of the year in 2008 for his performance in Beijing, where he broke Mark Spitz's 36-year-old record for most

gold medals in an Olympics.

In a statement, the United States Olympic Committee said it was "disappointed in the behaviour recently exhibited by Michael Phelps," describing him as a role model who was "well aware of the responsibilities and accountability that come with setting a positive example for others, particularly young people."

In May 1998, Gary Hall Jr., a

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MICHAEL PHELPS

Div I T20

Khelaghar clinch title

SPORTS REPORTER

Khelaghar won a last-ball thriller against Kalabagan to clinch the inaugural First Division Twenty20 cricket trophy at the Dhanmendi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

In the low-scoring final, Aslam Ali guided Khelaghar with an all-round performance during a four-wicket victory when he followed up his 2-8 with a match-winning unbeaten 49 off 58 balls that featured two sixes and a four.

Needing seven runs off the last over, Apurba Roy held his nerve with the ball to contain Aslam for the first two deliveries but six runs came from the next three and Aslam steered to third man in the last ball to seal victory.

Earlier, Khelaghar put their opponents to bat first and Shawon gave a perfect start by removing two openers with the scoreboard reading 26 runs. Kalabagan failed to recover from the early hiccup and were bundled out for 90 in 18.3 overs.

Enamul Haque was the other successful bowler with two for 21.

The highest 18 runs came from number eight Shehab Ahmed.

In reply, Khelaghar also made a poor start when they lost three wickets for 20 but a 36-run fourth wicket partnership between Aslam and Zakaria consolidated their position.

Zakaria made 18 off 21 balls with the help of two boundaries.

BRIEF SCORES

KALABAGAN: 90 all out in 18.3 overs (Imteazur 12, Kalim 13, Shehab 18, extras 7; Shawon 2-15, Enamul 2-21, Aslam 2-8).

KHELAGHAR: 91-6 in 20 overs (Aslam 49 not out, Zakaria 18, extras 5; Shehab 2-11, Rokibul 2-11).

Result: Khelaghar won by four wickets.

Balaji's return

AFP, New Delhi

Seamer Lakshminipathy Balaji was on Monday drafted into the Indian team for the rest of the Sri Lanka tour, marking the bowler's return to international cricket after nearly four years.

Balaji, 27, will replace seamer Munaf Patel, who is suffering from a groin injury, for the remaining three one-day matches and a Twenty20 international, the Indian cricket board said in a statement.

Balaji last played for India in a one-day match against Sri Lanka in August 2005, before his career was interrupted by a stress fracture in his back.

The right-arm seamer returned to domestic cricket this season and bowled well enough to force the selectors to recall him as Patel's replacement.

Patel will return home for rehabilitation and is expected to be out of action for seven to 10 days, the statement said.

Balaji, who made his India

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Premier T20 semis today

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful and his deputy Mashrafe Bin Mortaza lock horns today when the first semifinal of the Premier Division Twenty20 tournament takes place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Ashraful will face a tough task against his national team sidekick when his side Gazi Tank meet defending champions Abahani, who stormed into the last four with an unbeaten note, in the first semifinal starting at 9:30am.

The second semifinal between Biman and Mohammedan starts at the same venue from 1:30pm.

The tournament so far failed to produce any real flavour of the latest version of the game due to lack of run riots in the group stage but both Ashraful and Mashrafe hoped there would be fireworks today.

"Hope it would be a good match. Abahani have been playing good and are unbeaten but we also played some impressive cricket on way to semis. We lost only one match against Biman but it was because of poor fielding, so we are looking forward to reach the final," said Ashraful, who returned among runs in the tournament after poor showing in the international scene.

"I think there have been not enough runs because of the pitch. The pitch here is slow and the ball comes slow. I think the wicket should be much better for Twenty20 cricket where batsmen can go for the kill," he observed.

Abahani skipper and pace spearhead Mashrafe was also looking for a good game and he was confident about his team's chances to make the final pairing.

"It's just another match and we need to play our normal game to continue the winning run. I think it would be a good game as Gazi Tank also have some good players," said Mashrafe.

Dashing opener Tamim Iqbal failed to play a single match due to illness while pacer Nazmul Hossain has been diagnosed with typhoid but Mashrafe believed that they have very strong back-up players.

"We are a very balanced side and there are back-ups in the squad, so we are little concerned about injuries," he added.

In the second game, Biman will definitely pin their hopes on their star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who is now in top form and the good news was that the world number one all-rounder is fit again.

"I have been suffering from a groin problem but it's not serious. I'm enjoying the game and hope I play my natural game tomorrow to take the team into final," said the star all-rounder.

Mohammedan, so far unimpressive, must stop this all-rounder if they want to progress into the tomorrow's final at the same venue.

Pak govt bars IPL-ers

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Pakistan has barred its players from participating in the Indian Premier League (IPL) after its foreign ministry deemed it was unsafe for the cricketers to travel to India in the wake of the November terrorist attacks in Mumbai.

"We have been informed by the foreign ministry today [Monday] that the situation is not conducive for Pakistan cricketers to travel to India," Sports Minister Aftab Jilani told the Associated Press. The sports ministry had last week given clearance to the players to participate in the Indian Twenty20 league, while informing them that their security would be their own and their IPL franchise's responsibility.

"We [the sports ministry] had given the NOC, but the final decision was up to the government," Jilani said. "Ever since these attacks [in Mumbai] the situation has got tense and even Pakistani artists are facing problems in India."

Pakistan's top players, including Younis Khan, Shoaib Malik, Shahid Afridi, Shoaib Akhtar, Sohail Tanvir and Umar Gul, are contracted to various franchises in the league. "All the players who are already signed up with the IPL teams or those who were due to take part in the players auction have been declined permis-

sion," Saleem Altaf, the PCB chief executive, told PTI. Altaf said an email had been sent to the IPL about the ministry's decision.

With bilateral relations between the neighbours at a low, franchises had indicated they might trade their Pakistan players during the IPL's one-month-long trading window, which closed last month. No Pakistan players, though, were sold during the window. However, if they are unable to participate in this year's tournament due to government restrictions, they will have to forego their salaries for this season.

Five players -- Yasir Hameed, Yasir Arafat, Asim Kamal, Danish Kaneria and Mohammad Hafeez -- had also been included in the IPL's list for the auction before the second season, scheduled for February 6. Lalit Modi, the IPL commissioner, said their names would be withdrawn. "The Pakistan government has decided to inform us, through the Pakistan Cricket Board, no Pakistan player will be allowed to play in this year's IPL," Modi said. "There were five players on the [auction] list but we have removed them."

The two franchises most affected by the absence of Pakistan players will be Kolkata Knight Riders and Rajasthan Royals -- both have three on their rosters. Joy Bhattacharya, Kolkata's team director, said they will seek more options from the IPL to counter the development. Bhattacharya said they had already accounted the limited availability of Pakistan

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PHOTO: STAR

The Pakistan women's cricket team pose for photos after arriving at the ZIA International Airport in Dhaka yesterday. The Pakistani women are on a two-week tour of the country to take part in a tri-nation tournament involving Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.