

Revamped NCL all set

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Cricket League (NCL), country's lone first-class competition, will start from January 1 under a new format.

Rajshahi will face Sylhet at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium while Khulna will meet Dhaka at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi. Barisal take on Chittagong at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra in the opening day's four-day fixtures.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) made wholesale changes with a target to make the competition more competitive within a reasonable expenditure as the number of matches has been reduced.

The most significant changes is that the NCL has shifted from league format to a cup format with top two finishers in terms of accumulated points playing in a final match, which will be a five-day affair, to determine the championship. There

will also be no home and away basis competition.

In the first phase, six divisional teams will play each other on a single league basis with each team getting only five four-day matches and all the matches will be held at neutral venues and then top four teams will qualify for the second phase.

Four top divisional teams will play each other in the second phase on a single league basis with each team getting three four-day matches and points from the first phase will be carried over to the second phase.

"We have brought the changes with an eye on making the competition more competitive and we want to see how it goes. We have had certain issues in our mind before bringing the changes to the format. What we felt is that in this format there will be the competitiveness amongst the players as well as the teams to go into the next round and play in the final," explained BCB's tournament committee chairman Gazi Ashraf Hossain yesterday.

"From the last few years we saw that fatigue set in towards the end of the tour-

nament among the players because of the long duration and some matches were played without any purpose. But we believe that things will be different under this new format," he added.

"And what we felt that our players didn't get enough rest which is not good for a player's fitness. We had to look at our international calendar also because our 'A' team and academy team have some tours from August and more or less same players are playing for the teams. And they have got the opportunity to play the longer-version matches. And what we believe is that it could be a perfect stage for the players to perform well in the league to enter into the 'A' team and Academy team," said Ashraf.

The former national skipper however said that they had to change the home and away basis league because of a shortage of the venues as there are a number of international schedules for the international venues in the coming months.

Ashraf also said that they had to interfere slightly in team selection because of

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4TH ODI TODAY India seek to seal series

PTI, Kolkata

India's batting may have lost some sheen in the absence of Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Yuvraj Singh but the hosts still have enough firepower as they go into the fourth cricket one-dayer against Sri Lanka at the Eden Gardens here on Thursday hoping to wrap up the series by taking an unsailable 3-1 lead.

The hosts were already missing regular skipper Dhoni due to a ban imposed on him, and were dealt a blow when the dangerous Yuvraj Singh was also ruled out of the series due to a recurring finger injury.

The Lankans, who have also been hit hard by a spate of injuries, will be desperate to level the series in what promises to be a keen contest at the historic Eden Gardens.

Even though India have a decent batting order, a good start at the top will be imperative for them to do well in tomorrow's flood-lit encounter.

Fahima lifts silver

SPORTS REPORTER

Weightlifter Fahima Akther bagged a silver medal in the 16th Asian Junior Weightlifting Championship in Dubai on Tuesday.

Fahima lifted overall 155 kgs in the 63kg category to finish behind a Chinese weightlifter, said Bangladesh Weightlifting Federation general secretary Mohiuddin Ahmed.

Ricky's run against time

CRICINFO, undated

Ricky Ponting's teammates are confident he will lead the team in the Boxing Day Test, despite his failure to bat in the nets at the MCG on Wednesday. Ponting put in a vigorous performance in a fielding drill, diving and showing no serious signs of the tendon injury near his elbow, but a decision on his fitness might not be made until Christmas Day.

The New South Wales opener Phillip Hughes is with the squad in case Ponting does not recover from the blow delivered by Kemar Roach at the WACA. However, Simon Katich said that with two more days of recovery time, he was not expecting Ponting to miss his first Test since 2004.

"Knowing how tough Ricky is, I'd be very surprised if he doesn't play," Katich said. "He's going to the [hyperbaric]

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Bond's bye to Tests

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

Dynamic but injury-prone New Zealand fast bowler Shane Bond announced his retirement from Test cricket Wednesday, saying his body was no longer up to the rigours of the five-day game.

"It's been a tough call, because Test cricket remains the ultimate form of the game, but I'm comfortable I've made the right choice," the 34-year-old said.

Bond's latest comeback in the Test series against Pakistan ended after the first Test -- in which he took eight wickets -- when an abdominal muscle tear ruled him out of the

remaining two matches.

"I've worked really hard to get back to Test match fitness - it's what I've been working towards for the past two years - and I feel I gave as much as I could," Bond said.

"But looking back, so many of my injuries have come during Test cricket."

"Unfortunately my body just won't let me continue to play at that level, given the workload and demands of Test cricket."

Bond played only 18 Tests after his debut in 2001 because of a series of injuries and his involvement last year in the rebel Indian Cricket League.

But his pace and swing brought him 87 Test wickets at the impressive average of 22.09. He took five wickets in an innings on five occasions, the most recent against Pakistan in Dunedin last month after his two-year Test absence.

Bond said he remained committed to playing one-day internationals for New Zealand.

"This way I hope I've got a better chance of continuing to play. I hope I'll be able to continue to contribute to the team and to New Zealand cricket fans for a while yet."

He is aiming to rejoin New Zealand for the limited-overs matches against Australia, which start with two Twenty20 internationals in late February.

New Zealand Cricket chief executive Justin Vaughan said he understood Bond's decision.

"Of course we're disappointed that he won't be part of the Test line-up, but New Zealand Cricket supports his decision to focus on limited-overs cricket and hopes that

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PHOTO: AFP

A file photo of New Zealand speedster Shane Bond shows him celebrating the dismissal of Ramnaresh Sarwan of West Indies in 2006. Test cricket will be poorer as Bond yesterday announced his retirement from the longer version of the game.

Sami off to Australia

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistani paceman Mohammad Sami justified his recall with a burst of six wickets in the final of the country's premier tournament Wednesday, but former captain Younus Khan struggled to impress.

Sami, 28, has been summoned as a replacement to complement Pakistan's pace attack for the Test series against Australia, and finished with 6-38 to help the Karachi Blues win the first class Quaid-e-Azam Trophy title.

Sami flew to Australia later Wednesday for the first of three Tests starting in Melbourne from Saturday, and was upbeat about his

comeback.

"I am confident my recent form will help me in Australia and from there I am able to revive my career," said Sami, who played the last of his 33 Tests at Bangalore against India two years ago.

"We have a very good side and if we play to our potential then we can give a tough fight to Australia and also have the capability to beat them on their grounds," he added.

Sami had joined the unofficial Indian Cricket League and was banned from all forms of cricket by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) in early 2008.

Earlier this year, Sami and all other ICL players were pardoned by the PCB after they presented no-objection certificates from the league, enabling them to stage a comeback at international

level.

"Fast bowlers can excel in Australia provided they stick to the basics and I have played there before in 2004 so I know how to bowl there," said Sami, who joins Mohammad Asif, Umar Gul, Mohammad Amir and Abdur Rauf in the pace attack.

While Sami sparked, Younus managed scores of seven and four for Habib Bank in the final -- showing no signs of improvement in his declining form which prompted him to withdraw from the tour of New Zealand last month.

Younus, 32, managed just 22 runs in the three-match one-day series against the Black Caps in the United Arab Emirates last month. He took a break from the game to regain his form in a bid to return to

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V-Day hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan kept their hopes of playing the final of the Victory Day Hockey Competition alive with a 3-0 win over Bangladesh Police at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

With Bangladesh Hockey Federation XI already reaching the final with three wins in as many matches, BKSP have now seven points from their all four outings and they now have to wait for the results of the two matches -- Bangladesh Police versus Bangladesh Air Force and BHF XI versus Bangladesh Army.

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Brothers struggle

SPORTS REPORTER



Brothers Union dropped points again in their Bangladesh League match when the Orange outfit played out a goalless draw against giant-killers Rahmatganj MFS at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

With the third draw in a row, a depleted Brothers Union still remained unbeaten and raised their point tally to six from four outings while Rahmatganj bagged their first point in three matches after losing to Farashganj SC and Chittagong Mohammedan in their first two meetings.

Without striking duo Ghanaian Enok Bentil and Steven Aboua, who went to visit home during the one-and-half month break of the

league and still haven't returned, Brothers looked a very ordinary side and were lucky not to lose full three points against a side, who have a past record of stunning giants like Abahani and Mohammedan.

Brothers, however, had launched the first attack in the game when Sabuj Kumar whipped in a cross from the right for Maksudul Alam and Murad Khan, who failed to connect the cross and a Rahmatganj defender cleared the ball to erase any danger for the Old Dhaka outfit.

And, that was so far only attack for Brothers, but Rahmatganj gradually gained the confidence to control the match, but striker Idris Kasirye disappointed the side as the Ugandan striker twice failed to beat Brothers goalkeeper Iran Sheikh.

Idris should have given Rahmatganj a lead in

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Changes in the wind

ATIQUE ANAM



The Ispahani Tea Premier Division Cricket League that finished on Monday has been the most entertaining and enthralling in recent past. It was so close this time that the title was eventually decided on the last ball of the 'virtual final' match and ironically, the team that lost that match, not only had to relinquish the title but also had to be content with a third-place finish.

The league was entertaining because there

were many performers with the ball and the bat, not just a handful of national stars. On the contrary, it was those out of limelight that stole the show in many instances.

Abahani's two openers Imrul Kayes and Rony Talukder sit pretty at the top of the run-getters list with 572 and 562 runs respectively from 16 matches. Both scored two centuries and averaged in the mid-thirties. The next three are relatively unheralded names in Bangladesh cricket, Uttam Sarker of CCS, Mohammad Zahid of Kalabagan and Nazmul Hossain of CCS. Former ICL-er and Gazi Tank batsman Shahriar Nafees had a splen-

did comeback season scoring 502 runs in 10 matches averaging at 55.77 which earned him a recall to the national squad. Also returning was another ICL-er Aftab Ahmed who chipped in with valuable knocks collecting 461 runs at an average of 38.41 and played a big role in Mohammedan winning the title. But when one considers average, there is none better than Pakistani Abdur Razaq who amassed 459 runs from 7 matches at a staggering rate of 65.57.

Abdur Razaq was to many the performer of the season, lighting up the league with his hurricane knocks, after coming late into the side. But

he eventually had to bow down to his compatriot Navedul Hasan who stole the show in the last few overs of the Abahani-Mohammedan match to ultimately decide the title.

A very concerning fact that came out of this league was the poor performance of bowlers of the national squad. Only three of them made it into the top ten. Mahbubul Alam and Enamul Haque ended in joint tenth position capturing 22 wickets each. On top of the bowlers' list however are two Biman bowlers Elias Sunny and Shaful Islam with 30 wickets. Shaful's 30 wickets at an

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ISPAHANI TEA DHAKA PREMIER DIVISION CRICKET LEAGUE 2009-10

| TOP TEN BATSMEN | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|------|----|----|------|-------|------|----|-----|--|
| NAME | TEAM | M | I | RUNS | AVG | BEST | 50 | 100 | |
| IMRUL KAYES | AKC | 16 | 16 | 572 | 35.75 | 129 | 3 | 2 | |
| RONY TALUKDER | AKC | 16 | 16 | 562 | 37.46 | 120 | 2 | 2 | |
| UTTAM SARKER | CCS | 16 | 16 | 560 | 37.33 | 109* | 3 | 2 | |
| MD. ZAHID | KKC | 14 | 14 | 529 | 37.78 | 107 | 3 | 1 | |
| NAZMUL HOSSAIN | CCS | 16 | 15 | 519 | 43.25 | 89 | 5 | - | |
| SHAHRIAR NAFEEES | GAZ | 11 | 10 | 502 | 55.77 | 128* | 2 | 2 | |
| AFTAB AHMED | MSC | 13 | 13 | 461 | 38.41 | 107* | 3 | 1 | |
| ABDUR RAZZAQ | AKC | 7 | 7 | 459 | 65.57 | 185 | 3 | 1 | |
| JUBAER AHMED | KKC | 16 | 16 | 443 | 31.64 | 72 | 3 | - | |
| MD. ASHRAFUL | MSC | 13 | 13 | 442 | 36.83 | 100 | 2 | 1 | |

| TOP TEN BOWLERS | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|------|-------|-------|------|---------|-------|------|------|--|
| NAME | TEAM | MATCH | OVERS | RUNS | WICKETS | AVE | BEST | ECON | |
| ELIAS SUNNY | BIM | 16 | 119.1 | 447 | 30 | 14.90 | 6/36 | 3.75 | |
| SHAFIUL ISLAM | BIM | 16 | 131.1 | 528 | 30 | 17.60 | 4/24 | 4.02 | |
| MD. RAFIQUE | AKC | 16 | 139.4 | 449 | 29 | 15.48 | 4/28 | 3.21 | |
| SAQLAIN SOJIB | MSC | 16 | 148.0 | 563 | 27 | 20.85 | 5/36 | 3.80 | |
| SANJAMUL ISLAM | SUJ | 13 | 121.0 | 400 | 26 | 15.38 | 6/31 | 3.30 | |
| MOHAMMAD HOSSAIN | BIM | 16 | 126.3 | 419 | 26 | 16.11 | 4/17 | 3.31 | |
| NABIL SAMAD | MSC | 15 | 135.1 | 459 | 26 | 17.65 | 3/20 | 3.39 | |
| SHUBHABISH ROY | AKC | 16 | 112.5 | 488 | 26 | 18.76 | 4/16 | 4.32 | |
| TAREQAZIZ | BIM | 15 | 94.0 | 412 | 23 | 17.91 | 4/28 | 4.38 | |
| MAHBUBULALAM | SUJ | 8 | 71.1 | 347 | 22 | 15.77 | 4/33 | 4.87 | |
| ENAMUL HAQUE JR | KKC | 13 | 113.3 | 402 | 22 | 18.27 | 3/25 | 3.54 | |
| MONIRUL ISLAM | KHL | 13 | 104.0 | 415 | 22 | 18.86 | 5/42 | 3.99 | |



PHOTO: FILE

Biman paceman Shaful Islam had a fantastic season in the Premier League taking 30 wickets that earned him a call-up to the national squad.

Chess teams go down

SPORTS REPORTER

Both the men's and women's team of Bangladesh went down in their respective first round games in the Asian Team Chess Championship at Kolkata Town Hall on Tuesday.

Men's team comprising GM Niaz Morshed, GM Ziaur Rahman, FM Mohammad Abdul Malek and Jamaluddin lost to their Indian counterparts by 2.5-1.5 points. Niaz, Zia and Malek drew their boards against GM Surya Shekhar Ganguly, GM P. Harikrishna and GM Deepan Chakrabarty respectively while Jamaluddin lost to GM Parimarjan Negi.

In the women's section, Bangladesh lost to Vietnam by 3-1 sets. Though Nazrana Khan Eva beat WGM Le Thanh Tu of Vietnam, but Jahanara Haque Runu, WFM Zakia Sultana and Masuda Begum went down against Vietnamese WIM Pham Le Thao Nguyen, WGM Nguyen Thi Thanh An and WFM Nguyen Thi Mai Hung respectively.

A total of 10 men's teams from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Yemen are taking part in the championship while women's section comprises teams from Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Nepal, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

V-Day tennis

SPORTS REPORTER

The first round of matches in the Victory Day Tennis 2009 were held at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna yesterday. In the men's group, top seed Amol Roy had an easy outing against qualifier Sajib

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Bangladesh League

Abahani v Arambagh

Venue: Kamalapur Stadium

Time: 3:45pm