



India's middle-order batsman Suresh Raina is over the moon after scoring a fantastic century under pressure in the final of the Idea Cup against Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

IDEA CUP FINAL SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the final of the Idea Cup tri-nation one-day series between India and Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday:

INDIA	R	B	4s	6s
Sehwag c Sangakkara b Kulasekara	42	27	7	0
Gambhir b Kulasekara	0	2	0	0
Kohli c Sangakkara b Welegedara	2	8	0	0
Yuvraj c Samaraweera b Welegedara	0	3	0	0
Dhoni c Sangakkara b Kulasekara	14	19	3	0
Raina b Welegedara	106	115	10	1
Jadeja lbw b Dilshan	38	64	0	0
Harbhajan lbw b Randiv	11	26	0	0
Zaheer c Samaraweera b Kulasekara	16	8	2	1
Nehra not out	2	3	0	0
Sreesanth b Perera	4	15	0	0
Extras: (lb-4, w-6)	10			
Total: (All out in 48.2 overs)	245			

Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-4, 3-16, 4-47, 5-60, 6-166, 7-213, 8-233, 9-237, 10-245

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Kulasekara	10	0	48	4
Welegedara	10	1	53	3
Thushara	6	1	26	0
Randiv	9	0	47	1
Perera	8.2	0	49	1
Dilshan	5	0	18	1

SRI LANKA	R	B	4s	6s
Tharanga c Kohli b Nehra	0	3	0	0
Dilshan c Dhoni b Yuvraj	49	54	8	0
Sangakkara c Sehwag b Harbhajan	55	51	8	0
Jayawardene not out	71	81	5	0
Samaraweera b Jadeja	27	41	2	0
Kandamby lbw b Harbhajan	18	26	0	0
Randiv run out (Jadeja)	17	30	1	0
Perera not out	6	6	1	0
Extras: (lb-1, w-4, nb-1)	6			
Total: (For 6 wickets in 48.3 overs)	249			

Din not bat: Kulasekara, Thushara, Welegedara

Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-93, 3-109, 4-157, 5-189, 6-228

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Nehra	1.2	0	2	1
Sreesanth	9.3	0	72	0
Kohli	1.4	0	12	0
Zaheer	10	0	51	0
Harbhajan	10	0	41	2
Yuvraj	9	0	41	1
Jadeja	7	0	29	1

Result: Sri Lanka won the final by 4 wickets.

Man-of-the-final: Nuwan Kulasekara.

Man-of-the-series: Kumar Sangakkara.

Toss: Sri Lanka.

Umpires: Enamul Haque and Ian Gould.

Eyes on handball gold

SPORTS REPORTER

The gold medals Bangladesh had won in previous South Asian Games were in individual disciplines and there was no such success in team events, save football that won the gold in the 1999 Katmandu Games.

But the introduction of handball for the first time in the 11th edition of the Games opens up the prospect for Bangladesh to strike gold on the home soil when the regional showpiece event kicks off in Dhaka on January 29.

The Bangladesh Handball Federation (BHF) officials, while talking to the reporters at the newly-built Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) Bhaban yesterday, made the bold assertion admitting the fact that they had little or no knowledge about the strength of other

opponents -- India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Afghanistan.

"We have no idea about the opponents. We had tried hard to get the footages of other teams, but unfortunately we could not get any," said coach Qumrul Islam Kiron after BHF assistant secretary Nurul Islam had declared the final squad.

A yearlong training has made the coach and officials confident to present the nation with a gold medal, but maybe they have forgotten the fact of Bangladesh's success, especially in team events.

Compared to handball, more distinguished game of football took 15 years to establish their supremacy in the regional extravaganza to be champions in the 1999 Kathmandu meet after the Games' inception in 1984. Since then no other Bangladesh team like kabaddi, volleyball, basketball and hockey could grab gold medal in previous all 10 editions of the Games.

The Bangladesh handball team, how-

ever, finished behind champions India in the 2nd South Asian Handball Championship in 2000 and that was so far the last international tournament Bangladesh had participated.

Recently Bangladesh national handball team played seven practice matches against the Japan University team and lost four matches, won two and drew one and coach Qumrul believed those games would help his charges a lot.

Qumrul informed German coach Wolfgang Lowak has brought a drastic change in the training method in his 82-day training, split into three phases, and the German coach would accompany the boys again before the start of the Games.

Kabaddi coach Abdul Jalil was more realistic and said that they would fight for the bronze medal rather than gold, something they never won in any tournament or games.

"India are far better than us and

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NCL starts today with new format

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Cricket League (NCL), country's lone first-class cricket competition, gets underway today with a new format in place. Top first-class players initially opposed the format, but they finally backedtracked in the face of firm stance of the BCB, the sport's governing body.

The previous 10 editions of the league were held on home-and-away basis at six divisions, but this time around the six participating sides will be playing five four-day matches in the first phase before the top four teams qualifying for the second phase.

That means two bottom teams will be eliminated from the first phase and top four teams will get another opportunity to play three more matches among them and on completion of the second phase, top two teams will play the five-day final match.

Participating teams will also not get the home advantage in the first phase as they will have to play at neutral venue across the country with BKSP, Narayanganj, Khulna, Chittagong, Bogra and Rajshahi hosting the matches.

On the opening day, champions Rajshahi will play against Sylhet at Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah, Narayanganj, Khulna will face Dhaka at Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi and runners-up Barisal will take on Chittagong at Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna.

Not so spectacular

SPORTS REPORTER

Ten days of cricketing extravaganza came to an end last night when Kumar Sangakkara held aloft the Idea Cup with his team members on the podium. The Lankan captain deservedly took the plaudits, and the cash prizes too, having led his side to the first cricket trophy of the year.

But alas! there was hardly a third of the stadium full to cheer him on his team's success. Those that had come to witness an exciting finale got, on contrary, an early shock as favourites India had lost half of their side for a meagre 60. And only a few of them would imagine that the match would turn out as what it did in the end.

Blame whatever you like -- the weather, high ticket price, lack of interest in one-day cricket because of too much of it, the hosts' poor performance, or the predictability of the outcomes -- but the fact remains that the whole meet turned out to be the least-enthusiastic of tour-

naments in memory. The tournament coincided with two mediocre to severe cold waves that blew across the country and made watching cricket at the stadium a torture. Then there was the exorbitant pricing of tickets that staved off many a die-hard fan from attending.

After two poor turnouts in the first two matches, some had turned up to cheer the teams. The crowd started to build up and peaked in Bangladesh's first encounter with India. But as the tournament went towards a predictable end with the hosts making a docile exit, fans opted to remain home.

Even the best efforts from the organisers -- slashing gallery ticket price from Tk 300 to Tk 200 -- or the sponsors flying in a Bollywood actor did little to cheer the crowd. Go back twelve years, on a wintry evening like this at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. India were playing another subcontinent superpower Pakistan in the final of the triangular Independence Cup. Bangladesh as yesterday

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Shiv Sena plans tit for tat

AFP, New Delhi

An influential right-wing Hindu party in Mumbai warned Wednesday that it would try and stop Australian cricketers playing in parts of India because of attacks on Indians living Down Under.

Bal Thackeray, who heads the radical Shiv Sena party, said activists planned to disrupt matches involving Australians, like they did ahead of a Test match against Pakistan in 1999, when they duped up the pitch.

"We will not allow kangaroo cricketers to play in Mumbai and Maharashtra till the attacks on Indians are stopped," the ageing Thackeray wrote in Shiv Sena mouthpiece 'Saamna.'

"Our boys are being stabbed, burnt and shot at in that country and still our cricketers have no qualms in playing with them. Do they have any national pride?"

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SA's pride at stake

Final Test against Eng starts today

Cricket

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's reputation as one of the leading Test nations will be at stake when they try to stop England from clinching a series win in the fourth and final Test starting at the Wanderers Stadium on Thursday.

After away series wins against both Australia and England in 2008, South Africa briefly topped the International Cricket Council's Test rankings.

But they suffered a home series defeat against Australia last year and trail the current series 1-0 to face the prospect of another failure on home soil.

England won the second Test in Durban by

an innings and 98 runs, although in both the first and third Tests the tourists had narrow escapes, hanging on with nine wickets down in the final innings.

South African all-rounder Jacques Kallis said it had been frustrating because his side felt they were the better team -- 'although the England players might disagree' -- but said South Africa had only themselves to blame for being in a must-win situation.

"They haven't given up," Kallis said of England.

"They've been in tough situations in two games where they've been able to get their way out of it."

"That shows a lot of fight and character. Unfortunately in Durban we were in England's situation and we crumbled. As much as we say

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Australia captain Ricky Ponting (L) keeps his eyes on the target during a training session in Hobart yesterday ahead of the third Test against Pakistan that starts today.

Lot of life in Hobart

Final Aussie-Pak Test from today

Cricket

CRICINFO, Hobart

It is in dead rubbers that the basis of cricket as an individual sport becomes clearest. But for the grace of Pakistan everyone would've come to Hobart much happier; the series is gone and with it the prospect of a good end to summer. Now attention turns to personal battles of form and there is enough to this Test to keep it sprightly.

To Pakistan first and who would have thought dropping a wicketkeeper who dropped four chances in the last Test -- and it wasn't a one-off -- would be so difficult? Not least of the confusion surrounding l'affaire de Kamran, as it will now be remembered, has come from the Pakistan camp itself; just as coach Intikhab Alam was definitively ruling him out on Tuesday, Kamran Akmal, defini-

tively, was ruling himself in to an Australian newspaper.

He was finally ruled out as Pakistan, surprisingly, announced their playing XI a day before the Test. But the matter has overshadowed a number of other issues, namely the continuing failures of Faisal Iqbal and Misbahul Haq in the middle order. Changes have been made and Shoaib Malik and Khurram Manzoor are back in but sending back Fawad Alam, who represents a future -- in whatever form and shape -- was a poor choice. Mohammad Aamer is back as well to give Pakistan, finally, its first-choice attack and that is something that just hasn't happened in recent years. In all, there will be enough new faces from Sydney so that Pakistan are likely to have a fresh, energetic feel to them. They will be keen to prevent a 12th successive loss and a fourth successive whitewash against this particular opponent.

Australia are far more settled. Such

messes they don't often find themselves in and when they do, they are generally quieter and handle it with greater grace and coherence. Still, there are little niggling things that don't quite sit right about their line-up just yet.

A lack of runs from their middle order is chief among them. Ricky Ponting, Michael Clarke and Marcus North have two fifties each from six Tests this summer and the first two, at least, should be doing much more than that. Neither has looked particularly out of form, but that in itself can be a greater worry than being out of touch, as North appears to be. Some wickets for Peter Siddle would go down nicely as well, though his presence has never been a non-threatening one. In the bigger picture this Test may not matter much, but within it there will be enough players for whom it matters a great deal and that makes for compelling viewing.

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What to WATCH

TEN Sports
South Africa v England
Fourth Test, Day One
Live from 2:30pm

ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live from 8:30pm

Australia v Pakistan
Third Test, Day Two
Live from 5:30am (Friday)