

No NCL one-dayers

Lesser lights left neglected

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

The one-day leg of the National Cricket League (NCL) will not see the light of day at least for this domestic season.

The cancellation means that the less privileged cricketers of the country, those who do not play in the national team, A team or the GP-BCB National Cricket Academy will get even fewer matches under their belt.

These players are the large contingent of professionals who completely rely on tournaments like the Premier League, First Division and the two NCL competitions for their survival and future prospects.

Although the BCB tournament committee chairman Gazi Ashraf Hossain agreed that it would be a loss to the rest of the cricketers, he also felt it is still important to provide better quality cricket to the best talents in the country.

"It is partially correct [that they would get less matches] but we want the cream of the crop to get the best exposure," said Ashraf while referring to the tours of South Africa A and Academy side and the West Indies A side starting this month.

Apart from the two series, the top cricketers will also be busy playing the NCL Twenty20s, launched last month by the BCB in a new franchise-based arrangement.

While the Twenty20s are of immediate importance as the Tigers are going off to play the World Twenty20s in West Indies on April 25,

the one-day competition would be a big miss by most of the others.

The changed format of the first-class competition already meant five fewer matches for all divisional sides and according to some players, it was essential for the board to hold the tournament.

"BCB could have organised the one-day competition as two teams were knocked out early in the NCL first-class tournament and the final began on March 7. The one-dayers could have been held right after the final or when the teams got knocked out," said a cricketer who wished to stay anonymous.

"Actually the cricketers don't get many matches if they are not part of the national side, who get a salary and play all year round. It would be a loss to us since it is still a question of playing matches since some of us can't even get into the PCL or NCL T20 now.

"Look at how Sanwar (Hossain) and (Habibul) Bashar are playing in Sharjah although they have no prospect for national selection," he said.

It is of common knowledge that the top cricketers and the one's who are best connected, get to play most of the tournaments on offer. And due to this practice, the lesser known ones get lost and talent remains untapped.

After the NCL first-class final ended on March 10, it was expected that the limited overs tournament would commence just like in the previous seasons but a week later, the BCB announced the launch of the NCL Twenty20s.

Ashraf said yesterday that it would be hard

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PORT CITY CRICKET LEAGUE

Pirates power into semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Pirates of Chittagong made it to the semifinals of the Port City T20 Cricket League with a 3-run victory over Bengal Tigers in a nailbiting encounter at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium yesterday. Despite the defeat, Bengal Tigers also made it to the semis from this group.

The Pirates started plundering the Bengal Tigers attack from very early in the innings. The two openers, Rony Talukdar and Aftab Ahmed got severe on the opening bowlers, smashing them out of the ground with regularity. Aftab brought up the team's fifty in the fifth over with two huge sixes, one over square-leg and the next over long-on.

They were going at eleven-an-over when the first wicket fell after seven overs. Reddi forced Rony to play a false stroke and the batsman's

castle was cleaned. Two balls later, the same caused the downfall of newcomer Mushfiqur Rahim, who had danced down the wicket, to find his castle disturbed by the keeper this time. Next came in Alok Kapali, the man with a big reputation of clean-hitting and lived up to his reputation. Kapali and Aftab took the onslaught a little further before the latter got out for 57 that took only thirty-four balls.

After his departure, the run rate slowed down a bit, but Kapali stayed there to make sure the Pirates put on a big enough score to daunt the opposition. Kapali trail-blazed with 51 from 33 balls to set up a total of 185 for the loss of eight wickets. The two spinners Rajesh Sharma and Reddi took two wickets each.

Bengal Tigers' chase began in the worst possible fashion as they lost a wicket off the

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PHOTO: STAR

Action from yesterday's Citycell Dhaka Metropolis Women's School Football Championship match between Mohammadpur Preparatory Girls' High School and Motijheel Govt Girls' High School at the Sultana Kamal Women's Sports Complex.



PHOTO: AFP

THE CONTENTIOUS MOMENT: Barcelona captain Carles Puyol (3rd from R) tangles with Arsenal counterpart Cesc Fabregas (2nd from R) during their Champions League quarterfinal at the Emirates Stadium on Wednesday. Puyol was sent off as Arsenal were awarded a penalty that Fabregas converted to make it 2-2.

Royals ordinary, says Gambhir

INTERNET, undated

Delhi Daredevils skipper Gautam Gambhir, who led his team to an emphatic 67-run win over the Rajasthan Royals, rubbed salt into the Royals' wounds by branding them an "ordinary side", with Yusuf Pathan being their only dangerous player.

At the post-match presentation, Gambhir said, "I think Rajasthan was never a threat. Except for Yusuf Pathan, the other guys were pretty ordinary. We thought Yusuf was the only danger-man and didn't bother too much about anyone else."

Delhi Daredevils, who made 188-6 with Dinesh Karthik making 69 and Gambhir 43, beat Rajasthan Royals (121 all out) by 67 runs.

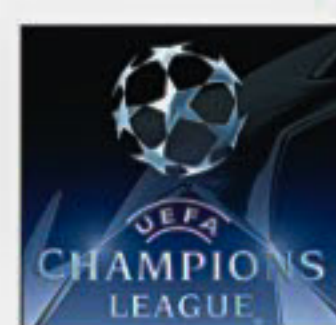
Later in the night, co-owner Shilpa Shetty expressed her disappointment with Gambhir's statement.

PCL LATEST

CHITTAGONG MOHAMMEDAN: 108 all out
CHITTAGONG BROTHERS: 109 for 2 in 15 overs (Nazir 63)
Result: Chittagong Brothers won by 8 wickets.

Barca blitz, Gunners grit

AFP, London



Arsenal came off the ropes to secure a 2-2 draw with Barcelona that kept their Champions League dream alive in the most unlikely fashion on an exhilarating night at the Emirates.

Having completely outclassed their hosts for much of the first half, the defending champions appeared to be cruising into the last four after two goals from Zlatan Ibrahimovic in the early stages of the second period.

But Theo Walcott's strike and a late penalty from Cesc Fabregas set the stage for a tension-filled second act in the Nou Camp next week.

Barca will be without both their first-choice centrebacks for the return leg with Gerard Pique, who was booked here, and Carles Puyol, who was sent off for the foul on Fabregas that led to Arsenal's equaliser, both ruled out by suspension.

Arsenal will scarcely be in better shape however with Fabregas also suspended after picking up a booking here and William Gallas and Andrey Arshavin both forced off with injuries.

"It was a fantastic game for the neutral," Walcott said afterwards. "It's been very frustrating for me not to get to start as many games as I want, but the team did fantastically well to come back tonight,

not just myself. We showed some fantastic character."

Wenger admitted his side had been run ragged at times but rued the defensive errors that contributed to both the visitors' strikes. "I don't deny that we played against a fantastic side but we gave away two cheap goals," Wenger said.

From the outset it was clear that Lionel Messi, Xavi and co. regarded the wide spaces and immaculate surface of the Emirates as an invitation to party.

For more than 20 minutes, the home side was restricted to the exhausting pursuit of shadows that is more commonly the lot of visitors to north London.

That Arsenal survived the torrid open-

ing unscathed was largely down to Manuel Almunia, who threw himself full length to deny Sergio Busquets, deflected a Messi effort over the bar with his legs and then pushed out a strong left-hand to deny Ibrahimovic, blocking Xavi's follow-up for good measure.

Profligacy also contributed to the lack of a breakthrough, notably from Ibrahimovic, who lifted a sixth minute chance over the bar from the edge of the six-yard box and then found the side netting after Thomas Vermaelen's slip had allowed him to run clear of Arsenal's backfour.

Arsenal conjured up their first moment of menace in the 23rd minute, Samir Nasri sidestepping Daniel Alves on the corner of the penalty area before curling a shot narrowly beyond the far post with Victor Valdes, the Barca goalkeeper, struggling to cover.

There was also a reminder of Barcelona's vulnerability in the air when Nicklas Bendtner got free on the right and sent in a cross that Abou Diaby, having outjumped Gerard Pique, nodded wide.

There was a palpable sense of relief among the home supporters that their team reached the interval on level terms.

Within 30 seconds of the restart however, Barcelona were in front thanks to a Pique punt that caught both Alex Song, who had been redeployed to centreback following the exit of Gallas, and Almunia badly out of position.

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Every rose has its thorn

STAR SPORT DESK

As Indian tennis star Sania Mirza and Pakistani cricketer Shoaib Malik are busy working out how their planned April 11 marriage can be arranged, an opponent in the guise of Ayesha Siddiqui's father is threatening to take the matter to court.

MA Siddiqui yesterday claimed his daughter was Shoaib's first wife and demanded a formal divorce with her before the Pakistani cricketer ties the knot with Sania.

"He [Shoaib] married my daughter and cheated her denying that. I have the proof and I will take legal action," Siddiqui, who claimed that Shoaib had married Ayesha in 2005, told reporters.

"He had confessed it [marrying Ayesha]. He told Arun Lal during a match between India and Pakistan, where he made some 75 runs, that he was very happy to be in the home town of his wife [Ayesha]. He received applause from the people because they were shouting 'Ayesha, Ayesha'. You can see that CD. Is it not enough?" Siddiqui asked.

Siddiqui also said that he has already consulted some top lawyers in the city who opined that he would definitely win the case if Shoaib did not formally divorce Ayesha.

"According to Islam, the marriage [of Sania and Shoaib] is allowed. But my daughter can't re-marry unless he gives the letter of divorce,"

he said.

"I don't want anything from him. I want only the letter of divorce. I have not taken a single penny from him. He had lied that he has given 14 lakh rupees, 18 lakh rupees. That is baseless."

"I don't expect anything from Shoaib. He is free to do anything. I can't impose my opinion on him. He cannot impose his opinion on me. But I will take legal action. I don't want to deviate from that," he added.

Siddiqui, however, made it clear that he did not want to say anything to Sania family and wished the tennis star good luck.

"I don't want to say anything [to them]. I have no right to say anything to them. Because they are free to do anything. I wish Sania good luck."

While Siddiqui claimed that Shoaib indeed married his daughter, the Pakistani cricketer has denied that. Siddiqui had hosted a party for Pakistan cricket team members when they visited Hyderabad during aseries in 2005.

Meanwhile Shoaib's family was also ready to face anything. A family member, preferring anonymity, said, "We will see what happens."

Meanwhile, preparations from both parties are going a good pace. Shoaib's family members who are willing to visit Sania's place have already obtained visas for India.

Family sources of Shoaib told Geo News that among the persons issued the visa are Shoaib's

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AYESHA SIDDIQUI



ATN Bangla
Port City League Semifinals
Live from 5:00pm

SuperSport2
Indian Premier League Kings XI Punjab v Bangalore Royal Challengers
Live from 8:30pm

ESPN
Sortscentre India Sports News
Live at 8:30pm



Bangladesh League
Abahani v Feni Soccer Club
Time: 5:00pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Club Cup Hockey
Usha KC v Sadharan Bima
Time: 2:30pm
Sonal Bank v Wari Club
Time: 4:00pm
Venue: Maulana Bhasani National Stadium

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

GIRLS FOOTBALL

Maisha scored a hatrick as Sir John Wilson School blanked Dawn Grammar School 4-0 in the Citycell Dhaka Metropolis School (Girls) Football Championship at the Sultana Kamal Women's Sports Complex ground yesterday.

Afia netted the other goal. It was their second consecutive victory.

In the day's other two matches at the same venue, Agargaon Adarsha High School and Dhanmondi Qamrunnesa Govt. Girls High School played out a goalless draw while the second match between Mohammadpur Preparatory HS Girls High School and Motijheel Gov. Girls High School also ended with the same result.

At the Azimpur Girls School & College ground, Yasmin struck twice as Rahmatullah Model High School defeated Jamila Khatun Lalbagh Girls High School 2-0 while the other match between Dhanmondi Gov Girls High School and Dholaipar High School ended in goalless draw.

INDEPENDENCE DAY TENNIS
Sharmin Alam Sharda, Moumitu Jannat Mou, Shathi

Sarkar and Ishita Afroz moved into the semifinals of the women's singles event of the Runner Group Independence Day Open Tennis Tournament at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna.

In the quarterfinals, Sharda outplayed Pinki 6-0, 6-0, Mou beat Aysha Sultana 6-3, 6-3,

Shathi defeated Kazi Sharmin 6-1, 6-1 and Afroz crushed Lo Lo 6-0, 6-0.

In the men's singles Amol Roy, Mahmudul Haque Babu, Pritul Mondal, Arvind Fernando, Ranjan Ram, Dipu Lal, Anwar Hossain and Alamgir Hossain moved into

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PHOTO: STAR

Lo Lo of Barisal plays a forehand during her Runner Group Independence Day Open Tennis Tournament quarterfinal against Ishita Afroz at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna yesterday.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

KKR return to winning ways

CRICINFO, Kolkata

Inspired by their captain Saurav Ganguly and urged on by the cauldron that is the Eden Gardens, Kolkata Knight Riders roared back into the Indian Premier League with a clinical win over Deccan Chargers yesterday.

A splendid 88 from Ganguly, who with David Hussey led the revival, propelled the home side to a formidable total of 181 for 6 in 20 overs and then their bowlers struck telling blows across Deccan's two-faced chase that petered out tamerly. In the end the Deccan Chargers were restricted to 157 for 5 in their allotment of 20 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS: 181 for 6 in 20 overs (Ganguly 88, Hussey 31, Pujara 17, Saha 10 not out; Jaskaran 2-18, Symonds 2-26, Ojha 2-38)
DECCAN CHARGERS: 157 for 5 in 20 overs (Gibbs 59, Symonds 45, Mishra 29, Suman 15 not out; Gayle 1-9, Mathews 1-25)
Result: Kolkata Knight Riders won by 24 runs.
Man-of-the-match: Saurav Ganguly.