

Pep extends Barca stay

Barcelona coach Josep Guardiola, who has led the club to seven trophies in two seasons, signed a one-year extension to his contract on Wednesday, the Spanish champions said. The new deal will keep the 39-year-old at the club until June 30, 2011, it said in a statement posted on its website. Guardiola's contract expired on June 30 but he agreed in January to extend it by one season while Joan Laporta was still the president of the club.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Uruguay players celebrate by lifting captain Diego Forlan onto their shoulders during their welcoming ceremony in Montevideo on Tuesday.

Fans welcome Uruguay home

REUTERS, Montevideo

Uruguay's World Cup team received a hero's welcome home on Tuesday as tens of thousands of cheering flag-waving fans lined the streets of Montevideo.

Soccer-mad Uruguayans waited for hours in cold winter temperatures to see the bus transporting the players pass by, and President Jose Mujica offered a tribute in front of fans gathered in the centre of the capital.

"We are moved, but mostly thankful, very thankful. These boys deserve recognition, but this has surpassed all that could be imagined," Uruguay coach Oscar Tabarez told the crowd.

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Shakib still No. 1

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Shakib Al Hasan remained on top of the ICC one-day all-rounders' rankings despite running into a trough.

The latest ratings, released by the game's governing body, confirmed that the left-handed all-rounder has 390 points, followed by Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi.

The news should cheer up the Magura lad who has been going through a tough time in international cricket. The situation had deteriorated so

5-a-side football

SPORTS REPORTER

Standard Chartered eliminated Olympic Industries with a thumping 6-1 victory in the knockout phase of Ascent five-a-side football tournament at the STM Hall in Uttara yesterday.

StanChart went on the rampage riding on a hat-trick from Remon, who scored a total of four goals, while his teammates Bobby and Faisal added one goal each to make the margin wider before Olympic Industries pulled a goal back.

Meanwhile, defending champions Beximco Pharma edged past Dhaka Bank 3-2 and hosts Ascent registered an emphatic 4-1 win over Bangla Cat.

much that he intended to leave his duties as captain and duly was released for the England one-day series.

Shakib is in second position in the Test all-rounders' rankings.

The one-day bowling rankings are still headed by New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori followed in second place by left-arm spinner Shakib, who did enough in the series in England to maintain second place.

Shakib will have an immediate opportunity to put more pressure on Vettori at the top as he embarks on a two-ODI series in Ireland and single

matches against Scotland and the Netherlands.

Outside the top twenty, Mashrafe Mortaza marked his return to the top flight with an impressive performance in the series. In three ODIs he took five wickets at an average of 20.60 and an economy-rate less than four runs per over. That effort has earned him 13 places in latest rankings and he now occupies 26th position.

In the Test rankings, Shakib was in 11th position, highest for a Bangladeshi bowler while Tamim Iqbal is the No 18 Test batsman in the world after his exploits against the English this summer.



SHAKIB AL HASAN

Football needs Super Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

The introduction of the money-spinning Taka one-crore Super Cup last year proved a shot in the arm for the country's flagging football. Not only did it revive attention for a sport that was slowly winding down, but it also offered hope of return to the heydays, when the beautiful game dominated the local scene. Understandably then, the uncertainty over holding its second edition, following reported unwillingness from the sponsors is making the footballing circle anxious.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is still waiting for the nod from the sponsors even though they are determined to make the tournament a success again.

"We are ready to roll the Super Cup out as soon we get assurance from Citycell, even though they have not yet responded after the budget was placed before them," said BFF general secretary Al Musabbir Sadi.

The inaugural Super Cup brought huge enthusiasm among the organisers, players, and supporters and the final of the eight-team tournament saw a full-house crowd. Fans from even outside the capital came to enjoy the clash between archrivals Mohammedan and Abahani.

Talking to all those concerned with the

Super Cup, it became evident that the response from the spectators was overwhelming, something that was missing from football for long and the presence of the massive crowd made the tournament more competitive.

"The Super Cup made waves across the country, especially amongst the spectators because of the one-crore taka prize money and it brought a noteworthy crowd to the venue in every match," Mohammedan ad-hoc committee convener Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan said.

"Keeping the Super Cup in mind, we spent a lot of money to form the team last season and we will be hoping that the Super Cup is held according to schedule. The federation should organise it at any cost in the greater interest of football," said Satyajit Das Rupu, manager of the Abahani football team adding that even though he believes the Super Cup made the people enthusiastic, it will not leave a lasting impression if not staged regularly.

Brothers Union's football manager Amer Khan said that despite its top-heavy prize structure, a tournament like the Super Cup is essential for football, since it brings spectators to the venue.

Brothers coach Wasim Iqbal believes all participating teams benefited from the Super Cup, not only the champions and

the runners-ups and the financial package reduced the burden on officials as every participating club was given Tk 2 lakh.

"The Super Cup had more appeal than the professional football league and everyone related to football was excited during the tournament. I think the federation should hold it regularly if they want to keep inspiring players and organisers," said Wasim.

National striker Zahid Hasan Emily believes the installation of the Super Cup benefited the players most during transfer season.

"Mohammedan spent a lot of money to form the team after winning the one-crore taka prize money from the Super Cup that eventually bettered the players' payment," said Emily, who reportedly got the highest payment of Tk 18 lakh from Mohammedan last season.

"It is a different feeling to play in front of a full-house and we are eagerly waiting to play in the Super Cup again," said national goalkeeper Aminul Haque.

Veteran coach Golam Sarwar Tipu believes the Super Cup attracted the young generation most and the federation should take steps to keep it intact as well as seek cooperation from the government to hold the event if there is any uncertainty over sponsorship.

Happy but not satisfied

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Habibul Bashar believes that the satisfaction level of those in charge of Bangladesh cricket should be higher if they are to expect better results in the future.

"I think the level of satisfaction should go up," said the former national captain.

"People always talk about too much expectation, which I think is not a good thing but if there's no expectation, it does no good to the team. It is time we shed the habit of being happy when we are 'playing well'. You must have some belief if you are looking for the right results," said Bashar.

The Tigers have just finished a one-day series against England where they won the second game by five runs, ending their long wait of defeating England in one-day cricket.

"I am not saying the win [against England] was insignificant. It is a huge achievement to win against England in their home conditions," added Bashar.

Despite the win, the Tigers conceded the series meekly with a thumping 144-run defeat in the third and final one-dayer on Monday. Now that seven months are

remaining for the World Cup, getting into a winning habit is vital particularly when the global event will be held at home.

But the series loss to England and the poor show in the Asia Cup last month did not dissuade chief selector Rafiqul Alam from saying on Tuesday that he was "satisfied" with the team.

"After two and a half years, we can easily say that this is now not only an improving side but also a good team. I am really satisfied with the way the team is shaping ahead of the World Cup," said Rafiqul.

Of course the Tigers' hard-fought win against England would have pleased everyone as it brought out a few positives including Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's return to form and the continuous good work by top-order batsmen Tamim Iqbal, Imrul Kayes and Junaed Siddiqui.

But as much as the left-handed trio improved in the last two years, the same can't be said about the middle and late order as well as the bowling attack. The likes of Shakib Al Hasan, Mohammad Ashraful and Mahmudullah Riyad are going through a dip in form.

Bashar, Bangladesh's most successful Test batsman, thinks a return to form for Shakib and Ashraful is the need of the hour.

"You cannot question [Mohammad] Ashraful's quality and I'm confident that Ash will make his comeback in the World Cup, but now he's badly out of form," said Bashar.

"I think he needs a break to do well in the coming months. That will make sure of his return to form as far as I'm concerned.

"Shakib must feel better now that the Mashrafe has the captaincy. I think it was too much pressure on him as I always felt that he was made captain too soon for his age. He can be the country's best captain, but only in the future," added Bashar who also felt that Mashrafe being injury-free is also very important for the Tigers' fortunes in the World Cup.

One can easily assume that the current squad of players, given their fitness, will make up the majority of the World Cup team come February. The continuous improvement of the top-order and the fleeting consistency of the bowling attack confirm personnel in that area.

Another reason for little change in the team make-up is the lesser number of matches from now till the World Cup. After they play four one-day matches against lesser-lights Ireland, Scotland

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Tigers up against Ireland today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will take on Ireland in the first one-day international of the two-match series at Belfast today.

The series against the ICC associate member country will be vital for the Tigers to improve their winning tally this year as Tigers have won only one game against England, their first-ever success against the English side.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's men lost the one-day series against Andrew Strauss's men but their brilliant five-run triumph in the second game definitely helped them to get back their confidence.

Bangladesh have so far won three one-day internationals against Ireland and lost only once in the second round match of the 2007 ICC World Cup in the West Indies. Bangladesh will take on Ireland on home soil for the first time and they may face a stiff challenge from the home side.

It's important for Tigers to win the both matches as Ireland is also their Group B opponents in the 2011 World Cup.

The second match will be held at the same venue tomorrow.

The series will be followed by one-off match against Scotland on July 19 and Netherlands on July 20.



PHOTO: AFP

Paraguayan model Larissa Riquelme poses for the media before attending an advertising photo session in Sao Paulo on Tuesday. Larissa garnered worldwide attention for her fanatical support of her country during the World Cup.

WORLD CUP POLL

Do you think Mueller deserved the Golden Boot?

Yes 57.8%
No 42.2%

TOTAL VOTES: 45

TODAY'S POLL

Should Howard Webb be happy with his refereeing in the final?

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