

Hit by a meteor

Two cricket fans' enjoyment of a county cricket match was interrupted when a meteorite sailed towards the boundary ropes, hitting one man in the chest.

Jan Marszel, 51, and Richard Haynes, 52, were watching Sussex players Luke Wright and Monty Panesar bat when a black object soared towards them.

The rock, five inches in length and thought to be up to 4.5 billion years old, crashed into the ground and broke in two just in front of their seats square of the wicket.



- INTERNET

Cricket season to go on as per schedule

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has confirmed that the 2011 World Cup preparations will not hurt this season's domestic calendar.

Country's major cricket venues in Dhaka and Chittagong are under construction for the showcase event, which will be inaugurated on February 17 next year at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. As co-hosts, Bangladesh will stage eight matches including two of the quarterfinals. That gave rise to the whispers that the game's governing body may cut short this season's calendar but BCB's tournament committee chairman Gazi Ashraf Hossain said they have no such plans.

"We can assure everyone that all the domestic competitions will take place as per schedule and as far as I know the season's calendar is all but complete. True, there is an issue with the availability of the major venues like Mirpur, Fatullah and Chittagong due to construction work but we are focusing on the other venues across the country to run the show in this

season," assured Gazi Ashraf yesterday.

"There is no uncertainty over any competition including premier division cricket league but some matches may be held outside Dhaka due to time constraint. We must complete all the competitions by January next year. You know the clubs have already started roping in their favoured players," he added.

The season is likely to kick off with the women's national league from September 15, which will be followed by longer-version competition of the National Cricket League (NCL).

Gazi Ashraf informed that they would stick to the changed format they had made last season. The governing body overhauled the country's lone first-class competition last year brining wholesale changes which has reduced the number of games due to shifting of league format.

"Though initially many opposed the new format but later everyone praised it. The short duration of the tournament and intensity of the competition made us believe that this format is effective for us," said Ashraf, a former national skipper.

As per draft calendar, the Premier

Division T20 will start from November 27 after the completion of the NCL longer-version and then the most coveted 50-over competition will likely start from December 8. The NCL one-day competition, which wasn't held last year due to time constraint, will take place after conclusion of the premier league.

Everything however will be finalised after getting the go-ahead from cricket operations committee as there are some international commitments during that time. New Zealand will arrive on September 20 to play two Tests and three one-day matches while the board is also planning a tri-nation one-day tournament after that involving West Indies and Zimbabwe. There are also scheduled tours for the second string Bangladesh A team.

Gazi Ashraf also informed that they are working on bringing changes to the character of the pitches in domestic competitions. "We must come out of the spin-oriented pitches. We must give our pace bowlers enough opportunity to explore in the domestic scene so that our cricketer can compete well at the international stage," said Ashraf.

Eyes on the Olympics

Shooters leave for World C' ships tomorrow

ANISUR RAHMAN

The country's top shooters fly out for Germany tomorrow to take part in the ISSF 50th World Championships with a hope of securing Olympic quota places as a total of 69 shooters from all 15 events of the championships will directly qualify for the 2012 London Olympics.

The eight-member squad includes SA Games gold medalists Sharmin Akhter Ratna, Syeda Sadia Sultana, Sharmin Akhter, Sabrina Sultana and Asif Hossain Khan and Abdullah Hel Baki and Shahriar Chandan.

The championships will get underway in Munich on July 29 and continue till 11th of next month.

Bangladesh usually participate in the Olympics through wild cards provided by the International Olympic Council, but the

Bangladeshi shooters never achieved a quota place through tournaments, organised or supervised by the International Shooting Federation (ISSF).

Bangladesh's achievements in international arena came through the rifle events, especially the 10m air rifle event, and all seven Bangladeshi participants will participate in that event though Sabrina and Chandan will also feature in the rifle events of 50m three position and prone three position respectively apart from their favourite event.

Nevertheless, the focus will be on Ratna, who followed up her SA Games double with gold medal in the Commonwealth Shooting pairing with Sadia, but the promising shooter has been going through up and down since her last international achievement.

Ratna lost her 10m air rifle national

crown to Sabrina but bounced back strongly to win the same event in the recently concluded air gun championship.

However, Ratna has been doing well in the practice sessions and once shot 399 out of 400, eclipsing her previous best of 398, set in the SA Games.

"When you score your highest, it makes you believe you can do it again and certainly it will inspire me," Ratna said, "I don't know what result waits for me in the championships but I will try my best to get a ticket for the Olympics."

Asif has also been continuing with inconsistency since the SA Games feat as the 2002 Commonwealth gold medalist won gold in his favourite 10m air rifle event during the air gun championship with a poor score of 689.8.

He thinks it is possible to secure an

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Real Madrid legend Raul Gonzalez signs a shirt that reads "farewell captain" following his news conference in Madrid on Monday. Real Madrid's talismanic striker bid an emotional farewell to the La Liga club after 16 seasons and said he was eyeing a move either to the Bundesliga or the English Premier League.

PHOTO: REUTERS

End of a love affair

Football

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid's talismanic striker Raul bid an emotional farewell to the La Liga club on Monday after 16 seasons and said he was eyeing a move to the Bundesliga or the English Premier League.

The 33-year-old, a huge favourite among Real fans and a club captain, had tears in his eyes when he announced his departure at a packed news conference at Real's Bernabeu stadium.

He acknowledged keen interest from Bundesliga club Schalke 04, who have offered him a two-year deal according to local media, but also said a move to England was a possibility.

"This is a very tough and very difficult day for me," Raul said, before pay-

ing homage to former Real player Alfredo Di Stefano, who is recovering from heart and respiratory problems in a Madrid hospital.

"I feel like a player and I want to continue feeling like a player for the time I can and that my body allows," he added.

"It's a chance to have an experience abroad. Schalke have shown a lot of interest but other teams too. My future lies in England or Germany."

Raul's exit follows the announcement on Sunday that midfielder Guti, also 33 and a popular figure with the club's hardcore fans, was leaving and considering a move to Turkish club Besiktas.

The pair barely featured last season under coach Manuel Pellegrini and the club have signed winger Angel Di Maria and midfielders Sergio Canales and Pedro Leon to strengthen the squad for Pellegrini's replacement, Jose Mourinho.

"Some very strong players have come in," Raul said. "I had the feeling it was time to end this."

Raul joined Real in 1992 after a brief stint in the youth setup of city rivals Atletico and made his first-team debut against Real Zaragoza in October 1994 at the age of 17.

He helped them to win six Spanish league titles and three Champions League titles and scored 323 times in 741 appearances in all competitions, according to the club's website (www.realmadrid.com).

In October last year, he equalled German Gerd Mueller's record of 66 goals in the three main European club competitions when he scored against AC Milan in the Champions League.

He holds the all-time scoring record for Spain with 44 goals in 102 appearances, one more goal than his successor in the number seven shirt David Villa.



Sri Lanka's two centurions, captain Kumar Sangakkara (L) and opener Tharanga Paranavithana run between the wickets during the first day of the second Test at the Sinhalese Sports Club Ground in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

SL take upper hand

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Tharanga Paranavithana and Kumar Sangakkara played India's bowlers for centuries in consecutive matches as Sri Lanka dominated the opening day of the second Test on Monday.

The left-handed duo, who made hundreds in their victorious first Test in Galle, put on 174 for the second wicket to help the hosts pile up 312-2 by stumps at the Sinhalese Sports Club.

Paranavithana, a 28-year-old playing his 12th Test, revelled in the familiar environs of his home club to follow his maiden century at Galle with a fluent 100.

ICC TEST RANKINGS Sachin rises, Gautam slips

PTI, Dubai

Senior India batsman Sachin Tendulkar gained two places to reach the sixth spot but a poor form saw opener Gautam Gambhir slip five rungs down the ladder at ninth in the latest ICC ranking for Test batsmen released on Sunday. Gambhir, who got out cheaply in the first over in both innings in first Test, have 773 points, while Tendulkar has 795 points in his kitty.

However, compatriot Virender Sehwag continued his upward surge after scoring a century in the first Test and topped the chart with 866 points. Among other Indians to figure in the top-20 list, VVS Laxman and Rahul Dravid, went down one step each to sit at the 14th and 18th place

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Skipper Sangakkara returned unbeaten on 130, his 23rd Test hundred, after he won the toss and elected to take first strike in typically good batting conditions at the SSC.

Both players reached their centuries in the same over, the 71st of the innings, as Paranavithana took three runs off a Prayagn Ojha misfield and Sangakkara lofted Virender Sehwag for a boundary.

Paranavithana was dismissed in the next over, bowled by seamer Ishant Sharma off the inside edge, but former captain Mahela Jayawardene kept Sangakkara company at stumps on 13.

The easy-paced wicket left India's bowlers facing an uphill struggle in hot and humid weather after captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni lost his seventh straight toss.

Young seamer Abhimanyu Mithun went for 0-75 in 17 overs and leading spinner Harbhajan Singh gave away 61 runs in 22 wicketless overs.

India, trailing 1-0 in the three-match series, suffered twin blows when opener Gautam Gambhir and middle-order batsman Yuvraj were ruled out of the key match.

Gambhir failed to recover from a knee injury, while Yuvraj developed high fever overnight.

The duo were replaced by left-hand batsman Suresh Raina, making his Test debut after playing 98 one-day internationals, and opener Murali Vijay.

Sri Lanka changed the entire frontline bowling attack that won them the first Test by 10 wickets.

With Muttiah Muralidaran now retired and fast bowler Lasith Malinga injured, the hosts replaced them with spinner Ajantha Fernando

and Dilhara Fernando.

Also out were left-arm spinner Rangana Herath and seamer Chanaka Welegedara. Their places went to debutant off-spinner Suraj Randiv and fast bowler Dammika Prasad.

"It is a good position to be in after day one," Sangakkara said on television after the day's play. "We are looking to get 450-500 or even 550 tomorrow."

"Tharanga is playing better after getting his first century in the previous match and even though [Tillakaratne] Dilshan missed out on a big score, his contribution at the top was vital."

"We have a new attack, but I am sure the bowlers will be able to exploit the conditions. I think the spinners will get bounce as the game goes on."

Paranavithana and Dilshan gave Sri Lanka a flying start by hammering 99 for the first wicket in 18 overs.

Dilshan smashed 54 off 42 balls before he was caught at short extra-cover by Venkatesh Laxman off left-arm spinner Ojha to provide India their only success of the morning session.

Dilshan hit Sharma for four consecutive boundaries and then took three in one over from Mithun.

When Paranavithana lofted Harbhajan for a six over mid-wicket, he brought up both the century partnership with Sangakkara and the 200 of the innings.

Paranavithana also struck 10 boundaries.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: First innings 312 for 2 (Paranavithana 100, Dilshan 54, Sangakkara 130 not out)

INDIA: Sehwag, Vijay, Dravid, Tendulkar, Laxman, Raina, Dhoni, Harbhajan, Mithun, Sharma, Ojha.

Talent hunt in 20 disciplines

SPORTS REPORTER

An initiative to introduce talent hunt program at the national level was taken at the National Sports Council (NSC) in order to groom sportsmen at national and international level for the country.

The decision was taken in a meeting held at the NSC conference room yesterday. Chairman of NSC and State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarkar was in the chair at the meeting.

The meeting decided to start the program in 20 disciplines with an estimated budget of Tk one crore.

The disciplines are Cricket, Football, Hockey, Swimming, Chess, Handball, Kabaddi, Volleyball, Basketball, Tennis, Table Tennis, Athletics, Karate, Cycling, Gymnastic, Weight lifting, Judo, Wushu, Taekwondo and Boxing.

The selected sportsmen will be handed over to the related federations for long-term training.

SPORTS POLL

TODAY'S QUESTION

Who is to blame for Bangladesh's latest debacle?

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Second Test, Day Two
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