

Astle to drive on a different track

Not content with holding the record for the fastest Test double-century, Nathan Astle is satisfying his need for speed in the world of sprint car racing. Astle, who retired four years ago, makes his debut at the Ruapuna Speedway near Christchurch on November 20 just five months after getting into the sport. "When you're out there you forget what's around you and you kind of feel how fast you do go," said Astle, who played 81 Tests and 223 ODIs for the Black Caps.



-INTERNET



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh football captain Aminul Haque (2nd from R) and some other members of the Asian Games-bound team spend some leisure time on the BFF House lawn before the official photo session yesterday. The team was to leave for China to participate in the 16th Asian Games which will be held in Guangzhou.

Bangladesh dream of second round

SPORTS REPORTER



With only a four-day preparation and despite an unsatisfactory record against their scheduled opponents, the Bangladesh U23 football team is dreaming big and hoping for qualification for the second round of the Asian Games in Guangzhou, China.

The desire of playing the 16-team second round was expressed at a press conference at the BFF House hours before their departure yesterday night.

"We expect a good tournament in the Asian Games as all the people are expecting to put good performance and I believe we can qualify for the second round," said national coach Robert Rubic.

Bangladesh, who are ranked 150 in the senior level, have been placed in Group E which also consists of Uzbekistan, United Arab Emirates and Hong Kong. All three opponents are ranked higher than Bangladesh by FIFA.

Uzbekistan, ranked 96, has always comfortably got the better of Bangladesh striking 15 goals in the three matches they have played so far after being separated from former Soviet Union in 1990.

The 99th ranked United Arab Emirates have also struck the same number of goals in four matches against Bangladesh national team.

Bangladesh and Hong Kong are neck and neck in the rankings and the best result for the local booters is a 2-2 draw in the four matches they have played against each other since 1975.

Bangladesh's lowest defeat margin against Hong Kong was 1-0 at Dhaka during the 2006 World Cup qualifiers.

Bangladesh's preparations have not been the best and Croat coach Rubic has not had the opportunity to have any practice match in a bid to settle his combination. He is further handicapped since he will miss the services of three key players; injured left-back Wali Faisal, Atiqur Rahman Mishu and winger Zahid Hossain for the first match against Uzbekistan on November 7.

Despite that fact, Rubic is optimistic

about a result and said that it depends on the motivation of the players, who have remained together for the last two to three years and were members of Bangladesh's triumph in South Asian Games in February early this year.

"If the players can play together and be serious to win the game, then it may be possible to qualify for the second round," said the 47-year old coach, who took charge of the national team in September.

The six group champions and runners-up as well as the four best third finishers will qualify for the second round in the meet that gets underway from November 7, although the 16th Asian Games will be officially inaugurated on November 12.

"What I can say at the moment is that we are ready for the first match and we are only thinking of the match against Uzbekistan," said Rubic, who however, has little idea about the opponents.

"We will go with our plans in every match. My strategy is to play quick and fast from the first to the last minute," said the Croat hinting that he was going to field either Towhidul Alam Sabuj or

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GM chess

SPORTS REPORTER

GM Ziaur Rahman lost his solo lead in the Berger Six Seasons Grandmasters Chess Tournament when he drew against Uzbek GM Vakhidov Tair in the sixth round at the Tulip Lounge of Uttara Club yesterday.

Zia now shares the lead with FM Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagar, who beat Indian FM Sayantan Das to join Zia with four points from six games.

GM Niaz Murshed was at the second position with 3.5 points after beating Yee Soon Wei of Brunei.

FM Abu Sufian Shakil drew against Indian IM Sahaj Grover and Indian Bitan Banerjee beat FM Mehdi Hasan Parag in the day's other matches.

Narail Express takes off early



SPORTS REPORTER

It seems that Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is in a hurry to return to action as the pace spearhead has already started to bowl during practice yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The Narail Express was supposed to start bowling after two weeks since he twisted his ankle during the first one-dayer against New Zealand last month, but he bowled for twenty minutes with a short run-up.

Apparently he was desperately trying to make himself match fit so that he can be available for next month's five-match one-day series against Zimbabwe, who will arrive in Dhaka on November 27.

"I'm just trying to get my confidence back and that's why I'm bowling few overs with a short run-up today (Thursday). I felt a little bit of pain. It's my destiny that I must play with pain. I'm ready to take the challenge. You know it takes at least three months to fully recover from the pain if you suffer an ankle injury," said Mashrafe.

"I'm really looking forward to playing in the Zimbabwe series and I am confident," he added. However, BCB's physician Dr. Debashish Chowdhury was not ready to say that Mashrafe started bowling.

"He (Mashrafe) might have tried to get back his confidence but he has to wait for another two weeks to return to action.

"You can't say that he started bowling in full throttle. I think he is just trying to gain some confidence. Actually in this situation everything will depend on his mental strength," said Debashish.

"He must be careful because another injury may jeopardise his career," he added.

Debashish also said that Mashrafe has a good chance to play in the upcoming series because he is progressing well.

The first match of the series will be held on December 1 at Mirpur where the second and third game will also take place on November 3 and 6 respectively.

The last two games will be held at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong on November 10 and November 12.

The third game will be played under floodlight.

Easy win for Sheikh Jamal

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club crushed North Bengal Cricket Academy by eight wickets in the First Division Cricket League at the Dhaka University ground yesterday.

Batting first, North Bengal were bowled out for 115 runs with Taijul taking 4 wickets and Rubaiyat picking up two scalps.

Promotion favourites Sheikh Jamal then took 28.1 overs to knock off the required runs with Mostafiz scoring an unbeaten 59.

Meanwhile, Agrani Bank, Dhaka Wanderers Club and Uttara Sporting Club also won their respective matches.

Army clinch v'ball title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Army clinched the inter-service volleyball title at the Volleyball playground in Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) Base Kurmitola yesterday.

They defeated Bangladesh Navy in straight sets in the final. Lance Corporal Sri Prakash Chakrabarty of the Army was adjudged the best player of the tournament.

Log Area Commander Maj Gen Muhammad Imrul Quayes watched the final and distributed prizes among the winners.

DAY'S EVENT

Nat'l Cricket League
 Khulna v Dhaka at Bogra
 Chittagong v Sylhet at Rajshahi
 Rajshahi v Barisal at Mirpur

Trio's deals suspended



AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket authorities have suspended the contracts of players Salman Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer, under investigation over spot-fixing allegations, an official said Thursday.

Former Test captain Salman and bowlers Asif and Aamer are facing charges of alleged spot-fixing during Pakistan's tour of England, which ended last month.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) legal adviser Taffazul Rizvi confirmed the contracts had been suspended.

"The central contracts of Salman, Asif and Aamer have been suspended because the PCB

only gives contracts to players who can play for Pakistan. Until their cases are decided they can't get any benefits from the board," Rizvi told AFP.

The corruption allegations came in a report in the British tabloid the News of the World, claiming several Pakistani players obeyed orders from an alleged book-maker during the Lord's Test against England in August.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) suspended the trio on September 2 and rejected the ensuing appeals from Salman and Aamer. Asif withdrew his appeal.

The PCB gave annual contracts to its top 18 players in March this year.

Salman and Asif were contracted to receive 250,000 rupees (2,900 dollars) monthly, while Aamer was placed in a lower category which

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India dominate Day 1



AFP, Ahmedabad

Virender Sehwag and Rahul Dravid struck centuries in contrasting fashion as India racked up 329-3 on the opening day of the first Test against New Zealand on Thursday.

Sehwag hit 24 fours and a six in his 199-ball 173 and also shared 237 runs for the second wicket with Dravid who scored a patient 104 off 222 balls with 14 fours.

Sachin Tendulkar, eyeing his 50th Test ton, was 13 not out with Venkatesai Laxman on seven when stumps were drawn for the day at the Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad.

Top-ranked India dominated their rivals who struggled in batsman-friendly conditions and dropped three easy chances after losing the toss.

Sehwag brought off his 22nd Test century in style, dancing down the track to loft left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori for a four over mid-off.

The dashing opener, dropped on 155 by substitute fielder Martin Guptill, was finally dismissed by Vettori, who became only the second player after Stephen Fleming to play 100 Tests for New Zealand.

Dravid, going through a lean spell with the bat this year, was dropped on 28 by wicketkeeper Gareth Hopkins who failed to latch on to a low chance off part-time medium pacer Jesse Ryder.

But the veteran batsman shrugged off a sluggish start and a blow on the head from a bouncer by debutant Hamish Bennett to complete his 30th Test century before being bowled by fast bowler Chris Martin.

The day belonged to Sehwag, who entertained the fans with a breathtaking array of shots all around the ground.

The swashbuckling batsman put on 60 runs with Gautam Gambhir, the duo surpassing the 3,010-run tally of Chetan Chauhan and Sunil Gavaskar to become India's most prolific opening pair.

Sehwag started off aggressively, hitting Martin for three fours in the third over of the day before Ryder struck to dismiss Gambhir, who inside-edged onto the leg-stump

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PHOTO: AFP

Virender Sehwag deposits the only six in his 173-run knock off New Zealand debutant Kane Williamson (not in picture) on the first day of the first Test at the Sardar Patel Gujarat Cricket Stadium in Ahmedabad yesterday.

MOST TEST RUNS IN 2010						
PLAYER	M	I	RUNS	HS	AVE	100 50
Sachin Tendulkar	10*	16	1283	214	98.69	6 4
Virender Sehwag	10*	17	1077	173	67.31	5 4
Ian Trott	10	18	880	226	55.00	2 3
Tamim Iqbal	7	14	837	151	59.78	3 6
Hashim Amla	7	12	796	253*	79.60	3 2

Saikat spins out CAB

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-17s rode on Saikat's six-wicket haul to take control on the opening day of their three-day game against Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) Under-17 side at the Comilla Stadium yesterday.

The off-spinner ran through the middle and lower order to help bowl out the visitors for 143 runs from 78.2 overs. In reply, the home side were 41 for no loss from 20 overs.

Saikat, who came into the bowling attack quite late, took 6 for 36 from 20.2 overs, while Sukanto, Rahat and Haider took a wicket each.

Late in the day, Rafsan and Sunny saw off the CAB new-ball bowlers and ended the day unscathed.



PHOTO: AFP

AC Milan's veteran striker Filippo Inzaghi (L) scores the equalising goal against Real Madrid during their Champions League match at San Siro on Wednesday.

Real's late escape

AFP, Paris



Real Madrid struck late on to earn a 2-2 draw at AC Milan on Wednesday and secure a place in the Champions League knockout phase, where they were joined by Chelsea and Bayern Munich.

Chelsea won 4-1 at home to Spartak Moscow to go six points clear in Group F, while Bayern maintained their perfect record with a 4-0 win at CFR Cluj in Group E, but Arsenal fell to a 2-1 defeat at Shakhtar Donetsk.

Real's trip to Milan marked Jose Mourinho's first visit to the San Siro since he left Inter Milan after guiding them to last season's Champions League title, and his new side immediately established a firm grip on the game.

Angel di Maria shot wide after cutting

in from the right, while Andrea Pirlo twice had to head the ball off the Milan goal-line, before Gonzalo Higuain broke the deadlock from Di Maria's cute pass on the stroke of half-time.

Real looked dominant, but in the 68th minute the hosts drew level when Iker Casillas palmed Zlatan Ibrahimovic's mis-hit cross into the air and substitute Filippo Inzaghi headed home from close range.

Inzaghi, a replacement for the disappointing Ronaldinho, put Milan ahead 10 minutes later, tucking away Gennaro Gattuso's through-ball for his 46th goal in the competition despite a strong suspicion of offside.

Real were on course for their first defeat under Mourinho, but in the fourth minute of injury time Pedro Leon converted a pass from fellow substitute Karim Benzema to snatch a share of the spoils.

The result puts Real five points clear of Milan, who are now just two points ahead

of Group G's bottom side Auxerre after the French team kept their hopes of a last-16 place alive with a 2-1 win at home to Ajax.

Chelsea joined Real in the next phase, but they had to wait until the second half before seeing off Spartak at Stamford Bridge.

Nicolas Anelka opened the scoring with a smart chipped finish in the 49th minute, before Didier Drogba marked his first start in the competition this season with a 62nd-minute penalty.

A brace from Branislav Ivanovic made sure of the points, with Nikita Bazhenov replying for the visitors.

Second-placed Spartak are now level on six points with Marseille, after Didier Deschamps's side belatedly hit form with a 7-0 thrashing of MSK Zilina -- a record for an away game in the competition.

Andre-Pierre Gignac claimed a hat-trick for the visitors, with Lucho Gonzalez netting a brace.

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