

Lightweight scarves known as snoods may be sweeping the playing fields of the English Premier League, but Manchester United coach Sir Alex Ferguson has banned his players from wearing them.

Former United striker Carlos Tevez has sported a snood while playing for Manchester City in recent weeks, with Arsenal midfielder Samir Nasri another convert. However, despite temperatures plunging in snow-hit Great Britain, Ferguson has reportedly told his players that the snoods are unmanly -- and forbidden them from wearing them in either games or training.

- AFP



SPORT

SAUNDERS SUNDAY DECEMBER 12, 2011 | news@thedailystar.net



PHOTOS: STAR

DYNAMIC DUO: Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan (2nd from L), the highest run-scorer in the series, and spinner Abdur Razzak (2nd from R), the highest wicket-taker, are limbering up at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong on Saturday ahead of today's series decider against Zimbabwe.

SIDDONS'S DESIRE Only Canada could play

SPORTS REPORTER

In response to coach Jamie Siddons's desire for the national team to play some more international matches before the 2011 World Cup, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday revealed that it might be possible to arrange some matches against Canada.

According to the existing schedule, the Tigers will play two warm-up games -- against Canada on February 12 and Pakistan on February 15 -- before taking on India in the opening match of the showcase event on February 19 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

"We also feel that it would be better if we could play some international matches before the World Cup and accordingly we are communicating with different countries. But the chance is very slim to get any team," said Enayet Hossain Siraj, chairman of BCB's cricket operations committee yesterday.

"We are however trying to bring Canada earlier than the schedule so that we can play some more matches against them before the World Cup," he added.

BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus said that they would continue their efforts to convince any team to play a series against the Tigers.

Bangladesh coach Siddons expressed his desire after the fourth match of the five-match series against Zimbabwe was washed out on Friday.

As per schedule the current series against the Africans is the last international engagement for Shakib Al Hasan's men, but the Tigers will get a chance to play the Premier Division Cricket League, which starts December 14.

All to play for

MOHAMMAD ISAM from Chittagong

As strong as Jamie Siddons's bullish mood was the Zimbabwe camp's assertion on ending the five-match one-day series with a win. The visitors have all to play for today as they take on the Tigers in the final game at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

Bangladesh are 2-1 up but with Friday's wash-out of the fourth one-dayer, the last game has suddenly gained importance for both sides; the visitors hoping at least to salvage a draw while the Tigers will want to make it a bigger series-winning margin.

"We are 2-1 up now, but we need to go 3-1 up. We need to play really good cricket to beat Zimbabwe. We need to keep them where they are now: in a little bit of indecision and lack of confidence, that's where we need to keep them," said Siddons yesterday after the Tigers' training session.

The tourists' skipper Elton Chigumbura, who had recovered from his groin injury before the

abandoned fourth game, said that he would settle for a 2-all draw. "It's better to level the series than to lose it. We just have to win the game and make sure we level the series," said the all-rounder.

Former Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak, now with the visitors as the bowling coach, also said that a drawn series would be an achievement.

"It would be something like that since Bangladesh recently beat New Zealand so convincingly.

"I think it would be nice to go from here with a draw, especially since this is our last series before the World Cup," said Streak.

The sun was out as the teams went about their nets but it was quite apparent that the ground itself hadn't dried up completely. Siddons also dispelled, for the time being, some of the concerns about the wicket.

"The wicket is really good, as good as we can expect. The outfield is still damp in places but sunshine and some wind can make it better. It's starting to look like a cricket ground again," he said.

Chigumbura, too, thought it was a typical Chittagong wicket, spin being the key to success.

"It's the sort of wicket I expect in Chittagong, making sure we stay on the wicket and defend a score while trying to chase whatever it is that is set for us.

"We are going with three spinners because of the wicket. I think anything under 220 would be a good score to chase. And if we bat first, anything over 200 is a winning score, especially with our bowlers," he added.

The Tigers meanwhile will go into today's match with an unchanged side, the chief selector Rafiqul Alam confirming that the winning combination from the third ODI would not be broken. "We are keeping the same team, a winning combination. Even though this is not a series decider, we have to make sure we win it 3-1," said the former national cricketer.

The Tigers have won the last three one-day series against the Zimbabweans, six in all while the visitors have won four, the last one coming in 2006.

Women's C'ship sees light today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar



The curtain of the inaugural SAFF (South Asian Football Federation) Women's Football Championship opens today at the Cox's Bazar Stadium with Nepal taking on Maldives in the opening game.

All the participating teams -- India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Maldives and hosts Bangladesh -- have already reached the coastal town, which has the largest sea beach in the world.

Meanwhile on the eve of this big event, the district has taken a festive look. The tourists town has been decorated with colourful festoons, banners and flags that have made the dwellers enthusiastic about the tournament. A handicraft fair has already opened near the venue to uphold the local heritage and culture.

A number of security measures have been taken up, said additional deputy commissioner Nurul Amin Nizami.

Worawi Makudi, chairman of FIFA women's committee and president of Thailand Football Association, is scheduled to arrive in Cox's Bazar today to declare the 12-day meet open as a

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Inspectors happy

SPORTS REPORTER from Ctg

The ground at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium has impressed the inspection team of the International Cricket Council (ICC).

The game's governing body has sent a 21-member team to inspect the various grounds of the 2011 World Cup and the port city is the penultimate one.

"The ground looks good, that's all I can tell you at this stage. Our job is to look at the facilities and submit our report," said ICC media operations manager Sami-ul Hasan while talking to reporters yesterday.

Hasan did not comment on the other aspects of the ground but said he was satisfied with the media facilities and confirmed that the view from the main segment of the press box (for the print media) will be better this time around. "There is provision, but during the World Cup there will be an uninterrupted view for everyone," he said.

He also informed that the grounds will be handed over to the ICC a fortnight before the tournament kicks off on February 19, adding that this doesn't necessarily have to be the last inspection.

"If need be, we will make another inspection," he said.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

BAD TIMING: The advertising prisms built into the sight screen at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium came clattering down just as the ICC inspection team was examining the venue in the port city yesterday.

Prism of shame

SPORTS REPORTER from Ctg

In the scale of embarrassing incidents, this one is definitely near the top.

As the 21-member ICC inspection team made themselves comfortable at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday, a huge clatter of falling steel startled everyone.

It didn't take too long to locate the origin of the noise: the sight screen at the media centre end was falling apart with the triangular aluminium prisms piling on top of each other. Half of it however remained glued to the screen, leaving only the "max" of Micromax (the series sponsor) visible.

The tri-vision sight screen, originally from Sweden, is 38 feet by 22 and it has 102 prisms, most of which had come off

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A year to remember

MOHAMMAD ISAM from Chittagong

Shafiul Islam's entire international career has been within the year 2010. Whether it is the 32 wickets that landed him in No 3 among the wicket-takers this year in one-day cricket or a stunning game-changing catch or even two very expensive spells; it has all taken place in the last 12 months.

As a result of the good and the bad, mostly good, the wiry paceman has earned attention with his nippy pace and ability to pick up wickets. Shafiul took his career best figures of four for 43 in the third one-dayer against Zimbabwe on December 5, and the quiet Bogra lad believes that the performance could help him in the long-run, especially with

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's presence doubling the competition for a place among the two new-ball bowlers.

"I didn't bowl much in the first two games and I didn't bowl too well either. So I really wanted to do a good job in the third game. Mashrafe bhai will play. There will be a fight for the other spot. If I do well, there will be a chance for me to play," said Shafiul.

Last Monday's display was clinical, Shafiul picking up the in-form Craig Ervine early and then taking the last three wickets as the Tigers strolled past the Zimbabweans and made it 2-1 in their favour.

This was Shafiul's third four-wicket haul, the last two coming in games where he was expensive: 4-61 against New Zealand back in February and 4-59 against Ireland in July. He also happened

to bowl two of the most expensive spells this year, a whopping 3-95 against Pakistan in Dambulla and 2-97 from nine overs against England in Birmingham, the match after Bangladesh beat the home side in Bristol.

"Actually my runs per over got up after two bad games against England and Pakistan. I gave a lot of runs in those matches. I think it is slightly difficult to bowl with the new ball," he said, adding that the Bristol win would rate as one of the best this year: "I felt I bowled quite well against England [in Bristol]. We really wanted to beat England, because we hadn't done so before."

Shafiul's initiation in international cricket has not gone unnoticed as

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Call for BHF committee to resign

SPORTS REPORTER

Having brought allegations of irregularities, inability, failures as well as downgrading the standard of the sport against the current body of Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF), former national hockey players, councillors and organisers have urged the authorities concerned to dissolve the existing committee led by Khondokar Jamiluddin to form an ad-hoc committee.

The demand was made yesterday at a press conference

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ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP HISTORY

A bittersweet symphony



The Wills World Cup in 1996 provided some great entertainment and a fairytale ending with Sri Lanka triumphing. The tournament though, was not free from controversy and planning gaffes, and trouble was on the horizon even before it started. Three weeks before the Cup started, over a thousand people had been injured in a terrorist bomb in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo, one of the host cities of the World Cup.

That led to Australia and West Indies refusing to play their league matches against Sri Lanka in Colombo, thereby forfeiting the matches and giving Sri Lanka two wins against two of their three big opponents in Group A, the other being India. It perhaps would not have mattered in the end, as Sri Lanka comfortably beat all their opponents, including Australia in the final at Lahore, but nonetheless it left an unnecessary question mark over the champions.

In an act of solidarity the Indian and Pakistan cricket boards sent their players to form an Asian XI to play Sri Lanka in a friendly one-day match in Colombo to prove the venue is indeed safe to play international matches.

The format of the tournament came in for criticism. The ICC had decided to include three Associate nations (Holland, Kenya, U.A.E), resulting in a lot of one-sided preliminary games. It was for a worthy cause, the globalisation of the game.

That was not the real reason for what Wisden called a "largely irrelevant saga of group games". The matches lost relevance because for the first time in World Cup cricket, there would be a quarterfinal stage; four top teams out of six in each group would go through to the knockout stages. This had the dual ill-effect of there being less competitive matches, and the fact that when two equal-strength sides did come up against each other, both teams played in the knowledge that a loss would not be the end because even finishing in fourth place would see them go through. There were only eight strong teams in world cricket, and it was no surprise that all eight of them qualified through an eventually meaningless group stage. Then, when business should have been picking up with the weaker teams being eliminated, it was all over in a frenzy of seven matches.

In the closing stages the world was witness to atrocious behaviour from the crowd at Eden Gardens in Calcutta, when the home team India stuttered to 120 for eight chasing Sri Lanka's 251 in the semifinals. The match had to be abandoned and the game awarded to Sri Lanka as the stands were set on fire and bottles were hurled on to the field.

According to a Wisden report on the World Cup, the crowd were only partly to blame: "They were merely responding to the seductions created for them by the promoters of the Wills World Cup, an event that plainly, disastrously, put money-making

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SPORTS POLL WEEKLY QUESTION

Do you think Bangladesh will win the ongoing series against Zimbabwe?

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