

# Star SPORT

DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 17, 2011, E-MAIL: sports@thedailystar.net

## Abidal to have liver surgery

Barcelona's France international Eric Abidal is to undergo surgery for a liver tumour, the club said late Tuesday. The 31-year-old will undergo the operation on Thursday at a Barcelona hospital, the Spanish champions announced in a brief statement on their website. The club said: "A liver tumour has been detected in the player Eric Abidal and he will be treated surgically next Friday. "Abidal will be operated on by Dr Josep Fuster Obregon. Per the express wish of the player, we call for the utmost respect for the right to privacy."



South Africa captain Graeme Smith (C) gets down from the team bus at Dhaka's Sheraton hotel after his arrival in the city yesterday, ahead of their clash with Bangladesh on Saturday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

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## All eyes on Eng-WI tie

SPORTS REPORTER



The match doesn't involve Bangladesh but the England-West Indies World Cup group B game will be watched keenly by every cricket-lover in this country as the two sides go head to head in a virtual knockout out game in Chennai today.

Apart from the backing of every Bangladeshi, West Indies will also have the advantage of recent form and overall record on their side, but in England's blue corner, there is World Cup history and the wins in recent games between the two sides.

But never before has a match between England and West Indies held so much importance for a third team.

England-West Indies encounters have been legendary, especially in the Test arena. Who would forget Garry Sobers's courageous declaration in the 1968 Port-of-Spain Test match which Colin Cowdrey's side managed to win by seven wickets, or the devastating Curtly Ambrose running through Mike Atherton's side of 1994, England being bowled for 46, also in Port-of-Spain.

In one-day cricket too, there have been plenty of classics including England's one-run win in Providence in 2009 as well as West Indies's 1-wicket win in Bridgetown in 1998.

Talking of the future and this England team have been the most watchable team of the tournament but are also the first big team facing elimination. Their inconsistency has been remarkable to say the least, winning against South Africa and the Dutch, tying with India but ending up on the losing side against both Bangladesh and Ireland.

But England can bank on their track record against the men from Caribbean. In the last five completed games, they won four but that was back in 2009.

Also on Andrew Strauss's side would be history of the World Cup where England have regularly defeated West Indies, only losing once. That one loss was the 1979 World Cup final when Viv Richards (138) and Collis King (86) tore Mike Brearley's team apart in an epic display of batting prowess.

But since that win, England have defeated them in 1987 (twice), 1992 and 2007, the last of which was Brian Lara's last-ever international appearance.

West Indies, on the other hand, has so far done what they were expected to do in the tournament. They were outplayed by South Africa but went on to crush the Netherlands and Ireland, in between unleashing themselves on the Tigers with a death blow that almost knocked Shakib Al Hasan's men out of the tournament. But Bangladesh survived by delivering their own shot at England to keep their quarterfinal hopes alive.

Overall, West Indies hold a 41-37 advantage over the English in ODI cricket but they are down by 6-11 in neutral venues. The last time they met at a neutral venue was in Ahmedabad where they won by three wickets.

As for the players, West Indies opener Chris Gayle will play a huge role in the game, the let-handed big-hitter having the highest score between the sides (132\* at Lord's in 2004) among the current players. Viv Richards holds the overall record with his then world record 189\* at Manchester in 1984.

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## Afridi willing to go to India

AFP, Colombo



Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi denied on Wednesday that he feared playing a World Cup quarterfinal in India, insisting a potential clash between the two neighbours can help ease strained relations.

"I have never said anything along the lines that we don't want to go to India. I never said that," said Afridi, hitting back at media reports that Pakistan want to avoid playing their last-eight games in India.

"We are here to play the World Cup, so wherever we have to play we will go and we have no fears over going to India," said Afridi of the possibility of a mouth-watering quarterfinal against their South Asian rivals at Ahmedabad.

"I think a cricket match has always brought the people of both countries together and has the capacity to improve the relations between the two," said Afridi.

The relationship between the nuclear rivals has been at breaking point since the terrorist attacks on Mumbai in 2008, which New Delhi blamed on extremists based in Pakistan.

Those attacks also forced India to stall bi-lateral cricket series with Pakistan, although both countries played against each other in the Champions Trophy in South Africa in 2009.

Afridi said he and his teammates have always enjoyed playing cricket in India.

"I have always enjoyed cricket in India, never enjoyed anywhere more than in India, I get maximum enjoyment there," said Afridi, whose first Test century came at Chennai in 1999.

He also hit one-day cricket's fourth fastest century off just 45 balls, against India at Kanpur in 2005.

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## 'Focus is on Proteas'

SPORTS REPORTER



Shahriar Nafees said yesterday that the Bangladesh team have their eyes firmly on the South Africa game, but it goes without saying that today's England-West Indies fixture would still interest him and his teammates.

The left-hander spoke after most of the Tigers took part in an optional training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, only six of

the 15-member side skipping practice as it was earlier scheduled as a rest day.

"Our main focus is on the South Africa game. If we can win this game, we can directly go to the quarterfinals," said Nafees, who was itching to get back to training after a day's break.

"The England-West Indies game is not under our control but we will still follow it. But it is important that we win. If we go into the quarterfinal with a win behind us, we can use this winning habit," he added.

Interestingly, the last time Nafees

faced the South Africans, their opening attack was comprised of speedsters Dale Steyn and Morne Morkel, but on Saturday, the left-hander could be expected to face a surfeit of spinners as the Proteas possess a varied bowling attack.

"We are all confident and we will watch their matches on video so that we can plan ourselves according to that. The way we have improved, I hope we can keep that going and continue it.

"It is difficult but the formula is simple: we have to play better than them in all three departments. Our bowling and fielding has clicked and if we can bat well, nothing is beyond us.

"They (South Africa) struggled against Ireland yesterday (Tuesday) and I think our bowling and fielding is better than Ireland's, so I don't see why it can't happen again," explained Nafees, who made a workmanlike 60-ball 37 in his comeback innings on Monday against the Netherlands.

In his first innings as a No 4 batsman, Nafees was involved in a 59-run third wicket stand with Imrul Kayes, who top-scored with an unbeaten 73. The Barisal captain hammered four boundaries and in the process more than doubled his previous World Cup tally of 31 runs that he had made from six innings.

But his dismissal -- bowled round his legs by the occasional off-spin of

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh batsman Shahriar Nafees is in a relaxed mood as he leaves the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium after practice yesterday.

**TODAY'S MATCH**

Match	Time	Venue
England v West Indies	3:00pm	Chennai

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England v West Indies

Though Bangladesh isn't playing today, this match is very important for them. If England lose the match, Bangladesh will be the fourth team to reach quarter final from group B. It is a must win game for England. West Indians are on top of their game after three consecutive wins in the tournament while England, after losing to Ireland and Bangladesh, is looking for a convincing victory to gain some of their respect back. In what is unquestionably the toughest of the two groups, West Indies were the team many expected to slip up against the lesser sides. Instead, they disposed of Ireland and Netherlands quite comfortably and gave Bangladesh the kind of pasting that the teams led by Lloyd and Richards were famed for.

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