

Star SPORT

Messi opens Facebook

Following tens of millions of other social media fans worldwide, Barcelona midfielder star Lionel Messi set up a Facebook page on Wednesday. In contrast to his electronic peers, however, within just a few hours his page had attracted more than six million followers. Such popularity warranted a speedy response from the Argentina international. "Welcome to everyone and thanks for all the messages you have been sending me. Now we shall be closer with Facebook," said the two-time world footballer of the year, whose followers come from all



S Africa A 301-7

SPORTS REPORTER

Justin Ontong hit 93 as South Africa A declared their first innings for 301-7 against Bangladesh A in the first day of the four-day match at the Senwes Park in Potchefstroom yesterday.

Pacer Robiul Islam gave the second string Bangladesh side a good start, removing the two openers with the score on 39, after Mohammad Ashraful decided to field first by winning the toss.

But Farhaan Behardien (33) with the experienced Jacobus Rudolph (32), who has so far played 35 Tests and 45 ODIs, repaired the early damage sharing 49 runs in the third wicket stand.

But it was Justin Ontong who neutralized the tourists' early initiative by hitting 93 off 102 balls with 13 boundaries before he was trapped leg before wicket by Nasir Hossain. The right-handed batsman, who has so far played 2 Tests and 26 ODIs for South Africa, shared a 115-run fifth wicket partnership with Stiaan van Zyl, who made 48 runs.

Left-handed batsman Stiaan van Zyl made 48 runs off 101 balls with eight boundaries while Heino Kuhn was the other notable scorer with unbeaten 36.

Robiul claimed three wickets conceding 56 runs in 20 overs while Kamrul Islam took two for 43 runs in 12 overs. Mohammad Ashraful and Nasir Hossain captured one wicket each.

In reply Bangladesh A were 12 for 1 at stumps, with opener Shamsur Rahman back in the hut.



Aussie paceman John Hastings (L) celebrates with teammates after completing his hat-trick during the warm-up game against BCB XI at Fatullah yesterday. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Hastings hat-trick guides Australia

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Australia were served a perfectly enjoyable buffet in their only practice game at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday with paceman John Hastings grabbing a hat-trick and four of their batsmen stroking half-centuries in their 90-run win over the BCB XI side.

Michael Clarke's men piled up 308 for six in 50 overs with Ricky Ponting top-scoring with 69 while Brad Haddin, Clarke himself and Michael Hussey warmed up well for the three-match one-day series against the Tigers that begins tomorrow.

BCB XI were 161 for two in the 36th over before Hastings made headway into the batting line-up, making it 166 for six in the space of his three-over second spell.

BCB XI ended up at 218 for seven in 50 overs with Hastings ending with figures of four for 15 in his seven overs.

Hastings first removed BCB XI skipper Rokibul Hasan to end a 149-run third wicket stand between Rokibul and Maishukur Rahman. Alok Kapali and Shuvogoto Hom Chowdhury were then trapped leg-before in the next two deliveries to give the big Victorian the hat-trick. Admittedly, Hastings tried a full delivery on his hat-trick ball, the umpire Nadir Shah adjudging Shuvogoto out much to the bowler's delight.

In his next over, he had Maishukur, the home side's top-scorer, caught by Tim Paine for 68.

"It is pretty surprising. When you get one, it is a very special feeling. There were two set batters at the crease and firstly, it was great to get the breakthrough but the next ones were a bonus," said Hastings.

It was only the 24-year-old Maishukur, a newcomer even for the local media and the small crowd, who battled manfully during his 103-ball innings that had five boundaries. Some of his shots were streaky but a few showed this hidden talent from Bogra. He was involved in the 100-plus stand with Rokibul after the home side were reduced to

12 for two in the sixth over.

"I tried to play according to my ability and tried not to look at them," said Maishukur who sounded confident despite making a debut in front of the cameras. "It was just a ball coming at me and all I did was meet the ball."

After reaching his half-century, Maishukur was praised by his more illustrious opponents. "Haddin and Brett Lee told me to continue batting well. They also praised me after I got the half-century," he said.

Maishukur, who got a reprieve from a diving Haddin on 31, latched on to that chance and batted with confidence as the virtually unknown quantity made his presence felt. Rokibul too looked in control at times but a fondness while facing away-going deliveries would be a cause for concern for national coach Jamie Siddons. He hammered five boundaries in his 94-ball 65 before falling to Hastings.

Earlier, Ponting smashed ten boundaries and a six in his 74-ball knock but it was Haddin who played the most attractive innings, smashing eight boundaries and a six in his 61-ball 66 after Australia had lost their first wicket in the fifth over, thanks to a sharp catch from

Alok Kapali at mid-wicket off Dollar Mahmud, who was a last-minute replacement for Nazmul Hossain.

Dollar and co bowled a poor length throughout, serving up one short ball after another as these world-class batsmen struck one wonderful boundary after another. Clarke's run-a-ball 56 went almost unnoticed as Hussey made his presence felt in the late overs. He too struck a half-century, ending with an unbeaten 52 off 50 balls with two huge sixes.

Shuvogotohom, with his occasional off-spin, and pacers Forhad Reza, Mahbulul Alam and Dollar Mahmud all took a wicket each.

BRIEF SCORES

AUSTRALIA: 308-6 in 50 overs (Ponting 69, Haddin 66, Clarke 56, Hussey 52 not out; Shuvogotohom 1-18).

BCB XI: 218-7 in 50 overs (Maishukur 68, Rokibul 65; Hastings 4-15, Johnson 2-24). Result: Australia won by 90 runs.

Mashrafe yet to decide

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The drama over Mashrafe Bin Mortaza playing the three-match one-day series against Australia still hangs in the balance with the first game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur only 48 hours away.

Everybody was curious to know whether Mashrafe would make an international return after missing the World Cup due to injury as the 'Narail Express' skipped training with the Tigers at Mirpur.

When he finally talked with the reporters after training, Mashrafe kept everybody guessing.

"I'm yet to take the final decision because I want to talk with everybody before taking this decision. I can assure you that tomorrow a decision taken for the best will be taken," said Mashrafe with an inquisitive smile.

What is confirmed is that Mashrafe is not fully fit and is also mentally going through turbulent times because of his ailing wife, making a decision on his

return to international cricket against a team like Australia difficult.

Mashrafe didn't explain the reason behind the dilly-dallying but a reliable source informed that he was under pressure from the board high-ups to play this series. It might sound funny but the reality is that he was drafted in the side despite the observation of the team think-tank that he was still unfit.

Besides, from the very beginning Mashrafe has been saying that he was not good enough to play in the series, prompting a burning question: Did the authorities concerned take his opinion before including him in the squad?

"I think it would not be wise to talk about the issue now. What I can say is that I am honest in my position. It would be good not to make public what happened before the selection," Mashrafe said when asked whether the authority has taken his opinion before drafting him into the squad.

Mashrafe however said that it would have been better for him if he had gotten at least one more week to improve his current fitness status.

"I'm giving hundred per cent in my bowling and it's not as if I was far away from my standard. But it could have been much better if I got at least one more week for preparation. Physio (Michael Henry) also told me that I need a few more days for gaining full fitness."

"Because of family problem I was out of touch for almost forty days which made it difficult for me to regain full fitness. As a player I want to play this series but I have to think about my team also," he continued.

Mashrafe however believes that his decision, be it yes or no, would not distract the team focus ahead of a tough challenge.

"I don't think it will hamper the team spirit because everybody is focused on the series and they are very much aware about my situation. And above everything I have to fight for a place if even I am hundred per cent fit because Rubel (Hossain) and Shafiq (Islam) are in the best form," said Mashrafe, adding the he would go for another surgery on his right knee sooner than later.

Pace in poor health

Cricket

REAZUR RAHMAN ROHAN

Bangladesh's cricket setup is designed with spinners in mind but one cannot expect captains to pull out 50 overs of spin.

Pace bowling is required in these hot conditions, where early seam movement comes by default while reverse swing can be a weapon later in the innings.

Refreshingly though, Bangladesh fielded a pace-based BCB XI in the lone practice match against Australia at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday. It might have been done from

the thinking that the Aussies would not get enough practice against spin, which will be plentiful supply in the next three ODIs against the Tigers.

However, it allowed a neglected pace stock a chance to show their worth against a world class opposition. But it did not look healthy.

Shuvashish Roy, Dollar Mahmud, Mahbulul Alam and Forhad Reza were the four seamers who played alongside off-spinner Mahmudul Hasan.

Australia scored 308 for six in their allotted 50 overs and 240 of those runs came from 37 overs bowled by the pacers, yielding only three wickets.

Taking a closer look at the different pacers on show, it seemed that none of them were aware of the length to bowl.

Dollar, though he got the breakthrough with the wicket of Shane Watson, kept bowling short and getting hammered for fours. He gave away 63 runs from his eight overs and one wouldn't need a wagon wheel to realise where he leaked runs mostly square of the wicket on the on-side.

The last time Dollar played for the national side, he was erratic and gave away too many runs and it has remained the same. In fact, some in the Bangladesh

team management believe that Dollar is a better batsman than a bowler, hoping to bring him in as an all-rounder once again.

But on yesterday's performance, it just goes to show not much improvement has been made on the bowling bit.

Shuvashish and Mahbulul bowled out their quota of ten overs, both giving away 59 runs each with one wicket under their belt.

Forhad's performance wasn't too eye-catching as well. Man-of-the-match in Rajshahi's last National Cricket League match with eight wickets, he never troubled the batsmen with anything, hoping to bowl on a length. He too conceded over six an over from his nine overs, giving away too many short balls at his pace.

It was a placid pitch to bat on, and after the Aussies decided to bat upon winning the toss, the bowlers should have just concentrated on line and length rather than going for pace and bowling short and getting battered all round the park. This is supposedly a back-up pace attack for the Tigers, and one for the future. Good seamers are rarely found nowadays with spinning or batting wickets prepared most of the times.

Interestingly, young left-arm seamer Kamrul Islam, from Chittagong, is currently the only paceman in the top ten bowlers list in this season's National Cricket League. The other spots all belong to spinners and most of them are left armers.



BCB XI batsman Maishukur Rahman heaves the ball towards the leg side during his fighting innings of 68 in his first taste of international cricket against Australia in the warm-up match at Fatullah yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

TEN-TEAM WORLD CUP

Speed slams ICC decision

Cricket

INTERNET, Sydney

Former International Cricket Council (ICC) chief executive Malcolm Speed has criticised the decision of the game's governing body to exclude minnow nations from the 2015 World Cup.

The ICC has confirmed that the 2015 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand would be contested by the 10

nations, four fewer than the recent tournament held in the sub-continent.

"The decision strikes me as an insular, parochial decision that just perpetuates the 10 full-member countries, who are actually full members because they are Test-playing countries," the Sydney Morning Herald quoted Speed, as saying.

"They're not full members because they're ODI-playing countries, they are chosen because they can sustain Test cricket. But other countries are

then excluded from the major one-day tournament, so I think it's a very insular, backward-looking decision," he added.

The previous World Cup format had been heavily criticised for the length of time between team's group matches and as a result, taking six weeks to complete the event.

Canada, Kenya, the Netherlands, Ireland and Zimbabwe were the non-Test playing nations participating in the 2011 edition on the Indian sub-continent.