



Former Bangladesh striker Sheikh Aslam (C) picks a name during the draw ceremony of the Independence Day Cup football at the BFF House yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Runner Group golf

SPORTS REPORTER

Indian golfer Kahlina Jashi maintained a solo lead in the Runner Group 26th Bangladesh Amateur Golf Championship with eight under par at the close of the third round's play at the Kurmitola Golf Course in Cantonment yesterday.

Kahlina played three under par to score 69 on the third day and finished with an overall score of 208 and is ahead of nine strokes from Bangladeshi Jakiruzzaman, who played three under par 69 in the third round to have an overall score of 217 to stay behind Kahlina. Local golfers Dulal, Nazim and Sajib Ali are jointly in the third position.

Zidane rubbishes Grozny invite

AFP, Paris

French football legend Zinedine Zidane on Friday expressed his anger as he denied he had been invited to the opening of a new stadium in Russia's war-torn republic of Chechnya next month.

Akhmad Kadyrov stadium, named for the late Chechen leader who was killed in a 2004 bomb blast while attending a ceremony in the republic's current main stadium, is due to open in the capital Grozny on May 9.

And Chechen sport chief Haidar Alkhanov said on Thursday that Zidane had already accepted an invitation to attend the opening ceremony, and that negotiations were currently under way to secure the presence of UEFA chief Michel Platini.

Mashrafe's

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it's not the case. I don't know what will happen if I play the match because I may concede 80 to 90 runs in ten overs and you can imagine what will be the consequence of it.

"On the other hand I am determined to go for another surgery which means I will be sidelined for another six to seven months or more, so I don't think there will be any chance for me to revive my career again. Actually I am not sure what is going to happen in my career," said a frustrated Mashrafe.

He was however not ready to give any answer when asked why he has decided to play the series when he felt that he was not hundred percent okay to make his international return.

From the very beginning of his selection the pace bowler has been saying that he was not in a good shape because of a combination of fitness issues and the poor health of his wife.

Groups drawn for Independence Cup

Football
SPORTS REPORTER

There will hardly be any climax in the group stages of the Independence Cup football tournament as all four groups have been decked up in line with the standings of the ongoing Bangladesh League.

The top four teams of the Bangladesh League table have been kept on top in different four groups, while the four teams standing from five to eight have been drawn in four groups and groupings have been completed through placing the lowest ranking four teams in four groups.

The tournament will kick off through the opening match between Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club and Farashganj MFS at 4:30pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Sunday followed by the second game between Abahani and Ctg Mohammedan.

BFF competition committee chairman Harunur Rashid informed they are planning

to bring Swadhin Bangla football team manager Mazharul Islam Tanna to inaugurate the second edition of the Independence Cup, which was first held in 2005.

"In a bid to keep the memories of our independence war and contributions of the freedom fighters to the next generation, the football federation has taken this initiative to hold the Independence Cup football," said Rashid at the ceremony.

The champions and runners-up will be awarded Tk 5 and Tk 3 lakh respectively while all participating teams will be given Tk 2 lakh as participation money.

Tickets at East and West Gallery have been kept Tk 20 while VIP for Tk 50.

GROUPINGS

Group A: Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club, Rahmatganj MFS and Farashganj SC
Group B: Sheikh Russel KC, Dhaka Mohammedan and Ctg Abahani
Group C: Muktijoddha Sangsad, Arambagh KS and Feni Soccer Club
Group D: Abahani Ltd, Brothers Union and Ctg Mohammedan

Ireland slams ICC decision

Cricket
AFP, Dublin

The Irish government promised full backing to their cricketers Friday in efforts to overturn their removal from the next World Cup, slamming the decision as flying in the face of sportsmanship.

On Tuesday the International Cricket Council confirmed a decision to slash the 2015 and 2019 World Cups to just 10 teams in a move that was described by Cricket Ireland's chief executive Warren Deutrom as "frankly outrageous".

Sports Minister Leo Varadkar, at a special reception to welcome back the national team after the recent World Cup tournament that featured 14 teams, slammed the plan as a "closed shop" that wouldn't be a "World Cup at all."

Ireland pulled off one of the shocks of the just-concluded tournament when they came from behind to beat England by three wickets in a thrilling group stage clash that Varadkar described as "stunning."

'Series will be competitive'

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"We can beat any team in the world if we can play as per our potential" is a statement which has become a mantra for the Jamie Siddons led side for the last one and a half years but the Bangladesh skipper gave an altogether different impression on Friday.

But whatever the fact, Bangladesh have now got a chance to regain pride after a forlorn campaign in the World Cup where they won three games including one against England but failed to qualify for the quarterfinals, capitulating to especially worrying scores of 58 and 78 which has still been haunting many.

Shakib's men have to bat well in the series against a new-look Australia if they want to impress the cricket fraternity again.

"Our main focus would be to play good cricket in the series. We didn't fulfill our expectation in the World Cup but now it's a new challenge for us and we are looking forward to this series. We must improve our batting performance and we must be consistent," said Shakib.

The focus will be on Shakib and his dep-

ty Tamim Iqbal because both the two key performers were not at their best in the World Cup and many thought that was the reason Bangladesh failed to fulfill their expectation.

"I don't have any personal goals rather my main objective is to contribute something for my team," opined Shakib adding that nothing has changed in their mind despite the fact that the hype and expectation was not same as it was before and during the World Cup.

Australia might have made an early exit from the World Cup losing the quarterfinal game against India and they might have lost their reign as champions but Shakib still believed that Australia would be a tough opponent.

"Australia came here with almost the same team what played in the World Cup. I think Australia is a very difficult opponent, so we must play our best game against them," warned Shakib.

Shakib however assured everybody that it would be a competitive series.

Hair-cut can wait

AFP, Berlin



With Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund facing a tough clash at Hamburg on Saturday, Germany midfielder Kevin Grosskreutz insists he will only cut his hair once his team lift the title.

The 22-year-old life-long Dortmund fan broke into the Germany squad this season on the back of an impressive form which has helped steer Dortmund towards their first German league title since 2002.

With his side currently seven points clear at the top of the table with six games left to go, Borussia are edging ever closer to the Bundesliga shield and a Champions League place next season.

But Grosskreutz, who scored as Dortmund came from behind to beat title rivals Hanover 4-1 at home last Saturday, is refusing to get a haircut until his team are crowned German champions.

"We are slowly getting towards the title and then I can get my haircut," he admitted.

"I have never had it so long before, I bet last October that I wouldn't get it cut until we win the league."

Hamburg coach Michael Oenning has said he hopes Dortmund win the title, but plans on pulling off an upset

when they host the German leaders.

"I like Dortmund and would be happy if they are champion," said the 45-year-old, who took over after Armin Veh was sacked last month.

"But we will cook something up for them."

And Hamburg captain Heiko Westermann, who used to play for Dortmund's rivals Schalke, said he wanted to beat the leaders to open up the title race.

"We want to reward our hard work by beating Dortmund to make the league exciting again," said the Germany defender.

Hamburg are seventh in the table and four points off a place in the Champions League.

"We need the points not only for our confidence, but also to achieve our goals," said Oenning.

Second-placed Bayer Leverkusen can expect few problems on Sunday as they host St Pauli, who are waiting to hear their punishment after last week's game with Schalke was abandoned after the assistant referee was hit by a beer cup.

Defending champions Bayern Munich are up to third in the table and are at Nuremberg in the Bavarian derby on Saturday.

They have few injury problems and only defender Daniel van Buyten will be missing as he struggles to overcome a muscle injury.

FIXTURES

Saturday
Schalke 04 v VfL Wolfsburg, Hamburg v Borussia Dortmund, Freiburg v Hoffenheim, Hanover 96 v Mainz 05, Nuremberg v Bayern Munich, VfB Stuttgart v Kaiserslautern

Sunday
Borussia M'gladbach v Cologne, Bayer

Inter-district athletics

SPORTS REPORTER

The Inter-District Athletics Competition got underway at the Sultana Kamal Women's Sports Complex in Dhanmondi yesterday.

Chameli Akhter of Gaibandha become champion in Long Jump followed by Sherpur's Mariyam Sarkar and Khulna's Tumpa Moni while Rani Bhoumick of Jessore won gold medal in discus throw while Sharifa Neha of Narail and Sharmin Akhter of Barisal finished second and third respectively.

Afridi urges IPL to include Pak players

CRICINFO

Shahid Afridi, the Pakistan captain, has said called on the IPL to include Pakistani players with relations between the two countries steadily improving. Pakistan played India in the World Cup semifinal in Mohali, a game watched by Pakistan Prime Minister Yusuf Gilani on the invitation of his Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh, who was also present.

"It is high time the Pakistani cricketers also get a place in the IPL. For three seasons, including the current one, we haven't been a part of the IPL. We have no problems playing in India as we have just played a World Cup semi-final there," Afridi told PTI.

Tamim in

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in four Tests against England, and a further 11 in the two-match series against Australia, including seven in the second Test at Headingley, when Australia were bowled out for 88 on the first morning.

"If [the player in question] were exonerated, then it would be possible to reconsider the position," explained Berry. "That's why I didn't pick anyone else instead. But as things stand, we don't feel we can choose him. It's all very sad."

Morgan also became the first Irishman to be selected in this list. His innovative strokeplay helped propel England to the World Twenty20 in the Caribbean, as well as secure a home ODI series wins over Australia and Pakistan.

Batting woes

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footsteps with Nazimuddin (13), Mohammad Ashraful (14) returning to the dressing room cheaply as the scoreboard read 43 for four.

Middle order batsmen Mehrez Hossain (18), Nadif Chowdhury (19), Sahagir Hossain (23) and Nasir Hossain (33) produced some resistance but their efforts were not enough to put a decent challenge against the hosts.

Stosur sent packing

Tennis
AFP, Charleston

Second seed and defending champion Samantha Stosur crashed out of the WTA's Family Circle Cup Thursday, falling in straight sets to unseeded Russian Elena Vesnina.

On a day when top-seeded Caroline Wozniacki passed a tough test with flying colors, coming up with two tiebreak victories to reach the quarter-finals, Australia's Stosur fell 6-4, 6-1 to Vesnina.

"Anytime you lose early in a tournament, it's not a good feeling," said Stosur, who this week announced through Tennis Australia that she would skip the country's upcoming FedCup tie against Ukraine to focus on the clay court build-up to the French Open.

"But especially in a tournament like this, where I really enjoyed playing," Stosur said. World No. 1 Wozniacki, meanwhile, fended off the solid challenge of Czech Barbora Zahlavova Strycova, 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (11/9) in a match lasting more than 2 1/2 hours.

"I knew that it wasn't going to be easy. I've seen her before and played her last year here," Wozniacki said.

Wozniacki jumped out to a 4-1 first-set lead.

But after a frustrated Zahlavova Strycova spoke to her coach, she adopted a more aggressive approach that paid handsome dividends.

The Czech was able to extend the rallies,

pushing Wozniacki into the corners of the court to chase down shots.

After forcing the first tiebreaker, Zahlavova Strycova dropped behind 5-1, then won five straight points to hold a set point that she couldn't convert.

Zahlavova Strycova took a 2-0 lead in the second frame before Wozniacki rallied.

After forcing the tiebreaker, Wozniacki took a 5-2 lead, but Zahlavova Strycova fought off four match points.

Zahlavova Strycova had a set point at 9-8, but again couldn't convert, this time surrendering the match.

Despite the defeat, Zahlavova Strycova said she was proud of her performance.

"Against these players, you have to risk a lot and you have to be aggressive," she said.

In the quarter-finals, Wozniacki will play sixth-seeded Yanina Wickmayer of Belgium, a 6-4, 7-5 winner over Georgia's Anna Tatishvili.

Vesnina next plays play Germany's Julia Goerges, who beat fifth-seeded Israeli Shahar Pe'er 6-2, 6-3.

Third-seeded Jelena Jankovic of Serbia defeated South African Chanelle Scheepers 6-2, 6-2 to reach the quarter-finals.

She'll face 18-year-old American Christina McHale, who beat Slovakian Daniela Hantuchova 7-6 (7/3), 6-1.

The other quarter-final will pit China's Peng Shuai against Indiana's Sania Mirza.

Peng defeated seventh-seeded Russian Nadia Petrova 6-3, 5-7, 6-2, while Mirza beat Germany's Sabine Lisicki 6-4, 6-4.



Indian tennis sensation Sania Mirza plays a backhand return against German Sabine Lisicki in the Family Circle Cup tournament in Charleston on Thursday. Sania won 6-4, 6-4. PHOTO: INTERNET