

## Thuram opens Al Bireh Stadium

French football icon Lilian Thuram inaugurated a spanking new international stadium in the West Bank on Thursday by kicking off the Palestinian Cup final. Thuram wound up a four-day visit to the West Bank by taking the first kick in the first division championship final between Al Bireh and Wadi Al Nees. The 9,000-capacity stadium at Al Bireh, on the outskirts of the West Bank political and economic centre of Ramallah, was built at a cost of one million euros (\$1.45 million) funded by France, Germany, the United Nations, FIFA and the Al Bireh municipality.



## More than just runs and wins

### Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

In John Wright's popular book "Indian Summers", he mentions on many occasions how difficult it is for coaches when all is said and done and the team is out in the middle.

During the second innings of the decisive 5th one-day against Pakistan in 2003-04, Wright wrote: "After all the practice, planning, fielding charts, computer analysis and the team talks, you're reduced to hoping like hell the other mob has an off day. I tried to stay as detached as possible, knowing there was nothing I could do."

Wright had Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid, Virender Sehwag,

VVS Laxman and Anil Kumble in his corner. Despite the presence of such luminaries, Wright had little or no control over the events in the cricket field. It is even more difficult for a coach who is in charge of mere mortals and that is exactly what makes Jamie Siddons's stint as Bangladesh coach remarkable.

If his three-year reign as Bangladesh coach is analysed, it would be the win-loss record that comes up first. His one reads 111-33-77-1 (in Tests, ODIs and T20s) including a historic one-day series win over New Zealand, first wins over England, a total of seven one-day series wins and one Test series win over West Indies. Given the time he took over and what he had to face less than a year into office, it is indeed noteworthy.

Apart from these 33 wins though, Siddons has made an important contribution to Bangladesh cricket at large. He has developed a batting line-up that can be considered part of the armoury rather than a liability. The Tigers now have a number of batsmen who have become of international standard. Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan certainly top that list with Imrul Kayes and Mahmudullah Riyad now becoming important members of the national team. Zunaid Siddiqui and Rokibul Hasan too did well till late 2010 while Mushfiqur Rahim still shows patches of form. Shahriar Nafees's resurgence also shows how important it is to play well in international cricket rather than just representing the country.

Siddons instilled the ethos of hard work and patience into players who came into the national team as half-baked cricketers. Their

development has been excellent to watch but so was the tapering off of some after the Zimbabwe series. It showed how fickle international cricket can be, the moment you take your eye off the ball, results drop and runs dry up.

Many say that Siddons's predecessor Dav Whatmore had tremendous man-management skills, an ability that he required with the experienced players and some of the temperamental ones. Siddons though seemed phlegmatic and less head-strong, giving him varied levels of success.

Mohammad Ashraful's downfall in international cricket is sometimes looked upon as a flaw in Siddons's time as the Tigers coach. When he wanted to create 'many Ashrafuls' in his early days, some say that he alienated the talented batsman. Some have also pointed out that the 'team rules' straitjacketed Ashraful's strokeplay, the ex-captain famously playing out a maiden over in the opening match of the Kityly Cup just to adhere to that.

But Siddons has helped tremendously in the development of a number of cricketers in the team, particularly someone like Imrul who was considered a "strokeless wonder".

Imrul's improvement is certainly a testament of the youngster's hard work and dedication but it is Siddons's ethos that has helped him develop into an opener of international standard.

Sometimes in Bangladesh matches, an eye on the glass door at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium's home dressing room would have showed Siddons constantly coming out near the rope than the others, especially when the Tigers are batting.

It may sound strange but most of the batsmen in the Bangladesh team needed their coach's presence to guide them through torrid starts, their 40s and sometimes the 90s. Siddons, more often than not, used to gesture to calm down hot heads and it is said by those close to this team, the Australian succeeded in doing so.

In that regard, Siddons has left behind a huge void to fill. In fact, when a coach leaves these shores, we tend to look for what they have left behind. Some, in the past, have left scars while others have given some joy.

So what has Siddons left as his lasting legacy? Definitely the improvement and some consistency among the batsmen is one

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JAMIE SIDMONS



A FINE START: Shakib Al Hasan (L) celebrates his second wicket (Shane Watson) during his IPL debut for Kolkata Knight Riders against Rajasthan Royals at the Sawai Man Singh Stadium in Jaipur yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Ton-up Elgar holds firm

SPORTS REPORTER

South Africa A were 269 for three on the third day of the rain-marred second unofficial Test match against South Africa A in Pietermaritzburg yesterday.

The second day was also washed out after the hosts were strongly placed at 233 for two after 62 overs on the first day before the rains took over the picturesque City Oval ground.

On the third day, Farhaan Behardien got out for 91 to Robiul Islam after he had added 168 for the third wicket with Dean Elgar, who was unbeaten on 136.

For the second string Bangladesh side, leg-spinner Noor Hossain and skipper Mohammad Ashraful took a wicket each.

## Shakib's fine debut

STAR SPORT DESK



Shakib Al Hasan made a bright IPL debut when he took two wickets in Kolkata Knight Riders' 9-wicket win over Rajasthan Royals at the Sawai Man Singh Stadium in Jaipur yesterday.

The Bangladesh captain, who was acquired by the Kolkata franchise for \$425,000 during the auction in January, removed Amit Paunikar in his first over before taking the prized scalp of Shane Watson in his last as he ended with figures of two for 31 from four overs.

South African Jacques Kallis top-scored with a 65-ball 80 not out while skipper Gautam Gambhir made an unbeaten 75 off just 44 balls as Kolkata achieved a 160-run target with nine deliveries to spare for their second win in three matches.

The pair added 152 for the unfinished second-wicket stand to ensure an easy victory for their team.

Left-handed Gambhir, caught off a no-ball when on 66, cracked one six and 11 fours, including four boundaries in an over from seamer Amit Singh. Kallis hit two sixes and seven fours in his third successive half-century.

It was the first defeat in three matches for Rajasthan, led by former Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne.

Kolkata spinners Yusuf Pathan (2-4) and Shakib Al Hasan (2-31) earlier shared four wickets to restrict Rajasthan despite a 25-ball 35 not out by New Zealander Ross Taylor.

Off-spinner Pathan bowled former India captain Rahul Dravid (35) and then held a return catch to account for Ashok Menaria (27) in the same over to put pressure on Rajasthan.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

RAJASTHAN ROYALS: 159-4 in 20 overs (Taylor 35 not out, Dravid 35, Menaria 27, Watson 22; Pathan 2-4, Shakib 2-31) KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS: 160-1 in 18.3 overs (Kallis 80 not out, Gambhir 75 not out) Result: Kolkata Knight Riders won by nine wickets.

## 'Fountain deal by April 19'

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has informed that they are still in negotiations with fielding coach Julien Fountain.

According to BCB CEO Manzur Ahmed, they are in talks with the Englishman with the outcome to be known sometime later this week.

"We are in talks with him and it will be confirmed in the next day or two. In fact we have a board meeting on April 19 and by then the outcome will be known," Manzur said yesterday.

Fountain's first contract, after being hired in August last year, was till March 31 but the board extended it by a month after the Australia series was confirmed.

"If he agrees with the terms and conditions, a fresh contract will be given as he currently has a temporary contract with the board," informed Manzur, who also added that the board will start searching for a new coach very soon.

It was however learned from sources that the board's negotiations have left a lot to be desired.

## Pak tennis star calls for peace match

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan tennis star Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi has resumed calls for a peace match on the Indian border to foster reconciliation efforts between the two South Asian rivals.

Qureshi, whose doubles pairing with Indian star Rohan Bopanna has been dubbed the "Indo-Pak Express", wrote to Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani calling for "tennis for peace."

The star's father Ihtesham told AFP that Aisam had made the request as a "unique effort to promote peace".

Qureshi and Bopanna, currently 17th in the ATP world doubles rankings, made headlines around the world when they reached the final of last year's US Open.

## Watson takes over Shakib's position

SPORTS REPORTER

Shakib Al Hasan's place as the No 1 ODI all-rounder has been usurped by Australian Shane Watson.

The Bangladesh captain, who first climbed into that position in the ICC rankings more than two years ago (April 23, 2009), has been going through a lean patch over the past three months. At the same time, Watson has built on good form from the Australian summer as well as a decent World Cup and a red-hot Bangladesh series to become the top all-rounder in limited overs cricket.

Watson made 294 runs, including a brutal, unbeaten 185 in the second game, smashing 15 sixes, a record, and as many fours, and picked up three wickets. It is his career-best ranking to date.

Shakib now trails him by 44 points while Watson also rose nine places to reach No. 4 in the rankings for ODI batsmen.

Interestingly, Shakib got Watson out in the left-arm spinner's IPL debut yesterday.

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## INDEPENDENCE CUP FOOTBALL

### Abahani, Sk Jamal win

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani and Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club emerged champions from their respective groups after winning their last group matches of the Independence Cup football tournament at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Abahani beat Brothers Union 1-0 courtesy of a first-half strike from Twum Frank while Sheikh Jamal thrashed Rahmatgonj MFS 4-1 with national striker Enamul haque scoring a brace. Despite the loss, Brothers do go through as runners up while Rahmatgonj missed out on goal difference to Farashgonj who finished second in their group.

Chances were few and far between in this high-tempo match between Abahani and Brothers with ball possession shared fairly equally.

However, the difference was made by Ghanaian Twum Frank, who had also scored the only goal in the match between the two teams in Bangladesh League, on the 37th minute as he broke the offside trap on a lob from Awudu Ibrahim before leaving the goalkeeper flat and dispatching the ball at the back of the net.

Brothers came close to equalising in the 58th minute when Brazilian Rafael Vivaldo dived to head a beautiful cross from his compatriot Everton Santos only to find the keeper come up with an equally good save.

The match opened up more in the last quarter with both team trying to score, but in

the end Frank's strike proved the difference. In the earlier match, Sheikh Jamal's 4-1 win came on a brace from Enamul and one each from Shakil Ahmed and Emmanuel Ayuk.

Sheikh Jamal had come to this match with a 4-2 win over Farashgonj, while the battle of the two Gonj's had ended 2-2.

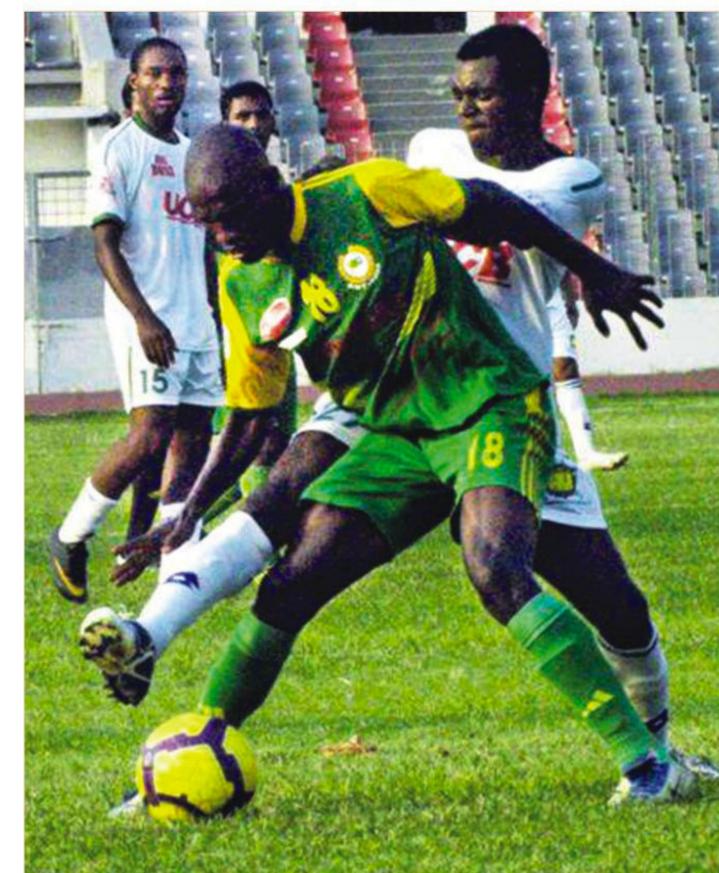
A new-look Sheikh Jamal with four of their African recruits took the lead on the third minute when Nigerian winger Femi Orunnimi's corner was headed in by Cameroonian striker Ayuk.

National forward Shakil winger scored the second for Sheikh Jamal in the 22nd minute when he beat the keeper with a placing shot from inside the box.

Sheikh Jamal coach Packer Ali brought in national striker Enamul Haque at the start of the second half and the lanky forward took less than a minute to get on the scoresheet. Shakil's well-worked minus from the edge of the box was worked to the path of Enamul who slammed it expertly at the back of the net.

Rahmatgonj pulled one back in the 54th minute when Uche Felix lay a feather touch to a goalbound ball from captain Idris Kasirye.

But Enamul restored the margin on the 74th minute volleying in a Shakil cross from six yards. Aminul made a brilliant double-save in the dying moments to put the match and quarterfinals beyond the reach of Rahmatgonj.



Action from yesterday's Independence Cup football match between Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club and Rahmatgonj at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

PHOTO: COURTESY