

Star SPORT

DHAKA TUESDAY MAY 17, 2011, E-MAIL: sports@thedailystar.net

West Ham sack Grant

Avram Grant was sacked as West Ham United manager on Sunday in the aftermath of the club's relegation from the Premier League, the club announced. "The club can confirm that Avram Grant is no longer the manager of West Ham United," said a statement released on the club website. "First-team coach Kevin Keen will take charge of the team for the final home match of the season against Sunderland on May 22." The east London club's owners David Gold and David Sullivan, together with vice-chairwoman Karren Brady, acted swiftly



IRON SHEIKH: Rahmatganj goalkeeper Iran Sheikh is the toast of his teammates after his numerous spectacular saves formed the basis of their victory over Abahani in their Bangladesh League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. *Inset:* Angry Abahani supporters vent their frustration at the loss on the players' dugout.

PHOTOS: STAR

Rahmatganj rob Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Abahani paid the price for missing numerous scoring opportunities including a penalty kick as they lost 1-0 against Rahmatganj MFS in their Grameenphone Bangladesh League fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Cameroonian midfielder Modo Hugues struck the all-important goal in the 23rd minute for Rahmatganj while goalkeeper Iran Sheikh made at least half a dozen saves to leave the Sky Blues wobbling in their bid for a fourth consecutive title. With their third defeats in 16 matches, Abahani remain on 35 points, three behind leaders Muktijoddha Sangsad who have a game in hand. Rahmatganj moved up to sixth position with 20 points from 16 matches. Muktis take on Sheikh Russel on Friday and a win on that match will open up a six-point lead for the Reds. While they wasted a lot of chances, Abahani managed to put the ball twice on the back of the, but they were ruled out for offside. Angry Abahani fans vandalised the referees' room as well as players' tent in front of inactive cops, who later intervened to

appease the fans and helped Rahmatganj's players and officials leave the venue. The fans also assaulted a few Abahani players on way to the dressing room injuring defender Amit Khan Shuvro, as was confirmed by manager Sattajit Das Rupu. Abahani, who won the first leg match between the two sides by 4-1 goals, went without injured striker Awudu Ibrahim, yet found the back of the net in the 12th minute through a Robin header, but it was cancelled for off-side. As Abahani pressed hard, Rahmatganj hit them on the counterattack when Hugues, who joined Old Dhaka Outfit from Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club in the mid-term players' transfer, found the ball near the centre area and let loose a powerful 25-yarder from outside the box to find the back of Abahani net. Abahani again thought they had scored on the 25th minute through Prantosh Kumar, but the veteran was adjudged to be in an offside position while making flick. Rahmatganj should have doubled the have doubled the lead three minutes later, but Idris Karisye missed sent the ball wide from a spotkick. And only two minutes later, another penalty was awarded, this time in favour of

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Tamim interested to play in SLPL

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Though Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal missed the opportunity to play in the cash-rich Indian Premier League, the left-hander may yet play in another money-spinning Twenty20 tournament in Sri Lanka. The Bangladesh vice-captain's name was included in the list of overseas players for the upcoming Sri Lanka Premier League (SLPL). The first edition of which will get underway on July 19 at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo (where all the matches will be held). "I'm interested to play in the tournament in Sri Lanka. I can't exactly recall but probably during the World Cup I signed on a contract paper for playing in this tournament but after that nobody has communicated with me," informed Tamim, who is the lone Bangladeshi player in the overseas players' list. Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) has almost confirmed the services of several prominent overseas cricketers like David Warner and Shaun Tait from Australia and Chris Gayle and Kieron Pollard from the West Indies, for the competition. As many as twelve Indian players including Dinesh Karthik and Irfan Pathan are expected to feature in the tournament while Shahid Afridi, who will be captaining a team in the tournament, along with Shoaib Akhtar, Sohail Tanvir and

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School rugby from today

SPORTS REPORTER

Cooline AC 2nd School Rugby Tournament gets underway tomorrow at the Paltan Ground with St. Gregory's School taking on Nabokumar Institute in the opening match. A total of eight schools, split into two groups, will take part in the group matches and top two teams from each group will advance into the semifinals. Sponsors Aboroni International, distributor of Cooline AC in Bangladesh, will provide Tk. 1.30 lakh out of an estimated budget of 1.65 lakh. The other schools participating in the five-day tournament are Nababpur High School, Madartek School and College, Cambridge High School, SOS Shishu Polli and Islambagh High School.

Khulna: No star, no team

The 12th National Cricket League has concluded on May 14, bringing an end to the country's first-class season. Eight months ago, The Daily Star Sport ran previews of all six divisional sides taking part in the competition and now as part of its evaluation of the campaigners, today it is publishing the second episode that of Khulna's. Tomorrow, the third part of this series will be published.

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Khulna is one of those few pipelines that Bangladesh cricket can be proud of. But as most people would tell you, it doesn't add up to much for the divisional cricket team. This season, the south-western division finished second from bottom, just a point ahead of Chittagong in the country's lone first-class competition. One of the reasons for the National Cricket League becoming a sideshow has been the absence of the national players and it is evident that Khulna has been the worst victim of this problem. When the NCL began in October last year, Shakib Al Hasan, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Abdur Razzak, Imrul Kayes and Rubel Hossain were busy beating the New Zealanders. Worse, it resumed midway through the World Cup when all these players were again either unavailable or injured (in the case of Mashrafe). "Everyone knows what the Khulna team is supposed to be, it's essentially the national team," said former national captain Habibul Bashar. Though he played four one-day matches for Khulna this season, the last time Shakib played a first-class game for his division was in December 2008 against Dhaka (scoring 59 and 129). Khulna won by 170 runs.



SAHAGIR HOSSAIN

KHULNA

Position in 2010-11: Fifth (no wins)
Top scorer: Sahagir Hossain (334 runs)
Most wickets: Nizamuddin (14 wickets)
High point: Sahagir-Syed Rasel 7th wicket partnership (100 runs)

"I have always seen that this has been Khulna's biggest problem. If they have all their main players, nobody can beat them. It is good that the division has produced so many players but since they are not available, it becomes difficult," he said. With so many of their stars missing, Khulna depended heavily on Sahagir Hossain, their wicketkeeper, main batsman and skipper. The 24-year-old delivered what was asked of him, scoring more than 300 runs from the three games he played. There too is another problem that only the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) could have solved but the scheduling of Bangladesh A's tour to South Africa was around the same time the NCL resumed. "I missed two games but I still feel our batsmen should have done better," rued Sahagir. "I thought we had a good team but we also missed the services of Tushar Imran and Nazmus Sadat for most of the campaign. He returned from injury for the two matches I missed while Sadat's wife was sick so he couldn't play after the tournament resumed," he said. That Sahagir pointed out the batsmen as the only failure could be slightly harsh on the likes of Amit Mazumder or Mohammad Mithun but it is true that these youngsters are not mere greenhorns but have been plying their trade for quite some time now. Taposh Ghosh and

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Invincible Djokovic

Tennis

AP, Rome

Novak Djokovic is just starting to get used to hearing his name mentioned in the same breath as the legends of the game. The seemingly unstoppable Serb stretched his unbeaten start to the season to 37 matches on Sunday with a 6-4, 6-4 win over top-ranked Rafael Nadal in the Rome Masters final. Djokovic's streak trails only John McEnroe's 42-0 start in 1984. Overall, the 23-year-old has won 39 consecutive matches stretching back to Serbia's Davis Cup triumph in December, seven behind Guillermo Vilas' Open era record set in 1977. "It's an incredible honour to be a part of tennis history in some way and part of an elite group of players - Federer, Nadal, McEnroe, [Ivan] Lendl, guys who were winning so many in a row," Djokovic said. "I don't know how much good it brings to tennis, but it's good that someone else is able to win other than just Federer and Nadal. It makes it more

interesting." The second-ranked Djokovic has racked up seven titles already this year, and beaten Nadal in all four finals they've played this year. He defeated the Spaniard for the first time on clay in last week's Madrid Open final and this win makes him the first player to beat Nadal on clay twice in the same year, a feat that comes exactly a week before the French Open starts. Djokovic is collecting so many records that he had to take a long pause when asked which one he's most proud of. "I'm just most happy about the game I have this year on clay -- the way I'm striking the ball and the way I'm so self-confident," he eventually responded. "I always knew I could beat the top players, but now I have the confidence to do it." Djokovic's edge over Nadal could enable him to overtake his rival for the No. 1 ranking the week after the

French Open. "He's doing amazing things. Every match he's very tough mentally and physically," Nadal said. "I'm doing everything I can. I can't ask myself anymore now. I'm doing very well but one player is doing

better than me. I am waiting every week to try solutions, so let's see." Nadal said it's "impossible" for Djokovic's streak to go on forever. "I have to wait for my moment to win and I know that," the Spaniard said.



Serbian world No 2 Novak Djokovic kisses the trophy after winning the Rome Masters by defeating Spanish world No 1 Rafael Nadal in the final at Rome's Foro Italico on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Chargers breeze past Warriors

SPORT DESK

Deccan Chargers made light work of Pune Warriors as they won by six wickets during their IPL encounter at the Dr DY Patil Stadium in Mumbai last night. They took just 19.2 overs to reach 138 for four as they overcame Pune Warriors' 136 for nine from 20 overs, receiving a blow to their play-off chances. Opener Shikhar Dhawan and Sunny Sohal gave Deccan a brilliant start through their 67-run stand before Kumar Sangakkara and Jean-Paul Duminy took a professional approach as they almost walked to the target. Skipper Sangakkara made 25 while Duminy, the South African left-hander, struck 23 off 26 balls. Leg-spinner Rahul Sharma took two wickets for 25 runs. Earlier, Mitchell Marsh's last-gasp 37 off 28 balls saved Pune's blushes after they had fallen to 92-7 at one stage. For the Hyderabad side, Pragyan Ojha, Amit Mishra and Dan Christian took two wickets each.

Only apology not enough

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

A local cricket association is set to lodge a criminal complaint against Australian bowling legend Shane Warne for his part in a bust-up with an official, reports said on Sunday. Warne, captain of the Rajasthan Royals team in the Indian Premier League, was involved in an angry exchange with Sanjay Dixit, secretary of the Rajasthan Cricket Association, following his team's defeat at home on Wednesday. Leg-spinner Warne on Saturday apologised for the incident but the RCA said they would still lodge the complaint, the Press Trust of India news agency reported. "It is an aggravated offence and it needs to be dealt with like that. Some kind of disciplinary action is to be taken," PTI quoted Dixit as saying. Rajasthan Royals chief executive Sean Morris on Saturday said in an email to Dixit that the franchise had taken action against Warne. "The player has accepted the action that we have taken and apologised for any distress caused," Morris said, without elaborating further. Dixit said the apology letter sent by Morris lacked details. Accordingly, the legal committee of the RCA decided to file a criminal complaint against Warne, the agency added. "I don't know what kind of disciplinary action has been taken. A mere statement was made and nothing more has been done, just [the] proverbial red herring," Dixit said.