

Becks roots for Fergie

Manchester United can upset the odds and beat Barcelona in Saturday's Champions League final because of their manager Sir Alex Ferguson claimed former United star David Beckham on Monday. Beckham told the BBC that he believes if anyone can bring Barca down to earth it is the wily 69-year-old Ferguson, who has just taken United to a record 19th league title. "He (Ferguson) can't get any better than what he is - he has proved year after year, team after team, player after player what an amazing manager he is,"



Muktijoddha's Sudanese striker James Moga (C) beats his chest in celebration of his equaliser against Mohammedan during their Bangladesh League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Coach selection still the issue



SPORTS REPORTER

In the cricket arena all recent discussion has centered on the appointment of a new coach for the national team. Everybody is curious to know about who will be the next head coach of the Tigers. But Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has been facing a big challenge to find out a suitable successor for Jamie Siddons, and it's not just because most of the high profile coaches were reluctant to agree to a long-term assignment, but also due to high salary demands. So, doubts persist about whether the game's governing body would be able to settle the issue before the Tigers next assignment against Zimbabwe in July-August. The Bangladesh team is likely to fly to Zimbabwe on July 28 to play one Test and five one-day internationals.

The national cricketers will start their fitness training under the guidance of trainer Grant Luden from June 4 till June 15 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in

Mirpur. But it's not certain what will happen after that, or who will take care of the batting and bowling practices if the board fail to appoint a coach on time.

BCB's cricket operations committee chairman Enayet Hossain Siraj, however, was confident that the board will be able to finalise the coach by June 10 -- though there has been slim progress on that front -- and because of that they were not thinking on any alternatives like appointing one of the local coaches to conduct the camp before the Zimbabwe trip.

"The negotiation is going on and we are hopeful that we will be able to sign up a new coach by June 10. You know we are not only looking for a head coach but also need to appoint specialist fielding and bowling coaches as well as a physio for the national team. Our CEO (Manzur Ahmed) is the corresponding authority but you know he is now on vacation and will join on June 7," said Siraj.

It was learnt that a local coach will be working as an assistant coach, but Siraj said that they are yet to discuss the issue of selection of

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Muktis held by MSC

SPORTS REPORTER

An injury-time goal from Alamgir Kabir Rana helped leaders Muktijoddha Sangsad win a point against Mohammedan SC in a 2-2 draw in the crucial Bangladesh League fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Nigerian hitman Sunday Chizoba put Mohammedan ahead in the 25th minute only to be cancelled by Sudanese striker James Moga five minutes later. Sunday restored the lead for the Black and Whites with his second in the 39th minute but Rana struck three minutes into injury time in the second half to eke out a point from this crucial encounter.

The third draw in 17 outings means Muktijoddha are just holding on to the top position of the 12-team table with 39 points, at risk of being overtaken by Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club who have 37 from 16 matches and are away to Feni Soccer Club on Thursday.

On the other hand, Mohammedan remain at seventh position with 22 points from 17 matches.

"It was sheer bad luck that we could not win the game despite holding on to the lead till the 93rd minute. Defenders

allowed Rana to have a shot on target and that forced us to share points," said a frustrated Mohammedan coach Shafiqul Islam Manik.

"Losing two points against Mohammedan is disappointing, especially after suffering defeat against Sheikh Russel in the previous match. Nevertheless we are still leading the table and are confident of recovering the lost advantage in the five matches that we have in hand. Teams like Sheikh Jamal and Abahani, who are just behind us, have some crucial matches still to play," said Muktijoddha coach Maruful Haque.

On a soggy pitch, Mohammedan dominated the first half as Muktijoddha rested four of their regular players. The All Reds might have paid a huge price had they not brought on those rested players from the bench in the second half.

Muktijoddha's central defender Rajani Kanta Barman and left-back Mofazzal Hossain Saikat struggled to restrict Sunday, who saw his ninth-minute tap from the close range come off the post. Then Muktijoddha keeper Biplob Bhattacharjee foiled a powerful drive from Uwiringiyimana Amani in the 21st minute to keep the scores nil.

Ghanaian goalkeeper Mohammad Al Hassan performed tremendously

under the Mohammedan bar and thwarted two successive attempts from Rokonuzzaman Kanchan and Rajan Mia before Sunday gave Mohammedan the lead.

Sunday ran down the right to dance past defender Saikat and keeper Biplob before sliding the ball home from inside the box. However, the lead lasted only five minutes as Moga rose high to head home a Luciano cross to level the margin that, taking his league tally to 15.

In the 39th minute Sunday showed his class again, this time the Nigerian striker dancing down the left and shrugging off his marker Rajani to enter into the box and place the ball at the near post as the Black and Whites went to the break with a 2-1 lead.

After resumption, coach Maruful was forced to send on three players -- midfielders Maruf Ahmed, Zahed Parvez Chowdhry and defender Yeamin Munna and that helped Muktijoddha take control of the midfield and dominate the proceedings but the Mohammedan goalkeeper stood firm under the bar to thwart numerous attempts. However, as Mohammedan seemed like closing in on a much-needed victory, Rana managed to break Hassan's resistance as he advanced into the box to drive a grounder past the keeper.

WOMEN'S CRICKET Abahani, MSC and Azad win on rainy day

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani, Mohammedan and Azad Sporting Club won their respective rain-interrupted super league matches of the 3rd Women's Club cricket at three different city venues yesterday.

All three matches were settled by D/L method following heavy rain in the afternoon.

Abahani defeated BKSP by 23 runs at the City Club ground.

BKSP were all out for 104 runs in 37.4 overs and Abahani, in reply, scored 75 for four in 20 overs before rain stopped the match. Abahani needed 53 runs in 20 overs in the revised target.

At the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Rumana Ahmed hit 64 as Mohammedan beat Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club by 15 runs.

Mohammedan scored 153

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BANGABANDHU INT'L YOUTH TT Hosts' frustrating start

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh got off to the worst possible start as the hosts lost all their matches in both boys' and girls' categories on the opening day of the Bangabandhu Invitational International Youth Table Tennis Championship at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium yesterday.

More humiliating was the fact that of all the matches they played, only Snigdha Rahman managed to win a single set, the other matches being lost in straight sets.

In the girls' section, Bangladesh suffered a straight 3-0 defeat at the hands of India as Fatema Tuz Zohra Akhi lost to SN Priya 3-0, Sarmin A Minara lost to M Anusree 3-0 while

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Bangladesh table tennis player Fatema Tuz Zohra Akhi in action against Priya of India on the opening day of the Bangabandhu Invitational International Youth Table Tennis Championship at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Afridi out of Irish ODIs



PTI, Karachi

Pakistan's flamboyant all-rounder Shahid Afridi has pulled out of the two-match ODI series against Ireland due to the illness of his father.

According to Geo News report, Afridi had informed the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) that he would not be available for the two matches in Ireland on May 28 and 30.

"Afridi wants to spend time with his ailing father who is under treatment in the United States. It has nothing to do with him being removed from the one-day team captaincy," a source claimed.

The chairman of the PCB, Ijaz Butt removed Afridi as captain earlier this month and replaced him with Misbahul Haq who is presently leading the team in the Test series against the West Indies.

Unofficially, the reason for removing Afridi as captain but retaining him in the one-day squad as a player was because Butt is unhappy with the all-rounder's habit of frequently addressing the media and discussing team issues.

The board had even issued a notice to Afridi for making statements on team matters after he returned home from the West Indies after leading the team to a 3-2 win over the West Indies in the five-match ODI series.

The source said Afridi, who is obviously disappointed with his sacking as captain, will now reach England late and might even miss a few matches for his county Hampshire in the T20 tournament in England.

The source also said that Butt was not very pleased with increasing complaints about the interference of head coach

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Chennai Super Kings batsman Suresh Raina plays the ball on the leg side during his match-winning innings of 73 against Royal Challengers Bangalore in the first IPL qualifier at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Chennai thrill their way to final

SPORT DESK



Chennai Super Kings plundered 59 runs off the last four overs to shock Royal Challengers Bangalore by six wickets in the first IPL qualifier at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. The win made Chennai the first team to make the final, to be played in Chennai on May 28.

Needing 33 runs off the last two overs, the pair of Suresh Raina and Albie Morkel hammered 21 runs off the penultimate over bowled by Sreenath Aravind, before hitting a six to seal the deal off the fourth ball of the last over bowled by captain Daniel Vettori.

Chasing a stiff 176 to win, Chennai made the worst of starts, losing openers Michael Hussey and Murali Vijay with the score reading 7. Thereafter Raina, Subramaniam Badrinath and captain MS Dhoni carried the score to 131 in the 17th over, after which Raina was joined by Morkel to enact the spectacular finale. Raina was adjudged man-of-the-match for his fine unbeaten 73 which included four 4s and six 6s.

Earlier, after choosing to field Chennai did well to restrict the explosive Bangalore batting to 73 for 2 after the first ten overs.

But Bangalore's strong batting meant the job was only half done, as Kohli consolidated, concentrating on picking the singles and hitting the odd boundary. It was near the end that he opened up along with Luke Pomersbach as Bangalore looted 53 runs off the last 5 overs. Kohli remained unbeaten with a 44-ball 70, inclusive of five 4s and three 6s.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ROYAL CHALLENGERS BANGALORE: 175 for 4 in 20 overs (Kohli 70 not out, Agarwal 34; Bollinger 1-20)

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS: 177 for 4 in 19.4 overs (Raina 73 not out, Dhoni 29, Morkel 28 not out; Zaheer 2-31)

Result: Chennai Super Kings won by six wickets. Man-of-the-match: Suresh Raina

Nasser Hejazi passes away

SPORTS REPORTER

Legendary former Iranian goalkeeper and former Bangladesh national team coach Nasser Hejazi, passed away on Monday after a long battle with cancer. He was 61 years old.

Hejazi, who was known as the 'Eagle of Asia' for his ball-poaching skills, was suffering from lung cancer and died in Kasra Hospital, according to the official website of the Asian Football Confederation.

Hejazi came to Bangladesh as a coach-cum-goalscorer of popular Mohammedan Sporting Club and guided them twice to First Division Football League titles in 1987 and 1988 seasons.

Following his domestic success, he was given charge of the Bangladesh national team, leading them to a runners-up finish in the 4th SAF Games in 1989.

Hejazi appeared as a goalkeeper in the 1972 Olympics in Munich and in 1976 in Montreal. He was also a member of Iran's World

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