

Star SPORT

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'Barcelona best team in history'

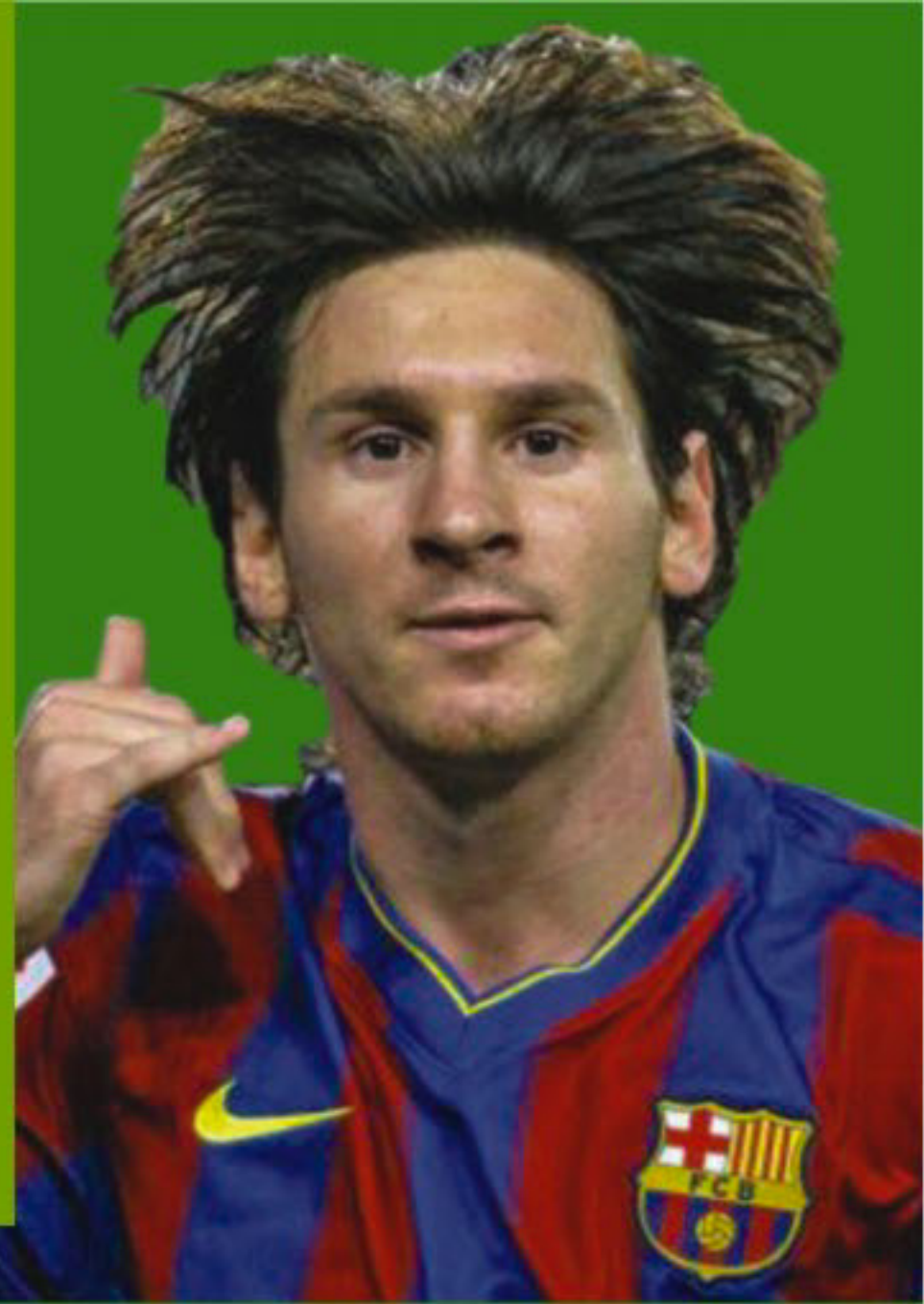
Lionel Messi has stated that the current Barcelona side are the best in history, and that he intends to finish his career with the Catalan giants.

"My idea has been to always stay in Barcelona and see out my career here," he stated in an interview with Sky Sports.

"I wasn't old enough to see the great teams from history we are compared with, but from what I have seen I think Barcelona is the best."

Messi went on to praise current coach Pep Guardiola, who he feels has improved him as a player.

- INTERNET



Not a dress rehearsal

India, Pakistan face off today

SPORTS REPORTER



When Pakistan beat Sri Lanka in their Asia Cup match on Thursday, and with India due to play Bangladesh the following day, most pundits were predicting that today's hotly anticipated Pakistan-India clash would be a dress rehearsal for the final. The presumption of an India win on Friday and the two great rivals setting up the final was upended but the home team not only put cricketing trends into a spin, the tournament received the much-needed buzz.

Today's match, then, takes on the significance it was meant to have in the first place, especially for India, who desperately need to win not just to stand a chance of making the final but to turn the tide of recent woe. It also has an intriguing subplot -- for possibly the first time, the crowd at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium will be overwhelmingly behind Pakistan (and not the usual polar support for the two teams); India's loss will put the home side in cool contention and they could seal it if they can beat Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

"We always enjoy playing in Bangladesh and the crowd has always supported us whenever we play against any other country," said Pakistan opener Mohammad Hafeez at the pre-match press conference yesterday. "So that will be a good sign for us that the crowd will back us."

On the field of play, it will be India who will have to do all the running, especially with a bowling attack that has been exposed as fragile and pedestrian. Their bowling was subjected to a fearful shellacking by the likes of Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan on Friday, so while India will be looking to maximise returns with the bat and controlling the damage with the ball, Hafeez said that Pakistan will be looking to exploit that very weakness when they take on their arch-rivals.

"As far as the Indian attack is concerned we will take it as a positive," said Hafeez. "They have a weaker side as a bowling unit, so we must have a plan on this and attack them. I personally feel that their bowling attack is not in good form at the moment, so we are going to try and exploit that weakness and demoralise their attack, so that we can control our batting too."

INDIA-PAKISTAN HEAD-TO-HEAD

Matches 120
Pakistan won 69
India won 47
No result 4

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HIGH AND HANDSOME: Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi hits one high with a baseball bat as his teammates and coaching staff look on during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Pakistan will take on archrivals India, who did not practise yesterday, in a marquee clash of the Asia Cup here today.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

The Fantastic Five

The Bangladesh players enjoyed a break yesterday after their stunning 5-wicket win over world champions India on Friday evening that opened up the Asia Cup. After Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim's exploits were documented immediately after the game, The Daily Star Sport's **Bishwajit Roy** and **Mohammad Isam** spoke to the five architects who helped the pair to a united effort.

MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

The pace spearhead believed that the Friday win was much different than the previous ones.

"We squandered a good chance against Pakistan in the opening match but we didn't make the same mistake against India which is, I think, unique for Bangladesh cricket. It's really fantastic that we played good cricket in two consecutive matches," he said excitedly. He, along with **Abdur Razzak**, was also praised by the captain for their impressive bowling on a flat track.

"I'm really delighted to see that everybody is hungry for

success. Now the big challenge is to play the last league match against Sri Lanka with same manner. I'm not interested to talk about the chances to play in the final. I believe we should play the tough brand of cricket that we've done in the last two games," he said.

"That would be a big achievement."

TAMIM IQBAL

After Nazimuddin's dismissal, Tamim told Jahurul Islam not to hurry. "When I had scored the 151 [against Zimbabwe],

I remember we didn't force ourselves into the chase. I told him the same that let's keep batting, we'll see what happens later," he said.

"We had talked about it in a team meeting that when we need 6 or 7 an over, we should score at around five per over so that we are still close to the target.

"But I can't express in words how Shakib, Mushfiqur and Nasir batted. I can't really explain," added Tamim, who

struck his second half-century in as many games.

So what was Tamim doing in the dressing-room when the skipper and Nasir were winding down the chase? Apparently, Mashrafe was jumping. Tamim was shouting while Shakib was playing the drums somewhere. Word in the dressing room has it that Riyadh was so much into urging the two batsmen, he hardly needed warming up when he walked out to the middle.

JAHURUL ISLAM

The right-hander considered himself the luckiest batsman as his maiden half-century played a big

role behind Tigers' success against India. "It's fantastic to see a batsman like Sachin Tendulkar make his hundredth century but I was the happiest man as my maiden half-century didn't go in vain. It's really a memorable day in my career," said the soft-spoken man with a smile.

"I had a talk with Tamim and

we never thought of the target, rather our main focus was to prolong the innings because we had a belief that it would not be impossible to score 100 runs from the last ten overs if we have enough wickets. We didn't want to lose too many wickets and tried not to make the same mistakes what we did against Pakistan," he explained.

"This team is playing as a unit which is fantastic. The celebration was over once we left the stadium. Now we are looking forward to our next game because we have to prove that we are consistence in our performance," said Jahurul.

ABDUR RAZZAK

If there is one spinner in the world who is actually enjoying the two new balls, it is this man. For two successive matches, the senior left-arm spinner has used "his" new ball in a way that has negated the slow bowlers' trouble on the unresponsive Mirpur pitches. "I have often bowled with the new or newer ball so it

has become a good habit. If the ball has some shine on one side, it helps me," said Razzak. "Some bowlers are not happy when they can't pick up wickets. I have always been happy contributing with my control, be it with just a wicket or two," he added.

NASIR HOSSAIN

When he lazily got caught at the crease by Umar Gul in the tournament opener, little did anyone

think Nasir would earn a promotion in the batting order. But coach Stuart Law put the street-smart cricket at No 4 so that he could capitalise on the Tigers' strong start. "We needed around 7-8 runs an over so the idea was to take as many singles as possible. With Shakib bhai going after their bowling, I just wanted to take on their pacers, but not Ashwin," he said.

When it was getting down to the wire, Nasir had only one thought: "I dearly wanted to hit the winning runs. But I couldn't, put one up in the air!"

'Tigers' win no upset'

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh cricket team infused life into the Asia Cup when they pulled off a stunning 5-wicket victory over India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on Friday, throwing the competition wide open. Among those who appreciated the Tigers' rabble rousing performance was Pakistan opener Mohammad Hafeez.

"I watched the match, and I must give the credit to Bangladesh," said Hafeez while talking to the media at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. "They were very positive, and they were more aggressive in the field, that is the reason why they won the game. I congratulate them."

The ever-improving all-rounder was not prepared to

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DOG DAY AFTERNOON: A match official shows a stray dog the exit during yesterday's Grameenphone Bangladesh Premier League match between Mohammedan and Team BJMC at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. However, the canine proved a hard one to officiate as it kept coming back onto the pitch, holding up play for a couple of minutes.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

MSC hold BJMC

SPORTS REPORTER



A struggling Mohammedan SC came from behind to hold newcomers Team BJMC to a 1-1 draw in their Grameenphone Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Guinean hitman Ismael Bangoura headed home to give BJMC the lead before Nigerian Basden Wilcox cancelled that to provide the Black and Whites a valuable point to raise their collection to six from as many matches.

Federation Cup runners-up BJMC leaptfrogged to the third position with nine points from six matches, eight points less than leaders Abahani and seven points behind second placed Muktiyoddha though they have a match in hand.

Fresh from a 2-0 win over Feni Soccer Club, BJMC went into the match with an upper hand against the tottering Mohammedan, who lost to Sheikh Jamal in the previous match, and expectedly the newcomers played better but failure of their strikers and a defensive attitude later in the game forced

them to share points with Mohammedan. After taking the lead seven minutes into the second-half, BJMC coach Jakaria Babu strengthened the backline sending on Ramjan Mollah in place of winger Rony Islam, who penetrated the defence from the left-wing many a time, and that saw his side concede the equaliser barely four minutes after the change.

"I brought about the change to strengthen the backline but the goal we conceded was the result of a misunderstanding between the defenders and goalkeeper," admitted Babu.

BJMC enjoyed the lion's share of ball procession and created more chances than Mohammedan as they came close to taking a lead in the ninth minute. But Mohammedan goalkeeper Arifuzzaman Himel brilliantly thwarted a Bangoura effort for a corner while Mobararak saw his weak shot from close range fail to trouble BJMC goalkeeper Mazharul Islam Himel in the 16th minute.

Mohammedan survived a scare one minute from the break as Bangoura sent a follow-up wide from the six-yard box after goalkeeper Arifuzzaman fisted a powerful

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