

Star SPORT

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Fischer's comeback under threat

Eight-time Olympic champion Birgit Fischer says cardiac arrhythmia is threatening her attempt to come back from retirement and compete at the London Games at the age of 50. Fischer was forced to give up plans to compete at the German canoe and kayak Olympic trials this weekend. Germany's most decorated Olympian told a news conference on Friday that routine checks this week revealed the condition, a problem with the heartbeat's speed or rhythm.

-- AP



The forgotten league

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Even if the Bangladesh Cricket Board forcibly orders (!) the restart of the Dhaka Premier Cricket League from tomorrow, the National Cricket League will be delayed by at least a week, making it the longest-running, yet shortest, first-class competition in the world.

What started on Monday, October 17 last year will probably go into its eighth month, though it hasn't seen the light of day since December 21 when it was stopped to accommodate the 50-over competition, which has now been shelved for the tenth straight day.

The original schedule given by the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis was for the Dhaka Premier League to end on April 6, yesterday, with the country's only first-class competition restarting on April 10 when the last games of the second round were supposed to start. The five-day final is slated for April 16, but it is now quite unlikely for the fixture to pan out accordingly.

With three rounds of Premier League matches still remaining, it is assumed that ten days at the very least will be required, which would push back the NCL into kal-boishakhi territory. The delay of more than a week would mean that those in charge of the tournament would require at least three days in advance to book a hotel and the four teams -- Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet

-- would at least need a single day ahead of the first-class game to get the players reacquainted with the format and each other.

After the NCL was stopped in mid-December, the Premier League was played in two phases though the second part only saw two days of cricket. International series against West Indies and Pakistan were held while the Bangladesh Premier League T20s were also accommodated.

Over the years, the organisers have had to accommodate the NCL around the other domestic tournaments and international matches held in the country. In the past, the competition has begun on October (2007-08, 2008-09, 2010-11), November (2000-01, 2005-06, 2006-07), December (2003-04, 2002-03, 2001-02), January (2009-10) and February (2004-05). On average, the league has taken up three months with large breaks in the middle to fit in the Premier League or the NCL one-day competitions.

This sort of dog's breakfast of a schedule cannot be a tradition and according to the moves being made in the cricket board, a better version of the tournament is being prepared. The talks of the new first-class competition under the franchise system sounds more exciting than the one in place but the question that comes up is whether both can exist in the cricket calendar.

It is still a question because the BCB tournament committee has proved that it is quite

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PHOTO: STAR

Mohammedan striker Wahed Ahmed (R) tries to avert a challenge from a Rahmatganj player during their Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.



England spinner Graeme Swann (C) celebrates after dismissing Sri Lanka batsman Thilan Samaraweera (not in picture) during the fourth day of the second Test at the P Sara Oval in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Swann tightens noose on Lanka

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Off-spinner Graeme Swann grabbed four wickets to leave a rejuvenated England on the brink of a series-levelling win in the second and final Test against Sri Lanka in Colombo on Friday.

Sri Lanka, trailing by 185 runs on the first innings, ended the fourth day's play at 218-6 in their second knock, a lead of 33 runs with only four wickets in hand on a wearing P Sara Oval pitch.

Skipper Mahela Jayawardene stood in England's way with an unbeaten 55, showing the form that has already fetched him two centuries in the series, including one in the first innings.

England, who lost the first Test in Galle, will return for the final day's play on Saturday looking to polish off the rest of the Sri Lankan batting quickly.

Andrew Strauss' men need a win to draw the series and retain their number one Test ranking.

The tourists were hoping for a swift closure when Swann grabbed the key wickets of Tillakaratne Dilshan and Kumar Sangakkara in the post-lunch session.

But Thilan Samaraweera (47) and Jayawardene kept the England attack at bay -

- even for nine overs with the second new ball -- during a 90-run partnership for the fifth wicket.

Swann, coming on two overs before stumps, bowled Samaraweera with his first delivery and Suraj Randiv with the third to pin Sri Lanka against the ropes.

If England do the unlikely and fail to win, they will rue a dropped catch off Jayawardene by Tim Bresnan at mid-on off Samit Patel when the batsman was on 20 and the hosts were still 46 runs behind.

Dilshan was unfortunate to be given out, caught in the slips off Swann as TV replays proved inconclusive whether the ball had gone off the bat.

Third umpire Rod Tucker reviewed Dilshan's challenge for more than five minutes before upholding on-field official Bruce Oxenford's decision to give the batsman out.

Dilshan, who earlier in the day had been fined 10 percent of his match fee for excessive appealing in England's first innings, walked off clearly unhappy with the decision.

Sri Lankan coach Graham Ford immediately went up to match referee Javagal Srinath to ask why the benefit of doubt had not been given to the batsman, as is the norm in cricket.

The infra-red Hot Spot technology, which could have determined an edge, is not being

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BCB calls emergency meeting

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has called an emergency meeting to break the deadlock surrounding the resumption of the Dhaka Premier Cricket League.

The board directors will discuss the recommendations of the four-member committee led by BCB senior vice-president Mahbubul Anam which was formed during last Sunday's board meeting to identify a solution to the crisis.

"The recommendations made by the committee will be discussed in the emergency meeting. We are hopeful that the matter will be resolved in the meeting," said Jalal Yunus, BCB's director and media committee chairman yesterday.

The super league was suspended following controversy over the registration of Pakistan and Victoria Sporting Club batsman Mohammad Yousuf on March 28.

Vernon repays Somerset faith

AFP, London

South Africa seamer Vernon Philander wasted little time in justifying Somerset's decision to sign him for the early part of the English season, taking just three balls to grab a wicket on Thursday.

Philander had a wicket in his first over of a rain delayed opening day of the English County Championship season and by stumps had taken three for 21 in 12 overs as Somerset reduced Middlesex to 118 for four in a First Division clash at Taunton.

Fortunately for the visitors, former Kent batsman Joe Denly was 64 not out on his Middlesex debut.

Somerset are desperate to win a maiden Championship title after being edged out by Lancashire last term and the recruitment of Philander looks like it could give them a valuable early season boost.

MSC off the doldrums

SPORTS REPORTER



Strugglers Mohammedan SC posted their second victory in the Grameenphone Bangladesh Premier League after six matches when they thrashed Rahmatganj MFS 4-0 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The victory took the Black and Whites to sixth position with nine points from eight matches while Rahmatganj remained at the bottom of the 11-team table with six points from eight matches.

Nigerian Basden Wilcox struck a brace while Wahed Ahmed and Shariful Islam netted one goal each in the league's biggest margin win so far.

Mohammedan have been struggling since their first-match win against Brothers Union and in the last six matches, they lost three and drew the other three. They came into this match, confined in the relegation zone but from the outset they put up signs of good football and left the field with head high after a long time.

"All credit goes to the players and I am happy to make the fans happy," said Emeka after the game.

"Mohammedan don't deserve to stay at 10th position in the point table. We lost many matches despite going close to winning them and it frustrated the

players but today they played well," said the Nigerian.

Mohammedan found the back of the Rahmatganj net in very fifth minute with a curling shot from Shariful Islam but it was ruled out due to offside.

After two more futile attempts, Mohammedan finally went ahead in the 41st minute when Wilcox chipped in a Shariful Islam lob inside the box while Wahed availing a through pass from Wilcox beat advancing goalkeeper to double the lead in the 62nd minute.

Nine minutes later, Shariful availed a defensive fumble hammered a grounder to the far post from the right side to make it 3-0 while Wilcox completed the rout with a diving header off a Shariful cross in the stoppage time of the second half.

Rahmatganj also created two to three good chances but Mohammedan goalkeeper Titumir Chowdhury thwarted those successfully. Rahmatganj skipper Idris Kasirye rattled the Mohammedan post in the first half.

"How could I fight, if the players are biased and decline to play despite coming to the field," said a frustrated Rahmatganj coach Mahmudul Haque Liton.

"Having drawn his own salary five days before the deadline, Nche Francis tried to convince other foreign recruits not to play," said Liton.

Barisal hurtle ahead

SPORTS REPORTER

Barisal made it to the second round of the 32nd inter-district cricket championship in style after crushing Patuakhali by a massive 269-run margin on Thursday.

Battling first, the hosts posted 354 for seven in 50 overs with Manik hitting 106 and Rabbi missing out on the three-figure mark by just five runs. Patuakhali's Sohag Gazi took three wickets but that's where it ended for them. Lasting only 31 overs, they were bowled out for just 85 runs. For Barisal, Jasim took three wickets while Rabbi picked up two.

It was a similar situation in Noakhali where Chandpur hammered Bandarban by 247 runs after they made 311 for seven in 50 overs. Mehdi top-scored with 78 but it was Farhad's

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PHOTO: AFP

Pune Warriors pacer Ashok Dinda jumps for joy after dismissing a Mumbai Indians batsman in their IPL T20 match at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday.

Pune pull off unlikely win

INTERNET, Mumbai

Pacer Ashok Dinda scalped four wickets as Pune Warriors pulled off an upset 28-run win over Mumbai Indians in a low-scoring Indian Premier League match at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Friday.

The Warriors defended their total of 129 for nine with a clinical bowling effort on a Wankhede strip that assisted the spinners and pacers alike, restricting Mumbai to 101 for nine in the allotted 20 overs.

The visitors reduced the home team to a sorry five for three at the end of the second over and tightened the noose gradually to come out on top.

Missing an injured Sachin Tendulkar, there was little of note in the Mumbai innings, barring Dinesh Karthik's 32 off as many balls and an identical effort from James Franklin.

Both the batsmen added 49 runs for the fourth wicket. Mumbai skipper Harbhajan Singh, who had bowled well for the wicket of his rival counterpart Sourav Ganguly earlier, made a valiant 16 off 15 balls towards the end.

Dinda, the Warriors' new recruit from Bengal, grabbed two wickets in his first over and then came back to add two more to finish with admirable figures of four for 18.

The spinners Murali Kartik, Marlon Samuels and Rahul Sharma choked up the Mumbai batting with the turn they got out of the pitch.

Karthik got two for 14, including the important wicket of Karthik when the game was wide open, while West Indian Samuels and leggie Sharma got a wicket apiece along with South African pacer Wayne Parnell.

Earlier, bowling effectively to a plan and fielding

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