

Euro agony for Smalling

Chris Smalling's hopes of breaking into England's Euro 2012 squad were dashed on Friday after the Manchester United defender was ruled out with a groin injury.

The versatile Smalling, regarded as one of the brightest prospects in English football, had been tipped for inclusion in Roy Hodgson's squad for his ability to offer options at right back and centre-back.

United manager Sir Alex Ferguson said a groin injury which flared up in last weekend's victory over Swansea was more serious than initially thought and meant he would be unavailable for England duty.

-AFP



Zimbabwe in June, Ireland in July

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The Tigers have good news in the form of on-field action next month and in July as they have received positive feedbacks from both Zimbabwe Cricket and Cricket Ireland.

They go into the training camp from May 16 to prepare for what looks like a tri-series against Zimbabwe and South Africa that starts in Harare on June 24. At the end of July, Bangladesh are set to travel to Ireland and Scotland after Cricket Ireland secured some funding from the ICC's High Performance Program as well as ICC Europe.

Both tours are like a blessing to Mushfiqur Rahim's men who were staring at a lot of down-time ahead of September's T20 World Cup in Sri Lanka.

"The Bangladesh Cricket Board requested that the Tigers join us in the World Cup warm

up matches that we will have with South Africa," ZC managing director Ozias Bvute told Zimbabwe Independent on Thursday.

"We wrote to South Africa who have since indicated that they have no problem with it being a triangular series. We are currently discussing the modalities with both nations. It should be noted, however, that these are not official matches but practice matches that we are all using to prepare for the World Cup," he added.

On the same day, BCB also received the full itinerary from Cricket Ireland. It includes five ODIs of which three would be against Ireland and then an ODI each against Scotland and the Netherlands. The ten-day trip of Ireland would also include a single warm-up game ahead of the three matches, from where they would go to Scotland for four days on July 30 or 31, to play the remaining two games of the tour.

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BCB president AHM Mustafa Kamal (L) is in conversation with the probable coach of the Bangladesh cricket team Richard Pybus at his office at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Manikganj cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Manik hit 90 as Bondhu XI defeated Provat Sangha by 70 runs in the Colonel Malek Smriti Premier Cricket League at Shahid Miraz Tapan stadium in Manikganj yesterday.

Bondhu XI made 231 runs for nine wickets in 40 overs after deciding to bat first. Manik scored 90 off 95 balls while Shamim added 51 off 43 balls.

Pavel and Moni picked up three wickets each while Rezaul took two wickets.

In reply, Provat Sangha were all out for 161 runs in 37.5 overs. Anchal top scored with 38 runs.

Jamil, Lal Mia, Manik and

U-15 cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Asadur Rahman occupied the crease for more than two and a half hours but his effort was not good enough for Bangladesh Under-15s to put up an impressive total on the board against visiting CAB Under-15 on the first day of the three-day match at BKSP yesterday.

One down Asadur made 43 off 137 balls that contained four boundaries while opener Omar Faruk added 42 off 97 balls with seven boundaries as the home side were all out for 159 runs in 91.2 overs.

Subhrajit Das claimed four wickets as the visiting CAB Under-15 dominated the first day while Pradipta Pramanik and Prayas Roy took two wickets each.

Johnson nearly quit

AFP, Sydney

Paceman Mitchell Johnson, recalled this week to the Australian team, revealed Friday he had lost his love of cricket and a foot injury this year probably saved him from quitting the game.

Johnson's roller coaster career was in limbo after he injured ligaments in his big left toe while batting in Australia's Test victory over South Africa last November and he missed the entire Australia season following surgery.

But the enigmatic 30-year-old fast bowler said he was already mentally shot by that point and in the doldrums over his cricket future.

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Abahani's Lucky charm

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani took their lead at the top of the Grameenphone Bangladesh Premier League to six points as the Sky Blues defeated Rahmatganj MFS 4-0, thanks to Nigerian hitman Lucky Paul's four goal haul at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Away at the Feni Stadium, a 78-minute strike from Faisal Mahmud guided visitors Sheikh Russel KC to a 1-0 win over hosts Feni Soccer Club.

With the fifth victory in 11 matches, Sheikh Russel joined Team BJMC on 17 points to stay in fourth position while Feni Soccer remained in ninth position with 10 points from 11 matches.

At the BNS, three-time champions Abahani went six points clear of second-placed Muktiyoddha Sangsad after toying with Rahmatganj and scoring one more than they did in the first-leg match.

Bottom-side Rahmatganj, who stunned Brothers Union 4-0 in their previous match, were helpless against Abahani, who could have won the game by a bigger margin had they capitalised on all the chances they got.

Shrugging off their poor performance against Muktiyoddha Sangsad in their last match of the first leg, Abahani came out in vigorous spirit with winger Zahid Hossain returning to the side and new-signing Yoko Samnik also getting in the eleven.

Nigerian striker Lucky Pual, winger Zahid Hossain and right-back Nasirul Islam were unstoppable up front as Awudu Ibrahim and Yoko Samnik played key roles in the midfield.

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Pybus-BCB a done deal?

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Richard Pybus yesterday spent a day of meetings with the Bangladesh Cricket Board and the national players, making it all but certain that the Englishman will become the next Tigers' head coach.

The confirmation wasn't made official by the cricket board though president AHM Mustafa Kamal said that no other candidates are due to be interviewed, and that Pybus's appointment is likely to be formally confirmed within a week.

After arriving on Thursday night, Pybus spent time with the BCB chief at his residence while on Friday, he visited the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur to check out the facilities and meet some of the directors. In the evening, he met some of the senior Bangladesh players in Dhaka before he heads back to Cape Town this afternoon.

Though billed as a first of three interviews, none of the parties, Pybus or Kamal, were calling it one but there was an air of optimism.

"This is nothing official nor is it an interview," said Pybus while speaking to the reporters. "This is a fact-finding

mission on my behalf and I am here to meet the president and the support staff. I want to make an informed decision and find out whether I can make a valid contribution."

When pressed for an answer about this being an interview, he repeated, "Not really, it is about meeting people and finding a common ground. I have a family back in South Africa and I will go back and tell them whether it is feasible."

The BCB president had high praise for Pybus, the former Pakistan coach, and urged him to speak to his family about the "big-heartedness" of Bangladeshis. The amicable exchange was indicative of the board's decision though the coach would be consulting his family before taking the plunge. The living situation is the only hitch in an otherwise done deal as the BCB chief confirmed that there won't be any more interviews or meetings with the other candidates.

"There won't be any more interviews, nobody else is coming. We want one person and I'm sure we will succeed. We have spoken to him [Pybus] and we are quite interested to get him. We can get a concrete decision from him in six to seven days," said Kamal later at his board office.

Pybus has seen Bangladesh up close a few times as Pakistan's coach,

most famously when the Tigers shocked the cricketing world by beating the 1999 World Cup finalists during a group game in Northampton. Before heading to Bangladesh, he spoke to Cally, the wife of former South Africa all-rounder and former Bangladesh coach the late Eddie Barlow.

"Eddie Barlow was a friend of mine in South Africa and before he passed away, he spoke very highly about Bangladesh cricket. I spoke to his wife Cally last week and she only had good things to say about the people in Bangladesh," he said.

It will be a return to international cricket for the 47-year-old Pybus who was last at this level in 2003. Seeing Bangladesh perform off late and having visited the Mirpur stadium, he was impressed and said that he has a passion for the top job.

"There is a lot of raw talent, and they have started to play some good cricket, build on the work done by Stuart [Law] and the support staff on the progress of the boys. It is a wonderful, world-class stadium. It is nice to be here and nice to be in a country where passion is incredible.

"There's never a shortage of hunger there. There's always a challenge but it is about making a valid contribution. Those

Women's cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club posted a comfortable seven-wicket victory over Azad Sporting Club in the 4th Women's Club Cricket League at BKSP yesterday.

Azad were all out for 44 runs in 31.3 overs after deciding to bat first as none could reach the double figure. The highest 18 runs came from extras.

Salma and Suktara captured three wickets each.

In reply, Mohammedan scored 45 for three wickets in 19.1 overs.

Tulika Biswas and Tahin Tahera were not out on 11 runs.

McDermott

quits Aus role

AFP, Sydney

Craig McDermott has quit as bowling coach of the Australian team, citing the conflicting demands of constant touring with family life, Cricket Australia said Friday.

Former Test fast bowler McDermott, 47, has worked with great success in developing Australia's fast bowling stocks in the 12 months he has been in the job.

"It has been a very difficult decision to leave my position as the bowling coach of the Australian cricket team, a job I have thoroughly enjoyed since beginning 12 months ago," McDermott said in a statement.

"However, the team's schedule is a particularly busy one and after looking at the upcoming touring demands, I felt this to be the right decision from a personal and professional point of view."

Australia, who have recently returned from a tour to the West Indies, play a series of one-day internationals in England from next month, followed by an ODI series against Pakistan. They host South Africa, Sri Lanka and



Abahani striker Lucky Paul (C) runs for the corner flag to celebrate one of his four goals, along with teammate Zahid Hossain, as bemused Rahmatganj keeper Sujon Chowdhury looks on at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Anand, the Tendulkar of chess

Chess

AFP, New Delhi

They might not enjoy the same levels of adulation, but in the world of chess India's Viswanathan Anand is every bit as accomplished as fellow countryman Sachin Tendulkar is at cricket.

Both Anand, 42, and Tendulkar, 39, rose to the top of their game while teenagers and have stayed at the highest level for decades, lauded by their fellow players at home and abroad for their talent and polite charm.

And while Tendulkar, one of the finest cricketers ever to play the game, is worshipped by millions of adoring fans and often considered India's top international competitor, some suggest Anand's record is actually superior.

"Anand is, quite simply, the greatest sportsman India has ever produced," declares the website of the Olympic Gold Quest, a foundation started in 2001 to support the country's world-class stars.

Anand, the undisputed world chess champion since 2007, embarks Friday on one of the biggest tests of his career as he defends his crown against Israeli Boris Gelfand in the 2.5 million dollars series in Moscow.

Dubbed the "lightning kid" for his ability to make quick moves, he has been in a hurry all his life.

He became an international

master at 15, was crowned Indian champion at 16, won the world junior title at 17 and became the country's first grandmaster at 18.

The Indian government, taking note of the young man's rapid rise, conferred on him India's fourth highest civilian award, the Padma Shri, a few months short of his 19th birthday.



VISWANATHAN ANAND

The Tamil Nadu-born wizard, who lives in Spain with wife Aruna and one-year-old son, is seen as a star not only of today's game but of all time.

"I always considered him to be a colossal talent, one of the greatest in the whole history of chess," said Russian grandmaster Vladimir Kramnik, who lost to Anand in the

2008 world final.

"Each champion has had some sort of speciality, and his is creating counterplay in any position out of absolutely nowhere."

In 1992, Anand became the first recipient of India's highest sporting honour, the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna, and the country's second highest civilian award, the Padma Vibhushan, came his way in 2007.

Anand started solving chess puzzles displayed on television as a six-year-old child.

"My mother and I solved all these puzzles and sent in our answers," Anand recalled. "At one point, they just said ... don't send any more entries so that others get a chance."

Anand's game is built on belligerent attack that catches opponents off-guard, but his unflustered approach ensures that he has the right defence in place when the going gets tough.

"If there is anyone close to perfection in chess, it is him," said fellow player Surya Shekhar Ganguly, a member of Anand's team that plots strategy for big clashes.

Anand will just be the younger man in the clash against Gelfand, 43, but his former opponent Kramnik last August wondered aloud whether Anand still had the hunger of his past.

"His main weakness is that he's no longer so young, and now he's also got a child," Kramnik said in an interview. "But at the given moment I