

## Defoe flies home

England striker Jermain Defoe has flown home from the squad's Euro 2012 training camp in Krakow following the death of his father, the Football Association confirmed Thursday.

Tottenham star Defoe, who only touched down in Poland with his England team-mates on Wednesday, will rejoin the squad at an unspecified date, the FA said in a brief statement.

"England striker Jermain Defoe has returned home to England this morning following the passing of his father."



## Euro 2012 kicks off today

AFP, Warsaw

Poland get the honour of opening Euro 2012 on Friday against surprise 2004 winners Greece but it would take a major upset to see either team or co-hosts Ukraine progress as far as the July 1 final in Kiev.

Instead, few people would disagree with UEFA president Michel Platini, who has predicted a repeat of the 2008 Spain-Germany final, as a major football championships goes behind the former Iron Curtain for the first time.

Holders and world champions Spain arrive aiming for an unprecedented three titles in a row for a European country, while Germany are intent on avenging their defeat in 2008 and two years later in the World Cup semifinal.

But some believe that La Roja's fluid passing game that has worn down opponents in the past is vulnerable.

Vicente del Bosque's side is also missing talismanic defender Carles Puyol and all-time record scorer David Villa through injury, while question marks remain over the form of Chelsea striker Fernando Torres and Puyol's Barca central defence partner Gerard Pique.

Germany, for their part, have looked like the natural heirs to the Spanish crown after a young and vibrant Mannschaft impressed at the 2010 World Cup and qualified for Euro 2012 with a perfect record.

Friendly defeats at home

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**EURO 2012**  
**TODAY'S MATCHES**  
 Warsaw, Group A:  
**Poland v Greece (10pm)**  
 Wroclaw, Group A:  
**Russia v Czech Republic (12.45am, June 9)**



# Hosts relying on German brigade

REUTERS, Warsaw

If Poland can upset former champions Greece in the opening game of Euro 2012 on Friday it will be a victory made in Germany.

Two of the hosts' likely starting lineup were born or brought up in Germany and German-speaking coach Franciszek Smuda has built his side around a trio from the Borussia Dortmund team that dominated last season's Bundesliga campaign.

The reliance on foreign-based talent has prompted some unrest in Poland shown by a row this week over French-born midfielder Ludovic Obraniak's inability to speak Polish and relations with the rest of the squad.

Centre half Damien Perquis, who also



**POLAND**  
10 WINS

**HEAD TO HEAD**  
 Played: 15  
 Draws: 2

**GREECE**  
3 WINS



hails from France, jumped to Obraniak's defence at a news conference this week.

All will be forgiven if the hosts, the lowest ranked team at this year's finals, can beat a Greece side who were shock winners of Euro 2004 and have lost once in the past 20 games.

"You can see that from the start Smuda set out to build this team on the basis of players from Germany," said leading Polish football columnist Michal Pol.

"That may mean that they are better prepared for this tournament than in the past," he added, pointing to errors in

conditioning made in an ill-fated campaign four years ago and at the 2006 World Cup in Germany.

Group A is seen as a pretty open contest, with Russia the favourites after a 3-0 win over Italy last month, and their much-praised drive to the semifinals four years ago.

That leaves the Poles, Greeks and Czech Republic battling it out for the other spot in the quarterfinals.

The Poles' hopes hang largely on striker Robert Lewandowski, third top scorer in the German top flight last sea-

son with 22 goals, as well as a hat-trick in Dortmund's 5-2 rout of Bayern Munich in the German Cup final.

Service for him comes from Dortmund colleagues Lukasz Piszczek and Jakub Blaszczykowski as well as emerging talents like winger Maciej Rybus and Obraniak - a French international at youth level before taking Polish citizenship last year.

They will face a Greece side that gave away just five goals in qualifying, led by the central defensive partnership of Avraam Papadopoulos and Sokratis Papastathopoulos.

They have already opened one tournament with a bang, having stunned hosts Portugal in 2004, and will take strength

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## McInnes set to be Academy's head coach

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) all but confirmed Australian Richard McInnes as head coach of the National Cricket Academy.

The former Bangladesh Under-19 and High Performance Unit coach in 2003-04, McInnes was supposed to arrive in the capital late last night to see the infrastructure and facilities on offer.

"Everything is confirmed and both parties agreed in principle to sign the deal. He is scheduled to come to Dhaka tonight to see all the facilities because he has had a stint in Bangladesh cricket long ago. Hopefully he will join the academy within next two three weeks after this visit," informed BCB director

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## Flame Boys, Gregarious notch wins

SPORTS REPORTER

Flame Boys and Gregarious won their respective matches of the Citycell Premier Division Basketball League beating their respective rivals at the Dhanmondi Basketball Gymnasium.

Flame Boys recorded a 80-61 win over Hornets yesterday after dominating the first half 49-17 as Shakib and Shuvo caged 27 and 14 points for Flame Boys while Hamidul and Mizan scored 24 and 13 points respectively for Hornets.

On Wednesday, Gregarious registered a 93-48 win over Rangers after leading the first half 51-23. Mithun and Soaib scored 23 and 19 points for the winners while Mahmudullah and Sundy caged 13 points each for Rangers.

## Usha thru' to semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Usha Krira Chakra moved into the semifinals of the Walton Club Cup Hockey Tournament with their third straight victory after blanking Ajax SC 5-0 at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Usha, last season's runners-up, led the first half 2-0 and later added three more goals to rout Ajax SC. Moinul Islam Koushik, Ehsan Ullah Khan, Mohammad Imran, Deen Islam and Afsar Uddin struck one goal each for Usha, who will now face Abahani in their group's last match to decide the Group B winners.

In the day's first match, Bangladesh SC tasted their first victory with a 3-1 win over the winless Wari Club.

Masum struck the board twice while Saimon scored

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## Victoria's flair v DOHS's grit

League winners to be decided today

SPORTS REPORTER



The stop-start Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League awaits a grand finale as the star-studded Victoria Sporting Club meet the efficient Old DOHS in the title-deciding last Super League encounter at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium today.

Perennial rivals Abahani and Mohammedan face off at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra in one of three last round matches but it can hardly be considered as a marquee encounter as all attention will be engaged at Fatullah where the result will ensure the new champions of the most coveted domestic competition.

It is after a long time that the league race is alive till the very last round as both league leaders Old DOHS (Prime Bank Cricket Club) and Victoria lost their penultimate round matches to keep interest alive till the last round.

Old DOHS go into the match with 22 points, two points clear of their nearest

rivals Victoria but only a win will give them their third title and a defeat may condemn them to a third-place finish if Gazi Tank, who also have twenty points, win their last round match against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club at BKSP.

On the other hand, a win will see Victoria level with Old DOHS but a head-to-head advantage over their opponents will give them the title for the fourth time.

Victoria captain Shakib Al Hasan has already announced that he was desperate to win the league title for the first time in his career. The league title is a notable exception from the many feathers in the world's number one all-rounder's cap, and without any doubt the focus will be on the 25-year old Magura lad and star batsman Tamim Iqbal.

But Shakib believes that they have to play as a team rather than focusing on any individual if they want to become champions. "I think everybody can take the opportunity to hog the spotlight and I have faith on all of my players. You know sometimes a little known

player emerges with a big contribution to make the occasion memorable. What I believe is that in the end the best team will be the winner. I'm looking forward to a good game," said Shakib after his team were unable to practise at the BCB Academy ground due to sudden rain in the afternoon.

"It is nice that the title race is alive till the last game. We have to perform well in all three departments in the do-or-die battle and I am very much confident in my team. Undoubtedly DOHS has been playing good cricket, they are leading the table, so we have to make sure that we play our best cricket against them in tomorrow's game," he added.

DOHS coach Khaled Mahmud, a shrewd tactician, admitted without hesitation that on paper Victoria are the favourites, especially when they have players like Shakib and Tamim in their arsenal, but he believe that his hard-working charges are very much capable of turning the tables on them.

"Without any doubt Shakib and Tamim are simply different from others

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## Pakistan easy victors

Cricket

AFP, Pallekele

Pacemen Umar Gul and Mohammad Sami each took three wickets as Pakistan posted a comfortable six-wicket win over Sri Lanka in the first one-day international in Pallekele on Thursday.

Man-of-the-match Gul finished with 3-24 and Sami with 3-19 before Pakistan achieved a rain-revised target of 135 with more than seven overs to spare in the day-night match for a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

The duo helped Pakistan restrict the hosts

to 135-8 in a match reduced to 42-overs-a-side due to the poor conditions.

Opener Mohammad Hafeez top-scored with 37, while Umar Akmal (36 not out) and skipper Misbahul Haq (30) were the other main scorers as Pakistan recorded their ninth one-day win over Sri Lanka in their last 11 matches.

Misbah added 51 runs for the third wicket with Hafeez after two wickets had fallen for 27 and then 55 for the fourth with Akmal.

Pakistan's win was set up by bowlers in seaming conditions as Gul took three wickets in a sharp opening spell, removing skipper Mahela Jayawardene, Tillakaratne Dilshan and

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