

Fans cheer Del Piero's luggage

Alessandro Del Piero has arrived in Australia to begin his two-year stint with Sydney FC and the locals are excited. According to the local news, about 500 fans greeted the 37-year-old Juventus legend at the airport and some waited as much as six hours for him to arrive. The report also said that even his luggage was cheered. Sydney chairman Scott Barlow called Del Piero "the most important signing in the history of football in this country," and the striker said that he and his family aren't in Australia for the money. They're there for the kangaroos.



Tigers lose last warm-up

BISHWAJIT ROY from Colombo

Bangladesh lost their final warm-up match by five runs against Ireland at the Moors Sports Club Ground in Colombo yesterday -- a timely wake-up call just before their challenge in the tournament proper of the ICC World Twenty20.

A brilliant all-round performance from Shakib Al Hasan, who hit a sublime half-century after taking two wickets, went in vain in the end due to senseless middle-order batting.

One can say that the result of warm-up games do not really matter, but the truth remains that there is reason to be concerned by the manner of the Tigers' defeat from a very comfortable position after winning the first warm-up match against Zimbabwe by five wickets. The team management, especially Richard Pybus, the head coach of the team, should take a long look at the team's preparation ahead of their big challenge, which begins with their first match against New Zealand on September 21.

The spinners' effort helped Bangladesh make up for their initial poor bowling and fielding after captain Mushfiqur Rahim decided to bowl first when the match started one and a half hours later than scheduled due to a wet pitch following the early morning rain.

Ireland posted a competitive 164 in 20 overs in the small



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ground. Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan then displayed their obvious talent by hitting the Irish bowlers all around the park after Mohammad Ashraful's early exit. The two batsmen provided a perfect example of how one should respond in a challenging situation.

The match was in the Tigers' clutches when Shakib walked back to the pavilion with the scoreboard reading 105-3, leaving his team to score only 60 from the last 9.3 overs with seven wickets in hand. There was no question of any pressure from the required run rate but skipper Mushfiqur, his deputy Mahmudullah Riyad and Nasir Hossain seemed in a hurry to return to the pavilion. The quick dismissals of the three batsmen saw the Irish team fight their way back into the match and finally win it by five runs as Bangladesh finished their 20-over quota at 159 for nine.

Mashrafe and the dashing Ziaur Rahman revived hopes after the middle-order hiccup. Bangladesh needed only 12 runs from the last two overs but Alex Cusack brought his team back into the game again, removing Mashrafe for 14.

Finally Bangladesh required ten runs from the last over but experienced pacer Trent Johnston denied them, taking the wicket of Zia in the third ball of the over.

There were many reasons for Bangladesh's loss -- Riyad conceding 24 in one over to Paul Stirling, the highest scorer

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Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was at his belligerent best at Moors Sports Club Ground in Colombo yesterday. But his 23-ball 52 was still not enough for the Tigers to avoid a stinging five-run defeat against Ireland in their final warm-up match.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Siddikur finishes 37th

SPORTS REPORTER

After fighting to stave off the cut for much of the rain-affected Yeangder Tournament Players Championship, Bangladesh's ace golfer Siddikur Rahman finished joint 37th with a final round of one-under-par 71 at the Linkou International Golf and Country Club in Taipei yesterday.

But the day belonged to India's Gaganjeet Bhullar who finished four strokes clear of joint second-place holders Thaworn Wiratchant of Thailand and Jason Knutson of USA with a final round of three-under-par 69 giving him a cumulative score of twelve-under-par 204.

Back to Siddikur's performance, yesterday was the first time in the tournament when he found any semblance of form. The previous two rounds had seen him record identical one-over-par 73s which saw him just avoid the cut by a single stroke. In the third and final round -- the tournament was curtailed because of inclement weather -- the 27-year-old traded three birdies for two bogeys to finish the tournament with a cumulative score of one-over-par 217.

Hope flays NCA

SPORTS REPORTER

The West Indian batsmen continued their domination on the second day of the four-day match against the BCB National Cricket Academy at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium at Khulna, ending the day on 521 for 8.

Kyle Hope, who resumed the day on 146, continued on his merry way as he reached his double century in quick time. He remained not out on 214 at the end of the rain-hit day.

Earlier, the visiting side, who had an overnight score of 394 for five, lost their skipper Carlos Brathwaite early to a catch in the outfield off Shakir Ahmed. The slow-left-arm struck again when he removed Jahmar Hamilton in the 100th over. The visitors required a much-needed partnership and that came in the form of a 93-run eighth-wicket partnership between Hope

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Kamran kills India

AFP, Colombo

Kamran Akmal smashed an unbeaten 92 off 50 balls as Pakistan came from behind to defeat India by five wickets in a warm-up match for the World Twenty20 on Monday.

Pakistan, chasing India's commanding 185-3, appeared to be out of contention when they lost five wickets by the 12th over with just 91 runs on the board at the Premadasa Stadium.

But Akmal and former captain Shoaib Malik turned the game around with a brilliant unbroken stand of 95 off 46 balls that helped Pakistan beat the shell-shocked Indians with five balls to spare.

Akmal plundered six sixes, including the winning shot off seamer Irfan Pathan which sailed over the cover fence. Malik remained unbeaten on 37 off 18 balls.

Virat Kohli had earlier top-scored for

India with 75 not out, while off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin claimed four wickets for 23 runs.

Some 3,000 Sri Lankan fans watched the arch-rivals battle out in the middle in the only warm-up match to be beamed live by the host broadcasters of the World Twenty20 that opens on Tuesday.

"We knew that if India could post a huge total, so could we," said Pakistan captain Mohammad Hafeez. "Kamran was exceptional, and Malik's experience also helped."

Indian captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said the batting worked well, but the bowlers needed to contain runs on the easy-paced wickets.

"It was not really a bad game for us," he said. "We have got to work on a few things with our bowling."

India and Pakistan are drawn in different groups for the preliminary league, but are

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Pakistan's pocket dynamo Kamran Akmal plays a forceful shot on way to a superb unbeaten 92 against India at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'This should shake us up'

BISHWAJIT ROY from Colombo

The Ireland team celebrated their five-run success against Bangladesh all the way yesterday regardless of it being just a warm-up game at the Moors Sports Club ground in Colombo. After the match Kevin O'Brien, who actually initiated the middle-order collapse taking three wickets in quick succession, didn't hesitate to say that it was a sweet revenge for their 3-0 loss in the T20 series against the same opponents at home in August this year. He also opined that both teams are now evenly matched after this victory, especially since two of the matches the Irish lost in August were decided in the last over. But Bangladesh's champion all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was not ready to accept the notion. "The reality is that we won the three-match series at their own den recently and winning the match in the last over is very much part of this version," said Shakib.

But it was hard for the ever-confident former Bangladesh skipper to hide his

frustration at the way his team signed off their build-up to the ICC World Twenty20, though he believed that they can take positives from the match.

"I honestly think this should actually shake us up a little. believe we lacked intensity in the last ten overs because with the batting we have there is no reason why we should lose that game from the position we were in. It was really sad that we still had around ten overs but nobody really got in to make a partnership," said Shakib, who was in top form in the match making a quickfire half-century after taking two wickets.

He however also believes that there was also a bright side to the defeat.

"It can inspire us too to do well in the tournament proper. It would be a different ball game when we take on New Zealand and Pakistan in the group matches. You always learn more from defeats. Now we know where we need to improve and which areas we need to brush up. We have four days in our hand to do the correction in practice before our first game in the tournament," observed Shakib.

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Bangladesh to end int'l hiatus

International friendly against Nepal today

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

After a nine-month long hiatus, the Bangladesh national football team will return to action today when they take on Nepal in the first of two international friendly matches at the Dasrath Stadium in Kathmandu. The match is scheduled to get underway at 5:20pm (Bangladesh Standard Time).

There is major concern, however, over the nature of the pitch which might be deemed unplayable following constant downpour, reports football portal goalnepal.com.

But despite the exhibition nature of the match, the national football team will definitely be focusing on an improvement in a bid to elevate their performance at the international level. They will draw motivation from

their last international stint, when the national side returned empty-handed after the 2011 SAFF Football Championship, where they lost to Nepal 1-0 and Maldives 3-1.

Bangladesh had historically always held the upper-hand against Nepal, but the national team find themselves on the backfoot against the Himalayan nation who have gone from strength to strength and have put up admirable performance against mighty opponents in the recent past. Bangladesh are now ranked four spots below Nepal in the FIFA rankings.

Nepal have gradually improved in recent years. This was best evident during the SAFF Football Championship where they stunned Bangladesh 1-0 to break an 18-year long hoodoo against their neighbours from the plains. Nepal's brilliant performance in the SAFF Championship also helped them earn a place, ahead of Bangladesh, in Indian Nehru Cup. In

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Tenth SAFF C'ship in Nepal

SPORTS REPORTER

The South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) has decided in principle to hold the tenth edition of the SAFF Championship in Nepal, but the timing of the regional extravaganza has not yet been decided.

The decision was taken at an executive committee meeting of the SAFF in Colombo on Sunday with president Kazi Salahuddin in the chair.

The championship usually takes place once every two years and the last ninth edition was held in Delhi in December, 2011.

In another move, the SAFF had scrapped its plan to hold SAFF Club Championship due to lack of fund and busy schedules of eight member countries, according to goalnepal.com.



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