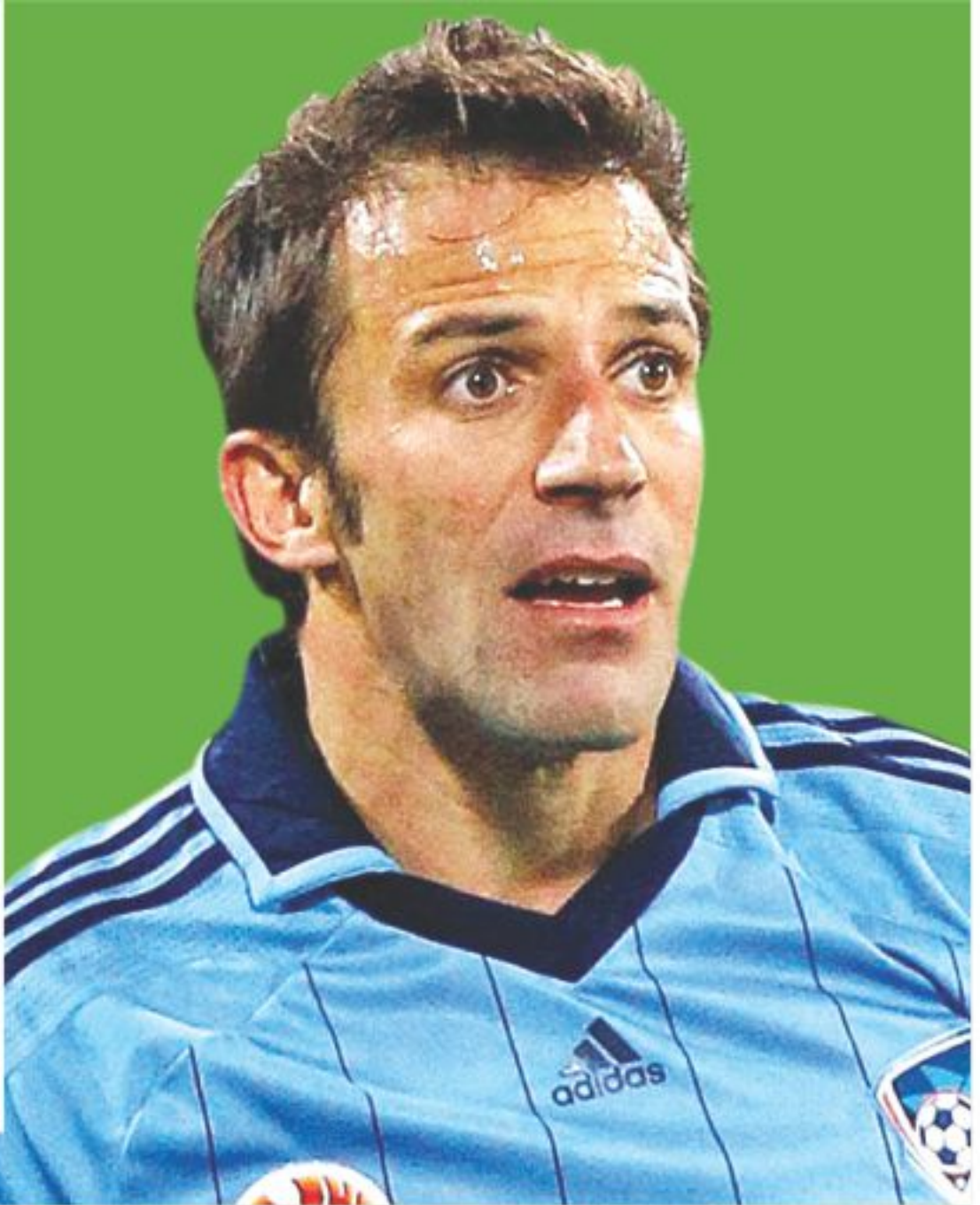


Losing debut for Del Piero

Italian superstar Alessandro Del Piero got off to a losing start with his new Australian club as Sydney FC crashed to a 2-0 defeat to Wellington Phoenix in New Zealand on Saturday.

World Cup winner Del Piero, on a reported Aus\$2 million (\$2.04 million) a season, was one of the few positives as the two-time A-League champions struggled against Phoenix in wintry Wellington.

The 37-year-old Juventus legend tried to get the spluttering Sydney attacks going, but despite a couple



Feisty v flair

Sri Lanka-West Indies final today

BISHWAJIT ROY from Colombo

There may be some differences in strength and skill between Sri Lanka and West Indies but there is one similarity -- both teams and their fans have been craving a success in a major tournament for long. So whoever lifts the trophy tonight after the final of the ICC World Twenty20 at the R Premadasa International Stadium, it will be a new chapter in their cricketing history.

Both captains -- Sri Lanka's Mahela Jayawardene and West Indies' Darren Sammy -- emphasised that sentiment saying that a win would be a memorable occasion for them while speaking to the media during the pre-match press conference. After the 1979 ODI World Cup triumph the West Indies enjoyed only one major success -- the 2004 Champions Trophy in England -- in an otherwise sordid period in their history while Sri Lanka have finished runner-up in three ICC multinational events after their heady success in the 1996 World Cup under the leadership of Arjuna Ranatunga.

It could not be learnt whether Sri Lankan hero Ranatunga sent any messages to the team before the big match but Sammy informed that the West Indies team received a message from their 1979 World Cup-winning captain Clive Lloyd, which added to their motivation to do something special today.

"Friday we were all pumped up. We have had many people rooting for us. Former captain Clive Lloyd sent us messages saying we got to win this. It means a lot to everybody. That in itself will be the biggest motivation for us. I got an email from Mr. Lloyd saying we are very proud in the Caribbean of what the team is doing, people are very happy and just go out and win it," disclosed Sammy.

West Indies showed in their semifinal against Australia how destructive they could be when their talented players come to the party but Sri Lanka also demonstrated in their consistent performances in the tournament how disciplined a team they are. So, without any doubt a good and fitting finale is a waiting cricket lovers around the world.

The "Gayle-factor" will crop up in discussions whenever a team plays against the Caribbean side. Interestingly however, both captains tried to play down the Gayle hype, instead emphasizing the importance of team effort.

"Not too much because that's not the way we went about this tournament, we never went after individual players. We have to focus on the entire team. Like I've always said, records, the numbers and everything is there, (but) its how you perform on the given day, so we just need to react to the situation on the day," responded Mahela when asked whether they were worrying about Gayle.

The Sri Lankan skipper also reacted sharply to Gayle's statement the other day where he said the pressure is now on Sri Lanka.

"When somebody says something like that is the pressure on us or on him? Don't know how to react to that. Probably the pressure is on him when he has said something like that," responded the usually soft-spoken Mahela.

"The physio did not tell me anything very serious (about the injury that Gayle suffered



Sri Lanka will seek an early thrust from their paceman Lasith Malinga to win the mouth-watering ICC World T20 final against the West Indies at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo today.

PHOTO: AFP

NCL a week away

Build-up not going as it should have been

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Cricket League (NCL), which is scheduled to begin on October 14, continues to face various organisational problems. The number of teams participating in the league, for instance, has still not been confirmed. While there were initially supposed to be eight teams in the league, latest developments suggest that the competition might pertain to only six clubs.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), which had decided to conduct the 14th edition of the competition on franchise-basis, apparently failed to find companies willing to sponsor two out of the eight teams in the competition. As a result, the teams -- Dhaka Metro and Rangpur -- may not participate in the league this year.

"There hasn't been any confirmation as yet. The board might sponsor the two teams.

But it's more likely that the two teams will join the league only next year. A final decision will be taken by the tournament's governing council once Mahbubul Anam, the council's convener, arrives," said Jalal Yunus, chairman of BCB's media committee.

The governing council was formed with representatives from the BCB, the franchises and the participating divisions. The council will aim to regulate the new-look tournament. Prime Bank Foundation, till date, is the only company to have received a franchise license to operate an NCL team. Five other teams are expected to receive franchisees in the coming days.

Meanwhile, the uncertainty preceding the NCL has gained criticism from various quarters. Former national captain Khaled Mashud believes that the board should have handled the logistics issues in a more

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Hosts ready for a party

BISHWAJIT ROY from Colombo



Hundreds of thousands of cricket-crazy fans have spent a sleepless night in their quest for a ticket because everybody wanted to be a part of history. Tickets became a precious commodity, mainly for young Sri Lankans, which is why many fans bought tickets at five times the asking price.

The entire nation is looking forward to celebrate their first major cricketing success since the glorious triumph in the 1996 ODI World Cup. The onus is therefore on Mahela Jayawardene & co to provide the finishing touches when they meet the mighty West Indies in the final of the ICC World Twenty20 at the R Premadasa International Stadium today.

The Sri Lanka captain, who obviously cannot do anything about the tickets, said, "It's unfortunate because the capacity is only 35,000." But it will be more than enough consolation for the fans who miss out if his brigade can overcome an

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U-14 booters off to Japan

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh U-14 national team left here early today (Sunday) for Japan to take part in the Japan-SAARC U-14 Football Exchange Program to Support Disaster Affected Areas, beginning from October 9 to 20.

Eight SAARC countries -- Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan -- and two teams from Japan split into two groups will take part in the football festival.

Bangladesh will face

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Women's handball

SPORTS REPORTER

Eden Women's College and Siddheswari Girls' College moved into the final of the 15th Delta Life Women's College/University Handball Tournament at the Shaheed M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium yesterday.

Eden defeated Dhaka Cantonment Girls' Public School & College 9-1 while Siddheswari thrashed Home Economics College 13-1.

The final takes place on Monday at the same venue.

Feni trounce Arambagh

Muktijoddha-Noakhali match abandoned

SPORTS REPORTER



Aminur Rahman Sajib slotted a hattrick to power Feni Soccer Club to a comprehensive 3-0 win over Arambagh KS in the Grameenphone Federation Cup at the Bangabadhu National Stadium yesterday, but the second match of the day between Muktijoddha Sangsad and Noakhali Football Academy was abandoned due to a power outage at the big bowl.

With a depleted Muktijoddha Sangsad leading 2-0 riding on a brace from Mohammad Yusuf, the power went off just three minutes into the second half but the match resumed after five minutes. Power again went off after 28 minutes of



Sajib... hattrick

of the re-match will be declared later.

Last season's professional football league runners-up Muktijoddha Sangsad -- who are a depleted side after the

second-half and the referee, in line with bylaws, called off the match after waiting for 40 minutes.

However, power came back just a few minutes later. After being informed by the Power Development Board (PDB), BNS administrator Mohammad Yahya said that they could not restore the electricity due to a problem in one of the grids.

BFF acting general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said that there will be a re-match between Muktijoddha Sangsad and Noakhali FC, according to the bylaws, and that the time

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Total darkness grips the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday that eventually forced the cancellation of the Federation Cup football's second match between Muktijoddha Sangsad and Noakhali Football Academy.

PHOTO: STAR

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ICC WORLD T20 TODAY'S MATCH
FINAL

MATCH	TIME	VENUE
Sri Lanka v West Indies	7:30pm	Colombo

during the semifinal), he seemed to be ok. Nobody is going to make Chris Gayle miss that final tomorrow. He has played through pain for us many times before and tomorrow won't be any different. Once Gayle gives us a good start at the top, it is good for the team. But we have the resources in the line-up to click if he does not give us the start. Tomorrow is about every single person doing what it takes to get us over the line," said Sammy.

And Sammy has every right to say that

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