

Star SPORT

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Cassano goes bad again

Inter Milan manager Andrea Stramaccioni has dropped striker Antonio Cassano for Sunday's Serie A match against Catania after a training ground row. Local media reported that Cassano was suspended by the club after the pair nearly came to blows on Friday. "What happened could happen in any changing room in Serie A," Stramaccioni told a news conference on Saturday. "There wasn't any physical contact, only a discussion, just as there has been in the past. Stramaccioni said Cassano would return to training on Monday.



Tigers warm up today

BISHWAJIT ROY from Matara



Even the warm-up match between the touring Bangladesh team and the Sri Lanka Development Emerging Team received significant attention from the picturesque beach town of Matara. When the sides square off today, it will mark the first time that an international team will play at the Uyanwatte Stadium after a gap of 10 years.

To commemorate the occasion there will be a ceremony before the start of the match and the organisers procured a CD from the Bangladesh team management to play the visiting team's national anthem. An additional point of interest surrounding the match is the inclusion of Kumar Sangakkara, who has not played competitive cricket since fracturing his index finger in the Boxing Day Test in Australia, in the Emerging XI side.

Bangladesh were however focused on how they can make the maximum use of the practice game before the two-match Test series. Shane Jurgensen, the head coach, wanted to give all his 14 players an opportunity in the match except left-handed batsman Tamim Iqbal, who has been nursing the injury on his left wrist that he sustained during a Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) match three weeks ago.

Despite missing some key players including star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, the Tigers were in good spirits during their practice session at the Matara Sports Club ground yesterday and were eager to erase their forlorn memories in the island.

The team has received better care so far compared to the previous visits. The team management believe that the Tigers' recent positive performances in the international arena was the reason for the improvement.

Jurgensen was trying to motivate his boys by asking them not to think about the past record. Along a similar

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PHOTO: BCB

Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim (C), all-rounder Nasir Hossain (R) and batsman Mominul Haque enjoy their time at the picturesque setting of Dickwella Resort in Matara yesterday.

SL contract row threatens tour

CRICINFO



A major contract dispute between Sri Lanka Cricket and the nation's top cricketers has threatened to derail Sri Lanka's home series against Bangladesh, after all 60 players who were offered contracts have refused to sign, with the deadline upon them.

The players were supposed to meet with Sri Lanka Cricket yesterday evening to attempt to break the deadlock, but SLC has already threatened that players who do not sign their contracts will not be considered for selection in the upcoming series. The contracts had been issued to the players earlier in the week, with signed contracts due in on Saturday, March 2. The major dispute for players is understood to be SLC's refusal to pay 25 per cent of their earnings from ICC events, as they

have done since 2003.

"The stance taken by the executive committee is that players who don't sign, can't play for Sri Lanka, so we'll have to abide by that decision," SLC president Upali Dharmadasa said. "The selectors will meet tomorrow (Sunday) to name the final team for the Tests, and we will have told them the situation."

Complicating the negotiation procedure for the players has been SLC's recent decision not to recognise player representatives, including both player agents and cricketers' associations. 48 players had signed a letter requesting Sri Lanka Cricketers' Association general secretary Ken de Alwis be appointed honorary, unpaid players' representative during the negotiations, but SLC has ignored this request.

"We are hoping that after tonight's

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Booters begin with a loss

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh started their campaign in the AFC Challenge Cup Qualifiers with a 0-1 defeat against Palestine at the Dasarath Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday.

A 78th minute strike by Haytham Theeb from a goalmouth melee decided the tie in favour of the Middle Eastern nation, who are ranked 16 places above Bangladesh in the FIFA rankings.

Against the superior-ranked side to whom Bangladesh lost once and drew on the other occasion, coach Lodewijk de Kruif decided to take a defensive strategy, fielding a 4-2-3-1 formation. And it looked like a good move as Bangladesh managed to keep them at bay, thanks to some brilliant saves from goalie Shahidul Islam Sohel.

Bangladesh could have taken the

lead in the 16th minute when striker Sakhawat Hossain Rony, who was playing as the hitman ahead of strike partner Mithun Chowdhury, found the opposition goalie in a one-on-one situation. However, the Abahani striker who has been in excellent form for his club of late but has a history of wasting chances at international level, blasted his shot way over the post. The first-half was a much even affair as both sides tried their luck from outside the box, but the scoreline remained 0-0.

The Palestinians stepped up the attack right from the restart and it was down to some excellent saves by Sohel which gave Bangladesh hope of a draw if not a shock win. However, Sohel could do nothing when the Palestinians took advantage of some miscommunication in the Bangladesh backline in the 78th minute. Abu Salah's cross from the right side was headed into the box by

Iyad, and as the defenders failed to clear the ball, Haytham pounced on it to put it at the back of the net.

Bangladesh tried to get back in the match after that and made a couple of changes up front, but the Palestinians held firm for three precious points.

Bangladesh coach de Kruif hoped that his boys would learn from their mistakes and bounce back against Nepal in the next match on Monday. "We conceded the goal because of a defensive mistake. Otherwise it was a good game for us. We had a couple of good chances, Rony missed an easy one," said de Kruif.

He also said that his side lost their concentration at the later stages. "We lost our concentration in the last minutes. We will have to be much better in defensive organisation," said de Kruif.

The Dutchman also admitted the chance that Rony missed was a

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Tamim keen on playing first Test

SPORTS REPORTER from Matara

Opener Tamim Iqbal yesterday said he aims to recover in time for the first Test against Sri Lanka, which will begin on Friday.

The left-handed batsman, who suffered an injury in his left wrist during the Bangladesh Premier League, is sitting out the three-day warm-up game against a Sri Lanka Development Side that begins here today.

"I definitely want to play. The team wants me to play. We are working towards that goal. I am looking forward to appearing in the first Test. Our physio is confident and so am I," said Tamim at a press conference at the Matara Sports Club.

"There is still some pain. The kind of injury I am carrying takes time to heal. If I play in the first Test I may have to endure some discomfort but it is looking better," he added. Tamim has so far battled against spinners in training and will face the quicker bowlers in the coming days.

The player further stated that he wanted to improve his record in Sri Lanka. "From a personal point of view I want to play well here. I have not had a good run in Sri Lanka in the past and that's why it is important for me to do well here," said Tamim.

"We have been doing pretty well at home lately. It is therefore a challenge for us to show that we can be successful away from home also against a good team," he added.

U-14 girls fly to SL today

SPORTS REPORTER

A 23-member Bangladesh team will fly for Sri Lanka today to participate in the AFC U-14 Girls' Regional Championship which will be held from March 5 to 19 in capital Colombo.

Bangladesh will play their first match against Iran on Tuesday. The other teams in the group are India, Tajikistan, Bhutan and hosts Sri Lanka.

BFF women wing's chairman Sirajul Islam Bachchu disclosed these at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

Team's head coach Abdur Razzaque was satisfied with the team's preparations. "We first started the camp with 40 players 40 days ago. I found them very hard working and

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Visiting Matara Hurricane

BISHWAJIT ROY from Matara



If you enter the town located in the southern coast of Sri Lanka's Southern Province for the first time and walk into the Polhena Beach road in the night after the journey through the beautiful Southern Lanka Express Highway, you may feel you are in a ghost town. But you will be met with a different sight the next day when you roam the city in daylight. It was a town which hit the international media headlines for the wrong reasons in December 2004 when the town was devastated by the Asian tsunami. The disaster is still fresh in many minds, although comprehensive recovery efforts transformed the town which now attracts tourists from all over the world.

Apart from the beach, the temple situated at the heart of the town, a very popular and sacred site among Buddhists; the popular lighthouse in Point Dondra; the two fortresses built by the Portuguese and the Dutch are the most attractive places. The touring Bangladesh players are also enjoying their time with a Caribbean flavour at the picturesque setting of Dickwella Resort in Matara.

But for any cricket follower Matara will first be known as the birthplace of one of the country's greatest cricketers,

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PHOTO: GOALNEPAL.COM

Bangladesh goalkeeper Shahidul Islam Sohel goes airborne to foil one of the attacks from Palestine during their AFC Challenge Cup Qualifiers game at the Dasarath Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday. Sohel made a few excellent saves to keep Bangladesh in the match until the 78th minute strike from Haytham Theeb.