

SPORT

Shakib face of Elite Force

SPORTS REPORTER

Talismanic Tigers all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has become the brand ambassador for Elite Force. Shakib, who is now spending his time at his in-laws' house in the USA, has signed an agreement with the local security company on May 26 at Elite Tower in Baridhara. Under the agreement Shakib will endorse and promote various services and products being offered by the company throughout Bangladesh.

Victoria, Agrani play out tame draw

SPORTS REPORTER

Agrani Bank and Victoria SC played out a 1-1 draw in the Premier Bank Bangladesh Championship League at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday. Kawsar Rabbi put Victoria ahead in stoppage time of the first half, only to be cancelled out by Milon in the 72nd minute. With the draw, Agrani Bank raised their points tally to 12 from 11 matches while Victoria remained stuck on seventh with 10 points.

Open chess

SPORTS REPORTER

GM Enamul Hossain Razib and FM Mehdi Hasan Parag won their respective second round matches in the 6th Mayor Cup International Open Chess Tournament being held in Mumbai, India. Razib beat Mithil Ajaonkar and Parag beat GM Akshayraj Kore to have 1.5 points, equal to GM Ziaur Rahman who yesterday drew against Indian Kulkarni Chinmay.

FOSTER IT with care

AL-AMIN



BCB coffers. Privately, though, he admitted that he was leaving a lot of loopholes to start with that he hoped would be mended as the tournament progressed.

We are now into the 16th month since the colourful start of the BPL. Unfortunately, neither has it laid any golden egg nor have the loopholes been mended.

True, it has been a success story on the field. The first edition finished with flying colours and many rated the event a distant second-best among domestic T20 tournaments worldwide, behind the glamorous and cash-rich Indian Premier League. The second edition lost a lot of gloss due to the absence of Pakistani cricketers. Still, it was again a successful story on the field.

But despite the success, the two-year-old baby is a hate name for many and a cause of real concern for the BCB. The players are shouting for their rightful wages that they are yet to get. The franchisees are turning deaf ears to the pending dues, forcing the BCB to think of taking legal action against them. Game On, the event management company of the BPL, continues to test the BPL Governing Council's nerves with time-extension applications when it comes to pay its pending dues. In the midst of a 'thick soup' the board is now up against more serious problems -- match-fixing and betting allegations that the ICC anti-corruption unit is seriously working on.

Confronting these multiple problems, the board is now on

the verge of taking a decision on whether to continue with the tournament that is deeply damaging Bangladesh's reputation in the cricketing world. BPL has now become a bad advertisement and on Wednesday Bangladesh premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan said that he would skip the BPL if he had other options. A day before Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim said that he could not find any of the franchisees owners' in his effort to claim his rightful dues.

These are very strong words from our own players, let alone the impression of overseas players.

So, what's going wrong with the BPL off the field? To start with, it was the recruitment policy of the board. And with due respect to the owners of the seven franchises, it won't be an overstatement to say that they lacked a sound financial base for a sustained operation of at least three to four years. It is now also understood that these franchisees are incapable of acting like reputed business houses, of which we have plenty in our country. Otherwise, the franchisees' owners would have acted positively to uphold their and the country's reputation.

The board has decided to wage a legal battle against the franchisees to realise its pending dues. But many feel the board has reached a crossroads where it will have to decide whether to continue with the present set up or off-load the burden once and for all. We do believe we have plenty of reputed business houses in our country who would love to be associated with BPL not only out of passion for cricket but as a future business prospect.

Love it or loath it, T20 is the face of new-generation cricket. And it has arrived like one-day cricket had arrived as a necessity in 1971. Don't kill the BPL baby. Foster it with care.



Sanctions for Test neglect Novak sails, Li out

AFP, London



The International Cricket Council's (ICC) cricket committee said Wednesday countries could risk losing their Test status unless they played a "minimum number of Test matches over a four-year period".

In a statement issued after it concluded its two-day meeting at Lord's, the committee, chaired for the first time by former India captain Anil Kumble and featuring ex-England skipper Andrew Strauss, said it was concerned by several recent examples of Test matches being postponed to make way for one-day games.

The committee, while approving of all three major international formats, which also include one-day internationals and the

even briefer Twenty20 fixtures, said Test cricket needed support if it was to retain its place at the pinnacle of cricket.

"The ICC cricket committee reiterated its support for the strategy of ensuring an optimum balance and a clear differentiation between the three formats of the game, and noted the need to ensure that Test cricket, in particular, was protected," the statement said.

"Noting the examples during the year where Test matches had been postponed to make room for other formats of the game, the committee recommended that all Test playing members should be required to play a minimum number of Test matches over a four-year period in order to maintain their Test status."

In September last year, Sri Lanka and West Indies agreed to scrap a two-Test series due to take place in May and instead play a tri-series involving India.

AFP, Paris



Last year's finalist and world No 1 player Novak Djokovic of Serbia sailed through his second-round French Open match, defeating Guido Pella of Argentina 6-2, 6-0, 6-2 in a dominant display at Roland Garros on Thursday. Meanwhile, China's Li Na crashed out losing 5-7, 6-3, 6-2 to Bethanie Mattek-Sands of the United States in a second round tie badly disrupted by rain.

It was the first time the 2011 champion had gone out at such an early stage of the tournament in seven appearances and wrecked her hopes of a second straight Grand Slam final appearance after Australia in

January.

Asked if the cold, rainy weather had contributed to her downfall, Li replied: "Lose is lose, I cannot find another thing (to blame)"

"The weather didn't change anything -- for both of us it was the same."

Former finalist Samantha Stosur and three-time semifinalist Jelena Jankovic reach the third round.

After a one hour, 40 minute halt had left ninth-seeded Stosur a set and 4-1 up on France's Kristina Mladenovic, the Australian then took advantage of a 20-minute window on their return to Court Philippe Chatrier to complete a 6-4, 6-3 win.

The 2011 US Open champion will face Serb 18th seed Jelena Jankovic for a place in the last 16.

Jankovic, a semifinalist in 2007, 2008 and 2010, beat Spain's Garbine Muguruza 6-3, 6-0.

"I think she's a great up and coming player. She hits the ball very hard, very flat," said Jankovic of the Spaniard.

"And especially in the beginning of the match she gave me a lot of trouble. It was not easy playing against such a player."

China's Zheng Jie also reached the last 32 with a 6-3, 6-1 win over Melanie Oudin of the United States.

Kazakh 27th seed Yaroslava Shvedova, who made the quarter-finals last year, was knocked out by Argentine qualifier Paula Ormaechea, 6-4, 7-6 (8/6).

Ormaechea will face America's Bethanie Mattek-Sands for a spot in the last 16.



PHOTO: REUTERS
Samantha Stosur of Australia plays a fore-hand return to Kristina Mladenovic of France during their second round French Open match at the Roland Garros yesterday.

JUNIOR ATHLETICS FROM SUNDAY

No electronic timer

SPORTS REPORTER

Following the unprecedented vandalism at the Bangabandhu National Stadium doled out by the activists of Hefajat-e-Islam earlier this month, two football tournaments have been held at the venue without any issues. However, the impending 29th National Junior (Age-Group) Athletics Championships, set to start from Sunday looks likely to be adversely affected.

During the Hefajat rampage, the time-house of the athletics section at the BNS was badly damaged and this has now forced the organisers to hold the meet without the help of an electric timer.

"The time-house for athletics was damaged badly and we are trying to get it fixed for the championships, although we are not sure we can get it ready on time," said Bangladesh Athletic Federation president SM Ali Kabir at a press conference at the BNS conference room yesterday.

But the fact is that the National Sports Council has yet to start the renovation work as

the estimated Tk 80 lakh budget, for repairing, has not yet been allotted by the government.

Approximately 600 budding athletes, divided into two groups of 16-17 and 18-19, will be taking part in 33 events, during the meet.

"Though the competition is for the youth but it is a gateway to the senior competition for them," said Ali Kabir. "We will scout the talented athletes from the competition to groom them for the future through a youth camp."

General secretary Ibrahim Chengis also claimed that he ran similar youth camps in 2001, which produced well-known athletes like Nazmun Nahar Beauty, Shamsun Nahar Chumki and Sumita Rani. However, the fact is that Beauty, Chumki and Sumita all came into limelight much before the 2001 camp started.

Sponsor Walton has provided Tk 3.5 lakh for the competition and will award the record-breakers by giving them Walton products, said Iqbal Bin Anwar, director in sports of RB Group.

'IPL root of evils' Sharif likely to retire

PTI, New Delhi

Ridiculing the Indian Premier League for turning cricketers into a bunch of avaricious people, World Cup-winning Sri Lankan captain Arjuna Ranatunga on Thursday said that the cash-awash T20 league has given Indian cricket nothing but disrepute. IPL is embroiled in a spot-fixing scandal, leading to the arrest of India's Test pacer S Sreesanth and several others including the BCCI president's son-in-law on charges of betting.

"I am not surprised with the current spot-fixing and betting scandal in IPL. It has been happening from the beginning. Each and every season had issues like betting, fixing, alcohol, drugs. I think IPL never gave anything to Indian cricket. Indian cricket has never got such bad name in world cricket," Ranatunga told PTI-Bhasha over phone from Colombo.

Ranatunga said it pained him to see that some of the former greats are backing the event just because they too are getting monetary benefits out of it.

"I feel hurt that past greats are trying to cover up as they are earning money through it. There are only a few like Erapalli Prasanna who have criticised it," he said without naming the greats.

He also said not only Indian but world cricket is getting affected by it. "It is making cricketers greedy. Everyone wants to play IPL now and the focus has been shifted. I don't understand what is the need of such a league. What has Indian cricket gained from it? It is spoiling players. I don't remember any world class player produced from IPL," he said.

"India will not get Tendulkars, Dravids or Gavaskars from IPL. BCCI's domestic structure is good enough to produce good cricketers, so what is the need of this league," he said.

SPORTS REPORTER

National discard footballer Enamul Haque Sharif is considering retiring following the upcoming Super Cup as the Sheikh Jamal DC midfielder is suffering from a knee injury.

"I can't play regularly for Sheikh Jamal DC due to knee injury and I am therefore thinking of hanging up my boots," said Sharif. "I won't go for surgery because it is not possible to return to my old form after surgery."

Sharif started his football career at Victoria SC in 2000 and then joined Sheikh Russel KC, Mohammedan SC and lastly Sheikh Jamal DC. But the midfielder never tasted the coveted league title for any clubs. Sharif represented Bangladesh national football team for five years from 2006 to 2010.

Chavan freed to tie the knot

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian cricketer Ankeet Chavan, arrested on suspicion of spot-fixing earlier this month, has been granted conditional bail so he can get married on Sunday, his lawyer said.

A Delhi court on Thursday granted the 27-year-old bail until June 6, Kishore Gaekwad told Reuters.

The court said there was no threat of the player tampering with evidence in the spot-fixing scandal.

Chavan, former India Test bowler Shanthakumaran Sreesanth and a third Rajasthan Royals player, Ajit Chandila, were arrested on May 16 for allegedly taking money to concede a predetermined number of runs in Indian Premier League (IPL) matches.

The trio have denied any wrongdoing.

Prize money, after five months

SPORTS REPORTER

The Pioneer Football League champions Khilgaon Football Academy and runners-up Matuail Udayan Sangsad were handed over Tk one lakh and Tk 50,000 respectively as prize money yesterday, five months after the completion of the DCC Pioneer Football League.

"We could not provide the prize money then due to a shortage of funds but we are now happy to disburse it finally," said Arif Khan Joy, chairman of pioneer league committee and vice president of the Bangladesh Football Federation.

Dhoni silent on spot-fixing

PTI, Birmingham



Indian captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni on Thursday refused to break the BCCI gag on him in answering questions on the spot-fixing scandal that has hit IPL except to say that some players are "slightly mentally weak" compared to others.

Addressing a press conference here ahead of the Champions Trophy, he made it clear that he would not answer questions relating to the recent controversies, saying he would definitely speak at the right time.

At the brief press conference, an ICC official reminded the journalists that the interaction should be limited to the Champions Trophy much like the Indian team media manager's intervention during the pre-departure press conference in Mumbai on Tuesday. Dhoni had come under severe attack from media and commentators for his silence in refusing to answer questions at the Mumbai interaction.

"If I have not answered Indian journalists, there is no reason why I should answer you...at the right time (I will speak)," he said in reply to a question today by a reporter who asked him about the spot-fixing scandal.

Asked if the Champions Trophy is an opportunity to "restore the reputation" of Indian cricket, Dhoni said, "It is not that the reputation has gone. If I go ahead to explain that I would rather answer his question also. When the right time comes, I will answer it."