

De Kruif tests options

SPORTS REPORTER

National football team's head coach Lodewijk de Kruif said he was edging towards forming a 23-member final squad from the 36 at his disposal, after holding a sixty-minute match among the players yesterday.

"It was a good opportunity for me as I watched all the players. We are moving ahead to form the 23 member squad" said de Kruif after the match where he tried two different formations – splitting his squad in two sides – Blue and Green. The Green team played in 4-3-3 formation and the Blue team played in 4-2-3-1 formation.

A last minute goal from Wahed Ahmed gave the Blue team a 1-0 victory, but it was not the lack of goals, rather the lack of stamina of the players that worried the coach.

"I felt the players lacked the fitness in the last 20 minutes, it is the area we have to work hard. We have about two months before SAFF Championship and I hope to attain the required fitness before that" said de Kruif.

Though the coach refrained from commenting on the players in general, he answered a query regarding Jamal Bhuiyan, the Danish expatriate. "I am happy with the performance of Jamal, that's all I can say" said de Kruif.

Players to meet Ahad today

SPORTS REPORTER

Hockey players are set to meet the state minister for youth and sports Ahad Ali Sarker at the National Sports Council today, in a bid to solve the ongoing crisis regarding inter-club players' transfers.

The inter-club players transfers, which was scheduled for July 2-4, was postponed by the interim committee of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF), which declared that the elected committee would hold the transfers on a new date after they take over.

"Our main demand to the sports minister and the chairman of the National Sports Council (NSC) is to ensure the players' transfer which is the lone income source of the players," said former national goalkeeper Rasel Khan Bappi, also the president of the Hockey Players' Welfare Association (HPWA).

BD finish 5th

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh finished 5th in the Mixed Team Blitz Chess of the 4th Asian Indoor & Martial Arts Games held in Incheon, South Korea yesterday.

Bangladesh team secured 6 points from five matches with three wins and two losses.

Vietnam clinched the gold, China bagged the silver while Indonesia got the bronze medal.

A total of 20 teams from Asia took part in the event.

Umps' hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

Abdul Malek Chunnun Smrity team and Ataul Haque Mallick Smrity team reached the final of the Walton Umpires five-a-side hockey tournament winning their respective semifinals at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

The final will be held at 3pm today at the same venue.

BFF ponders neutral venues

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is planning to replace the concept of home and away matches with neutral venue matches in the professional football league from the upcoming season in a bid to decentralise the top-tier league as well as reduce the frequency of match-days for each club while increasing the total match-days. Dhaka, Sylhet, Chittagong and Khulna or Jessore are being touted to be the neutral venues where each team will be playing at the weekend.

Till the sixth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), the participating teams played on a home and away basis, but the chance this time will mean that the teams will travel to all the venues and play equal number of matches at each venue.

The football's governing body is also planning to complete each round of the seventh BPL on a single day (Friday or Saturday), which means five matches may be held on the same day at different venues.

"As per FIFA standards, each club should give be given the opportunity to play 40 matches each season. This time we will be able to provide each club of the Bangladesh Premier League up to 30 guaranteed matches through the Federation Cup, Independence Cup, Bangladesh Premier League and Super Cup," said BFF president Kazi Salahuddin at his office yesterday.

He, however, said that the introduction of the new concept would depend on the approval from a BFF Executive Committee meeting, which will be held on July 13.

If the executive committee approves the new proposal, then the clubs will be involved nine months in a season which will start from October with the Federation Cup.

The number of participating teams in the Bangladesh Premier League will be increased to 11, with two teams coming from the Bangladesh Championship League (Chittagong Abahani and Uttar Baridhara Club) while Arambagh KS, who were relegated from the BPL, will be retained in the top-tier following their appeal to stay at the BPL.

The BFF president informed that they might increase the number of teams to 12 from the 2014-15 season to meet FIFA standards.

Football's governing body is also thinking of building a bridge between the national level leagues and district football leagues by restarting Club Championship, where the champions of the district league will participate.

The BFF president also informed that they would introduce a Relegation League where two bottom sides from BPL and top two sides from BCL will be fighting to secure places for the top flight.

There might even be another Relegation League where two bottom teams of BCL and top two teams of Club Cup Championship will be playing for places in the BCL, the second-tier professional league.



France's Marion Bartoli smiles as she holds the Venus Rosewater Dish, the Wimbledon women's singles winner's trophy, after defeating Sabine Lisicki of Germany 6-1, 6-4 in the final at the All England Club in Wimbledon yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Maiden Marion Slam

AFP, London



Marion Bartoli romped to her first Grand Slam title as the French 15th seed thrashed Germany's Sabine Lisicki 6-1, 6-4 in the Wimbledon final on Saturday.

Bartoli, 28, is the fifth oldest woman to become a first-time Grand Slam winner in the Open Era.

Six years after losing to Venus Williams in the Wimbledon final, Bartoli returned to Centre Court and finally ended her long wait for a major crown with a supreme display of power hitting.

She took just 81 minutes to rout 23rd seed Lisicki, who broke down in tears as the match slipped away in the second set.

"Honestly I just can't believe it, as

a little girl I dreamt of this moment for so long," Bartoli said.

"Finishing with an ace to win Wimbledon, even in my wildest dreams I couldn't have imagined that. I'm just so happy to be holding this trophy.

"I missed out here in 2007. I know what it is like and I'm sure Sabine will be here one more time, no doubt about it."

Lisicki, who was undone by 25 unforced errors, said: "I was just overwhelmed by the whole situation, but credit to Marion. She handled it perfectly. She's been on the tour for a long time and deserves this.

"I still love this tournament. I just hope I get another chance as well."

By finally winning her maiden major title in the 47th Grand Slam appearance of her career, Bartoli surpassed the previous record set by Jana Novotna, who won

Wimbledon in 1998 after 45 appearances at the majors.

Bartoli, who will climb to seventh when the latest world rankings are released on Monday, didn't drop a single set in her seven matches and is the first Frenchwoman to win a Grand Slam singles title since Amelie Mauresmo at Wimbledon in 2006.

Ironically, Mauresmo has played a key role in Bartoli's remarkable renaissance over the last two weeks.

Bartoli's career had been on a downward spiral in recent years and she hit rock bottom in February when she struggled with the emotional decision to move on from her dad Walter, who had coached her since childhood.

She eventually turned to Mauresmo for help after failing to strike up a rapport with a series of coaches and her compatriot has

brought a calmer approach to Bartoli's preparations.

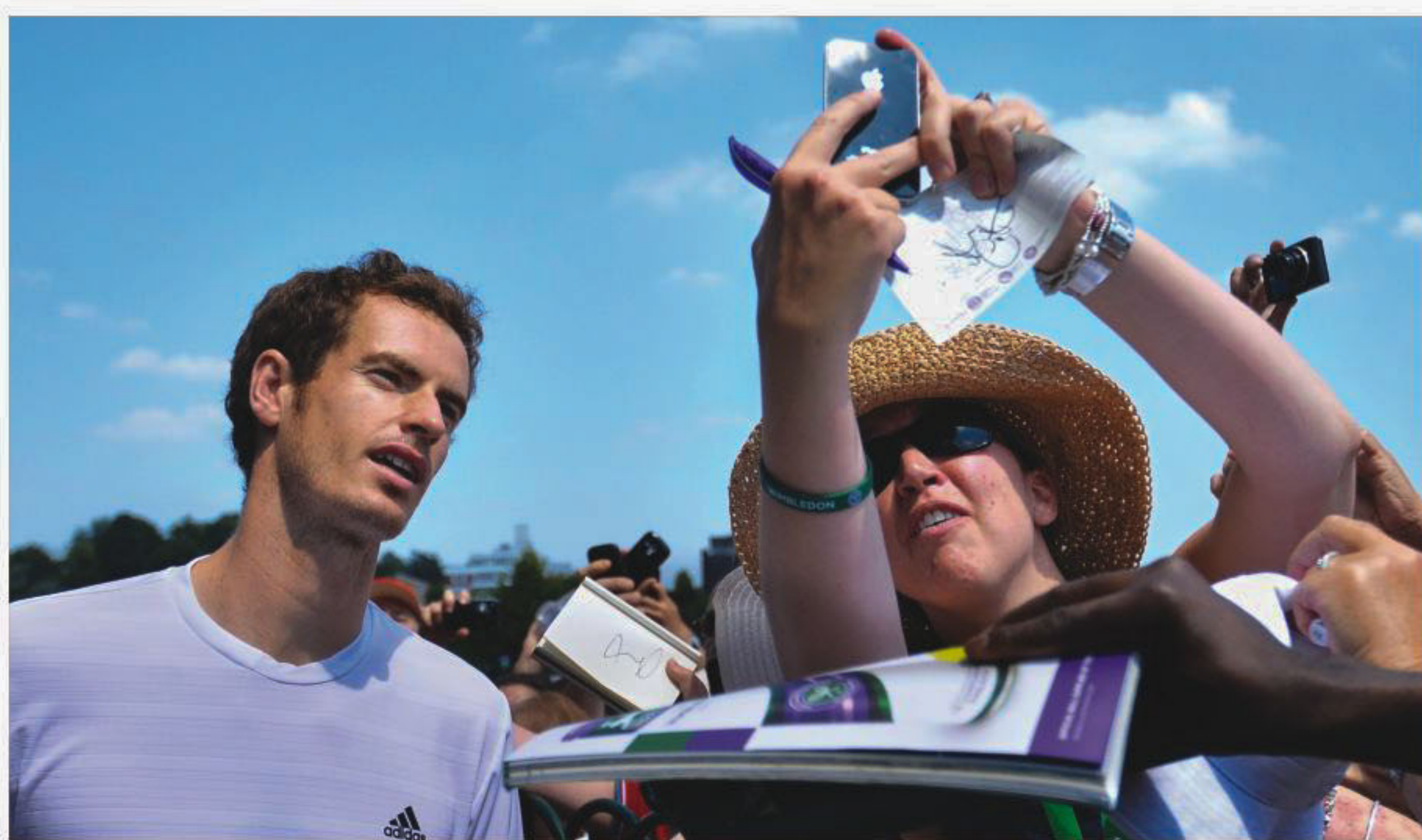
Bartoli was broken in the first game, but Lisicki then surrendered her own serve in error-strewn fashion.

Lisicki, 23, was a shadow of the bold stroke-maker who stunned defending champion Serena Williams in the fourth round.

But Bartoli had shaken off her early anxiety and took advantage of Lisicki's nerves to break again for a 3-1 lead.

Throughout her career Bartoli's game has been marked by bizarre routines as she jumps, skips, shuffles and twirls her racket before serving or returning.

And her quirky routine was on full display as she took the attack to Lisicki in the sixth game, breaking to seal the set thanks to a series of punishing forehands.



A female fan of Andy Murray (L) takes a photo of the British tennis superstar on his mobile phone after training at the All England Club in Wimbledon yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Another Murray & Djokovic finale

AFP, London



Andy Murray set up a titanic Wimbledon final showdown with Novak Djokovic as the world number two beat Polish 24th seed Jerzy Janowicz 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 6-4, 6-3 in a bad-tempered last four clash on Friday.

Murray remains on course to end Britain's 77-year wait for a male winner of the Wimbledon singles' crown, but the Scot had to do it the hard way once again.

Just 48 hours after battling back from two sets down to defeat Fernando Verdasco, Murray survived an early pummeling from Janowicz and then a controversial decision to shut the Centre Court roof due to bad light when he had just taken a two-sets-to-one lead.

Murray was furious with Janowicz, who had been pleading for the roof to be shut, and referee Andrew Jarrett,

claiming there was still time to finish the match in daylight.

But he returned to finish the job, sealing his second successive appearance in the All England Club final thanks to 20 aces and 18 winners in two hours and 52 minutes of nerve-racking action.

Murray, who missed the recent French Open due to injury, has now reached the final in each of his last four Grand Slam appearances.

However, that will mean little to the 26-year-old unless he avenges last year's tearful final defeat against Roger Federer and emulates Fred Perry's 1936 Wimbledon triumph.

Murray's seventh Grand Slam final on Sunday will be his fourth meeting with world number one Djokovic with a major title on the line.

The Serb defeated Murray in the 2011 and 2013 Australian Open finals, while the Scot won a five-set thriller to seal his maiden Grand Slam title at the US Open last year.

Murray was appearing in his fifth

consecutive Wimbledon semifinal and had won his previous 16 matches on grass, while Janowicz was making his Grand Slam last four debut.

But the 6ft 8in Janowicz, who was ranked outside the top 200 last year, came out all guns blazing.

Firing down one 139mph rocket in his opening service game, Janowicz's booming deliveries regularly topped the 130mph mark.

Murray failed to convert two set points at 5-4 and Janowicz took advantage of that escape in the tie-break, racing into a 4-0 lead and sealing the first set thanks to a Murray double fault.

Murray needed an immediate response and he got it with a break in the opening game of the second set.

Even then Janowicz ensured nothing came easily for Murray before he finally levelled the match at one set all.

With darkness closing in Janowicz broke for a 3-1 lead in the third set. But a fortunate net-cord gave Murray a break at 4-2.

BCB to track progress

SPORTS REPORTER



With the aim of expediting the construction work at the proposed venues for next year's T20 World Cup the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the National Sports Council (NSC) have begun weekly coordination meets. These meetings, the first of which took place yesterday, will try to ensure that ongoing construction works at the stadiums meet their monthly targets.

"We told the ICC about a list of things that would be completed before the ICC inspection team's next visit in August. And these meetings are to ensure that we meet those deadlines," said Mahub Anam, member of BCB's ad-hoc committee.

"We have monthly targets and through these meetings we'll help the NSC shape the schedule of the construction work," he added.

While the focus of the media has been on the remaining work in Cox's Bazar and Sylhet, the coordination meetings will aim to ensure that all the proposed venues are ready in time.

"We have teams in each of the venues reporting to us about the rate of progress," said Anam.

With regard to this month's target for the stadium in Sylhet, Anam said, "We are hoping that the media centre and the pavilion will be ready by the end of this month. These are the two things that are the most time-consuming and require more civil work."

"The scoreboard will be readymade and can be placed. The floodlight towers will also be done by August," he added.

With regard to the stadium in Cox's Bazar Anam stated that the army would join the construction work in order to boost the rate of construction. Members of the NSC and the BCB are expected to visit the venues later this week.

The Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong, Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, the Sylhet Divisional Stadium and the new stadium in Cox's Bazar are the proposed venues for the World Cup starting in March next year. The stadiums at Fatullah and the grounds in BKSP have been kept as alternate venues for Sylhet and Cox's Bazar respectively.

India rebound strongly

AFP, Port of Spain



India surged back into contention in the Tri-Nation Series with a crushing 102-run victory over the West Indies in the fourth match at the Queen's Park Oval on Friday.

At the bottom of the standings following defeats in Jamaica in their first two matches of the competition, the World Cup holders rebounded with a tremendous all-round effort in the sultry Trinidad conditions.

Put in by home captain Dwayne Bravo, the Champions Trophy winners amassed 311 for seven batting first and then earned a bonus point to go with the comprehensive win in restricting the home side to 171 all out after the Windies were set a revised target of 274 off 39 overs under the Duckworth-Lewis system following a 90-minute interruption for rain.

West Indies have little time to lick their wounds as they face Sri Lanka on Sunday before the preliminary phase of the series concludes on Tuesday with the Indians taking on the Sri Lankans.

The Caribbean side still top the table with nine points but India have joined Sri

Lanka on five, although they still trail on net run-rate, leaving all the possibilities open ahead of the remaining fixtures.

With injured regular captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni looking on approvingly, stand-in skipper Virat Kohli led from the front with an attacking innings of 102 -- his 14th ODI century -- in pacing India to their formidable total.

He was given an excellent platform courtesy of an opening partnership of 123 between Shikhar Dhawan (69) and Rohit Sharma (46) and was in no mood to waste such a promising foundation, blasting his way to the hundred in the final over of the innings off 83 deliveries with 13 fours and two sixes.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: 311 for 7 in 50 overs (Kohli 102, Dhawan 69, Rohit 46, Vijay 27; Best 2-51, Samuels 1-39)

WEST INDIES: 171 all out in 34 overs (Charles 45, Narine 21, Roach 34; Bhuvneshwar 3-29, Yadav 3-32, Ishant 2-30, Jadeja 2-44)

Result: India won by 102 runs on D-L method.

Player-of-the-match: Virat Kohli.