

SPORT

Riyad named Gazi Tank captain

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National vice-captain Mahmudullah Riyad will lead Gazi Tank Cricketers in this year's Dhaka Premier League. Former national opener Imrul Kayes has been named his deputy.

Speaking to reporters at the club's first official meeting with its players yesterday, Riyad said, "The team this year is very balanced from all the sides. There are some really good players and I am really looking forward to a good result this year."

Sarwar Imran will be coaching the side.

The team, which also includes former national player Aftab Ahmed and Rakibul Hassan, will play their first match against Khelaghar Samaj Kalyan Samity at Bogra on September 10.

Gazi Tank finished runners up last year after losing to Victoria.

Inter-club transfers from Oct 29

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday decided to hold the inter-club players' transfer from October 29 to 31 before starting the season through the Club Cup from November 15.

The decision was taken at the meeting of the Hockey League Committee with the presence of representatives from six clubs -- Abahani, Usha KC, Shadharan Bima, Sonali Bank, Ajax SC and Azad SC.

However, representatives of Mohammedan SC, Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, Bangladesh Sporting Club, Wari Club and Wanderers Club were not present as they had already announced that they would not take part in any activities under the existing executive committee.

"The president of Wanderers Club promised that they would take part in the players' transfer," said BHF general secretary Rahmatullah. "We are hoping that the rest of the clubs will also take part in the players' transfer in the greater interest of hockey and the players as we want to start the Club Cup with the participation of all eleven clubs."

Replying to a query, Rahmatullah said that they would take further decisions at their executive committee if any clubs refused to participate in the transfers.

Dan thinks the world of Ish

CRICINFO, Auckland

Daniel Vettori, the former New Zealand captain, has said that Northern Districts leg-spinner Ish Sodhi was one of the most promising bowlers he had seen. Sodhi was named in New Zealand's Test squad for the tour of Bangladesh on Friday.

"He's probably one of the most talented bowlers I've ever seen," Vettori told New Zealand Herald. "His skill level is incredibly high. I think there's something special about him."

ERRATUM

In our yesterday's report on the US Open, in the headline it was written that the ladies' singles final would pit Venus Williams against Victoria Azarenka. It was a typing mistake. The final was played between Serena Williams and Victoria Azarenka. We regret the slip.

-- Sports Editor

Nepal fall at semi hurdle

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu



A dreadful mistake by goalkeeper Kiran Kumar Limbu and a string of missed chances, including a penalty-retake by midfielder Rohit Chand, ended hosts Nepal's dreams of reaching the first final of the SAFF Championship, as they got beaten by last edition's finalists Afghanistan 1-0 in a high-voltage clash at the Dasharath Rangasala Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday.

It was a repeat of the semifinal of the last edition and on that occasion too, Afghanistan had prevailed 1-0 after an extra-time goal from Belal Arezou. This time, the home side came into the match with plenty of momentum and were looking to avenge the last edition's defeat, but despite getting plenty of help from a generous referee, fell painfully short at the end.

The hosts will be kicking themselves at having conceded a soft 11th minute goal after Kiran failed to gather a regulation cross from Afghanistan winger Mustafa Azadzoy, leaving striker Sanjar Ahmadi with a simple tap-in.

The Gorkhalis found enough chances to equalise from open play in both halves before they were awarded with a controversial penalty kick in the 85th minute. The penalty resulted after Afghanistan goalie Mansur Fagiryar, who put in a match-winning performance, seemingly kneed a Nepalese player after having already taken the ball in his control.

The Saudi Arabian referee pointed to the spot, much to the chagrin of the irate Afghanistans. But Rohit, who missed the first two matches through injury, saw his effort well parried by the Afghan goalie. Further angering the Afghans, the referee called for a retake, after conferring with his linesman, as one of the Afghan players had reportedly encroached the box before the kick had been taken. Rohit stepped up once again, but with a chance to redeem himself he could only place a feeble attempt at the same corner that was easily gathered by Fagiryar.

Nepal found more chances to equalise during the seven minutes of stoppage time, but Fagiryar's brilliance and incredible misses from the Nepalese meant there would still be no maiden final for the football crazy nation.

Afghanistan, on the other hand, deservedly made it through to their second successive SAFF Championship final, despite being on the wrong end of the physical play of the Nepalese and some controversial refereeing decisions.

The highest-ranked South Asian side will now face the winners of the second semifinal between India and Maldives, which will take place at the same venue today, in the final on Wednesday.



Sathira Jakir (R) helps Bangladesh captain Salma Khatun to get ready for the national women's cricket team's pre-series photo session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: STAR

Bounce & pace beckon

SPORTS REPORTER



Adjusting to bouncy wickets and foreign conditions will be Bangladesh's main task when the 15-member women's national team leave for South Africa today morning.

The last time the two sides met was in Mirpur last year when the visitors won both the ODI and T20I series by two games to one.

However, facing the South Africans in their own den is bound to be a more difficult task and it's something which the team management is very much aware of. To add to that the cricketers just had three weeks of training with national coach Oshadee Weerasinghe joining the

team less than a week back.

Speaking to reporters at Mirpur yesterday Sathira Jakir, who returned to the national side courtesy of a player-of-the-series performance in the women's Club Cup, stated the difficulties that her team was likely to face.

"We don't know what kind of a wicket we will be playing on. It will be a new experience for us, honestly speaking. We know that it's going to be bouncy, so we practised facing the short ball during the camp. Hopefully things will work out," said Sathira.

Sathira did not make the team the last time Bangladesh faced South Africa, but was present at the ground during the matches and knows the abilities of the players she will be up against. "I watched them play from

the sidelines. I also got to watch video footage of those games. We were a match short in both the formats, hopefully things will be different this time," she said.

Captain Salma Khatun echoed Sathira's sentiments and regretted the late start to the team's training camp. "We did not get enough time to prepare. I think if we could have practised a bit more, it would have been really good for us," said Salma.

Traditionally dependent on spin, the Bangladeshi selectors have however chosen four pacers in the side because of the pace-friendly conditions in South Africa.

Bangladesh will play three ODIs and three T20 internationals against the hosts with the T20 series beginning on September 12.

2015 SAFF C'ship in India

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu

India will host the next edition of the SAFF Championship in 2015, it has been learnt. The decision will be officially announced in the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Executive Committee meeting to be held on Tuesday in Kathmandu.

SAFF president Kazi Salahuddin, when contacted over phone yesterday, confirmed that SAFF has decided to host the 11th edition in Delhi as most of the big sponsors for the tournament come from India.

It has been learnt that according to an agreement between SAFF and the World Sports Group (WSG), the official marketing group of SAFF, India should host the regional football tourney every alternate occasion.

In its ten editions including the ongoing one, India have hosted only two SAFF Championships so far—the first time in 1999 in Goa and the second time in 2011 in New Delhi.

Meanwhile, Salahuddin is expected to enjoy another four-year term in office as he remains the only candidate for the president's post. The election will take place during the executive committee meeting on Tuesday. Even though Salahuddin himself declined to make any comment in the affirmative, it is highly likely that he will be elected unopposed.



NOVAK v RAFA once again

REUTERS, New York

World number one Novak Djokovic and number two Rafael Nadal set up a mouth-watering men's singles final at the US Open with victories in the semifinals at Flushing Meadows on Saturday.

Monday's US Open showdown will be the third in four years for Djokovic and Nadal at the US National Tennis Center after they advanced in contrasting fashion.

Top seed Djokovic sealed his berth first by overtaking gutsy ninth seed Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland in a heart-pounding 2-6, 7-6(4), 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 victory over four hours.

Nadal conserved his energy, dismissing eighth-seeded Richard Gasquet 6-4, 7-6(1), 6-2 to improve his career record to 11-0 against the Frenchman and his 2013 hardcourt record to 21-0.

The Spaniard, winner of 12 grand slam titles, won his only US Open crown in 2010 against Djokovic, who claimed his Flushing Meadows title the following year against Nadal. Last year Djokovic was runnerup to Briton Andy Murray.

"Last year I didn't have the chance to play on this court," said Nadal, who was sidelined seven months due to a knee injury.

"To have the chance to play in the final Monday is just a dream for me. It has been two amazing weeks for me."

Djokovic and Nadal are the most familiar of rivals and will be playing against each other for a tour record 37th time. Nadal leads their series 21-15.

"Novak is an amazing competitor," said the reigning French Open champion. "His results say he is probably one of the best players I have ever seen. He's a great champion and will be a tough final for me, but I hope to be ready for that."

While Nadal took apart Gasquet in his semi-final, Djokovic got off to a slow start against an inspired Wawrinka and relied on his stamina to wear down the Swiss.

The tumultuous match included a warning for courtside

coaching from Djokovic's box, the mangling of a racket by a frustrated Wawrinka and a medical timeout for the Swiss for a strained thigh muscle.

It reached a crescendo at 1-1 in the fifth set on Wawrinka's serve.

The combatants locked into a marathon duel that lasted 21 minutes and featured a series of fierce rallies and brilliant shot-making.

Wawrinka fought off five break points among 12 deuces before closing out the game on the 30th point with a service winner, and players earned warm ovations for their desire and skill.

"These matches are what we live for, what we practise for," Djokovic said after reaching his fourth successive US Open final.

"All the credit to (Wawrinka) for being so aggressive and playing so well. I'm just fortunate to play my best tennis when I needed to."

Djokovic said he had to regroup after that epic game. "Twenty-one minutes. Wow," said the Serb. "I was thinking whoever wins this game is going to win the match. I told myself I was going to have to fight again."

The Herculean effort seemed to sap the last bit of energy from Wawrinka, who had earlier left the court for treatment of a thigh strain during the changeover when trailing 4-1 in the fourth set.

Djokovic held serve, then broke Wawrinka in the next game for a 3-2 lead and served out to win another classic encounter between the pair following their five-set struggle in the fourth round of the Australian Open, where the Serb closed out the decisive set 12-10.

"It was a great tournament for me," said Wawrinka after his first Grand Slam semifinal. "Tough match, tough loss. I gave everything. I fought until the end. With this crowd, it was an amazing experience."

Czech pair Andrea Hlavackova and Lucie Hradecka capped off Saturday's programme by winning the women's doubles title with a 6-7(4), 6-1, 6-4 win over Australians Ashleigh Barty and Casey Dellacqua.

Aus ride on Clarke ton

AFP, Manchester



Michael Clarke led from the front with a century as Australia overwhelmed England by 88 runs in the second one-day international at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Victory saw Australia take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series following Friday's washout in Leeds.

Australia captain Clarke's 105, only his eighth hundred in 229 matches at this level, was the cornerstone of a total of 315 for seven and came on the same ground where he made 187 in the drawn third Test against England last month.

Man-of-the-match Clarke received good support from vice-captain George Bailey (82) in a fifth-wicket stand of 155 as Australia made their highest one-day international score against England in England, surpassing their 302 for six at Nottingham's Trent Bridge in 2009.

England, having only twice before made more than 300 to win an ODI, slumped to nine for two as Mitchell Johnson took two wickets in three deliveries and were dis-

missed for 227 with 34 balls to spare.

Clarke hit 14 fours included several well-struck drives, cuts and pulls.

England, in the absence of rested opening duo Alastair Cook, their regular captain, and Ian Bell, entrusted first-wicket duties to Kevin Pietersen and Michael Carberry.

But Carberry had made just four and Jonathan Trott was out for a duck and when Joe Root was clean bowled by James Faulkner, England were 38 for three.

Stand-in captain Eoin Morgan and Pietersen tried to rebuild but when left-hander Morgan holed out for 54, England's already fading hopes of victory went with him at 154 for six.

Buttler made 75 off 65 balls for a lost cause.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: 315 for 7 in 50 overs (Finch 45, Watson 38, Clarke 105, Bailey 82, Faulkner 18; Finn 2-68, Rankin 2-49, Bopara 2-57)

ENGLAND: 227 all out in 44.2 overs (Pietersen 60, Morgan 54, Buttler 75; McKay 3-47, Johnson 2-36)

Result: Australia won by 88 runs

Player-of-the-match: Michael Clarke

Hurt but hopeful

SPORTS REPORTER



Following the disappointing results of the national football team in the SAFF Championship, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin found himself sleeping fitfully over the last few days. However, he kept faith in the existing squad while advocating some small changes.

Salahuddin was not ready to make any statements about the performance of the national team as well as the four Dutch coaches despite repeated requests from the media, saying he wanted to first talk to coach Lodewijk de Kruijff and the members of the National Teams Committee.

Instead, Salahuddin talked about the dejection he has felt since the helpless 0-2 loss to Nepal in the opening match in Nepal, which was followed by two a draw against India and a defeat to Pakistan.

"It was not a match (Nepal-Bangladesh). At one stage I felt pain in my heart and left my seat thinking that there was only 19 minutes left in the game but later I discovered that only the first half was completed when other guests came down to the refreshment room," said Salahuddin.

He believed Bangladesh played well against India and Pakistan but paid the price for a lapse in concentration in the dying moments.

"There is nothing to be disappointed about with the performance of the team. I think the current shape of the squad is not bad. If we can insert two to three fresh players in a few positions, we can see the difference. It is a question of time and I won't give up hope," said Salahuddin, who is today leaving for Nepal to attend the SAFF Congress and to watch Wednesday's final at the Dasarath Stadium.

Bangladesh diplomats' champions

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Embassy won the Ambassadors' Cup Cricket Tournament, organised in Maryland, Washington DC on Saturday. Eight Embassies from Test playing nations participated in the tournament and the Bangladeshis won the championship by beating the Australia Embassy by nine wickets.

Batting first the Australians scored 76 runs in the allotted ten overs. In reply the Bangladeshis raced to their target with three overs remaining. The Ambassador of Bangladesh to the United States of America, Akramul Quader later congratulated the team and the Bangladeshi community for their engagement in the event.

The envoys of the other Test playing nations shared similar voice and spirit.