

Shamsur won't be out for long

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Top-order batsman Shamsur Rahman, who twisted his ankle on Saturday during the third match of the T20 Challenge Series, will miss the Victory Day cricket match at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium today.

An MRI scan confirmed the player has suffered a sprained ankle and ligament injury. National team's coach Shane Jurgensen informed that the injury was not serious and that the player would not be out for 'too long'.

The player will be replaced by Rony Talukder in the Shaheed Jewel XI, who will be playing the exhibition match against Shaheed Mushtaque XI. There is another change in the Shaheed Jewel XI, with pace bowler Mohammad Sharif coming in for seamer Robiul Islam, who won't be available.

Shaheed Jewel XI will be captained by middle-order batsman Naeem Islam whereas former national opener Shahriar Nafees will be leading Shaheed Mushtaque XI.

Harder than before

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One of the joys of watching domestic cricket is to see the hunger of the out-of-favour players for reclaiming their places in the national team.

It was something that was witnessed in the recently concluded T20 Challenge Series, where Bangladesh A completed a clean sweep against the national team.

There were quite a few sparkling performances by the 'former regulars' -- as they are politely referred to these days -- in this year's Dhaka Premier League, which ended last month. Former national opener Nafis Iqbal's unbeaten 150 against Prime Bank Cricket Club in September began the proceedings. The 28-year-old went on to score 430 runs in ten matches at an impressive average of 71.67. Top-order batsman Rokibul Hasan drew plenty of attention as well for his match-winning knocks during the Super League. His unbeaten scores of 98 and 90 in crucial games helped Gazi Tank to the title.

Also in form towards the latter half of the competition was Rokibul's teammate Imrul Kayes, who with 655 runs was the second highest scorer of the meet. All-rounder Forhad Reza was also amongst those who shone, topping the wickets column in the competition.

While these performances were not extraordinary, they did depict some of these players' urge to work their way back into the national fold. While the effort has been there, national selectors point out that the discarded players will need to work a lot harder than before to make a return.

"There's a lot of competition. In the past, an out-of-form national player would be replaced by someone with decent perfor-

mances in domestic competitions. But now, since the youngsters are playing so well, the 'former regulars' have to play extraordinary cricket in order to make a comeback," said national selector Habibul Bashar.

There were times in the past when a mere century would be enough for a player to make it to the national playing eleven. Junaed Siddique, Nazimuddin and Shahriar Nafees are among a group of players who were repeatedly given opportunities following just-above-average performances in leagues. But over the last year or so, the players themselves have raised the standard for a comeback.

"The criteria are slightly different now. It's not that the door is closed on them. There are plenty of opportunities today with good facilities. But the level of their performance needs to be of a higher degree, since the team is so settled now," said Bashar.

While consistency and temperament have always been important factors, the aspect that the team management has put extra focus on in the recent past is fitness. Fatigue was a clear problem for the likes of Shahriar, Alok Kapali, Junaed, Aftab Ahmed and many more this year and it's an aspect that will have affect comeback plans.

While the prevailing factors have made it more difficult for comebacks, new chief selector Faruque Ahmed finds it as a welcome change. Faruque had earlier stated that new faces could be in contention in the T20 format, but he said that the longer formats were a lot more competitive.

"The entry itself is a lot difficult than before, but then that is really good for the team. That means the team's unit has done well. When there's more competition and you have a group of 20 players performing at almost the same level, we have more options to choose from," explained Faruque.



PHOTO: AFP

Australia opener David Warner celebrates his century on the third day of the third Ashes Test against England in Perth yesterday.

Rally for WC trophy held

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Celebration for the arrival of FIFA World Cup trophy has begun yesterday, two days before its scheduled arrival, through a rally which started from the Bangladesh Football Federation house and ended at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin led the rally which also comprised of BFF executive members, former and current players and organisers, in a bid to create a buzz among the football lovers.

Meanwhile, Kazi Salahuddin yesterday called on the President of the People's Republics of Bangladesh, advocate Abdul Hamid, at Bangabhaban to appraise him about the arrival of the trophy.

"The BFF president has requested President Abdul Hamid to receive the world cup trophy at the airport," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayem Shohag. "The President's office will confirm tomorrow (Monday) morning whether he will be able to receive the trophy."

If the president is not available, the BFF president himself will receive the trophy, added Shohag.

UNDER-19 WORLD CUP Bangladesh in Group B

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Bangladesh have been placed in Group B and will face Australia, Afghanistan and Namibia in the group stages of the Under-19 Cricket World Cup, which will kick off in the UAE on February 14.

The junior side will begin their Cup-run against Afghanistan on February 15. They will then take on Namibia and Australia on February 17 and 19 respectively.

The tournament features 16 teams, divided into four groups, and the top two from each group will progress to the quarterfinals. The bottom two teams from each group will compete in the Plate Championship quarterfinals.

Bangladesh U-19s beat the West Indies 4-3 in their last series at Guyana. Prior to that, they participated in a tri-series in England, including the hosts and Pakistan in which they failed to reach the finals.

India will face Pakistan in the opening match on February 14. Afghanistan, Canada, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Scotland, United Arab Emirates and the 10 Full Member nations will compete in 48-match tournament.

GROUPINGS	
GROUP A:	India, Pakistan, Scotland, Papua New Guinea
GROUP B:	Australia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Namibia
GROUP C:	South Africa, West Indies, Zimbabwe

AFP, Perth



England were battered and all but beaten with Australia on the verge of regaining the Ashes at stumps on the third day of the third Test in Perth on Sunday.

Australia led by 134 runs on the first innings after the England tail folded meekly again before lunch and the home side were dismissed for 251.

The Australians were 235 for three in their second innings at the end of play for an overall lead of 369, with Shane Watson on 29, and Steve Smith on five and two days left to play.

Opener David Warner (112) capitalised on the shoddy wicketkeeping of Matt Prior, who missed two stumping opportunities from the left-hander, to post his second century of the series and take his tally for the series to 457 runs at 91.40.

Akbar coming on Friday

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Iranian coach Ali Akbar Pourmoslemi is coming on Friday, six days before the start of the 7th Bangladesh Premier League, to take charge of four-time professional league champions Abahani while archrivals Mohammedan SC are still looking a foreign coach following Saiful Bari Titu's decision to join the Bangladesh Football Federation.

The two traditional powerhouses failed to make it even to the semifinals of the Federation Cup after being eliminated by ultimate champions Sheikh Jamal DC and both the clubs are looking to foreign coaches to revive their fortunes in the professional league.

Abahani had communicated with Ali Akbar, who guided the club to the 2010 Federation Cup victory and the 2011 Bangladesh Premier League triumph in two seasons, soon after releasing Australian coach Nathan Hall a day before the start of the Federation Cup.

Mohammedan, on the other hand, had their assistant coach Jewel Rana in charge during the Federation Cup as Saiful Bari Titu, who won them the Super Cup last season, was unavailable at that time and later committed to BFF. A source within Mohammedan informed that they have three biographical data of foreign coaches and they would confirm any of those three by this week.



PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Ace Bangladesh cricketer Shakib Al Hasan and his wife Umme Ahmed Shishir at their wedding reception at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre yesterday. The ceremony has been long overdue after the couple had tied the knot last year on December 12.

Broad hopes to be fine

AFP, Perth

England paceman Stuart Broad said Sunday he hoped to overcome a foot injury to play a further part in his country's campaign to retain the Ashes, and refused to concede it was doomed.

Broad was struck on the right foot by Australian fast bowler Mitchell Johnson on the third day of the third Test, as the match and series looked to be sliding away from the beleaguered English on another scorching Perth day.

V-DAY SPORTS

SPORTS REPORTER

ABAHANI BLANK AJAX

Abahani blanked Ajax SC by 7-0 goals in the only match of the Walton Victory Day Hockey Competition at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday. Dween Islam and Rumman Sarkar scored twice for Abahani while Hasan Jubair Niloy and Sheikh Mohammad Nannu scored one goal each. The other goal was an own goal. The winners led the first half by 2-0 goals.

DAY-LONG RUGBY

The Victory Day Rugby Competition will be held today at the Paltan Ground. Four teams -- Bangladesh Army, Victoria Sporting Club, Flame Boys Club and Khilgaon Pragati Sangha -- will participate in the daylong competition. Valiant freedom fighter Mohammad Shamsul Haque, who is currently employed as the Guard Commander

of the National Sports Council, will inaugurate the competition as the chief guest.

KABADDI FINAL TODAY

The final of Victory Day Volleyball Competition will take place between Bangladesh Army and Border Guard Bangladesh at the National Kabaddi Stadium in Paltan this afternoon. Shibnath Roy, joint-secretary of the National Sports Council, will distribute prizes among the teams after the final.

ARMY TAKE ON PDV

Defending champions Bangladesh Army will take on Power Development Board in the final of the Walton LED TV Victory Day Volleyball Competition at the volleyball stadium in Paltan at 3:00pm today. The final will be followed by a prize distribution ceremony where secretary general of Bangladesh Olympic Association, Syed Shahed Reza will be present as the chief guest.

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA: First innings 385 (Smith 111; Broad 3-100)					Johnson 22 7 62 2				
					Watson 12 3 48 1				
ENGLAND: First innings (overnight 180-4)					Siddle 16 5 36 3				
Cook c Warner b Lyon 72					Lyon 16 6 39 1				
Carberry b Harris 43					AUSTRALIA: Second innings				
Root c Haddin b Watson 4					Rogers c Carberry b Bresnan 54				
Pietersen c Johnson b Siddle 19					Warner c Stokes b Swann 112				
Bell lbw Harris 15					Watson not out 29				
Stokes c Haddin b Johnson 18					Clarke b Stokes 23				
Prior c Haddin b Siddle 8					Smith not out 5				
Bresnan c Haddin b Harris 21					Extras: (b-8, lb-4) 12				
Broad lbw Johnson 5					Total: (For 3 wkts in 70 overs) 235				
Swann not out 19					To bat: Bailey, Haddin, Johnson, Siddle, Harris, Lyon				
Anderson c Bailey b Siddle 25					Fall of wickets: 1-157, 2-183, 3-223				
Extras: (b-11, lb-7, w-5, nb-2) 25									
Total: (All out in 88 overs) 251									
Fall of wickets: 1-85, 2-90, 3-136, 4-146, 5-190, 6-198, 7-207, 8-229, 9-233									
Bowler									
Harris									
22	10	48	3	W	Root	23	1	20	0