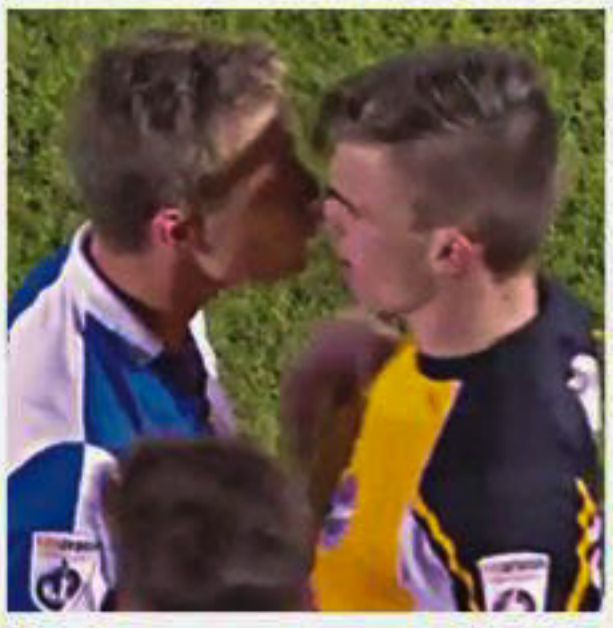


SPORT

KISSED TO QUELL IT

Bristol Rovers midfielder Lee Mansell has revealed why he kissed Gateshead midfielder JJ O'Donnell during Sunday night's game. With the pair jostling for the ball, they eventually ended up forehead-to-forehead -- with Mansell then attempting to kiss a clearly confused O'Donnell.

"I did it to defuse the situation. It's the first time I've been



Franchise league in the offing?

SPORTS REPORTER

A Kolkata-based sports event management company has tabled a proposal to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) for organising a franchisee football league, styled after Indian Super League, in Bangladesh next year.

Celebrity Management Group (CMG), which helped BFF host the Argentina versus Nigeria FIFA Friendly in Dhaka in September, 2011, came up the proposal at the BFF House yesterday.

Bhaswar Goswami, executive director of CMG, admitted making the proposal and informed that they have also proposed Argentine legend Diego Maradona to be the chairman of the league committee.

"I tabled the proposal to the Kazi Salahuddin and he accepted it heartily," Goswami told reporters yesterday. "If the league takes place, I think it will change the face of football in Bangladesh. It will feature world football stars and will entail a complete entertainment package as well as youth development program."

"I have very good relations with (Diego) Maradona, who visited India twice at my request. I requested him to be involved with our initiative," added the sports management official.

As per the proposal, the league will feature eight

franchisees -- the seven divisions of Bangladesh and Mymensingh district.

CMG and their local partners Showbiz Entertainment will jointly organise the tournament where, according to them, a number of European and Latin clubs have shown interest to buy 25 per cent stake and the rest of ownership will be owned by local franchisees.

Goswami said they have offered Tk 3 crore to the BFF to organise the league and BFF will only need to incur approval of the FIFA and the AFC.

CMG also expressed their interest in purchasing all sponsorship and marketing rights of the Bangladesh national team, informed a BFF official.

"CMG offered two different proposals," BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag admitted. "Apart from arranging the franchise-based tournament, they also want to purchase all the rights of the Bangladesh national team."

"CMG wants to host FIFA friendly matches for the next one-and-a-half years as per the FIFA Friendly calendar. According to the proposal, CMG will provide money and arrange the opposition teams and venue for Bangladesh and they will hold all the sponsoring, broadcasting and ticketing rights," Shohag explained.

"However, nothing has been finalised as yet. We will discuss these proposals in our next executive committee meeting where a final decision might be taken," added Shohag.

CMG proposes an eight-team franchise football league

Diego Maradona touted to head the league

CMG interested in buying sponsorship and marketing



Mushfiqur Rahim remains hopeful that Tamim Iqbal will come back from his injury before the World Cup.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Roach out, Peters in for Windies

REUTERS, St. John's

West Indies have lost their most accomplished fast bowler after Kemar Roach was ruled out of the final two matches of the Test series in South Africa and replaced by uncapped Kenroy Peters, the country's cricket board announced.

Roach injured his right ankle while bowling on the first day of the first Test in Pretoria that ended in an innings and 220 run defeat for the tourists and will return home to continue his rehabilitation.

Peters, a 32-year-old left-arm fast bowler, was the leading bowler in the domestic four-day competition in 2014.

He has yet to represent the West Indies at senior level in any form of the game but has an impressive first-class record with 190 wickets at an average of 20.21.

The second Test starts in Port Elizabeth on Friday with the final match in Cape Town from January 2.

Tantalising Super Sixes

SPORTS REPORTER



With a four point advantage at the top of the table, both Abahani and Prime Bank Cricket Club will begin the Super Six round of the Dhaka Premier League today as favourites. The remaining four

sides are all tied at 14 points each. Regardless of the lead, the final five rounds promise to provide an exciting finish. For one, the national players, who have played just four rounds so far, are yet to get into their groove. Also, with the World Cup knocking at the door, the national selectors will keep a keen eye on the league and everybody will want to put in their best performance.

The first round of the Super Sixes will witness the classic Abahani-Mohammedan contest at Fatullah, with league leaders Abahani going in as favourites. However, led by Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, sixth-placed Mohammedan can spring a surprise.

It's not the national stars who performed for Abahani this year, but their younger recruits. Opener Liton Kumar Das with 577 runs is the tournament's highest run-getter. He boasts an average of 52.45 and has five 50s and a century already. His impact on the team can perhaps best be understood by the fact that he is the only player from Abahani in the top 15 run-getters of the tournament. The next best is Rakibul Hasan with 326 runs in 11 matches. In the bowling department, it has been their spinners who have dominated. Such has been the impact of their slow left-armers, Nazmul Hossain and Saqlain Sajib, that they decided against picking national leg-spinner Jubair Hossain.

On the other hand, Mohammedan have been going

through a rough patch. They struggled to make it to the super sixes and the players are reportedly facing payment issues. However, with Mashrafe in charge, that mood may change in no time at all. Their key player will be Naeem Islam, who has performed both with the bat and the ball this season.

Second placed Prime Bank Cricket Club will take on the most talked about team of the season thus far, the Legends of Rugganj. So far it has been a team effort that has taken Prime Bank CC ahead. Shadman Islam, Saykat Ali and Soumya Sarker have all scored more than 300 runs each. They also have a bowling attack that has peaked at the right time with the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Taijul Islam, Forhad Reza and Enamul Haque Jr.

In terms of the quality of players though, Shakib Al Hasan's Legends are second to none. In Mohammad Shahid, who has taken 19 wickets so far, and Abul Hasan, they have a good opening combination. And then the experienced Mosharraf Hossain will join Shakib to throw in those vicious turners. Their batting department may have been jolted by Tamim Iqbal's injury, who has been ruled out for the rest of the league, but their other batsmen have packed a punch as well. Junaid Siddique, Ashar Zaidi and Jahurul Islam are their key players at the top.

At the home of cricket in Mirpur today, Anamul Haque's Kalabagan Cricket Academy will take on Mushfiqur Rahim's Prime Doleshwar. Kalabagan will hope their national stars, Anamul and Sabbir Rahman, can fire them into a good position. In the same way, Prime Doleshwar will want Mushfiqur and Mominul Haque, who haven't quite joined the party as yet, to do most of the talking.

Mushfiq upbeat about Tamim

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim expressed his optimism over injured Tamim Iqbal's chances of playing in next year's ICC World Cup.

"Everybody plays with some minor injuries. I talked with him (Tamim) and I don't think he has a serious injury. I hope everything will be okay in time for the World Cup. Previously Tamim had played with a thumb injury after taking an injection to alleviate the pain. So injuries are nothing new to Tamim. I think Tamim will come back," said Mushfiqur, while talking to reporters yesterday, ahead of the Super-Six clash of the Dhaka Premier League. Tamim is set to go to Australia within a short time to receive treatment on his injured left-knee.

The Super League will be the last chance for the players to fine tune their game before flying to Australia on January 24 to play the mega-event.

The wicketkeeper-cum-batsman Mushfiqur, who is playing for Prime Doleshwar, said that the Super League is important for players in terms of making an impression ahead of the team selection for the World Cup, but he also believed that the World Cup was not the end.

"The Super League is important for everybody, both the clubs and the World Cup probables. The teams are equal in terms of strength and as there is an issue of getting a chance to World Cup team, so everybody will try their best," opined Mushfiqur.

"The World Cup will remain in everybody's mind but the World Cup is not the end of life. Even if the players do not go, they will have more chances in the future. Without any doubt the World Cup is a very prestigious tournament but one must also keep in mind that every year we should play the league because it's the main source of income. So the main idea is that one should perform their best," added Mushfiqur.

Palolic Group win Premier Table Tennis

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite going down by a 2-3 game defeat, Palolic Group emerged champions in the men's group of the Agrani Bank Dhaka Metropolis Table Tennis League which concluded at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium in Paltan yesterday.

Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, who defeated Palolic Group in the last round, had to be content with a runners-up finish.

In the Women's League, Abahani emerged champions while Jahangir Builders TT Club became runners-up. In the First Division League, Boys' Club emerged champions while Nabin Mela TT Club finished second.

Hafeez to go to Chennai for tests

PTI, Lahore

Senior Pakistan all-rounder Mohammad Hafeez is expected to fly to the Indian city of Chennai on December 25th for his bowling action test at the International Cricket Council bowling centre.

A member of the Board of Governors of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said it is yet to be decided if Hafeez will go for an informal bowling test or an official ICC test.

If Hafeez appears for an official ICC test and in case he fails the bowling action test again he can face a ban from bowling in international cricket for another year which would rule him out of bowling in the World Cup.

"Hafeez will go to Chennai around December 25 but on Tuesday it will be decided whether it will be for an informal test or official one," Shakil Sheikh said.

He added to a question that Hafeez was expected to get his visa from the Indian High Commission in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday.

Hafeez was suspended from bowling in international cricket last month by the ICC after failing a bowling test soon after he was reported for his action by match officials after the first Test against New Zealand.



The Abahani team members pose for photographs after winning the Agrani Bank Dhaka Metropolis Women's Table Tennis League at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium in Paltan yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Bouncer-hit Watson OK

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australian all-rounder Shane Watson was forced to cut short his training session in the Melbourne Cricket Ground nets after being hit on the helmet by a bouncer on Tuesday, three days before the start of the third Test against India.

Watson, under pressure for his place at number three in the batting order, was knocked to the ground when a short ball from James Pattinson hit him flush on the helmet.

"Shane Watson shaken up, but OK, after helmet blow," Cricket Australia tweeted.

Pattinson was also shaken up by the incident, which came less than a month after former Australia batsman Phillip Hughes was killed by injuries sustained when he was hit by a short ball in a domestic match in Sydney.

Left-arm paceman Mitchell Starc also left the session early after being hit on the knee by a ball but his likely replacement in the side, Ryan Harris, was apparently untroubled by the thigh injury that ruled him out of the second Test.

Tushar's racing career takes off

SPORTS REPORTER

Mahfuzur Rahman Tushar has been making waves in Bangladesh with his inspirational performance in the JK Tyre Racing Championship in India as Bangladesh's sole competitor. Aged only 15, he finished 12th in 19 December's championship, with his team 'Avalanche' finishing the race as runners-up.

Tushar endeavoured abroad to further his dream of racing in Formula One, facing 22 competitors in Delhi's Buddh Circuit. Despite the good finish, Tushar was dissatisfied, saying, "I hoped to be in the top 10, but due to the dense fog I could not see clearly at first. If my sponsors (Shah Cement) help me race again, I see myself finishing much higher."

The competition is considered by many to be a stepping-stone to the international racing motorsports. And with Tushar, the hope is that he will continue to do our nation proud.

India must win at MCG

AFP, Melbourne



India must reverse a demoralising losing streak at the Melbourne Cricket Ground to prevent Australia from regaining the Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Friday's Boxing Day third Test.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni's tourists trail 2-0 in the four-match series after defeats in Adelaide and Brisbane, and have lost their last five encounters at the MCG stretching back 23 years.

While India have competed well in the series, they unravelled both times in their second innings.

The Indians lost their last seven wickets for 73 to go down by 48 runs in Adelaide and nine for 148 to leave the Australians chasing 128 runs for a four-wicket victory in Brisbane. Dhoni said India had not been getting the 50-50 umpire calls and were not far off winning away from home where they have a dismal record of just one victory from their last 21 away Tests.

"There's plenty of areas we're showing improvement, but we're still not crossing the line," Dhoni said. "We need to give it a bit more time. Once they start crossing that line, once they harness that aggression in the right channel you'll see plenty of good results from this side."

Yadav and Ishant Sharma.

"It was quite good to see our fast bowlers still running in, giving 100 percent," said Dhoni, who is lining up for his 90th Test match as a player and 60th as captain in the Melbourne Test.

"We have seen the execution power of our fast bowlers has increased."

Australia are likely to give batsman Joe Burns his Test debut as a replacement for hamstring-victim Mitchell Marsh, while senior paceman Ryan Harris is bidding for a recall after missing the Gabba Test with a quadriceps problem.

The home side has a pool of five pace bowlers to choose from, but ideally would go in to the Boxing Day showpiece with Mitchell Johnson, Harris and Josh Hazlewood, who took seven match wickets on his debut in Brisbane.

"The Gabba Test was played at a fast pace, it was four-and-a-half runs an over for the whole Test match," Australia coach Darren Lehmann said.

"It was exciting again and it's been an amazing nine days of Test cricket."

Lehmann said he expects opener David Warner, who was struck a painful blow on his left thumb while facing Aaron in Brisbane, to play in the third Test.

Australia have had match-winning performances from new skipper Steve Smith (375 runs with two centuries), Warner (twin tons in Adelaide), spinner Nathan Lyon (17 wickets) and Johnson (a fiery 11-ball spell of three for 10 in Brisbane).

But a crucial part of the series so far has been Australia's ability to get far more runs out of their tail than India.