

SPORT

PLATINI'S HOUSE BALL-BARDED

A new viral video shows a group of Cristiano Ronaldo fans displaying support of the player's bid to win the Ballon d'Or at the FIFA event in Zurich next Monday. After UEFA president Michel Platini said Cristiano Ronaldo would be an undeserving winner in November, Ronaldo fans took 61 footballs – to represent Cristiano's 61 goals last year – to Platini's house and then they kicked all of them at his property on Thursday.

– INTERNET



Bangabandhu Gold Cup from Jan 29

SPORTS REPORTER

The much-awaited Bangabandhu Gold Cup international football tournament will be held from January 29 to February 9 in Dhaka and Sylhet, confirmed a source inside the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday.

The source also confirmed that Bahrain will send its U-23 team, which will fly to Bangladesh after ending its campaign in the U-23 Gulf Cup. The other teams of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup are: Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and hosts Bangladesh.

The schedules were finalised at the sidelines of the extra-ordinary general meeting of AFC in Melbourne on Friday where BFF president Kazi Salahuddin and general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag met with the officials of the other participating teams. The BFF officials returned from Melbourne last night.

Abahani fly in three Hungarians

SPORTS REPORTER

Four-time professional football league champions Abahani yesterday flew in three Hungarian booters for the upcoming season. The three booters, who have been picked by the new Abahani coach George Kottan, will go through trial over the next few days before the club takes a decision whether to sign them.

The three Hungarian booters checked in at Kottan's Dhanmondi flat yesterday morning before going through a light training session at the BFF artificial turf. One of the three booters, Szabolcs Csorba, who mostly warmed the benches of Hungary's current premier league champions Debreceni VSC from 2009 to 2013 before becoming a free-agent last year, claimed he watched a few video footages of Bangladesh football on youtube.

"I do not know a great deal about Bangladesh football, but I have heard from the coach [Kottan] that Abahani are a top team in Bangladesh," said the 23-year-old forward.

The other two Hungarian booters are -- Gabor Demjen, a 28-year-old midfielder who represented Hungary at the U-17, U-19 and U-21 level and Gyula Illes, a 32-year-old left-winger, who played for the Hungarian second-division side Gyirmót SE in the last two seasons.

Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu informed they would watch these players in trial over the next few days before deciding whether they will be signed for the upcoming season.

"We have not yet signed these players, but since Kottan has brought them, we believe that they will be good," Rupu said.

Abahani, who finished runners-up in the Bangladesh Premier League last season, have already retained Ghanaian defender Samad Yusuf and are on the process of recruiting Nigerian defender Obam Henry from Mohammedan SC.

Each team will be allowed to register a maximum of five foreign players while a maximum of three foreign players can be picked for a match, in the upcoming edition of Bangladesh Premier League.



TIGERS DOWN UNDER

Big shoes to fill

BISHWAJIT ROY

He is not a big name in the country's cricketing fraternity and it would not have invited much discussion or created controversy had left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny not been selected for the World Cup. Even his look-a-like Taijul Islam gained a bit of celebrity status in his brief stint at the highest level of the game, especially after of his hat-trick feat against Zimbabwe.

But the 28-year-old Sunny was selected to the final team by Faruque Ahmed-led selection panel ahead of none other than country's highest wicket-taker Abdur Razzak as his consistent performances in the domestic circuit over the years and impressive bowling during his short stint in international cricket were rewarded. Questions were still raised about why three left-arm spinners were on the team, but no one questioned Sunny's inclusion. It's not that he played some extraordinary matches in his eight ODIs last year, but what he has done is he put up some decent performances with 16 wickets at an average of 17.81.

Only time will tell whether he can make up the experience of Razzak in very difficult conditions, but chief selector Faruque believed that the right man was chosen in place of Razzak.

"You know fitness was a big issue behind Razzak's exclusion and the performances of Raj [Abdur Razzak] were also not satisfactory in recent



ARAFAT SUNNY

times. We thought Sunny was the right bowler to replace Raj because of his performances," said Faruque.

"For the last seven-eight years Sunny was in top form and it was the right time for him to continue his services for the national side. He even bowled well for the national side and I am hopeful he can continue as

discipline is the main strength of his bowling," he added.

Sunny was excited as it was a dream come true for him, but he was not ready to compare himself to Razzak, instead he showered praise on his senior colleague.

"I think it was bad luck for Raj bhai as he could not make it and as far as I know fitness was an issue for him. It's bad luck for him but on the other hand I am lucky. It would not be wise to compare myself with him even though I replaced him, because you all know what he has contributed to Bangladesh's cricket," said Sunny.

"But as the opportunity came to me, I will try to capitalise on it. I don't want to take any extra pressure by thinking too much about the World Cup. I know it will be a challenge for a spinner like me to be successful in Australia and New Zealand's conditions, but I firmly believe that if I can bowl in right areas then success will follow," hoped the spinner, who is yet to play any international matches outside of Bangladesh.

"I saw Shakib's [Al Hasan] bowling in the Big Bash today and his bowling gave me the confidence that if I can maintain line and length, then it will definitely be possible for me to contribute something to my team if I play," added Sunny.

Sunny's biggest challenge at the moment however will be to win the battle against Taijul to get a chance in the final eleven.

Shakib's Renegades lose

SPORTS REPORTER

Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan picked one wicket and scored one run as his side the Melbourne Renegades went down to the Melbourne Stars by three wickets in a thrilling encounter in the Big Bash League yesterday.

Batting first the Renegades posted 153. The Stars required six runs off the last over and eventually scampered to a win by taking a single off the last ball. The Renegades seemed done and dusted halfway through as cameos from Kevin Pietersen (49) and Glenn Maxwell (66) gave the Stars a rampant start. However, five wickets for 18 runs brought the Renegades back.

Shakib came in to bat in the 19th over and was caught brilliantly at deep mid-wicket as he attempted to heave one out of the ground. The fielder Johan Hastings, caught the ball, tossed it up in the air while going over the ropes and then jumped back in to complete the catch.

With the ball Shakib put in a much better performance as he finished with figures of 1 for 23 in four overs.

He bowled Stars skipper Cameron White with an arm-ball in the second over.

Rubel's chances brighten up

SPORTS REPORTER



Rubel Hossain's prospects of playing the World Cup looked back on track with some initiatives taken yesterday by the Bangladesh Cricket Board suggesting that the board would stand by the national pacer.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon told reporters yesterday that he asked the BCB's legal experts to analyse the case filed against Rubel in a bid to decide as to whether or not the board would support the bowler.

Talking to reporters, at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday Papon said, "Since the players' camp is set to begin soon, we have to take a decision. I have asked our legal team to get involved in this issue. We want them to analyse the merit of the case.

"If there is merit in the case then we may have to take a decision against him. But if we see that there is suspicion and that the case is not too strong then the board will stand by him.

"The issue has become a bit embarrassing for us because he landed in jail soon after he was included in the World Cup squad. Everyone around the world has come to know about the issue and we have received several queries as well," added Papon.

It was learnt that Rubel's lawyer may appeal for his bail today.

Earlier in the day the chairman of BCB's cricket operations committee, Akram Khan, went to meet Rubel, who was sent to jail on Thursday, along with the player's parents.

"I went there with his parents to meet him. We went there to give him support. He was down and we wanted to give him confidence. We are confident that we will get him for the World Cup," Akram told The Daily Star yesterday.

A case was filed against the pacer under the Prevention of Women and Child Repression Act last month.



Eyeing a good show

Team leave for Malaysia tonight

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh national hockey team will leave for Malaysia tonight to play two practice matches as they target a top-three finish in the Hockey World League (Round-2) to be held in Singapore from January 17 to 25.

The 18-member squad, which trained for more than 40 days in BKSP under head coach Gobinathan Krishnamurthi, will play against Malaysia U-21 team tomorrow and Malaysia A the following day before playing their last warm-up match against Oman on January 15 in Singapore.

Three teams from the eight-team group will qualify for the World Hockey League's third round, and with players reportedly in good fitness level and three practice matches lined up, the team's assistant coach Mamunur Rashid believes they have a chance of reaching that stage, which they failed to do in their last attempt.

"The players have improved their fitness considerably in the 40-odd days of training so that they will be able to play in the same pace for four quarters, which was not the case during the Asian Games in September," said Mamun, before running his team through their paces for the last time at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday afternoon.

Mamun believes that the pool matches will be vital and if they can win at least one of the three matches, their chances of going through to the semifinals will be higher.

"In Pool B, Bangladesh (30) have Japan (14) and Poland (18) who are above us in ranking while Mexico (35) are below us. Even though we don't know much about

Mexico, I think we can beat them. If we can do a positive result against another team, we will get a relatively weaker opponent in the quarterfinals," opined Mamunur, who has 12 members from the U-21 team he coached recently, in the 18-member squad.

The format of this league has been prepared in a way that the pool matches will be played to decide the standings, based on which the quarterfinal opponents will be decided. If Bangladesh finish third in the pool, they will play against the second-placed finishers of Pool A, which comprises Malaysia, Ukraine, Oman and Singapore. If Bangladesh finish fourth in pool, they will be up against the top finishers of Pool A.

Ace forward Russel Mahmud Jimmy, who returned to the national fold along with Imran Hasan Pintoo and Kamruzzaman Rana, after serving a one year suspension, was happy with his fitness and that of his teammates.

"The lack of match practice only matters when you have lack of fitness. We are in good shape and I think that will help us, both the senior players as well as the youngsters, to perform well," said the veteran, who was named the best midfielder of the Hockey World League (Round-2) in Delhi in 2013.

SQUAD

Khorshed, Sarwar (VC), Milon, Nippon, Shitul, Chayan, Ashraf, Asim (GK), Romman, Rezaul, Mimo, Niloy, Krishno (C), Koushik, Jimmy, Rana, Rimon, Pintu.

POOL MATCHES

Bangladesh v Japan Jan 17
Bangladesh v Mexico Jan 18
Bangladesh v Poland Jan 20



(From L-R) Gabor Demjen, Gyula Illes and Szabolcs Csorba go through the paces at the BFF artificial turf yesterday during a light practice session for Abahani.

PHOTO: STAR



Australian players line up in the slip cordon in an attempt to apply pressure on the Indian batsmen but came up three wickets short on the last day of the fourth and final Test at the SCG yesterday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

Salma No.1 all-rounder

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's cricket captain Salma Khatun has topped the ICC T20 all-rounders' rankings for the first time in her career. The announcement was made by the International Cricket Council on Thursday. With 291 rating points, Salma is currently four clear of Sri Lanka's HASD Sirivardene.

Currently, she is also ranked as the number one T20 bowler in the ICC Player Rankings.

Salma, who came to know of her achievement yesterday, expressed her delight.

"I was initially a little surprised when I was congratulated by the board since we just played around nine matches last year. But it was really good to hear the news," Salma told The Daily Star.

"I think personally it's a great achievement, but it will be better if we get to play more matches. The only two instances when we got a chance to play were during the World Cup and the Asian Games. I achieved this feat today, tomorrow there will be a number of other cricketers from Bangladesh who will want to do the same and for that we need to play more matches," she added.

India keep Oz at bay

AFP, Sydney



India clung on for a tense draw with three wickets left to deny Australia their third victory of the series in the fourth Test in Sydney on Saturday.

The Australians, with nine fielders crowding around the bat towards the final stages, pushed for victory but could not dislodge Ajinkya Rahane and Bhuvneshwar Kumar as the gritty tourists batted it out at 252 for seven.

Rahane was unbeaten on 38 and Kumar was 20 not out when the game was called off with one ball left.

Australia skipper Steven Smith was named the player-of-the-series after scoring four centuries for the winning side.

"I thought we were going to get there in the end but India hung on well," Smith said.

"Unfortunately, we didn't quite get there but I'm really proud of all the boys' efforts for this Test match and for the series as well."

The Australians declared at their overnight total of 251 for six, leaving the tourists to hunt down 349 runs to win off 90 overs on the fifth day.

Australia grabbed the vital wicket of Kohli for 46 in the 67th over as he sparred with Mitchell Starc, and Shane Watson took a catch low down at slip.

It completed a magnificent series for the new skipper, with a series aggregate of 692 runs at 86.50, the most by an Indian batsman in a series against Australia.

Kohli said. "We took them to the end on three occasions, two Tests were draws and one was a loss that could have gone either way."

"I'm really proud of the way the guys have played in this series.

"We certainly do have negatives we want to improve on, especially seeing the way the Australians bowl.

"If we can improve on that we're going to be a very strong test team moving forward."

The highest successful run chase in the fourth innings of a Sydney Test remains Australia's 288 for two against South Africa nine years ago.

Vijay gave a few chances before his dismissal, offering a tough chance to Shaun Marsh at short cover on 42 off Ryan Harris in 37th over.

Marsh had two grabs at the ball before it went to ground.

It was Australia's 17th missed fielding opportunity in the series.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 572 for 7 declared (Smith 117, Warner 101; Shami 5-112)

INDIA: First innings 475 (Kohli 147, Rahul 110; Starc 3-106)

AUSTRALIA: Second innings 251 for 6 declared (Smith 71, Burns 66, Rogers 56, Haddin 31 not out; Ashwin 4-105)

INDIA: Second innings 252 for 7 (Vijay 80, Kohli 46, R Sharma 39, Rahane 38 not out; Hazlewood 2-31, Starc 2-36)

Result: Match drawn and Australia won the 4-match series 2-0.

Player-of-the-match: Steven Smith. Player-of-the-series: Steven Smith.