

SPORT



TIGERS DOWN UNDER

Al Amin's chance to prove

NAIMUL KARIM

Despite being the third highest wicket-taker last year, Al-Amin Hossain's place in the World Cup squad wasn't assured. With 17 wickets in 11 matches last year, only Shakib Al Hasan and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza had scalped more wickets. In fact, until the Zimbabwe series Al-Amin was the highest wicket-taker for the Tigers.

Doubts regarding his place in the side stemmed from the ICC's decision to question Al-Amin's bowling action. Although he cleared the test, selectors felt that the decision had a negative effect on the bowler's confidence. Al-Amin barely seemed like the bowler that he had been during the first phase of the year after the episode.

He was just given eight overs in the first Test against Zimbabwe and was dropped for the second.

The ODI series wasn't much better as he was given 10 overs in two ODIs. The first ODI saw him give away 21 runs in two overs, while in the second he finished with figures of 1 for 44 in eight.

A contrasting performance considering the fact that Al-Amin, in the initial days of the year, was the captain's go-to bowler.

His death-bowling in the Asia cup earned him heaps of praise. In the match against Pakistan, he kept an informal Shahid Afridi relatively quiet

with his yorkers in the death overs, after the latter had smacked Shakib for three consecutive sixes. It was an aspect that eventually built pressure and led to Afridi's run-out and brought the hosts back into the game for a brief period.



AL AMIN HOSSAIN

His greatest achievement of the year though, came in the West Indies. He took 10 wickets in three matches, which included two four-wicket hauls, as he became the top wicket-taker of the tournament. Prior to the series many expected the likes of Dwayne

Bravo or Sunil Narine to dominate the bowling, but it was Al-Amin's burst that ended up surprising the hosts.

It's an aspect that the Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and co will hope that the bowler can replicate in Australia and New Zealand. Right before the announcement of the World Cup squad, the BCB president conferred with Mashrafe and asked him if there was any particular player that he really wanted in the team; Mashrafe identified Al-Amin's importance, who was already in the main 15.

The captain emphasised the pacer's bowling in the death overs which, according to him, adds a different dimension. Spinners aren't likely to be used towards the end in Australia and New Zealand and Mashrafe's record in the death overs isn't that great; and that will leave Al-Amin with a lot on his plate.

While chief selector Faruque Ahmed opined that the questioning of the bowler's action pulled the bowler down, Al-Amin thought otherwise. "It was because of my university exams. It was difficult to keep both aspects in check. The Zimbabwe series unfortunately went a little badly but I performed consistently last year," said Al-Amin.

If that is indeed the case then there's no better opportunity than the World Cup for the bowler to prove his point.



MARADONA coming within two months?

SPORTS REPORTER



A Celebrity Management Group (CMG) official yesterday claimed they will bring Argentine football legend Diego Maradona to Bangladesh for the launching of the Bangladesh Super Soccer, a franchise football league proposed to be held here at the end of this year.

"We will bring Diego (Maradona) for an official launching of the league within the next two months, even though we are planning to hold the league sometime towards the end of this year. I will be meeting Diego in Madrid on January 29 and then I can confirm the exact timing of Diego's arrival," executive director of CMG, Bhaswar Goswami, who met with Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin, told reporters yesterday.

Salahuddin confirmed that he has given a letter of intent to the CMG official to go ahead with their plans, but said that BFF will only engage in further talks to work out the details of the league once Maradona comes to Dhaka for the official launching.

"If Maradona comes here, we will be able to comprehend the viability of such a league in our country because of the hype and interest his arrival will create. Only then we can give the CMG the official confirmation to go ahead with the league," the BFF president told reporters.

According to CMG's proposal, which was first tabled before the BFF on December 23 last year, the franchise league will feature eight teams, which will be owned by Bangladeshi companies while each of those teams will have a foreign club (European and Latin American) as partner to provide the teams with foreign players and coaching staff. The league will feature 61 matches spanning 12 weeks and will be held on home and away basis across eight venues.

Goswami also claimed that they have acquired official confirmation from Brazilian club Flamengo to be partners of one of the clubs while talks with some other clubs are also in progress.

The CMG is a Kolkata-based sports management company which had previously brought Maradona to Kolkata and also played a key role in organising the FIFA International friendly between Argentina and Nigeria in Dhaka in September 2011.

HOCKEY WORLD LEAGUE BD take on Japan today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national hockey team will take on Japan in the opening match of the Hockey World League (Round-2) in Singapore today, with an aim to give their superior opponents a run for the money.

The 30th-ranked Bangladesh, who had lost against 14th-ranked Japan by 0-8 goals in the Asian Games in September, had a relatively good preparation despite losing against Malaysia U-21 and Ukraine while winning convincingly against Malaysia U-23 team in practice matches ahead of the tournament.

"Japan is a good team but our target is to put up a good show and perform better than we did in the Asian Games," said assistant manager Rafiqul Islam Kamal over phone yesterday. "I think our team is in good shape as the coaching staff worked on the mistakes they made during three practice matches."

In yesterday's practice session, the Bangladesh team analysed the video footages of their Asian Games' match against Japan.

"Last time, we gave Japan a lot of space but this time we are not going to do that and each player will be marked," said Kamal.

Bangladesh will take on the other Pool B opponents -- Poland (ranked 18th) and Mexico (ranked 35th) on Sunday and Tuesday respectively.

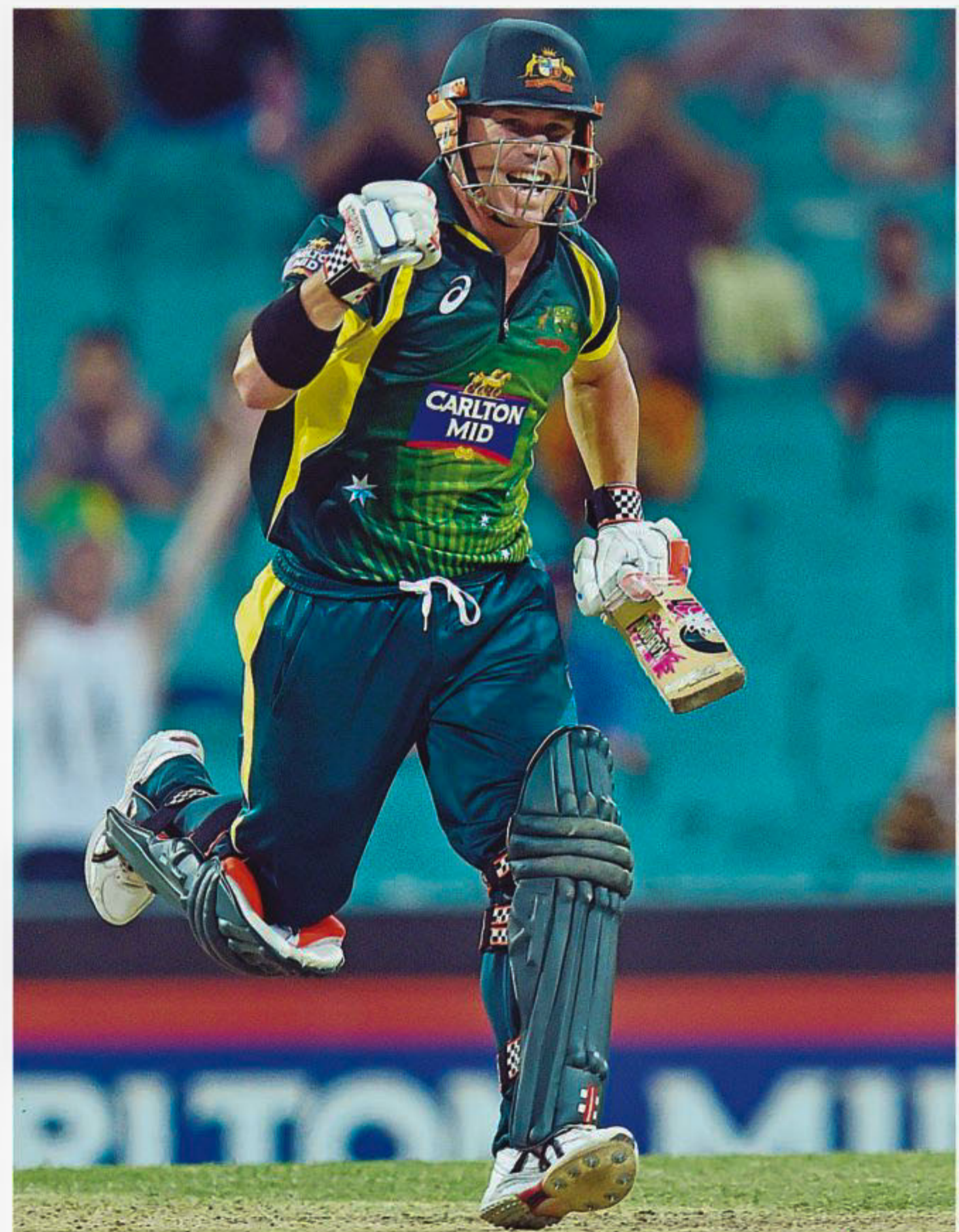
Kvitova wins all-Czech final

AFP, Sydney

Petra Kvitova edged out fellow Czech Karolina Pliskova in two tiebreak sets to win the Sydney International on Friday.

The reigning Wimbledon champion downed her rising compatriot 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (8/6) to send her into next week's Australian Open full of confidence.

Kvitova quelled Pliskova's tenacious challenge in one hour and 52 minutes to secure her 15th career title.



Australia opener David Warner celebrates his match-winning century against England during the first ODI of the triangular series at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Warner ton guides Oz

AFP, Sydney

Australian opener David Warner led his team to an emphatic three-wicket win over England in the opening one-day international of the triangular series at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Friday.

The powerful left-hander's commanding century cancelled out a long overdue ton by new England skipper Eoin Morgan to help the Australians earn a bonus point for reaching the target inside 40 overs.

Morgan's lone hand of 121 off 136 balls with 11 fours and three sixes enabled England to recover from a disastrous start to make 234 in 47.5 overs.

Warner then made 127, breaking his own drought with his first one-day international ton since back-to-back hundreds against Sri Lanka in 2012, as Australia cruised to the victory target with 61 balls to spare, finishing on 235 for seven from 39.5 overs.

Warner faced 115 balls, hitting 18 fours, and fell when just eight runs were needed to win and Australia was chasing the bonus point.

England have now won just three of their last 14 one-day internationals as they head towards next month's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

In the first match of the triangular series, which also features India, Morgan won the toss in his first game as skipper since replacing Alastair Cook and elected to bat.

His sixth one-day century for England helped the tourists put on a defensible total before being dismissed in 47.5 overs.

Morgan was the only England batsman to score over 30.

The century ended a dry run for Morgan, as it was his first century in his past 20 one-day innings, which had included just one prior half-century. He brought up his ton by lofting James Faulkner (3-47) over cover from the 127th ball he faced, having hit nine fours and two sixes.

Morgan had to save the innings after a top-order collapse and strode to the wicket with his side in strife at 12 for three.

The home side struck with the very first ball, with Ian Bell trapped lbw by left-armers Mitchell Starc for a duck.

ENGLAND: 234 all out in 47.5 overs (Ali 22, Morgan 121, Buttler 28, Jordan 17; Starc 4-42, Faulkner 3-47) AUSTRALIA: 235 for 7 in 39.5 overs (Warner 127, Smith 37, Haddin 16; Woakes 4-40) Result: Australia won by 3 wickets. Player-of-the-match: Mitchell Starc.

Lusai in critical condition

SPORTS REPORTER

Legendary hockey player Jummon Lusai is battling for life after reportedly suffering from a brain stroke as well as cardiac arrest yesterday.

The former national star was rushed to the Bangladesh Medical Hospital in Dhanmondi after collapsing at the Abahani club premises afternoon. Lusai is currently in life support at the hospital.

"As per the doctors, he (Lusai) is in critical condition. The doctors are apprehending that he suffered a brain stroke as well as cardiac arrest even though they (doctors) are yet to see the test reports," said Abahani hockey team's manager Zaki Ahmed Ripon.

Lusai was the only Bangladeshi player to be selected for World Hockey Eleven in the 1980s. He is also involved with Abahani hockey team.

Ali to get back home

AFP, Louisville

Boxing legend Muhammad Ali is expected to be released from hospital Friday after receiving follow-up care for a urinary tract infection, a family spokesman said.

Ali, who turns 73 on Saturday, was admitted to an undisclosed hospital earlier this week, said Bob Gunnell of Louisville-based Boxcar PR.

It was Ali's second hospital visit in the last month.

"Ali hopes to celebrate his 73rd birthday on Saturday at home with his family," Gunnell said on Thursday.

The three-time former heavyweight champ was released from hospital on January 7 after a two week stay for what was then thought to be pneumonia.

But doctors ultimately determined he had a urinary tract infection.

Ali is also an Olympic gold medallist and has suffered from Parkinson's disease since the 1980s.

"The Muhammad Ali family respectfully requests privacy. No further details are being released at this time," Gunnell said.

Committees formed, finances ensured

SPORTS REPORTER



With only 12 days remaining to the start of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup international football tournament, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is going through a hard time to put everything in place as some BFF executive committee members raised questions about the official announcement of the tournament without endorsement from the executive committee.

Despite their grievances, an emergency meeting of the executive committee yesterday approved the third edition of the tournament. The meeting also formed 12 subcommittees under the organising committee, headed by finance minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, and tournament committee, headed by BFF president Kazi Salahuddin.

The BFF is yet to disclose the fixtures of the tournament, but unofficially disclosed the slots where the first three group stage matches (Jan 29 to 31) will be held in Sylhet and the remaining group stage matches (Feb 1 to 3) will be held in Dhaka. One of the semifinals will be held in Sylhet and the other in Dhaka. Dhaka will also host the final on February 8.

However, the BFF has been relieved on the finances front as it has been ensured Tk 12 crore from the sponsors to run the tournament smoothly.

The executive committee meeting also fixed the price of tickets at Tk 50 for general galleries and Tk 80 for VIP galleries for group-stage matches while the price of tickets has been fixed at Tk 100 and Tk 150 respectively for the knockout stages.

Meanwhile, the game's governing body is still uncertain about the arrival of Lodewijk de Kruij for taking charge of the national team. The death of the Dutch coach's father on January 13 has made matters complicated. Interim coach Saiful Bari Titu is preparing the team at the BKSP camp in Savar for the six-nation tournament.

WI struggle as rain pours

Amla fastest to 5000 runs

AFP, Durban



Half-centuries by Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers and David Miller enabled South Africa to score 279 for eight before a storm halted play with 1.5 overs remaining in their innings in the first one-day international against the West Indies at Kingsmead on Friday.

South Africa were rocked by two early wickets and were pegged back towards the end of the innings but runs flowed freely in between as De Villiers shared partnerships of 99 with Amla and 123 with Miller, both at slightly better than a run a ball.

Amla and De Villiers, South Africa's champion batting pair, came together with the total 16 for two in the fifth over and the runs soon started to flow.

Amla reached 5000 one-day international runs in his 104th match - fewer than any other batsman - when he went past 54.

The left-handed Miller made 70 off 68 balls before his dismissal, with the total on 238 in the 40th over, sparked a collapse.

De Villiers followed soon afterwards after making a relatively restrained 81 off 94 balls and run-scoring slowed as wickets fell.

The West Indies were set a revised target of 229 from 33 overs to win after a storm stopped play for almost three hours. They got off to a good start with a 51 run partnership from Gayle and Smith, with Gayle contributing 41 runs to the stand, before Gale was dismissed, with Johnson following suit on a duck.

Samuels and Smith managed 29 runs among themselves, before Samuel's dismissal. Smith and Ramdin only managed four runs between them, before Smith was dismissed and Ramdin formed a 22 run partnership, before rain interrupted the game for a brief period.

SCORES IN BRIEF SOUTH AFRICA: 279 for 8 in 48.2 overs (Amla 66, De Villiers 81, Miller 70; Taylor 2-50, Russell 2-51) WEST INDIES: 152 for 7 in 26 overs (Gayle 41, Smith 29, Ramdin 24 no; Philander 2-31, 2-22)