

SPORT

WC heroes greeted

SPORTS REPORTER

A makeshift stage at the Manik Mia Avenue witnessed some of Bangladesh's most popular rock-stars perform yesterday afternoon. From the age-old 'Jala Jala' by Miles to the more contemporary riffs of 'Kobe', the songs entertained the thousands who flocked into the arena.

However, for once, it wasn't the music artists that the audience was craving for in the concert. While they were no doubt enthralled by the popular tunes, the main spectacle was reserved for the evening. As their cricketing heroes took the stage one-by-one, the crowd forced themselves as close to the stage as possible and stretched their arms in an attempt to hold the hands of their heroes.

It was a scenario that one often sees in concerts, except that in this case, the rock-stars had gently decided to take a back-seat and let the cricketers take over their roles for a brief period. One of Bangladesh's oldest pop-rock bands, Miles, had sung half their songs before they were asked to take a break in order to let the cricketers come on stage and they obliged.

Judging by the way fans thronged to the programme yesterday, the reception organised by the Bangladesh Cricket Board for its cricketers was a much needed one.

An emotional Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, the Bangladesh skipper, sporting a jersey made especially for yesterday's programme, thanked the BCB and the fans.

"You [fans] were there with us throughout... during our bad times and good... I hope we receive the same kind of support for as long as we play," said Mashrafe.

"We have many cricketing assignments this year. We start with Pakistan on the 17th. Hopefully we can live up to your expectation and make you all happy this summer," he added.

Recalling various moments from the World Cup Mashrafe emphasised the importance of the three-week preparatory period in Brisbane where they worked hard on getting accustomed to the foreign conditions. The skipper also thanked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith was also present in the programme and he too expressed his joy.

"We played the quarterfinal in the last World Cup. It won't be too long before we become the number one team in the game," said Muhith.

Deputy speaker, BCB directors, members of the RAB, police and cricket leagues were also present in the programme.



ALL SMILES: Bangladesh's national cricketers thoroughly enjoyed the reception organised by the BCB to celebrate their World Cup performance at the Manik Mia Avenue yesterday. Thousands of fans flocked into the arena to catch a glimpse of their cricketing heroes.

PHOTO: STAR

The hosts' pitch conundrum

SPORTS REPORTER



"Everybody wants to take home advantage in their home series, so nobody likes to make sporting wickets." Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who will lead the team in absence of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza in the first ODI against Pakistan on April 17 at Mirpur, had made this comment regarding the pitch in the series before leaving the country to take part in the IPL.

The Tigers' outstanding performances in

the ICC World Cup made many believe that sporting wickets are compatible with them against an inexperienced Pakistan team but according to sources it's not easy to decide what kind of pitch will suit the Tigers most, as Pakistan's bowling has variety in both pace and spin.

Bangladesh's home advantage means they would ideally like to play on a slow pitch, but they would not want to see much turn as Pakistan's spin maestro Saeed Ajmal is back in the side along with Mohammad Hafeez. Bangladesh team management is also well aware of the fact that there is

another leg-spinner in Yasir Shah.

According to sources, the Bangladesh team management will prefer to play the two-match Test series on slow pitches as their pace bowling department lacks bite. Rubel Hossain is the only pacer who can hit the deck hard, so they have to rely on their slow bowlers and will be hoping their batsmen can push the Pakistan team in the Test series.

But when it comes to the 50-over format, Bangladesh are a more confident side, especially after their performances in Australia and New Zealand gave them the

courage to transcend traditional thoughts. That's why they were thinking about good pitches for the three-match ODI series.

It is believed that this team has got the ability and confidence to score 300 runs on good wickets. Bangladesh's middle order was fantastic in the World Cup and if the opening problem is resolved in the series, then the batting will be strong enough to turn the table on Pakistan. The notion is that good wickets will create more opportunities for the home team in the three-match ODI series, instead of offering bouncy or spinning tracks for Pakistan.

IN A NUTSHELL

Zimbabwe agree Pakistan tour

AGENCIES, Karachi

Zimbabwe have agreed to tour Pakistan for a five-match one-day series next month, the first Test-playing nation to visit the country in six years.

"Zimbabwe's final reply is that yes we want to come to Pakistan and although there are some details to be finalised we hope that they will come to play five one-day matches next month," said Shahryar Khan, chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board.

Foreign teams have refused to tour Pakistan over security fears since a terrorist attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore in March 2009.

Pakistan has since hosted all home matches in the United Arab Emirates.

More teams are in line to visit Pakistan as Sri Lanka named a new team manager, Jeryl Woutersz, for their upcoming tours of Pakistan and India.



Cricketers from Nepal and Australia played a match as tribute to Phil Hughes in Kathmandu yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Holiday for first day of Test

INTERNET, Antigua

An official half-day holiday has been declared in Antigua and Barbuda for Monday, the first day of the first Test match between the West Indies and England. The cabinet in Antigua made the decision on Friday as the West Indies prepare to battle England at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium.

Attorney General Steadroy Benjamin said the official half holiday is part of measures aimed at attracting a large turnout.

Spieth channels inner Tiger

AFP, Augusta

Jordan Spieth completed the greatest 36-hole start in Masters history Friday, firing a six-under par 66 at Augusta National that matched him for the lowest halfway total in any major.

The 21-year-old American stood on 14-under 130 after two rounds, giving Spieth a Masters midpoint record-matching five-stroke lead over compatriot Charley Hoffman.

Spieth's 36-hole domination, with 15 birdies against one bogey, evoked memories of Tiger Woods's record-setting 1997 Masters romp. Woods will remain the youngest Masters champion by about five months even if Spieth wins this year.

Ali expects tough fight

AFP, Lahore



Newly-appointed Pakistan one-day captain Azhar Ali Saturday said his team will not take Bangladesh lightly after their strong World Cup performance, promising a tough fight from his young players next week.

Ali will lead the team for the first time on tour starting with the first of three one-day internationals in Dhaka on Friday.

He replaced Misbahul Haq, who retired from one-day cricket after Pakistan slumped out of this year's World Cup, co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand, in the quarterfinals.

Ali, 30, said his team is ready for Bangladesh, who shocked England to also reach the World Cup quarterfinals, where they lost to India.

"Bangladesh's performance in the World Cup was good and they looked a much-improved side. They are also tough in their condition, so we are no way going to take them lightly," Ali told reporters on the last day of the training camp.

"There will be two teams fighting and I believe my young boys will perform well," said Ali about the tour where Pakistan will also play a Twenty20 International followed by two Tests.

Ali said his young team, including new uncapped opener Sami Aslam, will progress with time.

He said he was inspired by former captain Misbah, who is still leading Pakistan's Test side.

"I have a big example of Misbah who led Pakistan in tough times and positively. Being a team member I saw a lot of good things in him, how he handled the situations so this is going to help me."

Ali hoped his under-performing batsmen will show improvement.

"Bowlers definitely did well in the World Cup so we are going to rely on them, but it's important that batsmen should also feel the sense of responsibility."

"Cricket is changing and we as a team have to play with a positive frame of mind. I am seeing how excited the players are. They want to do something good for Pakistan and I am sure... it will be a different side."



Gayle blows KKR away

STAR SPORT DESK



Royal Challengers Bangalore opener Chris Gayle blasted 96 runs off 56 balls to seal a 3 wicket victory against Kolkata Knight Riders at Eden Gardens yesterday.

Put into bat after losing the toss Kolkata captain Gautam Gambhir top scored with 58 runs as his team posted 177 runs for 6. Gayle was at his best hitting 7 towering sixes as Bangalore overhauled the target easily with an over to spare. Bangladesh star Shakib Al Hasan did however manage to take one wicket for Kolkata.

Earlier, in the first match of the day Chennai Super Kings opener Brendon McCullum smashed the first century in the eighth edition of Indian Premier League paying way for a convincing 45-run victory against Sunrisers Hyderabad. McCullum hit 9 sixes during his 56 balls knock.

McCullum's knock enabled Chennai to post a formidable 209 for 4 as Hyderabad managed 164 for 6 in their 20 overs despite captain David Warner's 42-ball 53.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KKR: 177 for 6 in 20 overs (Gambhir 58, Russel 141 not out, Uthappa 35)

RCB: 179 for 7 in 19 overs (Gayle 96; Pathan 2-40, Shakib 1-17) **Result:** Bangalore won by 3 wickets

CSK: 209 for 4 in 20 overs (McCullum 100 not out, Dhoni 53, Smith 27)

SRH: 164 for 6 in 20 overs (Warner 53, Dhawan 26, Williamson 26 not out; Bravo 2-25, Mohit 2-36)

Result: Chennai won by 45 runs.

Tamim fit

BCL final today

SPORTS REPORTER

Tamim Iqbal was declared fit to play today's Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) final between Islami Bank East Zone and BCB North Zone. The day-night match will take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The match will provide the left-hander with his last opportunity to regain confidence by scoring some runs ahead of the coming home series against Pakistan, who arrive in Dhaka tomorrow to play three ODIs, one T20I and two Tests against the Tigers.

Tamim was sidelined for the previous match due to a right knee injury which he suffered while fielding last Tuesday at Fatullah, but national team physiotherapist Bayzedul Islam informed yesterday that the opener recovered from that minor injury and would be able to play the BCL final.

"We reassessed his [Tamim's] condition and found nothing wrong with his knee. He can play the final," said Bayzedul.

East Zone skipper Mominul Haque, who had also missed the previous match due to a minor groin injury, said that Tamim and he would both play the final. "He [Tamim] will play," confirmed Mominul.

Mushfiqur Rahim, Sabbir Rahman and Nasir Hossain played sparkling knocks in the previous match to take North Zone into the final and it would be fantastic for them if they carry their form into the final with the Pakistan series knocking at the door. However, not only the East Zone but the national team management would also love to see Tamim hit form ahead of the series as the openers are a big concern.

After the BCL final the Tigers will get only four days to prepare for the three-match ODI series against Pakistan, as the first match will take place on April 17 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

'A little apart from and above the rest'

AGENCIES, Sydney & London



Australia's media reflected on the life of cricket great and esteemed broadcaster Richie Benaud in effusive tributes on Saturday.

Benaud, who had been fighting skin cancer and suffered serious injury in a car accident in late 2013, passed away in his sleep early Friday at age 84.

Overall Benaud played in or commented on approximately 500 Test matches and has been lauded as the most influential Australian cricketer and broadcaster of his era.

The Sydney Morning Herald carried a 12-page wrap-around tribute, while the front cover of Sydney's Daily Telegraph remembered "a marvellous innings" and followed with five pages on the cricket icon in the news section and more in sports.

"Benaud the cricketer was as Benaud the commentator, a little apart from and above the rest," Greg Baum wrote in Melbourne's Age newspaper.

Malcolm Knox, writing in the Sydney Morning Herald, focused on Benaud's playing career of 63 Test matches and never losing a series as captain, which ran for 28 games from 1958.



Richie Benaud (R) with Australian cricket legend Sir Donald Bradman.

PHOTO: FILE

"As a cricketer, Benaud was more than a symbol of post-war liberalism, an icon, with his unbuttoned shirt and emotional celebrations, of the change in style from 1948, when he played his first first-class game, to 1964, when he played his last: from Peggy Lee to the Beatles," he said.

Author Gideon Haigh said in the Australian

newspaper: "Benaud the commentator seldom referred to his on-field experiences and accomplishments -- a shrewd expedient which had the effect of making him seem almost ageless -- and was amused when young admirers inquired innocently whether he had been a player."

Jim Maxwell, the doyen of Australia's radio cricket commentary, said of Benaud: "If cricket had ever appointed a pope it would be Richie Benaud."

Prime Minister Tony Abbott has offered a state funeral to Benaud's family, describing his death as "a sad day for Australia".

English newspapers also paid tribute to Benaud, who anchored cricket coverage on the BBC and Channel Four for almost half a century.

There were many tributes for Benaud in England where he began his commentating career -- after Australia's 1956 tour to England he stayed behind to train as a presenter with the BBC, then worked as a reporter at the News of the World. His first BBC radio commentary came in 1960, followed by his first TV appearance three years later.

Respected BBC cricket correspondent Jonathan Agnew explained how Benaud's "authority, popularity and skill" was unrivalled and how warmly he was accepted by English cricket viewers.