

Robi pacer hunt comes to a close

SPORTS REPORTER

After nearly two months, the 'Robi Fast Bowler Hunt' programme finally came to an end yesterday.

Through the search, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has unearthed 13 fast bowlers -- 10 from the male category, one from the female category and two from the physically challenged category.

It was a long ride that began in January this year. According to the BCB, 14,611 bowlers qualified to take part in the contest after around 30,000 initially registered for the competition. At the preliminary stage around 100 fast bowlers were short-listed. The final phase of the selection took place yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

According to BCB coach Sarwar Imran, the bowlers were selected based on four attributes -- speed, accuracy, swing and height. A bowler from the Bangladesh Air Force named Ibadat, according to Imran, clocked the fastest speed of 139 km/h. Each of these players have received a stipend and will also be given the opportunity to join a training camp later this year organised by the BCB.

Kane double downs Villa

AFP, Birmingham

Harry Kane reignited Tottenham Hotspur's Premier League title challenge with a well-taken double as his side heaped more misery on rock-bottom Aston Villa with a 2-0 win on Sunday.

The prolific England striker took his tally to 22 goals for the season by striking either side of half-time at Villa Park as Spurs moved to within two points of leaders Leicester City, who host Newcastle United on Monday.

"It was a good victory and three important points after a few games that have not been so good," Spurs manager Pochettino told the BBC. "We need to keep the pressure on and win games. You cannot stop the dream of the supporters and they are right to dream. But we need to work hard."

Kane's England teammate Dele Alli set up both of his goals.



STAR ECONOMICAL BOWLER: Bangladesh fast bowler Taskin Ahmed (2nd from L) gave the team a brilliant start against Oman yesterday, taking a wicket in his first over and giving away just eight runs from two overs.

PHOTO: AP



Martial rescues united Watford dump Arsenal

AGENCIES, London



Manchester United striker Anthony Martial kept their FA Cup hopes alive when he struck eight minutes from time to salvage a 1-1 draw with West Ham United in Sunday's quarter-final tie at Old Trafford.

West Ham playmaker Dimitri Payet looked to be sending the 11-times Cup winners tumbling out of the competition with a wondrous, curling free kick in the 68th minute.

But with time running out, United's young French starlet Martial hooked Ander Herrera's cross back into the net from the narrowest of angles.

United will now have a replay at what will be the last Cup tie to be staged at West Ham's Boleyn Ground in the Londoners' final season there before they move to the Olympic Stadium.

In the day's earlier match, Watford ended Arsenal's two-year reign as FA Cup holders with a 2-1 win over the gunners.

Winners in 2014 and 2015, Arsenal were bidding to become the first team to win the competition for three consecutive years since Blackburn Rovers between 1884 and 1886.

But their hopes of a record-extending 13th FA Cup triumph were shattered at the

Emirates Stadium as Watford prevailed courtesy of second-half goals from Odion Ighalo and Adlene Guedioura.

"Our fantastic run has come to an end on a day where we felt that our performance deserved a win," said Wenger, whose side replied through substitute Danny Welbeck in the 88th minute. "Credit to Watford, they created few chances, but took them all. It's sad because we gave everything."

With Arsenal eight points off the pace in the Premier League and 2-0 down to Barcelona ahead of Wednesday's Champions League last 16 return leg, their chances of silverware are fading fast.

But Wenger said that all hope was not lost ahead of the mid-week trip to Camp Nou.

"It is very difficult against Barcelona, but we have to see it as a challenge and try to make the impossible possible," said the Frenchman.

Watford join Crystal Palace, Everton and either Manchester United or West Ham United in the semi-finals, which will be played at Wembley next month.

"I have memories on television of the old Wembley and watching in Spain and seeing the finals of this competition," said Watford's Spanish manager Quique Sanchez Flores.

"Now it is a new Wembley. I've just arrived in England and to get there is exciting. I'm really happy for the fans and they deserve this kind of day."

Under-fire Selangor seek first win

Team reaches Dhaka to play against Sk Jamal

SPORTS REPORTER



A 26-member contingent of Malaysia's Selangor FC arrived here yesterday morning ahead of their AFC Cup Group E fixture against Sheikh Jamal DC on Tuesday.

The Malaysian Super League runners-up are in the third position of the four-team table with one point from two outings, just ahead of winless Sheikh Jamal and they are looking forward to bouncing back with their squad comprising of four national players as well as four foreign recruits from Indonesia, Australia, Argentina and Liberia.

It is the fifth AFC Cup appearance for Selangor, who had played the quarterfinal in 2006 and qualified for the 16-team round in 2013 but were twice eliminated from the group-stages in 2010 and 2014.

However, the Red Giants are under much scrutiny. They were booed by fans

following their 1-0 home defeat at the hands of Tampines Rovers of Singapore. Zainal Abidin Bin Hassan's charges were confined to the Selayang Stadium after the defeat against Rovers, as fans blamed former Selangor FC striker-turned-coach of fielding an 'under-strength side'. Nevertheless, Abidin will be hoping his team can soldier on and taste victory for the first time in three matches to pacify their supporters.

After having rested for a couple of hours, the Selangor players -- who played out a 2-2 draw against Ceres La Salle FC of Philippines in their first match -- trained for more than an hour at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday afternoon in a bid to get acclimatised to conditions ahead of tomorrow's match.

Though media personnel approached head coach Abidin, the 54-year-old, who has been with Selangor FC for the past year, refused to speak with the media before the official media conference to be held today.



Players of Selangor FC have a light training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium just hours after arriving in Dhaka yesterday morning.

PHOTO: BFF

INDEPENDENCE CUP HOCKEY Navy, BAF play final today

SPORTS REPORTER

Star-studded Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) moved into the final of the Independence Cup hockey tournament after beating their respective rivals in the semifinals at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Bangladesh Air Force defeated Bangladesh Army 5-3 in a shootout after regulation time ended 3-3, while, Bangladesh Navy -- comprising 11 national players -- defeated Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan 6-3 in the second semifinal.

The teams will face off in the final at the same venue today.

More love in India than at home: Afridi

AFP, Kolkata

Pakistan skipper Shahid Afridi on Sunday brushed off concerns over security for his team at the World T20, saying he was looking forward to playing in front of India's crowds.

"We are cricketers, not politicians," Afridi told a press conference in Kolkata. "We have always enjoyed playing in India and have been loved by Indians crowds more than crowds back home."

In his first comments since arriving with the team on Saturday night, Afridi said they were confident of success in their first outing against the yet unknown qualifier, who turned out to be Bangladesh.

Fan's death dampens Dortmund win

AFP, Berlin



Goal-scorer Marco Reus admitted Borussia Dortmund's 2-0 Bundesliga win over Mainz on Sunday was overshadowed by the death of an 80-year-old fan in the stadium.

The elderly Dortmund fan collapsed with a suspected heart attack in the south-west stand of Borussia's 81,000 sold-out Signal Iduna Park.

A second fan also collapsed, but was revived on the way to hospital. Reus scored on 30 minutes, but it meant the second-half was played in a subdued atmosphere as the news circulated.

Japan midfielder Shinji Kagawa

netted Dortmund's second on 73 minutes in almost complete silence.

"On the pitch, we had no idea what was going on and were initially irritated by the silence," said Reus.

"Straight after the game, our coach [Thomas Tuchel] came to us and explained what had happened. It put a shadow over the game and complement to the fans for the way they behaved."

Once the news sank in after the final whistle, the Dortmund team gathered as the home fans sang an emotional rendition of the club's anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone".

"I have never experienced something like that where the supporters were united in expressing their grief and respect," German FA interim president Reinhard Rauball told Sky.

"I also take my hat off to Mainz for

the way they gave their support."

Victory leaves Dortmund in second, five points behind Bayern Munich.

Earlier, ten-man Bayer Leverkusen had an own-goal to thank for ending their four-match winless streak in the Bundesliga in a 1-0 victory over Hamburg.

Hamburg's Sweden midfielder Albin Ekdal slid the ball into his own net after 18 minutes at the BayArena to hand Leverkusen victory.

Leverkusen had Croatia right-back Tin Jedvaj sent off in the dying stages after being shown two yellow cards in quick succession for time wasting, then mocking referee Christian Dingert.

On Saturday, Thomas Mueller and Thiago Alcantara netted twice as leaders Bayern beat Werder Bremen 5-0.

Zlatan quadruple gives PSG title

AFP, Paris



French giants Paris Saint-Germain, inspired by four stunning Zlatan Ibrahimovic goals, turned on the style Sunday to beat Troyes 9-0 and clinch a fourth consecutive Ligue 1 crown in record time.

Just four days after advancing to the Champions League quarter-finals, PSG wrapped up the club's sixth French title with eight games to spare by beating a Troyes side destined for an immediate return to the second tier.

Laurent Blanc's men obliterated the French

stage in 10 magical minutes.

The towering Swede made it 4-0 just seconds into the second-half after Cavani intercepted another poor clearance. "Ibra" gifted too much space on the edge of the box and making no mistake as he drilled the ball low into the left-hand corner.

Ibrahimovic's second was a gem, a first-time mid-air volley of an inch-perfect Angel di Maria cross as PSG swamped Troyes. His third -- and 100th in Ligue 1 action -- was equally sublime, the 34-year-old Swede meeting a Layvin Kurzawa cross at full speed and unleashing a blinding right-footed shot that swerved into the far corner of the net.

Matthieu Saunier compounded Troyes' woes

with an own goal, while Lossemy Karaboue saw red for hauling Cavani down in the box. Dreyer saved the penalty, but Cavani tapped in at the second bite.

It was left to Ibrahimovic to wrap up the 9-0 rout, the striker showing great strength to ride a tackle and unleash an unstoppable shot.

Zlatan afterwards that he may be tempted to stay with the French champions -- if a statue of himself is erected in place of the city's iconic Eiffel Tower.

"For the moment, I won't be at PSG next season," said Ibrahimovic whose current deal ends in July. "What happens next year, for the moment, I don't know. If they replace the Eiffel Tower with a statue of me, I will stay at PSG. I can promise that!"

Nadal hits back at doping claims

AFP, Indian Wells



Spanish tennis star Rafael Nadal hit back Saturday at a claim that he faked an injury in 2012 to cover up a failed drugs test.

The 14-time major winner said it was unfathomable that someone would accuse him of using a false injury to try and escape the wrath of the tennis' anti-doping officials.

"Me?", he asked. "You can ask the ITF (International Tennis Federation), you can ask WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency), you can ask everybody."

Nadal has never failed a drug test in his many years on the ATP Tour and has always vehemently denied ever using a banned substance.

"I never did and I will never do and I don't want to talk about that again," he told Agence France-Presse on Saturday night after his doubles loss to the Americans Bob and Mike Bryan at the hardcourt tournament at Indian Wells.

Roselyne Bachelot, France's sports minister between 2007 and 2010, claimed that Nadal had faked an injury in 2012, when he missed the final six months of the season due to knee problems, to hide a positive drugs test.

Nadal said he wants "justice" -- his name cleared and for people to stop pointing fingers at him.

"I have been working so hard during the whole of my career to have the success that I

have and now is the moment to do justice. I am tired of that and I want justice," Nadal said.

Nadal's comments come in the wake of former world number one Maria Sharapova's failed a drug test at the Australian Open which she revealed on Monday.

Sharapova tested positive for meldonium, which was added to the WADA's banned list this year.

Nadal said Saturday he was pleased to see all the support he has received from sports organizations, sports personalities, fans and family who have rushed to his defence after Bachelot's comments.

"Just thanks for the support from the people," Nadal said. "It is great to see the huge support from the world of sport."

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane launched a staunch personal defence of Nadal, saying "he is a gentleman and a person that has shown values".

Real Madrid also released a statement and Nadal's uncle Toni Nadal called Bachelot "an imbecile".

Nadal hopes that with the support he has received he can now put the matter to bed once and for all.

"Believe me our sport is clean," he told AFP. "If everybody is doing something wrong then the people go to the justice and go on trial and then the judge decides."

"Our sports is not a sport that covers up for people doing negative things. I am tired of all of this."



PSG players celebrate after clinching the Ligue 1 title against Troyes yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

record for the quickest league victory, currently held by Lyon who won the 2007 title under Gerard Houllier with five games to go.

Three goals in six early first-half minutes settled PSG's nerves at Troyes' sun-kissed Stade de l'Aube.

First up was Edinson Cavani, the Uruguyan capitalising on a poor back pass to sneak in to beat goalkeeper Matthieu Dreyer on the second attempt.

Pastore made it 2-0 shortly after, a David Luiz interception played quickly to Ibrahimovic, whose sublime backheel found the Argentinian who toe-poked a looped finish past a despairing Dreyer.

No sooner had the game been restarted than Adrien Rabiot was the welcome recipient for PSG's third after following up on a Cavani shot that rebounded off Dreyer.

It was then time for Ibrahimovic to take centre

LIGUE 1 TABLE						
TEAM	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
PARIS SG (CHAMPIONS)	30	24	5	1	62	77
MONACO	30	13	13	4	10	52
NICE	30	13	8	9	10	47
LYON	29	13	6	10	14	45
RENNES	29	11	11	7	6	44