



The Bangladesh cricket team seem to be in good spirits after landing in Sydney. Aside from training they also seemed to be enjoying roaming around the city during their spare time. Mushfiqur Rahim (L) is seen taking a selfie in front of the Sydney Opera House, while Mahmudullah Riyad clicks one with his teammates during a random gathering. The entire squad has now reached Australia and will be spending the next ten days there preparing for the New Zealand series.

PHOTOS: COLLECTED

Number four for Ronaldo

AFP, Paris

Cristiano Ronaldo won his fourth Ballon d'Or on Monday to get one over his nemesis Lionel Messi in their long-running duel for the title of best footballer on the planet.

It was the perfect ending to another fantastic year for the Real Madrid star, who won the Champions League for the second time in three seasons and then led Portugal to their first major title at Euro 2016 -- albeit he went off early injured and in tears in the surprise win over France.

A video of him accepting the award earlier this year was broadcast by the organisers.

In it he said: "A great honour to receive my fourth golden ball. The emotion is like the first one. It's the dream come true again. I never thought in my mind to win the golden ball four times, so I am pleased and happy."

"I have the opportunity to thank all my teammates, the national team, Real Madrid, all the people and players who helped me to win this individual award. So as you can imagine I feel so proud and happy to receive this amazing and beautiful ball," he added.



As has been the case for almost a decade now, the 31-year-old's main rival was Messi -- but the Barcelona and Argentine maestro had to relinquish the crown after a less-than-stellar year for club and country by his lofty standards.

Never one to play down his achievements, Ronaldo was spotted midweek in training having dyed his hair gold in anticipation and several media outlets published a photo earlier on Monday appearing to confirm he was the winner, before France Football made the official announcement.

Ronaldo is now one Ballon d'Or behind last year's winner Messi.

"For me there is no debate. The Ballon will be for him," Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane said after his talisman's hat-trick saw off Atletico Madrid last month to underpin Real's domination in La Liga.

"He showed it last season and he shows it again and again. We expect a lot of him but he stands above everyone."

Despite such effusive praise Ronaldo, rested at the weekend ahead of the Club World Cup in Japan, has had some negative headlines in the past week -- not least pertaining to accusations of tax evasion.

Denying any wrongdoing, he responded by publishing his financial records on Thursday, showing last year he earned a bumper 227 million euros (\$240 million).

'I can hit a six with a toothpick'

AGENCIES

In an interview with Hindustan Times yesterday, West Indian batsman Chris Gayle showed a softer side to his party-hardened personality as he spoke about his daughter, but also seemed much more his usual self when addressing the recent proposal to limit bat sizes.

When asked why he had opted to sit out of this year's Big Bash League, Gayle responded: "This is my daughter Blush's first Christmas. I never got a chance to be home on Christmas or New Year. I want to make this one count. It is hard to leave her after spending some time. I will hug her and play around."

When his attention was drawn to the possible regulation of bat sizes, Gayle shrugged it off, saying he could hit sixes with a fork.

"It doesn't matter. Give me a toothpick, a knife or a fork. Size doesn't matter. Trust me it is all about the weapon. They can cut down my size, but they can't cut down my sixes."

Finally, he was asked who the 'king' of Jamaica was between Bolt and himself.

"I am the king, the universal boss. Bolt is a legend, he is the fastest man in the world. We are kings in our own rights," was the reply.

Sohail's future up in the air

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan's promising left handed batsman Haris Sohail could face a tragic end to his international career due to a failed knee operation in Dubai.

According to sources in the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Sohail has now been taken to London for more examinations by the specialists after it was revealed that his knee operation, which he underwent in Dubai in 2015 was not successful.

Sohail, 27, has not played any cricket since September last year and his last Pakistan appearance was in May, 2015.

"It is sad news that Sohail's knee operation last year was not successful. The PCB Chairman has now sent him to London for examinations but the picture is not very good about his future," a source revealed.

Despite not having played for a year, Sohail has also been given a central contract by the PCB in October.

Perfect weather for NCL

SPORTS REPORTER



National selector Habibul Bashar hopes that the National Cricket League (NCL), the country's first first-class cricket competition which is set to resume on December 20, takes place in 'proper conditions.'

After a two-month break, the NCL will resume without the presence of the national players, who are now in Sydney preparing for their tour of New Zealand.

According to Bashar the quality of the tournament or the amount of importance that it receives shouldn't fluctuate with regards to the absence or presence of the national cricketers. He reckons that this tournament, which is likely to be less attractive without the national stars, should receive the best possible treatment.

"Many have asked me why we didn't get any new players from the recently concluded Bangladesh Premier League. I think everyone should understand the fact that the BPL is a tournament that gives the players exposure."

"On the other hand, players will come out of the National Cricket League, because it's the base of our cricket," said Bashar.

The NCL had been postponed after three rounds due to the rains. They had to push the remainder of the league after the BPL.

The postponement of the NCL came at a time when calls of better first-class cricket were being made in Bangladesh.

Even after Bangladesh's historic Test victory against England, Bangladesh Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim advocated for better first-class competition.

"I must say that our first-class cricket's standard has improved a lot. Players are motivated now to do well because they know it's only the competition where they can prove themselves to draw the attention."

"I don't think we are in a position to hold back any tournament for availability of the national players. The absence of the national players virtually creates an opportunity for others to show their mettle," said Bashar.

"Wickets are much better now but we can further improve in this arena. I will be looking forward to seeing matches being played on sporting wickets and even on grassy wickets as the weather is now fantastic and the pitches have got enough rest," he continued.

Left-handed batsman Shahriar Nafees also said that lot has changed from arranging the tournament to the attitude of the players. "Every-

body is aware of the fact that the performance of domestic cricket is now highlighted. It may not get enough attention to print and electronic media in the country but in my personal experience I know people follow it very much," said Nafees.

"From experience I now know that one must not think about what is going on in the national team rather one must concentrate on the job he has in his hands. Fahim sir (Nazmul Abedin Fahim) basically injected this in my mentality and interestingly most of the players are very much committed to the National League because it's the only platform for the players to go ahead," he added.

Nafees's team Barisal Division, until the break, were leading Tier-1 with 23 points while Rajshahi Division, with 33, were on top of Tier-2.

Kohli's 'sweetest' victory

AFP, Mumbai



Virat Kohli hailed India's series win over England as his 'sweetest' as captain on Monday after the hosts humiliated the tourists by an innings and 36 runs in the fourth Test.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin tore through England's lacklustre lower order in just half-an-hour in Mumbai as India clinched the five-match series 3-0 with a game to spare and equalled their longest unbeaten run.

England started the final day at the Wankhede Stadium trailing by 49 runs with four wickets remaining, and needing something extraordinary to avoid defeat.

But Ashwin grabbed all four wickets to send England crashing to 195 all out and finish with figures of 6-55 in the innings, and 12 scalps in the match.

Skipper Virat Kohli was named man of the match for his brilliant double century in a win that confirms

India as Test cricket's top side and avenges their two consecutive series defeats to England.

"This series win is probably the sweetest we have had in the last 14-15 months," said Kohli.

India have now won five straight series under Kohli and are unbeaten in 17 Tests, which equals their best-ever run which was set back in 1987.

After the game, England captain Alastair Cook hinted that he may step down after the series, saying Joe Root was ready to be captain.

"What I said sticks true to the end of this series. Then I'll sit down with Strauss [England's Director of Cricket Andrew Strauss] in the new year, like we made that pact to always talk openly and honestly about stuff."

"I think Joe Root is ready to captain England. He's ready because he's a clue on guy, he's got the respect of everyone in the changing room."

"He hasn't got much captaincy experience but that doesn't mean he can't be a very good captain," Cook added, saying the magnitude of the

task should not be underestimated.

At one point, emotions then threatened to boil over as Ashwin approached and exchanged words with James Anderson as he came into bat. He walked with him down the crease, forcing Virat Kohli to intervene and play the role of a peacemaker.

Kohli, who is known for his feisty demeanour on the field, joked that "for the first time I was trying to calm down things down".

"I was laughing but Ashwin wasn't too impressed so he let him know. He didn't use any bad words, honestly," said the captain.

The fifth Test, which is now a dead rubber, starts in Chennai later this week.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First innings 400

INDIA: First innings 631

ENGLAND: Second innings 195 all out (Root 77, Bairstow 51, Cook 18, Stokes 18; Ashwin 6-55, Jadeja 2-63)

Result: India won by an innings and 36 runs and lead the 5-match series 3-0.

Player-of-the-match: V Kohli.



India captain Virat Kohli (C) celebrates with teammates after his side defeated England on the final day of the fourth Test to clinch the five-match series 3-0.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Former Olympic swimmer and Pool Deck ambassador Stephanie Rice (2nd from L) sits alongside Australian cricketers at the Gabba.

PHOTO: CA

Poolside cricket

SMH



Cricket Australia has splashed out to lure fans to the Gabba for the first day-night Test match at the ground.

Along with a pool and pool deck to be populated with cricket fans dressed in swimwear and chosen from among the crowd, CA is offering \$20 special "twilight session" tickets to the two "after-work" sessions this week.

The 32,000-litre pool opens on Thursday, when the First Test against Pakistan begins at 1pm.

It is part of a suite of changes to bring fans back to Test match cricket as authorities experiment with the day-night Test match formula.

"Basically we will run two sessions at the pool each day," a Cricket Australia spokesman said.

"People just wear the best beach attire or swimwear and they will just be chosen at random from among the crowd to come onto the

pool deck," he said.

"We will have spotters going around and those with their pool gear, or a Hawaiian shirt or something similar."

"They have the chance of getting onto the pool deck and into the pool."

The Gabba's official cricket pool ambassador, Olympian Stephanie Rice, will be at the deck on Thursday.

The deep end, at one metre, is the edge closest to the cricket ground, with a depth of 200mm at the opposite edge.

Cricket Australia will have lifeguards and other people at the pool watching for skylarking.

The \$20 twilight tickets

will allow fans to finish work at 4pm, with time to spare to arrive after the "lunch break" and see the final two sessions of play for \$20.

They could bring along their child, grandchild, nephew or niece for \$10 extra.

Those chosen to enjoy the pool deck are able to stay pool-side in a three-and-half-hour session.

"You don't have to be in the pool that long, that's just how long you can stay on the pool deck."

"It's a first for cricket. It's a real fan-engagement type of idea, to give them something else to come along and enjoy the cricket with," the CA spokesman said.

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