

What to WATCH	BANGLA TV Federation Cup Final Bashundhara v Rahmatganj Live from 7:00pm STAR SPORTS SELECT 1 India v Sri Lanka	First T20! Live from 7:30pm SONY SIX Australia v New Zealand Third Test, Day Three Live from 5:30am South Africa v England	Second Test, Day Three Live from 2:30pm SONY ESPN FA Cup Crystal Palace v Derby Live from 8:00pm Gillingham v West Ham	Live from 12:15am (Monday) TEN 1 FA Cup Middlesbrough v Tottenham Live from 8:00pm Genoa v Sassuolo Live from 11:00pm	Roma v Torino Live from 1:45am (Monday) TEN 2 FA Cup Chelsea v Nottingham Live from 8:00pm Liverpool v Everton	Live from 10:00pm Arsenal v Leeds Live from 2:00am (Monday)
DAY'S EVENT	Federation Cup Final Bashundhara v Rahmatganj	Time: 7:00pm Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka				



I think their (Rahmatganj) coach is the main person responsible for their success. They are a well-organised unit. They have two good players upfront and high-energetic players in midfield.

OSCAR BRUZON
BASHUNDHARA KINGS COACH



While the two pictures of Rahmatganj players jogging at the BFF turf and Bashundhara Kings players working out at a lavish gym is only symbolic, it is a fair reflection of the gulf of resources between the two sides, who incidentally square off in the final of the Federation Cup today.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

A true David v Goliath encounter?

Rahmatganj up against Bashundhara Kings in season's first final

SPORTS REPORTER



While both Bashundhara Kings and Rahmatganj MFS will be looking for their first Federation Cup title when they face off in the final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today, it is quite a surprise that the Kings, the beaten finalists of last season, are playing a team who were rank outsiders before the start of the tournament.

The Old Dhaka based outfit had never made it to the final of any top-tier competition in their 87-year history. They had just about avoided the drop from the Bangladesh Premier League by two points last season. But here they are, standing toe-to-toe against Bangladesh football's new powerhouse, who had won two titles last season and narrowly missed out on another.

But since this is only a two-week

tournament, with the demands of a long series of matches of a league not in the equation, surprises are quite commonplace in the Federation Cup. In fact this edition of the curtain-raising tournament has been full of surprising results right from the beginning, with all six former champions being eliminated from the race. The 21 matches up to the final has seen exciting matches, close competition and valuable contributions from foreign players, especially the players from the Central Asian region.

Bashundhara Kings has not had the best of starts to the campaign, moving into the last eight with a victory and a defeat. They had a tough time getting rid of Muktiyoddha Sangsad in a tiebreak win in the quarterfinals before a straightforward victory over Bangladesh Police in the semifinals.

Rahmatganj, on the other hand, had only squeezed into the quarterfinals with

two draws, but the Old Dhaka outfit caused the biggest upset by knocking out defending champions Abahani in a thrilling tie-breaker in the last-eight battle. And then they eliminated Mohammedan, the second-most successful team in this competition after Abahani, with a single-goal win in the semifinals.

The two teams, from a strategic point of view, are quite polar opposites of each other. Bashundhara Kings, blessed with a number of quality attacking options, favour all-out attack contrary to the pragmatism of Rahmatganj, who have thrived on compact defending and disciplined attacks.

As the two teams stand on the verge of history, Bashundhara Kings coach Oscar Bruzon feels that a defeat is not an option for his star-studded side, who boast eight national team players along with some quality foreign players.

"If we don't win the final, this [semifinal win] will be nothing. We are here to win the

final, not to play the final," the Spaniard told the media after his side's 3-0 win over Police on Thursday.

The veteran coach praised his opposition coach, calling him the main man behind their run to the final and warned his players against complacency.

"If we think Rahmatganj will be an easy game for us, we start to lose the game. The key point for us is to start strong and score in the first half," Bruzon added.

Rahmatganj coach Syed Golam Jilani showed respect to his opposition, but was confident in the ability of his charges.

"Since this is the final, the title is the only thought. Bashundhara Kings are a big team, but on the pitch there is no such thing as a big or small team. We will try our best to win it," Jilani said.

The match will kick off at 4:00pm, with Bangla TV telecasting live from the venue.

Bangladesh, Palestine in same group

Three African sides in six-team tournament

SPORTS REPORTER



Hosts Bangladesh were pit alongside defending champions Palestine in Group A as the draw for the six-nation Bangabandhu Gold Cup was held through a glitzy ceremony at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

Sri Lanka are the other team in Group A while Group B features three African nations -- Burundi, Mauritius and Seychelles.

The sixth edition of the tournament will be held at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka from January 15 to 25.

Palestine are the highest ranked (106) side in the tournament, followed by Burundi (151), Mauritius (172), Bangladesh (187), Seychelles (200) and Sri Lanka (205).

Bangladesh were beaten by eventual champions Palestine in the semifinals of the last edition held in October, 2018 while Bangladesh's best result in the tournament till date was a runners-up finish in the 2015 edition, where the hosts were beaten 3-2 by Malaysia under-22s in the final.

This is the first time that three countries outside the Asian continent will take part, even though the quality of the teams does not speak volumes on the matter. Although Palestine, the defending champions are a strong side, the other teams, including the two teams ranked higher than Bangladesh, have not had very good results in recent times.

Burundi have won only two out of the 14 matches they played in 2019, losing eight of those while drawing the other four. The island nation of Mauritius, who

also have won one of the six matches they played last year, losing the remaining five while Seychelles and have lost seven out of their eight matches and Sri Lanka lost nine out of their 11 matches, with their only victory, technically speaking, coming as a forfeit against Macau in the first round of World Cup qualifiers.

However, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) high-ups remain optimistic about successfully hosting the tournament, which was originally scheduled to be held last year.

"We are very proud to host this tournament. It was originally scheduled for December last year, but as per the Prime Minister's advice, we deferred it to January to make it part of Bangabandhu's birth centenary celebration," BFF president Kazi Salahuddin said in his speech at the draw ceremony.

The tournament's rights-holders K-Sports' CEO Fahad Karim said, "It is difficult to get international teams for a tournament due to their busy AFC and FIFA schedules. However, BFF has done a commendable job in getting these teams on board for the tournament, which will commence the celebrations of the birth centenary of the father of the nation.

Salahuddin thanked Finance Minister AHM Mostafa Kamal, State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Easel, chief coordinator of the national implementation committee for celebration of Bangabandhu's birth centenary Dr. Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, Dhaka North City Corporation mayor Atiqul Islam and other stakeholders for their presence at the programme and contribution towards hosting this tournament.



Organisers and dignitaries pose for a photograph during the draw ceremony of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SUMON



Australia batsman Marnus Labuschagne celebrates after reaching a double century on the second day of the third Test against New Zealand in Sydney yesterday. Australia posted a massive 454-run first innings total.

PHOTO: AFP

Labuschagne double lifts Aus to 454

AFP, Sydney



New Zealand made a secure start after a Marnus Labuschagne double century lifted Australia to a massive 454 first innings total in the third Test yesterday.

The rock-solid number three reached his highest Test score of 215 in Sydney with the Australians dismissed just before tea on the second day.

In reply, the Blackcaps grittily batted through the final session without losing a wicket, leaving skipper Tom Latham on 26 and Melbourne Test centurion Tom Blundell at 34 in their team's total of 63.

There were a couple of close calls -- notably a leg before wicket appeal off Nathan Lyon and a possible edge off Pat Cummins -- but the Kiwis showed plenty of fight after enduring five tough sessions in the field in sapping heat.

The day belonged to Labuschagne, who sweated on 199 for 20 minutes before he thick edged Colin de Grandhomme through the vacant slips to the ropes to bring up his double ton.

The milestone came off 363 balls with 19 fours and a six and eclipsed his previous Test record of 185 against Pakistan in Brisbane last November.

The Kiwis finally dispatched him after he was caught and bowled by leg-spinner Todd Astle.

Skipper Tim Paine supported Labuschagne to reach his double century before he was bowled between his bat and pad by de Grandhomme for 35.

Paine faced 92 balls and shared in a 79-run stand with Labuschagne to take Australia beyond 400.

SCORES IN BRIEF:
AUSTRALIA: first innings 454 all out (Labuschagne 215, Smith 63, Warner 45; Wagner 3-66, Grandhomme 3-78)
NEW ZEALAND: first innings 63 (Blundell 34 not out, Latham 26 not out; Labuschagne 0-1, Lyon 0-13)

Irfan hangs up his cleats

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA
from New Delhi

India all-rounder Irfan Pathan yesterday announced his retirement from all forms of cricket to effectively bring an end to his injury-plagued career.

The 35-year-old left arm seamer's retirement was more or less expected given the fact that he last played international cricket seven years ago while his most recent competitive match was in February 2019, when he featured in the Syed Mushtaq Ali trophy domestic competition for Jammu and Kashmir.

Irfan made his international debut against Australia at the Adelaide Oval in 2003. Since then, he played in 29 Tests, 120 ODIs and 24 T20Is.

Irfan, now a commentator, said: "I played cricket with all my heart and soul. I am really proud when I look back. It's been a great career." "I will keep contributing to Indian cricket but it is better if someone else takes my place in domestic cricket," said Irfan.

Broad, Anderson give Eng the edge

AFP, Cape Town



Stuart Broad and James Anderson led a relentless bowling performance as England gained what could prove a crucial advantage on the second day of the second Test against South Africa at Newlands yesterday.

South Africa were 215 for eight the close, still 54 runs behind England's first innings total of 269 on a dry pitch which is likely to get more difficult for batsmen later in the match.

More than half of South Africa's runs came in a 117-run fourth wicket partnership between Dean Elgar (88) and Rassie van der Dussen (68).

But Elgar and Van der Dussen were unable to dominate as England dried up the runs, with Elgar eventually falling to a lofted drive when he tried to lift the scoring rate.

Anderson took three for 34, while Broad and Sam Curran took



South Africa opener Dean Elgar scored 88 runs on the second day of the second Test against England in Cape Town yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

two wickets apiece.

Anderson took two wickets with the second new ball, bowling from the northern, Kelvin end.

A crack just outside the line of

off stump created uncertainty for right-handed batsmen.

Twelve of the 18 wickets in the match have fallen from that end.

Ben Stokes held four catches at

second slip, three of them athletic diving efforts.

Off-spinner Dom Bess played an important role, bowling accurately from the northern end while England captain Joe Root rotated his faster bowlers from the more helpful end.

Bess had spells of nine and 14 overs and finished the day with one for 62 off 27 overs.

Elgar and Van der Dussen rescued South Africa from a precarious 40 for three.

England earlier added only seven runs to their overnight total of 262 for nine before Anderson was caught at slip off Kagiso Rabada, leaving Ollie Pope unbeaten on 61.

SCORES IN BRIEF
ENGLAND: first innings 269 all out (Pope 61 not out, Stokes 47, Denly 38; Rabada 3-68, Pretorius 2-26)
SOUTH AFRICA: first innings 215 for 8 (Elgar 88, Dussen 68; Anderson 3-38, Broad 2-36, Curran 2-39)