

‘Only thinking of winning’

SPORTS REPORTER

The special edition of the Bangladesh Premier League, named the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) to commemorate the birth centenary of father of the nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, will culminate today with the final between Rajshahi Royals and Khulna Tigers. The two captains were all smiles on the eve of the title decider during a trophy unveiling ceremony at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

Mushfiqur Rahim’s face lit up once the curtain was removed to reveal the trophy. He uttered a ‘wow’ when he saw the trophy, one he is yet to get his hands on in his glittering career. In fact, Mushfiqur will be playing in his first BPL final tomorrow. Having never quite found his comfort zone with various franchises in the past, this time he led his side from the front. But Rajshahi Royals, and especially their captain Andre Russell, will be a huge roadblock in Mushfiqur’s quest for a maiden BPL trophy.

Having already won a BPL trophy while playing for Dhaka Dynamites in 2016, this edition has been Russell’s first stint as captain. He was not keen on focusing on any one particular player from Khulna, saying: “We’re not going to look at any individual players.”

Thwarted by an extraordinary innings from Cumilla Victorians’ Tamim Iqbal in last season’s final, it would have been playing on Russell’s mind that a significant performance from a top batsman could change the scenario in the all-important final.

“You never know whose day it will be tomorrow and you can’t stop them. They have a lot of match-winners, so we’re going to plan for the entire team. We’re going to make sure that we plan properly and come out and execute,” Russell told reporters yesterday.

But the West Indies all-rounder is one cool customer, as



Opener Liton Das, who has been in fine form in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League, will try to impress once more today to crack open the final for Rajshahi Royals against Khulna Tigers at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium. (Inset) Khulna skipper Mushfiqur Rahim and Rajshahi counterpart Andre Russell, meanwhile, will be hoping to eliminate each other from the picture when the fireworks light up the Mirpur sky.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

opening batsman Afif Hossain said in a recent interview. “He relaxes the atmosphere,” Afif had said.

Russell injects belief as well and perhaps that has contributed to the opening pair of Afif and Liton Das raising hell in the Powerplays all tournament. Despite not coming up with the goods in their last two fixtures, Russell expected the openers to come up trumps today.

“They struggled last game but I am not going to say they don’t help and I think they are going to give us the start that we really need tomorrow [Friday]. We know we didn’t win against those guys [Khulna] a couple of nights ago but I hope they [the openers] keep doing well, keep expressing themselves and with confidence,” he said knowing that the opponent’s openers are also in form, with Nazmul Hossain Shanto in particular finding his groove at the right moment.

Ismail, Shirin become BD’s fastest

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Ismail dethroned Hasan Mia as the country’s fastest man by grabbing a gold medal in 100m sprint at the 43rd National Athletics Championships at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

Bangladesh Navy’s Ismail, who lost his crown to Hasan Mia at the Summer Athletics Championships held in August last year, clocked 10:40 seconds (hand-time), 00:20 seconds worse than his national record timing at the 42nd National Athletics Championship in 2019.

Hasan of Bangladesh Army took 10:50 seconds to finish second, ahead of Abdur Rouf of Bangladesh Navy, who clocked in at 10:60 seconds.

Meanwhile, sprinter Shirin Akter continued her dominance as the Bangladesh Navy sprinter clocked 12:10 seconds to finish well ahead of silver medallist Sharifa Khatun of Bangladesh Army, who took 12:30 seconds while her teammate Sonia Akter took 12:60 seconds to win the bronze medal.

At the close of the first day, Bangladesh Navy top the table with six gold, four silver and four bronze medals while Bangladesh Army won three gold, five silver and four bronze medals to stay in second position.



Shirin Akter (L) and Mohammad Ismail.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

More than a trophy at stake

NABID YEASIN

Under-19 tournaments and series have always been seen as platforms for young players to showcase their talent and make a statement for being considered at the national level. Among all the youth competitions, the Under-19 World Cup remains the most anticipated platform for the young guns of all cricketing nations.

The stage is once again set, this time in South Africa, for youngsters of all 16 participating nations to prove that they have what it takes to get to the next level as the hosts will kick off the 2020 ICC Under-19 World Cup by taking on Afghanistan in Kimberley today.

High hopes have been pinned on the Bangladesh U19s as even skipper Akbar Ali did not rule out the possibility of playing in the final while speaking to media before leaving for South Africa last month.

However, for Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) selector Habibul Bashar, the primary expectation from the young Tigers is not to win the tournament. The former national skipper was of the opinion that while winning matches would be the cherry on top, the emergence of potential prospects would matter the most at this level.

“We are getting a lot of players from the Under-19 side. Players like Anamul



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Bangladesh players take a selfie following their victory against South Africa in the Under-19 World Cup opener in Chattogram on January 27, 2016.

Haque, Soumya [Sarkar] have all come to the national side from this level. So, I hope that we will get some players from here for the future. Look, I think to be the champions or not at this level is not very important. If we can be champions, it would be great. But if we can’t, then I would be more than happy if we can get four-five good future players, just as we have been getting players in the past,” Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday.

Bashar was right when he said that the Tigers got some of the more promising players in the recent past from the Under-19 level. It was under the leadership of Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who has now established himself as a regular face in the national team, that the Bangladesh U19s achieved their

best ever result in the tournament by finishing third in the 2016 edition at home. Players like Afif Hossain, Mohammad Naim -- who debuted for Bangladesh in T20Is in November 2019 -- are now igniting the stage in the ongoing Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League.

The showpiece youth event being treated as a proving ground is not exclusive to Bangladesh. Pakistan’s 16-year-old pace sensation Naseem Shah, who made his Test debut in Australia in November last year, was taken out of the U19 squad as he had already established himself by taking a fiver against Sri Lanka the following month, so that a new face can stake a claim.

Hafeez & Malik recalled for T20Is

AFP, Karachi



Pakistan recalled veterans Mohammad Hafeez and Shoaib Malik, but surprisingly dropped pacemen Mohammad Amir and Wahab Riaz from the 15-man squad for the three-match Twenty20 series against Bangladesh starting next week.

The squad announced by chief selector and head coach Misbah-ul-Haq is a total revamp to the team which lost 3-0 to Sri Lanka in October last year, and then 2-0 to Australia in November.

It comes as Pakistan hopes to hang on to its world number one rankings in the shorter format as well as prepare for the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia in nine months.

Eight players who were part of the squad in the Australia Twenty20 series have been dropped.

The three matches are scheduled in Lahore on January 24, 25 and 27. Bangladesh will also play a one-day international and two Tests on two separate visits to Pakistan.

Squad: Babar Azam (C), Ahsan Ali, Amad Butt, Haris Rauf, Ifukhar Ahmed, Imad Wasim, Khusdil Shah, Mohammad Hafeez, Mohammad Hasnain, Mohammad Rizwan, Musa Khan, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shoaib Malik, Usman Qadir.

Mushy declines to tour Pakistan

SPORTS REPORTER

Mushfiqur Rahim has declined to visit Pakistan for the forthcoming series, which will start with three Twenty20 Internationals later this month.

“Mushfiqur rang me today to inform that he will not go to Pakistan. We are now waiting his formal letter. Once he does that, we will leave him out of the series,” chief selector Minhajul Abedin told AFP.

Minhajul also said they are likely to announce the squad for the series in a day or two.

“Mushfiqur expressed his desire during initial discussions between the board [Bangladesh Cricket Board] and the players, so it’s not a new development. Let’s wait for the team announcement to clear about everything,” BCB CEO Nizamuddin told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mushfiqur’s absence could be a blow for Bangladesh who are already without suspended all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan.

End of the Dhoni era?

Former captain excluded from central contract

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi



Former captain and wicketkeeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni was excluded on Thursday from the Board of Control for Cricket in India’s (BCCI) list of centrally-contracted players, triggering fresh doubts on his future.

Dhoni, who who has not played since the World Cup semifinal loss to New Zealand last year, does not figure in any of the four categories of players announced by the BCCI in a statement for the central contracts for October 2019 to September 2020. Dhoni was in the A category, which fetches a player Rs 5 crore, until last year.

Incumbent Test team skipper Virat Kohli, his deputy Rohit Sharma and top paceman Jasprit Bumrah were retained in the highest

A+ bracket of Rs 7 crore. Among others, batsman K L Rahul has been promoted from B grade to A.

Dhoni’s contract not being renewed does not come as a surprise because he has not played a competitive game for India since that World Cup semifinal on July 9 in England. He has been on a sabbatical and has refused to divulge his future plans.

India’s head coach Ravi Shastri had recently said that Dhoni may soon end his ODI career but could be in contention for a spot in the T20 World Cup squad provided he does well in the IPL.

The veteran wicketkeeper has played 90 Tests, 350 ODIs and 98 T20 Internationals for India, aggregating over 17,000 runs and effecting a staggering 829 dismissals behind the stumps.



South Africa pacer Kagiso Rabada (L) celebrates the dismissal of England’s Dom Sibley on the first day of the third Test in Port Elizabeth yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Stokes, Pope steer Eng to 224 for 4

AFP, Port Elizabeth



World cricketer of the year Ben Stokes survived three reviews by South Africa as he and Ollie Pope regained the initiative for England on the first day of the third Test at St George’s Park on Thursday.

England were 224 for four at the end of an attritional day during which South Africa had briefly claimed the advantage. England were 148 for four when Stokes and Pope came together, in danger of failing to capitalise on batting first on a placid pitch on a hot, sunny day.

But the pair added 76 without being parted and were able to lift a slow scoring rate after England were able to score only 117 for two in 58 overs before tea. Stokes was unbeaten on 38 at the close while Pope made 39 not out.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First innings 224 for 4 (Crawley 44, Sibley 36, Denly 25, Root 27, Stokes 38 not out, Pope 39 not out; Rabada 2-48)