

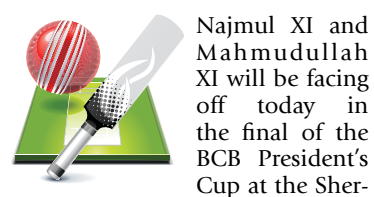


Threatening dark clouds were hovering over the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Everybody will hope that rain will not play spoilsport in today's BCB President's Cup final. The good news however is that there is a reserve day.

PHOTO: STAR

Can rusty batsmen make a mark in the final?

SPORTS REPORTER



Najmul XI and Mahmudullah XI will be facing off today in the final of the BCB President's Cup at the Sher-

e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. The fixture was originally scheduled for Friday but the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had to reschedule it to today taking into consideration the weather forecast for the past 72 hours.

The intention to stage the three-team fifty-over tournament was to help cricketers return to the groove after a gap of over seven months due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The BCB announced some monetary incentives to help increase the competitiveness of the intra-squad tournament. The champion team will receive Tk 15 lac while the runner-up team will get Tk 7.5 lac. Apart from that, the man-of-the-series will get Tk 2 lac and the best batsman, bowler and fielder of the series are to receive Tk 1 lac each. Unfortunately the competitiveness has yet not been reflected on the field. While it was expected of the players coming from a long hiatus to be a bit rusty, they seemed to have carried the



It feels good to feel the final and it's great that we are playing a tournament as cricket was stopped during the Covid period and we are looking forward to playing good cricket in the final. Although it's a preparatory tournament, all the players gave their best shot with the competitiveness and the urge was there to do well all the time. The way BCB created the bio-bubble and the players also maintained that with great responsibility [was commendable] and we gained good experience.

MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD



Obviously it feels good to reach the final and we all have enjoyed our game throughout the tournament. The most important thing was to return to cricket and be able to play the tournament and share the dressing room after long time. Mushfiqur bhai has been in great touch along with Towhid Hridoy, Irfan Shukkur also chipped in. If I talk about the bowling department obviously Taskin bhai, Al Amin bhai, Nayem and Nasum bhai all bowled well and there was a healthy competition among them.

NAJMUL HOSSAIN SHANTO

rust till the final.

Batsmen have disappointed the most. The only hundred of the tournament came from Najmul XI's Mushfiqur Rahim, courtesy of which Najmul XI posted the tournament-high 264 for 8 against Mahmudullah XI and won the game by a huge margin of 131 runs in the group stage. Najmul XI went on to win their second group game against Mahmudullah XI by

four wickets. Mushfiqur remained outstanding among the batsmen. The 33-year-old scored two fifties and a hundred in four games to see himself top on the highest run-getters' list. Mushfiqur however, suffered a shoulder injury in the previous game but still is expected to play today.

Young Afif Hossain, Towhid Hridoy and Irfan Shukkur have also shown promise with the bat

in the middle order while players like Najmul Hossain Shanto and Soumya Sarkar in the top order have failed to make a mark. Najmul XI bowlers however did a good job as the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Al Amin Hossain, Abu Jayed, Nasum Ahmed and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain impressed throughout the tournament.

Mahmudullah XI, on the other hand, had to wait for the result between Tamim XI and Najmul XI in the last group game as a win for Tamim XI would have ended Mahmudullah XI's hopes of playing in the final. Batting failures were evident in Mahmudullah XI too. Players like Liton Das, Mohammad Naim Sheikh and Mominul Haque failed to score big at the top order.

Imrul Kayes, except for his one forty-odd innings in the group stage, has been inconsistent otherwise. It was skipper Mahmudullah and wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan who played a few vital knocks for the side on their way to the final.

In terms of bowling, pacer Rubel Hossain has been in superb form and is among the top wicket-takers with ten scalps. Another pacer Ebadot Hossain and young left-arm spinner Rakibul Hasan also impressed.

This is my toughest season, says Klopp

AFP, London



Jürgen Klopp fears this season will be the toughest of his career as Liverpool navigate the unique challenges of defending the Premier League title in the coronavirus age. Klopp's side have already seen Sadio Mane and Thiago Alcantara briefly sidelined by Covid-19 this season, while a host of injuries have also taken their toll.

The delayed start to this season, a result of the previous campaign's three-month hiatus because of the pandemic, means teams are being stretched to breaking point by the gruelling schedule.

Liverpool boss Klopp has lost Virgil van Dijk to a knee injury that will sideline him for most of the season, with Joel Matip, Naby Keita and Thiago missing the midweek Champions League win over Ajax because of knocks.

Jordan Henderson was limited to just 45 minutes in that game on medical advice, while Klopp substituted Mohamed Salah, Roberto Firmino and Mane in the second half against Ajax in order to protect their fitness.

"It will become more challenging. It is

already," Klopp said when asked if this was the most testing season he had faced.

"Life is more challenging than what I ever experienced before and with football it is no different.

"We need help from everybody just to bring the boys through it. We've had a lot of discussions with that [medical] department."

Concerned that his stars will be burned out by the intense fixture list, Klopp called for commonsense from the schedule makers.



"I have no problem that we have to play again and I will not moan about anything but, with this schedule thing, we have to make sure that the teams who play midweek don't play 12.30 on Saturday," he said.

"If you play Tuesday in the Champions League, for example, then 12.30 Saturday is fine. If you play Wednesday then Saturday 12.30 is 'Oh my God!'

"We need to have the time to rest. I know people don't want to hear it and they go back to all the other things they say about professional football players.

"But it's like Formula One. Everyone can drive a car but it is difficult to drive at 300mph in a pretty close area and then you hope that your brakes work."



Fourteen members of the Bangladesh national football team took part in the opening day's training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday under the guidance of local coaches, with an eye on next month's FIFA friendlies against Nepal. The booters went through Cooper test and other drills as fitness was on the forefront of the agenda. The team physio later remarked that the fitness levels of the players were satisfactory.

PHOTO: BFF

Brazil recall Becker, Jesus

AFP, Rio de Janeiro



Liverpool goalkeeper Alisson Becker and Manchester City forward Gabriel Jesus were recalled by Brazil coach Tite on Friday as he named his squad for next month's World Cup qualifiers against Venezuela and Uruguay.

Real Madrid pair Vinicius Junior and Eder Militao, and Juventus midfielder Arthur have also been brought back into the squad alongside stars Neymar, Coutinho, Casemiro and Thiago Silva.

Alisson and Jesus were both called up for the victories over Bolivia (5-0) and Peru (4-2) earlier this month but had to pull out after picking up injuries with their clubs.

Vinicius, 20, was last selected in September 2019 while Militao, 22, had not been part of a squad since last November.

"If a normal car has five gears, he has six or seven," Tite said of Vinicius, who scored seconds after coming on as a substitute for Real in their shock 3-2 home defeat to Shakhtar Donetsk in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Coming into this El Clasico, Real Madrid were under tremendous pressure after having lost against Cadiz in La Liga and Shakhtar Donetsk in the Champions League. But Zinedine Zidane's men turned it around at Camp Nou last night with a 3-1 win over archrivals Barcelona. Sergio Ramos drilled the ball home from the spot to restore the visitors' lead in the 63rd minute after Federico Valverde's early strike was cancelled out by Ansu Fati. Luka Modric then put the game to bed with a third goal in the 90th minute.

PHOTO: REUTERS



KKR consolidate fourth spot

STAR SPORT DESK

Varun Chakravarthy wreaked havoc, finishing with figures of five for 20 as Kolkata Knight Riders crushed Delhi Capitals by 59 runs in their Indian Premier League fixture in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

Chasing a steep target of 195, Delhi were restricted to 135 for nine in 20 overs, thanks to superb bowling effort from Chakravarthy.

Pat Cummins picked up three wickets as Delhi Capitals, in second position on the table with 14 points from 11 matches, crumbled.

The win consolidated Kolkata's fourth spot on the table with 12 points from 11 matches.



West Ham United striker Michail Antonio (C) scored a spectacular bicycle kick to give his side the lead in the 18th minute of their Premier League fixture against Manchester City yesterday. Phil Foden, though, came off the bench and equalised six minutes into the second half as Manchester City snatched a point against the Hammers.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Foden rescues a point for City

AFP, London



Phil Foden came off the bench to spare spluttering Manchester City's blushes as the England midfielder rescued a 1-1 draw against West Ham on Saturday. Pep Guardiola's side fell behind to Michail Antonio's superb overhead kick in the first half at the London Stadium.

Foden came on at half-time and produced an instant equaliser, but City couldn't deliver the knockout blow and have now won just one of their last four Premier League games.

Injury-hit City, without Fernandinho, Aymeric Laporte, Nathan Ake and Gabriel Jesus, rarely reached peak form in the latest of a growing list of inconsistent displays.

While Arsenal and Porto were beaten in their previous two matches, City still don't seem to have completely recovered from their 5-2 thrashing by Leicester in September.

They are already five points behind leaders Everton, who play Southampton on Sunday, and look more vulnerable than at any time since Guardiola's first season in charge.

QUIZ CONTEST

The Daily Star | STAR CINEMA

10 WINNERS EVERYDAY! 2 PREMIUM TICKETS FOR EACH WINNER

Email your answer to starquiz@outlook.com by 4.00 pm today with your name, DOB, mobile number and address. The winners of the quiz will be announced tomorrow in this newspaper and through email.

Winners are requested to follow the instructions given in email

QUIZ - 03
Where is the 4th branch of STAR Cineplex opening soon?

WINNERS LIST OF QUIZ - 02

1. Asif Shahriyar, Ramna
2. Pinton Saha, Mohakhali
3. Md. Nazmul Islam, University of Dhaka
4. Sadia Tut Taiyeba, Panthapath
5. Md. Arman, Bogura
6. Abdur Rafi Islam Ron, Mirpur 10
7. Mehrin Karim, Greenroad
8. Sabiha Kabir Reeti, Madaripur
9. Ashbab Intisar Khan, Uttara
10. Mokhtashif Hoq, Bashabo