

Liton, Fizz power Ctg

SPORTS REPORTER

Gazi Group Chattogram continued their clinical form to register a fourth consecutive victory in the Bangabandhu T20 Cup, but it came off the very last ball of the game against Minister Rajshahi in the night game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The final over saw Rajshahi require 14 runs to reach the 178-run target. However, Mustafizur Rahman held his nerve despite being hit for a four and a six by Rony Talukdar.

The left-arm pacer was the pick of the bowlers, scalping three wickets for Chattogram.

Rajshahi eventually reached 175 for seven after opener Anisul Islam laid the foundation with a brisk 44-ball 58.

Earlier, Chattogram's openers shone again as Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar provided a flying start. The pair added 62 runs for the opening wicket before Soumya departed for 34 runs off 25 balls. He struck two sixes and four boundaries.

Liton continued with Mosaddek and the pair added 72 runs for the fourth wicket. Mosaddek was dismissed after a quick-fire 28-ball 42 that featured a couple of sixes and fours. Liton remained unbeaten on 78 off just 53 balls as they posted the highest total of the tournament, 176 for five.

Pacer Mukidul Islam was the best bowler for Rajshahi, picking up three wickets for thirty runs from his four overs.

Scores in brief:
Chattogram: 176 for 5 in 20 overs (Liton 78, Mosaddek 42; Mukidul 3-30)

Rajshahi: 175 for 7 in 20 overs (Anisul 58; Mustafizur 3-37)

Result: Chattogram won by one run.



Mushfiqur Rahim and Yasir Ali wear broad smiles after anchoring a small run chase against Barisal to register Dhaka's first win of the Bangabandhu T20 Cup in Mirpur yesterday. (Inset) Chattogram opener Liton Das pulls one on way to an unbeaten 53-ball 78 against Rajshahi in the day's second match, the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Barishal's batting failure hands Dhaka first win

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Yesterday's first Bangabandhu T20 Cup saw yet another low-scoring encounter as Beximco Dhaka registered their first win by beating Fortune Barishal by seven wickets in Mirpur.

Chasing a small target of 109 runs, Dhaka took the game to the 19th over when Yasir Ali and skipper Mushfiqur Rahim's unbeaten 55-run fifth-wicket stand sealed the win.

Both batsmen opted for a steady approach after the team lost three wickets for 54. Yasir was the more enterprising of the two and remained unbeaten on 44 off 30 balls, hitting his second six of the innings to score the winning runs.

However, after a thrilling opening day, the standard of cricket has continued to dip, especially in the batting department. After being asked to bat first, Barishal's batsmen never seemed up to the task as they

limped to 108 for eight. It speaks to the batting failures that Minister Rajshahi's 169 for nine on the opening day against Dhaka -- on the same pitch as the one used for this match -- remains the highest score in the tournament.

Barishal shuffled their order, bringing in Saif Hasan to open the

from the bowler.

Skipper Tamim Iqbal, who has been in relatively good form, got an early life when he was dropped at extra cover by Muktar Ali and had to adjust his approach as he kept losing partners at the other end.

There has been talk about the Mirpur wicket getting slower but yesterday, it was the Barishal batsmen who had themselves to blame for their inability to rotate the strike.

Robiul ended up with four wickets but not with the best of deliveries as the Barishal batters put themselves under pressure after playing a lot of dot balls. Off-spinner, Nayeem Hasan, gave away just eight runs from his four overs and picked up a wicket.

With the score on 65 in the 12th over, Tamim felt the pressure and was the fifth to depart, handing a simple catch at deep midwicket going for a pull off a short-pitched Robiul delivery after scoring a run-a-ball 31. It was Towhid Hridoy's 33 in the middle that helped Barishal go past the hundred mark in the end.

SCORES IN BRIEF

FORTUNE BARISHAL: 108 for 8 in 20 overs (Towhid 33, Tamim 31; Robiul 4-20)
BEXIMCO DHAKA: 109 for 3 in 18.5 overs (Yasir 44 not out, Mushfiqur 23 not out; Mehedi 1-13)
Result: Dhaka won by seven wickets.

innings in place of Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who failed in the first three games, but the result was the same.

Saif was the first to be dismissed when the right-hander went for a sweep to a rather full delivery from off-spinner Robiul Islam and was adjudged leg-before after a review

Room for optimism ahead of Qatar tie

SPORTS REPORTER



The national team footballers were worried ahead of their international friendlies against Nepal last month, especially as it would be their return to action after an eight-month layoff due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, having won one and drawn one against Nepal and then getting in two more warm-up matches in Doha, they are physically and mentally more assured ahead of tomorrow's World Cup qualifier against hosts Qatar tomorrow.

Ahead of the Nepal friendlies, the players were worried about fitness, which did not appear to be in great shape after seven months without group training due to the suspension of all sports activities in mid-March.

To their credit, the players and coaching staff did not sit idly by. They sweated it out at home for months through core training programmes prescribed by Jamie Day but

early September and their national team has played three international friendlies against Ghana, Costa Rica and South Korea.

"The fitness levels of the players have improved massively," assistant coach Stuart Watkiss told The Daily Star from Qatar. "You only get truly match-fit by playing competitive matches, but unfortunately we have still not played nearly enough [to reach the fitness levels we need to]," Watkiss said. "Qatar's players have played many matches, so they have an advantage in terms of fitness."

Qatar not only have the edge in fitness, the defending Asian Cup champions are 59th in the FIFA Rankings, 125 places ahead of Bangladesh (184).

Given the circumstances, Bangladesh will be expected to defend well and counterattack on the fast surface at the Al Khalifa Stadium.

"Of course we focused on defending in training because we are playing against a really strong team. It will be important to pass the ball well and try to get some control of the game. We know this will be a difficult game but we will all do our



Assistant coach Stuart Watkiss briefs the Bangladesh players during a training session in Doha yesterday ahead of Friday's World Cup qualifier against Qatar.

with only 20 days of training before the first match against Nepal, there were still some concerns. Ultimately, they overcame Nepal with a 2-0 win in the first game and a goalless draw in the second.

The men in red and green also faced stiff away challenges in Doha during their practice matches against amateur side Qatar Army and second division side Lusail Sports Club, losing the matches 3-2 and 1-0 respectively.

The biggest challenge for Bangladesh will be contending with their Qatari counterparts' superior strength and physical condition. Qatar's domestic competition began in

very best," said head coach Day, who left for Qatar yesterday after testing negative for Covid-19.

In the two practice matches in Qatar, the players were punished for familiar mistakes, especially when it came to decision-making. They also did not appear to have the kind of rhythm that played a key role in good performances against India and Qatar last year.

The positive is that they are fully-focused on Qatar, having banished any worries of the effects of a lengthy layoff, and are further buoyed because they have nothing to lose against the Asian champions.

Soaring Malan's small error

REUTERS, Undated

England's Dawid Malan has notched up the highest-ever rating for a batsman in the men's Twenty20 International rankings after topping the scoring charts against South Africa, the International Cricket Council said on Wednesday.

The 33-year-old has reached 915 points, the first player to cross the 900-point mark in the format. Australia's Aaron Finch posted exactly 900 points in July 2018.

Malan's terrific run with the bat saw him top the series aggregate with 173 runs as England completed a 3-0 series sweep against South Africa.

His match-winning unbeaten 99 in the final match on Tuesday helped England leapfrog Australia to take the top spot in the men's T20I team rankings.

Malan holds a 44-point advantage in the rankings over Pakistan's Babar Azam, whom he overtook in September.

Yet, he missed out on the chance to score two hundreds in T20Is. The simple reason -- he forgot to do the basic math.

Dawid Malan started Tuesday's innings a train, but ended it quite calmly. The game was put beyond South Africa as Malan crashed a six and a four to get the scores level. However, he chose to finish the match with a single and thus, he remained stranded on 99.

In the post-match presentation, Malan acknowledged that he did not know about the hundred. "I honestly should've known about the hundred, I did, but I went for the single either way. Maybe I should go back to math class," Malan said.



CWI delegates satisfied by measures

SPORTS REPORTER

Cricket West Indies (CWI) delegates, visiting ahead of a scheduled series against West Indies in January that will feature three Tests, three ODIs and two T20Is, were satisfied by the Covid-19 management plan presented by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

The delegation, including Director of CWI Akshai Mansingh and head of security Paul Slowe, visited various facilities including stadiums, hotels, and hospitals in Dhaka and Chittagong.

"I have to say that the protocols that were described to us by the BCB were very well thought-out. The fact that there have been three competitions prior to our coming and one going on now obviously; they are well-practiced. We are very happy with what we saw in Dhaka and Chattogram," Mansingh told media at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

The date for the team's arrival, however, is yet to be finalised. According to Mansingh, it will depend on quarantine protocols.

"Certainly for the first three days, we suggest in-room quarantine. After the third day, we do a second test. After that is negative, we would like to do some practicing within our squad, but not exposing ourselves to anybody else until seven days are passed. We will have intra-squad practice and activities. After day 7, the recommendation is that we should have net sessions with Bangladeshi players," he added.



Curtis Jones was ecstatic after scoring the only goal of the game against Ajax at Anfield on Tuesday as Liverpool moved into the last 16 of the Champions League. Elsewhere, Shakhtar Donetsk beat Real Madrid 2-0 at home -- their second win over Zinedine Zidane's men in two matches -- as Group B blew wide open going into the last matchday of the group stages.

PHOTO: REUTERS/TWITTER

Kohli's record as India avoid clean sweep

REUTERS, Canberra



India all-rounder Hardik Pandya scored his highest one-day international score of 92 to set up a thrilling 13-run win for his team against Australia in the third match at the Manuka Oval on Wednesday and avoid a clean sweep in the series.

Pandya's unbeaten knock in 76 deliveries featured seven fours and one six and he added 150 in an entertaining unbroken stand for the sixth-wicket with Ravindra Jadeja to help India post 302 for five.

The hosts seemed cruising in their chase but India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah dismissed Glenn Maxwell with Australia 35 runs away from a win to turn the game in his team's favour.

Bumrah returned in the last over to take the final Australian wicket to bundle them out for 289 with three deliveries remaining. Maxwell fell for 59 off 38 balls



and one of his four sixes landed on the top of the roof of the stadium in Australia's capital city.

India captain Virat Kohli was out for 63 to fast bowler Josh Hazlewood for the third time in the series. During his knock, Kohli became the fastest batsmen to reach 12,000 runs in the 50-over format,

reaching the milestone in his 242nd innings. The 32-year-old Kohli broke the record of India batting great and all-time leading run-scorer Sachin Tendulkar, who reached the milestone in 300 innings.

The two sides will next play three Twenty20 matches, starting with the first on Friday at the same venue.



Australian Open delayed to Feb 8

AFP, Melbourne

The Australian Open tennis Grand Slam will start three weeks late on February 8, reports said on Wednesday, with players cleared to train during quarantine following lengthy negotiations with state authorities.

According to Australian media, the start date was announced to players by tournament director Craig Tiley. If confirmed, it will join the three other major tournaments in being disrupted by the coronavirus.

Tennis Australia has been in protracted talks with Victoria state authorities in Melbourne, which only emerged from a months-long lockdown in October following a second wave of cases.

"It's taken a while, but the great news is it looks like we are going to be able to hold the AO (Australian Open) on 8 February," Tiley was quoted as telling players in a leaked letter.

"Players will have to quarantine for two weeks from 15 January, but the Victorian government has agreed to special conditions for AO participants -- agreeing that they need to be able to prepare for a Grand Slam."

Under the plan, players who test negative for the virus will be able to train while in isolation, Tiley wrote. Tennis Australia did not confirm the reports on Wednesday, and said plans were still awaiting approval from the state government.

A February 8 start date would allow for a week of warm-up tournaments after quarantine.