



Mashrafe joins Khulna

SPORTS REPORTER

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will be back in action with the ongoing Bangabandhu T20 Cup as the veteran pacer was picked up by Gemcon Khulna following a lottery at the BCB office yesterday.

The former Bangladesh captain, who has recently recovered from a hamstring injury, has been subject of interest by three to four teams in the tournament, forcing the organisers to call for a lottery.

Mashrafe will join national team colleagues Mahmudullah Riyad and Shakib Al Hasan at the Khulna dressing room.

The 37-year-old has been out of action since March this year following the ODI series against Zimbabwe; a series where he stepped down as the captain of Bangladesh ODI team.

The pacer underwent fitness and Covid-19 tests and passed both before being picked in the lottery.



RIYAD TURNS IT AROUND AGAINST RAJSHAHI

Although it was low-scoring, Gemcon Khulna's five-wicket win over Minister Rajshahi was a thrilling affair. Returning spearhead Mohammad Saifuddin's costly no ball in the 19th over of the chase was punished by Khulna captain Mahmudullah Riyad with fours both off the ball and free hit. Riyad made 31 off 19 and the penultimate over yielded 15 runs. With five needed off the last over, Ariful cut through the tension with a boundary off the second ball.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Dhaka ride on Mushy to win third on the trot

SPORTS REPORTER



Skipper Mushfiqur Rahim once more took on the responsibility to get Beximco Dhaka out of trouble after another top-order failure and set up their third consecutive win of the Bangabandhu T20 Cup yesterday.

Dhaka managed to gun down high-flying Gazi Group Chattogram, handing them their first defeat, by seven runs, in the days' first game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Mushfiqur made full use of his experience after Dhaka's early stutter as Bangladesh's star wicketkeeper-batsman guided Dhaka to a total of 145 for five, scoring an unbeaten 50-ball 73, which featured seven fours and three sixes.

For the first time in the tournament, Chattogram felt pressure with the bat and could not quite cope with the climbing rate and a disciplined bowling unit, ending with 138 for nine in 20 overs.

But earlier, it was yet another disappointing performance from Dhaka's top-order batsmen as the team management opted for their fifth different opening pair in six games in the form of Naim Sheikh and Sabbir Rahman yesterday.

But as has been the case in the tournament till date, no combination seems sufficient as both openers departed inside the power play. Dhaka at one stage were struggling on 23 for three as Mushfiqur was joined by another form player in Yasir Ali to start the rebuilding job.

The best part of Mushfiqur's knock was the amount of pressure the experienced campaigner adsorbed as he expertly went

about the task of not just stabilising the innings but also looking for runs and posting a fighting total.

And the 33-year-old proved once again why he is called "Mr Dependable", shouldering the responsibility and leading from the front as he added 86 runs for the fourth wicket with Yasir 12 overs. Yasir however departed for 34, which only made Mushfiqur's continued presence more important. He realised this and stayed till the end to ensure that his bowlers had a substantial total to defend.

His innings was a blend of aggression



and stability, featuring improvised lap shots along with his favourite slog-sweeps.

He now has 211 runs in six games at an average of 52.75, and considering the burden he has to take on every time he goes to the crease, a strike rate of 115.3 is also impressive. He also finished the day as the second-highest run-getter behind Liton Das with 247 runs until yesterday's second game, but the Dhaka team management would definitely want to correct things at the top and move away from relying heavily on Mushfiqur in every game.

Chelsea move top as fans return

REUTERS

Chelsea, Manchester City and Manchester United enjoyed comfortable wins in the Premier League on Saturday as fans returned to stadiums after an eight-month absence.

Chelsea beat Leeds United 3-1 in front of 2,000 spectators at Stamford Bridge while Manchester United fought back from a goal down to win 3-1 at West Ham United -- their fifth straight comeback victory on the road -- in front of the same size crowd.

Clubs in less restricted areas of England were allowed to welcome back 2,000 fans but in higher risk places games carried on behind closed doors with Manchester City beating Fulham 2-0 and Everton held to a 1-1 draw at Burnley.

Chelsea finished the day at the top of the league table for the first time since September 2018, although Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool can overhaul Lampard's side again later on Sunday.

Chelsea manager Frank Lampard said there is nothing wrong with supporters dreaming they can win the Premier League title but stressed his players cannot afford to get complacent.

Asked if Chelsea fans are right to consider their title contenders, Lampard told reporters: "There's certainly nothing wrong with the

fans thinking that. It's great to have them back, their input was huge, the noise huge. You can see how excited they are at the end that we are top of the league," he said.

"My job and our job is to know that it's a long season and the next question is how consistent can we be with this form, how much we can improve, because I believe there is a lot more we can do and there will be a lot of challenges ahead."

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has however claimed Chelsea are favourites to lift the title this

season because of the strength and depth of the squad that coach Frank Lampard has at his disposal.

"If I watch football games at the moment then Chelsea, for me, look like favourites," Klopp told reporters.

"They have the biggest squad, great players playing well together after a rusty start - and they are full on. They have unbelievable opportunities to change in games and make changes from one game to the other - so that is it."

While Liverpool were six points

clear at the top this stage last season, this term they have had to cope with a congested fixture list and several injury setbacks.

Klopp said this season's title race would be more open than in previous campaigns but stressed Liverpool must remain focused only on their own performances.

"I don't feel we are chasing anyone at the moment - or that anyone is chasing us," the German coach said. "Pressure is there for us, but it's about how much you think about that pressure, to be honest."



Chelsea's Kurt Zouma celebrates scoring their second goal against Leeds United with Olivier Giroud in front of their supporters at Stamford Bridge on Saturday.



PHOTO: REUTERS



DEBUT DOUBLE FOR BASHUNDHARA KINGS

After scooping the Bangladesh Premier League in their debut season in top-flight men's football, Bashundhara Kings have now won the title of women's league on debut. The Sabina Khatun-led side confirmed their title with a game in hand following a 13-1 win over Jamalpur Kacharipara Ekadash at the Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. Sabina led the onslaught with five goals while five other players got their names on the scoresheet as the star-studded side notched their 11th win in 11 matches.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'It's the legendary 100 mark'

AGENCIES

Kylian Mbappe netted his 100th Paris Saint-Germain goal as PSG claimed a 3-1 win over Montpellier on Saturday night and moved four points clear at the Ligue 1 summit.

"It's the legendary 100 mark. I've been thinking about it for two or three games and maybe that's why I hadn't scored. Maybe I thought about it too much," the 21-year-old told PSG TV.



"This one wasn't the hardest. It's a liberation, especially at a big club like this and all the great players who have been here. When I signed here, I never thought I'd score 100 goals so quickly. It was part of the distant objectives," he added.

PSG coach Thomas Tuchel heaped praise on the 21-year-old, saying, "The boy is always decisive. Every striker needs to score. And I hope it will continue."

Zizou reflects on 'tough few days'

AGENCIES, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane praised his side's ability to withstand pressure after they ended a troubling week of results by beating Sevilla 1-0 away from home on Saturday in La Liga.

An own goal by Sevilla keeper Bono handed Madrid victory and the perfect response to losing against Alaves last weekend and Wednesday's defeat to Shakhtar Donetsk, which endangered their chances of qualifying from their Champions League group.

"We've earned three very important points but the most important thing is the performance," Zidane said after a first league win in four games.

Zidane, who led Real to the Spanish title last season, had to swallow speculation during the week that president Florentino Perez was looking to sack him after their poor start to the campaign.

Real need to beat Borussia Moenchengladbach on Wednesday to

guarantee their place in the Champions League knockout stage and then face La Liga frontrunners Atletico Madrid.



"The last few days have been very tough but this team has a lot of character and loves challenges. Today's victory is very important for what is coming next," he added. "We know that whenever we don't play well there will be criticism but we have to focus on the positives and keep trying to be consistent. But we can't worry about what people say about us because that's not going to change."

Pandya seals series for India

REUTERS, SYDNEY

Hardik Pandya smashed two huge sixes in the final over to give India a dramatic six-wicket Twenty20 victory over Australia yesterday, sewing up the three-match series for the tourists with a game to spare.

Chasing 195 for victory, India needed 14 runs from the last over and Pandya delivered with two runs off the first ball and sixes off the second and fourth deliveries, the latter flying deep into the stands at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Australia's bowling attack, making do without Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Pat Cummins, had kept the contest tight. But debutant Daniel Sams was unable to contain Pandya, who finished with 42 runs off 22 balls and was named Man of the Match.

"It's fantastic," said Pandya. "I just wanted to finish it early, I don't like it when it goes down to the wire."

The victory brought delight to a crowd mostly supporting the tourists and, after Friday's 11-run victory in Canberra, secured the series ahead of Tuesday's third and final match in Sydney.

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