



Former Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza cheers up his Khulna teammates while Mustafizur Rahman, along with his Chattogram teammates, observes something attentively during practice yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur ahead of today's Bangabandhu T20 Cup final in Mirpur.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Chattogram's youth takes on Khulna's experience in title match

SPORTS REPORTER



Arguably two of the most deserving sides in the five-team Bangabandhu T20 Cup will battle it out for the title as Gazi Group Chattogram take on Gemcon Khulna in the final today.

It has been an action-packed tournament with Chattogram, led by Mohammad Mithun, having been clinical from the start riding on two of the most elegant opening batsmen in Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar in prime form.

Liton in particular has been phenomenal with the bat. The stylish right-hander is the highest run-getter of the tournament with 370 in nine games, including three fifties. The port city side have also impressed with the ball with Mustafizur Rahman rediscovering his rhythm and sitting atop the wicket-takers' list with 23 scalps.

Even with Mustafizur and Liton's individual brilliance, what sets Chattogram apart is their collective approach with a relatively young side. Members of the Under-19 World Cup winning team, such as left-arm pacer Shoriful Islam, spinner Rakibul Hasan, off-spinner Nahidul Islam have also performed



PHOTO: BCB

Chattogram are a very good side. Liton and Soumya have been doing really well at the top and they also have a good bowling attack. But I think we should focus on our strength and if we can play freely and have the belief, it will be good for us. The inclusion of Mashrafe bhai is obviously a huge thing and obviously, if we had Shakib it would have been even better. But even without Shakib it's our responsibility and also a chance to perform.

MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD

We have played some extraordinary cricket in every department throughout the tournament. Obviously, Khulna are very good but we are not thinking about what happened in the past and looking to focus on our strength. Missing Shakib bhai in the final is obviously a big setback for them as they now have to pick a separate batsman and a bowler to replace him. I think we will have a psychological advantage from that perspective.

MOHAMMAD MITHUN

well and put their hands up at crucial moments with the ball.

Perhaps Chattogram's only weak link is their middle order, which has been mostly untested courtesy

of some brilliant batting from the openers. Mahmudul Hasan Joy, another under-19 stalwart, has shown glimpses of his talent at number three. Skipper Mithun,

Shamsur Rahman and Mosaddek Hossain will also have to fire if they face early hiccups.

Star-studded Khulna, on the other hand, is loaded with experience and Mahmudullah Riyad's side has gained momentum at just the right stage of the tournament.

However, Khulna will definitely miss their star-allrounder Shakib Al Hasan, who had to leave for the US after their first qualifier against Chattogram to be with his critically ill father-in-law.

Shakib had a quiet tournament with the bat -- his 28 in the first qualifier was his highest score. With the ball, although he picked up just six wickets, he was economical.

While Shakib's loss is a blow for any team, Chattogram can take heart from the fact that they have made it this far without any major contributions from their best player. More importantly, they beat Chattogram by 47 runs in the first qualifier, when former Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza picked up his maiden five-wicket haul in T20 cricket.

Jahurul Islam, Imrul Kayes, and Shuvagata Hom also offer a lot of experience for Khulna and it is expected to be a cracker of a final where youth battle experience.

HIGHLIGHTS

Chattogram and Khulna have met thrice in the tournament so far -- twice in the group stage and once in Qualifier 1. While Chattogram won both the group stage matches, Khulna beat them convincingly in the qualifier to be the first team to ensure a spot in the final.

Khulna were bundled out for 86 -- the lowest total of the tournament -- during their first meeting with Chattogram.

Interestingly, Chattogram's opening pair of Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar, who have been in phenomenal touch throughout the tournament, have failed twice against Khulna and the only time the duo strung over a fifty-run stand was when they were in chase of a meagre 86.

With 370 runs in nine matches at an average of 52.85, Gazi Group Chattogram's Liton Das is the top run-getter in the five-team tournament. Liton smashed one of his three fifties during Chattogram's nine-wicket victory over Gemcon Khulna in their first group stage encounter.

Khulna opener Jahurul Islam has been the side's highest run-getter. The opener scored 254 runs in nine games with the highest of 51-ball 80 coming against Chattogram in the qualifier.

Mustafizur Rahman is the highest wicket-taker of the tournament, scalping 21 wickets in nine matches. His tournament-best bowling figures of four for five in 3.5 overs also came against Khulna. The ace left-armers scalped a total of eight wickets in three encounters against Khulna -- most by any bowlers between the two sides.

'It was a top game'

REUTERS, LIVERPOOL



Liverpool manager Juergen Klopp believes Tottenham Hotspur will be in the battle for the Premier League title right until the end, despite their 2-1 defeat to his side at Anfield on Wednesday.

Roberto Firmino grabbed the winner in the 90th minute after Spurs looked set for a point having missed two great chances to take the lead after the break.

"They will be top of the table until the end of the season because they are really good. But to play against them is a proper challenge and to play like us, is pretty special," said the German.

Klopp's counterpart Jose Mourinho, who took aim at Klopp after his team's defeat and even found time to refuel his

lot," Klopp added.

"Of course Tottenham had chances, I know that they scored a goal and an unbelievably tight offside decision -- we are really not lucky with these moments in the moment. They had other chances.

"But around these moments we were completely in charge of the game, which is important, stay concentrated, protected our attacks sensationally well, counter-press was good, passing was good," he added.

Mourinho brushed off talk of his team being title contenders but said they had to learn how to finish off their opponents in big games.

"I think the first thing that makes title contenders is to go to every match to win it, with that ambition.

"I promise you that the ambition is there. If in any match you see us not trying to win it, it's not because we won't want



old feud with Pep Guardiola, said his team had deserved not only a point but victory from the game but the German, not surprisingly disagreed. Mourinho and Klopp had a lengthy discussion after the final whistle with the Spurs boss saying he told his Liverpool counterpart that the "better team did not win". "I thought he was joking, but he wasn't," Klopp responded.

"It was a top game, (we) deserved the three points against a top side, organisation-wise so difficult to play against them with the counter-attacking threat they have. So, I liked the game a

to... it's because the opponent pushes us to different situations.

"You have to kill matches of this dimension. You have just to kill it. The game was there. We were in the face of the keeper two or three times and we just have to kill it.

"Steven Bergwijn has two face to face with the keeper, we have the corner of Harry (Kane) with the free header, we had other counter-attacking situations that we didn't finish.

"We had it, we knew how to hurt and we should do much more than we did," he said.

Barca and Real ramp up title challenge

REUTERS, MADRID



Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman's assertion that his side are mounting a challenge in the Liga title race will be put to the test on Saturday when Valencia visit the Camp Nou.

The Catalans have endured an inconsistent season so far, losing four times already in the league, and sit six points off pacesetters Atletico Madrid, Real Sociedad and Real Madrid.

However, with no team pulling away in a wide-open battle at the top, Barca are finding form and looked back to their best on Wednesday when they came from behind to beat Sociedad 2-1.

Koeman praised his side's relentless pressing after their win over Real Sociedad, when the Catalans finally came alive after

an awful start to the season. The result led a bullish Koeman to suggest he believes they can mount a title challenge.

"Yes (we can), it's in our hands and there's a long way to go," he said. "We played the best half we have all season, we were brilliant with the ball and we pressed hard."

"This is the team I want to see. Every player played out of their skin. The biggest difference was our play without the ball today, and Messi worked very hard in that respect, pressing a lot, and so did everyone else," he said.

Real, who were facing a crisis at the start of December after defeat by Shakhtar Donetsk in the Champions League, have also been resurgent in the past fortnight and will seek to keep up their title charge when they visit Eibar on Sunday.



Barcelona full-back Jordi Alba produced a delectable finish as the ball dropped to him inside the box to net the equaliser in a clash against Real Sociedad on Wednesday. Barca won 2-1.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Kohli rescues India on Day 1

REUTERS



India captain Virat Kohli forged two half-century partnerships to rescue his side against Australia before falling victim to an almighty mix-up on an attritional opening day of the day-night first test at Adelaide Oval on Thursday.

The right-hander sacrificed flair for efficiency in his industrious 74 as the tourists reached 233-6 at stumps after opting to bat in the series opener.

Wriddhiman Saha, on nine, and Ravichandran Ashwin, who is 15 not out, will return on Friday hoping to continue India's march towards the 300-mark.

Earlier, Mitchell Starc removed the scoreless Prithvi Shaw with the second delivery of the day and Pat Cummins castled fellow opener Mayank Agarwal (17) later in the opening session to give Australia a strong start to the four-match series.



250 AND COUNTING

Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski became the first non-German player to reach 250 goals in the Bundesliga when he netted the first of a match-winning brace against Wolfsburg on Wednesday. The 32-year-old is also only the third player in Bundesliga history to get to 250 goals after Gerd Muller (365) and Klaus Fischer (268). Lewandowski required 332 games to hit the total, making him quicker than Fischer (460) but not as rapid as the great Gerd Muller (284). The Pole appears to prefer the comforts of home, with 151 of his efforts coming on his own patch compared to 100 in away games.

PHOTO: TWITTER