T SPORTS Federation Cup Bashundhara Kings vs Rahmatgonj Live from 5:30 pm TEN 2 Serie A

Crotone vs Parma

Live from 11:30 pm

Juventus vs Fiorentina Live from 1:45 am (Wednesday) FACEBOOI La Liga Elche vs Osasuna Live from 10:30 pm Valencia vs Sevilla Live from 10:30 pm

Real Sociedad vs Atletico Madrid Live from 12:45 am (Wednesday) Huesca vs Levante Live from 12:45 am (Wednesday) Valladolid vs Barcelona Live from 3:00 am

Villareal vs Athletic Bilbao Live from 3:00 am (Wednesday) SONY SI) Big Bash T20 League Sydney Thunder vs Perth Scorchers Live from 2:15 pm

(Wednesday)

Fed Cup to end long hiatus

Our preparations and practices have always been of high-intensity with the aim of challenging our players to improve on a daily basis. Our team, from both an individual and collective

points of view, has dramatically improved from last season. We reach the beginning of the Federation Cup in good shape

OSCAR BRUZON

No one really knows how football will be in the new normal, it's a situation that none of us have ever faced before and most important is the health of the players. About being contenders, I believe not only Abahani and Bashundhara but also Chattogram Abahani, Sheikh Russel and Saif will have something to say too.

MARIO LEMOS

Everybody is in the same situation for the Federation Cup apart from Bashundhara Kings, who I believe have had an extended pre-season training camp due to their involvement in the AFC cup. Our first target is to get out of the group stage and once we have done that, anything can happen.

SEAN LANE

Corona has affected football worldwide, so it is not easy to have good preparation because the players were out of competition for eight months. Season is not that easy but we are trying to do our best. We spent hard time in the last five weeks and have already shown our performance in training.

PAUL PUT

Mickey Arthur relishing battle

with Boucher

REUTERS, JOHANNESBURG

Sri Lanka coach Mickey

Arthur is looking forward

to slugging it out with his

South African counterpart

Mark Boucher when the

Boxing Day, hailing the

former wicketkeeper for

his aggressive style on the

Boucher was one of

Arthur's most trusted

senior players when the

between 2005 and 2010

with excellent success in

back a helluva long way

and I am really looking

with him," Arthur told

reporters on Monday.

forward to locking horns

"He was an aggressive

player and I'm sure he will

be an aggressive coach too.

It will be up to us to match

"There is a wonderful

familiarity for me now

Africa never leaves you.

That knowledge of the

walking into the grounds.

conditions will hopefully

be of great benefit to us.'

Pakistan when they lost

a Test series 3-0 in South

Africa last year.

Arthur was in charge of

"Mark Boucher and I go

the test arena.

that intensity.

latter coached the Proteas

teams start a two-Test

series in Pretoria on

pitch.

SPORTS REPORTER



Following Bangladesh's return international football last month, the country is set to

welcome back domestic football as the Walton Federation Cup, featuring 13 top-flight teams, gets underway at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Holders Bashundhara Kings take on last season's runners-up Rahmatganj MFS in the opening match at 5:30pm. Private satellite channel T-Sports will telecast the match live. All sports activities remained suspended in the country since the middle of March in the wake of the pandemic, prompting Bangladesh Football Federation to cancel the remainder of last season in May which eventually resulted in players sitting idle for nearly eight months.

national However, team members returned to action through international friendlies against Nepal last month before squaring off against Qatar in a World Cup Qualifying fixture in Doha earlier this month. But majority of top-tier footballers are waiting to return to football on the back of a brief pre-season preparation.

Bangladesh is not Europe where players join in pre-season training camp after two to three weeks of holidays. It is really hard to have good preparation in such a short period," Saif SC's Belgian impeccable belief," said Kings' coach Paul Put said yesterday at the pre-tournament briefing, his statement perhaps ringing true for trophies with new acquisitions



I think football will remain like in normal times because the situation is same for all teams. The standard may be a bit low initially but it will go up as the tournament progresses. I am hopeful of fighting for the title because it is the same squad; they know what I want from them and I also know their ability

MARUFUL HAQUE

for Bashundhara Kings.

The defending champions had 17 weeks' preparation for the season opener while Abahani, Saif SC, Chattogram Abahani, Sheikh Russel, Sheikh Jamal and Mohammedan SC had around four to six weeks of preparation time. An exception is Brothers Union who failed to submit players' registration documents within deadline and have not started training as yet.

"I think every team will face difficulties after the long break. We have reconstructed our playing style in the last few months with successful Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon, who wants to win all all the participating teams except from Brazil, Argentina and Iran.

The players may lack fitness as we had only four weeks' training. It is not enough time to prepare a team, but the good thing is they have been together for the last two seasons and have good understanding among

themselves. Our target is to get out of the

group stage and then think further.

SHAFIQUL ISLAM MANIK

Like Kings, 11-time champions Abahani have also brought three changes in their foreign line-up with the inclusion of two Brazilian players. The foreigners in will undoubtedly make an impact this time too as most teams have already bolstered their foreign acquisitions. "The new foreign players were signed to improve the team and we have confidence that we can win the Fed Cup. It will not be easy but are looking forward to the challenge," said Abahani coach Mario Lemos.

Foreign coaches, too, will have a key role in the campaign Abahani, Kings, Bangladesh Mohammedan, Police and Arambagh KS have already appointed foreign coaches while Muktijoddha Sangsad and

Brothers Union, too, are supposed to rope in foreign coaches.

In last edition, Rahmatganj stunned big teams like Saif SC, Sheikh Jamal, Abahani and Mohammedan to reach the final but now they have a depleted side with three foreigners yet to join the squad a day before their opening

As things stand, the title race is expected to be fought among teams with previous experience

COVID-19 PROTOCOL

Footballers and officials with Covid-19 negative reports will only be allowed inside stadium

Each team will have to submit Covid-19 reports 72 hours before their match

Each team will undergo Covid-19 tests once in 15 days

BFF has appointed a dedicated executive to oversee the issues related to Covid-19

The ground and Stadium will be sanitised today

No general spectators will be allowed

Only clubs' own fans can enjoy matches. maintaining health guidelines

BFF has already issued a small amount of tickets to club authorities

of winning it, but veteran coach Maruful Haque believes dark horses may appear and upset the applecart.

"In my opinion, this time more clubs [other than Bashundhara, Abahani, Saif, Sheikh Russel] will be in the race and can challenge for the title," said Bruzon.

Babar, Imam ruled out of first Test

ICC

Babar Azam and Imam-ul-Hag have been ruled out of the first Test against New Zealand, which begins on 26 December in Mount Maunganui.

Pakistan named 17-man squad for the twomatch Test series, which forms a part of the ICC World Test Championship.

Both Babar and Imam had fractured their thumbs during a training session last week and will be monitored closely the team's medical staff. Mohammad Rizwan will lead in Babar's absence, becoming Pakistan's 33rd Test captain.

Pakistan head coach Misbah-ul-Hag expressed his disappointment on losing the T20I series against New Zealand but his hopeful about the Test team's chances.

"It is disappointing to lose the T20I series against a well-settled New Zealand side, who utilised their resources and conditions to their advantage," he said.

"Contrary to the T20I side, the Test side appears to be pretty organised and we boast some experienced cricketers, both in batting and bowling departments." given the green signal or for the upcoming series.

Challenges surrounding Tigers' return SPORTS REPORTER



International cricket is set to return to Bangladesh after a 10-month halt due to the coronavirus pandemic as the Bangladesh Cricket Board will host West Indies for a three-match

ODI and two-match Test series starting from January. The Tigers last played an international series back in March this year against Zimbabwe and a big challenge looms for the BCB to make sure that they put their best foot forward both in terms of the cricket on the field and the organisation off it.

TIGERS' INJURY UPDATE

As far as cricket on the field, there are some injury headaches in the Test squad. Bangladesh Test skipper Mominul Haque had undergone a surgery on his right thumb in the UAE on December 10 after the left-handed batsman sustained an injury while fielding during the Bangabandhu T20 Cup.

Another vital player in the longest format, off-spinner Nayeem Hasan, also underwent surgery on his right little finger, which he injured while fielding during the Bangabandhu T20 Cup.

However BCB's chief physician Dr Debashish Chowdhury is confident that both cricketers will be able to regain their fitness ahead of the two-match Test series against West Indies.

"In the last two weeks, two of our cricketers underwent surgeries and one of them is our Test captain Mominul Haque. He had his surgery in Dubai and is now doing his rehabilitation under our health guidelines. Then we have Nayeem Hasan who injured his little finger and his surgery has been done at a hospital in Dhaka. His rehabilitation will also start within the next few days.

"Our aim is to get them back to proper fitness before the practice game, which is scheduled for January 25 ahead of the Test series. We are very hopeful that both cricketers will be able to regain proper fitness before the warm-up match," Debashish told the media yesterday.

Another member of the Test squad, pacer Abu Jayed is also recovering from a Grade 1 thigh strain sustained during the Bangabandhu T20 Cup is also expected to return to the field by the first week of January, said Debashish.







Mominul Haque

BCB'S HEALTH PROTOCOL

The board will conduct coronavirus testing on the first, third, and sixth or seventh day of the West Indies squad's arrival.

After completing a three-day guarantine, the West Indies team will be allowed to practise from the fourth day. However, the visitors will only be allowed to practise between themselves from the fourth to the seventh day.

After undergoing three coronavirus tests in seven days, the West Indies side will be allowed to have net bowlers in their training and can interact with people related to the series.

According to the MoU, both teams will have separate transportation -- separate flights and buses -- while traveling.

LESSONS FROM DOMESTIC TOURNAMENT Another main challenge will be creating and maintaining

an effective health protocol and a bio-secure bubble for the touring side as well as hosts. However, the board will be encouraged by the fact that they arranged two local tournaments -- BCB President's Cup and the just concluded Bangabandhu T20 Cup -- while maintaining a bio-secure bubble. According to Debashish they will implement the experiences of those two tournaments in the upcoming

Debashish also said that Cricket West Indies had already given the green signal over the MoU provided by the BCB

SAFETY A CONCERN

Crowd flooded the Mymensingh Circuit House ground yesterday to witness the opening day's action of the Mymensingh Premier League (MPL), the first 100-ball cricket tournament of the country. Organised by the Mymensingh Masters Cricket Association (MMCA), a forum of ex-cricketers, the five-day tournament had already raised concern over a local association's capacity in maintaining health guidelines and social distancing. And despite the organisers' claim, health safety and social distancing was nowhere to be seen as the large portion of the crowd were even without masks. Mymensingh Thunders and Mymensingh Riders won their encounters against Mymensingh Tigers and Mymensingh Eagles respectively on the opening day but the real victory of the tournament would be to see everyone involved with the tournament, including the invited former national team players and members of the World Cup-winning Under-19 team, stay unharmed till it's completion.

PHOTO: AMINUL ISLAM

'Benzema is a focal point'

AGENCIES

Real Madrid forward Karim Benzema kept up his impressive run of form by scoring and providing two assists in a 3-1 win away to Eibar on Sunday, taking the champions level on points with La Liga leaders Atletico Madrid. Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane was again grateful to Karim Benzema after victory over Eibar.

"Benzema is a match winner because what he's doing is on a different level, not just because of the goals. I always repeat myself saying the same thing about Karim. It's not only his goals, he's a focal point in our game, he's very important for us and when he scores, he scores it's even better, obviously, but he's very important for our team. We have to highlight everyone's performance," said Zidane.



Messi Lionel admitted has the ill feeling between him Barcelona over his attempt

to leave the club in the close season has affected his form this season, in which he has posted his lowest goal and assist tallies

Messi caused consternation at Barca when he sent the club a burofax (official notice) that he wanted to leave in August, but then president Josep Maria Bartomeu blocked the move and he committed to stay this season to avoid a legal battle.

He has less than seven months left on his contract and is able to negotiate with other clubs from January.

"Everything that happened before the summer, how the season ended, then the burofax and everything else... I dragged everything into the start of the season a bit," Messi said in an interview with Spanish

television channel La Sexta. "The truth is right now I'm feeling fine but in the summer I had a very bad time.

The Argentine struck for the 643rd time for Barca on Saturday to equal Pele's goals record for a single club. However, he has drastically underperformed this campaign, as have his side, who trail leaders Atletico Madrid by eight points in La Liga.

Messi, who finished top scorer in La Liga last season and routinely gets more than 40 goals each year for his club, has only scored nine times in all competitions this campaign, five Barcelona, who are currently fifth in Spain's top flight, will be looking to return to winning ways in La Liga when they take on an improving Real Valladolid tonight. They will hope that Lionel Messi will lead from the front and surpass Pele's single-club goals haul. Barcelona legend Messi, who scored his first goal for the Catalan club in 2005 against Albacete, equalled Brazil legend Pele's record of 643 goals for a single club by scoring in Saturday's draw against Valencia. Pele scored 643 goals in 19 seasons for Brazilian side Santos between 1956 and 1974.

'I had a very bad time this summer'



of which came from the penalty spot. He also has no assists in 13 league games after contributing 21 last season, making the start of this campaign his worst since the 2007-08 season, when he was 20-years-old and suffering from injuries.

Barca face elections on Jan. 24 to pick the successor to Bartomeu, who resigned in October, and Messi remained tight-lipped on where his future lay, saying he was fully focused on helping his side return to form. "Right now I'm feeling good and looking forward to fighting for every competition we have ahead," he added.

"I know the club is in a difficult moment at institutional E level and on the pitch and everything surrounding Barca right now is difficult, but I'm feeling excited."

