



Bashundhara Kings players celebrate Robson Da Silva's (2nd from R) goal against Rahmatganj MFS during their 3-0 victory in the opening match of the Walton Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

'WI may be on the back foot mentally'

SPORTS REPORTER



In the pre-pandemic era, all the talk ahead of an international series revolved around the pitches, the conditions and the opposition. But amid the Covid-19 pandemic, teams heading into a series are mostly thinking about life inside the bio-secure bubble, which has become an integral part of health protocols on tours.

Following in the footsteps of England, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan and Australia, Bangladesh is also set to return to hosting international cricket with the upcoming home series against West Indies in January, comprising three ODIs and two Tests.

The two-Test series, which will be part of the ICC Test Championship, will be a crucial series for Bangladesh Test skipper Mominul Haque, who has undergone surgery on his right thumb and is expected to return.

West Indies are among the first teams to experience the new health protocols and stay inside a bio-secure bubble when international cricket resumed amid the pandemic.

But Mominul thought that the visitors would be under more pressure than the hosts when it comes to experiencing life inside the bio-secure bubble.

The 29-year-old is aware that West Indies -- who had a terrible outing in New Zealand, losing both the two-match Test and three-match T20I series -- will be on the back foot

when they arrive in Bangladesh.

"They [West Indies] have played three-four series prior to this one and also stayed inside the bio-secure bubble. They might be on the back foot mentally, and since they are coming off the back of losing a Test series, that is certainly a positive for us. I think it's a completely mental thing [adjusting to the bio-secure bubble]."

"We are yet to play any international series while staying inside the bio-secure bubble. Until the vaccine arrives, we have to play like this and it's better not to think about this and stay positive," Mominul told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The Test skipper however does not want to take his position lightly and said it will be important for Bangladesh to play their best cricket.

"It does not mean that you will beat them easily because they lost a series. You have to play your best cricket to get the result in your favour and the only positive side is that they will be morally down. But that doesn't mean we can be relaxed. Yes, there may be a chance that the West Indies side will be so desperate to win here that they could take on extra pressure. They were inside the bio-secure bubble for the last three series and it's not easy," he added.

Bangladesh last played a Test match back in March this year against Zimbabwe. When asked whether Bangladesh are prepared for the longest format after such a long gap, Mominul said they had been prepared as they trained for the Sri Lanka tour, which was eventually postponed.

BAF put 8 past Police

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Air Force came from behind and handed a massive 8-2 defeat to Bangladesh Police in the Walton Victory Day Hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Arshad Hossain struck a brace while Rakibul Hasan, Shamim Mia, Debashish, Sajib Hossain, Mirazul Islam and Prosenjit Roy netted one apiece for Air Force, who suffered a 1-3 defeat to Bangladesh Navy in their previous match. Amirul Islam and Mohsin scored one each for Bangladesh Police.

In the day's other match, Sonali Bank held Bangladesh Army to a 1-1 draw with the former's Nayeem Uddin canceling out Monojobabu's strike.

Raina regrets arrest

AGENCIES, MUMBAI

Former India cricketer Suresh Raina, who was among those arrested and released on bail by Mumbai Police for violating COVID-19 social distancing norms at a club here, has regretted the "unintentional and unfortunate" incident.

A statement issued by Raina's management team said the 34-year old was not aware of the local timings and protocols at the time of the incident.

"He was not aware of the local timings and protocols," read the statement.



Lampard lauds Tammy's impact

AFP, LONDON

Tammy Abraham's double in the 3-0 win over West Ham on Monday will do wonders for his confidence said Chelsea manager Frank Lampard.

The 23-year-old's goals could not have come at a better time with German Timo Werner drawing a blank for the seventh successive match.

Werner's drought is his longest in club competition since September 2016, between spells at Stuttgart and RB Leipzig (nine). Lampard was also rewarded for opting to start Abraham -- for the first time in a month -- instead of the in-form France World Cup winner Olivier Giroud.

Abraham's goals, his first double since September 2019, and one from Brazilian veteran Thiago Silva saw Chelsea move into fifth place in the table, six points off leaders Liverpool.

Abraham -- whose tally of 25 goals since the start of last season is seven more than any other Blues player -- paid a nice tribute to man-of-the-match Silva, 36, who got Chelsea off the mark. Lampard said Werner is experiencing something all strikers go through.

"That's the period Timo is in," said Lampard. "It's unfortunate but he's getting in the positions -- when one goes in it will be a run for him. Tammy and Oli (Giroud) both bring different things. Tammy did his thing today and that's what we needed." "It is good for Tammy's confidence clearly," said Lampard. "You have to work for your goals and he did work for the goals today and put a lot of effort in. I wanted him to be a handful, I wanted to see movement and he did that."

Flying start for champions

SPORTS REPORTER



Reigning champions Bashundhara Kings made a flying start in season's curtain-raising Federation Cup with a 3-0 win against last edition's beaten finalists Rahmatganj MFS at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Argentine forward Raul Becerra and Brazilian midfielder Robson Da Silva scored one goal apiece for Kings while Rahmatganj's Egyptian defender Alaeeddin Nasr Eissa scored an own goal to ensure an easy victory for the star-studded outfit.

Bashundhara Kings' last match was in March this year when they thrashed Maldivian outfit TC Sports 5-0 in the AFC Cup before the pandemic halted proceedings. The Bangladesh Premier League champions initially struggled to break Rahmatganj, who were playing with only one foreigner

against Kings' four.

Kings coach Oscar Bruzon claimed his team are in better shape than the last season, but they seemed to have lost the cutting edge upfront in absence of Costa Rican World Cupper Daniel Colindres.

Before the start of the season's first domestic match in front of an almost empty stadium, Kings' new recruits -- Becerra, Jonathan Fernandes and Robson were at the centre of attention regarding their debut in Bangladesh football.

Even though they could hardly show their individual skill and failed to capitalise on some scoring opportunities inside the box, it must be said that they were behind all the attacking moves with nice exchange of the ball among them. Unfortunately they failed to beat goalkeeper Rasel Mahmud Liton from one-on-one situation on a few occasions.

Rahmatganj came into the match on the back of four weeks of reparation, so Kings might face a lot

of trouble against stiffer opposition.

From the word go, Kings, as expected, established their full control on the match and created some good chances in the first half, with Becerra squandering an opportunity in the second minute with only Liton to beat. Defender Yeasin Khan saw his header at rear

to be blocked by Kings goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico on the half-hour mark.

Kings finally broke the deadlock three minutes from the break when Becerra rose high to nod home a well-judged free-kick from Robson.

After resumption, Becerra was used as a Number 10 while Robson played in number nine position and the Brazilian doubled the margin availing a fumble from defender Mahmudul Hasan Kiran after his countryman Jonathan Fernandes had failed to beat goalkeeper Liton from a one-on-one situation.

Becerra and Robson narrowly missed the target on the hour-mark before Rahmatganj defender Alaeeddin Nsr headed into his own net when a clearance from Liton came his way in front of goal in the 65th minute.

Rahmatganj, who lost 2-1 against Kings in last edition's final, tried to press on Kings and denied them from extending the lead any further.

**Basundhara Kings 3
Rahmatganj MFS 0
Becerra 42', Robson 53',
Nasr 65' (OG)**

post narrowly miss the target in the next minute.

Becerra was again denied by Liton in the 12th minute while Rahmatganj forward Sanoar Hossain danced past two Kings defenders inside the box to muster a shot from a difficult angle, only

Rizwan fends off T20 sweep

AFP, NAPIER



Mohammad Rizwan celebrated his elevation to the Pakistan Test captaincy in style Tuesday, smashing a career-best 89 to stop New Zealand claiming a series sweep in the third Twenty20 in Napier.

Pakistan reached New Zealand's target of 174 with two balls to spare, ending on 177 after Iftikhar Ahmed sealed the win with a six in the final over. But it was Rizwan's 89 from 59 balls, with support from 41-run Mohammad Hafeez, that inspired the victory.

It was a hard-fought win for the tourists, who suffered heavy defeats in the two opening matches after a rocky preparation that included Covid-19 quarantine in Christchurch with no training.

The win was particularly sweet for Rizwan, who was named on Monday as captain for the first Test against New Zealand starting December 26 after regular skipper Babar Azam was ruled out with a broken thumb. "I never thought I'd be made the captain of Pakistan and I can't explain my happiness," he said after his man-of-the-match T20 performance.

Rizwan said the T20 victory was an important morale booster ahead of the two-Test series against the Black Caps.

"We want to take momentum from this into the Test match, so this is very important for us," he said. After two losses when batting first, Pakistan changed tactics and opted to bowl when they won the toss, restricting New Zealand to 173 for seven, with Devon Conway top-scoring on 63.

'Let it go and move on'

PTI



Australian batting star Steve Smith has no time to think about how India might plot revenge in the second Test here this weekend but he does have a word of advice for the visitors jolted by the first game's battering -- "Let it go and move on".

The Australian trio of Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood produced one of the finest fast bowling performances in recent times to dismiss India for their lowest Test score of 36 in the opening day-night Test here.

Australia won by eight wickets and the series will now move to Melbourne for the Boxing Day Test starting December 26.

"Look, the other day we just saw some pretty incredible fast bowling. It is probably the best I've seen our bowlers bowl collectively for about five years I think," Smith said in a virtual media conference facilitated by series' official broadcaster Sony Network.

"The lengths they were hitting were just

impeccable. Sometimes that happens, you get a good ball and you nick it...You got to let it go and move on and try and keep yourself in a positive mindset," the 31-year-old added.

Asked what he feels would be the Indian mindset after such a huge defeat, he said: "Again every individual is different, the way they take their dismissals, how they think about the game after it's finished.

"It's important to keep moving forward, look at yourself individually, what you could have done better."

On the next match, the star batsman said he gets shivers down the spine from the thrill of batting in a Boxing Day Test.

Since his first Boxing Day Test appearance in the Ashes 2010-11, the talismanic batsman has smashed four centuries -- three of them

unbeaten -- and three fifties in seven such games.

"I always remember watching the Boxing Day Tests at home and with the family after Christmas. It's sort of like a dream-come-true moment in a way. As a kid, I always wanted to play in a Boxing Day Test match," Smith, who averages an astonishing 113.50 at MCG, said.



Lionel Messi added to his glittering trophy cabinet with a record-breaking seventh Pichichi trophy and fourth on the trot after finishing as La Liga's top scorer last season with 25 goals. Meanwhile, after releasing some of the pressure of a packed December with two goals in a 7-0 win at Crystal Palace earlier this week, Liverpool star Mohamed Salah continued to relax as he took his daughter, Makka, out for breakfast in Wilmslow.

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