

DHAKA PREMIER CRICKET LEAGUE PREVIEW

The smaller of big names

MOHAMMAD ISAM

The Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League is not just about Abahani and Mohammedan and the money they spend, the country's most popular cricket competition also accommodates diverse teams, some of whom hardly have the club structure these days.

A handful of clubs however still follow the age-old club culture with players living in the club's quarters. Surjo Torun goes along these lines, though their players are housed in the club president's residence, as the club doesn't have a cricket ground.

They will practise at the Dhanmondi Cricket Academy (DCA) ground on Road 4 and according to club official Tanjeeb Ahsan Saad, a former national cricketer, the club is targeting a better finish than last year.

"We don't want to go through what happened last year," said Saad about Surjo Torun's direction this year after they were almost relegated last season, winning only the final game against Khelaghar.

This year the club has retained the services of Junaed Siddiqui, also adding the in-form left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak as one of their three pool players (Sohrawardi Shuvo being the other).

"Apart from the pool players we have Rajin Saleh, Anisur Rahman and Imtiaz Ahmed as well as pacemen Shafaq Al Zahir and Sajidul Islam," added Saad, who informed that they had a budget around Tk 70 lakh for the season.

Similar to Surjo Torun is Orient Sporting Club, the Lalbagh-based team that got promotion after two years. According to team manager

Jubair Kabir Chowdhury, the club suffers from the usual neighbourhood-based club problems.

"Everything depends on money. We run a small team and our goal is to survive in the League. We can't afford national pool players so we have opted for mainly those players who gained us the promotion," said Jubair, adding that the club usually goes for high-scoring First Division batsmen and also a few from the locality.

They were runners-up in the second tier last year, finishing behind Prime Doleswar who were the runaway champions. Sponsored by Prime Group, the team is situated by the Doleswar river where the players practise at the high school ground and are housed in a one-storied building.

"Our target will primarily be to stay in top flight and then push for the Super Six stage," said joint secretary Mushtaq Hossain, who informed that Prime Group DMD Abul Bashar Shiplu is the general secretary of the club. "We are in league cricket for the past four years, two each in Second and First Divisions," added Mushtaq. From the national pool, Doleswar has acquired Rubel Hossain and Nazmul Hossain.

BKSP however breaks the mould of clubs like Orient, Doleswar and Surjo Torun as the national sports institute has no club structure to speak of. "Our students will play, some of whom are from the Under-19 teams. They have a six-year contract with us so all of the players are students of BKSP," said coach Akhinnuzzaman Rusho.

"Our target will be to reach the Super Sixes and take it from there. We know what sort of opponent we'll be facing, but we should not care much about it. We are mostly focused on our game," he said.

Sk Jamal, MSC draw friendly

SPORTS REPORTER

Star-studded Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club and Mohammedan Sporting Club played out a 1-1 draw in a practice match ahead of the Bangladesh League at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Defender Ariful Islam put Sheikh Jamal ahead early in the first half while Mohammedan's Rwandan player Ismail leveled the margin converting a penalty in the second half.

In another warm-up match, Sheikh Russel handed a 2-1 defeat to Brothers Union.

The fourth edition of the Bangladesh League will begin on December 27.

National archery on

SPORTS REPORTER

The Uttara Bank 4th National Archery Championship was inaugurated yesterday at the Army Stadium in Banani with state minister for youth and sports Ahad Ali Sarker declaring the three-day meet open.

During the inauguration, the sports minister has promised to give the Bangladesh Archery Federation Tk 2 lakh.

Some 154 archers including 45 women from 53 teams are taking part in the events of recurve, compound and bamboo bow as the main battle for medals begin today.

Federation president Lt Gen Moinal Islam, general secretary Razib Uddin Ahmed Chapal, Uttara Bank managing director Shamsuddin Ahmed and trainer of International Archery Federation (IAF) Pascal Colmaire were also present.

Steve slams selectors

AFP, Perth

Former captain Steve Waugh says a lack of stability within the side is contributing significantly to the current Australian cricket team's woes.

Down 1-0 after the first two Tests in the Ashes series against England, the once all-conquering Australian Test team has not tasted victory for five matches.

Waugh, who lost just nine of his 57 Tests as Australian captain, believes the national selectors have made too many changes to the team over the last 18 months and not shown enough faith in young players.

He recalled the start of his own career, when he battled in a young side struggling for wins, but capitalised on the faith shown by the selectors to blossom into a champion player in a champion team.

"What the selectors have got to do, which they did back then, is have belief in the younger players they pick and say 'you are there, we believe in you, we think you are the future of Australian cricket and you are going to have a bit of leeway'," he said.

"It's not always going to be successful early days, I guess I was a perfect example -- I didn't score a hundred until my 26th Test and I never won a Test until my 13th Test playing for Australia.

"You have to see the bigger picture and you can't just pitch and change if someone fails in one Test and doesn't look the goods, you have got to give them an opportunity."

Australia are again set to make a number of changes to their side for the third Test, at Perth's WACA ground, which they must win to have a chance of regaining the Ashes.

Ben Hilfenhaus and Mitchell Johnson are in line for recalls after being dropped for the second Test and first Test hat-trick hero Peter Siddle is battling to retain his spot.

Another SA

FROM PAGE 17 go. Steve Waugh pulled in all eleven fielders inside the circle to stop the fatal single. The third ball was a full-pitched one that Klusener drilled to mid-on. No run. He fired the next ball towards Mark Waugh at mid-off and set off for a nonexistent run. Donald stayed put, dropped his bat and only started running after Klusener was more than half-way down the pitch. Waugh flicked the ball to Fleming, who rolled it down the wicket to Gilchrist, and the match ended in a tie. Australia went through because of their victory against their photo-finish opponents in their Super Six encounter, to leave South Africa with another Cup heartbreak.

Battle of top two

First SA-India Test from today



AFP, Centurion

Just three days after the official start of their tour, India face what shapes as the biggest threat to their ranking as the number one team in Test cricket when they meet South Africa in the first Test at SuperSport Park on Thursday.

India go into the clash against their nearest challengers without having played a warm-up game in conditions which, in the early part of the match at least, are expected to be favourable to South Africa's formidable fast bowling pair of Dale Steyn and Morne Morkel.

Overcast weather with a chance of rain is predicted through to Thursday although the sky is expected to clear over the weekend.

There was a good covering of grass on the pitch on Tuesday and both Morkel and South African coach Corrie van Zyl said they expected help for the bowlers.

Van Zyl cautioned, though, that his bowlers would have to perform well against a powerful Indian batting line-up.

"There has been a lot of talk about pace and bounce but it's one thing playing in those conditions, it's another thing to execute."

Nor will India's batsmen be likely to succumb as meekly to pace as some of their predecessors in a country where India have only won one Test on four previous tours.

Five of India's top seven batsmen have played in at least one Test series in South Africa and most of the rest of the touring squad have recent experience of local conditions through playing in Indian Premier League and Champions League tournaments in the country.

And, although the tour only started officially on Monday, following the conclusion of a one-day series against New Zealand last Friday, most of the players have been working with coach Gary Kirsten at his academy in Cape Town for the past week.



PHOTO: AFP

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni is relaxed during a press conference in Johannesburg yesterday, on the eve of the first Test of a much-awaited top of the table series against South Africa, beginning today.

Indian captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said his players were "very calm, very relaxed, thinking about the process and not getting caught up with other things".

Although winning in South Africa is seen by many Indian critics as the final challenge to the number one team, Dhoni refused to over-hype the three-match series.

"It's not about one series," he said. "If you talk about rankings, it is the process that takes you to a place. If you talk about our ranking, we started from September 2008, and where we are right now is because of all our performances."

He acknowledged, though, that it was important for India to adapt to local conditions, which he said had been helped by the time in Cape Town.

Although the battle between Steyn and Morkel and the Indian batsmen is crucial, with India boasting an explosive opening pair in Gautam Gambhir and Virender Sehwag, followed by some of India's most successful batsmen of all time in Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar and VVS Laxman, India will pose a considerable threat to the home team's similarly solid batting.

If anything, India might have the

better balanced attack, with fast bowler Sree Sreesanth, who had an excellent tour four years ago, and experienced off-spinner Harbhajan Singh backing up Zaheer Khan and Ishant Sharma.

There is some doubt, though, about the fitness of Khan with a possible hamstring injury.

South Africa's back-up bowlers may be less threatening, with the inexperienced Lonwabo Tsotsobe and Ryan McLaren vying for one seamer's place while Paul Harris, with a modest recent record, is the only spinner.

TEAMS
SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme Smith (captain), Alviro Petersen, Hashim Amla, Jacques Kallis, AB de Villiers, Ashwell Prince, Mark Boucher, Ryan McLaren, Dale Steyn, Paul Harris, Morne Morkel, Lonwabo Tsotsobe.

INDIA (from): MS Dhoni (captain), Gautam Gambhir, Virender Sehwag, Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, VVS Laxman, Suresh Raina, Harbhajan Singh, Zaheer Khan, Ishant Sharma, Sree Sreesanth, Murali Vijay, Cheteshwar Pujara, Wriddhiman Saha, Umesh Yadav, Jaidev Unadkat, Pragyan Ojha.



PHOTO: COURTESY

State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarker poses with the triumphant Bangladesh Ansar team that won the Exim Bank 21st National Women's Handball Championship at the Handball Stadium yesterday.

Treble for Ansar

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Ansar emerged champions in the Exim Bank 21st National Women's Handball Championship with a 22-15 win over Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) in the final at the Handball Stadium yesterday.

It was a hat-trick title for Bangladesh Ansar, who have now won the championship 15 times since the championship began in 1983.

Five-time champions BJMC, who returned to the championship after a two-and-a-half year gap, reached the final and offered good fight against their mighty opponents to end the first half 9-5, but their effort was not enough to tame Ansar, who scored 12 goals in the second half to finish the game 22-15.

State minister for youth and sports Ahad Ali Sarker distributed prizes among the winners while BHF president AKM Nurul Fazal Bulbul, Exim Bank managing director Das Dev Prasad and BHF general secretary Asaduzzaman Kohinoor were present.

Sagar lifts Rating Chess title

SPORTS REPORTER

FM Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagar emerged champion in the 8th Amritolal Dey International Rating Chess tournament concluded yesterday in Barisal.

Sagar earned 8.5 points from nine games as he beat Delwar Hossain in the ninth and final round while Firoz Ahmed became runner-up with seven points.

FM Aminul Islam finished third through the breaking as five players earned 6.5 points. Shafir Ahmed, Debaraj Chatterjee, FM Mohammad Javed and Mahtabuddin Ahmed Robin finished fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh respectively.

Barisal Chess Club president advocate Enayet Pir Khan distributed prize money among the winners as some 54 players participated in the event in the Swiss-League system competition.

The brave face

FROM PAGE 17

Their first international match, a 13-0 defeat against Nepal on Wednesday, was perhaps not the start they were looking for, but it did nothing to deflate the spirit of those who have defied so many odds on their way to reaching the international stage.

"True that I and my teammates are disappointed, since it was our first international match. But we are positive that we would play good football in the tournament."

Born to a well-off family in Kandahar, Khalida's choice of profession was met with much opposition by both her father and her brothers. Her school-teacher mother was the only one supporting her venture.

"My mother has always supported me, even though my father and brothers did not want me to play football. But I always wanted to play football, and now they are happy to see my success."

While the family resigned to her desperate ambition, the conservative society was not so easy to bend.

"Everywhere we went, people used to say: 'Why are you playing football? This is not a woman's game'."

"But since we are doing well, things have started to change now. People now know us, the media are also very supportive and are promoting us."

"Afghan girls can kick" a documentary on the course these girls took to reach the international stage has been aired recently. But despite achieving the recognition, the biggest problem for the team is the lack of security and playing fields.

Women's football is only played in Kabul. The team is allowed to use only one football field, inside a NATO base in Kabul, only three times a week, with helicopters flying overhead all the time.

But the environment of insecurity and suffocation does not deter the resolve of Popal and her teammates. They dream of reaching an even bigger stage.

"This is how I fight. We want to send a message over the world to show that women can play football, and study, and work."

'Corruption 'rife' in cricket'

AFP, London

One of the lawyers assisting former Pakistan captain Salman Butt has said "corruption is rife in world cricket," adding he has evidence that "will make your hair stand on end".

Butt, together with Pakistan seamers Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Aamer, has been charged under the International Cricket Council's anti-corruption code in relation to allegations of spot-fixing during the fourth Test against England at Lord's in August.

The trio were provisionally suspended ahead of a hearing by an independent tribunal in Doha due to take place between January 6-11.

All three players deny the allegations against them and Aftab Gul, a member of Butt's legal team, said in an interview with Sky Sports News: "Corruption is rife in world cricket."

"I have so much evidence. I will tell you names which will make your hair stand on end."

added: "It has now become spot fixing, it is much easier."

The News of the World tabloid accused Aamer and Asif of bowling no-balls to order, with Butt alleged to be conducting events as captain.

However, Butt said: "I'd like to say obviously I haven't done anything such as this in all my life and all my cricket career."

Asked if his teammates were corrupt, Butt said: "No, I don't believe it."

He added: "I wish that all three of us get back and play for our country which is our passion because we love cricket and we would love to get back and play for our country."

Butt, when questioned as to whether corruption was a problem in Pakistan cricket, said: "If it is there it should be erased."

"But it does exist all over the world, it happens everywhere, name any sport, any department of life and there are people who are trying to dodge other people and as individuals the best thing we can do is try ourselves not to indulge in it."

Kirsten may not stay: Dhoni

AFP, Centurion

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni on Wednesday praised the contribution of South African coach Gary Kirsten to his team's success but admitted it might be difficult for India to keep him when his contract expires after the World Cup which ends in early April.

"Gary has been one of the great things that has happened to us," said Dhoni. "We have had a great time under him. It's an advantage for us to have him."

Dhoni said money alone would not be the key factor in whether Kirsten stayed with the world's leading Test team.

"What you need to see is that he has been part of the Indian cricket team for the last three years."

"Gary wants to spend some time with his family, which is the most crucial thing apart from the money aspect. Of course it will be a pleasure to have him in the side but more than the cricketing part it will be the family that will have an impact on his decision."

Dhoni said talks about Kirsten's future had yet to take place.

"We've got a World Cup coming up and it's a discussion that will take place at the right time," he said.

'No Facebook, Twitter'



AFP, Lahore

Pakistan has banned its cricketers from social networking sites Facebook and Twitter in the latest effort to exert discipline following a series of damaging scandals, an official said Wednesday.

Team manager Intikhab Alam said the decision was taken after wicketkeeper Zulwain Haider used Facebook to announce his retirement, after absconding from duty in Dubai and flying to London last month.

He used the popular social networking site to announce that he was retiring from international cricket and intended to seek political asylum after allegedly receiving death threats and being pressured to fix matches.

Haider has also threatened to name and shame on Facebook Pakistani teammates allegedly involved in match-fixing.

Alam told AFP that players had been ordered to steer clear of such websites.

"Nobody is allowed to discuss cricket on websites like Facebook and Twitter, and since there is a clause in players' central contracts, they are bound to follow it," Alam said.

Alam said players had disowned any Facebook and Twitter accounts.

"We have also sought advice from our legal adviser as to how to stop people making fake Facebook and Twitter accounts. We can take them to court if they don't abstain from this," Alam said.

Alam said the ban is part of the Pakistan Cricket Board's drive to maintain strict discipline and lift the team out of a series of fixing controversies.

"We have told the players to maintain discipline and avoid any controversy, and this ban is part of that planning," said Alam.

Senior batsman Younus Khan, former captain Shoaib Malik, Umar Akmal, Asad Shafiq, Kamran Akmal and Shoaib Akhtar have Facebook profiles, but only a few use their accounts regularly. Still there was criticism of the ban.

"It is a bit harsh on us, because it's social contact and we can talk to our families on Facebook while on tour," said one cricketer, who is travelling to New Zealand with the team later this month but did not want to be named.

Players from England and Australia regularly use Twitter to vent their feelings.

England captain Andrew Strauss defended the medium but urged his players to use Twitter judiciously after ace batsman Kevin Pietersen blasted practice facilities at Adelaide ahead of the second Ashes Test in Australia.

Surprisingly, Pakistan's popular all-rounder Shahid Afridi is not on Facebook and neither have his fans created a community page in his name.

"Maybe Afridi has privacy on his Facebook page. The only way you can judge whether players' pages are genuine or fake is through their mutual friends," said IT expert Imran Fida.

In May, Pakistan briefly blocked access to Facebook after an anonymous user called on people to draw the Prophet Mohammed to promote "freedom of expression", sparking angry protests in the conservative Muslim country.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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| 12 Old Italian money | 41 Round bread of India | 3 Vicinity | 24 Greet |
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| Geller | 45 Some hosiery | 5 Just outside the Arctic | 25 Whatever amount |
| 14 Inlet | 49 Bed-spread | 6 Schedule abbr. | 26 "What Not to Wear" specialty |
| 15 Second-hand | 51 "American —" | 7 "Bye!" | 27 Occupied |
| 16 Wrist adornment | 52 Hastens | 8 Spotted wildcat | 29 Born |
| 18 Member of the service? | 53 Guitar's kin | 9 Potential mountain? | 30 Chow down |
| 20 Former Houston squad | 54 Mediocre | 10 Always | 33 Crucial time |
| 21 Awe-struck | 55 Blunders | 11 Trawler gear | 36 Exit |
| 23 Homer's interjection | 56 Club — | | 38 Sign up |
| | 57 Genealogy chart | | 40 Rowing tool |

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