

SPORT

DPL to begin at long last

A chance to grab national team spots

SPORTS REPORTER



The country's cricketers' long wait for some cricket action will finally end today as the Dhaka Premier

Division Cricket League, which has seen multiple postponements over the last seven months, kicks off at three different venues across the country.

Victoria Sporting Club will start their title defence by taking on newly-promoted side Kalabagan Cricket Academy at the BKSP while Gazi Tank will face Khelaghor Samaj Kallyan Samity at the Shahid Chandu Stadium in Bogra. Brothers Union meanwhile will meet Prime Bank Cricket Club at the Shahid Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi.

There has been disappointment among players over this year's new payment system and rain may play a disruptive hand, but the start of the league comes as a sigh of relief for the cricketers as for a majority it is the chief source of cricket and income.

The repeated delays may however be a positive for the national selectors ahead of next month's home series against New Zealand, who will arrive in the capital on October 1 to play two Tests, three ODIs and a T20I.

"Unfortunately the players had missed the opportunity to show us something

during the A team's tour of England and we were also looking to the Under-23 players ahead of the home series, but the reality is that we are now looking forward to the league. We will closely monitor the performances of the players in the league because some of the positions in the national team, we believe, are wide open," said chief selector Akram Khan yesterday.

"We have five-six settled players in the team but the number two, three and four positions are up for grabs. We have some problems with the pace bowling. So this league is a big opportunity for some players and we hope the players try their best to seize it. We will consider the league performances for both the Test and ODI series," he said, adding that they would like the players in contention to play as many matches as possible.

Akram said that the focus would also be on Mashrafe Bin Mortaza to see how the pace spearhead responds to competitive cricket after bowling impressively in the just-concluded three-day practice match in Khulna. Mashrafe, will however play no earlier than September 12 when his new club Mohammedan take on Prime Doleshwar at Bogra.

Abul Hasan, Shahadat Hossain and young prospect Taskin Ahmed have been

suffering from injuries and it has created an opportunity for young Al-Amin to draw the attention of the selectors, who already impressed with his performance on the England tour.

Batting-wise Shahriar Nafees, Naeem Islam, Marshall Ayub, Jahurul Islam, Anamul Haque, Rokibul Hasan, Mominul Haque and Shamsur Rahman will be under the scanner with three batting positions, according to Akram, wide open.

The new transfer system have ensured a semblance of balance between the teams as Kalabagan Krira Chakra netted star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who is nursing his finger injury and is likely to play the league only after September 18.

The evenly-matched state of the teams means that all the clubs are looking to foreign recruits, of whom three can be fielded in a match, to make the difference.

Considering the weather, a reserve day has been kept for every round and CDDM (Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan) chairman Jalal Yunus said yesterday that they have taken full preparation to cover the field during rainfall.

It may be the most important domestic competition, but the BCB has conferred it List A status for the first time this season, after nearly 39 years of the league's existence.



Final statistics

Williams	Azarenka	
9	Aces	2
5	Double faults	7
57	1st serve percentage	57
7	Break points	12
4	Break points won	8
36	Winners	17
35	Unforced errors	27
126mph	Fastest serve	104mph

Top Five Grand Slam winners

24-	Margaret Court (AUS)
22-	Steffi Graf (GER)
19-	Helen Wills-Moody (USA)
18-	Chris Evert (USA), Martina Navratilova (USA)
17-	Serena Williams (USA)
12-	Billie Jean-King (USA)

Serena's 17 Grand Slam titles

US Open	5
Australian Open	5
Wimbledon	5
French Open	2

World number one Serena Williams of the United States dances with the glittering piece of silverware that she captured for the fifth time at Flushing Meadows after defeating Belarus's Victoria Azarenka in the US Open women's singles final on Sunday.

Walton DPL 2013 title sponsors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Walton Group has bought the title sponsorship rights for this year's Dhaka Premier League.

The company, which also sponsored the previous edition of the league, was the only interested party this year, paying Tk 30 lakh for the season. The total cost of the tournament is expected to be around Tk 2 crores.

"[Walton] has remained with us and we hope they will be with us in the future," acting Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said during the sponsorship signing ceremony.

"We are privileged to sponsor the tournament. We got the rights as we were the only interested party," said Walton executive director Jahid Hasan.

The champions will receive Tk 10 lakh, while the runners-up will receive Tk 9 lakh.

The third- and fourth-placed teams will get Tk 8 and Tk 7 lakh respectively from the BCB.

BOXING

No World C'ship for young Sumik

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Boxing Federation (BBF) recently cancelled their schedule tour of Ukraine to take part in the AIBA World Junior Boxing Championship after failing to get the government order in time.

Boxer Sumik Ahmed, a class VIII student of Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP), was supposed to take part in the World Junior Championship, which got underway Thursday last in Kiev, Ukraine, along with two officials but the federation was forced to cancel it after not receiving a government order.

But a source close to the National Sports Council (NSC) informed that the federation had applied for a government order two to three days before the start of the championship and they could not get the order from the ministry.

Toklish, Sohel in U-19 squad

SPORTS REPORTER

National striker Toklish Ahmed and midfielder Sohel Rana have been included in the 33-member preliminary squad of the national U-19 team which will play the qualifying round of the AFC U-19 Championship.

Bangladesh have been pitted along with last edition's runners-up Iraq, Kuwait and Pakistan in Group C and will play their matches in Iraq from October 8 to 12.

Nine group champions and the six best sides from all groups will qualify for the 16-team finals where hosts Myanmar will play directly.

India in final

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu

India sneaked in to the final of the 10th SAFF Championship final, thanks to a late strike from defender Arnab Kumar Mondal and some controversial refereeing decisions, to set up a rematch of last edition's final against Afghanistan.

The six-time champions, who have had the rub of the green throughout the tournament despite playing below-par football, once again profited from glaring partiality from referee Idham Mohammad Tumah to book their ninth final berth in ten SAFF Championships.

The Jordanian referee disallowed a genuine penalty appeal from the Maldivians when their star striker Ali Ashfaq was brought down inside the box by the Indian goalkeeper Subrata Paul. Thirteen minutes later, Arnab slotted in a corner-kick from Mehtab Hossain to give India the lead which they preserved till the end.

There were vehement protests from the Maldivian coach Istavan Urbanyi and his charges after the final whistle, which only earned them two red cards.

"We had two definite penalty decisions disallowed by the referee," said an infuriated Urbanyi.

Strongly Williams

REUTERS, New York



Serena Williams repeated as US Open women's champion by holding off a battling Victoria Azarenka of Belarus 7-5, 6-7(6), 6-1 in a windblown final at Arthur Ashe Stadium on Sunday.

Williams bounded in a series of joyous jumping jack leaps after Azarenka's backhand sailed long on the second match point of a thrilling, two-hour 45-minute final that earned her a fifth US Open singles title that took her total to 17 Grand Slams.

The big-hitting American, who turns 32 later this month, became the oldest US Open women's winner since tennis turned professional 45 years ago, eclipsing Australian Margaret Court, who was 31 years and 55 days when she won the title in 1973.

The triumph moved Williams to within one

Grand Slam singles crown of Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova for a tie for fourth place on the all-time list behind Court (24), Steffi Graf (22) and Helen Wills Moody (19).

It had looked like it was going to be plain sailing for Williams after she won a difficult first set, boosted by a late break in the 11th game for a 6-5 lead and then served out a love game before racing to a 4-1 second-set lead.

Williams, who earlier looked confounded by the gusty wind that affected service tosses and the direction of bounces off groundstrokes and was muttering to herself between points, finally settled into a rhythm in the second set.

"The wind was unbelievable," said the champion. "And it just got worse and worse and it never let up. But at this point you have to play under any circumstance."

She claimed the 4-1 lead after Azarenka double-faulted three times in the fifth and her US

Open repeat looked a certainty as she begun to find her range on her imposing service game that saw her serve broken only twice in six previous matches.

But Azarenka was not ready to capitulate. "I think it was raising from the first point, the tension, the battle, the determination," the second seed said about the quality of the match. "It was really kind of like boiling the water. It felt from every point, it was rising the level."

The Belarusian showed her fight and took advantage of a string of Williams errors to break right back for 4-2 and rode that momentum.

Twice Williams served for the match, at 5-4 and again at 6-5, but Azarenka rose up to break the American's serve and force a tiebreaker.

Williams took a 3-1 lead but Azarenka won five of the next six points to seize a 6-4 advantage and sent the match to a third set when Williams belted a backhand long to lose it 8-6.

Starc blow to Aussies

AFP, Sydney



Mitchell Starc is expected to be out for a "prolonged period" with a back stress fracture in a further blow to Australia's fast bowling stocks, Cricket Australia said Monday.

Starc returned home earlier this month from Australia's one-day series in England with lower back soreness and CA's worst fears were realised with confirmation of his injury.

"Mitch Starc had scans following his arrival back to Australia and they have shown an early stage low back stress fracture," CA's chief medical officer Justin Paolini said in a statement.

"His management plan will be determined in the coming days but he is expected to be unavailable for a prolonged period."

The left-arm fast medium bowler endured a frustrating tour of England, playing in the first, third and fifth Tests of the five-match Ashes series while being dropped for the second and the fourth.

CA had better news concerning another pacesman Jackson Bird, who also returned home early from England with back trouble.

"Jackson returned home with some lower back soreness. We have ruled out a major injury but will review scans in two weeks to confirm this," Paolini said.

"We expect that he will be available during The Ashes (in November)."

Starc joins other Australian fast bowlers James Pattinson and Pat Cummins on the sidelines with back injuries.

Pattinson was diagnosed with a stress fracture in his back after the second Test at Lord's in July, while Cummins is expected to miss most of the 2013-14 domestic season with recurring back trouble.

Leave my son alone: ST

INTERNET, Mumbai



Sachin Tendulkar has asked the media to leave his son alone, and allow him to play the game without any pressure.

"My son has played a match today [Sunday]. First club match, an official match. He is passionate, he is madly in love with cricket. But the other things that go around the cricketer and not just the on-field activity but whatever he gets to hear or gets to read or the way it gets projected, I would appreciate if everyone allows him to be himself and to have his own identity and enjoy his cricket above all," Tendulkar said

at a meeting arranged by the Sports Journalists' Association of Mumbai.

"At no stage of my life, there were comparisons. He [Arjun] started his career, so it is a humble request if he can live his life like a normal 14-year-old, without thinking about anything else except falling in love with this sport," he added.

Tendulkar was being felicitated by the association for scoring 100 international centuries.

Arjun Tendulkar made his Kanga League debut for the Young Parsee Cricket Club on Sunday. He made one run off 12 deliveries and took a wicket. Needless to say there was a lot of attention, something his father wasn't very comfortable with.

SHARIF shows the power of spirit



AMPUTATED ALL-ROUNDER! 15-year-old Mohammad Sharif can bat like Tamim Iqbal, besides bowling like Shakib or fielding like Nasir, only with his love for the game of cricket.

PHOTO: WRITER

ANURUP KANTI DAS

Every once in a while we come across certain incidents that reinstates our belief in our own capabilities; that the resolute force present in us can lead on to miracles.

The story of 15-year-old Mohammad Sharif from Chittagong is one such spectacle.

Four years ago, a dreadful accident led to Sharif losing both his legs and his right hand. He was chasing a kite on the roof of their house and in the process was electrocuted with surges reaching up to 33,000 volts. For him to survive, the doctors did the only thing they could - cut off his limbs.

A cricket-maniac from an early age, Sharif had always wanted to follow the footsteps of Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan and don the national cricket jersey one day. But while

the accident may have spoilt his dream of becoming a professional cricketer, it has not hindered his love for the game.

Today, Sharif, who is an all-rounder, is the captain of a local team which includes children from his neighbourhood at Mazharbari, Kamalgate. They play every Friday.

"I can bat like Tamim and smack sixes outside the boundary-line, I can turn the ball like Shakib and get wickets and I can field like Nasir and restrict the opposition from scoring," Sharif says with a hint of pride.

"I have to perform in all the departments. After all I am the captain of the side and I have to lead them like Mushfiqur [Rahim]," he adds.

If you happen to spend five minutes in the region on a Friday, you would easily be able to see just how important Sharif is to the team. The two overs that he bowled in last Friday's

game saw him pick up a crucial wicket. And with the bat, which is almost as tall as him, he dispatched many a deliveries to the boundary like an accomplished T20 cricketer.

If you feel sorry for him or think that life is a bit too challenging for him, all you need to do is have a chat with him. His high spirits and positive outlook towards life will convince you that there is nothing holding him back. But you can't keep him long, for in his eyes he has better things to do, like for example, setting his field right.

The second among two brothers and two sisters Sharif, dropped out of school when he was in class three. He now helps his father out in his business. He also sells fruits in his region to help out his family. But of all the activities that he engages in, it is the game of cricket played every Friday for which Sharif truly lives.