

Final auditions for SL series begin today

SPORTS REPORTER



The second round of the Bangladesh Cricket League, which begins today, will essentially be the last phase of practice for the Bangladesh national players ahead of the Sri Lanka Test series beginning on January 27.

Mushfiqur Rahim's North Zone will take on Tamim Iqbal's East Zone, while Mahmudullah Riyad's Central Zone will face Abdur Razzak's South Zone at the BKSP in Savar.

The first round of four-day games, which witnessed six centuries including Shamsur Rahman's double, saw batmen dominate on flat decks. While the second round will be taking place at the same venue, the curator is expected to make the wickets more bowler-friendly in order to further test the batsmen as per Mushfiqur's desire.

It's a good move considering the fact that the Sri Lankan top order has been among the runs. Almost all of their top six have hit form in the ongoing Pakistan series and a lot will depend on Bangladesh's bowling in the upcoming Test.

The second round -- which is the last opportunity for the national selectors to build their team -- will see a number of aspects in focus; the most important of which is finalising a partner for Tamim Iqbal at the top.

Anamul Haque, who played in the Tigers' last Test, failed to perform in the first round, scoring just three in South Zone's only innings. With the likes of Imrul Kayes and Shamsur Rahman scoring centuries and Nazimuddin hitting form as well, it will be interesting to see who the selectors eventually decide to field.

Also in focus is North Zone's Naeem Islam, who is taking all the right steps towards a Test comeback. Naeem scored a century at number four in the first round and has been among the runs lately. To find a way back to national colours he will have to win the race against either Marshall Ayub or Mominul Haque, the players who batted at three and four respectively in the last Test. Mominul's imperious form in the series against New Zealand however makes it highly unlikely that his spot is in question.

From the bowling point of view the focus will be on South Zone's Rubel Hossain, who missed out on the last four-day due to a sore back. The team management will hope that he churns out a performance similar to what teammate Robiul Islam put in when the Sathkhira lad got five wickets on a dead pitch in the first round.

All the analysis, of course, can only take place if the weather permits. The last round saw both matches lose at least a day due to winter fog. Encouragingly, according to the weather forecast the upcoming week is not expected to be hazy.



Sheikh Jamal's Haitian striker Wedson Anselme gestures after converting a penalty to give his team the decisive lead against Muktiyoddha Sangsad in their Bangladesh Premier League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Sheikh Jamal maintain perfect record

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Title contenders Sheikh Jamal DC continued their hundred per cent record in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League when they handed Muktiyoddha Sangsad a 1-0 defeat at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Haitian striker Wedson Anselme struck the decider in the 22nd minute to help the Federation Cup champions regain the sole lead in the 10-team table with maximum 12 points, three clear of second-placed Sheikh Russel KC while Muktiyoddha Sangsad, after two successive defeats, stayed at fifth position with four points from as many matches.

Sheikh Jamal came into the match having scored 11 goals in their previous three matches, but they found the going hard against the All Reds, a side they had beaten 1-0 in the final of the Federation Cup.

The 2011 champions played comparatively better in the first half, but their in-form striking duo of Emeka Darlington and Wedson, who have shared eight goals between them before yesterday's match, looked inconspicuous throughout the match

except for the one move which decided the outcome.

Right winger Mobarak Hossain came close to giving Sheikh Jamal the lead in the 11th minute, but his effort from inside the box sailed over the bar. Muktiyoddha Sangsad earned a penalty kick six minutes later when Nigerian striker Nkwocha Kingsley was brought down by Sheikh Jamal goalkeeper Ziaur Rahman inside the box. Referee Toyeb Hasan pointed to the spot against vehement protests from the Sheikh Jamal players, and Nigerian forward Eleta Kingsley found the back of the net with a powerful shot. However, the referee disallowed the goal and instructed a re-take as a couple of Muktiyoddha players had entered the box before the kick was taken. Kingsley, in his second attempt, struck straight at the bar and Sheikh Jamal survived an early scare.

Three minutes later, Muktiyoddha keeper Rasel Mahmud Liton committed a foul by pushing Darlington inside the danger zone while trying to clear a long ball. Wedson made no mistake from the spot and raised his tally to three goals.

After resumption, Muktiyoddha established their control in the midfield but it was Sheikh Jamal who went close to doubling the lead from a

counter-attack, but Liton charged out of the danger zone to thwart an effort from Wedson five minutes into the second half.

Muktiyoddha should have levelled the margin on the hour-mark but Nkwocha Kingsley failed to find the target despite receiving and controlling the ball well and beating the goalie. It worked as a wake-up call for Sheikh Jamal, who tightened their backline and did not allow the opponents any space to manoeuvre any scoring chances. The win is Sheikh Jamal's lowest margin win so far in the league as they defeated Chittagong Abahani 3-1, Brothers Union 4-1 and Feni Soccer 4-2 in their previous matches.

"It was not luck, rather we deserved to win as we played good football," said Sheikh Jamal coach Joseph Afusi in the post-match press conference.

His opposite number Shafiqul Islam Manik blamed the referee for the defeat.

"Both the decisions by the referee were unacceptable. First he ruled out the first penalty kick despite whistling for goal. And then he awarded Sheikh Jamal a penalty kick even though our goalkeeper touched the ball in the air while trying to clear a long ball."



Sri Lanka batsman Dilruwan Perera plays the pull on way to scoring 95 on debut on the second day of the third Test against Pakistan at the Sharjah International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Premier hockey league begins today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Green Delta Insurance 29th Premier Division Hockey League gets underway today with current runners-up Usha Krira Chakra taking on Dhaka Wanderers Club while Abahani will face Azad SC, both at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium.

In the absence of traditional powerhouse Mohammedan SC, Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, Bangladesh SC and Wari Club -- all of whom opted out of domestic hockey in protest against the current executive committee of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation -- the premier league has been reduced to a seven-team affair. However, the title race will likely be between ten-time champions Abahani and most recent Club Cup winners Usha KC, who have three league titles in their cabinets.

Both Abahani and Usha have formed strong sides with local stars while they have also contacted foreign players who will be arriving soon.

Mamunur Rashid, the coach of Usha KC, was confident of winning the title after grabbing the Club Cup title, the season's curtain-raiser on Friday.

The top four teams from the group stages, where all the teams will face each other once, will advance to the super league stage.

Mathews, Perera make Pakistan toil

AFP, Sharjah



Dilruwan Perera missed a century on his debut while skipper Angelo Mathews fell for 91 as Sri Lanka frustrated Pakistan in the third and final Test in Sharjah on Friday.

Perera (95) and Mathews made life difficult for Pakistan through their 112-run seventh wicket stand before Sri Lanka declared their first innings at 428-9, leaving Pakistan to score 19-0 in a tricky six overs before the close of the second day's play.

Openers Ahmed Shehzad (five) and Khurram Manzoor (14) survived an anxious time as Pakistan go in search of a big lead to square the series after losing the second Test by nine wickets in Dubai.

Sri Lanka, leading the series 1-0 after the first Test ended in a draw in Abu Dhabi, are aiming to seal the series.

The day once again exposed the flat Sharjah stadium pitch as Mathews put on 73 for the sixth wicket with Prasanna Jayawardene (35) and then batted solidly with Perera, leaving Pakistani bowlers frustrated and failing in their search for quick wickets.

The 31-year-old Perera, who made his one-day debut in 2007 but had never played a Test before, looked more solid during his 305-minute innings as he drove and pulled with perfection before hooking paceman Mohammad Talha into the hands of deep fine-leg.

He hit 12 boundaries and two sixes and added an invaluable 72 for the ninth wicket with Shaminda Eranga (25 not out). Mathews once again anchored the Sri Lankan batting, defying Pakistan's bowling for six hours before he fell to a miscued drive off paceman Junaid Khan who finished with figures of 3-81. Talha finished with 3-99 while spinner Saeed Ajmal had 2-120.

Mathews, who hit 91 and a career best 157 not out in the drawn first Test in Abu Dhabi, took full advantage of the dropped caught and bowled chance by Talha on Thursday when on nought, by hitting five boundaries and a six off 256-balls.

No T20 place for Gambhir, Sehwag

CRICINFO, New Delhi

Gautam Gambhir, Irfan Pathan and Yusuf Pathan were the big names missing in India's list of 30 probables for the World Twenty20 to be played in March and April of this year. Virender Sehwag didn't make it either, but with his abysmal form in the domestic season it was more or less expected. Cheteshwar Pujara and M Vijay missed out too, which is a clear sign the selectors look at them as Test specialists. Yuvraj Singh, who has been dropped from the ODI side, continued to be part of India's Twenty20 plans.

Probables: Dhawan, R Sharma, Kohli, Raina, Rahane, Rayudu, Dhoni, Karthik, Jadeja, R Ashwin, B Kumar, Shami, I Sharma, V Kumar, S Binny, M Sharma, Jadhav, Yuvraj, A Mishra, Bhatia, Samson, Pandey, Yadav, U Chand, Mandeep, Harbhajan, Aaron, Nadeem, P Patel, K Sharma.

Magical Faulkner pulls off a stunner

AFP, Brisbane



Australian all-rounder James Faulkner smashed 69 runs from just 47 balls to give Australia a miraculous one wicket win in the second one day international at the Gabba on Friday.

Chasing 301 for victory, Australia looked down and out at 244-9 with six overs remaining.

But Faulkner had other ideas as he launched an all-out assault on the English attack, being particularly brutal to Ben Stokes, who went for 1-74 from his 10 overs.

Faulkner smashed three fours and five sixes against England, who had been on track to record their first win over Australia on a miserable tour.

The Tasmanian sent the crowd of just over 32,000 into raptures with two massive sixes in the 49th over, before finishing England with three consecutive boundaries off Tim Bresnan to give Australia a 2-0 lead in the five match series.

Faulkner's innings overshadowed a superb century from England's Eoin Morgan, whose 106 earlier in the day came from 99 balls.

After starting cautiously, the left-handed Morgan picked up the pace in the last 10 overs, smashing four boundaries

and clearing the rope six times in a brutal display, his second 50 taking just 24 balls.

With such an imposing target to chase, the Australians needed to get away to a good start -- but they were rocked early when Chris Jordan dismissed Aaron Finch, the first match century-maker spooning a simple catch to Gary Ballance at mid-off for a duck.

Jordan struck again to remove David Warner for 18, somehow hanging on to a one-handed return catch from a full-blooded drive from the dangerous Australian opener.

Part-time off spinner Joe Root then grabbed the key wickets of Michael Clarke (17) and Shaun Marsh (55) to put the visitors in control at 114-4. The Australians were in further trouble six runs later when towering seamer Boyd Rankin found the right length and had George Bailey trapped in front for 24.

Glenn Maxwell (54) and Brad Haddin (26) launched a counterattack, putting on 80 in 67 balls, but Bresnan struck twice in one over to dismiss both batsmen and leave the home side at 206-7.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: 300 for 8 in 50 overs (Cook 22, Bell 68, Morgan 106, Bopara 24, Buttler 49; Coulter-Nile 2-55, Faulkner 2-73, Maxwell 2-31)

AUSTRALIA: 301 for 9 in 49.3 overs (Warner 18, Marsh 55, Clarke 17, Bailey 24, Maxwell 54, Haddin 26, Faulkner 69 not out; Jordan 2-53, Bresnan 2-64, Root 2-46)

Result: Australia won by 1 wicket and lead 5-match series 2-0.

Siddikur in 34th position

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman dropped to 34th position in the leaderboard of the King's Cup Golf Hua Hin after carding one-over-par (73) in the second round yesterday. The two-time Asian Tour winner, who was in 31st position at the end of Day 1, took his overall tally to even-par (144).

The 29-year old golfer struggled to cope with the windy conditions and fast greens of the Black Mountain Golf Club in Thailand as he managed only three birdies against two bogeys and a double-bogey.

Siddikur was eight shots adrift of joint-leaders Prom Meesawat of Thailand and Rikard Karlberg of Sweden. Both of the leaders carded one-under in the second day following seven-under on the opening day. The cut was made at two-over-par (146) and a total of 71 golfers made it to the last two rounds.

Ukrainian coach wants more boxers

SPORTS REPORTER

Ukrainian boxing coach Gurenko Alexandr, who took charge of the national boxing team on January 10, wants more boxers in the long-term training for the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games after being given only three boxers to work with.

Gurenko arrived here on January 10, the starting day of the long-term training camp, conducted by the Bangladesh Olympic Association, and worked only a week with three selected boxers -- Al Amin, Sur Krishna Chakma and Arif Hossain.

"Those who have been in the training camp are good and interested to learn and they are quick learners but I want to see other boxers as well," said Alexandr through an interpreter at the Bangladesh Boxing Federation yesterday.

The former Ukrainian boxer believes Bangladeshi boxers have a bright chance of winning gold in the Asian Games and he promised to take every necessary step to take the boxers to Europe to gain experience by participating in various tournaments.