

SPORT

BCL dates set

Franchise owners unhappy with scheduling

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB'S) tournament committee confirmed the dates of the final rounds of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) -- a franchisee-based four-day competition played between four zones -- yesterday, amidst criticism from team owners unhappy at the hurried nature of the schedule.

The third round of the competition will take place at Fatullah from April 28 to May 1. The top two teams will then face off in the finals in a five-day encounter at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium at Mirpur on May 4.

While the dates have been finalised, the scheduling of the competition -- which saw the first two rounds take place from January 12 to January 22-- was not appreciated by some of the franchise owners.

The BCL took a break after January 22 to make way for the National Cricket League -- the country's prime first-class competition played between eight teams -- which began on January 30. The NCL was then postponed after February 27 due to the ICC World Twenty20 and resumed on April 12. The BCL will take place after the NCL, which ends on April 22.

Unlike the NCL, the BCL is a competition that involves private companies. Walton, Prime Bank and Islami Bank own Central

Zone, South Zone and East Zone respectively. As a result, the haphazard scheduling did not go down too well with some of the owners.

"When we were asked to buy the teams by the BCB, we were told that this would be the next big thing in BCB's first-class cricket. They told us that there would be day-night matches with pink balls and it would be televised. Now it seems as though the BCB just wants to finish the tournament somehow," said an official of one of the franchises.

The BCB, for their part, stated that they were hoping to televise the finals of the BCL in a bid to provide the tournament more exposure.

Scheduling tournaments has not been the governing body's strongest aspect. Last year Bangladesh's prime 50-over tournament, the Dhaka Premier League, was delayed a number of times and eventually took place this season. There were a number of reasons behind the delay -- from election-related problems to the clubs' demand of fielding the national players -- and it led to several first-class players protesting the move. The competition eventually took place between September 10 and November 29.

Currently, Central Zone leads the four-team tournament with 31 points, followed by North Zone.

Central's Shamsur Rahman, who scored a career-best 267 during the first leg, tops the runs chart with 345 runs, while North Zone's slow-left armer Taijul Islam has the highest number of wickets so far with 16 scalps.



PHOTO: STAR

Victorious Bangladesh cagers pose with the trophy after beating Maldives in the last match of the 1st Citycell South Asian 3-on-3 Basketball Championships at the Dhanmondi Basketball Gymnasium yesterday.

Siddikur raring to go at Maybank

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Two weeks after helping Team Asia clinch the joint crown of the inaugural Eurasia Cup, golfer Siddikur Rahman will be eager to display similar fighting spirit when he steps up to the tee at the CIMB Niaga Indonesian Masters today.

The Bangladeshi star is hopeful he can put up another strong performance at the Royale Jakarta Golf Club against a star-studded international field that includes France's Victor Dubuisson, Major winner Louis Oosthuizen of South Africa and defending champion Bernd Wiesberger of Austria.

"I've got good memories at Royal Jakarta. I came in third one year when Westwood won and I always enjoy playing at Royale Jakarta," Siddikur told Asiantour.com on the eve of the event. "It rewards accuracy which suits my style of play and I feel comfortable on the greens which is the key."

KKR thrash Mumbai

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Kolkata Knight Riders kicked off the seventh edition of the Twenty20 Indian Premier League in style by beating defending champions Mumbai Indians by 41 runs at the Sheikh Abu Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday.

On winning the toss, Kolkata skipper Gautam Gambhir decided to bat on a batting-friendly surface and scored 163 runs losing five wickets, thanks to a 131-run second-wicket partnership between Jacques Kallis and Manish Pandey. Kallis scored 72 runs off 46 deliveries while Pandey scored 53 off 46. Shakib Al Hasan was dismissed for 1. Sri Lanka speedster Lasith Malinga took four wickets for 23 runs.

In reply, Mumbai Indians managed only 122 runs for seven wickets, with Ambati Rayudu being the top-scorer (48). West Indies spinner Sunil Narine took four wickets for 20 while Shakib took one wicket for 29.

SCORES IN BRIEF
KKR: 163 for 5 (Kallis 72, Pandey 64, Shakib 1; Malinga 4-23)
MI: 122 for 7 (Rayudu 48, Sharma 27; Narine 4-20, Shakib 1-29)
Result: KKR won by 41 runs.

AFC revamps competitions

More matches for Bangladesh expected

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The Asian Football Confederation, in an executive committee meeting yesterday, decided to approve a proposal to cut down on the number of tournaments while increasing the opportunities for member nations to play more matches. As part of the decision the committee decided to scrap the AFC Challenge Cup, a tournament where Bangladesh used to participate, but increase the number of teams in the Asian Cup from 16 to 24 from the next edition (2019) and merge the World Cup Qualifiers with the qualification for the Asian Cup.

According to the decision, the 2014 AFC Challenge Cup which will be played in Maldives from May 19 to 30 will be the last edition of this competition.

Depending on the number of entries, the Member Associations will be divided into eight groups in the preliminary stage of the Asian Cup and the eight group winners and four second best teams among all the eight groups will qualify for the FIFA World Cup final round of qualifiers and also the AFC Asian Cup finals. Presently, only 10 teams battle it out in the final round of the FIFA World Cup qualifiers.

The next best 24 teams from the preliminary qualification round will compete for the remaining slots in the AFC Asian Cup finals in six groups of four teams each. The final round of FIFA World Cup qualifiers and AFC Asian Cup qualifiers will be separated.

It means Bangladesh, who used to go through the World Cup pre-qualifiers, will play in the Asian Cup and will play against three other teams -- possibly more depending on the number of entries -- in the group phase on a home-and-away basis.

While this decision scraps the AFC Challenge Cup from Bangladesh's menu, it also makes sure teams like Bangladesh get to play more matches during the qualifiers.

The committee also approved the proposal to rank the Member Associations based on their national teams and clubs' performance over the last four years in AFC competitions. 30 per cent of points will be allocated for national teams' performances while seventy per cent for the clubs' showings.

The committee also decided to scrap the AFC President's Cup while introducing play-offs for the AFC Cup (the second-tier club competition) where the representative from Bangladesh will participate.

Bangladesh are currently ranked 33rd

Bangladesh win 3-on-3 title

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Bangladesh became unbeaten champions of the First Citycell South Asian 3-on-3 Basketball Championships which concluded in Dhaka yesterday. Bangladesh beat Maldives by 20-9 points in the last match of the round robin stage at the Dhanmondi Basketball Gymnasium to lift the title.

Bangladesh finished top with eight points while Sri Lanka finished runners-up with seven. Maldives won the Fair Play award. Nepal and Bhutan were the other two participating teams in the two-day meet.

The last match started one hour after the scheduled time as the chief guest of the occasion, Advocate Kamrul Islam, the food minister, arrived 50 minutes late.

But once the game started, it finished in a flash as Bangladesh raced to maximum points (20) within 8.52 minutes, with more than a minute remaining on the clock. Well, that is the nature of the shortest format of basketball, which some people call the twenty20 of basketball.

Played in one half of the court, the game is between two teams of three players each who jostle to cage the ball in one basket. Ten minutes is the stipulated time, but if one team reaches 20 points before that time, the game is over. Less rigorous than standard basketball, this format gives more reward to those who have greater body skills and are less reliant on their height.

"This format is growing popular in recent times and it has been included in the Asian Beach Games, Indoor Asian Games and it is a target of FIBA (Federation of International Basketball Association) to spread the game. So we (SABA) have staged this international tournament for the first time here, even though three-on-three has been played quite a few times in domestic league," said AK Sarker, the recently re-elected general secretary of SABA (South Asian Basketball Association) and also the general secretary of the Bangladesh Basketball Federation.

The chief guest distributed prizes among the teams where president of BBF Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, secretary general of Bangladesh Olympic Association Syed Shahed Reza, head of corporate affairs of Citycell Taslim Ahmed were also present.

Zia finishes 15th in Dubai

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Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman finished 15th after beating CRG Krishna of India in the ninth and final round of the 16th Dubai Open Chess Championship which concluded in United Arab Emirates yesterday. Zia earned six points from nine rounds and thereby improved his rating by seven points. GM Eduardo Romain of France became unbeaten champion with eight points.

Meanwhile, Zia and WFM Nazrana Khan Eva will participate in the 13th Asian Continental Chess Championships which starts today in Sharjah. Five players from open section will qualify for the 2015 World Cup and one player from women's section will qualify for the in 2014 Women's World Chess.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Roger Federer of Switzerland plays a forehand return to Radek Stepanek of the Czech Republic during the Monte Carlo Masters in Monaco yesterday.

Nadal, Federer set sail

AFP, Monte Carlo



Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer rushed into the third round at the Monte Carlo Masters on Wednesday, with both posting quick opening victories.

Top seed Nadal, champion at eight of the last nine editions, spent 72 minutes in smothering any upset hopes of Russian Teimuraz Gabashvili, who got off to a shock 3-1 lead before Spain's king of clay reeled him in for a 6-4, 6-1 success.

Federer, seeded fourth at a Masters

1000 event that he has never won, delivered a 6-1, 6-2 thrashing to fellow veteran Radek Stepanek.

Federer's rout in 52 minutes was seven minutes longer than another easy victory by holder Novak Djokovic a day earlier.

The Swiss will next face off for a quarter-final spot on Thursday when he takes on Lukas Rosol.

The Czech booked his spot over Frenchman Michael Llodra 6-4, 6-4.

Federer improved to 14-2 over Stepanek, 35, whose last victory in the series came in Rome six years ago.

Federer, 32, swept the first set in 22 minutes and faced his only spot

of bother as he saved a pair of break points in the sixth game of the second set.

The winner was aided by five Stepanek double-faults, with Federer breaking four times.

The Swiss won an ATP Tour-leading 25th match of the season. Nadal steadied after going down early against Gabashvili, with the Spaniard improving to 49-2 at the event. The top seed won six games in a row on his way to claiming the opening set and reaching 4-0 in the second.

A break by his opponent for 4-1 only delayed the inevitable, with

Nadal getting the break straight back for 5-1 before taking the win on a first match point a game later.

Nadal will now line up against Andreas Seppi after the Italian defeated Pablo Andujar 7-6 (7/5), 5-7, 6-4.

Australian Open champion and third seed Stanislas Wawrinka was taking on Croatian Marin Cilic.

Canadian eighth seed Milos Raonic duplicated his best showing in the principality with a 6-7 (4/7), 6-2, 6-1 defeat of Taiwan's Yen Lu-Hsun.

Italian tenth seed Fabio Fognini beat Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain 7-6 (8/6), 6-4.

SC rejects Srini's plea

AFP, New Delhi



The Supreme Court on Wednesday rejected N Srinivasan's plea to reinstate him as India's cricket chief, saying he had effectively turned a blind eye to allegations of wrongdoing in the Indian Premier League.

The court last month ordered Srinivasan to stand aside as president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), installing batting great Sunil Gavaskar to oversee the latest edition of the Twenty20 tournament which opened Wednesday.

Srinivasan, seen as the most powerful man in world cricket, asked the court on Tuesday to reinstate him, saying he was being unfairly blamed for corruption allegations that have hit the board's flagship IPL.

But the court said Srinivasan knew about, but did not take seriously, allegations contained in a court-commissioned report over claims of illegal betting and spot-fixing embroiling the IPL.

Justice AK Patnaik reiterated the court's opinion that Srinivasan's presence as head of the BCCI was preventing a fair probe into the allegations.

"We cannot close our eyes after having come to know about allegations," the Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted Patnaik as saying, adding the court wanted the BCCI to handle the investigations itself.

"It [the report] said all these allegations were brought to his [Srinivasan's] notice but he did not take any action. That means he was aware about the allegations and did not take it seriously," he said.

The court asked the BCCI to provide details on how it planned to conduct any probe into the allegations contained in the report, before adjourning the case until April 22.

A court-appointed panel has been looking into allegations into last year's IPL when former Test bowler Shanthakumaran Sreesanth was caught deliberately bowling badly while playing for the Rajasthan Royals in return for thousands of dollars from bookmakers.

The panel's report, sections of which were released in February, concluded that Srinivasan's son-in-law Gurunath Meiyappan -- who was the team principal of the Chennai Super Kings -- could be guilty of illegal betting on IPL games.