

SPORT

SUPER SIXES The ultimate stage

SPORTS REPORTER



The first phase of the Dhaka Premier League came to an end this week, and in terms of the points table, witnessed quite an exciting finish. While the top two teams, Abahani and Prime Bank Cricket Club had confirmed their presence in the Super Six round long before the eleventh round, the four other sides finished on 14 points each and had to wait till the last round to confirm their berths.

Nevertheless, the real battle begins now. The Super Sixes, which is expected to begin on December 24, have a lot at stake. Club rivalry will be at its fiercest mode; in addition, the selectors will have a special focus on its group of 30 players to make the final cut prior to the World Cup.

So far it seemed like the national players were taking it a bit easy, following the Zimbabwe series, however, with the Super Six round around the corner, they will need to press on the gas.

Anamul Haque, for instance, got off to a flying start as he hammered a 113 in his first match for Kalabagan Cricket Academy. However, the next three games saw him score a total of just 16 runs.

Another top order batsman who will need to hit form is Mominul Haque. He has scored just 55 runs in four innings for Prime Doleswar Sporting Club. With Mominul competing for the all important number three position in the national setup, he will want to get some runs from his bat. Also competing for that spot is Shamsur Rahman, who unfortunately won't be taking part in the Super League as his side Kalabagan Krira Chakra finished at a disappointing eighth. With 439 runs in eleven innings he is currently the second highest run-getter of the competition.

The lower middle order is another position that the selectors will be eyeing. Sabir Rahman played at number seven during the Zimbabwe series and he is likely to make the final cut. In terms of performances in the DPL Sabir is ahead of his closest rival Nasir Hossain. While Sabir has scored 247 runs in six matches at an average of 41, Nasir has 269 runs at an average of 38.43. The Super Six round will be Nasir's last chance to prove himself for a spot in the final 15.

With regards to bowling, the spinners will be in focus. While Jubair Hossain is yet to get a game for Abahani, slow left-armers Arifat Sunny and Taijul Islam have taken 12 wickets each in eight matches. Sunny's side did not qualify for the Super Sixes. As a result, it will be a good opportunity for Taijul to show the selectors something special and compete for the spot that currently is tilted towards Sunny.

Abdur Razzaq, who has taken 16 wickets in eight matches, is another bowler who won't be featuring in the Super Sixes, which further derails his chances of making the final cut.

Taskin Ahmed has been the highlight amongst the pacers. He has taken 12 wickets in six matches at an average of 11.58. Now it's left to see as to whether Al-Amin Hossain, Rubel Hossain and Abul Hasan can further their impetus.



Bangladesh captain Mamunul Islam (2nd from L) shares a light moment with his teammates during a training session at the BUET ground yesterday, ahead of today's friendly match against Japan U-21s.

PHOTO: STAR

Booters brace for Japanese challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Presuming that Bangladesh would play with a five-man backline, the Japan U-21 team trained at the match venue yesterday evening by building up the game from the two flanks, indicating that they are keen on playing aggressive football as they take on Bangladesh national team in today's international friendly at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The tall and well-built Japanese players were fast in attack -- through the flanks and down the middle -- as the forwards connected to low crosses regularly, finding the target.

Though hosts Bangladesh, who are going to face a Japanese age-level side for the first time having lost all five matches against Japan's senior side by big margin, have already decided to play on counter

The match will begin at 5:00pm and will be telecast live on Channel 9.

Gallery ticket price Tk 30, VIP ticket

attack, the visitors are not worried about the strength of the hosts.

"Whenever we play, we play for winning. With due respect to Bangladesh, we are not thinking about the opposition, rather we are concentrating on playing our own game as this is our last overseas game before the Olympic Qualifiers," said captain Matsubara Ken at the pre-match briefing at the BFF House yesterday.

The Japanese team management conceded that they have little knowledge about their opponents even the coach did admit that his

deputy has watched video footages of some of the recent matches of Bangladesh team.

The Japan coach earmarked Ken and forwards -- Suzuki Musahi, Kubo Yuya and Minamino Takumi as the best players of the team.

Bangladesh coach Saiful Bari Titu could not promise anything positive apart from learning something against Japan to exploit it in future.

"We watched the video footages of the Japan team's recent match against Thailand U-21, which they won 2-0. I told my players that they should not make the mistakes that Thailand made," said the former Bangladesh international.

"The fitness level of our players is not at peak and another worry for us is that we tend to lose possession as quickly we gain it. I would like to see my players not make that mistake so that they don't get themselves under

pressure," said Titu, adding that they would try to entertain the crowd as much as possible while taking a counter-attacking strategy.

The interim coach also hinted that they might resort to a different formation from the usual 4-5-1, depending on the match situation.

The most likely starting line-up could see Rasel Mahmud Liton under the bar; Nasiruddin Chowdhury and Atique Rahman Meshu partnered by Raihan Hasan and Yeamin Munna at the back; Mamunul Islam, Mona Khan Raju and Jamal Bhuiyan in the middle with Zahid Hossain and Sohel Rana/Hemanta Vincent Biswas on either flank and Zahid Hasan Emily as the lone centre-forward. However, since this is a friendly match, he might make maximum substitutions available, hinted the Bangladesh coach.

Women's v'ball team off to Nepal

SPORTS REPORTER

A 17-member Bangladesh team left for Nepal yesterday to participate in the First South Asian Women's Volleyball Championship to be held from December 19 to 23 in Kathmandu.

Six countries -- India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Maldives and hosts Nepal -- will compete in the regional Volleyball meet, initially on league basis. Later, two top teams will play in the final.

Bangladesh team trained for about five weeks at the Sultana Kamal Women's Sports Complex in Dhammudi as part of preparation for this tournament. The bound contingent comprises 12 players and five officials.

Josh's debut makes dad's pals richer!

AFP, Brisbane

Australian cricketer Josh Hazlewood's Test debut Wednesday is set to bring joy to a group of punters who placed a 500-1 bet on him playing such a game when he was still a teenager, reports said.

Friends of Hazlewood's dad Trevor reportedly placed a 100 Australian dollar wager with British bookmakers almost nine years ago that Josh would become a Test player.

They now look set to win 50,000 dollars each after he took the field for his maiden Test against India at the Gabba on Wednesday.

Trevor confirmed the story to The Brisbane Courier-Mail but would not reveal the identities of the gamblers, believed to be from Tamworth in New South Wales near where Josh grew up.

Kiwis draw level

SPORTS DESK

Skipper Kane Williamson hit a sublime century and veteran left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori scalped three important wickets as New Zealand beat Pakistan by 7 runs in the fourth one-day international against Pakistan in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday. The result means the two teams go into Friday's fifth ODI tied at 2-2.

Williamson hit 123 to help steer New Zealand to a challenging total of 299-5. The 24-year-old right-hander scored 123 off 105 balls while opener Martin Guptill made 58 after New Zealand won the toss and batted on a conducive batting strip at Sheikh Zayed Stadium.

Williamson pulled pace-man Mohammad Irfan to deep square-leg for his ninth boundary to complete the three-figure mark off just 92 balls. He was finally bowled by Irfan off the last delivery of the innings.

Pakistan kept themselves in the chase till the last over of the match, thanks to a 117-ball 103 from Younis Khan and a whirlwind 49 off just 25 balls from skipper Shahid Afridi. But timely strike by Vettori and support from the rest of the bowlers meant the Pakistanis fell seven runs short.

SCORES IN BRIEF
NEW ZEALAND: 299 for 5 in 50 overs (Guptill 58, Brownlie 42, Williamson 123; Irfan 2-53, Afridi 1-46)
PAKISTAN: 292 for 5 in 50 overs (Younis 103, Afridi 49, Jamshed 30; Vettori 3-53)

Result: New Zealand won by 7 runs.



India batsman Murali Vijay celebrates his century during the first day of the second Test against Australia at the Gabba in Brisbane on Wednesday.

Vijay makes it India's day

AFP, Brisbane

Murali Vijay made Australia's bowlers toil in the brutal Brisbane heat with a defiant century as India frolicked in the second Test at the Gabba on Wednesday.

Vijay profited from two dropped catches by Shaun Marsh to score his fourth Test century against Australia and his first in this country, putting the tourists in a commanding position after the opening day.

The Chennai right-hander, cruelly out for 99 in the Adelaide series opener, made it look easy on a Gabba pitch where the Australians have remained unconquered for 26 years.

Vijay was out late in the day, caught behind off spinner Nathan Lyon for 144 -- equaling Sourav Ganguly's

2003 knock as the highest score by an Indian at the Gabba.

"Today was really hot and was testing us all. As a batsman I could see a lot of bowlers sulking out there because it was really hot," Vijay said.

"The [post-tea] session was really important for us and I thought a lot of people on their team were getting tired. I wanted to wait until that time and make use of it."

Vijay batted for 332 minutes and faced 213 balls with 22 fours. He put on 124 with Ajinkya Rahane for the fourth wicket.

At the close India were 311 for four with Rahane unbeaten on 75 and Rohit Sharma not out 26.

The century continued Vijay's impressive start to the four-match series with scores of 53 and 99 in India's 48-run defeat in the first Test.

He was helped along the way by two

chances put down by Shaun Marsh on 36 and 102, both off Mitchell Johnson's bowling and by a tiring Australian bowling attack on a sweltering day.

It was a sorry day in the field for the Australians, with both new pacemen Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc having fitness problems in the heat and a third bowler Mitchell Marsh off the field with hamstring trouble.

"I thought the first session was okay, the second session very good, third session very poor," Australia coach Darren Lehmann said.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings 311 for 4 (Vijay 144, Dhawan 24, Pujara 18, Kohli 19, Rahane 75 not out, R Sharma 26 not out; Hazlewood 2-44)

AUSTRALIA: Warner, Rogers, Watson, Smith, S Marsh, M Marsh, Haddin, Johnson, Starc, Lyon, Hazlewood

Hashim, AB put SA on top

AFP, Centurion

Captain Hashim Amla and his senior lieutenant AB de Villiers both hit centuries as South Africa took command after early setbacks on the first day of the first Test against the West Indies here on Wednesday. South Africa were 340 for three at the close. Amla, captaining South Africa for the first time in a home Test, made 133 not out, while De Villiers hit an unbeaten 141. They added 283 for the fourth wicket, a South African record against the West Indies.

The pair came together with South Africa in a minor crisis after losing three wickets for no runs with the total on 57.

It was a superb display of batting by two of the best batsmen in the world but it was not a good day for the West Indians, who failed to take advantage of sending South Africa in to bat in heavily overcast conditions.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 340 for 3 (Petersen 27, Elgar 28, Amla 133 not out, De Villiers 141 not out; Roach 2-52)

WEST INDIES: Ramdin (captain, wkt), Brathwaite, Smith, Johnson, Samuels, Chanderpaul, Blackwood, Roach, Taylor, Benn, Cottrell.

Roach was surprisingly not given the new ball and runs flowed freely from South African openers Alviros Petersen and Dean Elgar before Roach was brought into the attack after nine overs.

He made the first breakthrough in his third over when he had Petersen caught at first slip and followed up with the wicket of Faf du Plessis, who was caught behind. When Roach limped off he had taken two for 52.

Roach's wickets sandwiched the dismissal of Elgar, who was caught at gully off left-arm Sheldon Cottrell. The three wickets fell in the space of 15 balls.

Rain delayed the start by half an hour and the sky was overcast for almost the entire day but with the exception of Roach, the bowlers were not consistent enough to exploit any assistance from the conditions.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: 292 for 5 in 50 overs (Younis 103, Afridi 49, Jamshed 30; Vettori 3-53)

NEW ZEALAND: 299 for 5 in 50 overs (Guptill 58, Brownlie 42, Williamson 123; Irfan 2-53)

Result: South Africa won by 10 wickets.

'Pak players shattered'

PTI, Karachi

Former Pakistan captain and senior batsman Younis Khan feels playing the fourth cricket ODI against New Zealand on Wednesday would be very difficult as the terrorist attack on a school in Peshawar had left the players shattered.

"When the Australian batsman, Phil Hughes died recently it touched us all and one day's play in a Test match against New Zealand was postponed as a mark of respect. You can imagine what this terrorist attack must have done to us today," Younis said.

"It is a national tragedy and a barbaric act and honestly playing the match is going to be very difficult," he said on Geo Super channel.

Cook won't walk away

REUTERS, Colombo

Alastair Cook said he had no intention of stepping down as captain after his England side lost the seventh and final match of the one-day series against Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

The left-handed opening batsman struggled for runs again, making just 32 as his team were beaten by 87 runs to slip to a 5-2 defeat in the series.

"I haven't played as well as I'd like on this tour," said Cook at the presentation ceremony. "I'm working hard on my game, I'm hungry as ever to score runs."

"You dust yourself off and you go again. I'm captain of my country, yes it hasn't gone well over the last 12 months with my batting in the one-day game, but I would feel very wrong to walk away."

"If that decision gets taken out of my hands then I have to hold my hands up and say I haven't been good enough but until that moment I'll do what I always do," added Cook.

"I'll work incredibly hard. I'm still incredibly hungry to do it."

While England were down in the dumps, Sri Lanka paid a warm tribute to master batsmen Mahela Jayawardene and Kumar Sangakkara after they played their final international match on home soil.

Clarke surgery better than expected

AFP, Brisbane

Michael Clarke's hamstring surgery had "the best result" possible, former cricketing great Shane Warne said Wednesday, raising hopes the Australian skipper will make the upcoming World Cup.

Clarke badly tore his right hamstring on Saturday during the first Test against India in Adelaide, a match he went into under an injury cloud given his long history of back complaints.

The 33-year-old said after the match that he was unlikely to play any further part in the four-match Test series against India and that the injury could cut short his career.



COOKIES FAIL TO ENERGISE

Chester's Gareth Roberts enjoys a packet of biscuits during his side's FA Cup second round replay against Barnsley on Tuesday. But the energy boost failed to work -- Barnsley comfortably won the game 3-0 to