

SPORT



(Clockwise from L) Mustafizur Rahman (2nd from L) will be one of the star attractions of the Bangladesh Premier League which starts today. Chittagong Vikings skipper Tamim Iqbal shares a light moment with his team's two Pakistani recruits. Rangpur Riders' Darren Sammy and Misbahul Haq enjoy their time at training yesterday.

PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED



MATCH INSIGHT



KEY PLAYER

MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

The deadliest Bangladeshi bowler at the moment, Mustafizur's bursts will have to be carefully used by Kumar Sangakkara. It's not just the foreign players who are bound to be troubled by him; even the local players will be tested.

SUNIL NARINE

Although his action has been questioned a number of times in the recent past, there is no doubt that if Narine manages to stay away from that issue in this tournament he can cause huge problems for opponents.

STRENGTH

Courtesy of a number of clever buys, the Dynamites have managed to form a strong group of local players, which could prove to be a crucial aspect in the competition.

WEAKNESS

The team lacks a batsman who can go after the bowlers right from the start of the game.

Mustafizur is an exceptional and outstanding young cricketer. He seems to enjoy what he is doing with a smile about him. He is going to be special for us.

-Kumar Sangakkara

The BPL is going to be an excellent platform for the Bangladesh's national players to get in form before the T20 World Cup. Everyone will want to utilise this chance.

-Imrul Kayes

The best opportunity

SPORTS REPORTER



It has taken two years and nine months, but the third season of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is finally here. When the skippers of Rangpur Riders and Chittagong Vikings, Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal, step out at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium at 2 pm today for the toss, all wait will have come to an end.

Later in the evening Kumar Sangakkara's Dhaka Dynamites will take on Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's Comilla Victorians, a match expected to be a cricketing tactician's delight.

A little more than three years ago, when the inaugural season of the BPL was about to begin, there was a sense of excitement similar to one in the ground today. The players seemed pumped up, there's plenty of chatter during the training sessions and with four teams training almost simultaneously, the Mirpur stadium is abuzz.

However, as the world eventually saw, the excitement was short-lived. Marred by both on-field and off-field issues, the Bangladesh Premier League faltered even before it could take off.

There were payment issues, the timeline of which stretched to such an

extent that the problem was solved only a few months ago. In addition, the fixing scandal, which broke soon after the second season of the competition, was arguably the biggest setback that the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had ever faced.

However, all those aspects are now in the past. The BCB is attempting to make a fresh start after a gap of nearly three years and a lot has changed. There are new franchises, there are new owners and the players' payment system has been drastically changed in order to avoid problems from the past.

In a sense, all these changes were necessary. As the BCB attempts to restart the league, they will know that they have to put up their best show ever this season and there are many reasons for that.

First and the foremost is the fact that the league is taking place after a long hiatus. One expects the administrators to have learnt from their mistakes and built strategies to prevent history from repeating itself.

A smooth BPL is what the people of Bangladesh want and the best part about it is that there is every chance for that to take place.

The Pakistan Cricket Board have agreed to send their players and the

Bangladesh cricketers have enjoyed their best ever run in international cricket this year. At the moment everything seems to be going the BCB's way; except the slightly precarious security scenario in the country. But then again that is an issue that has been tactfully handled by the board.

Secondly, a competitive BPL can go on to be a good launching pad for the Bangladesh cricketers ahead of the Asia Cup, which will be hosted by Bangladesh and the ICC World Twenty20 next year.

Bangladesh's last T20 series against Zimbabwe suggests that there's still plenty of room for them to improve in this format of the game. In other words, the BPL could very well be the start of Bangladesh's preparations for the mega event in India next year.

Meanwhile, there were injury two injury blows as Bangladesh left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak and Dhaka Dynamites batsman Malcolm Waller were injured during training at the BCB Academy ground in separate incidents yesterday.

Razzak suffered a hamstring injury while fielding and the player is likely to be out for a week. He will not be available for Sylhet's first two matches against the Chittagong Vikings and the Barisal Bulls.

Waller on the other hand hurt his head



MATCH INSIGHT



KEY PLAYER

TAMIM IQBAL

For the Vikings a lot will depend on Tamim Iqbal. It has been a while since Tamim tore apart a side in T20 cricket but he has been in good form this year. A good show from Tamim can entirely change the scenario for Chittagong.

STRENGTH

With a series of aggressive batters in the side, the Vikings have formed a solid batting order. Tillakaratne Dilshan, Tamim Iqbal, Anamul Haque, the Akmal brothers and the list goes on.

WEAKNESS

Although they have Tillakaratne Dilshan and Ziaur Rahman, the absence of a genuine all-rounder may be a bit of a concern.

In terms of training, we have covered each and every department well. We are very confident for our match tomorrow.

-Ziaur Rahman

I have watched the BPL before and I think this year will be the best. You look at the kinds of players that have come here and it shows that cricketers are interested to play here.

-Darren Sammy

Booters face Lijiang today

SPORTS REPORTER

Having started their ASEAN International Football Tournament campaign in Yunnan with a 3-2 defeat against Myanmar on Friday, Bangladesh national football team will look to bounce back when they face hosts Lijiang team in their second match today. However, the preparation for the second match has not been ideal for Fabio Lopez's charges.

Having reached the Yunnan province late on Wednesday night, Bangladesh had to take the field early in the morning to face Myanmar following attendance in the opening ceremony. And according to messages from the team, they did not hold any practice sessions yesterday, spending time at the hotel.

Jamal Bhuiyan, in his post-match reaction, had said that he felt Bangladesh should have won that match while he also felt the team might need to work on formation ahead of the second game, according to the message sent from Yunnan. The midfielder also informed that the Bangladeshi players are having difficulties with food as they are served only Chinese food.

The fourth team in Bangladesh's group are a team from the Hebei province of China. Three teams from each of the two groups will go through to the next round.

SYLHET SUPERSTARS Pace-packed power

SPORTS REPORTER



The most noticeable aspect of the Sylhet Superstars is their strong pace attack. While the other teams filled their respective sides with spinners and slow left-armers, Sylhet went the other way and signed up quite a few quick bowlers.

By the end of the players' draft they already had Rubel Hossain, Mohammad Shahid, Sohail Tanvir and Chris Jordan. After the draft they also included Shubashish Roy, an upcoming Bangladeshi pacer, and Fidel Edwards.

It's still unclear how effective their strategy will be at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. While the wicket at Mirpur does have plenty of bounce, that characteristic may wane as the tournament progresses.

The focus on the pacers doesn't necessarily mean that they have completely ignored the spinners. In fact they actually have some of the best in the business in the form of veterans such as Abdur Razzak, Shahid Afridi and Ajantha Mendis. On the whole, it seems like a very strong bowling unit.

However, at the moment it seems their batting will have to depend on Mushfiqur Rahim and a host of foreigners. Apart from Mushfiqur, some of the other big names in the squad include Joshua Cobb, Brad Hodge and Ravi Bopara.

Amongst the local batsmen it's still unclear who the team could rely on. They have the likes of Mominul Haque, Nurul Hasan and Nazmul Hossain Milon, all of whom have great potential. However, their impact in this format of the game is something that is yet to be measured.

On the bright side, this could also be an opportunity for these batsmen to make a name for themselves. For instance, for players like Mominul, Nurul or even Junaid Siddique this could be the platform that could benefit them the most by catching the eye of the selectors.

This could also be an opportunity for Mushfiqur to get used to the approach of T20 cricket. He is bound to be a crucial batsman for the Tigers in the ICC World Twenty20, and many hope that he can adjust to this format of the game as quickly as possible.

SQUAD

LOCAL PLAYERS: Mushfiqur Rahim, Rubel Hossain, Mominul Haque, Abdur Razzak, Nurul Hasan, Mohammad Shahid, Nazmul Hossain Milon, Abu Sayem Chowdhury, Shubashish Roy, Enamul Haque.

FOREIGN PLAYERS: Sohail Tanvir, Joshua Cobb, Chris Jordan, Shahid Afridi, Brad Hodge, Ravi Bopara, Ajanta Mendis, Dilshan Munawera, Fidel Edwards

COACH: Sarwar Imran

JUNIOR ASIA CUP BD set up 5th-place play-off

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh under-21 hockey team beat Oman 3-2 in penalty shoot-out yesterday to ensure a berth in the 5th place play-off match in the Junior Asia Cup in Kuantan, Malaysia. The Bangladesh team, which had earlier beaten the same opponents 5-4 in a group game last week, will play against defending champions Malaysia in the place-deciding match today. A win will see Bangladesh finish fifth while a defeat will see them finish sixth in the eight-team competition.

Since the win against Oman last week, Bangladesh have beaten South Korea 2-0 and lost against Japan 0-3 to relinquish their chance of a top-four finish and therefore a berth in next year's Junior World Cup.

Bangladesh faced stiff challenge from Oman yesterday as regulation time ended 2-2. Bangladesh took a first-half lead through a penalty corner (PC) from Roman Sarkar in the 31st minute, but Oman scored twice in 64th and 67th minutes to take lead. However, forward Milon Hossain equalised in the final minute to take the match into penalty shoot-out, where Harun's charges prevailed by 3-2 goals.

Hafeez won't play with Amir

AFP, Dubai



Senior Pakistan batsman Mohammad Hafeez on Saturday became the first cricketer to refuse to play alongside Mohammad Amir.

The tainted but cleared paceman will feature for Chittagong Vikings in the Bangladesh premier league starting from Wednesday -- a team Hafeez said also asked him to join.

"I was approached by my agent to play for the Chittagong team but when I knew that Amir was also in that team so I refused it point blank," Hafeez told AFP.

"I have no personal issues with Amir or Chittagong, it's my personal opinion that I can't share the dressing room with someone

who hurt my country's integrity."

Hafeez added: "If any other team makes me an offer then I will play the league and I have no problems facing Amir as I have played against him in the domestic matches but can't be in the same team," said Hafeez, a former Pakistan Twenty20 captain.

"We [Pakistan] had to suffer the taunts of the fans and after 2010 every act, every defeat and every mistake of ours was seen as suspicious, so we overcame that tough time and will not allow it to happen again."

Asked what if Amir is included in the Pakistan team again, Hafeez said: "We will look at it when it happens, it's premature to say anything now."

Reportedly Hafeez had an lucrative offer of around ten million Pakistani rupees to play but he turned it down.

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP

Pakistan pull out

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) has decided not to send its team to next month's South Asian Federation (SAFF) Championship in India, according to a high-official of the regional football body.

"I received an e-mail yesterday from the PFF saying it is withdrawing the Pakistan team from the SAFF Championship," said SAFF general secretary, Anwarul Haque Halal, adding that no official reason was provided for the pull-out.

Pakistan did not participate in any of the AFC and SAFF tournaments in recent times, including the inaugural SAFF U-16 Championship in Sylhet, the SAFF U-19 Championship in Nepal, and the AFC U-21 Championship in Dhaka this year, thanks to a high-court ruling regarding a disputed election of the PFF. All the activities of the federation have remained postponed due to the court order.

It is believed that the same issue has led to their pulling out of the show-piece event, branded as the 2015 Suzuki SAFF Cup, scheduled to be held from December 23 to January 3 in Kerala. Pakistan's pull-out means the 12-day tournament will be a seven-team affair, with India Nepal and Sri Lanka in Group A while Group B will feature defending champions Afghanistan alongside Maldives.

Kader, Lokman show-caused

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has issued show-cause notices to veteran organisers Manzur Kader and Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan for their derogatory comments against local football's governing body as well the former's meeting with the national team players at his office some 24 hours before Bangladesh's recent World Cup qualifying home fixture against Australia. BFF's Professional Football League Committee (PFLC), headed by Abus Salam Mursedy, took the decision after an emergency meeting at the BFF House yesterday.

"Sheikh Jamal president Manzur Kader and Mohammadan's director-in-charge Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan have been making derogatory remarks and baseless allegations against the BFF in recent times. Furthermore, taking away national team players to Sheikh Jamal club's meeting a day before the FIFA fixture between Bangladesh

and Australia was a clear violation of the FIFA regulations," said Mursedy after the emergency meeting, adding: "Under these circumstances, the PFLC has decided to issue show-cause notices to Manzur Kader and Lokman Hossain asking to explain why any action will not be taken against them."

Mursedy further added that the BFF Disciplinary committee will analyse their replies, which they must send within 24 hours of receiving the notices, and thereby take appropriate measures. The show-cause notices were expected to be served by last night.

Earlier, some 20 to 25 people, led by officials of two Dhaka clubs, staged a protest against Kader and Lokman inside the BFF House, asking for punishment against the two. Saleh Jaman Selim, an official of Sheikh Jamal KC and secretary of the Dhaka Metropolis Football League Committee, was at the forefront of the protest. "The incident of taking away national team players before the match amounts to treason. This is part of a conspiracy against football. Those responsible for the incident should be handed exemplary punishment," said Selim.