



Rangpur Riders skipper Shakib Al Hasan (R) tries to pick the mind of his Comilla Victorians counterpart Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. The two friends will become foes when their teams clash in the first qualifier of the Bangladesh Premier League encounter today. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Mash, Shakib take centre stage

SPORTS REPORTER



The reason why Comilla Victorians and the Rangpur Riders have claimed the top two spots is simple: their local players have actively supported the overseas cricketers.

And when the two teams will meet today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur for the first qualifier, there's no doubt that the performance of the local players will be crucial.

The Victorians, for instance, have banked on the likes of Abu Hider and Imrul Kayes. Hider is currently the joint-highest wicket-taker of the competition alongside Shakib Al Hasan with 17 wickets. The energetic young pacer bowled clever lines and has been a joy to watch with all his aggression.

Similarly, Imrul, albeit after a couple of ducks, has gone on to look extremely comfortable at the top of the order. Although he is yet to get a half-century, he is Comilla's highest run-getter in the competition and has batted with an immense amount of freedom lately.

A lot however, will also depend upon Comilla's foreign quadrant. Luckily for Comilla, all the overseas players in the team have been in good touch. Ever since his arrival, Ahmed Shehzad has been terrific form. He averages above 40 and has been the batsman that Comilla has leaned on.

Ashar Zaidi may not be a big name but he too has been consistent both with bat and ball. The two other foreign players likely to play for Comilla tomorrow are Shoaib Malik and Andre Russel. Although an inform Nuwan Kulasekara might just replace either of these players.

The Rangpur Riders have been a lot more dependent upon their local players. The roles played by the likes of Shakib Al Hasan, Jahurul Islam and Arafat Sunny have been pivotal. While Shakib has done his part with the ball, he is yet to click with the bat and there's no better occasion for him to do so than today.

With 196 runs in eight matches, Jahurul has averaged 49 in this competition so far and has arguably been the most consistent batsman amongst the local players.

There will also be a lot of burden on Arafat who has scalped 15 wickets in the competition so far and has an average of 13.26. The four overseas players that the Riders are likely to employ today are Thisara Perera, Darren Sammy, Mohammad Nabi and Lendl Simmons.

Of the four, it is Perera who has been the most effective so far. He has bowled a tight line and has also helped the batting line-up with his aggression.

The head-to-head analysis amongst the players is tight. With the match featuring arguably two of the most aggressive Bangladeshi captains, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Shakib, there's no doubt that we are set for a thriller.

A battle of opposites

SPORTS REPORTER



It's going to be battle between bat and ball when the Barisal Bulls take on the Dhaka Dynamites in the all-important eliminator at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

The tension levels in this game will obviously be a lot higher than the other game of the day since the team that loses this match will wave goodbye to the league.

These two teams did have a dress rehearsal on Thursday during the final round of the group stage. It was a match which the Barisal Bulls won

at the last-minute courtesy of a fine half-century from Rayad Emrit after being shaken early on.

However, one can't possibly make assumptions based on that game since a number of key players from both sides were rested for the match.

A match between the full-strength sides of these two teams should be a very different scenario.

The strongest aspect about Barisal is that they have had at least one of their players play a game-changing knock in each of their seven wins.

Be it the five-wicket hauls taken by Al-Amin Hossain and Kevon Cooper or the half-centuries scored by Mahmudullah and Emrit or even the

thunderous knocks from Evin Lewis and Chris Gayle; there has always been someone from the side who has put his hand up in crucial moments.

However, their bowling hasn't been all that impressive and that is a department where Dhaka has excelled.

With Mustafizur Rahman, Yasir Shah and Mosharraf Hossain in good touch, the Dynamites will be looking to attack Barisal's key batsman from the start of the match. If they can get crucial wickets, especially that of Gayle's.

However, it's been the batting that's been a concern for the Dynamites. Their skipper Kumar Sangakkara is the highest run-getter

of the competition with 339 runs. However, their second highest contributor is Nasir Hossain who has a batting average of 19.66. For Dhaka to perform, they will need their local batsmen to fire.

It's not like they don't have the potential. In fact, the likes of Mosaddek Hossain and Saikat Ali have had one of the best batting records in domestic cricket lately. At the moment it seems as though the local batters just need to get into their groove.

There's only one thing for certain in today's match. With players like Gayle and Mustafizur in the line-ups and a place in the semifinal at stake, both teams will be going all-out and that should make for a gripping

Siddikur misses cut again

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman missed the cut in the Thailand Golf Championship after settling for two-over-par (74) in consecutive rounds. The 31-year-old golfer traded a birdie for a bogey and a double bogey at the Amata Spring Country Club in Chonburi yesterday for an aggregate score of four-over-par (148) as he finished tied for 99th.

The cut was made at even-par (144), with 66 golfers making it to the weekend rounds. This was the eighth time in 18 events this season that the two-time Asian Tour winner failed to make the cut.

Siddikur will be looking to cap off a frustrating season with a good show next week when he takes the field in the season-ending Philippine Open.

Neil's 'missile' aided by seagull?

AFP, Dunedin

A low-flying seagull was blamed for interfering with the speed gun on Friday when New Zealand's Neil Wagner bowled a ball clocked at 160 kilometres (99.4 miles) per hour -- one of the quickest on record.

The surprise missile from Wagner, whose normal bowling speed is in the low 130s, lit up social media before the speed radar's operators said the reading may have been affected by a passing bird.

The left-arm seamer's ball came on a blustery day at Dunedin's University Oval when he was bowling to Sri Lanka's Dinesh Chandimal on day two of the first Test.

However, members of the television production team operating the speed radar said a bird had probably caused an inaccurate reading from one of two monitors at the ground. The alternative reading was 133kph, more in keeping with Wagner's usual pace.

If Wagner did in fact send down a ball at 160kph, he would have been just a shade off Mitchell Starc's Test world record of 160.4, set last month in Perth.

Dharamsala to host Indo-Pak showdown

AFP, Mumbai



The sleepy hillstation of Dharamsala will host arch-rivals India and Pakistan at next year's cricket World Twenty20, while the final will be staged at Kolkata's historic Eden Gardens, organisers said Friday.

The bitter foes will meet in the group stages on March 19 in remote Dharamsala in the Himalayan foothills whose stadium houses just 23,000 fans, the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced in India's Mumbai.

World cricket's governing body said eight venues across India would host the showpiece event, which runs from March 8 to April 3, with Mumbai and New Delhi staging the semi-finals and Kolkata the final.

"The ICC and BCCI are fully committed and will work together to make this a memorable event," said ICC chairman Shashank Manohar, who also heads the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

India versus Pakistan is set to be one of the most anticipated clashes of the tournament but fans could find tickets hard to come by, with organisers overlooking larger stadiums in favour of Dharamsala, home to the Dalai Lama.

Eden Gardens, in comparison, can accommodate more than 60,000 spectators while Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium, which is likely to have been ruled out because of security reasons, has a capacity of around 35,000.

"We, as hosts, are fully prepared to organise one of the most entertaining spectacles in world cricket," said BCCI secretary Anurag Thakur, who is also president of the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association which runs the Dharamsala stadium.

India had suspended bilateral cricket with Pakistan in the aftermath of the deadly 2008 attacks on Mumbai, which New Delhi blamed on militants based across the border.

A recent thaw in relations has raised hopes for a bilateral series, which is currently awaiting the Indian government's approval.

India, Pakistan, New Zealand and Australia are placed in Group 2 of the second round Super 10s stage, the ICC announced.

South Africa, England, West Indies and Sri Lanka are in Group 1. Two qualifying teams will join the Super 10s stage after the first round.

The second round gets under way with hosts India taking on New Zealand on March 15 in Nagpur, in the western state of Maharashtra.

Tigers pitted against Ireland

Tough group awaits in Super 10

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh have been pitted in Group A alongside Ireland, Netherlands and debutants Oman in the first round of the ICC World Twenty20 2016, the groupings and schedule of which was announced yesterday by the International Cricket Council (ICC).

The Tigers will play their first match against the Netherlands on March 9 in Dharamsala, before taking on Netherlands on March 11 and Oman on March 13 at the same venue. Group B features Zimbabwe, Scotland, Afghanistan and Hong Kong.

The top team from Group A will join India, Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand in Group 2 of the Super 10 stage, while the top team from Group B will move to Group 1, comprising South Africa, England, West Indies and defending champions Sri Lanka.

Although Bangladesh are the highest ranked T20 side in Group A and are expected to qualify, they have been vulnerable in T20s. The Tigers will have to put their best foot forward, especially when they meet Ireland on March 11, a tie which could potentially decide the group.

However, the road for the Tigers will only get tougher from there. If they make it to the Super 10, the Tigers will have to



PHOTO: AFP

India captain Virat Kohli admires the ICC World Twenty20 trophy at an ICC ceremony in Mumbai yesterday.

take on India, Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand, all of whom have proven their credentials in the T20s.

If Bangladesh are to make it to the semifinals, they must finish among the top two in their group. The last time the Tigers were in the competition, at home

GROUPINGS	
FIRST ROUND	Group A: Bangladesh, Netherlands, Ireland, Oman
	Group B: Zimbabwe, Scotland, Hong Kong, Afghanistan
SUPER 10	Group 1: Sri Lanka, South Africa, West Indies, England, Winners Group B (Q1B)
	Group 2: India, Pakistan, Australia, New Zealand, Winners Group A (Q1A)
WOMEN'S GROUPINGS	Group A: Australia, South Africa, New Zealand, Sri Lanka, Ireland
	Group B: England, West Indies, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh

in 2014, they qualified for the Super 10 with two wins and a shocking loss to Hong Kong. They failed to win a single game after that, losing four on the trot.

Meanwhile in the women's tournament, Bangladesh were placed alongside England, West Indies, India, and Pakistan in Group B. The Jahanara Alam-led side will begin their campaign against India on the March 15 in Bangalore.

The Bangladesh women's team go into the tournament off a brilliant qualifying campaign, securing qualification without any losses. They did have one loss, in the final, but that came after the team had already qualified.

Bravo fights after Voges' 269*

AFP, Hobart



Nathan Lyon put the skids under the flailing West Indies as Australia set course for an overwhelming early victory despite Darren Bravo holding on in the first Test in Hobart on Friday.

At the close of a stop-start Day Two through showers, the Windies were 207 for six with Bravo offering spirited resistance on 94 with Kemar Roach in support on 31.

Bravo and Roach kept the Windies innings ticking over with an unbeaten seventh-wicket stand of 91.

Lyon claimed two wickets in one over to trigger a middle-order collapse to have the West Indies in familiar trouble in their chase after a mammoth declaration of 583 for four on the second day.

The probing off-spinner snared the wickets of Marlon Samuels and Jermaine Blackwood in his seventh over along with opener Rajendra Chandrika for 175 Test wickets to leave the hapless Caribbean tourists struggling to avoid a heavy defeat with three days left.

The Windies sticky predicament was accentuated by the dismissal of skipper Jason Holder, the last of the recognised batsmen at the crease with Bravo.

Holder refused to seek a referral after being struck high on the pad by Peter Siddle and walked off for 15, leaving his side in deep strife at 116 for six.

Replays showed that the ball was missing the stumps and the towering Holder may have stayed on as the players left the field for a brief rain break.

The West Indies efforts were in sharp contrast to Australia's run spree, propelled by a record 449-run fourth-wicket stand by Adam Voges and Shaun Marsh.



36-year-old Australia batsman Adam Voges scored 269 not out, smashing 33 boundaries, before his side declared and put in the West Indies to bat on Day Two of the first Test at the Bellerive Oval in Hobart yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 583 for 4 decl (Burns 33, Warner 64, Voges 269 not out, Marsh 182; Warrican 3-158)
WEST INDIES: First innings 207 for 6 (Chandrika 25, Bravo 94 not out, Roach 31 not out; Hazlewood 2-43, Lyon 3-43)

SL strong in reply

AFP, Dunedin



Dinesh Chandimal and Dimuth Karunaratne spearheaded a gritty Sri Lanka fightback on the second day of the first Test against New Zealand in Dunedin on Friday.

They came together with the tourists looking fragile at 2 for 29 and put on 122 for the third wicket in reply to New Zealand's first innings 431.

At stumps, Sri Lanka were 197 for four with Chandimal on 83 and Kithuruwan Vithanage on 10.

Karunaratne was out for 84 after providing stubborn resistance with Chandimal, which was desperately needed after Sri Lanka failed to make the most of the conditions when they won the toss and sent New Zealand into bat.

After the New Zealand innings wrapped up early on Friday, the outlook for Sri Lanka darkened when Test novices Kusal Mendis and Udara Jayasundera fell cheaply, both caught behind by BJ Watling.

But Karunaratne and Chandimal stepped up, curtailing their attacking instincts.

They delicately negotiated their way to bring up the 100 in the 45th over just before tea.

The middle session produced only 65 runs, but while the New Zealand bowlers sent down a series of dot balls they seldom looked threatening.

As the pitch flattened in the final session, Sri Lanka upped the tempo and cracked 48 in 13 overs before left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner made the breakthrough.

Karunaratne, a century-maker against New Zealand a year ago, had played patiently for 198 balls before he slashed at a drifting delivery and gave Watling his third catch.

Skipper Angelo Mathews only made two before he added to Watling's collection and gave Tim Southee a 27th birthday present with the finest of edges to a bullet heading down leg side.

Umpire Nigel Llong said not out but a New Zealand appeal showed the faint edge picked up by the Hotspot technology and Sri Lanka were four down for 156.

Vithanage had a life five overs before stumps when he drove Doug Bracewell hard at Kane Williamson at short cover and was dropped.

Chandimal, who played a chanceless innings, has faced 208 deliveries for his 83.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 431 (Guptill 156, Latham 22, Williamson 88, McCullum 75, Bracewell 47; Lakmal 2-69, Pradeep 4-112, Chameera 2-112)

SRI LANKA: First innings 197 for 4 (Karunaratne 84, Chandimal 83 not out; Boult 1-38, Southee 1-35)