

# SPORT



## Structures are soulless without utilisation

BISHWAJIT ROY

"Zero tolerance for corruption and irregularities." That was the policy that newly appointed State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel vowed to uphold on Tuesday, his first day as chairman of the National Sports Council (NSC).

It may sound like something we have heard before as promises are often big and ambitious when embarking on a new assignment. But the promise is hope. Cynics may consider the promise a mere string of words without much substance but coming from someone like Russel, who served 10



bodies without souls. Hence, the new sports boss must take a close look into sports activities at the grassroots levels to ensure the huge expenditures for structures are justified and not a drain on resources. With sporting activity outside the capital and even in other divisional cities starting to fade, many are of the opinion that the authorities are more interested in creating concrete structures than rousing the passion and enthusiasm for sport among the youth.



Grounds like the Rafiq Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh are scattered throughout the country but without a proper domestic sports calendar, many such stadiums are underused and ultimately fall into disrepair. PHOTO: AMINUL ISLAM

years as the chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on youth and sports, this bold statement carries some weight.

His long association with sports has definitely provided the new state minister for youth and sports enough experience to identify what he would need to do for the betterment of sports in the country and his words during the first day's conversation with reporters did not appear out of the blue.

He rightly thanked the NSC for its great contribution in creating sports structures across the country as the body manages a number of cricket stadiums, football stadiums, 64 district stadiums, swimming pools, indoor stadiums, indoor practice stadiums, hockey stadiums, gymnasiums and the women's sports complexes.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is also implementing a project to construct a Sheikh Russel Upazila Mini Stadium at all upazilas of the country; refreshingly these stadiums will have no galleries, but there will be a number of benches allowing people to comfortably watch and hopefully be inspired to participate.

And here we must also calculate the maintenance cost of all those huge structures.

One cannot deny the importance and necessity of infrastructure and modern sports facilities to improve the state of sports in a country, especially if the desire is to compete at the international level. But what is the value of concrete structures if proper utilisation is lacking? In reality most of the stadiums are unused for long periods as there is hardly any sporting activity at the grassroots levels and many just host a few national programmes in a year, and the rest of the time they resemble

tournaments with the former for men and the latter for boys simultaneously introduced way back in 1914 in Mymensingh, 21 years after the IFA Shield and 26 years after the Durand Cup were launched -- have now turned into things of the past due to negligence by local authorities.

Dhaka-centric sports activities and focus on only one sport -- cricket -- cannot be the reflection of a healthy state of sporting affairs indeed. The new state minister must ask the local sports organisers what they are doing in their territories and what they need from him to be able to do their jobs better.

The new sports boss was also very correct in his observation when he said: "There is no alternative to training if we want to achieve something. There is no meaning of having talented players if there is no continuation of training programmes because without training, those talented athletes will disappear."

And he definitely knows better than anybody the gulf between spending money on structures and spending on training.

Yes, winning medals at international level is important but the overall purpose of sport cannot be linked only to international success. It has a social component and involving youth in healthy activities that advance their physical as well as mental acuity has wider social benefits, which is why getting young people to participate in sports all over the country will be the main challenge, and if ached arguably the most rewarding outcome, for the new man at the helm.

Only time will tell whether things remain the same or improve, but at this moment we can wish him all the success on his mission to keep sport clean from any irregularities.



Today's BPL encounter between Dhaka Dynamites and Rangpur Riders has turned into a veritable battle between Bangladesh's top brass with Dhaka skipper Shakib Al Hasan (L) and Rangpur captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza both looking for their third win on the trot. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Perfect Dhaka take on Rangpur

Comilla hoping to bounce back against Rajshahi

SPORTS REPORTER

After yesterday's rest day, the sixth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League resumes today and an exciting day of cricket seems to be on the cards as the top two teams -- Dhaka Dynamites and Rangpur Riders -- battle in the first game while Comilla Victorians face Rajshahi Kings under lights later on the day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

**Dhaka Dynamites vs Rangpur Riders**  
Although this edition of BPL has seen many low-scoring affairs, after a day's rest it can be expected that the slow Mirpur pitch will be more batting-friendly. And with the big names on both sides, spectators can hope to start the day by witnessing a cracker of a contest.

Shakib Al Hasan's Dhaka are on a roll and his side will be stepping onto the field on the back of a massive 105-run victory over Khulna Titans last Tuesday -- their biggest ever win in BPL and the second biggest win in the tournament's history -- looking to maintain their perfect run

against Rangpur.

However, even after a flawless beginning, one thing that could be of concern for Dhaka is that their middle order is still untested in the tournament as the lion's share of their runs in both the matches have been scored by their top order batsmen, with opener Hazratullah Zazai, the top-scorer of the tournament, having scored 135.

On the other hand, defending champions Rangpur have bounced back brilliantly after losing their opening fixture against Chittagong Vikings with two consecutive wins -- the last of which was a whopping nine-wicket victory against Comilla.

Rangpur opener Rilee Rossouw was also confident of carrying on with their winning ways as he mentioned after their practice session yesterday that they were not intimidated by Dhaka's big names, which include the likes of Kieron Pollard and Andre Russell.

"I think in every single team there are big names. If you look at big names whole time, you won't go anywhere. You just have to stand up

and face them."

**Comilla Victorians vs Rajshahi Kings**  
After their humiliating nine-wicket defeat against Rangpur in their last game, more bad news came Comilla's way as it was confirmed that skipper Steven Smith will not be available today, having suffered an elbow injury.

While Smith's absence is a big blow to the franchise, coach Mohammad Salahuddin believes the onus will now be on local players to step up.

"Tomorrow [Friday] the team that plays better cricket will win. Especially our local batsmen need to do better as they are habituated to playing here, so if they can score runs then it will be easy for the overseas batsmen. If our local players do well and I think if we can start well then we can get to a good position as we have a long batting line-up," Salahuddin said.

While Comilla are pinning their hopes on locals, Rajshahi's young skipper Mehedi Hasan Miraz will be looking to register a second win in the tournament and move up the table, in which they are currently second from the bottom.

## BPL timings revised

SPORTS REPORTER

The match timings for the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League has been changed and the new schedule will take effect from January 12 onwards, informed the Bangladesh Cricket Board yesterday.

On weekdays, the day's first match will now begin at 1:30pm instead of the previously set 12:30pm while the second fixture will begin at 6:30pm instead of 5:20pm.

The Friday match timings remained the same with the first match set for 2:00pm while the second match will get underway from 7:00pm.

Today's Dhaka Dynamites-Rangpur Riders and Comilla Victorians-Rajshahi Kings fixtures will be played as previously scheduled.



Even Rangpur Riders coach Tom Moody (L) was reduced to being a fan as he was seen taking a picture of West Indian hard-hitter Chris Gayle during team practice yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

## Not expecting walkover: Rohit

AGENCIES, Sydney

India's vice-captain Rohit Sharma insists Australia are still a quality ODI side and won't be a walkover, despite resting their premier quicks and a dreadful recent record in the format.

Quicks Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc have all been rested from the three-match series that starts on Saturday at the SCG.

Of that trio, only Hazlewood played in the last ODI series against India in Australia in 2016 and he participated in only the first of the five games.

"We were still beaten 4-1," Sharma said.

"Of course those three are their premier bowlers but they have got the guys who can do the job for them.

"Their bowling lineup can put us under pressure without a doubt.

"It's not going to be an easy walkover situation for us.

"We've got to grind it out there, face the challenge and make sure that we put them under pressure.

"Of course the team is high on confidence right now, so we've got to carry that into this format as well and make sure that we keep doing the right things."

Defending World Cup holders Australia won just two of their 13 ODIs last year, while India racked up 14 wins, four losses and two ties in 2018.

India are ranked second behind England, while Australia have plummeted to sixth.

Sharma expected Australia to show fight at home while suggesting the losses of banned batsmen Steve Smith and David Warner had impacted on the side.

"Obviously they are missing a few players but that puts a little bit of pressure on their batting group," Sharma said.



## TALK ON BPL



It was important to bounce back after the first match. After winning two matches in a row, the boys are confident ahead of tomorrow's match. Hopefully, we will replicate what we have done in game two and game three. The boys are looking forward to tomorrow's match. We know Dhaka is a very strong team and so are the other BPL teams. Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza] is unbelievable in the team as a character. This is the first time I am working with him and I am enjoying every second with him.

RILEE ROSSOUW  
RANGPUR RIDERS BATSMAN

## Smith flying home

SPORTS REPORTER

Steve Smith will be unavailable for Comilla Victorians for the next two Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) fixtures as the former Australia captain suffered an elbow injury. Smith was scheduled to fly for Sydney yesterday night, however, the right-hander is expected to rejoin Comilla during the BPL's Sylhet phase beginning on January 15.

"He is quite positive about returning,

possibly during the Sylhet phase of the competition. He will undergo an MRI in Australia, which isn't available in Bangladesh, and will inform us about it [his injury]," Comilla Victorians media manager Sohanuzzaman Khan told ESPNcricinfo.

So far, Comilla have won one out of their first two matches under skipper Smith but the middle-order batsman has been unable to make a mark in either game, scoring 16 and a duck.

Comilla's next two fixtures are against Rajshahi Kings and Chittagong Vikings on January 11 and 13 respectively.



After losing their last BPL fixture against Rangpur Riders, Comilla Victorians suffered another blow as captain Steve Smith (R) was ruled out for the next two matches at the least due to an elbow injury. PHOTO: STAR

## 'No complacency' SA-Pak third Test starts today

AFP, Johannesburg

Stand-in South African captain Dean Elgar said on Thursday he had given a "blunt message" to his players ahead of the third and final Test against Pakistan, starting at the Wanderers Stadium on Friday.

"I spoke to the team yesterday and I told them that any complacency needs to be ironed out," said Elgar, who is standing in for the suspended Faf du Plessis. Elgar said South Africa were determined to complete a 3-0 clean sweep against the tourists.

There is a personal reason for Elgar to get a win as captain. His only previous international captaincy was in the first Test against England at Lord's in 2017 when Du Plessis flew home to be the birth of his first child.

South Africa were beaten in that match and Elgar admitted that he found the experience "chaotic".

"It was the start of a very big series with all the hype and media commitments, so I wasn't really able to enjoy it," he said.

"This time we've got the series in the bag and although it's still a massive goal to win 3-0 there is a little less stress. I'm hoping to enjoy this experience."

Pakistan batsman Azhar Ali said that although his team were disappointed to have lost the series, they hoped to bring their "A game" to the Wanderers.

"Every Test match you play outside (the UAE) is important for us. Hopefully we can win this Test match and it will be very good for us, especially with the one-dayers coming up."

Pakistan play a series of five one-day internationals after the Tests.



DEAN ELGAR