



Tamim Iqbal will hope to hit a few shots like this one as the Comilla Victorians opener will be a crucial figure in today's BPL final, the first featuring Tamim for any team, against Dhaka Dynamites in Mirpur. (Inset from R to L) The Victorians will also be hoping that their trio of foreigners in Shahid Afridi, Wahab Riaz and Thisara Perera fire on all cylinders if they are to overcome an in-form Dhaka.



## Test players for ODI warm-up

SPORTS REPORTER



There is hardly any doubt the Tigers, coming off recent home successes against West Indies and Zimbabwe, will face a stiff challenge in New Zealand and that only good home-work and preparations can bring the best out of the players. From that perspective, a warm-up match deserves some attention, especially when the players are going to shift their focus to a one-day series following a T20 extravaganza at home.

However, the fact was that the team management needed makeshift arrangements to put together a playing eleven for the practice game on February 10 as two players from the Test squad -- Mominul Haque and Shadman Islam -- and ODI squad members Mohammad Mithun and Shaiful Islam yesterday joined the eight who left on Wednesday.

The remaining players from the ODI squad are expected to leave Dhaka tomorrow. Of the 15 in the squad, four will be playing in today's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) final while captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza -- whose Rangpur Riders were eliminated from the BPL after a five-wicket defeat to Dhaka Dynamites -- will be travelling with Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Rubel Hossain and Mohammad Saifuddin.

The New Zealand series is being considered a crucial part of the team's preparations for the upcoming World Cup.

"The situation is not ideal for us since the series is not at home. We will reach there on February 10 and try to adjust as much as possible," Mashrafe told reporters after the BPL's second qualifier on Wednesday.

The three-match ODI series will start from February 13 in Napier.

## All-rounders clash with local talent

Dhaka Dynamites take on Comilla Victorians in final today

SPORTS REPORTER



After a month filled with cricketing action, the sixth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) has reached its finale with Dhaka Dynamites set to battle it out with Comilla Victorians for the coveted prize in the final at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

There will be added excitement as the two premier Bangladesh stalwarts, Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal, will feature for Dhaka and Comilla respectively and the fans can expect some tactical battles between the duo. While Shakib will be at the helm of Dhaka, Comilla skipper Imrul Kayes acknowledged that Tamim was an integral part of the team as he often relies on the insights of the dashing opener during crunch situations.

The fans should expect some cricketing brilliance from the aforementioned stalwarts as Tamim remains the top scorer for his side in this BPL with 326 runs and two fifties in 13 matches. Shakib, meanwhile, shone with the bowl as he remains this edition's joint highest wicket-taker with 22 wickets in 14 matches alongside Sylhet Sixers' Taskin Ahmed and Rangpur's Mashrafe.



Dhaka Dynamites' Andre Russell has been in terrific form as of late and so Shakib Al Hasan and Co will surely bank on the West Indian's all-round skills in the BPL final against Comilla Victorians in Mirpur today.

PHOTO: STAR

Shakib and Tamim aside, the two franchises possess quite a few game-changers. Dhaka will presumably be banking on their all-rounder quartet - Shakib, Andre Russell, Kieron Pollard and Sunil Narine. While Pollard's 62 off 26 balls against Rangpur in the early stage of the tournament remains the only highlight for the West Indian, Russell and Narine have proved their worth on multiple occasions. Narine's 18 wickets in 14 matches sees him among the top wicket-takers while his 279 runs saw some quickfire innings

at the top. Russell, who usually comes down the order, is relied upon to provide the finishing touch, like he did with his 19-ball 40 against Rangpur in the second qualifier to see his side over the line comfortably. He has also proved handy with the ball, scalping 14 wickets so far. Dhaka will also be expecting pacer Rubel Hossain, who has taken 21 wickets -- the second-highest in the list -- to continue his excellent form.

The presence of Russell and Pollard in the outfield should also not be underestimated as they save runs and take

blinding catches, a marked advantage in a tournament that has not seen the highest standard of fielding.

Comilla, on the other hand, as mentioned by coach Mohammad Salahuddin, will be relying on the local talents of Tamim, Mohammad Saifuddin and Mahedi Hasan despite having some top foreign all-rounders like Shahid Afridi and Thisara Perera in their ranks.

"We have good all-rounders but Dhaka is ahead in this department. But our team combination is very good. The most important thing is that the local players are doing well. To win this competition, local players need to perform. I think the main strength of my team is local players," said Salahuddin in Mirpur yesterday.

All-rounder Saifuddin has shown his match-winning capabilities for Comilla and he has taken 18 wickets in 12 matches. Comilla have also relied on another young local prospect in Mahedi, who returned match-winning figures of four for 22 against Sylhet Sixers in the league stage while opening for Comilla.

Comilla got the better of Dhaka in their two league matches in this edition. Both were close encounters with the Victorians triumphing by seven runs and one run respectively. The stiff competition augurs well for today's finale being a humdinger.

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League meetings: Comilla Victorians won both their matches in the league stage, overcoming Dhaka Dynamites by seven runs in Dhaka on January 22, before winning a thriller by one run on February 1.



### FINAL VITALS

COMILLA VICTORIANS
WINS: 9
LOSSES: 4

Top score: 237 for 5 vs Khulna

Highest conceded: 186 for 6 vs Chittagong

X-factor: Evin Lewis

The West Indian is the one man in the Victorians lineup who can end the contest within 10 overs if he gets going. He missed a chunk of the season due to injury, but proved to be the last piece in Comilla's puzzle when he returned with a 49-ball 109 against Khulna in Chattogram. His 53-ball 71 against Rangpur in the first qualifier secured Comilla's final berth and he will be looking to continue his big-match exploits.



### DHAKA DYNAMITES

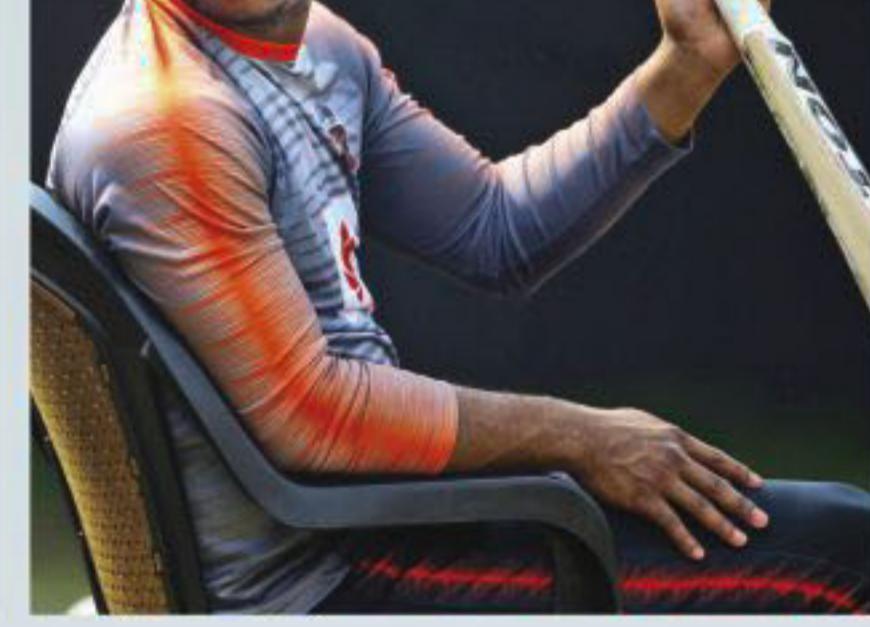
WINS: 8
LOSSES: 6

Top score: 192 for 6 vs Khulna

Highest conceded: 189 for 2 vs Rangpur

X-factor: Rubel Hossain

The fast bowler with the slinging action is peaking at precisely the right moment and put in a player-of-the-match performance in the second qualifier, when his four for 23 booted Rangpur out of the tournament and cleared Dhaka's passage to the final. His yorkers and changes of pace in the slog overs have proven lethal, as 21 wickets from 14 games at a respectable economy rate of 7.37 show.



## Abahani extend run

Sk Jamal slay giant-killers Arambagh

SPORTS REPORTER

Holders Abahani extended their unbeaten run against Team BJMC in the professional football league by handing the side a 1-0 defeat in a Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

With this triumph, the 10th consecutively against BJMC, the Sky Blues also stretched their winning streak in the ongoing 11th edition of the BPL to four.

A lone strike from defender Tapu Barman helped Abahani secure the win and top the 13-team table on 12 points, three more than Bashundhara Kings, Sheikh Russell, Saif SC and Arambagh KS, who have either played three or four matches.

Six-time champions Abahani, who came into the match on the back of two straight two wins, dominated from the onset, putting huge pressure on BJMC with Rubel Miah floating a shot over the crosspiece from the six-yard box after a miscued hit from Haitian Kervens Fils Belfort came his way in the seventh minute.

Three minutes later, BJMC survived a huge scare when Jahirul Alam rattled his own crossbar while attempting to clear a Wali Faisal corner. However, Barman then headed a Wali Faisal freekick home to give Abahani a deserved lead in the 26th minute.

After resumption, BJMC came close to levelling the margin but Cameroonian defender Fombagne Baybeck saw his header go inches wide in the 54th minute.

BJMC came close to equalizing the margin again in the 74th minute but defender Barman made a goalline save after goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel lost grip of a Shariful Islam shot to send the team home with their third straight defeat.

In the second match, Sheikh Jamal DC ended a dream run for Arambagh KS by inflicting a 2-0 defeat on the visitors, who came into the match on the back of wins against Saif SC, Mohammedan SC and Chittagong Abahani.

After a barren first half, Gambian forward Solomon King put Sheikh Jamal ahead in the 61st minute, converting a penalty before Argentinean Luciano Perez sealed victory through a 67th minute strike.

With the second consecutive win, the three-time champions leapfrogged from eighth to sixth position with seven points from five matches while Arambagh KS remain in fourth position with nine points from five matches.

ABAHANI	1 - 0	TEAM BJMC
SK JAMAL	2 - 0	ARAMBAGH

TAPU BARMAN 26'

SOLOMON KING 61'

LUCIANO PEREZ 67'

## Barca hold fiery Real

REUTERS, Barcelona

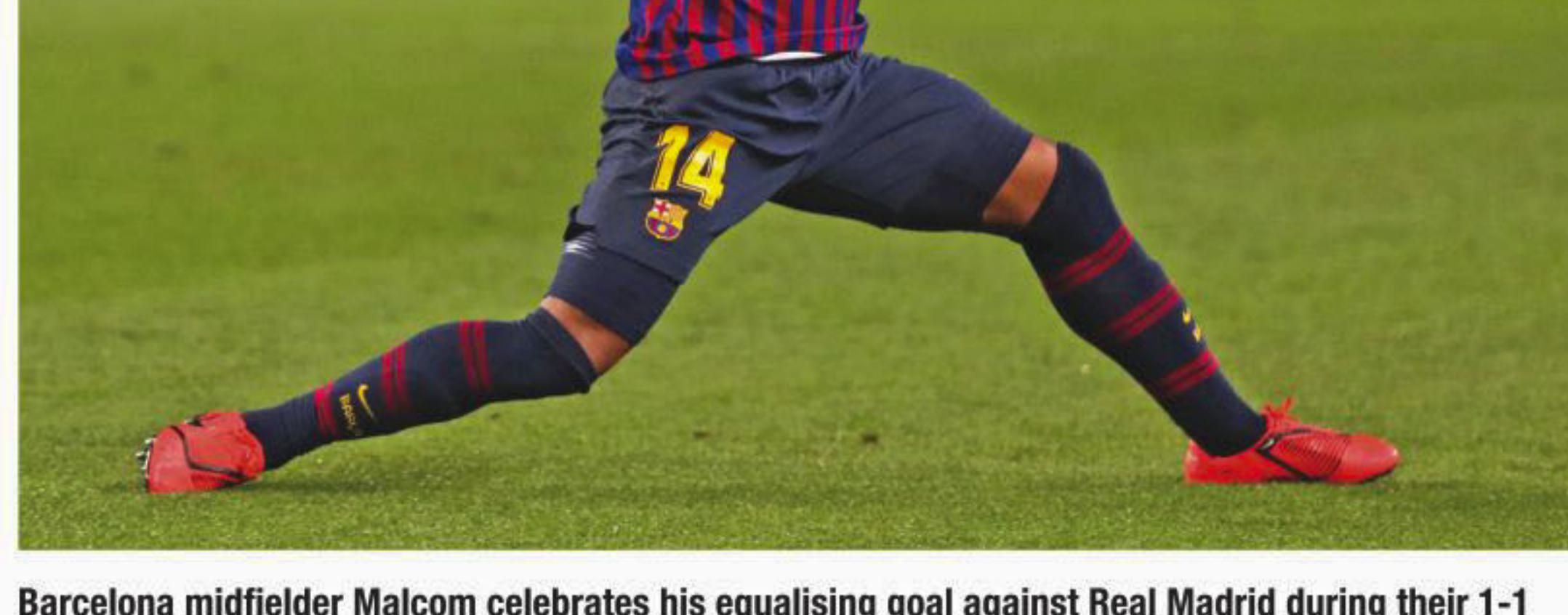


Santiago Solari marked his 100th day in charge of Real Madrid with a 1-1 draw at Barcelona in the Copa del Rey on Wednesday, 101 days after his predecessor's reign ended with a 5-1 thrashing to the Catalans.

Julen Lopetegui's short spell in charge was brought to an end in October with a humiliating capitulation to Barca and Solari was appointed the next day on an interim basis. He took the role full time a fortnight later and has since helped to drag them out of crisis.

Madrid had the better of the first half against Barcelona on Wednesday, breaking the deadlock through Lucas

Malcom before Malcom celebrated his equalising goal against Real Madrid during their 1-1 draw in the Copa del Rey semifinal first leg at the Nou Camp on Wednesday.



Vazquez before Malcom, who started in place of Lionel Messi, equalised after the break and Gareth Bale missed a gilt-edged chance to seal a win.

"The result is unfair, we did more in attack to win the game," said Vazquez. "Maybe we did let Barcelona off lightly in the first half. We made clear chances; we didn't know how to put them away and ended up drawing."

"The draw leaves the tie open. What we want is to win the game at the Bernabeu, in front of our fans."

Solari was pleased with his team's performance and thought they might have snatched a victory.

"It's hard to talk about justice in football," said Solari. "We had chances to score, but what will stick with me is that it was a precise game, very entertaining."

However, after a traumatic defeat in their last Clasico, Wednesday's performance was a distinct improvement and shows just how far Madrid have come.

## Ruhel's 4-for rattles Eng

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Under-19 bowler Ruhel Ahmed took four wickets on the opening day of the first Youth Test yesterday to mitigate the effects of the England openers' assault and leave the visitors on 280 for eight.

After electing to bat at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, England openers George Balderstone and Ben Charlesworth put on an impressive 124-run partnership before slow left-arm Ruhel took over.

He took a catch off his own bowling to send back Balderson for 65 before castling Lewis Goldsworthy (4) and having Tom Lammonby (7) caught in quick succession to leave the visitors on 144 for three.

Jamie Smith joined the left-handed Charlesworth and the pair added 30 runs before the former was trapped in front by Minajur Rahman. Following another noteworthy 56-run partnership with George Hill, Charlesworth's 248-ball stay was finally ended by Ruhel.

The Gloucestershire cricketer fell an agonising one run short of a century, departing for a 99-run knock that featured 12 boundaries.

George Hill added a further 26 to the scorecard before being removed by Asadullah Hill, who also removed next batsman Luke Hollman for nought.

Hamidullah Qadri became the last wicket to fall on the day -- Minajur's second victim -- leaving Don Mousley and Adam Finch at the crease.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND U-19s: 261 for 8 (Balderson 65, Charlesworth 99; Ruhel 4-61, Asadullah 2-68, Minajur 2-28)