

SPORT



Having been in recovery since Bangladesh's tour of New Zealand, where the wicketkeeper-batsman sustained a fractured rib in addition to multiple other injuries, Mushfiquur Rahim resumed batting in the nets at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

Aftab explodes onto the scene again

SPORTS REPORTER



With the Super League stage of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) set to begin from tomorrow, all eyes will be on the players and their on-field impact as usual. However, there is another who has grabbed the spotlight this time around, Legends of Rugbanj coach Aftab Ahmed.

The 33-year-old, who was considered one of the most promising talents during his playing days before his career ended somewhat prematurely, has steered Rugbanj to the top of the table on his first stint as head coach of a major domestic team.

Although his playing career ended a little early, the man from Chattogram has made an exciting start to his coach career -- although he still has a long way to go -- just as he did to his playing career.

Aftab's Rugbanj -- comprised mostly of experienced players with a few youngsters in their ranks -- have only lost one of 11 games during the round robin stage of the coveted 50-over tournament.

The secret behind such a brilliant start was made clear by Aftab, according to whom only gaining the next two points matter.

"I have actually been saying from the beginning that we are not directly aiming for the title. Our target is rather playing games one by one. So, it does not matter who we are playing against as we only aim for two points. When we will be playing in the Super League stage, it will be a very tough competition so there is no scope for being casual. Our first match is against Mohammedan and our aim is to win that game and then think about the next game," Aftab told reporters in Mirpur yesterday.

The novice coach can make his first experience as a head coach more memorable by leading Rugbanj to the title and Aftab is not short on confidence.

"We are in a very good position and we have a very good chance of becoming champions."

Platform set for Purbachal Stadium

BCB waiting on NSC for renovation of other stadiums

SPORTS REPORTER



The Project Implementation Group (PIG) sat for the first meeting regarding a new cricket stadium in Purbachal, where the government recently allocated 37 acres of land for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

The BCB, who will have sole rights over the stadium, has already proposed the name 'Sheikh Hasina International

Cricket Stadium'. There are big plans in the works, with an academy ground and building, swimming pool, gym and other facilities adjacent to the stadium.

"We had the first meeting of PIG today [Saturday] and we chalked out plans on how we would work on this project. This land has already been registered for the BCB with directions from the Prime Minister and we will get the position by this month. After we get the position we will start working. The physical work will not begin before next winter. We are

expecting it will take two years to complete the stadium after the work begins," BCB director Mahbub Anam told the reporters yesterday.

There was also discussion over other stadiums in the country which required renovation.

The gallery, hospitality box and media centre at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna were damaged followed by the tornado back in April 2016.

Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium also requires a lot of work, espe-

cially in the stands and the press box. As the National Sports Council (NSC) holds the ownership of the stadium, BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Younus said they were waiting for NSC to start renovations.

"The stadiums we are using at the moment in Khulna or Chattogram all require renovation and perhaps the situation of the Khulna stadium is worse. We had only taken a lease and the requirement of construction is under NSC and they may be planning to renovate them soon," Jalal told the media.

SHEIKH KAMAL U-20 NATIONAL FOOTBALL
April 17 kick-off in Narail, Natore

SPORTS REPORTER

The Sheikh Kamal Under-20 National Football Tournament will kick off in Natore and Narail on April 17, with eight divisional teams split into two groups to battle at two venues for the four semifinal spots.

Narail will host the Group A matches, from April 17 to 22, featuring Dhaka, Khulna, Rangpur and Barisal. Natore will simultaneously host the Group B matches involving Chittagong, Sylhet, Rajshahi and Mymensingh.

The semifinals will be held in Cox's Bazar on April 25 and 26 while the final will be held on April 28 at the same venue.

The details of the tournament, initiated by the Bangladesh District and Divisional Football Association (BDDFA), were revealed at the tournament's logo-unveiling ceremony at a hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

Tarafder Ruhul Amin, secretary general of BDDFA, informed that they had scouted 700 players from all 460 upazilas of the country starting from September 2018 and had given them training before selecting 144 players for the eight divisions.

"We have conducted a residential



Organisers and team officials attend the logo unveiling ceremony for the Sheikh Kamal Under-20 National Football Tournament, which will get underway on April 17 with eight division teams vying for the title, at a city hotel yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

camp of one-and-a-half months for the selected 144 footballers in eight divisions. We will select the best 50 players from this tournament and prepare them through a residential camp for the national level," Ruhul Amin told the programme.

The secretary general of BDDFA further informed that they would introduce a similar tournament for under-18 and under-16 players over

the next two years to strengthen the pipeline of national footballers.

The event's chief guest Sheikh Hafizur Rahman, member secretary of Bangabandhu Memorial Trust, said that he was "pleased that the tournament was named after Bangabandhu's eldest son Sheikh Kamal, who was a pioneering figure in not only football, but also cricket, basketball and other sports in the country."

Shakib bats for Dhoni

PTI, Hyderabad



Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan could relate to Mahendra Singh Dhoni's recent outburst at the umpire during an Indian Premier League encounter as he was in former India captain's shoes exactly 13 months back during an international T20 encounter against Sri Lanka.

In a rare public show of anger, Dhoni breached the Players' Code of Conduct entering the field of play to challenge one of the umpires Ulhas Gandhe after he signalled no-ball only to backtrack at the insistence of square leg umpire Bruce Oxenford. Dhoni was let off with a light penalty of 50 percent match fees.

"I did the same thing in Nidahas Trophy. I can't make any comments on that," Sunrisers Hyderabad's Shakib told reporters on the eve of their next game against Delhi Capitals on Sunday.

He was referring to a Nidahas Trophy encounter against Sri Lanka where a no-ball decision had irked him and he wanted his players to pull-out before changing his mind. Once the match was over, there was an ugly altercation between players of the both teams and dressing rooms were damaged.

"It happened at the heat of the moment and it shows how passionate you are as a cricketer. How much you want to win for

your team," Shakib tried to rationalise Dhoni's behaviour which was certainly out of line.

Hyderabad's performance has been patchy this year and Shakib pointed that there are areas of concern in all three departments.

"We have not been as good at the death as earlier years. We have conceded a lot of runs in the final three overs. We have the quality and we are working to minimise the dam-



age. Also the middle-order has not fired but there is a lot of talent and we can inflict a damage on the opposition," said Shakib.

On personal front, Shakib is disappointed that he is not playing but he admitted that all the four overseas players (David Warner, Jonny Bairstow, Rashid Khan and Mohammed Nabi) have performed.

No Gayle, Russell for tri-series

ICC

West Indies have named a 14-man squad without the likes of Andre Russell, Chris Gayle, Shimron Hetmyer and Alzarri Joseph for the tri-series, which serves as dress rehearsal in the lead-up to the ICC World Cup.

The side still features a good mix of experience and youth with Jason Holder as captain. He'll enjoy the services of other established players such as Darren Bravo, Shai Hope, Roston Chase and Shane Dowrich. Interestingly, Shannon Gabriel, who last played an ODI in December 2017, has also earned a call up.

The series, which will be played between May 5 and May 17 in Dublin, involves Bangladesh as the third team.

Squad: Jason Holder (capt), John Campbell, Darren Bravo, Shai Hope, Sheldon Cottrell, Shannon Gabriel, Kemar Roach, Sunil Ambris, Raymond Reifer, Fabian Allen, Ashely Nurse, Roston Chase, Shane Dowrich, Jonathan Carter.



Manchester United midfielder Paul Pogba scored twice from the penalty spot to lead his team to a 2-1 victory against West Ham during their Premier League match at Old Trafford yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

RR, RCB post easy wins

AGENCIES

Jos Butler laid the platform with 89 as Rajasthan Royals powered to a four-wicket victory over Mumbai Indians while Kohli (67) and de Villiers (59 not out) led Bangalore to an easy eight-wicket win against Kings XI Punjab in an Indian Premier League encounter yesterday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Mumbai: 187 for 5 in 20 overs (De Kock 81, Sharma 47; Archer 3-39)

Rajasthan: 188 for 6 in 19.3 overs (Buttler 89; Pandya 3-34, Bumrah 2-23)

Result: Rajasthan won by 4 wickets.

Punjab: 173 for 4 in 20 overs (Gayle 99 not out; Chahal 2-33)

Bangalore: 174 for 2 in 20 overs (Kohli 67, de Villiers 59 not out)

Result: Bangalore won by 8 wickets

'No bowler in the world can stop him'

REUTERS, New Delhi

There is not a bowler in the world that can stop Shikhar Dhawan when the opener is in determined mood and the left-hander will be crucial to India's hopes at this year's Cricket World Cup, former captain Sourav Ganguly has said.

Dhawan smashed 97 not out off 63 balls in Delhi Capitals' seven-wicket victory against Kolkata Knight Riders in Friday's Indian Premier League (IPL) contest at Eden Gardens, much to the delight of Ganguly, an advisor to the Capitals.

Captain Virat Kohli and his deputy Rohit Sharma are India's batting mainstays in one-day cricket but Ganguly puts Dhawan, who has 16 centuries from 128 ODIs with a 93-plus strike rate, in the same league.

"The three best players in



one-day cricket -- Dhawan, Rohit, Virat," Ganguly told the IPL website. "When he (Dhawan) gets set and gets in he's unstoppable.

"All I expect from him is determination. When he is determined, no bowler in the world can stop him."

Dhawan's second fifty of this IPL season, which catapulted Delhi into the top four, augurs well for India ahead of the May 30 to July 14 World Cup in England and Wales.

"If he gets set, he takes the game away. This is how he plays for India," Ganguly, who led India to the final of the 2003 World Cup, later told reporters. "He's a class act."

Two-time champions India begin their World Cup campaign against South Africa in Southampton on June 5.

'Archer makes any team better'

ICC

Ben Stokes and Jos Buttler were all praise for Jofra Archer, their team-mate at Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League and potentially with England as well, adding that the youngster has a good chance of making it to England's ICC World Cup squad.

Archer, who is yet to play a game for England, has 131 wickets at 23.44 in 28 first-class games. The Barbados-born all-rounder has just become eligible for England selection through his father.

In the meantime, he has been performing well in global T20 leagues. Stokes and Buttler, who play alongside Archer in Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League, conceded that the England selectors will have a tough time while announcing the World Cup squad on April 17.

"Jofra makes any team better," Stokes said on the Dooora podcast on BBC. "He is the most naturally gifted bowler I've seen and I don't think he quite realises how good he is."