

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

GTV & MAASRANGA TV

ODI TRI SERIES

Ireland v Bangladesh

Live from 3:45pm

TEN 1

Europa League

Semifinal second leg

Chelsea v Frankfurt

Live from 1:00am (Friday)

TEN 2

Europa League

Semifinal second leg

Valencia v Arsenal

Live from 1:00am (Friday)

Bangladesh Premier League

Time: 4:00pm

Bashundhara v Sk Jamal

Venue: Nilphamari

Nofel SC v Abahani

Venue: Noakhali

Muktijoddha v Ctg Abahani

Venue: Gopalganj

Time: 7:00pm

Sk Russel v Arambagh

Venue: Sylhet

Buoyed Tigers take on Ireland

SPORTS REPORTER

Although Bangladesh started their Ireland tour with a thumping 88-run defeat in the practice match against Ireland Wolves, the Tigers will be oozing with confidence when they take on the hosts at the Clontarf Cricket Ground in Dublin today following their commanding eight-wicket victory against West Indies on Tuesday.

The Tigers will also take confidence from their last encounter with Ireland when they sealed an eight-wicket victory back in 2017 -- also during a tri-nation series played among Bangladesh, Ireland and New Zealand in Ireland.

It was the same opening duo of Tamim Iqbal and Soumya Sarkar that had provided the Tigers with a solid start -- a 95-run opening stand with Soumya remaining unbeaten on 87 -- when the two sides last met. Something similar or even better will be expected of the duo when the Tigers take on Ireland today. And Soumya's optimistic words after Tigers' tri-series opener promises of something better.

If I could score a hundred or remain unbeaten, then the confidence would have been higher. There was an opportunity today [Tuesday], and I won't say I wasted it but I missed something. Next time if I get the opportunity in the few remaining matches here, I will try not to miss it.

Soumya Sarkar
Bangladesh Opener

"If I could score a hundred or remain unbeaten, then the confidence would have been higher. There was an opportunity today [Tuesday], and I won't say I wasted it but I missed something. Next time if I get the

MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

WILLIAM PORTERFIELD

opportunity in the few remaining matches here, I will try not to miss it," the left-handed opener told reporters in Dublin after the victory against West Indies.

"Of course, there is regret when missing out on a century. Both of us missed it and both of us will try to take a lesson from it. The way we were progressing towards the win, if both of us made it through maybe the win would have been even sweeter and we would both have had big scores," Soumya added.

Another positive that Bangladesh could take before going into today's game is the performance of the country's best all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan. After spending most of his time in the sidelines with his Indian Premier League (IPL) side Sunrisers Hyderabad, Shakib showed why he is still considered as a game-changer with economical figures of one for 33 before stroking an unbeaten run-a-ball 61.

A disciplined batting and bowling unit could be credited for Bangladesh's triumph in their tri-series opener. However, the only anomaly in that match could be Mustafizur Rahaman's expensive figures of two for 84.

HEAD TO HEAD							
Bangladesh				Ireland			
M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
9	6	2	1	9	2	6	1
Last meeting in ODIs: Dublin, May 19, 2017. Bangladesh won by eight wickets.							

With Mustafizur being a pivotal figure in Tigers' squad, the question remains whether the team management will try and get their ace left-arm paceman back in rhythm with more match time before the World Cup or will they shuffle their squad and try one of the four backups -- Forhad Reza, Taskin Ahmed, Yasir Ali and Nayeem Hasan -- or even Rubel Hossain, who was not picked for the last game.

Another thing that could have an impact on today's encounter is the persistent rain in Dublin which forced Bangladesh's training session on Wednesday being called off. And with rain in forecast for today as well, it would not be surprising to see the game interrupted.

Premier league back with four matches

SPORTS REPORTER

The title race of the Bangladesh Premier League will be virtually confined to within two teams when the second leg gets underway today, with four matches taking place in four different venues outside the capital.

Some four to five teams were expected to have been in the race when the 10th edition of the top-tier professional league started in the third week of January, but the scenario changed a lot in just 13 weeks following the completion of 78 matches.

Teams like holders Abahani, newcomers Bashundhara Kings, resurgent Sheikh Russel KC, Saif Sporting Club, Sheikh Jamal DC and Mohammedan SC formed strong squads to show signs of a competitive race but most of the contenders have fallen out of the race by the midway, leaving it into a two-way battle between six-time champions Abahani and newcomers Bashundhara Kings.

Bashundhara Kings, who are four points ahead of second-placed Abahani, are in superb form since the start of the league as they dropped only two points in 12 matches. They have also strengthened their attacking line-up by signing up Trinidad & Tobago striker Willis Deon Plaza while the newcomers are getting back the services of all players, some of whom missed some crucial matches due to injuries.

"Bashundhara Kings fielded their full-strength side in the last two matches following recovery of all injured players. They are now in good shape ahead of tomorrow's [Thursday] game while goal-scoring will be

less of an issue with the inclusion of Plaza," said the club's manager BA Jubair Nipu.

"However, the match against Abahani is a do-or-die for us. If we can beat them again, we will go close to the title," said Nipu. Bashundhara Kings have 34 points from 12 matches.

However, Abahani are determined to topple Bashundhara Kings to retain the title as the Sky Blues do not want to drop a single point in the second leg and bring down Bashundhara Kings to close the gap.

"We believe we can [topple Bashundhara] and we are working towards that's goal. The goal is to become champions," said Abahani's Portuguese coach Mario Lemos. "We know we are 4 points behind Bashundhara and we can't lose points in the second leg, every game is crucial for us."

Third-placed Sheikh Russel KC, with 27 points, are still not entirely out of the race but they need some miraculous results to overtake both Abahani and Bashundhara Kings.

"We are seven points behind Bashundhara, so we are a bit behind in the race. If the match between Abahani and Bashundhara ends in a draw, then we will also come into the race again and we need to notch up points in the matches against Abahani and Bashundhara," said Sheikh Russel KC coach Saiful Bari Titu, who is aiming to finish at least in second position.

The title race may have turned into a two-horse race, the battle to avoid has turned intense with three to four teams fighting still fighting. There will be no surprise if once-giants like Brothers Union or Mohammedan may fall from the top-flight this season.

ARCHERY WORLD CUP

Sana, Rubel in third round

SPORTS REPORTER

The country's top archer Ruman Sana came out of his shadow to better his performance in the elimination round, moving to the third round in recurve event of Hyundai Archery World Cup (stage-2) in Shanghai, China yesterday.

Sana, who hit a low in qualification round with a score of 655 points, thrashed his Chinese opponent -- Ding Yiliang -- by notching up a straight 6-0 sets win in the first round before handing a 6-2 sets defeat to Netherlands' Steve Wijler in the second round.

Though Sana, who bagged a silver medal in Asian Cup: world ranking tournament (stage-1) in Thailand in March, comfortably crossed the first two round hurdles, he will be up against tournament's third-ranked archer Sjef Van Den Berg of Netherlands today.

Like Sana, teenager Hakim Ahmed Rubel also did extremely well in the first two rounds of by beating New Zealand's Finn Matheson (6-2) and Japan's Ohi Kazuki (6-2), but he will have an uphill task in the third round against tournament's fifth-ranked Lee Seungyun of South Korea.

However, veteran Emdadul Haque Milon and young Tamimul Islam were eliminated from the first round after losing to England's Patrick Huston and Finland's Antti Tekoniemi in 6-2 sets and 7-3 sets respectively.

In women's recurve event, Beauty Roy beat Iran's Parmida Ghassemi 6-4 but lost to Japan's Hayakawa Ren 7-3 while Sushmita Banik lost against Madeleine Ong Xue Li of Singapore by 141-143 points in women's compound individual event. Ashim Das, too, suffered a 142-140 points defeat against Malaysia's Wong Co Wan in men's compound individual.

BFF signs deal with ISP

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) roped in International Sports Partner (ISP) as its commercial partners, signing a one-year agreement with the company at the BFF House yesterday.

ISP will have authority to sell the rights of all domestic competitions, and the company has already sold the title sponsorship of Bangladesh Premier League to TVS Autos Bangladesh Limited. Some matches of the second leg of the league will be telecast live by private satellite channel Bangla TV.

During the signing ceremony, BFF's senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshed, ISP's senior vice-president Deepak Singh, TVS Auto Bangladesh Limited's managing director J Ekram Hussain and Bangla TV's managing director Sayeed Samadul Haque were present.

Australia batsman Steve Smith scored an unbeaten 89 to lift his team to 279 runs during the second warm-up match against New Zealand in Brisbane on Wednesday. However, Will Young stroked a masterful 130 to steer an under-strength New Zealand to a seven-wicket win.

PHOTO: AFP

RIBERY PLANS TO PLAY ON

Bayern Munich winger Franck Ribery plans to play on for a few more seasons after leaving the Bavarians at the end of the current campaign, he said on Tuesday. The 36-year-old last week announced his departure from Munich after 12 years at the club. "There are several options, but it is still a bit early to say what will happen next season," Ribery told a news conference in Munich. "But there will be something, that's for sure. I will play on for one or two more years, and then I will return 100 percent to Munich."

--REUTERS

SHAKIB'S involvement

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

When Windies left-hander Jonathan Carter hit Mustafizur Rahman wide of long-on, he perhaps felt that he had found a boundary. What he found instead was an electric Shakib Al Hasan racing across to his left before taking flight and arresting the ball's trajectory, all the while maintaining balance and composure before clutching the ball out of thin air to take a spectacular catch. Even Shakib was in awe of the speed the ball was travelling in and his face said it all, especially after getting into the thick of the action after a long time. But that catch was neither the Bangladesh top all-rounder's only contribution nor the most critical one in the Tigers' eight-wicket victory over West Indies in their opening fixture of the tri-series in Ireland -- a game where Tigers' ace all-rounder put in a sublime all-round performance.

He felt the critical contribution had come when West Indies openers were running away with the match. "We did not start well. For me the most important time in the match was when me and [Mehedi Hasan] Miraz were bowling. Our bowling partnership was good and the breakthroughs came at that time. The way they started, at one stage it seemed like they would score 300 to 320," Shakib told reporters yesterday in Dublin.

After all the talk of his non-involvement in the team's World Cup jersey photo shoot, it was his involvement on the pitch that stood out in this match against the Windies. The ace all-rounder has been missing in action for a long time for the national team as his preparation for the World Cup were hindered by injuries. Lacking in match fitness, he pulled out a performance to help the Tigers after they slumped to defeat in a practice match against Ireland Wolves and facing difficulties with cold Irish weather.

For Shakib, the recipe for adapting -- even to difficult conditions -- was to stay consumed in the match.

"You can find ways to keep yourself warm. If you can be involved with the match, I think you can adjust to the cold," he said.

When he came in to bat, his task was to keep the momentum of the chase going after Windies managed 261. He approached the chase in his usual free-flowing manner. A tempo that made Tigers' chase easy and an innings that would have helped even

You can find ways to keep yourself warm.

If you are involved with the match then you might not feel the cold too much. I tried that myself and maybe others did too. If you can be involved with the match they I think you can adjust to the cold.

SHAKIB AL HASAN
Bangladesh All-rounder

during a 300-plus chase. His run-a-ball 61 was decisive just like his contributions with the ball and on the field.

"I played after a six-month period for the national team so physically there is the possibility of nervousness. Since I played well in the practice match, there was some confidence but doing well against a bowling lineup of West Indies' calibre is a big relief. We have started well and we need to continue," he said.

He said that the performance had removed some doubts. "There were many ifs and buts ahead of the first match but I think after this those things will clear out," he added.

With his involvement, Shakib is well on his way to removing self-doubt following his return for the Tigers.

Shakib Al Hasan impressed in his first appearance for the Tigers upon returning from a finger injury sustained during the Bangladesh Premier League final in February. He contributed in all three departments as Tigers clinched a clinical eight-wicket victory against West Indies.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

SHORT CORNER

BD U-16s match ends in draw

The second three-day test between Bangladesh Under-16 and their Pakistani counterparts ended in a draw yesterday at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna.

Starting the day on 29 for two, overnight batsman Shakib Shahriar was the first one to fall after scoring 32 off 64 balls. A team high of 87 off 109 balls came from Aich Molla's bat, who was also involved in a 50-run fourth-wicket stand with Rafsanjani in the middle. Bangladesh however, declared their innings on 183 for eight in 58.3 overs after setting a 256-run target, courtesy of a 72-run first innings lead.

Pakistan played out the rest of the 25 overs of the day, scoring 103 for the loss of three wickets. Mahfuzur Rahman Rabbi was the pick of Bangladeshi bowlers, scalping two wickets for 25 runs. --SPORTS REPORTER

FIFA upholds Chelsea transfer ban

The ban on Chelsea signing players over the next two transfer windows remained largely in place after FIFA issued their ruling on the London club's appeal on Wednesday.

In February, the Blues were banned from signing players for their men's teams for the next two transfer windows after being found guilty by FIFA's disciplinary committee of breaching regulations relating to the recruitment of minors.

Chelsea denied any wrongdoing and appealed.

On Wednesday, the governing body of world soccer announced that its appeal committee had "decided to partially uphold the appeal".

The committee lifted part of the ban, but only for players under 16 who are not "international transfers and first registrations of foreign minor players".

That means Chelsea will still not be able to sign male players over the age of 16 when the summer transfer window opens. --AFP

UEFA considering CL with promotion/relegation

UEFA has drafted a controversial plan to introduce promotion and relegation to the Champions League at a meeting at its Swiss headquarters in Nyon, sources told AFP on Wednesday.

There would be four groups of eight teams from 2024 if the proposal is put into action it would significantly increase the number of European matches and favour bigger clubs. But UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin played down the plan, saying: "What is important to remember, is that, despite a lot of talk in the media, no decisions have been made. At the moment we have only ideas and opinions."

The revamped tournament would not see games played at weekends, which would have sparked uproar among the domestic leagues. The top five teams in each group would be automatically qualified for the next edition, effectively making the Champions League far harder for clubs from smaller countries to play in. --AFP