Star SPORT
e-mail: sports@thedailystar.net
DHAKA TUESDAY DECEMBER 17, 2019, *POUSH 2, 1426 BS*

Launchpad in Chattogram?

BBPL resumes in the port city today

MAZHAR UDDIN *from Chattogram*

The sporting and batting-friendly wicket at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur for the Dhaka leg of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) came as a pleasant surprise for those who had complained about difficult pitches of BPLs past.

At the start of the previous edition, there was much dissatisfaction among batsmen about the slow and low nature of the surface.

Low-scoring matches have remained a feature of opening-phase games, much to the disappointment of spectators who went to the stadium to see sixes and fours -- the biggest draw of T20 cricket.

This time, however, the pitch at the home of cricket was livelier, offering proper bounce and carry, which allowed both batsmen and bowlers to make the most of the surface.

Even with the more helpful surface, none of the eight matches so far have been edge-of-the-seat thrillers and the lack of high-scoring matches has been the disappointing aspect of the BBPL so far.

Dhaka Platoon posted the highest total in the BBPL with 182 for four and went on to register a 24-run win over Sylhet Thunder.

Mohammad Mithun's unbeaten 48-ball 84 for Sylhet against Chattogram Challengers is the highest individual knock so far.

As the tournament resumes today in Chattogram, with the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium known as a batter's paradise that offers a lot of runs, the fans will be hoping for some high-scoring affairs much like last season.

After a series of low-scoring matches in Dhaka in the last edition, it was the Chattogram leg that saw the first century of the season, which was swiftly followed by the second in the same game.

Alex Hales and AB de Villiers struck twin hundreds for Rangpur Riders to post the highest total in the history of the BPL of 239 and went on to win comprehensively by 72 runs against Chittagong Vikings.

In fact, four of five hundreds last season were scored at the ZACS, the exception being Tamim Iqbal's blistering century against Dhaka Dynamites in the final in Mirpur to clinch the second title for Comilla Victorians.

So, all eyes will be on the port city this time too as the BBPL starts its second leg from today.

With two wins in as many games, Rajshahi Royals will be eyeing their third straight win against Khulna Tigers, who have won their only game of the season against Chattogram.

Rajshahi's hard hitting wicketkeeper -batsman Liton Das, who has been in fine touch with scores of 39 and 44 not out in the first two matches, is eyeing a big knock.

"Obviously, we always set a target to score big, but T20 cricket is something where you have to face different situations batting first or going for the chase. Obviously, if I get the opportunity, I would like to play a big innings.

"The pitch in Mirpur was very good and we never encountered such [a pitch at the venue] before, and I was surprised that even 150-170 runs were chased easily, which normally does not happen. I think it will remain the same in Chattogram," said Liton yesterday.

Khulna Tigers skipper Mushfiqur Rahim aims for the gallery during practice yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Chattogram Challengers skipper Mahmudullah Riyad got into the patriotic spirit yesterday, donning a headband and waving the Bangladesh flag to celebrate Victory Day at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram during a practice session.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Technique irrelevant as long as you perform: Liton

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) moves to Chattogram from today and Rajshahi Royals, who saw their top order fire them to the top of the table with two wins from two games in the first Dhaka phase, will hope to get more of the same when they take on Khulna Tigers at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium today.

Right-handed opener Liton Das's fluent knocks in both games were pivotal for Rajshahi, who have a healthy net run-rate of 2.295 -- the highest among seven teams. Liton's technique has been exquisite so far as he hit a quickfire, unbeaten 26-ball 44 during their convincing eight-wicket victory against Sylhet Thunder after scoring a 27-ball 39 to help thrash Dhaka Platoon by nine wickets in their opening game.

However, the 25-year-old opined that technique would not matter if he fails to perform.

"Technique or basics actually does not amount to much. If you perform, everything is okay. Will I be picked if I cannot perform? That's not going to happen. No one expects that Liton will play every game just because his technique is right. Everyone asks when I will perform and I also think about my performance. Technique will be there but the main thing is to perform," Liton told reporters in Chattogram yesterday.

Liton, who had failed to perform to expectation in the previous edition of BPL, was least bothered about the past.

"I am not thinking of the past. You are making me think, but I am not focused on what has gone by."

Liton came to the BPL after recovering from a concussion suffered when he was hit on the helmet by pacer Mohammad Shami during Bangladesh's pink-ball Test against India last month. The right-hander, who was reported to be suffering from colour-blindness, shed some light on the matter yesterday.

"Was it the Indian media or you [Bangladesh media]?" was Liton's response when asked how he felt after the Indian media had claimed that he was having trouble playing the pink ball.

"If I had a problem spotting the pink ball, then I would have struggled from the beginning. It depends on how you take these things. It is not a huge factor for me and what matters is how people are taking it. And a lot of people read the news published by you or the Indian media. A lot of people follow the Bangladesh media and they might think that Liton may be suffering from colour-blindness. It will come out as you put it," concluded Liton.

Meanwhile, Chattogram Challengers coach Paul Nixon hoped to win all four home games starting with the one against Sylhet Thunder, which will be played under lights at the same venue today.

Tamim in hospital with fever

SPORTS REPORTER *from Chattogram*

Tamim Iqbal, suffering from high fever over the past couple of days, was admitted to hospital in Dhaka yesterday as a precautionary measure.

Initial medical reports found no dengue virus and the doctors have advised further tests. If all turns out well Tamim will be discharged this morning and will take at least a week to recover. Tamim is expected to join Dhaka Platoon in Chattograam once he recovers.

"He was admitted to hospital as precautionary measure because of fever. We hope he will be back for us for the game on December 23. Tamim will join the team in Chattogram once he recovers," said Dhaka team manager Ahsan Ullah Hasan yesterday.

Cash-strapped Ireland swap BD Test for T20I

STAR SPORT DESK

Cricket Ireland (CI) has decided against playing a Test match during their home series against Bangladesh in May citing financial constraints, Ireland's RTE reported yesterday.

The Bangladesh fixture would have been just Ireland's second home Test following a defeat to Pakistan in summer 2018. That match has now been downgraded to T20I and a planned T20I series against Afghanistan was cancelled altogether.

Cricket Ireland chief executive Warren Deutrom said yesterday that the body had faced "a number of financial headwinds" in "the transition from an Associate Member to the operations required of a Full Member".

Cricket Ireland (CI) had also faced financial problems during their maiden home Test against Pakistan as rain washing out the first day caused a cash-flow crisis that meant Deutrom had to give the board a short-term loan of €100,000 later that year.

Ireland had been expected to receive International Cricket Council funding of $40m in the period 2015-23 but Deutrom said: "With an allocation amounting to less than half of that of Zimbabwe, our expected revenues from the ICC Funding Model for Full Members have not been realised."

He added that the focus for now would be on white-ball cricket.

"The first area of prioritisation for 2020, has been white ball cricket over red ball.Like all Irish cricket fans, we would love nothing more than to be competing on all three fronts. Unfortunately, financial constraints have led us to cut the home Test.

"As the Test does not form part of the World Test Championship, the one-off match lacks context. For effectively a 'friendly', the expected costs for hosting the Test would be over €1 million, with little expectation of creating revenue streams to cover the costs of hosting."

When asked about the change, BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said: "Ireland had informed us a while ago of their problems but they did not inform the ICC which is why it had stayed like that in the Future Tours Programme. Now we are working on shorter-version formats."

He may not be playing in the ongoing BBPL because he is serving out an ICC ban, but Shakib Al Hasan's is a name that is hard to escape in Bangladesh. The electronic scoreboard at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram still carries his name from the last match played here, when Shakib scripted a four-wicket win over Afghanistan in September.

PHOTO: RAMIN TALUKDER

A little slice of South Africa in Bogura

MOSTAFA SHABUJ *from Bogura*

The Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogura, one of five purpose-built cricket grounds established in the lead-up to the 2004 Under-19 World Cup, has hardly been buzzing with cricketing activity as the venue has not hosted an international match since December 2006. It is only when first-class matches take place or some local programmes are held that some noise is heard from the venue.

Since December 7, some life returned to the ground with the Bangladesh Under-19 cricketers fine-tuning their skills ahead of the ICC Under-19 World Cup to be held in South Africa from January 17 next year. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) sent the Young Tigers to Bogura with the aim of providing the players a slight taste of South African conditions because recently the grassy surface has aided the pacers, offering seam movement and bounce.

U-19S IN BOGURA

SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH THE VIDEO STORY

"We came here for our last camp, aiming to adjust to South African conditions. So far, the condition of the Bogura wicket is good. It has grass and bounce. We will return to Dhaka on December 26 and we are hopeful that we can take maximum advantage of these conditions," said team manager Sajal Chowdhury, adding that they are expected to fly to South Africa on January 3.

Captain Akbar Ali thanked the board for arranging the camp in Bogura. "We have been playing good cricket for the last year. This is our last camp in Bogura before the World Cup. Bogura's wicket is batter for pace bowling than other pitches in the country. The board has taken a good decision to send the team here as we are expecting similar conditions in South Africa. We are trying to take maximum advantage of these conditions and fix the problems we had seen in the last three-four series," said Akbar.

Coach Naveed Nawaz said: "We have had good preparation. 2019 has been a brilliant year for us. We have played nearly 23 games in the last year and had a lot of success. We have a strong team and our first goal is to reach the knockout stage. Therefore, we will focus match by match. We don't want to put pressure on our boys; instead, we are telling them to play as a team and perform to their best.

"During this time, we played in New Zealand and England, where conditions were quite similar to South Africa. The South African wickets will be drier and bouncier than local Bangladeshi wickets. We are going in South Africa seven days early, and hopefully we will have a good tournament," he added.

Bangladesh were drafted in Group C along with Pakistan, Scotland and Zimbabwe in the 16-nation tournament and will take on Zimbabwe on January 18 in their opening match. Before that, they will play a total of four warm-up matches including two official games against Australia and New Zealand.

The Young Tigers, who are completing their final preparations for next year's ICC Under-19 World Cup to be held in South Africa, listen to Bangladesh Under-19 fielding coach Trevor Penney during a practice session at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogura on Saturday.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ