

What to WATCH

GTV & MAASRANGA
BBPL
Khulna v Cumilla
Live from 1:30pm
Dhaka v Rangpur
Live from 6:30pm

DAY'S EVENT

Bangabandhu Bangladesh
Premier League
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National

Stadium, Dhaka
Khulna v Cumilla
Time: 1:30pm

Dhaka v Rangpur
Time: 6:30pm

Quality foreigners make Fed Cup competitive

SPORTS REPORTER

 Ending the dominance of traditional powerhouses, the just-concluded Federation Cup produced a new champion, with big-budget Bashundhara Kings beating minnows Rahmatganj in an entertaining final on Sunday.

The season's curtain-raising tournament had its fair share of upsets, with three-time champions Sheikh Jamal and big-spenders Sheikh Russel KC eliminated from the group stage. The other big teams such as 11-time champions Abahani, 10-time champions Mohammmedan, Saif SC and Chattogram Abahani fell victim to either minnows Rahmatganj or promoted Bangladesh Police FC.

Those upsets reflected how competitive the 22-match tournament was, giving an indication of how competitive the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League could be.

The Federation Cup saw 51 goals scored, out of which 34 were by the foreign players. The number of goals was, however, 23 less than the season's Federation Cup, but that was mostly due to the presence of quality foreign defenders and compact defence of the teams.

Coaches of different clubs admitted that the tournament was very tough and the standard of play increased due to the presence of quality foreign players, even at small clubs.

The federation cup was overall a good tournament. Teams like Rahmatganj, Bangladeshi Police, Mohammmedan surprised other teams. Bashundhara were very consistent and deserved to win but Abahani were disappointing as we lost in the quarterfinals. We should have done better," Abahani coach Mario Lemos said. "The League is going to be tougher. Every team got stronger; also this year we allowed to five foreigners. It's going to be more challenging this time."

"The Federation Cup was, as expected, competitive as the small teams played really well and did not any room to the big teams. The small teams are getting closer to the big teams in terms of strength," said Chattogram Abahani coach Maruful Haque. "The standard of play has improved as all



Throughout the recently concluded TVS Federation Cup, foreign recruits were vital to each team's success over the course of the competition as players like Bangladesh Police's American forward Sydney Rivera (2nd from L) proved their worth time and again.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

teams played very calculative football."

"Every team, from small to big, tried to sign quality foreign players in centre-back, defensive midfield and attacking positions. Those players had good influence in maintaining tempo of the matches aside from the influence of coaches. That's why the Federation Cup turned more competitive than the last season," said Sheikh Russel KC coach Saiful Baru Titu.

However, Mohammmedan coach Sean Lane was not prepared to judge the performance of the teams based on the Federation Cup only.

"I think it is difficult to judge the season just on the basis of the Federation cup performances. Many teams started training late and all teams were at different stages of fitness. I think the league will be closer than last season," Lane said.

"Mohammmedan is in a rebuilding phase. We want to get a good start in the league and we certainly

want to do better than last year."

Lane, however, believes big-budget teams will eventually prevail. "Most of the new clubs performed well in the Fed Cup, but I still expect the big clubs with big budget to be on top of the league."

Maruful also believes the minnows will lose out in the long run while the big clubs will remain in the title race.

"Management is a big factor in the league because small teams are eager to complete the league within a short period while their players are focused on avoiding relegation, but players of big teams stay focused on the title race," explained the UEFA A licence holder.

Though Maruful believes new teams may emerge as title contenders, Titu feels the race will be confined to within the big teams who have previously won the title.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

BSPA sports awards on Jan 20

SPORTS REPORTER

Cricketer Shakib Al Hasan, archer Ruman Sana and footballer Jamal Bhuiyan have been nominated for the best sportsman of the year award by Bangladesh Sports Press Association (BSPA).

The announcement was made yesterday at a press conference regarding the Kool-BSPA Sports award ceremony, which will be held at a hotel in the capital on January 20.

BSPA also nominated Shakib, Ruman, Jamal, karateka Marzan Akter Priya, weightlifter Mabia Akter Simanta, fencer Fatema Mujib in popular category award as sports fans will choose one of them through online voting, which will start on January 10. Fans can also vote for any sports star out of this list.

BSPA general secretary Sudipta Ahmed Ananda informed that the association will award 16 sports personalities in 15 categories at the press conference where BSPA president Mustafa Mamun and sponsors Square Toiletries' senior manager of marketing Fazal Mahmud Rony were present.



PHOTO: AFP

Ben Stokes (2nd from R) collapses in excitement as his three-wicket spell helped England beat South Africa by 189 runs in their second Test in Cape Town yesterday.

Stokes helps Eng level series

AFP, Cape Town

 Ben Stokes produced an explosive spell of bowling as England beat South Africa by 189 runs inside the last hour of the fifth day of the second Test at Newlands yesterday.

The win levelled the four-match World Test championship series.

South Africa were bowled out for 248, with the last wicket falling when only 8.2 overs were left in the match.

Stokes took the last three wickets in the space of 14 balls to clinch the victory.

Only three wickets fell before tea as South Africa defended grimly after starting the day on 126 for two after being set an improbable 438 to win.

Opening batsman Pieter Malan, making his debut, made 84 in 369 minutes and 288 balls before he fell to Sam Curran.

It meant England needed five wickets in the last session.

Stokes produced an inspired spell to have Dwayne Pretorius and Anrich Nortje caught in the slips before he took the final wicket when Vernon Philander was caught at gully.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First innings 269 & second innings 391 for 8 decd.

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 223 & second innings 248 all out (Malan 84, De Kock 50; Stokes, 3-35, Anderson 2-23)

Result: England won by 189 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Ben Stokes

Lukaku helps Inter back to top

AGENCIES, Milan



Inter Milan forward Romelu Lukaku scored twice, the first from a run which started inside his own half, to lead his side to an entertaining 3-1 win at Napoli which kept them top of Serie A on Monday.

Lautaro Martinez was also on target as Inter claimed their first away win against Napoli since 1997.

Inter lead the standings on goal difference from Juventus, who beat Cagliari 4-0 earlier on Monday, with both teams on 45 points. The head-to-head record will be used once the two sides have met twice.

Napoli, on the other hand, suffered their second defeat in three games since Gennaro Gattuso replaced Carlo Ancelotti as coach and stayed eighth with 24 points despite showing flashes of their old style.

Napoli had chances before Lukaku put Inter ahead after 13 minutes. The Belgian, who now has 14 league goals this term, intercepted a pass just inside his own half, charged forward and scored with a shot which went in off the post.

His second in the 33rd minute came with a helping hand from Napoli goalkeeper Alex Meret, who seemed to have Lukaku's shot covered but allowed it to slip through his legs into the net.

Napoli kept plugging away and Arkadiusz Milik tapped in Jose Callejon's low cross to pull one back in the 39th minute. The Pole should then have equalised when he had a free header just before halftime but directed his effort well wide of the goal.

Napoli continued to press after the break but, despite some flowing moves, they failed to find the final pass and Inter went further ahead just after the hour.

Matias Vecino floated over a cross from the right which Napoli defender Kostas Manolas managed to intercept but, in doing so, laid the ball off for Martinez to score his ninth league goal of the season.



Inter Milan striker Romelu Lukaku celebrates after scoring his second goal in a Serie A encounter with Napoli, which the Nerazzurri won 3-1, at the San Paolo stadium in Naples on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP



Participants of the Mujib Borsho Cup Amateur Golf Championship pose for a photograph with the organisers at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday. A total of 205 golfers from eight countries will take part in the championship, which will get underway today.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Mujib Borsho Cup golf inaugurated

SPORTS REPORTER

The Mujib Borsho Cup Amateur Golf Championship will get underway today at the Kurmitola Golf Club in Dhaka with 205 golfers including 183 Bangladeshi golfers and 22 golfers from seven other countries taking part.

The event, named so to commemorate the 100th birth centenary of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was inaugurated at the KGC by the State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel.

Sponsored by the Orion Group for the fourth time, the tournament originally known as Bangladesh Amateur Golf Championship, is being held at the KGC since 1982.

A press briefing in this regard was held at the KGC where details of the event were disclosed. Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal will give away prizes among the winners after the end of the fourth round on January 11.

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BANGABANDHU GOLD CUP
Palestine up first for hosts

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts Bangladesh will square off against defending champions Palestine in the opening match of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup on January 15, according to the fixtures released yesterday.

Bangladesh will play their second and final group match on January 19 against Sri Lanka, who will play their first match against Palestine on January 17.

In Group B matches, Mauritius will take on Burundi on January 16 before playing their last group match on January 20 against Seychelles, who will square off against Burundi in their first match on January 18.

The first semifinal between Group A champions and Group B runners-up will take place on January 22 while Group B champions and Group A runners-up will play the second semifinal on the following day.

The final of the sixth edition of the tournament will take place on January 25. All matches will kick off at 5:00pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Meanwhile, the national team players, except for seven Bashundhara Kings and captain Jamal Bhuiyan, reported to manager Satyajit Das Rupu yesterday for training camp, which will start today at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium. Head coach Jamie Day is scheduled to return to Dhaka while Jamal is expected to join the camp tomorrow.