

TESTING STATION AT EDGBASTON

English county cricket club Warwickshire have donated their Edgbaston ground to the National Health Service so they can carry out drive-through tests on their staff for coronavirus. The Birmingham ground's car park will serve as host to the NHS staff for the testing as the British Government bid to radically increase the amount of tests per day for the deadly virus. There has been particular concern over the lack of tests being carried out on the NHS staff who are in the frontline of treating patients with the virus. Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced plans on Thursday for 100,000 tests a day nationwide on all citizens to be conducted by the end of April.



POST-PANDEMIC REALITY

Ideal time to focus on domestic cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The coronavirus pandemic has already halted major sporting events around the globe with uncertainty looming over the resumption dates of the postponed events. As the situation remains ever-evolving, doubts regarding a number of future events have also emerged.

As far Bangladesh cricket is concerned, the latest series that came under the coronavirus cloud is New Zealand's tour of Bangladesh in August this year. New Zealand Cricket (NZC) yesterday mentioned that there are 'obvious question marks' over the Black Caps' tour of Bangladesh.

Had it not been for the coronavirus outbreak, the Tigers would now have been in Karachi for the third phase of their three-legged tour. But that was postponed with the two boards agreeing on finding a common window in future to play the solitary ODI and the second World Test Championship fixture of the postponed tour.

Such was the case too for the Bangladesh-Ireland series, originally scheduled for May in Ireland and England. That, too, was cancelled after agreement between the two boards and commitment of finding favourable future dates for the series.

Even Australia's Test skipper Tim Paine recently mentioned that their tour of Bangladesh would probably not go ahead in June. Australia are scheduled to arrive in the country for two World Test Championship fixtures.

With the way things are going, especially after NZC's latest remarks regarding Bangladesh tour, it can almost certainly be said that the landscape of international cricket will change drastically once normalcy returns.

All the cricketing powers will be trying to fit in a potential crammed-up international calendar, trying to squeeze in the postponed events to make up for the huge



Unlike the glory days when fans used to flock to the ground to see the likes of Abahani and Mohammedan battling it out in a domestic league, Dhaka Premier League matches nowadays are played out in front of sparse crowds as this photo from before the league was suspended shows. Things might change in the post-pandemic era but that will depend on the BCB implementing ideas to make the leagues interesting for crowds once again.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

chunk of lost revenues during this crisis. Even England's World Cup-winning skipper Eoin Morgan mentioned the possibility of them fielding separate squads for two different series against two different oppositions at the same time.

Keeping all these in mind, it can be rightly assumed that even when the situation becomes normal, it will still take a lot of time for international cricket to get rolling. It might as well happen that a totally unique method will be adopted in arranging international series after the pandemic.

This might lead to a situation where the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), not amongst the most powerful of cricket boards, might be left wanting for an international series even for years to come. And it would require true instances of

leadership from the BCB high-ups to convince and bargain their way into finding a suitable international series amid all the chaos that await.

In the worst case scenario, what could be the best way for the BCB to tackle the situation? Because just like general people, the cricketers are also eagerly waiting for normalcy to return and for them normalcy means battling out against opponents in the field with bat and ball.

The best way to ensure some cricketing action immediately after the end of the pandemic is resuming domestic leagues. For years now it is being lamented how attractive domestic cricket was in old times when fans used to flock to grounds to witness the likes of Akram Khan playing for Abahani and Minhajul Abedin fighting for

Mohammedan.

In the post-pandemic reality, the focus could be on returning to the roots and the BCB could put more importance in enriching the domestic circuit with better facilities and competitive wickets. Even the cricket fans, who are now confined to indoors spending time watching highlights and counting days of when they get to see players in action live once again, will surely be delighted to get a sight of the ball travelling to boundaries, even in domestic leagues.

Planned and executed properly, the glory days of domestic cricket might just return and if it does, it would be BCB's responsibility to come up with some innovative ideas to keep the fans engaged sustainable periods and not let it fade away again.



Leicester City defender Christian Fuchs showed off an impressive home exercise, walking up and down some steps and doing squats along the way with a chair above his head. His family is in the background as they are in self-isolation.

Babar's reply to 5-year-old Oscar

AGENCIES



Pakistan captain Babar Azam on Friday made a 5-year-old fan's day by responding to his heartfelt tribute on social media.

Oscar, a 5-year-old from the UK, wrote a heartwarming tribute to Babar Azam, saying the Pakistan star is his favourite cricketer. He also revealed his meeting with Babar after he had a surgery on his foot.

The handwritten note was tweeted by Somerset County Cricket Club on Thursday.

The note said Babar Azam was his 'favourite player' and the Pakistan batsman, 'the best T20 player', can hit 'big sixes'.

Babar Azam responded to the tweet by Somerset CCC, thanking Oscar for the note. "Hey Oscar, thank you so much for such a kind note. I am so proud of you buddy. You are a rockstar. Study hard & play even harder champ! Look forward to meet you," he said.

One of the most consistent players, Azam is the only batsman to have registered a batting average in excess of 50 in all three formats since the start of 2018.

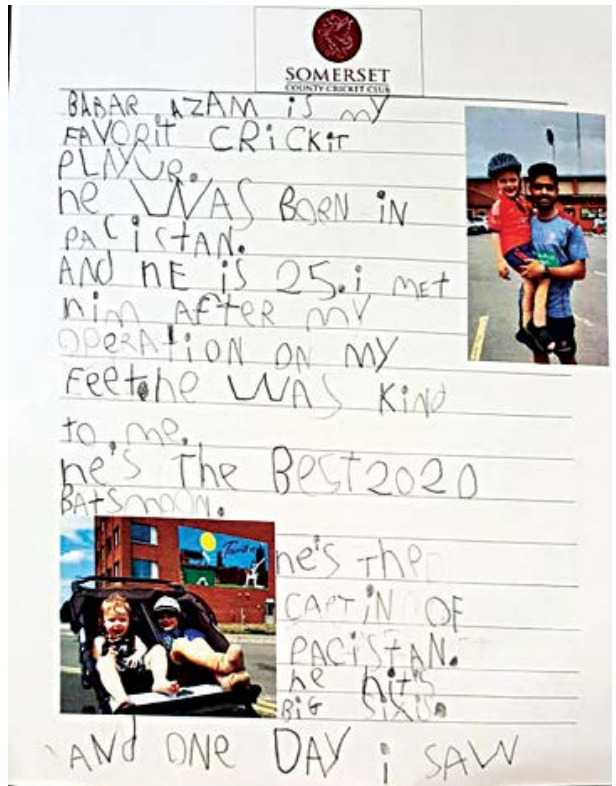


PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

SAFF events in doubt

SPORTS REPORTER



With just under six months left till the scheduled start of the Bangabandhu SAFF Championship in Dhaka, the South Asian Football Federation is having doubts about whether it can hold the seven-nation event due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In a bid to contain the spread of Covid-19, the domestic sporting competitions in all South Asian nations have been postponed for indefinite period while AFC and FIFA have also halted their competitions.

In these circumstances, organisers are having to rethink the fate of the SAFF Championship, scheduled for September 19 to 30 in Dhaka, which had earlier hosted the regional football championship in 2003 and 2009.

"There is no point of making any comment at the moment. If the situation improves, then the SAFF secretariat will hold the championship as scheduled in September, subject to avoiding clash with World Cup Qualifiers which have been suspended," SAFF general secretary Anwarul Haque Helal told The Daily Star

yesterday.

Helal informed that the SAFF secretariat was supposed to hold an executive committee meeting in the latter part of April, but the meeting has been cancelled following recommendations from SAFF president Kazi Salahuddin, who did not want to put anyone involved at risk.

"If our announced date clashes with FIFA calendar, we will have to reschedule the fixtures because as one knows when the situation will improve and when will FIFA resume its World Cup qualifiers," said Helal.

"If everything comes under control and sporting activities resume in different countries, we won't have any problem holding the championship. But if we see one or two countries still struggling with coronavirus, it will not be possible to hold the championship by excluding any participation nation," said the veteran organiser, who was once general secretary of the Bangladesh Football Federation.

The SAFF U-15 Boys' Championship is scheduled to take place in August, followed by SAFF U-15 Girls' championship in September and SAFF U-18 Girls' Championship in October.

Reminiscence: My first match

In these times of social distancing, we must be safe while remembering that we do not get too used to the world being at a standstill.

We were meant to go watch matches together, agree with a few of our neighbours and disagree with the rest. So, we are taking turns at The Daily Star Sport talking about our first live experience at a sports venue.

NABID YEASIN from Chittagong, 2010



I am widely unpopular among my friends, family and colleagues for remembering things. And hence, as I take my turn to reminisce about the first live match that I watched, I could just barely recall some flashes of the day Bangladesh took on England on March 5, 2010 at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, my hometown.

But even though I am unable to recall much, I vividly remember that I was left heart-broken at the end of the day. Bangladesh had lost the match by 45 runs but I would be lying if I say that that was the reason behind my tears.

Even days before when my father managed tickets for the game for the 13-year-old me, my younger brother and my uncle -- who was vested with the responsibility of our safekeeping and escorting us back home on time -- I was dying in anticipation, thinking about the day I could finally watch Tamim Iqbal, the local boy, smashing some boundaries and sixes and providing the locals with a lot to brag about for days.

The day had finally come and we (me, my brother and our uncle) started hours before the scheduled 9:00 am start of play even though the stadium was just a 40-taka rickshaw fare away from my place.

I remember that the sun had not been cruller that entire summer, burning with all its might. I was still not bothered. And why would I be? I was certain that it would all be worth it if I get to see Tamim taking all the frustration out on English bowlers.

We made it to the gallery -- I don't remember which one -- and after a few minutes, Shakib Al Hasan won the toss and elected to field. I was a bit disappointed as my wait for seeing Tamim in action was extended.

My disappointment would soon increase 10-fold seeing almost a new face in the England squad, Craig Kieswetter, tearing the Tigers' bowling line-up apart. I might have consoled myself had I witnessed any one among the likes of Alastair Cook, Kevin Pietersen, Paul Collingwood and Eoin Morgan rampaging but it was Kieswetter's century that helped England pile up 284 for five.

A big total? Well that just means Tamim has more runs to chase, ergo more fireworks to come, yay! -- I thought to myself as the battered Tigers made their way to the dressing room.

Finally, the moment I had been waiting for arrived. Tamim walked out and took strike. Taking a deep breath, I waited as debutant Ajmal Shahjhad

ran in and enticed Tamim to have a go at a wide delivery outside off. Tamim missed it just as my heart skipped a beat.

Tamim connected the next one but my heartbeats gathered pace, perhaps indicating what was about to happen. Tamim, who is now the batsman the team plays around, was not renowned for his sensible nature back then as he often used to lose his cool initially. I was praying and hoping that it would be one of those days when the elegant left-hander gets past the initial phase and unleashes the beast later on. However, proving my fears right, Tamim could not contain his urge and slashed hard at an outside off delivery the very next ball and was caught near



the boundary at third man.

I just stood there, feeling totally numb as I saw Tamim walk back without opening his account. If this happened now, I would have rationalised it saying any player may have a bad day, but back then there was nothing that could console a 13-year-old kid. I was upset, so much so that I convinced my brother and uncle to go back home just minutes after Tamim's dismissal.

Tamim did somewhat make up for breaking my heart that day when he smashed an incredible unbeaten 141 for Comilla Victorians against Dhaka Dynamites in the final of the Bangladesh Premier League in February 2019, with me writing about his rampage at the press box in Mirpur.

But even after all these years, even after being at the receiving end of many other heartbreaks in personal life, I still cannot forget the one meted out by Tamim that scorching day in 2010.

PL suspended indefinitely

AGENCIES, London



England's Premier League was suspended indefinitely Friday following a meeting of the 20 clubs where a series of financial measures were discussed amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The English league had given a tentative return date of April 30 but that was pushed back with a statement saying the "2019-20 season will only return when it is safe and appropriate to do so" and only with the full support of government and medical guidance.

"There is a combined objective for all remaining domestic league and cup matches to be played," the league said, "enabling us to maintain the integrity of each competition."

The clubs are desperate for the season to be finished if possible to avoid the potential of having to reimburse broadcasters a reported £760 million if they fail to fulfil fixtures for television contracts.

However, clubs insist they will follow government advice on when it is safe for matches to return.

Premier League clubs also agreed to provide a £125 million fund for the English Football League and National League.

UEFA yesterday stated their determination that the current football season should be played to a conclusion and threatened that teams may be excluded from the next Champions League if their domestic competitions are ended prematurely.

The joint response came after the Belgian Pro League announced on Thursday that it recommended declaring the season over with the present table accepted as final. It is the first European league to take such a measure.

That means Club Brugge would in theory go straight into the next Champions League group stage, but UEFA, the ECA and the European Leagues indicated that they may be barred from continental competition if the Belgian league decision is finalised.