Star SPORT
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DHAKA WEDNESDAY AUGUST 5, 2020, *SRABAN 21, 1427 BS*

WHAT TO WATCH

SONY SIX
England v Pakistan
First Test, Day 1
Live from 4:00pm

TEN 1 EUROPA LEAGUE
Copenhagen v Basaksehir
Live from 11:00pm
Inter Milan v Getafe
Live from 1:00am (Thursday)

TEN 2 EUROPA LEAGUE
Shakhtar Donetsk v Wolfsburg
Live from 11:00pm
Man United v LASK
Live from 1:00am (Thursday)

Limited spectators at Afghanistan game?

ANISUR RAHMAN

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) will allow its member associations to hold the upcoming Joint Qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup in the presence of full spectators, limited spectators or without spectators amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Since the postponement of all types of matches in March following the outbreak of the coronavirus, there had been an apprehension that the AFC might instruct member associations to hold the Qualifiers behind closed doors with hopes to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

"The AFC sent the guidelines and protocols on July 31, where they mentioned holding the match in three ways -- like normal, with limited spectators or behind closed doors," Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) competition manager Zaber Bin Taher Ansari told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The BFF has to take the highest level of health and sanitary measures if we want to hold the match like normal in presence of a full crowd. However, the AFC is encouraging us to admit only 50 per cent of the total capacity. All spectators must wear masks, maintain social distancing and hygiene inside the seating area and their temperature must be scanned before entering."

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

He added that the AFC also encouraged them to put only 30 to 50 per cent of tickets on sale, keep eight per cent for the visiting team and the rest reserved as complementary for stakeholders.

The AFC has also recommended dividing the stadium into nine areas to be monitored with sufficient manpower, who will ensure sanitary measures, and recommended to clear all areas.

"The stadium must be vacated and disinfected on the matchday in presence of the match commissioner before spectators, teams, match officials, supporting staffs and security personnel enter," Zaber said.

Generally, players of both teams shake hands before and after the match but this time there is no need to maintain such gestures. Even players were instructed to not shake hands with teammates. There is even no need for players to be escorted by children.

Bangladesh will host Afghanistan at the Sylhet District Stadium which had a 15,000 capacity. But the capacity has been reduced to 12,000. According to an NSC source, 8,000 seats have already been installed and the remaining seats will be installed by August. If the BFF decides to hold the match with limited spectators, they may put 3,500 tickets on sale as per instructions.

"The BFF is yet to decide because there is a huge involvement of manpower to maintain everything and, also, there is an issue of expenditure to ensure AFC match protocols. However, we are looking at the possibility of holding the match in presence of limited spectators," Zaber said.

Head coach Jamie Day believes having some spectators is better than none.

"I think any spectator is better than no one as long as it is safe for everyone involved and attending the matches," said Jamie, who believes support from the gallery depends on the number of spectators.

"I suppose supporting the team from the gallery depends on how many spectators are allowed to watch the matches. If it is only a small amount, then it won't have much of an impact on the players' performance," said Jamie.

EID SPECIAL WORKOUT! Following the successful completion of the first phase of individual practice sessions last month at BCB facilities across the country, it is expected that more cricketers have now gained the confidence to return to the field from August 8 after the Eid break. But wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim continued his outdoor training even during the break and posted photos and videos of his 'Eid special workout' training on Facebook. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Can England break their decade-long jinx?

AGENCIES

If anything that history suggests, England will have their work cut out when they go in search of a first series win over Pakistan in a decade when the two sides get their three-Test contest underway with the first Test at Old Trafford today.

International cricket returns after the coronavirus break when England took on West Indies in a historic series last month and the series was a fine advertisement for Test cricket on its return; England bounced back to clinch the series 2-1 against a spirited Jason Holder's side.

England are certainly going to face a tougher challenge. While England can point to recent series victories over most of their rivals, their last such success against Pakistan was back in 2010 -- a campaign overshadowed by a 'spot-fixing' scandal.

Pakistan will also boast confidence from the fact that since the series in 2010, the two series that Pakistan played in England -- in 2016 and 2018 -- ended in draws.

However, to Pakistan's disadvantage, they will be going into the first Test on the back of just a couple of intra-squad warm-up fixtures -- that too after completing a 14-day mandatory quarantine following their arrival in the country in late June -- compared to an English side that have already played and won a three-match series against West Indies 2-1 last month. But the fact that England have lost the first Test in eight of their last 10 series -- including their last series against West Indies -- is sure to be an encouragement for the tourists ahead of the first Test today.

HIGHLIGHTS

England have lost the first Test in eight of their last 10 series.

England's James Anderson -- on 589 wickets in 153 matches -- could become only the fourth bowler in history with 600 Test wickets.

Nervousness could however also get the better of the Pakistan side just as head coach Misbah-ul-Haq suggested on Monday.

"We've had good preparations and team bonding. Still we feel there is always a slight nervousness when you just play Test cricket after a long, long time (away)," Misbah added ahead of his side's first Test in six months.

Pakistan have eight quicks in their 20-man squad for the series -- understandable from the success that Pakistani pacers have had over the years playing in English conditions.

Meanwhile, England will have to decide if they will stick with four quicks as they did during their 269-run win against West Indies last week as Ben Stokes played as a specialist batsman due to a quad injury that restricted the all-rounder from bowling.

Good news for the hosts is that the star all-rounder was, however, reported to have bowled with good pace in the nets on Monday.

JOE ROOT

AZHAR ALI

BCB refutes FICA claims

FICA says non-payment in BPL is still an issue

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board [BCB] has termed FICA's [Federation of International Cricketers' Associations] claims regarding the handling of franchisee event contracts and payment of players from ICC events misleading and misinformed.

In a report titled 'Men's Global Employment Report 2020', FICA listed the Bangladesh Premier League T20 (BPL) as one of the sanctioned leagues and the only league among the ICC's Test-playing nations where the issue of late payment or non-payment continues.

Since the start of the BPL in 2012, the first few editions of the cash-rich T20 tournament were marred with irregular payments. The BPL also endured match-fixing and spot-fixing scandals in its initial stage, but the franchise-based tournament seemed to have come a long way in terms of ensuring payment to players and support staff in the latter editions, until the FICA report revealed recent irregularities.

In a statement yesterday reacting to the claims made by FICA on BPL payments, BCB said, "BCB would like to clearly state that the only unresolved/disputed payment from the BPL concerns four (04) persons -- three overseas players and a coach, of one particular team that had participated in the 6th edition of the BPL held in 2018. This is an isolated case in a tournament where more than 170 local and overseas players and support staff were contracted.

"Between January and April 2020, the BCB received complaints from the representative(s) of the players and coach that the franchisee in question had failed to comply with its obligations and did not complete payment. As per the franchisee agreement it was the responsibility of the franchisee to directly pay in full its contracted players and support staff.

"Nevertheless, as the regulatory body of the event the BCB had duly inquired the matter and subsequently has initiated legal proceedings against the accused franchisee to realise the pending payment and resolve the issue. It should be noted that the Board has kept constant contact with the concerned individuals and representative(s) who are fully aware of the steps taken by the BCB."

According to sources all three players and the coach mentioned by the BCB had participated for Sylhet Sixers in the 2018 edition. It was learned that the three overseas cricketers were West Indian cricketer Nicholas Pooran, Pakistani pace bowler Sohail Tanvir, Gulabdin Naib from Afghanistan and the coach is former Pakistan pace legend Waqar Younis.

"Initially, there were issues over irregularities in players' payment in the BPL and I heard a few local and foreign cricketers were anxious about their payments. But it has changed over the years -- there might be one or two cases of payment irregularity.

> Initially, there were issues over irregularities in players' payment in the BPL and I heard a few local and foreign cricketers were anxious about their payments. But it has changed over the years.

Personally, I have never faced such a situation in the BPL as I have been playing the tournament since the beginning," said an experienced domestic cricketer who preferred not to be named.

The FICA report also mentioned that Bangladesh national players are still owed their ICC event prize money, which the BCB claimed as a 'misrepresentation of facts'.

"The board has completed prize money payments to players from all previous ICC events including the last, which was the ICC Cricket World Cup 2019 in England and Wales. It may be mentioned that the BCB has maintained a standard by which players on a number of occasions have received additional incentives from the Board on top of the prize money from ICC events during distribution," said the BCB statement.

Booters to join camp today

SPORTS REPORTER

After four-and-a-half months of inaction caused by the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, national footballers will finally return to the training process today when the first group will go through medical procedures. Three Bashundhara Kings booters, who recently recovered from injury, will however miss the national camp.

Captain Jamal Bhuiyan and Finland-born defender Tariq Raihan Kazi will also be missing as they are still looking for tickets to return to Bangladesh from Denmark and Finland respectively.

On July 26, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) announced a 36-member preliminary squad for the rest of the four fixtures of the Joint Qualifiers for World Cup and Asian Cup, but head coach Jamie Day has to start the camp with 33 players.

Although Kings have agreed to release 11 other players for the national camp up to August 31, they did not allow fit-again striker Matin Mia, midfielders Masuk Mia Jonny and Atiqur Rahman Fahad to join the camp saying that the trio had sustained serious injuries before the pandemic-induced shutdown.

Kings are supposed to start a rehabilitation camp this month with their injured players before starting the pre-season camp for the AFC Cup in early September as they are scheduled to resume their campaign on October 23 in Maldives.

Kings also mentioned in the letter sent to the BFF that they would release all players on October 5, just two days before Bangladesh's tie against Afghanistan on October 7 in Sylhet, as per FIFA regulations, as they believe that the World Cup Qualifiers and AFC Cup are of equal importance because both teams will represent Bangladesh on the international stage.

Thirty-three players will join the training camp separately with the first 12 players to check into Sarah Resorts in Gazipur today after taking the Covid-19 test at BSMMU, while 12 more will join them tomorrow after undergoing the same process. The seven remaining players will join the camp on August 7.

Murray wants assurances on quarantine

REUTERS

Players need assurance that they would not face mandatory quarantine upon returning to Europe from the U.S. Open before travelling to New York amid the Covid-19 pandemic, former world number one Andy Murray has said.

Organisers United States Tennis Association (USTA) will set up a strict bio-security 'bubble' to minimise the risk of coronavirus during the Grand Slam, which will be played from Aug. 31.

The Western & Southern Open, which was relocated from Cincinnati this year because of Covid-19, will also be held in New York from Aug. 20-28 and will serve as a tune-up for the hardcourt Grand Slam.

Mandatory quarantine would rule out players' participation in other ATP and WTA claycourt events scheduled in Europe before the French Open from the end of September. The two major claycourt events in the leadup to Roland Garros are in Madrid and Rome.

While Spain does not require mandatory quarantine, Italy would need travellers to quarantine for 14 days if coming from the U.S. The USTA has said the organisers are working with authorities to resolve issues.

"My understanding is that it would be sorted before we go to America. But things can change in the next 10 to 12 days," Murray told British media.

"Hopefully before we leave, the players will have the assurances that, when they come back from America, they won't have to quarantine for two weeks.

"If that is the case, and if you do well in the U.S. Open, you can't just arrive on the Sunday before the French Open starts on the Monday. That's not going to work."

Casillas hangs up his gloves

REUTERS

Spain's World Cup-winning captain Iker Casillas announced his retirement at the age of 39 on Tuesday.

Casillas had suffered a heart attack during a training session last year and has not played since April, 2019. "The important thing is the path you travel and the people who accompany you, not where it takes you, because that comes with work and effort alone, and I think I can say, without hesitation, that the path I have taken is the one I dreamt about #Thanks," Casillas said on Twitter.

Casillas was given a role on Porto's technical staff at the start of last season.

Jesse Lingard was on the periphery of Manchester United's rise into the Premier League's top four over the second half of the season. The 27-year-old had to balance off-field issues with trying to win his place back in a flourishing team. He could play a key role in the Europa League, which restarts today with United's game against LASK at Old Trafford in one of four fixtures. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side hold a 5-0 advantage from the first leg in Austria PHOTO: TWITTER