

# Dancing down the rough patch

Shakib Al Hasan, undoubtedly the brightest star of Bangladesh cricket, does not always necessarily need to be involved in a cricketing activity to hog the spotlight. The premier all-rounder almost always seems to find his way into buzzing topics.

Latest incident was his appearance in public gathering during the launching ceremony of a certain super shop, less than 12 hours after his arrival from USA and thus his return was not only a reason for celebration but on the flip side,

caused a Covid-19 related controversy.

While often it is his blistering centuries, or a magnificent five-wicket haul or an incredible effort while fielding that catches everyone's eyes, it is also not rare to see him create headlines for off-the-field misdemeanors.

Be it a history of lashing out against fans in several occasions- most notably when he was handed a six-month ban by the Bangladesh Cricket Board for going into the crowd and physically

assaulting a spectator in 2014, not showing up for unveiling Bangladesh's World Cup jersey, leading a central role in players' movement, one-year ban from International Cricket Council (ICC) for failing to report corrupt approaches from an alleged bookmaker to the ICC's anti-corruption unit, controversy over his self-isolation in March this year, workers unrest at his aquaculture farm in Satkhira, Shakib has often grabbed attention for his off-the-field activities.

However, he also appeared into the limelight for an off-the-field involvement earlier during the pandemic through his The Shakib Al Hasan Foundation, which took the noble initiative of aiming to provide needy families with groceries supply and carried out community based services like disinfecting public places.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

**Bashundhara Kings forward Krishna Rani Sarker celebrates one of her two goals during their 7-0 victory over Uttar Bongo FC in the Tricotex Women's Football League, which resumed after more than seven months, at the Kamalapur stadium yesterday.**

## Salahuddin urges players to give 100 percent

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin asked the national players to give their best shot against Nepal despite the lack of preparation and deficiencies in fitness.

The BFF boss, along with the high-ups of the federation, inspected a training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday morning as the team shifted from fitness training to tactical training ahead of the two FIFA friendlies against Nepal. The matches are scheduled for November 13 and 17 at this venue.

"I ask you to give your 100 percent and that is all you can do," Salahuddin, who has recently been elected for a fourth term as the federation's president, told media

after meeting the players.

"The big issue is lack of time. We have plans but there is a gap in fitness, which is expected. If there is seven months' gap, it should take around six months to recover," the BFF boss opined after watching the squad play a practice match among the ranks.

BFF vice-president and national teams committee chairman Kazi Nabil Ahmed hoped that these two matches will kickstart all football related activities in the country and that 'football will grow from strength to strength'. Meanwhile, all 25 players of the Nepal team returned negative Covid-19 tests yesterday. The Nepal team, which arrived in Dhaka on Thursday, had stretching sessions in the last two days at the team hotel, where they are quarantined. The team is expected to end its three-day quarantine and start training from today.

## 'No place for princes in my team'

SPORTS REPORTER



Journeyman coach Paul Put vowed to build a team of young players with strong work ethic after arriving in Dhaka yesterday to take charge of Saif SC. The 64-year-old Belgian landed in the capital to prepare the mid-table side ahead of the upcoming football season, which is scheduled to get underway with the Federation Cup from December 19.

"I like also to play with young players. My philosophy is that in my team, there is no place for princes. We need players who work and players who are motivated. We need players who would be proud to wear the shirt of Saif Sporting and have the mental strength to get the best results," Put said during an interview with local media yesterday.

Put brings two decades of managerial experience with him including managing a number of African national teams and Jordan, with whom he came to Dhaka in 2015. However, a bigger challenge than those could be Saif SC - a club which finished fifth in the league last season and one that is not known for its patience with coaches.

"If you work with young players, you'll have to work with a long-term vision. You cannot work with a short-term vision. I will try to do my level best," the veteran coach said. The coach will not get the services in the Federation Cup and the first leg of the league of the club's inspirational skipper Jamal Bhuiyan, who has been loaned to Kolkata Mohammedan.



AFF, LONDON



For the past three years Manchester City and Liverpool have dominated the Premier League to an extent never seen before in English football.

But after three seasons in which the title winner has averaged 99 points, neither side carries the same fear factor in an unpredictable campaign that offers a series of challengers hope of winning the league.

Defending champions Liverpool still head to City on Sunday top of the table.

But Jurgen Klopp's men have already dropped more points in seven games than they did in their opening 27 in romping to the title last season.

Last season it was Liverpool's 3-1 success early in the campaign that opened up a nine-point lead between the sides that City never recovered from.

This time, though, Guardiola, who admitted earlier this year that Klopp's Liverpool are "the toughest rival I have faced in my career", believes it is too early to make conclusions this time, much like

## 'Like USA elections, all the votes must be counted'



**Mohamed Salah is all smiles in training ahead of today's clash against Manchester City.**

PHOTO: TWITTER

another battle for power this week.

"It's an important game, but like the presidential elections in the United States of America, all the votes must be counted," he said on Friday. "There are a lot of points to play (for)."

"So many things are different this year. Nothing is to compare with last year. Nothing is to compare with the year before. We just have to make sure we get through very

intense periods, line up the fittest players and play the best football we can. In this case it is against Man City, which is obviously one of the most difficult games to play in the world," said Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp.

Meanwhile, fitness issues have contributed to City's shaky start. After a two-week long pre-season due to their Champions League commitments in August, Pep

Guardiola's men won just two of their opening five league games, including a 5-2 thrashing at home to Leicester.

Injuries to Sergio Aguero and Gabriel Jesus have left City often without a natural striker, while Aymeric Laporte, Riyad Mahrez and Ilkay Gundogan also missed matches due to positive coronavirus tests.

City start the weekend down in 10th, albeit just five points off Liverpool and with a game in hand.

But City have never lost at home to Liverpool in the league since the Catalan arrived in Manchester, including a 4-0 thrashing of the newly-crowned champions when they last met in July.

Clashes between the two have gone a long way to settling the destiny of the title in recent years. After an uncertain start to the season, City's 5-0 triumph over a 10-man Liverpool in September 2017 was the second of an 18-match winning run that catapulted them towards a record 100 Premier League points.

A thrilling 2-1 win for Guardiola's side in January 2019 was Liverpool's only defeat of the season in which they still missed out on the title despite amassing 97 points.

## Australia start off as favourites, says Akram

PTI

Pakistan pace great and former captain Wasim Akram has said Australia would be the favourite to win the much-anticipated Test series against India in December-January.

"I think Australia's fast bowling is the best in the world. They have Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and other top-class bowlers. It will be a close contest but I would say Australia start off as favourites," Akram told Cricket Baaz, a YouTube channel.

Akram said the competition would be intense owing to India's strong fast-bowling line-up led by Jasprit Bumrah.

Akram pointed out that the Indian team of today has a lot of self-confidence. "The Indian team has got a lot of confidence. Their body language has changed. As a team they have confidence in themselves just like when we used to enter the ground in the 90s.

## Storm on the horizon?

AGENCIES

Real Madrid duo Eden Hazard and Casemiro have tested positive for Covid-19 and the two players are now isolating, the Spanish club said in a statement yesterday. Italy coach Roberto Mancini, as well as former Manchester City forward Edin Dzeko, have also contracted the virus.

Italy have three fixtures in the coming two weeks -- a home friendly with Estonia on Wednesday before facing Poland and Bosnia-Herzegovina in Nations League.

Football has been hit hard by the pandemic and fresh cases like these could be indicative of a storm on the horizon.



PHOTO: REUTERS

**A Bruno Fernandes brace cancelled out Bernard's opener as Manchester United eased the pressure on manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer with a 3-1 win at Everton in the Premier League yesterday. Edinson Cavani grabbed his first for the club.**

## Djokovic equals childhood hero's record

REUTERS



Novak Djokovic has sealed the year-end men's world number one tennis ranking for the sixth time to go level with childhood

hero Pete Sampras after closest rival Rafael Nadal opted against playing in the ATP Tour event in Sofia next week.

Spain's 20-time Grand Slam champion Nadal, ranked second, was the only player who had a chance to stop the Serbian from finishing as the top-ranked player in 2020.

"Pete was somebody I looked up to when I was growing up, so to match his record is a dream come true" Djokovic said in an ATP statement.

"I will also keep striving to be a better player, hopefully have more



success and break more records in a sport I love with all my heart."

During the year Djokovic won the ATP Cup in January before picking up a record-extending eight Australian Open Grand Slam in Melbourne. He also won the Cincinnati Masters and a record 36th ATP Masters title in Rome. In September Djokovic also

overtaken American Pete Sampras, who ended as No. 1 for six straight years between 1993 and 1998, for the most weeks overall at the top ranking and will begin his 294th week in first spot on Monday.

The 33-year-old Djokovic, the winner of 17 Grand Slam titles, has mentioned that Roger Federer's record of 310 weeks as No. 1 remains his target and he will have a chance to move past the Swiss on March 8 if he can hold on to his top spot.

"To finish the year as No. 1 is one of the most impressive achievements in our sport, one which requires sustained excellence across the season," ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi added.

"To see Novak achieve this for the sixth time and match Pete's record is simply incredible, and he continues to cement his place in the history books."