

SPORT

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS
BANGLADESH PREMIER LEAGUE
Bashundhara Kings vs
Uttar Baridhara
Live from 4:00 pm

SONY SIX
BIG BASH T20 LEAGUE
Sydney Thunder vs Sixers
Live from 2:15 pm
STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
PREMIER LEAGUE

Manchester City vs Brighton
Live from 12:00 am
(Thursday)
Tottenham Hotspur vs
Fulham
Live from 2:15 am (Thursday)



Taskin to 'recover soon'

SPORTS REPORTER

Taskin Ahmed is expected to recover ahead of the three-match ODI series against the West Indies after the pacer suffered an injury scare from a cut on his finger during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on Monday.

The tall pacer sustained the injury while bowling in the nets to Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal as he tried to stop the ball on the follow-through. "His cut is not deep. He has received superficial stitches on the skin. It will take around five to seven days to recover. It is good that the injury is on his left hand, which is not his bowling hand. He will recover soon," Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) chief physician Dr Debashish Chowdhury told media yesterday.

Bangladesh are to play their first international series after 10 months with the first of the three-match ODI series against the West Indies scheduled for January 20.

Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal, two of the stalwarts of Bangladesh cricket, were in a jovial mood as the Tigers continued their training drills for a third day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday ahead of the series against the West Indies.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Enthusiasm and hunger can trump experience: Simmons

SPORTS REPORTER



The Tigers will be keen to get back into the groove on home soil when they return to the international circuit after nearly ten months in the upcoming series against the West Indies.

West Indies have travelled the most during the pandemic, starting with a tour of England that signalled the resumption of international cricket in July last year amid the Covid-19 threat.

Given their relatively inexperienced line-up, West Indies head coach Simmons conceded that Bangladesh were clear favorites but added that enthusiasm could at times undo experience.

"Bangladesh are clearly favourites and we can't argue with that," Simmons said during a virtual press conference yesterday. "Sometimes experience plays a

part and sometimes enthusiasm and hunger play a role and trump experience. Hopefully we can do well," he said.

Top players like Jason Holder, Keiron Pollard and Dwayne Bravo opted to skip the tour citing fears of Covid-19 after travelling to the UK and touring New Zealand. When asked whether those players had made the wrong call, Simmons said: "I think all our players have been given their options since the first series in England. Some took their options in the first series, some in the second series in New Zealand and some decided to skip the third here in Bangladesh. It is up to the individual and it's the players who make their call."

In the new normal, life inside a bio-secure bubble can take a toll on the players' mental health and West Indies faced some trouble maintaining health protocols in New Zealand recently.

Simmons believes any away series is tough, but opined that the

West Indies were one of the most experienced when it comes to staying inside bio-secure bubbles.

"It's definitely not easy to be away from home. The two series we played, everything was put into the series. No series away is easy as I said before. We are going to give our best."

"It's important what you learn as you go along. We are one of the most experienced teams when it comes to staying inside a bio-secure bubble. And you know you have to stick to the bio-secure environment and keep health safety intact and it's all about learning as you go along," Simmons said.

The last time the Caribbean side toured Bangladesh was back in 2018, with the losing both the ODI and Test series although they had a full-strength team. Despite a relatively young side this time around, Simmons said that they have a balanced unit with both spinners and pacers in the squad and were eyeing a series win.

Virus containment and performance equally vital as BPL kicks off today

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Premier League is set to get underway today with participating clubs facing the additional challenge to keep players and supporting staff coronavirus-free during the lengthy league to keep performing well on the ground.

On the opening day of the 13-team league, defending champions Bashundhara Kings take on Uttar Baridhara Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Following a long coronavirus-induced break, domestic football returned last month through the Federation Cup. Despite the lack of proper preparation, most clubs had performed well with no team -- big or small -- going unchallenged in the league matches, which raises hopes of a competitive BPL.

Coaches, however, are a bit worried about the new challenge of keeping their players Covid-19 free and on the field in the hope of being in the title race. Six-time league champions Abahani are enduring tough times after five players tested positive during the Federation Cup.

"I think the management of Covid-19 is going to be an additional challenge during the long league, although everyone already has a clear idea of how to follow health guidelines the Federation Cup," said Sheikh Russel KC coach Saiful Bari Titu. "Players being infected with Covid-19 may reduce the strength of the clubs if they don't have a strong reserve bench. So, containing the virus during the league is as important as the performance on the ground."

Sheikh Jamal DC coach Shafiqul Islam Manik said, "Everything depends on the attitude of the players and support staff [about following health guidelines]."

"During the short Federation Cup, we

could manage it well but we are in doubt about maintaining it during the long league because we have to travel outside Dhaka [Cumilla, Tongi and Munsighanj] to play matches and we don't know how the environment and management is there."

Apart from their existing Covid-19 concerns, Abahani's Portuguese coach Mario Lemos spoke about concerns over players' injury which has already weakened them ahead of their first match on Thursday.

"It is going to be tough because five players tested Covid-19 positive, two players -- Raihan Hasan and Masih Saighani -- are injured along with two suspended players. So, we are trying to find the solution," said Lemos. He also said instead of it being a two-way battle between Abahani and Bashundhara Kings, the likes of Sheikh Russel, Saif SC and Chattogram Abahani will also be hot contenders.

Echoing the sentiment, Bashundhara Kings' Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon said, "We are eager to compete so we will approach every game as if it is a final. The boys and the team remain hungry for more success."

"There are five-six teams initially that will contest for the BPL title. The league will favour the team performing well on a regular basis and we will get a clear idea of title contenders only after three to four months of competition," he added.

Saiful Bari Titu believes every team has signed up quality foreign players and it would not be wise to tag any team as small or big because every match will be tough for every club.

Zahidur Rahman Milon, coach of Uttar Baridhara Club, said, "There is a gulf of difference between big and small teams in terms of strength but the small teams, on the back of short preparation, are playing with a positive attitude, which is the main strength of the small teams."



MISSION ASIAN CHAMPIONS TROPHY

Ahead of Asian Championship Trophy in Dhaka from March 11, the national team's players including Rasel Mahmud Jimmy (2nd from L) started a two-month preparation camp at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday, ending approximately two-and-a-half years of hiatus from international hockey. Out of the 32-member preliminary squad, Debashish Kumar could not turn up due to testing Covid-19 positive while Abu Sayeed Nippon sought time due to a family engagement.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Apologetic Paine defends Smith

AFP, Sydney

Australian captain Tim Paine apologised Tuesday after launching an ugly tirade at India's Ravi Ashwin in the drawn Sydney Test, admitting he was "bitterly disappointed" in his own conduct.

Paine said frustration got the better of him on Monday when he tried to unsettle Ashwin, who played a key role as the tourists denied Australia to salvage a draw on the final day of the third Test.

"I want to apologise for the way I went about things yesterday... my leadership wasn't good enough, I let the pressure of the game get to me," the Australian skipper told reporters.

Stump microphones picked up Paine making a series of verbal jabs at Ashwin, including calling him a "dickhead".

But the tail-ender was defiant and his unbeaten 39 helped keep the series level at 1-1 to set up a winner-takes-all fourth and final Test in Brisbane starting Friday.

Paine acknowledged his actions undermined the goal he set himself when appointed Test captain in 2018 to revamp the team's toxic culture after the "Sandpaper-gate" ball-tampering scandal.

"I'm a captain who wants to enjoy the game, who wants to play the game with a smile on his face and I fell short of my expectations and our standards," he said.

Paine, who was also fined for dissent after an expletive-laden rant at umpire Paul Wilson on day two of the match, admitted "my mood throughout the whole Test was probably a bit off".

He insisted the behaviour was a "blip" that would not be repeated and said he had not considered standing down as captain over the incident.

Star batsman Steve Smith, who was Australia's captain during the sandpaper cheating scandal, also attracted negative attention when footage suggested he scuffed up batsman Rishabh Pant's guard at the crease.

The stump camera showed Smith shadow batting and then apparently rubbing off the pitch marks -- made by the batsmen to judge where they stand -- with his boots.

Paine said it was just part of Smith's regular routine.

"It's one of his mannerisms, he was marking centre, he wasn't by any stretch of the imagination trying to change guard or do anything like that," he said.

England fan's lonely wait faces new blow

AFP, Galle

A devoted England cricket fan who has waited 10 months in Sri Lanka for a postponed tour to restart could miss out again as the series goes ahead behind closed doors.

England will play Sri Lanka in a Test match from Thursday in an empty stadium in Galle, 72 miles (112 kilometres) south of the capital Colombo, and Rob Lewis' only hope is that he can watch from atop a local landmark.

The 37-year-old member of the Barmy Army fan group was on a plane to Sri Lanka last March when Joe Root's team abruptly ended a practice match ahead of the two Tests against Sri Lanka and left the country as the coronavirus was declared a global pandemic.

Lewis stayed in Sri Lanka through its virus curfews, working remotely as a web designer 8,700 kilometres (5,400 miles) from his Surrey home, waiting for England to return and play the two Tests.

He even landed a part-time gig as a DJ at a bar in Colombo, calling himself "DJ Randy Caddick", in homage to England fast bowler Andy Caddick.

"I've been in Sri Lanka the whole time on blind faith, on a wing and a prayer," Lewis told AFP at the Galle Fort, which overlooks the cricket stadium.

He had hoped he would get into the ground but, amid a surge in infections, no fans will be allowed in for the matches.

At one point, he had jokingly asked Sri Lanka's coach Mickey Arthur -- with whom he has struck up a friendship -- if he could be the water boy for the Sri Lankan side, just to get near the action.

However, he may not miss out completely.

"Lucky enough, because it is Galle, we have the beautiful fort

to watch (from)," he said on the ramparts of the 16th-century fort.

The imposing fortifications, founded and developed by Portuguese and Dutch colonisers, have become a popular viewing spot for locals who do not want to pay for tickets to matches at Galle.

Lewis hoped to keep up Barmy Army standards by hanging a banner that the players could see from the pitch.

He also planned on "yelling 'Jerusalem' out as loud as I can to support the players", referring to

month and then see what happens' But it rumbled on... there's never been a point where I thought I should go home."

He said he could work remotely and support his stay in Sri Lanka comfortably. "I could get annoyed about the money I spend on rent back home... but it's offset by the cheaper cost of living here."

"There are not many tourists around so things are cheaper. I'm able to stay at nicer villas for half the price... it's been great. I've gone on tours that normally may be not



the popular English hymn regularly chanted at the team's matches.

"I'm going to print a few hymn sheets out and try and get as many people to help me sing 'Jerusalem' as possible," he said.

After England left Sri Lanka on March 13, the side's fans scrambled to catch flights home, paying several times the usual fare. Lewis thought the pandemic would be quickly dealt with, and decided to stay.

"I thought, 'Oh, this coronavirus will be a month. I'll stay in for that

affordable."

Sri Lanka is facing a surge in infections with the number of cases rising to nearly 50,000 from 3,300 in early October. The number of fatalities has risen from 13 in October to 240 on Tuesday.

With London under another strict virus lockdown, Lewis says he is not sure when he will return, but he misses his friends and family.

"It will be great to see them again," he said. "It's been a long time."

MU to face L'pool in FA Cup 4th round

REUTERS

Manchester United will host Liverpool in the fourth round of the FA Cup after the two arch rivals were drawn together on Monday, with the game set to be played a week after their Premier League summit clash.

The two sides, who are both top of the Premier League table and go head-to-head in the league on Sunday, meet in the cup for the first time since Dirk Kuyt scored a late winner as Liverpool beat United 2-1 in January 2012.

United have not beaten Liverpool since March 2018, with Ole Gunnar Solskjaer yet to taste victory against the Anfield side in four attempts as manager, once as Cardiff City boss.

The winners will clash with either West Ham United or League One (third tier) side Doncaster Rovers after the Hammers eked out a 1-0 win at National League (fifth tier) outfit Stockport County on Monday.

Holders Arsenal will be on the road and play either Southampton or Shrewsbury Town, with the third round tie yet to be decided after the game was called off when Shrewsbury reported COVID-19 cases in their squad.

Manchester City travel to fourth tier side Cheltenham Town while Tottenham Hotspur, who beat eighth tier Marine, travel to second tier Wycombe Wanderers.

Chelsea host Championship side Luton Town.