

T SPORTS

Bangladesh Premier League
Sheikh Jamal DC vs Chittagong Abahani
Live from 4:00 pm
SONY SIX & TEN 1
Australia vs India
Fourth Test (Day 5)

Live from 6:00 am (Tuesday)
TEN 2
Sri Lanka vs England
First Test (Day 5)
Live from 10:30 am
SONY SIX
Big Bash T20 League

Sydney Thunder vs Hobart Hurricanes
Live from 2:15 pm
STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
English Premier League
Arsenal vs Newcastle United
Live from 2:00 am (Tuesday)

Chance for batsmen to level up

MAZHAR UDDIN

The onus will probably be the most on batsmen to adapt to international cricket after a gap of more than 10 months when Bangladesh will take on West Indies in the upcoming three-match ODI series starting from January 20.

Bangladesh played their last ODI back in March 6, 2020 against Zimbabwe and since then their participation in international cricket was halted due to the pandemic.

After a majority of West Indies' top cricketers opted to skip the tour, it has generally been thought that the Tigers' return to international cricket would be a comfortable one as there is a gulf of experience between the two sides.

Russell Domingo took up the Bangladesh head coach's role with the intention to create a better cricket culture after the Bangladesh Cricket Board parted ways with Steve Rhodes following an eighth-placed finishing in the 10-team 2019 ICC World Cup.

Increasing the comfort factor for Bangladesh is the fact that they will be making their return in their most favoured format -- fifty-overs cricket.

Under new skipper Tamim Iqbal, the focus will be on a positive approach especially from the batsmen to become a better unit in the ODIs, much like England did after their disappointing exit from the group stages of the 2015 ICC World Cup and then becoming champions in 2019.

It will be important for the Tigers' think tank to form a settled batting order and have a long-term plan for the 2023 ICC World Cup, which the selectors mentioned ahead of the series.

The presence of four experienced batsman in the form of Tamim, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, and Mahmudullah Riyad will be an obvious advantage but it is also the best time for players who have been playing for four or five years like Liton Das, Soumya Sarkar and Mohammad Mithun to step up their games.



HIGHLIGHTS

Bangladesh batting in the 1st Powerplay (1-10 overs) since 2019 ICC World Cup
Sri Lanka Tour (2019): 1st ODI - 36 for 3, 2nd ODI - 35 for 2, 3rd ODI - 41 for 2.
Zimbabwe Series (2020): 1st ODI - 44 without loss, 2nd ODI - 65 for 1, 3rd ODI - 53 without loss.

MOST RUN-GETTERS FOR TIGERS SINCE 2019 ICC WORLD CUP

Player	M	R	Avg.	Strike Rate	100s	50s	HS
Tamim Iqbal	6	331	66.20	100.30	2	0	158
Liton Das	3	311	155.50	118.70	2	0	176
Mushfiqur Rahim	5	249	62.25	86.75	0	1	98*

It will also be a huge opportunity for youngsters like Nazmul Hossain Shanto and Afif Hossain to showcase their talent and give the team management the luxury of having a strong reserve bench. Tamim is the most successful batsman for Bangladesh and of

course there will be the added pressure of captaincy, but the other side of the coin is that when a leader performs well it encourages the entire team to give their best.

Tamim will be opening the innings alongside Liton Das who has been in terrific touch in the recent past and the elegant right-hander has all the attributes to run away with the game on any given day.

With the vast experience of Tamim and the pyrotechnics of Liton, the Tigers would really want to cash in and form an invincible opening pair that could lay the foundation of the innings in the limited-overs format.

The return of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan after completing his one-year ban from cricket will allow the team management to add an extra batsman or a bowler to form a balanced eleven.

Shakib had the time of his life with the bat in the 2019 ICC World Cup coming in at number three and scoring 606 runs in eight games at an average of 86.57, including two hundreds and five fifties.

The champion cricketer will be hungrier than ever on his comeback, which will only help the Tigers and his experience will certainly help skipper Tamim get off on the right foot in his captaincy career.

The dependable Mushfiqur Rahim has always provided assurance in the middle order in any situation over the years. He has been one of the most consistent batsmen for Bangladesh across formats and the team management would really expect him to continue in the coming days.

Last but not least among the veterans, Mahmudullah Riyad has played many match-winning knocks for the Tigers over the years in various situations and positions.

The likes of all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin and the uncapped Mahedi Hasan can also provide valuable support with the ability to score some quick runs in the latter stages of the innings.

The ingredients are there for a strong future, and the Tigers should look to begin that path with the West Indies series.



(Clockwise from top) Following his victory in 400m on the previous day, sprinter Zahir Rayhan won the 200m dash on the final day of the Bangabandhu National Athletics Championships at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Ritu Akter's record high-jump was one of the highlights of the three-day competition, where Bangladesh Navy successfully defended their crown.

PHOTO: STAR

Hierarchy unchanged as calls for advanced training grow

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangabandhu National Athletics Championships came to an end at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday in usual fashion, with services teams maintaining their stranglehold in the 44th edition, which produced one national record.

Bangladesh Navy bagged 21 gold, 12 silver and 13 bronze medals in a successful defence of their title, which was their third successive triumph along with another national and one summer championship. Bangladesh Army had to be content with second place with 13 gold, 20 silver and nine bronze medals. Bangladesh Ansar, who won one gold, five silver and six bronze medals, finished third.

There were hardly any expectations of discovering anyone promising, especially factoring in the long layoff due to the Covid-19 pandemic and Bangladesh athletics' unimpressive state over the past decade. Experienced campaigners dominated as expected in all events bar the high jump, in which Ritu Akter of Bangladesh Army created a new record by clearing an impressive 1.70 meters, a height that would perhaps be enough to win a medal at the South Asian Games.

Sprinters Mohammad Ismail, Zahir Rayhan and Shirin Akter made pleas for advanced training programmes abroad to improve themselves as only Rayhan could improve on his time in the last edition of

the meet.

A talent like Umme Hafsa Rumki had also sought advanced training after creating a national record in the women's high-jump in 2019 by clearing 1.68 meters. She maintained her previous height, but lost her crown to Ritu.

Two prominent coaches, Abdullah Hel Kafi and Farid Khan, who worked with Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Navy on a contractual basis, also backed the athletes' desires to receive advanced training either at home or abroad.

"Bangladeshi coaches are not given proper training facilities compared to what foreign coaches are given. So, I agree that athletes should be sent abroad. But I think it is better to bring foreign coaches here to train more athletes instead of sending one or two athletes abroad. They could also engage local coaches, who will also learn from foreign coaches," Kafi opined.

"To be honest, Bangladesh's athletics is confined to Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Navy and BKSP is working as a pipeline to provide promising athletes. I believe there are some talented athletes in both services teams, especially in Navy, and if we can nurse them well then we can get out of the current situation a bit," Kafi added.

Navy coach Farid said: "It is true that we have good athletes but there is no alternative to good training to achieve any target. I think if the federation brings foreign coaches for athletes, then local coaches will also get an opportunity to learn something new from them and apply it in future."



It's mighty important [to get a good start in the ODI Super League] because we have to catch up with this series. We don't want to be going into the playoffs anymore so we need to start right. It's never enough for me. I think I would have liked the sort of time span we had in New Zealand. But this is what we have and we just try to fit in as much as we can in this period.

WINDIES COACH PHIL SIMMONS SAID YESTERDAY DURING A VIRTUAL MEDIA CONFERENCE.



FLYING START FOR MOHAMMEDAN

Mohammedan Sporting Club's Malian forward Souleymane Diabate celebrates his 19th-minute opener against Arambagh KS in their Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Nigerian striker Abiola Nurat doubled the Black and Whites' lead on the half-hour mark before local forward Aminur Rahman Sajib wrapped up a 3-0 victory with a fine effort in the first minute of the second half.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Batsmanship has been a real standout'

AGENCIES

Regular captain Virat Kohli led the tributes to Shardul Thakur's brave batting in the Brisbane decider but the number eight batsman was underwhelmed by his praise as he never considered himself a dud with the bat.

Thakur, playing his second Test, emerged as India's unlikely batting hero, top-scoring with a counter-attacking 67 to deny Australia a substantial first-innings lead. Debutant Washington Sundar was his partner in a 123-run seventh-wicket stand as both made their maiden Test fifties in the fourth and final game of the series on Sunday.

"I do believe I have some batting talent. I do work on my batting in the nets. We wait for these moments, these opportunities, to contribute with the bat," Thakur, who



claimed three wickets in Australia's first innings, said in a video conference.

"When I came to the middle, crowd was cheering Australian bowlers then I remembered what Ravi Shastri told, he said when you perform in Australia they will love you. That is the one which was in my mind and it will also help India," he added.

"Outstanding application and belief by @Sundarwashi5 and @imShard. This is what Test cricket is all about," Virat Kohli, who returned home after the opening test to attend the birth of his daughter, said on Twitter.

"The batsmanship has been a real standout and their application and concentration. They didn't throw it away. The partnership was outstanding, exactly what India needed at the time which is what they've been able to produce in a few Test matches," Ricky Ponting told cricket.com.au.

Leach spins Eng near to victory

REUTERS, GALLE

Left-arm spinner Jack Leach took five wickets as England edged towards victory over Sri Lanka in the first Test in Galle, but they made a nervous start to their pursuit of a modest target of 74 and closed day four on 38 for three on Sunday.

Jonny Bairstow (11 not out) and debutant Dan Lawrence (7 not out) will lead the victory charge on the final day but must master a wicket offering prodigious turn that will leave Sri Lanka believing they are still in with a sniff of an upset.

South Africa were skittled for 73 in their fourth innings in Galle in 2018 as the home side took 28.5 overs to take 10 wickets, a blueprint for their potential success in this match.

Sri Lanka were bowled out for 359 in their second innings as opener Lahiru Thirimanne scored his second Test century in 37 matches before being dismissed for 111.

All-rounder Angelo Mathews (71) batted well with the tail to frustrate the visitors and allow them to set some sort of target, his 219-ball vigil finally ended by Leach (5-122).

Leach was getting considerable turn on the crumbling surface.

'No room to swing a racket'

REUTERS, MELBOURNE



As one of the 47 tennis players forced into a hard isolation ahead of the Australian Open, New Zealand's Artem Sitak may be bouncing off the walls of his Melbourne hotel room by the end of his 14-day quarantine.

The Russia-born doubles specialist was on flight QR7493 from Los Angeles, sharing the chartered plane with three people who tested positive to Covid-19 after landing in Melbourne.

Now, as one of the two-dozen players aboard the flight deemed "close contacts" of the infected trio, Sitak is effectively in solitary confinement at the View Melbourne, an inner city hotel converted into a quarantine facility. Unlike other players who arrived safely and have the luxury of leaving their hotels to train five hours a day, the 34-year-old cannot even open



British tennis player Katie Boulter exercises in her hotel room in Melbourne as players are quarantining for two weeks ahead of the Australian Open.

PHOTO: TWITTER

his door for the threat of a A\$20,000 (\$15,400) fine under Australia's strict quarantine regime. Some players have complained and said they are at a disadvantage compared to better-prepared opponents ahead of the Feb. 8-21 Grand Slam.

But Sitak is philosophical, and intends to burn through the hours with exercise, reading and playing games on his Nintendo Switch. "Everything that I did in the off-season ... I had six very good weeks of training, it's not completely ruined but it's not the same now," he told Reuters in an interview. The world number 68 Cuevas posted video on social media of himself hitting a ball against an upturned mattress in his room and "surfing" on his bed.

"That was pretty cool," said Sitak. "He has a pretty big room, so he can actually swing his racket in it. I don't think I can swing my racket in this room."