

**T SPORTS**

Bangladesh Premier League  
Saif Sports vs Sheikh Jamal DC  
Live from 4:00 pm

**T SPORTS & SONY SIX**

Abu Dhabi T10 League  
Qalandars vs Maratha Arabians  
Live from 6:00 pm

Delhi Bulls vs Pune Devils  
Live from 8:15 pm

Northern Warriors vs Deccan Gladiators  
Live from 10:30 pm

**T SPORTS & STAR SPORTS SELECT 1**

English Premier League  
Wolves vs Arsenal  
Live from 12:00 am (Wednesday)

Manchester United vs Southampton  
Live from 2:15 am (Wednesday)

**STAR SPORTS SELECT 2**

English Premier League  
Sheffield United vs West Brom  
Live from 12:00 am (Wednesday)  
Newcastle United vs Crystal Palace  
Live from 2:15 am (Wednesday)

## Rewarding Test specialists for a rewarding Test team

NABID YEASIN from Chattogram

The name James Anderson is almost synonymous to Test cricket. His iconic yet smooth bowling action while donned in the all-white of England is what cricket lovers and enthusiasts immediately picture when they hear or read Anderson's name.

And similar, if not the same, relevance to Test cricket is created in the minds of regular cricket followers at the name of India's Cheteshwar Pujara. The 33-year-old's gritty 211-ball 56 on the final day of the Brisbane Test, helping India gun down mighty Australia and hand them their first Test defeat at the Gabba fortress since 1988, has only magnified his reputation as an Indian Test specialist.

Bangladesh, too, have players solely considered for Tests, but the truth is that the likes of Mominul Haque, Ebadot Hossain and Abu Jayed still have a long way to go before being truly hailed as Test specialists. One reason behind that is the low number of Tests played year-round by Bangladesh and hence the players do not get the exposure needed to flourish to their fullest abilities in the format.

Another reason behind Bangladesh players' lack of success in Tests was pointed out by Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, someone who has worked for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) in many capacities.

"Unfortunately the four-day or longer-version matches that are held in our country are not competitive cricket. There are many loopholes in it," said Fahim.

"Players do not face many challenges in domestic games and hence they are not familiar with the pressure of performing at the international stage. You won't see our players taking a chance to win the game by declaring suddenly and trying to bowl out the opposition quickly," explained Fahim.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Then again, it needs a lot of sacrifices for a player to truly establish himself as a Test specialist and achieve milestones in the toughest format of the game. Anderson became the first seamer to have scalped 600 Test wickets, joining the elite club that previously featured three spinners -- Muttiah Muralitharan (800 in 133 matches), Shane Warne (708 in 145) and Anil Kumble (619 in 132).

It was the 38-year-old's sacrifice and choice of solely focusing on Test cricket that helped him achieve the feat. The last time Anderson played an ODI was back in 2015 and his last T20I was back in 2009. Unlike most of the modern players, Anderson did not involve himself in franchise cricket as he chose to keep doing the hard yards with the red ball.

The modern-day cricket set-up is such that it lures players more towards the shorter and formats

which bring more financial solvency along with greater fame and exposure. And not many players like Anderson can stick to their determination of making a name in the longest format as getting picked for the money-spinning T20 leagues like Indian Premier League (IPL) is now considered by many as one of the highest points in a cricketer's life.

The players' urge for featuring in T20 leagues and being considered as a good T20 player is understandable considering the financial aspect. But this urge may even make the very few players in the modern era who nurture the hope of establishing themselves in the longest format sway away from their ultimate goal.

"Those countries [England, Australia, India] have made ways for their [Test] cricketers to earn enough. And before talking about

a player's commitment and him putting sole focus in Test cricket, what the board needs to do is to ensure their financial security. Otherwise, the players designated for Test cricket will try to do better in shorter formats so that they can earn more money by playing in tournaments. There is nothing wrong with that but sometimes it happens so that players may need to compromise on their role as a Test cricketer," remarked Fahim on ways to help players focus and flourish in Tests. While the likes of Mominul, Ebadot and Jayed -- the ones that are usually considered for Tests in Bangladesh -- may have to make sacrifices similar to the ones made by Anderson, it also remains the board's responsibility to create an atmosphere around these players that would help them grow as Test specialists and leave lasting impacts in the format.

## 'Can't pick out-and-out pace attack on an unfriendly pitch'

As Bangladesh return to Test cricket after almost a year with the first of two Tests against the West Indies from tomorrow, head coach Russell Domingo yesterday spoke about various topics before the series. The following are the excerpts of the press conference:



**ON PRESSURE OF PLAYING TESTS AT HOME:** The players understand the expectations and pressure and the coaches also understand. For sure, we want to do well in Test matches as it is the format [where] we really feel there's a big improvement required. We have got some good young pacers coming through the system. Our performances in Test cricket over the past few years haven't been that good and this is something we are really trying to rectify. It's the start of a process for us in Test cricket and the results are very important, we know that, but we also want to make sure that we play in a way that can take Bangladesh cricket forward in the next couple of years.

**ON SHAKIB AL HASAN'S RETURN TO TESTS:** Obviously, Shakib is an important player both in batting and bowling; he is a world-class all-rounder and very difficult to replace in any format. Preparation for him hasn't been easy after picking up a groin niggle in the last ODI. He has gone through the rehab and still is not quite hundred percent. He's got another day or so and we are pretty confident that he will be ready for the first Test. He is working really hard as he bowled in the nets and he hit a few balls... not feeling that much discomfort.

**ON THE PROBABLE BATTING ORDER:** The batting order still needs some discussion. I have got an idea of who is going to bat at numbers three, four, five,

and six but obviously, I need to have a final discussion with the selectors. The opening spot -- to go with Tamim to open the innings -- we have a few options like Saif Hasan who played the last Test. Shadman Islam was the man in the position before he broke his fingers. We have some options and we need to discuss with the selectors.

**ON BALANCE BETWEEN PACE AND SPIN:** It's a really tough one. We have some really exciting young fast bowlers coming through. But looking at the wicket in Chattogram and the way we have practised in the last few days, pace bowlers don't seem to be too much of a threat. You also can't be stupid and pick an out-and-out pace attack playing on wickets that don't offer them anything. Also, very difficult for the bowlers to make debuts on this type of pitch. I will have to discuss with the selectors to make sure how we keep the right balance between pace and spin.

**ON MOMINUL'S CAPTAINCY:** I am expecting the senior players to be of paramount importance

to assisting Mominul to develop his captaincy. We have got some players who have been playing for over 10-12 years like Tamim [Iqbal], Mushfiqur [Rahim] and Shakib and their support to the captain is important in providing options, guidance when things are tough. It's still early days for him and he is trying to develop his style of captaincy. He is very focused and that for me is the main ingredient for a good leader and if he keeps focus and tries to improve the team, he's got a chance.



Bashundhara Kings' Argentine forward Raul Oscar Becerra celebrates his first goal during his side's 4-1 victory over Mohammedan Sporting Club in their Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Becerra brace drives Kings

SPORTS REPORTER

Holder Bashundhara Kings continued their brilliant run in the Bangladesh Premier League with a 4-1 thrashing of Mohammedan while title contenders Abahani dropped points again with a 1-1 draw against their Chattogram namesake yesterday.

Argentine marksman Raul Becerra, who went through a drought in the league following his five goals in Kings' Federation Cup success, scored a brace to help the defending champions to their fifth victory in five matches at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla.

Brazilian duo of Robson Da Silva and Jonathan Fernandes also got on the scoresheet as Kings consolidated their lead with 15 points, four ahead of third-placed Abahani while Mohammedan slipped to eighth position with five points from as many matches.

Mohammedan had put on a fighting display against archrivals Abahani in a 2-2 draw at this venue in their previous match, but the Black and Whites simply failed to match

the quality of Bashundhara Kings, who took only eight minutes to take the lead.

Becerra played a nice one-two with Fernandes before heading the ball home from inside the box but Mohammedan staged a short- yet-strong comeback to level the margin in the 22nd minute when Abiola Nurat slotted home a feeble clearance from Kings goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico.

Mohammedan's Malian striker Souleymane Diabate rattled the crossbar with a free-kick in the 44th minute before Kings restored their lead with in a superb move right in the next minute. Robinho ran down the left side to enter the box before chipping the ball cleverly with his left foot over advancing Mohammedan goalkeeper Ahsan Habib Bipu.

Kings emerged from the break in a more destructive mood and added two more goals, with Fernandes widening the margin in the 50th minute before Becerra wrapping up the victory with his second goal from the spot in the 80th minute.

**Abahani drop more points**  
Six-time champions Abahani surrendered their lead again as they were held to a 1-1 draw by Chittagong

Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Francisco Rodrigues gave Abahani the lead from a spot-kick in the 31st minute but Chittagong Abahani's Nixon Guyllherme scored the equaliser, this one too from the spot, in the stoppage time of the first half.

Abahani coach Mario Lemos sent unfit Brazilian midfielder Raphael Augusto in an effort to restoring their lead in the second half, but to no avail. Instead the Sky Blues were lucky to leave the field with a point after goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel saved a spot-kick -- the third one awarded in the match by referee Mizanur Rahman -- three minutes before the final whistle.

**Sheikh Russel ride on own goal**  
A second-half stoppage-time own goal from Shoeb Mia helped Sheikh Russel edge Muktiyoddha Sangsad 1-0 at the BNS later in the day.

With the clock ticking down, Obi Moneke ran down the left to release a powerful low cross for Bakhtiyar Duishobekov but the Kyrgyz defender's marker Shoeb put the ball into his own net, helping Sheikh Russel to the second position in the league with 13 points.

## Messi proves worth with terrific free-kick

AFP, Madrid



Lionel Messi underlined his worth to Barcelona by scoring a sensational free-kick on Sunday but Atletico Madrid are in charge of La Liga after beating Cadiz to stand 10 points clear at the top of the table.

Messi's stunning effort in a 2-1 win over Athletic Bilbao had been matched by the Argentinian's friend and former team-mate Luis Suarez, who earlier curled in a superb free-kick of his own in Atletico's 4-2 victory over Cadiz.

Atletico end the weekend even further ahead after Real Madrid's defeat by Levante on Saturday, which means Zinedine Zidane's side are now level with Barca on points, both of them struggling to keep pace in the title race.

Barca's win at least maintains their

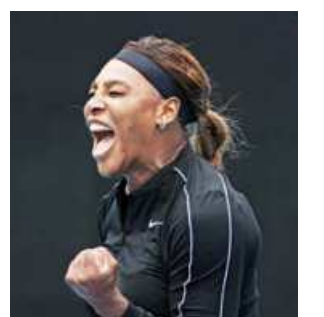
momentum while Messi's 650th club goal may have carried extra satisfaction for the Argentinian, who had the details of his contract published in the Spanish newspaper El Mundo on Saturday night.

El Mundo claimed the deal signed by Messi in 2017 shows he could earn up to 555 million euros over its four years, describing it as "the colossal contract that ruined Barcelona". "Someone has done it with bad intentions to cause problems," said Ronald Koeman. "You have to respect a player who has given so much to Spanish football and to this club. I didn't have any doubts that it wouldn't affect him on the pitch."

Few can argue with Messi's contribution in that regard, with the 33-year-old showing against Bilbao why the club have gone to such lengths to keep him.



Lionel Messi (L) scores his 650th goal for Barcelona from a sublime free-kick during his side's 2-1 victory over Athletic Bilbao in a La Liga home match on Sunday, avenging a defeat by the Basque side in the Spanish Super Cup final. PHOTO: TWITTER



## 'Feels good to be back here'

REUTERS

Serena Williams showed no signs of rust as she began her season with a comfortable 6-1 6-4 win over Daria Gavrilova in Melbourne on Monday to reach the Yarra Valley Classic round of 16.

The 23-time Grand Slam champion, who is warming up for the Australian Open, was at her dominant best after a slow start.

Former world number one Williams has not played since withdrawing from last year's French open second round in September with an Achilles injury. "It feels good to be back here," the 39-year-old Williams, who is chasing a record-equalling 24th major, said. "I felt I was definitely composed and in a zone and trying to do the things I've been working on."

## 'I just keep practising in training'

AGENCIES



Mohamed Salah felt very satisfied after Liverpool's 3-1 victory over West Ham United on Sunday. Salah became the first Liverpool player to score at least 20 goals in four straight seasons since club great Ian Rush after the Egyptian netted twice in Sunday's win.

Salah's double took his tally for the season to 21 in all competitions and manager Jurgen Klopp said the forward had an incredible appetite for goals.

Salah cut in to curl home with his left foot in the 57th minute for his first league goal since December 19, ending a run of six Premier League games without a goal. "I just keep practising in training for my right foot and left foot," the Egyptian reflected. "But it was a good ball from Shaq. I have to give him credit as well for the lovely ball from him. I just kept the first touch and the second was the finish."

