



Bangladesh's top golfer Siddikur Rahman minutely measures the slope of the green and distance to the hole during the opening round of the 5th Paragon Professional Golf Tournament, which got underway at the Army Golf Club in Dhaka yesterday. The BPGA-sanctioned event is the first golf tournament in the country since the coronavirus outbreak in March last year. Siddikur settled for second position with a one-under-par (71) at the end of the first round of the Tk 15 lakh event, featuring the top 82 professional golfers of the country.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Sublime 9, a statement to young guns'

REUTERS, Sydney

Novak Djokovic's "unbelievable" performance to win his ninth Australian Open final was a statement to the young guns looking to break the stranglehold of the "Big Three" on Grand Slam titles, according to seven-times major winner Mats Wilander. Arguments over which of Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal or Djokovic are the greatest men's champion of all time might rage long after they hang up their rackets, but at Melbourne Park's Rod Laver Arena the Serbian is in a class of his own.

"It was an unbelievable performance," Swede Wilander told Eurosport. "That's a huge statement to (the next generation), to us, to the whole world. Novak is just so complete these days, he can hit those little drop shots, he can come to the net, he's got choices."

Police draw further dents Sheikh Jamal's chances

SPORTS REPORTER



Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club lost more ground in the title race of the Bangladesh Premier League following a 3-3 draw against Bangladesh Police at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The three-time champions, who had won their first five matches to challenge runaway leaders Bashundhara Kings, have now fallen off the pace following their fourth straight draw.

This was the Dhanmondi giants' second consecutive 3-3 draw as they had eked out a 3-3 draw against Uttar Baridhara last week following a 2-2 draw against Abahani and a controversial goalless draw against the champions.

Shafiqul Islam Manik's charges now have 19 points from nine games, three behind Abahani who have played 10 matches and nine adrift of Bashundhara Kings, who too have played 10 matches.

Bangladesh Police, on the other hand, moved to nine points from nine matches.

Sheikh Jamal took the lead three times in the match, but everytime Police found a way back into the match and they had Sheikh Jamal goalkeeper Ziaur Rahman to thank for.

The former national team keeper failed to judge the flight of the ball when Police midfielder Murolimzhon Akhmedov's

floating effort from 30 yards sneaked into the net on 33 minutes.

The goal cancelled out Omar Jobe's opener on 10 minutes, the Gambian dinking the ball over Police goalkeeper Mohammad Nehal for his 11th goal of the campaign.

Valijonov Otabek stabbed home the second Sheikh Jamal goal in the 40th minute, but Ziaur was again at fault six minutes later when he was beaten at near post by Frederic Pooda as the first half ended 2-2.

Sheikh Jamal took the lead for the third time in the fourth minute of the second half when Solomon King buried home a rebound after Suleiman Sillah's initial shot was parried to the far post by Nehal, but Pakeer Ali's charges scored a third equaliser in the 69th minute when Mohammad Jewel tapped home after Jalal Miah's header was pushed back in front of goal by Sheikh Jamal's substitute goalkeeper Mamun Khan.

Both sides had further chances to score a decisive fourth goal, but neither managed to do so as they had to bag a point apiece.

Meanwhile, Muktijoddha Sangsads and Brothers Union played out a goalless draw in the second match of the day, leaving the former at 10th position with eight points from nine matches and Brothers in 12th position with two points from same number of matches.

'Only those who love the game should play'

SPORTS REPORTER



With the question of players' commitment recently becoming a hot topic, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is now focusing on revising the terms of the central contracts of national cricketers.

There has been a lot of talk about BCB's decision to allow star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan to miss the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka and play in the Indian Premier League instead after he was roped in by Kolkata Knight Riders for a whopping 3.2 crore rupees during the auction last Thursday.

While the BCB said they do not want to force players to play, the reality is that they could not stop Shakib because he is not among the current lot of centrally contracted players as he was serving out a one-year ban when the contracts were prepared last year.

"I can't deny the fact [of Shakib's request making him feel like a hostage] and it's not that such things didn't happen in the past, but now our mind is very clear," BCB President Nazmul Hassan told the media yesterday. "We

are not going to force anyone and those who are not interested in playing, won't play. Nobody is indispensable. We want all to play but if someone likes to play in other leagues ahead of the national team, they are free to go.

"This message is for all and not just for Shakib. In fact, we have discussed it and we are going for a contract as we didn't make the new contract for this year yet. We are going to add a few things -- the players have to mention which format they want to play. If the players sign the contract, we won't allow them to play in other leagues. Now it's open -- previously it was based on the individual and now we are making it contractual."

The BCB boss expressed disappointment and raised questions about whether Shakib really enjoys playing Tests.

"Look, if we want, we could have forced Shakib to play Test matches but we don't want this anymore. We want that only those who actually love this game should play. If you have noticed, Shakib didn't want to play Test cricket three years back.

"He didn't show any interest in

Test cricket and we even made him the captain and forced him but you can't force anyone to play. That is why we are unable to move forward and are instead going backward. If we know who are the players not willing to play Test cricket, we must look for substitutes. Maybe it takes one year or more but we will get some players for the future," said Hassan.

From Hassan's words, it was not clear whether the BCB would allow players to take part in other franchise leagues if there is no international commitment during that time. Previously, the BCB had issued No Objection Certificate (NOC) to players wanting to play franchise leagues abroad at the last minute. But Hassan said the board will no longer provide NOCs at the last minute.

"Mustafizur [Rahman] came to me today [Monday] and asked whether he could play the IPL. I said if you want to play you can by giving us an application; I have no problem," said Hassan.

It was learned that the board wants the central contract to be more specific keeping the interest and commitment of the players in mind.



The Bangladesh national team players pose wearing the jersey with the logo of Evaly, who are the sponsor for the tour of New Zealand. The Tigers are scheduled to board the New Zealand-bound flight at 4:00pm today to play three ODIs and as many T20Is against the Kiwis, starting from March 20.

PHOTO: BCB

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ROUND OF 16

HOLDERS Bayern face Lazio test

AGENCIES

Lazio host Bayern Munich at the Stadio Olimpico in the first leg of their UEFA Champions League round of 16 clash on Tuesday night.

The hosts made it through to this stage of the competition after a dramatic matchday six fixture in Group F. The Italians drew 2-2 with Club Brugge and scraped through to the knockout stages.

Bayern, on the other hand, comfortably topped a group also consisting of Atletico Madrid, RB Salzburg and Lokomotiv Moscow.

The Bayern juggernaut shows no sign of slowing. The holders are nearly two years unbeaten in the UEFA Champions League, winning 16 and drawing one since defeat by Liverpool in the 2018-19 round of 16

second leg.

Lazio will approach the game unburdened by expectation and they have an ace in their pack. For all Robert Lewandowski's brilliance in 2019-20, one man outscored even him in Europe's top leagues: Lazio's Ciro Immobile.

Hansi Flick will not have an easy task as Bayern begin the home stretch towards retaining the crown that they won in Lisbon last August. This is especially true as Bayern have multiple injury issues to deal with.

Lazio have never faced Bayern Munich in a competitive game before this tie, and will look to start off with an upset against the Bavarians. Injuries and COVID-19 issues have ensured that Bayern have lost some momentum, so Lazio will fancy their chances as well.



Chelsea lock horns with Atletico

AGENCIES

Chelsea will take on Atletico Madrid in the first leg of their last-16 Champions League clash on Tuesday night, with the fixture being held in Romania due to coronavirus protocols over travel.

The match is technically Atletico's home leg despite the fact that it is not taking place in Spain, with the reverse fixture due to take place in London in the middle of March.

Tuesday's contest in Romania will be the first time that they have locked horns with Chelsea since the group

stages of the 2017-18 Champions League, with the English club winning 2-1 in Madrid before the points were shared in a 1-1 draw at Stamford Bridge.

Last season's chastening 7-1 aggregate loss to Bayern condemned Chelsea to a fourth successive round of 16 elimination, and on form that run is expected to continue. The Blues impressed in the group stage, winning 4-0 at Sevilla, but have since stuttered, replacing head coach Frank Lampard with Thomas Tuchel in January. Meanwhile, Atletico (who ended Liverpool's defence at this stage 12 months ago) are making a strong bid for their first Liga title since 2013-14.



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