



### SPORT CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

International Women's Day was celebrated by women sportspersons of different disciplines. Some 200 budding female footballers from BFF age-group teams and a number of schools took part in six-a-side matches at the BFF astro-turf. The footballers received certificates from BFF as part of AFC Women's Football Day. Meanwhile, Mumta Hena's four-for helped Bangladesh Blue secure their spot in the final of the ninth Bangabandhu Bangladesh Games as they thumped Bangladesh Green by nine wickets at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/BCB

### Aussie women cricketers to get a statue

AFP, Sydney

Sports-mad Australia has 73 statues and sculptures of cricketers dotted around the country, and they all depict men. But that will change with Cricket Australia Monday commissioning the first of a female player to address the glaring gender imbalance. Who will be immortalised in bronze has not been revealed, but it will go on prominent display at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

The governing body also announced a working group to further champion female recognition, including naming sporting ground stands after women, to coincide with International Women's Day. "Just as this year's International Women's Day theme promotes 'choose to challenge', we are committed to challenging ourselves to continue to address gender inequality across our game," said CA interim chief Nick Hockley.

Australian vice-captain Rachael Haynes will be involved in the effort and was excited to be working alongside some pretty incredible female leaders.

## Kings leading a one-horse race

ANISUR RAHMAN

At the start of this season's Bangladesh Premier League, there were fears about a poor show from the footballers following the long coronavirus-induced break and the nominal payment to players.

The fear seems to have been justified as at the close of first leg the race for the prestigious title has become a one-horse affair, unlike previous editions.

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings are now eight points clear of second-placed Sheikh Jamal DC at the end of 12 matches. Last season, five teams were in close competition before the league was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic, but this time only one team has been in the title race, diminishing the excitement at the halfway stage of the league, which is likely to restart after a five-week gap.

Inconsistent performances of other title contenders has given a big advantage to Bashundhara Kings, who had a good pre-season preparation and their professional attitude has already paid dividends as they won the season's first trophy -- the Federation Cup -- and are now leading the 13-team table comfortably.

The first leg of the professional football league also saw the dominance of foreign players up



front and they have been at the top of the scorers' list. Six-time champions Abahani, meanwhile, have fallen behind the pace miserably, but three-time champions Sheikh Jamal DC showed their character, thanks to four quality foreign players up front.

The country's lone UEFA A-licensed coach AKM Maruful Haque offered an explanation for such a one-sided race.

"I think Bashundhara Kings made a huge difference by developing themselves in a long pre-season preparation with the participation of the full squad, including foreign players, but other teams had less pre-season preparation with depleted squads," said Maruful.

"Besides, the players -- except those of Bashundhara -- could

have been playing attacking football instead of their usual defensive strategy, while Lane thought that the foreign players in general are of a better standard this season.

Although the league as usual experienced an empty Big Bowl in Dhaka, it saw a good number of spectator turn up in every match of Bashundhara Kings and Mohammedan SC in Cumilla, while Tongi's Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium also saw a substantial number of spectators support the home team -- Uttar Baridhara Club.

However, the fall of Abahani at the halfway stage was spectacular, due to lack of preparation as well as lack of quality players on the reserve bench.

"I did not think we would be nine points behind [leaders Bashundhara] at this point of the season," said Abahani coach Mario Lemos. "The reasons are we have conceded too many draws and conceded goals at the end of games. Our [quality in the] second halves haven't been at the same level as our first halves. I believe fitness has played a part... during this break we have to improve our fitness."

Finally, the professional league hit the headlines with the allegation of online betting and match-fixing by Arambagh KS and Brothers Union, which gave the authorities concerned food for thought and they now have to find the facts before delivering punitive measures.

## 'Need to focus on line and length'

SPORTS REPORTER



Mahmudullah Riyad's connection with New Zealand is a memorable one as the all-rounder has played some sparkling innings against the Kiwis over the years.

Among his three ODI tons, two came against New Zealand, that too in ICC's flagship events. Even in red-ball cricket, the experienced campaigner has been successful, with two of his four Test tons coming in tough New Zealand conditions.

The 35-year-old, boasting great knowledge of the New Zealand conditions and pitches, made some suggestions for the Bangladesh bowlers for their upcoming limited-overs series.

The selectors included seven specialist pacers for the three-match ODI and three-match T20I series, keeping seaming conditions in mind.

However, according to Mahmudullah, the challenge for the bowlers will be in their level of execution. He also emphasised on the importance of the bowlers bowling at the right line and length on New Zealand pitches to ensure they do not leak easy boundaries.

"I feel the biggest challenge for the bowlers is to make sure of their level of execution and it is also important to set their frame of mind. The length is very important (in



New Zealand). The boundaries rise if you do not focus on your length," Mahmudullah said through a video message of the Bangladesh Cricket Board yesterday.

"So we will have to ensure that we do not give away easy boundaries and focus on continuously bowling proper line and length," the all-rounder added.

The Bangladesh team travelled to New Zealand with the intention of rewriting history as they have not yet won an international match in 26 attempts across formats against the Kiwis at their backyard.

Mahmudullah did not forget to mention of the tough challenge awaiting them and also reminded the fact that New Zealand have been in superb form in recent times.

"New Zealand are in very good form right now. They have defeated Australia in T20 series. But we should rather focus on our strengths and weaknesses and not on what they have done. That way it will help us with our game and I think if we have an aggressive mindset, we will have some good results," said Mahmudullah.

The Bangladesh team will complete their 14-day mandatory quarantine in a day and given the results of the final Covid-19 tests come negative, they will be free to train together and move freely inside the country.

## BFF to write to AFC

SPORTS REPORTER



While not yet completely ruling out the possibility of hosting Afghanistan in a World Cup qualifying fixture, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is making arrangements to send the national team to Kathmandu to play a tri-nation tournament involving hosts Nepal, Bangladesh and Kyrgyzstan U-23 team, scheduled for March 23-29.

A decision in this regard came yesterday after the national teams committee, headed by BFF vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed, met with head coach Jamie Day, assistant coach Stuart Watkiss and technical director Paul Smalley at the BFF

HIGHLIGHTS
Squad to be named today
Reporting & Covid-19 test on March 13
Camp starts on March 14
Flight for Nepal on March 18
Match days: March 23, 25, 27, 29

House. "We informed the AFC in January that we were ready to host the three World Cup Qualifying matches, one of which was against Afghanistan on March 25. Two days ago, Afghanistan wrote to us that they would not be able to play the match

in Bangladesh due to the pandemic. They cited that their players from different parts of the world were facing problem to get to one place. That's why they want to play the match at a centralised venue," Nabil said after the meeting. "However, we have decided to write to the AFC that we still want to host Afghanistan on March 25," Nabil said, adding that as part of Plan B, they are taking the opportunity to participate in the tri-nation tournament in Nepal but if AFC gives instruction to host Afghanistan on March 25, they would bin that plan. The director-in-charge of Abahani also informed that they are going to give room to new faces in the tri-nation tournament to explore their potential and observe the status of the national team.

### CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ROUND OF 16



### Will Porto stun Juventus again?

FIRST LEG: Porto Won 2-1

AGENCIES



The reigning champions of Italy and Portugal resume their battle for a Champions League quarter-final place tonight, as Juventus host Porto at the Allianz Stadium trailing by a goal from the first leg. This match is set up to be an enthralling second leg encounter.

Porto's home leg could not have gone better for them, securing a 2-1 advantage to take back to Turin. To win the tie outright Juventus has to defeat Porto by two goals and there is plenty of firepower to call upon.

Juve's current home form will give them confidence that they can overcome the deficit as they have won 8 of their last 9 home games in all competitions. However, Porto will also fancy their chances of progressing with an impressive away form of just 1 loss in their previous 10 away games. Neither team are currently top of their respective domestic leagues, making Champions League success even more important.

To turn this tie around, Juventus will look to talisman Cristiano Ronaldo. The Portuguese striker has an exceptional Champions League record, with his 134 goals being the most of any player in the competition's history. He will be looking to replicate his heroics from last season, when he scored a hat-trick in the Round of 16 against Atletico Madrid, overturning a 2-0 deficit from the first leg.

### Focus on Dortmund ace Haaland

FIRST LEG: Dortmund Won 3-2

AGENCIES



Borussia Dortmund will be looking to book their spot in the quarter-finals of the Champions League when they host Sevilla at the Signal Iduna Park in the second leg of their last-16 tie tonight.

The German giants recorded a 3-2 victory over the Europa League holders in the first leg last month and are therefore the favourites to advance to the final eight of the competition.

Dortmund come into the game in somewhat patchy form, having won just 3 of their last 9 league games. They currently sit 6th in the Bundesliga.

Their key danger man in this tie is undoubtedly Erling Haaland. Haaland currently has 29 goals in 28 games in all competitions this season, including 8 goals in 5 Champions League matches. He impressed at the weekend with two goals against current European champions Bayern Munich. The Norwegian striker dominated the first leg and assuming he is fit and firing for this one.

The closest Sevilla player to these numbers is Youssef En-Nesyri, who has recorded 17 goals in 31 games. Although this is an impressive record, Haaland's goalscoring form is a level above.

Sevilla have also struggled for form in the last couple of weeks, having lost their last two league games and exited the Copa del Rey.

Steven Gerrard celebrates with members of his coaching staff after the Glasgow-based outfit were confirmed of their 55th Scottish Premiership title on Sunday. This is the first managerial trophy for the former Liverpool and England midfielder and first for the club in 10 years, ending a record-equaling nine-year reign by city rivals Celtic. "I'm on a real, emotional high and it has been a journey that is not finished," Gerrard told the club website.



PHOTO: RANGERS FC