

T SPORTS

BPL
Rahmathonj vs Arambagh KS
Live from 4:00 pm
Brothers VS Saif SC
Live from 6:15 pm
LA LIGA
Mallorca vs Espanyol

Live from 12:00 am (Saturday)
Valencia vs Deportivo Alaves
Live from 2:15 am (Saturday)
SONY SIX
ENGLAND VS INDIA
Third Test (Day 3)
Live from 4:00 pm
SONY TEN 2

BUNDESLIGA
Borussia Dortmund vs Hoffenheim
Live from 12:30 am (Saturday)
STAR SPORTS 1
C P L
Jamaica Tallawahs vs Saint Lucia
Zouks
Live from 8:00 pm



Bangladesh's pace sensation Mustafizur Rahman, in his hotel room, is seen watching the highlights of his latest performances where he bamboozled Australia throughout the five-match T20I series. Fizz would be eyeing a repeat of his stellar display in the upcoming series against New Zealand, starting on September 1. Tigers will take to the field today to train after a three-day room quarantine.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

WILL MUSHFIQUR mend middle-order issues?

NABID YEASIN

Bangladesh have now won two successive T20I series -- one away to Zimbabwe and then the historic first-ever bilateral series triumph at home against Australia. If things don't go south, the Tigers are likely to make it three in three by winning the upcoming five-match T20I series against an inexperienced New Zealand, who are already in the country with a squad formed of players from outside their squad for the forthcoming T20 World Cup.

For a moment, if we sidestep the debate of the benefit of winning at favourable home conditions which is likely to be far from what the Tigers would be welcomed to at the UAE and Oman during the T20 extravaganza just two months away, the feat of successive T20 series triumph before the T20 World Cup should be commendable regardless, especially considering that the format has always been the Achilles' heel of Bangladesh cricket.

Even though the Tigers emerged victorious in their previous two T20 assignments, still there were areas of concern, especially in their batting. However, with the return of batting mainstay Mushfiqur Rahim for the series, Bangladesh can finally chalk out their batting approach ahead of the big event.

Mushfiqur, one of the regulars of Bangladesh cricket, had to leave the Zimbabwe series bio-bubble to return home early due to a family crisis and was forced out of the Australia series for not meeting the quarantine protocols. Even in their wins against Zimbabwe and Australia, Bangladesh's cricket, especially their batting, were not free of hitches. After Mohammad Naim and Soumya Sarkar put together the country's first-ever 100-run opening stand in T20Is to comfortably chase a 153-run target against Zimbabwe in the first T20I, the opening duo failed to maintain consistency in the following game. The dearth of consistency at the top has been a consistent facet of Bangladesh cricket for a while now and it ended up costing the Tigers in the second T20I, which ultimately ruined the hopes of a first-ever clean series sweep away from home across formats.

The inconsistency of the openers often impacts the middle-order adversely, like it did in the aforementioned game against Zimbabwe where Bangladesh lost Shakib Al Hasan, skipper Mahmudullah Riyad and Mahedi Hasan in the space of just two overs while chasing 166. And eventually, a contribution from Afif Hossain combined with quick-fire knocks from debutant Shamim Hossain and Mohammad Saifuddin



only managed to reduce the margin of defeat as the Tigers missed a well-paced knock in the middle, something that Mushfiqur provides often.

The following Australia series, played in a slow, low and gripping Mirpur pitch, saw batsmen of both sides struggle throughout as boundaries were hard to come by. And the Tigers had fallen short in the department which demanded keeping the scoring rate ticking with sneaky singles and doubles.

Given that the nature of the Mirpur pitch, where all the matches against the Kiwis are scheduled to be held, is likely to keep behaving in a similar fashion, Bangladesh could at least

expect an improvement in rotating the strike more often as Mushfiqur's guile, experience along with combination and understanding with the stalwarts Mahmudullah and Shakib could provide some much-needed stability in the middle-order.

The onus will also be on the 34-year-old, known as one of the most competitive and hard-working fellow in the national side, to get some runs before the T20 World Cup as the right-hander's last true contribution in the format was when his heroics -- an unbeaten 43-ball 60 -- helped Bangladesh beat India for the first time in T20Is, that too away from home in Delhi back in November 2019.

Belfort scripts Abahani's biggest-ever win

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani Dhaka registered their biggest-ever win in the professional football league by handing a whopping 8-0 defeat to Uttar Baridhara Club in their penultimate round of Bangladesh Premier League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The 13th victory in 23 outings positioned the six-time league champion to third place of the 13-team table with 46 points, three less than Sheikh Jamal DC as both Abahani and Sheikh Jamal have a match left to play. Uttar Baridhara, on other hand, finished 11th with 19 points from 24 matches.

Haitian forward Kervens Belfort's four goals, winger Jewel Rana's brace and a goal each from Nigerian Sunday Chizoba and Brazilian Raphael Augusto resulted in Abahani overtaking their previous best margin of victory in the Bangladesh Premier League, of 6-0, which came against Khulna Abahani in 2009 and Rahmatganj MFS in 2021.

However, the three-time champion Sheikh Jamal hold the league record with a 9-1 win over Farashganj SC in 2015 and they had also bagged 8-0 and 8-1 wins against Baridhara Club and Chittagong Abahani in 2014.



England captain Joe Root continued his rich vein of form as the home side tightened their grip on the third Test against India at Headingley yesterday. Root and top-order batsman David Malan smashed half-centuries and their 139-run partnership came to an end on the stroke of Tea on the second Day when Malan fell caught behind after a fluent 70. Having bundled out India for a paltry 78, England's top order fired in unison to power them to 298-3, a lead of 220, at Tea. Root was batting on 80 at the break, cementing his position as the leading scorer in the five-match series which India lead 1-0. Each one of England's top four batsmen helped themselves to half-centuries against India.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Regional Cricket Association: A pipe dream?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) annual general meeting (AGM) took place at a city hotel yesterday after the event remained postponed ever since board president Nazmul Hassan was re-elected back in 2017. While there were many accomplishments to list for BCB, both in men's and women's cricket, the decentralisation of the country's cricket -- which was said to be top priority when the BCB president was re-elected in 2017 -- remains unfulfilled.

The formation of the Regional Cricket Association (RCA) have been a long-unfulfilled demand and was a commitment that BCB had wished to uphold when they applied for Test status. Nazmul stated back in 2017 that decentralization of cricket was of top priority and will be 'finalised in next six months'.

Decentralisation would see stronger regional bodies take both responsibility and accountability, backed by right infrastructures, patrons, grounds and facilities to boost cricket.

While four years have passed, the BCB president admitted that they found implementation much more difficult than expected. Even after putting top priority on piloting the RCAs, not much of structural significance has taken place.

"Our failure is regional cricket and we haven't



been able to do what we thought we could do. The Regional Cricket Association, which we thought would be easy to implement, has been difficult," Nazmul said yesterday.

The board previously dictated that some of the regional associations will be selected to test the waters and outline a plan for all regions. The same thing was touted once again. "We have

begun work experimentally in two places, Sylhet and Chattogram. We did this to ascertain what kind of problems we would be facing or if we need to bring any changes to our original plans," Nazmul said.

The regional bodies not being able to ensure either facilities or standard means for the up and coming cricketers to get involved in the game, cricket in Bangladesh remain Dhaka-centric.

The BCB president pointed at the lack of grounds which crucially impeded the development of the game and that the BCB have undertaken measures to address the issue. "Sports fields are very important for regional cricket. The biggest obstacle in Bangladesh cricket is the lack of fields where anyone can play. We have formed a committee in our last board meeting and we are interested in buying fields. We won't be building stadiums but we will make fields available for cricket," he said.

While such matters are dealt with by regional associations in other countries, the continuation of the centralised structure implies that promises of decentralisation are likely to remain unfulfilled.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Ronaldo to City?

With the summer transfer window into its final week for the major European leagues, there are growing speculations that Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo could be on his way to Manchester City. Spanish sports daily AS reports that an agreement has been reached between Cristiano and Premier League champions Manchester City over a sensational move away from Serie A. According to the report, City have offered Ronaldo a two-year contract with a salary of €15 million per season, about half of what he earns in Turin. However, while Ronaldo has reportedly agreed terms with City, no deal has yet been struck between the team and Juventus, who are seeking a €25m transfer fee for the 36-year-old and would be interested in signing City forward Gabriel Jesus, but City do not want to pay a transfer fee or let their Brazil international leave this summer.

'Lord Ted' no more

Former England Test captain Ted Dexter, one of the country's greatest players, has died aged 86 after a recent illness, the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) said on Thursday. Dexter, nicknamed "Lord Ted", was



an aggressive batsman and part-time seam bowler who played 62 tests for England after making his debut in 1958 against New Zealand. He captained England and Sussex in the early 1960s. Dexter scored 4,502 runs at an average of 47.89 during his Test career and took 66 wickets at an average of 34.93.