

BCL in focus after international debacle

SPORTS REPORTER

For a long time, there have been media reports, talks and criticism regarding improving the competitiveness in the domestic circuit. The main agenda, more or less, remains the standard of pitch, or the lack thereof, that ultimately acts as a major factor behind the sub-standard cricket played in domestic arena.

Following a string of losses in the international arena, the latest being whitewashes in T20I series and a Test series at the hands of Pakistan, coupled with the apparent vacuum in the immediate pipeline of players, it has now become more important than ever to shift the focus back to the development of the cricketing culture and process at the domestic level.

And the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is seemingly taking steps which are set to be implemented in the upcoming Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL).

"Our aim will be to make four-day cricket attractive again in the country and to also grow players' interests for



playing longer version cricket," BCB chief selector Minhajul Abedin told The Daily Star yesterday. The ninth edition of the franchise-based competition is being planned to start from December 12.

After the usual four-day encounters, all the four teams will also play one-dayers.

This, in fact, is only the second time that one-day matches will be played in the BCL after the edition in 2015.

According to Minhajul, there are plans afoot to make this tournament more competitive and exciting. "Obviously, longer version cricket is now our priority. It

has been for a while. And to make it [BCL] more competitive, we decided to have at least six millimetres of grass and to have bouncy tracks at all the venues," informed Minhajul.

The primary focus of the BCB will be to have bouncy and grassy tracks to encourage the pacers and to enable the batters get used to a more challenging condition.

"We also provided separate instructions to all the coaches and team management. There are also two sides with leg-spinners, so we will be focusing on them as well.

BCL will be played across the country at four different venues - Rajshahi, Chattogram, Dhaka and Sylhet. The first round of the tournament is supposed to begin in Rajshahi and Chattogram while the one-dayers are all set to be played in Sylhet.

Plenty of promises were made regarding the development of pitch and standard of cricket in the domestic arena in the past as well, however, those never materialised. Promises better be materialised this time or else there might be no arresting the slide in international cricket.

Head pinching himself after Ashes ton

AFP, Brisbane



Travis Head blasted the third-fastest century in Ashes history to crush England hopes on the second day of the opening Test at the Gabba on Thursday.

At the close of play a dominant Australia were 343-7, a lead of 196 on England's dismal first-innings total of 147.

Head was on 112, alongside Mitchell Starc, who was not out 10, on another desponding day for England in Brisbane.

England had threatened a comeback after tea when Ollie Robinson took two wickets in consecutive balls, but Head's aggressive innings put paid to any hopes of a miracle recovery.

The 27-year-old Head, controversially recalled to the Australia side ahead of veteran Usman Khawaja, justified his selection by passing 100 off only 85 balls.

He smashed two sixes and 12 fours in his century -- the third-fastest in the Ashes behind only Adam Gilchrist's 56-ball ton in Perth in 2006 and Gilbert Jessop's 76-ball effort at The Oval in 1902.

"I'm still pinching myself -- I can't quite work out what transpired over the past couple of hours," Head said. "I took some chances -- technically and mentally I was really composed, really relaxed," he added. "I found the first 20 runs really tough, but the game opened up and I was able to take the chances, which is pleasing."

Head attacked from the outset and was particularly harsh on spinners Jack Leach and Joe Root, the English skipper. Head came to the crease with Australia 189-3 after Steve Smith edged Mark Wood to keeper Jos Buttler just before tea.

He then watched David Warner (94) and Cameron Green depart to Robinson's accurate seamers after the break, with Australia still only 89 runs ahead.

Earlier, Warner rode his luck in the first two sessions. The gritty Australian batsman was bowled by a no-ball by Ben Stokes before lunch, then dropped by Rory Burns in the first over after the break, before Haseeb Hameed bungled a simple run-out.

Warner's good fortune began when Stokes bowled him when he was on 17, but the all-rounder had overstepped to give the Australian opener a mighty reprieve.

Television replays showed that Stokes had also overstepped on the first three balls of his over, but nothing was called. It later transpired that technology issues were at the centre of the no-ball drama.



Members of champions Rangpur Division celebrate after beating Mymensingh Division 1-0 in the final of Bangamata Sheikh Fajilatunnesa Mujib (U-17) National Gold Cup at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday. Sylhet Division, meanwhile, beat Rajshahi Division 3-1 in tiebreaker to become champions in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (U-17) National Gold Cup tournament, with both tournaments organised by the youth and sports ministry. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina watched the girls' final and joined the closing ceremony through digital platform and encouraged the players with a speech.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

SAFF U-19 WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

'We want to defend the title'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have their eyes locked on the inaugural SAFF Under-19 Women's Championship trophy as the regional football extravaganza kicks off at Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur on Saturday.

Meanwhile, all visiting four teams - India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan - have already begun training in the city for the tournament, which will be played in a round-robin format before the top two teams feature in the final on December 22. On the opening day, hosts Bangladesh will kick-start their campaign against Nepal after Bhutan take on Sri Lanka.

As winners of the now-defunct SAFF U-18 Women's Championship, which has been replaced with this upcoming U-19 tournament, the Women in Red and Green are geared up to defend their title by taking advantage of familiar playing environment and home crowd.

"Being champions of the tournament's last edition, we want to defend the title by presenting a good performance at home," captain Maria Manda told reporters at a press conference at the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) House yesterday.

Maria is one of the experienced players of the U-19 squad alongside 14 campaigners of the senior women's team in the 23-member squad,

declared yesterday.

Head coach Golam Rabbani Choton is optimistic about his side's chances while acknowledging that they will be in for a tough competition.

"After a week's rest following two tough matches in the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers till September 22, the girls resumed training from September 30 and have worked really hard to display a trophy-winning performance," informed Choton.

BFF Women's Committee chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiran hoped that this group of girls, who had won different tournaments before, would also be in tune this time to taste glory.

Barcelona to 'start from scratch'

AFP, Munich

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez vowed to return the Spanish giants to the pinnacle of European football after they crashed out of the Champions League on Wednesday with a 3-0 defeat at Bayern Munich.

Five-time European champions Barca were eliminated in the group stages for the first time in 21 years. They had reached the last 16 in each season since 2003-04, when they did not qualify for the competition at all.

Goals by Thomas Mueller and Leroy Sane gave Bayern a 2-0 half-time cushion in falling snow at the Allianz Arena, which was devoid of spectators due to high numbers of Covid-19 cases in Bavaria.

Teenager Jamal Musiala grabbed Bayern's third after the break to seal Barcelona's fate. "I'm angry. I don't like that this is our reality now. We start a new era from here - to work hard and get back in the Champions League," said Xavi.

Bayern, who also beat Barca 3-0 at the Camp Nou when the sides met in September, had already qualified for the knock-out stages as Group



E winners. They now join Liverpool and Ajax with a perfect six victories from six games in the group stage.

Benfica's 2-0 win at home to Dynamo Kiev means Barcelona finish third and drop into the Europa League. It was almost eight years to the day since Bayern lost a home Champions League game in the group phase and the Bundesliga leaders were in no mood to be generous. Xavi, 41, who took charge of struggling Barcelona four weeks ago, has now suffered back-

to-back defeats after his first loss as head coach against Real Betis last weekend.

"We start from scratch. Unfortunately, we are in the Europa League, which is not the place for us," insisted Xavi. "We will work hard to put Barcelona back in the right place. We have many things to correct.

"We need to win the Europa League and recover the points in the Spanish league. "We have had some injuries, maybe we can sign some more players, but we start from zero."

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