



Competitive cycling's awareness in the country got a big boost as four Bangladeshi amateur cyclists -- Drabir Alam, Tanvir Ahmed, Mohammad Alauddin and Rakibul Islam of Team BDC -- sealed a Guinness World Record yesterday by riding over 1600 km in 48 hours between December 8 and 10. In a relay format, the riders looped non-stop around a 1.7km track in Dhaka's Purbachal under adverse conditions derived from the aftermath of Cyclone Jawad.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Shakib set to feature for Central Zone

SPORTS REPORTER

Premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is set to feature for Walton Central Zone when they take on Islami Bank East Zone as the one-day format of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), named Independence Cup, will kick off in Sylhet today. The match between Shakib's Central Zone and East Zone will be held at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

Shakib returned from the USA last week. The 34-year-old has already joined the team in Sylhet and also took part in their practice session yesterday. With the Bangladesh Premier League in Shakib's sight, the all-rounder will be keen to get geared up through the BCL one-dayers.

Another key figure of the Bangladesh cricket team, Tamim Iqbal, will also be participating in the Independence Cup. However, Tamim, who has been recovering from a finger injury that ruled him out of Pakistan and the ongoing New Zealand series, will be available for East Zone from the second round of the tournament. Meanwhile, the other match of the day, between BCB South Zone and BCB North Zone, will take place at the academy ground of the same venue today.

‘NEW ZEALAND will definitely be nervous’

SPORTS REPORTER

When New Zealand stepped into the Hagley Oval in Christchurch on Sunday morning, they encountered a different atmosphere even at their backyard in front of their home crowd.

For the first time in over four years – since being beaten by South Africa in a Test series at home – New Zealand are now up for a rare task of levelling a series at home, courtesy of Bangladesh's historic win at the Bay Oval in the first Test of the two-match series.

The tables have turned dramatically in the last few days. Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo admitted that his side were the ones who were anxious before the first Test as they came on the back of a string of losses.

But today, the situation is different and it is, in fact, New Zealand who must be nervous about the final match of the series, Domingo opined.

“They [New Zealand] are a quality side and they will be hurting. But they will definitely be nervous going into the Test match. They got a break for two days but it is not a lot of time to recover,” Domingo said at the pre-match presser yesterday.

“When you play Test match cricket, the margins are very small. And they will know that they will have to be on top of their game to win this match and level the series. That can work in our favour. Bangladesh were not expected to beat them here. Being at home, they will probably be under a little bit of pressure,” the ‘Tigers’ head coach added.

Domingo mentioned that the conditions in Christchurch will not be similar to what was in the Mount Maunganui, where the



in-form pace trio of Bangladesh – Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam and Ebadot Hossain – cornered the Kiwis with intelligent bowling coupled with a fair bit of off-the-pitch assistance.

The anticipated green surface at the Hagley Oval, historically a graveyard for visiting teams, will be much more conducive to swing, pace and seam. But instead of that working as an added advantage to the hosts who are packed with world-class seamers, Domingo thought it would rather bring Bangladesh into the game.

“Maybe the pitch will offer something more to the fast bowlers than what it offered in Tauranga. But I think that also brings us into the game. It is not often that Bangladesh can say that they are actually looking forward to bowling on a wicket that’s got a bit of grass on it,” Domingo said, adding that the toss will be an important factor as that will allow players to use the new-ball to their advantage early.

Bangladesh lead the series 1-0 and are staring at a rare feat of winning a series against New Zealand in New Zealand.

Indonesia test to kickstart Cabrera tenure

SPORTS REPORTER

Javier Cabrera, the latest foreign coach of Bangladesh national team, will have his first taste of occupying the hot seat when he takes the men in red and green to Indonesia for two friendly matches later this month.

The 37-year-old Spaniard, who has previously worked mostly with academies, will be the 23rd foreign coach as Bangladesh look to make a new start following two experiments in the wake of acrimonious departure of Jamie Day.

After a meeting of the National Teams' Committee, its chairman Nabil Ahmed disclosed the new coach's appointment at the BFF House yesterday.

“Spaniard Javier Cabrera has been appointed as our new national team coach for 11 months, ending in December 2022. We are expecting him to be here by 15th of this month,” the BFF vice-president said.



“His first task would be to lead the team in two FIFA friendlies against Indonesia in Bali on January 24 and 27,” Nabil added.

Although an open secret for the last few days, Cabrera's appointment is as a bit of a surprise considering the game's local governing body's recent drift towards giving charge, albeit temporarily, to

experienced club coaches such as Oscar Bruzon given and Mario Lemos following the separation with Day, who had a similar background to Cabrera's.

The Spaniard, though, is a UEFA Pro licenced coach, last acting as the academy coach of La Liga side Deportivo Alaves. The 37-year-old also worked as the technical director of Sporting Goa, an Indian outfit, from 2013 to 2015. He had also worked with Rayo Majadahondo, a Spanish second division side. The BFF high-ups believe that his academic knowledge will help him succeed in his job.

“Cabrera has good academic qualification. He is young and energetic with good academic background, which attracted us,” Nabil said.

One of the points of contention between BFF and Day was the time the former coach spent away from Bangladesh. According Nabil, this time there is no scope for that.

“Cabrera doesn't have a family. So he will be able to stay here and be involved with the game or watch the games. He will be allowed 10 days of paid leave during his contract period.”

While Bangladesh have been starved of success for a long time, with both Bruzon and Lemos failing to guide the team to a regional trophy, the target for success will remain the same under the new coach, no matter how novice he is. There are quite a few assignments for the men in red and green in the coming months, and the game's local governing body would want to taste success with the Spaniard.

“There may be a SAFF Championship in October this year. Then there is a FIFA window in March and AFC (Asian Cup) Qualifiers in June. So these will be our target,” the BFF vice-president said.

Nabil also claimed that they are at the latter stage of an ‘amicable solution’ regarding the separation process with Jamie Day.

Can Rahmatganj be third time lucky?

SPORTS REPORTER

Lightweight Rahmatganj will be hoping to create history when they take on giants Abahani in the Bashundhara Group Federation Cup final at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur today.

Rahmatganj, best known as a giant killer in domestic competition, never won a trophy in the top flight football in its 79-year club history and are now featuring in any top-tier tournament final for the second time. The Old Dhaka outfit have been in fine form, edging past big shots Sheikh Russel and Mohammedan, on road to final.

The charges of Syed Golam Jilani are undoubtedly the underdog against the Sky Blues, who are eager to clinch back-to-back trophies of the season. Abahani, however, find themselves in a spot of bother with serious doubt over key players Raphael Augusto in the midfield and Brazilian striker Dorielton Gomes.

“We had a couple knocks from the match but we still have one day to see if these players recover,” Abahani coach Mario Lemos told The Daily Star.

“Rahmatganj are a good team [with



a] balance of experienced and youth players. Their foreigners know Bangladesh football very well; they run a lot,” said the Portuguese coach.

No doubt, Lemos is well aware of the threats from Rahmatganj, who are able to damage any side with Ghanaian Philip Adjah and Nigerian Sunday Chizoba.

Apart from relying on their striking duo, Rahmatganj will have to defend well against the Abahani forward lineup of Andres Colindes, Nabib Newaj Jibon and Rakib Hossain. “We are hoping to perform better in the final than what we did against Mohammedan SC,” Rahmatganj coach Jilani said. “We feel no pressure and we have nothing to lose after qualifying for the final on the back of one month of preparation.”



Usman Khawaja scored his second century of the match to help Australia to 265 for six declared on the fourth day of the fourth Ashes Test on Saturday, handing England an unlikely victory target of 388. The stylish 35-year-old left-hander became only the sixth Australian batsman to score twin centuries in a Test and the third to do so in an Ashes Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

PHOTO: AFP