

There is another T20 World Cup this year and another opportunity for us. Opportunities will be there for the ones who will perform well in BPL.

Mahmudullah Riyad
Bangladesh T20I captain



Premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was all smiles during Fortune Barishal's training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. The Barishal skipper will only be happier if his hope for good sporting wickets is fulfilled in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League, starting today with his side's clash against Chattogram Challengers in Mirpur.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

BPL HIGHLIGHTS

1. Six teams – Chattogram Challengers, Comilla Victorians, Minister Group Dhaka, Fortune Barishal, Khulna Tigers and Sylhet Sunrisers – will be taking part in the eighth edition of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League.
2. The teams will play a total of 34 matches, including four games in the playoffs stage. The final will be held at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur on February 18.
3. The tournament will be played in a double round robin format with each team facing the same opponent twice in the league stage. All the matches will be played in three venues in Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet.
4. The tournament, set to be held from January 21 to February 18, will be played behind closed doors.
5. Rajshahi Royals, who were crowned champions last year, are now defunct, with the Rangpur region also not having any franchise to its name. Barishal, which did not have a franchise for half a decade, will mark their return to BPL for the first time since 2016.
6. A number of big names will take part in the upcoming season, including Fay du Plessis, Sunil Narine, Moeen Ali, Chris Gayle and Andre Russell.
7. There will be no DRS used in the tournament this time.

'A positive sign for Bangladesh cricket'

SPORTS REPORTER

That Bangladesh had the most number of players in the ICC Men's ODI Team of the Year 2021, announced by the International Cricket Council (ICC) yesterday, is a sign of Bangladesh's prosperity in the format over the years.

"This is a very positive sign for Bangladesh cricket," said premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan. Alongside Shakib, wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim and Bangladesh's ace left-arm paceman Mustafizur Rahman also found their places in the prestigious eleven.

"It feels great to be recognised in this manner by the ICC. I think we have been a very good side in the one-dayers over the years, both at home and abroad. This recognition shows that Bangladesh have been displaying good quality cricket," Shakib added.

Locals excited by BPL's allures

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is special cause for celebration for local players, especially in the midst of the pandemic, as the arrival of international stars not only provides greater challenge and inspiration, but also an opportunity to gather knowledge of T20s, a format Bangladesh are desperate to improve upon.

The Omicron variant of Covid-19 is still at large, making things difficult for the organisers but the players have so far relished the opportunity to train, mingle with each other and learn from foreign coaches.

The tournament will bring fresh challenges for national team stars as well, with a few coming head to head in the opening day's fixtures today. Shakib Al Hasan's Fortune Barishal will face Mehedi Hasan Miraz's Chattogram Challengers at 1:30pm before Mushfiqur Rahim's Khulna Tigers take on Mahmudullah Riyad's Minister Group Dhaka in the evening affair.

Mushfiqur was dropped from the Bangladesh T20 lineup following the World Cup debacle in UAE.

"This is a big opportunity, especially for the locals. We have a World Cup coming up. Although the Covid situation is not good, we are getting the opportunity to play in a good environment. I'm not worried about



a comeback or thinking of the national side. Right now, I am focused on the BPL. I'm still the highest run-getter in the BPL. Holding on to that place will be a different challenge," Mushfiqur told reporters yesterday after a practice session in Mirpur.

Three-time champions Dhaka, who had issues with ownership before BCB took it upon itself to lead the franchise, will have Tamim Iqbal and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza to bank on. Although Mashrafe's injury issues may see him sit out today's fixture, the team will be in able hands with Mahmudullah leading a side that have Andre Russell as a genuine T20 weapon and Rubel Hossain and Oshane Thomas toting the pace battery.

Wickets will be the biggest issue heading

into the tournament, with Mirpur's slow tracks often failing to rope in fans by allowing displays of power-hitting. However, Mahmudullah was not thinking about the wickets at this stage.

"We have to think that the wickets are good before we play a match. If we enter with a negative mindset, it will have a negative impact," Mahmudullah dictated.

Despite the obvious setbacks, Shakib was keen on the inspiration gained from such a tournament. The all-rounder continued his power-hitting drills yesterday, scattering a few of the journalists watching on with ranged aerial shots. The onus was on improving certain facets of his game and the BPL was a good platform although it remains to be seen whether the pitches are conducive to good T20 cricket.

Leading a strong Barishal outfit, there are expectations. "Every side has expectations and there are expectations that one has from their own self. This is inspiring for us and we want to take it positively," Shakib said.

Taskin Ahmed was seen in conversation with former Australia speedster and Chattogram's pace bowling coach Shaun Tait. The conversation evoked memories of the good that come from such tournaments, especially for locals, even in such trying times.

'You have to think differently'

SPORTS REPORTER

Known as somewhat of a progenitor of the concept of power-hitting coaches in world cricket, Julian Wood arrived in Bangladesh as the batting coach of Sylhet Sunrisers in this year's BPL. But while power hitting, a speciality in the T20 format, cannot be taught within the space of a single tournament, his insights can certainly add new themes to Bangladesh cricket.

While talking to The Daily Star, he divulged certain aspects of his processes, beginning with how he started thinking of his concepts 12 years ago in the USA.

"I was watching the techniques used by baseball players. It's totally focused on hitting the ball hard. Cricket was basically still dependent on the hands but having talked to other professionals, I understood the game was changing. Power is not only dependent on hands, so I was thinking of using the whole body's strength. If you are not muscular, the power has to be created differently," he said.

He talked about being smarter, given the physique of the Bangladesh players. "You have to be a lot more dependent on rhythm and timing. For me, the base is very important. If your base starts from the ground, it's easier to generate power. I use very heavy bats in training because when you use a heavy bat you have to be able to control it and that enables players to understand the stress on their body. You have to be aware of your body mechanisms.

"There is also the bat speed factor. If you are not muscular, you have to think differently," he added.

US Open champion Raducanu crashes out

AGENCIES, MELBOURNE

Reigning US Open champion Emma Raducanu crashed out of the Australian Open in the second round Thursday as she struggled with blisters on her serving hand.

The 19-year-old, making her debut at Melbourne Park, looked on track when she raced to a 3-0 lead in the opening set against Montenegro's Danka Kovinic.

But the 17th seed then lost five games in a row and needed a medical timeout for treatment on her right hand. Despite battling back she couldn't stop Kovinic winning 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 on Margaret Court Arena.

The result put Kovinic, the world number 98, into the third round of a major for the first time.

She will now play either two-time Grand Slam winner Simona Halep, seeded 14, or Brazilian Beatriz Haddad Maia for a place in the fourth round.

Meanwhile, "Frustrated" three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray was stunned by Japanese qualifier Taro Daniel in straight sets in the second round of the Australian Open on Thursday. The 120th-ranked Daniel ambushed the former world number one 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 in 2hr 48min in John Cain Arena to reach the third round of a major for the first time.

World number two Daniil Medvedev put an end to the Nick Kyrgios show at this year's Australian Open on Thursday, dumping out the mercurial local hope with a clinical 7-6(1), 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 victory to reach the third round. "I came to win this match and I am happy to do it," said Medvedev.



Manchester United interim manager Ralf Rangnick had to deal with a Cristiano Ronaldo tantrum after substituting the Portuguese forward in the second half during their 3-1 victory away to Brentford in the Premier League on Wednesday. Ronaldo, who missed the last two games because of a niggling injury, took an age to walk off the pitch, scowling at United's coaching staff and throwing his jacket down in anger, and continued to show resentment from dugout.

PHOTO: AFP

What to WATCH

T SPORTS

BPL
Chattogram Challengers vs Fortune Barishal
Live from 01:30 pm
Khulna Tigers vs Minister Group Dhaka
Live from 06:30 pm
La Liga
Espanyol vs Real Betis
Live from 02:00 am (Saturday)

TEN 2 & SONY SIX

Australian Open 2022
Round 3
Live from 06:00 am onwards

GTV & STAR SPORTS HD 2

ICC U19 World Cup 2022
South Africa vs Ireland
Live from 07:00 pm
STAR SPORTS HD 1

EPL

Watford vs Norwich City
Live from 02:00 am (Saturday)