

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
Bangladesh vs Afghanistan
1st ODI
Live from 11:00 am
BANGLADESH PREMIER LEAGUE
Abahani vs Mohammedan
Live from 05:30 pm (YouTube)

TEN 1
UEFA Champions League
Benfica vs Ajax
Live from 02:00 am (Thursday)
TEN 2
UEFA Champions League
Atletico Madrid vs Manchester

United
Live from 02:00 am (Thursday)
STAR SPORTS HD 1
EPL
Liverpool vs Leeds United
Live from 01:45 am (Thursday)



Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan smiles with his arms wide open as it seems as if he is all ready to invite and face serious challenge from the spirited Afghanistan team [Below] full of skillful players. The two sides trained at the Zahur Ahmed Cricket Stadium yesterday ahead of the first ODI of the three-match series to be played at the same venue today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Obviously, we are a better side'

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

As the Bangladesh national team return to the limited-overs cricket today, the hosts will be happy to resume the music through their favoured format too.

With the three-match ODI series against Afghanistan, premier batter Tamim Iqbal will also be making a comeback to international cricket since he led the Tigers in whitewashing Zimbabwe in July last year.

Afghanistan have consistently presented a great threat to the Tigers over the years. But despite the spin challenges from the likes of Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Mohammad Nabi in store, Bangladesh skipper said he expects the hosts to have the edge in the series while speaking to the media ahead of the first ODI in Chattogram yesterday.



"There's nothing like facing a challenge as, more or less, we all are experienced players. I think it's the right decision to start the series with the ODIs against them," Tamim said.

"Obviously, we are a better side. Everyone is among games, which is positive, and we want to do well as a unit."

Afghanistan, on the other hand, is known to be a fearless unit in the shortest format but the visitors will be confident after their 3-0 whitewash over the Netherlands in ODIs earlier this year.

The visitors will also start with a good memory of beating Bangladesh in the lone Test when they last played in Chattogram back in 2019.

"Yes, of course, I want to start from there [that Test win]. We have good memories here and took positive things," Afghanistan skipper Hasmatullah Shahidi told the media yesterday.

"We have all played here in Bangladesh. A lot of the boys, who are in the squad, have experience with BPL. So, it will help us with the wickets and grounds and everything," said Shahidi.

HIGHLIGHTS

**The two sides faced each other in eight ODIs where Bangladesh won five while Afghanistan managed to win three games.

**The average first innings total at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram in the last five ODIs is 255, out of which four times the teams batting second have won.

**Super League points are at stake for both teams. If Bangladesh wins the series 3-0, they will move ahead of Pakistan to the sixth position in the ICC's ODI ranking.

**Bangladesh's series-winning run at home stretches back to five years, while having lost just one bilateral series at home in eight years now.

**Afghanistan have won each of their last six ODIs, making it their longest winning streak in the format.

**In the last ten years, Bangladesh have a win-loss record of 6-1 in ODIs in Chattogram. Their only defeat came against England in 2016.

Self-belief in the air

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chattogram

Bangladesh make a return to the ODI format today having last played a 50-over game in July last year and although half a year has passed since the last ODI, Bangladesh looked quietly confident heading into the series during their practice session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday.

While there were a handful of changes to the squad, the key components mostly remain the same. So the think-tank's major area of focus in terms of team composition tomorrow will be whether Mahmudul Hasan Joy or Yasir Ali come into the side.

"This is undoubtedly one of our favourite formats. So, it's about doing well. If you look at it, we have a few ODIs this year, which was not the case last year, maybe due to the T20 World Cup. We're excited and looking forward to tomorrow so that we can start well," ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal said following yesterday's practice.

Bangladesh find themselves in a stable position with 80 points in the ICC ODI Super League after four series. Two wins in the Afghan ODIs can solidify their position, important given the next three ODI assignments after the Afghan series will be away. There is the onus on results

but there is also room for growth in a stable unit.

Shakib Al Hasan's position in the batting order at number three is not up for doubt. Mushfiqur Rahim will provide stability at number four while Mahmudullah Riyad will continue at six.



This leaves

Joy and Yasir, both of whom have done well in their first hurdles, competing for the number five spot. The latter has already been around the national team set-up for two years while Joy showed heart in the New Zealand Test as an opener before doing well in the recently-concluded BPL. But if he gets an opportunity here, it will be at number five.

Yasir has gone from strength to strength since making his debut in the Pakistan Test series. Combined with a gritty knock in Christchurch and some powerful strokeplay in the BPL, it earned a call up for the Afghanistan series.

Tamim reiterated that both were being considered for at number five because of their proficiency against spin. "If either of them plays, it will be at number five," the skipper reminded.

Both batters batted at the nets yesterday, with Yasir looking slightly more confident with his power shots. With Afghanistan's strength in the spin department, it will be an important choice for the team management.

"We're trying to work out who is doing well in domestic games and give them chances. If you look at this team, you will get that feeling," Tamim said.

The scenes around the camp remained vibrant with a stable core amidst youthful vigour. Shakib shared a laugh with Alif Hossain, reckoning the batter to be out, but the latter had a different opinion. Head coach Russell Domingo was active, getting in some throwdowns himself at practice while Jamie Siddons took part in his first practice session. Before the first ODI, things appear breezy and the Tigers will be hoping for a good start.



"I'm not willing to think and talk much about any specific bowler. As I said, they have got some good bowlers and probably they have the best spin attack. But we have played well against them, especially in the ODI format. So why should we think much again? Instead of thinking about the opponent, we should focus on our strength."

Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal

Robson pulls the strings in 3-2 win

SPORTS REPORTER

Brazilian forward Robson da Silva proved instrumental as Bashundhara Kings recorded a come-from-behind 3-2 win over Rahmatganj MFS in a Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday.

A fourth win in five matches saw the hosts claim top spot in the league table with 12 points, two ahead of Abahani although the Sky Blues have a game in hand.

However, Kings were made to toil hard against Rahmatganj, who came into the match on the back of a creditable 3-3 draw against last season's runners-up Sheikh Jamal.

Bashundhara, upbeat after a 3-0 win over Bangladesh Police FC in their previous game, got off to a fine start and displayed some crisp passing but hosts were shocked as Nigerian forward Sunday Chizoba nodded home a Mahmudul Hasan corner in the 27th minute.

But the Old Dhaka outfit's lead only lasted five minutes as Robson entered the box from the left after a one-two with Masuk Mia Johnny and lofted the ball over the advancing goalkeeper to level the margin in the 31st minute.

Bashundhara then took the lead in the 44th minute after Robson found Ibrahim with a sublime long ball

and the latter drove home without hesitation, but Sunday again brought Rahmatganj back into the game by converting a penalty in stoppage-time of the first half.

ABAHANI HOST MOHAMMEDAN IN SYLHET

Abahani will today host archrivals Mohammedan at the Sylhet District Stadium, their adopted venue for the rest of the Bangladesh Premier League. The Sky Blues, in second position with 10 points from four matches, will reclaim top spot from defending champions Bashundhara Kings, who are on 12 points from five matches, with a victory today. A victory for the Black and Whites, meanwhile, will see them move to second position with 11 points. The match will kick off at 5:30pm.

After resumption, Kings pressed to regain the lead and a couple of efforts went in vain before Robson again provided the final ball from a corner in the 76th minute for Yeasin Arafat, who rose high to make it 3-2. Rahmatganj had two further chances to draw level but Sunday and Philip Adjah squandered the chances in the dying minutes.



[Inset] David de Gea returns to the city of his birth and club tonight where he grew up as Manchester United head to Atletico Madrid in a Champions League clash between two giants that have fallen on hard times. The 31-year-old has by a distance the most saves of any Premier League goalkeeper this season with 9, testament to both his form and United's failure to protect their goal as a team. Meanwhile, Sebastien Haller will be bidding to continue his remarkable scoring record in this season's Champions League when Ajax face Benfica in the first leg of their last-16 tie.

PHOTO: TWITTER