

Kings face Swadhinata again

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings will look to avoid a slip-up similar to the first phase when the Bangladesh Premier League champions travel to Swadhinata Krira Sangha for the first match of the second phase today. Kings, who suffered a 2-1 defeat in the league's first matchday, will be playing against the newcomers at the Muktiyoddha Smriti Stadium in Rajshahi.

The defending champions have made some important reinforcements in the mid-season transfers, roping in Gambian striker Nuha Marong after dispatching Bosnian centre-forward Stojan Vranjes. The league leaders, top of the table with a four-point advantage over of second placed Abahani, have also got midfielder Miguel Figueira in place of Jonathan Fernandes, who has left the country following a lengthy injury.

Swadhinata, who are bottom of the table with only six points, have made a number of foreign acquisitions too in a bid to avoid the drop after just a year in top-flight.

Meanwhile, strugglers Uttar Baridhara will host third-placed Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club in the other match of the day at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj.



Mushfiqur Rahim and his Sheikh Jamal teammates train at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday, ahead of today's crucial DPL match against Prime Bank. A win for Sheikh Jamal and a defeat elsewhere for second-placed Legends of Rugganj will ensure a maiden DPL title for the Dhanmondi outfit.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Anamul's Prime stand in Sheikh Jamal's way

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Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club will be eyeing to close in on their maiden Dhaka Premier League title as they take on Prime Bank Cricket Club in the Super League game at the BKSP-4 today.

With 22 points in 12 matches, Sheikh Jamal has the chance to seal the title with two games in hand if they edge past Prime, given the second-placed Legends of Rugganj, with 18 points in equal games, lose to Abahani Limited in Mirpur today. However, a win for both Dhanmondi and Rugganj will keep the two sides in the hunt for the DPL trophy.

Sheikh Jamal have been in terrific form,

winning their last five consecutive games, as their wicketkeeper-batter Nurul Hasan Sohan smashed an unbeaten match-winning century in the previous game to clinch a four-wicket victory over Rugganj Tigers Cricket Club.

Prime Bank, with 14 points in twelve games, will bank on an in-form Anamul Haque Bijoy who has already become the most run-getter in a DPL season in the previous game. The wicketkeeper batter will be eager to continue his prolific run, having tallied 878 runs in 12 games with seven fifties and two tons.

Rugganj on the other hand, led by former Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, are chasing their maiden

triumph with the presence of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan in the side.

Rugganj beat Prime Bank in a low-scoring encounter by three wickets in the previous game, courtesy of Muktar Ali and Tanbir Hayder's thrilling last-over finish.

Mashrafe's Rugganj will take on the defending champions Abahani, led by Mosaddek Hossain Saikat, who are already out of the title race with 14 points in twelve games.

In the other super league encounter, Rugganj Tigers will encounter Gazi Group Cricketers at the BKSP-3 while Brothers Union face City Club in the tournament's relegation battle.

'Mustafizur will play SL Tests if needed'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan said that if need be, Mustafizur Rahman will have to make himself available for the upcoming two-Test Sri Lanka series in May.

"If we need him [Mustafizur] for the Sri Lanka series, he will definitely have to play," Hassan told media yesterday.

However, Mustafizur, who is currently playing for the Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League (IPL), told The Daily Star in an interview that the pacer is apparently not interested to play the five-day format in order to stay fit for a long time for his two favourite versions of the game -- one-dayers and T20s.

The 26-year-old was not also included in Bangladesh's latest central contract for Tests.

"We had sent forms to players seeking information on the formats that they would consider playing. And according to that, we enlisted players [for the central contract]. Mustafizur did not put his name for Tests. He did not say that he wants to play Tests."

"However, it does not matter what he said. If we need him to play, he will have to oblige," Hassan said.

Bangladesh's pace-unit is grappling with injury concerns with the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam and Ebadot Hossain all injured.

"Taskin, Shoriful and Ebadot are there in the Test side. If we keep Mustafizur too in the Test side, it will only then depend on the management if they would play him or not. But whenever he is needed, we will keep him in the squad. He will play [Tests], there is no issue about it," Hassan added.

The BCB is yet to announce the squad for the Sri Lanka series and keeping Mustafizur in the squad would mean that the player would need to return midway from IPL, for which he has been granted NOC.



Arsenal's French striker Alexander Lacazette (R) embraces Swiss midfielder Granit Xhaka after the latter's winning goal in a 3-1 victory over Manchester United in their Premier League fixture at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Rangnick gives up on top-four chances

REUTERS, London

Arsenal dealt a blow to Manchester United's hopes of a top-four Premier League finish as Nuno Tavares, Bukayo Saka and Granit Xhaka struck in a 3-1 win on Saturday that revived the home side's chances of Champions League football next season.

Arsenal were rewarded for their blistering early pace as Tavares tapped home in the third minute after United goalkeeper David de Gea pushed away a curling effort by Saka, following some poor defending by the visitors at The Emirates.

Saka doubled the Gunners' lead from the penalty spot after a foul on the winger in the build-up to a strike by Eddie Nketiah that went in but was ruled out as offside by the Video Assistant Referee (VAR).

The visitors got one back as Cristiano Ronaldo swept in Nemanja Matic's cross. The Portuguese forward's 100th Premier League goal came after a traumatic week personally after the death of one of his newborn

twin babies. United improved in the second half but their woes deepened as skipper Bruno Fernandes hit the post with a poor effort from the penalty spot following Tavares' handball, before a 70th-minute thunderbolt from Xhaka sealed the win for the Gunners.

"It's a big performance in a game that had everything. We created chances, we had to suffer, there were moments when we lacked energy and they were on top, we were efficient in the boxes, we had luck," Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta told BT Sport, adding that the fight for fourth place was going to be tight.

The win lifted Arsenal to fourth place on 60 points, three ahead of fifth-placed Tottenham Hotspur who take on Brentford later on Saturday. United are sixth, with interim boss Ralf Rangnick facing a tough task in his final four games.

Rangnick said United's top four chances had effectively ended.

"For me even before the game it wasn't very likely, but after today's result it's gone, yes," the German said.

Lampard would take draw at Liverpool

AFP, London

Everton manager Frank Lampard said Friday he would happily take a draw against "incredible" Liverpool even though his side desperately need points to survive.

The Toffees could be in the bottom three by the time Sunday's game kicks off at Anfield. But Lampard said he would be satisfied with a point at the home of Jurgen Klopp's side.

"It is a tough game we are going into, make no bones about that," he said.

"I am a realist. You understand the position we are in. The table is a reflection of where you are at."



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