

BCB still cautious about Liton

SPORTS REPORTER

There was some good news in the Bangladesh camp as four cricketers who missed the Asia Cup due to injury have made strides in their recovery and are expected to be available for the ICC T20 World Cup in Australia next month.

Wicketkeeper-batter Nurul Hasan Sohan and batter Yasir Ali are expected to return soon, but the team management is unwilling to take any risks with Liton Das' hamstring injury although the stylish left-arm opener took part in a running session in Mirpur yesterday. On the bowling front, pacer Hasan Mahmud will complete his 21-day rehabilitation next week.

"Liton is recovering slowly but he is making progress. I think it will take another week for him to find rhythm, but the intensity of a game is totally different. We won't take any risks," BCB chief physician Debashish Chowdhury told the media on Thursday.

Sohan, who underwent surgery on his left index finger, has already joined training sessions and is expected to be fit for the upcoming tri-nation series in New Zealand, also featuring Pakistan.



Bangladesh captain Nigar Sultana Joty takes a selfie during an official photo session in Mirpur yesterday prior to their departure for the UAE, where they will play the ICC Women's T20 World Cup qualifier from September 18 to 25. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'We all earned it'

REUTERS, New York

A first-time US Open women's champion will be crowned on Saturday and world number one Iga Swiatek said all four semi-finalists deserve to be there.

Top seed Swiatek will meet Belarusian powerhouse Aryna Sabalenka, while in-form Frenchwoman Caroline Garcia battles tough Tunisian Ons Jabeur on Thursday with trips to the final on the line.

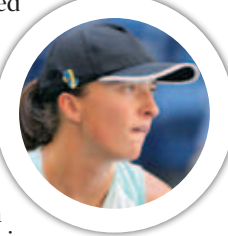
"It feels like we all earned it," Swiatek said after her straight-sets quarter-final win over American Jessica Pegula.

No one is surprised to see the 21-year-old Swiatek in the mix. The Pole went on a blistering 37-match winning streak earlier this year before cooling off ahead of the New York Grand Slam.

Despite struggling in the earlier rounds she raised her game late on Wednesday, whipping forehands and playing excellent defence to see off Pegula.

Standing in Swiatek's way is sixth seed Sabalenka, who showed her mettle by storming back from a set and 5-1 down against Kaia Kanepi in the second round, saving two match points along the way.

Garcia, seeded 12th, is enjoying a career renaissance and playing with confidence bordering on swagger after cruising to the semis without dropping a set.



A chance to get the mental edge

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI FROM DUBAI

The game between Sri Lanka and Pakistan today is a dead rubber in the sense that both teams have already made the final with two wins from two matches in the Super Four stage of the 2022 Asia Cup. However, it will now take prominence as a dress rehearsal for Sunday's final.

The approach of Pakistan's middle and lower-middle order batters and Sri Lanka's middle order is pretty similar, indicating that an interesting battle awaits in the final. Ahead of that, however, the dress rehearsal will provide plenty of information for both teams.

Pakistan's opening duo of Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan are like opposite sides of the coin at this tournament.

Skipper Babar, who had come into this tournament on the back of three fifties in a series against the Netherlands, has averaged just a touch above eight in the Asia Cup, his form a concern even as Pakistan march on. On the other hand, Rizwan gives the assurance of both scoring at a high rate and carrying his bat deep into the innings. Rizwan will have a big role to play in the upcoming matches.

Sri Lanka's opening duo of Pathum Nissanka and Kusal Mendis are showing a similar mix of styles, starting with both patience and confidence, getting a measure of the bowling attack and then bringing their flair.

Their batting prowess led them to a win against India, a side with so much batting depth, it seemed improbable that Sri Lanka – a side that had lost all of their T20I matches during a Covid-affected 2020 – would get the better of the defending champions, especially in a game that the pre-tournament favourites were desperate to win.

Pakistan's middle-order of Iftikhar Ahmed, Shadab Khan, Mohammad Nawaz and Asif Ali are all capable of massive carnage. Sri Lanka's Bhanuka Rajapakse, skipper Dasun Shanaka and Wanindu Hasaranga are capable of similar destruction.

"We are going to take it very seriously because, as you know, Pakistan are one of the best sides in the world. Since we are playing against the same opponents on Sunday, we will take it very



seriously," Sri Lanka spin coach Piyal Kashiyapa said in a press conference yesterday.

There is a feeling that the two teams are on equal footing and Sri Lanka it appears are aware of the seriousness needed.

"We will come out with our A game and we will control what we can control and take it from there. The Pakistan team have been winning and so have we. Both the teams are equal," Kashiyapa added.

Asked what it would mean for the team to bring a smile to the country by winning the Asia Cup, Piyal said: "It's been huge [making it to the final]. We've been waiting for this moment for a long time. If we can win this tournament, it will be a huge deal for our country as well."

The stage is set, it's time for the dress rehearsal and, if it was a battle of nerves as well, both teams have exhibited the presence of mind in the right situation. Pakistan secured a huge win against Afghanistan after number 11 batter Naseem Shah hit two sixes in the final over to ensure a final berth.

Sri Lanka, meanwhile, will be hoping that pace duo of Dilshan Madushanka and Asitha Fernando can match Naseem's fierceness with the ball. It will be a tight affair ahead of the final and a good dress rehearsal.

MATCH-FIXING SCANDAL Two clubs found guilty while one acquitted

SPORTS REPORTER

Uttara Azampur Football Club, accused of participating in illegal activities including online betting, spot-fixing, match manipulation, and match fixing, were cleared of the allegations by Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) on Thursday, meaning the Uttara-based football club will be eligible to feature in the top-tier Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) next season.

It is the second time that the country's professional football clubs have been penalised for their involvement in illegal activities after Arambagh KS, who were suspended last year over similar charges.

Having stepped down from the post of head coach of Uttara Azampur FC, former national striker Saifur Rahman Moni brought allegations against the club of fixing their fixture against Farashganj SC.

Following the accusation, the BFF launched an investigation against a few clubs in mid-April.

BFF's disciplinary committee, however, could not find sufficient evidence in support of the allegations made against Azampur FC. There were whispers that the club would be exempted due to their good relations with the BFF officials.

However, the disciplinary committee punished BPL outfit Uttar Baridhara Club and BCL outfit Karwan Bazar Pragati Sangha by demoting both the clubs to the 2nd and 3rd Division Football Leagues, respectively. Both the clubs were in the relegation zone.

It was learned that the BFF disciplinary committee was able to find evidence of illegal activities from Uttar Baridhara and Karwan Bazar after AFC provided BFF with relevant documents, video clips, and the pattern of online betting in the third week of May.

Baridhara were involved in online betting in their BPL matches against Abahani and Sheikh Jamal DC while Karwan Bazar were found guilty of engaging in online betting in three of their BCL matches against Youngmen's Club Fakirapool, Uttara FC, and Agrani Bank.

The BFF also suspended 11 players – five from Baridhara Club and six from Karwan Bazar – for two years. Four Karwan Bazar officials were also handed suspensions for different terms but, surprisingly, no Baridhara officials were punished.

The duration and the severity of the punishment were decided by the BFF disciplinary committee on the basis of the reports provided by the fixed-match identification committee.

Tigers set for two T20 WC warm-ups

SPORTS REPORTER

As a prelude to the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2022 in Australia next month, Bangladesh are scheduled to play two T20 warm-up matches in Brisbane.

Bangladesh will face Afghanistan and South Africa on October 17 and 19, respectively, after the World Cup begins with the game between Sri Lanka and Namibia in Geelong on October 16.

The matches will begin at 02:00pm (BST) and will be played at the Allan Border Field.

The warm-up fixtures – not carrying official T20 International status – will not be open to spectators. However, the ICC digital channels will feature live scores and match highlights for all matches.

Lewy's unique hat-trick

Extra-time drama in Madrid; Reds bleed at Napoli

AGENCIES

Last season's beaten finalists Liverpool got their Champions League campaign off to a disastrous start in a 4-1 defeat away to Napoli on Wednesday, while Robert Lewandowski hit a hat-trick in a big 5-1 win for Barcelona on Wednesday night.

Juergen Klopp's side were outplayed in the first half and fortunate to only go in 3-0 down at the break and the German, who won the competition with Liverpool in 2019 and led them to the final last season, said there was plenty to be fixed.

"We have to reinvent ourselves. The fun part is we have to do that in the middle of a Premier League season and a Champions League campaign," Klopp told reporters after match.

At the Camp Nou, Lewandowski became the first player to score a Champions League hat-trick for three different clubs as the ex-Borussia Dortmund and Bayern star marked his first appearance in the competition with Barcelona in style.

The Pole now has 89 Champions League goals, three more than Karim Benzema, with only Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi ahead of him. Barca's next game will be away to Lewandowski's old side Bayern Munich.

Meanwhile, Bayern strolled against Inter

2-0, Tottenham Hotspur beat Marseille by identical margin, and Atletico Madrid and Ajax Amsterdam also got their campaigns underway with victories.

"To compete in the Champions League you spend hundreds of millions, for us to compete it is too much to ask," insisted the Rangers manager, Giovanni van Bronckhorst, as the last season's Europa League finalists' return to the group phase of Champions League since 2010 started off with a 4-0 thrashing by the Dutch giants.

The game between Atletico and Porto at the Metropolitan Stadium in Madrid saw an incredible finish. Porto had Mehdi Taremi sent off late on before Mario Hermoso put Atletico ahead with a deflected 92nd-minute strike.

Hermoso then conceded a penalty for handball, allowing Matheus Uribe to equalise in the 96th minute, only for Antoine Griezmann to head the winner in the 11th minute of injury time as Atletico beat Porto 2-1.

Coincidentally, the only other game in Champions League history to feature three goals scored in stoppage time was Porto's home meeting with Atletico in December last year.

Elsewhere, Club Brugge edged past Bayer Leverkusen 1-0, while Sporting Lisbon scored all of their goals in the second half to hammer Eintracht Frankfurt 3-0.



PHOTO: AFP

Robert Lewandowski marked his first Champions League game for Barcelona with a hat-trick as the Catalan giants thrashed Viktoria Plzen 5-1 at the Camp Nou while Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah looks devastated after his side conceding fourth goal against Napoli on Wednesday.