

Super Cup returns next April!

SPORTS REPORTER

The Super Cup, the popular biennial football tournament in Bangladesh which only saw three editions since its inauguration in 2009, is set to make a comeback after 10 years as the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) officials informed that the cash-rich competition is scheduled to take place next year.

The Super Cup had made headlines for its unprecedented prize money of 1 crore, which was introduced at the time to negate the decaying competitiveness of the domestic clubs, as well as bring disinterested spectators back to the stadium in numbers.

The project turned out to be a success as the maiden season's final played between archrivals Abahani and Mohammedan drew around 40,000 spectators, reminiscing the bygone era of the 90's. However, the tournament could not continue due to various reasons, with lack of sponsorship being the primary one.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin, last Sunday, had revealed his intention to get Super Cup back in the domestic calendar and following a meeting held by the BFF professional league management committee, the six-team Super Cup's schedule was confirmed to be held from April 02 to April 13 in 2023.

Super Cup revelation aside, a detailed domestic calendar for the upcoming season -- involving the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), Federation Cup, Independence Cup -- was also announced during the meeting at the BFF House.

"Four out of the six teams will be based on next season's BPL standings and the remaining two teams will make the cut through selection," informed BFF vice-president Ataur Rahman Bhuiyan Manik.

Asked if the board had acquired sponsors for the Super Cup, both Manik and the BFF president seated next to him said that sponsorship matters are almost settled.

It was learnt that the BPL will feature six venues and will be played on weekends from December 9 this year and run till July 22, 2023, while the Federation Cup will be played only on Tuesdays from December 20 this year to July 18, 2023, and the Independence Cup's final round is slated for November 13 to December 5 this year.

Manik further informed, among other things: "We had the first meeting of the season with the representatives of BPL and BCL, who already received the calendar we created.

"We have set the duration of BPL's player transfers from October 08 to November 07. In BCL's case, it's from October 08 to October 31."

It was a good initiative by the BFF to lay out a detailed calendar for the upcoming season. However, it remains to be seen whether they can execute it.



India's Jemimah Rodrigues dances down the track to smash one out of the park during her rapid 53-ball 76 that helped her side register a commanding 41-run victory over Sri Lanka in the Women's Asia Cup at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, Ground 2 on Saturday. (Bottom) The Ground 2 of the Sylhet Stadium, which made it's international debut through the game between Bangladesh and Thailand earlier yesterday, saw crowd come in numbers to cheer for the Tigresses.

PHOTO: BCB

BCB boss admits 'failure' in providing for women

EKUSH TAPADER from Sylhet

Despite showing significant growth over recent years, the Bangladesh national women's cricket team has not received the limelight or focus that was anticipated, evidenced by the lack of hype when the hosts started the Women's Asia Cup with a convincing nine-wicket win over Thailand on the opening day at the Sylhet

International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The Tigresses have just returned after becoming unbeaten champions in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifiers and the defending Asian Cup champions have their eyes on retaining their title at home. Despite all the encouraging results, even Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan admitted



that they were unable to place enough emphasis on women's cricket.

"The girls have been playing well for quite some time now, but we are not looking at them. That is our failure. They were the champions in the World Cup Qualifiers and qualified for World Cups in the past. They also became champions in the Asia Cup, so they have been playing well consistently," Hassan told the media

nine. Ireland, Scotland, Thailand and Zimbabwe are the teams behind us, but those teams are of a pretty similar standard. Since they play World Cup, they are strong opponents. That is why I was a bit worried before the game today (Saturday). It was a tough game but the way they played and showed confidence felt good," he added.

There were also discussions about the unusual timings of the matches for the ongoing Asia Cup. The first game of each day is scheduled to start at 9:00am while the second starts at 1:30pm. But despite that and the bare-minimum promotional activities ahead of the event, there were at least five hundred supporters present at the ground to cheer on the Tigresses yesterday.

Government official Ashraful Islam travelled from Sunamganj to Sylhet with his wife and kids to watch Bangladesh's game yesterday, adamant to not miss the opportunity.

"Normally we watch games on TV. But it is a different feeling to watch the game live from the ground. We heard that there would be matches played both in the outer and the main stadium. Despite the fact that we may have to suffer from hot and humid weather, at the end of the day we are enjoying our time at the," Ashraful said.

Compared to the men's cricket team, there are still huge financial discrepancies between the two teams. It will be important for the BCB to ensure they narrowed that gap and in terms of facilities and opportunities in order to boost women's cricket in the country.

'Hand of God' shirt to go on display in WC

AFP, Doha

The shirt that Diego Maradona wore when he scored his infamous 'Hand of God' goal against England in 1986 will go on display in Qatar during the World Cup just five months after it set a record price at auction, a top official said Saturday.

The shirt, which sold for \$9.3 million to a secret buyer, has been loaned to Qatar's 3-2-1 sports museum and will go on display from Sunday until April 1.

Qatar has not named the shirt's new owner, who paid a then record price for any sports memorabilia object, but negotiations are understood to have started just weeks after the May 4 auction.

Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, head of Qatar Museums and a member of the Gulf state's ruling family, said she was "excited" to have secured the shirt for a special World Cup exhibition.

"The jersey has been through quite a journey," she added in a statement to AFP.

"Starting with the moment when Nottingham Forest midfielder Steve Hodge swapped jerseys with Maradona after the match, in what now seems an inspired move."

Maradona scored both goals in the World Cup quarter-final 2-1 victory over England in Mexico City's Aztec Stadium in 1986.



Japan wrestling legend Inoki dies

AFP, Tokyo

Flamboyant Japanese professional wrestler turned politician Antonio Inoki died Saturday aged 79, local media reported.

Public broadcaster NHK said he died of heart failure.

Standing 1.9 metres (six feet three inches) tall, Inoki was a pioneer of mixed martial arts in Japan, and shot to fame in 1976 for taking on world heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali in a zany wrestler-versus-boxer bout in Tokyo.

In 1989 he was elected as an upper-house lawmaker for the now-defunct Sports and Peace Party.

He travelled to Iraq prior to the 1990 Gulf War to gain the release of Japanese hostages.

The wrestler -- whose birth name was Kanji Inoki -- said he wanted to "contribute to world peace through sports" and had arranged martial arts and wrestling festivals in North Korea, often meeting high-ranking officials during his visits.

Japanese officials dismissed the trips as a sideshow.

Asked about them at the time, the then chief cabinet secretary Yoshihide Suga pointedly reminded journalists that Tokyo had a travel ban in place for North Korea, urging the politician to "act appropriately".

Martinez versus Haaland in Manchester derby

AFP, London

Erik ten Hag's faith in Manchester United "warrior" Lisandro Martinez will be put to the test as Manchester City striker Erling Haaland aims to extend his red-hot streak in Sunday's derby.

Haaland has made a blistering start with City since joining the Premier League champions from Borussia Dortmund for £51 million (\$57 million) in the close season.

With 14 goals in nine games in all competitions for City, the Norway striker, playing in his first Manchester derby, will put United's recent revival to the test.

Only once has Haaland been denied a goal in the Premier League this season, but United manager Ten Hag might have the solution to taming the prolific 22-year-old.

When Ten Hag's Ajax faced Dortmund in the Champions League last season, they stopped Haaland scoring and won the group match thanks in large part to an inspired display from a tenacious defender now playing his trade with United.

Ten Hag brought Martinez with him to Old Trafford in the summer transfer window in a deal that could reach nearly £57 million and the 24-year-old is already producing commanding performances.

At 6 feet 4 inches (1.93 metres), Haaland will tower over Martinez, who is the Premier League's smallest centre back at

5ft 9in.

But the aggressive Argentine does not let his diminutive stature stop him taking the fight to opposing strikers.

Living up to the "Butcher of Amsterdam" nickname given to him at Ajax, Martinez has already earned cult hero status among United fans with some ferocious tackling.

Partnering with Raphael Varane in central defence after Harry Maguire was dropped two games into the season, Martinez has shored up a unit that was United's Achilles heel last season.

United have won all five games in which Ten Hag has played Martinez and Varane together at the heart of the defence.

Ten Hag calls the Argentine a "warrior", lauding his "attitude and fighting spirit".

But he knows keeping Haaland off the scoresheet at the Etihad Stadium will be a tall order if Martinez does not get enough help from his team-mates.

"We don't play against Haaland, we play against Man City," said Ten Hag. "We are convinced of our capabilities. If we act as a team we can beat our opponents."

Second-placed City are five points ahead of fifth-placed United and Guardiola urged his side not to let the frenzied derby atmosphere distract them from the task.

"We have to try to figure out what they are going to do but you don't have to have extra emotions, everyone knows what it is," he said.



Arsenal's Granit Xhaka celebrates scoring their third goal during a 3-1 win over bitter rivals Tottenham Hotspur in the north London derby at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday. It was seventh win in eight games for Mikel Arteta's side, who moved four points clear at the top of the Premier League table.

PHOTO: REUTERS