

# Mouth-watering Hockey Champions Trophy on the cards

SPORTS REPORTER

When it comes to the Dhaka Premier Division Hockey League, the title race always ends up being confined to two to three teams but the inaugural Hockey Champions Trophy (BCT) appears to be heading for a different route, especially after the completion of the players' draft yesterday.

Amid a festive mood among the corporate houses, all six participating teams have completed the formation of their respective squads, with the collection of 17 players – including four foreigners – through a long three-hour players' draft under five categories: Icon, A+, A, B and C.

The main attraction of the players' draft was who were going to be six icon players among 19 national players. In the end, defender Ashraful Islam, goalkeeper Biplob Kujur, defender Rezaul Karim Babu, midfielder Sohanur Rahman Sabuj, forward Rasel Mahmud Jimmy and midfielder Roman Sarker were picked as the icon players by the participating teams, who confirmed them in line with the teams' plan.

The coaches of all participating teams admitted no team is tipped as favourites, especially after the way the players have been distributed. The teams had been given the list of drafted players – consisting of 187 local and 24 foreign players – and yesterday, the teams picked 78 local players and 24 foreign players to form their respective squads based on lottery. "As there was a matter of luck in



the lottery, we could not get the first three goalkeepers we attempted to rope in as other teams picked them ahead of us," said Acme advisor coach Mahabub Harun after the completion of the players' draft at a private club in the capital city.

Saif Powertech Khulna assistant coach Ashiquzzaman said, "I think all teams have equal strength, with the inclusion of local and foreign players who are also of similar standard."

"Except a couple of players, we got all expected players according to our plan but no team can say that they have formed the best squad," Rupayan Cumilla assistant coach Moshir Rahman Biplob said.

However, the assistant coaches are worried over the fitness of foreign players.

"Though all teams seem to have equal strength, I think the foreign players will make the difference in the match. However, we don't have any idea of the performance and physical condition of the foreign players at the moment as we chose them by seeing their biodata," said Walton Dhaka assistant coach Zahid Hossain Raju.

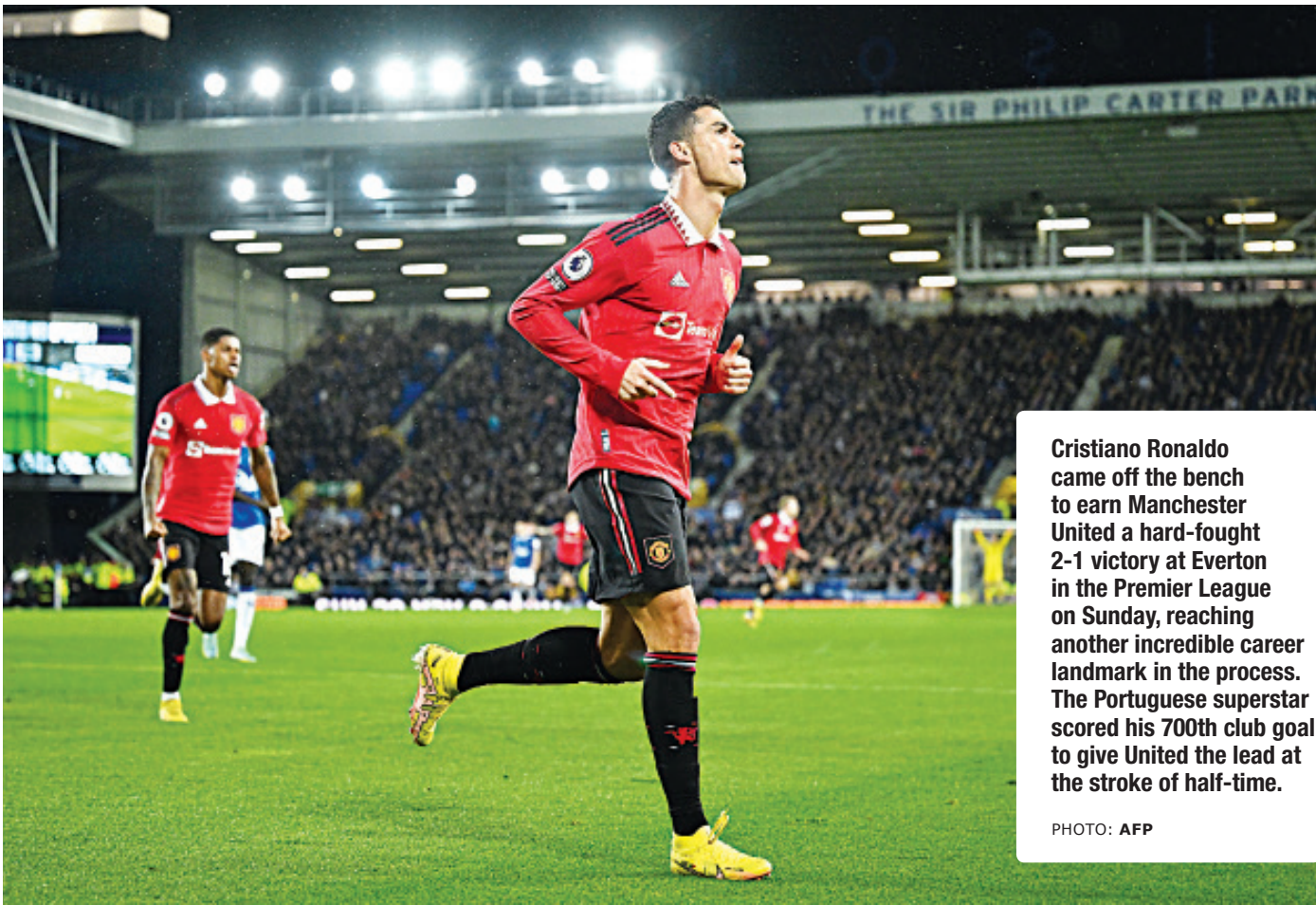
Metro Express Barisal assistant coach Moududur Rahman Shuvo said, "As the teams still have an option to rope in a player under the direct signing category, a good foreign player can play a vital role in deciding the match."

"What if any teams are good on paper but not good on the ground? So everything depends on the performance," said Morch Padma assistant coach Shahidullah Titu.

All teams are expected to start the preparation within a couple of days, with the league getting underway on October 28 at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.



Having already sealed three wins from three games, Manchester City players were in a jovial mood during training ahead of their Group G game against FC Copenhagen on Tuesday. The scenes were quite similar in Paris as well where Marco Verratti and Sergio Ramos enjoyed a training session as they prepare to host Benfica. PSG, however, will be without Argentine star Lionel Messi due to a calf injury.



Cristiano Ronaldo came off the bench to earn Manchester United a hard-fought 2-1 victory at Everton in the Premier League on Sunday, reaching another incredible career landmark in the process. The Portuguese superstar scored his 700th club goal to give United the lead at the stroke of half-time.

PHOTO: AFP

# 'I am sure more goals will come'

REUTERS, Liverpool

Manchester United coach Erik ten Hag said he believed Cristiano Ronaldo could build on his first Premier League goal of the season in the 2-1 win at Everton on Sunday and find his prolific form again.

Ronaldo came off the bench to fire the winner in the first half at Goodison Park, a strike that was his 700th club goal of an incredible career, 20 years and two days on from his first.

It was Ronaldo's first league goal of a season where his game time has been restricted under Ten Hag, and the manager felt it would give him a lift ahead of some crucial matches.

"That is really impressive when you score 700 goals, it is a huge performance," Ten Hag said. "I am really happy for him, and congratulations to him."

"He had to wait for it but I am sure more goals will come."

"Every player needs the goals. I have worked with goalscorers, they need goals every season to have that feeling. Once they have some goals, they have the flow. Games go easier. That will happen with him as well."

# The Shakib-Liton batting order conundrum

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI

Bangladesh's batting order and their overall batting plan in the T20I format continue to flummox, with Liton Das and skipper Shakib Al Hasan's batting positions turning up as areas which negate Bangladesh's advantage as a batting unit heading into the T20I World Cup in Australia.

"Unless you're a born opener, No. 3 is the best place to bat. If you don't have Bill Lawry and Bob Simpson or Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes – a highly successful opening partnership – preceding you, you have the opportunity to establish the pattern of play. You walk out to bat at your own pace and, apart from when there is an immediate setback, you will have had a chance to quickly assess from the pavilion how the pitch is playing," Ian Chappell, the former Australia captain known for his aggressive and resourceful cricket, wrote in a column for ESPNcricinfo in 2015.

While Chappell was not of the opinion that the best batter should bat at number three and the fact that he was referring to Test cricket, however, when it comes to T20Is, the context of what your batting line-up combines into will dictate who can bat at number three. Bangladesh think-tank must get out of the rote idea of just focusing on left and right-handed batting combinations and matchups, which risk the Tigers falling further behind, given the profiles they possess.

Chappell's column holds weight

when it comes to the discussion around Shakib's position and therefore, to a certain extent, Liton's as well.

Bangladesh do have their best batter at number three in Liton but it takes away a major advantage of having him in the side. Liton's early career shows that the Powerplay can be about the carnage and acceleration he can provide. Given



the available profiles in the current batting order, there are players who can negotiate the middle overs meaningfully. And if Liton carries on, he can still anchor the innings as an opener.

Bangladesh's experiment with two make-shift openers have failed to an extent and Sabbir Rahman was dropped in favour of Najmul Hossain Shanto in the last tri-nation series match against hosts New Zealand on Sunday. Liton anchoring is not a bad thing but when you take away the number of deliveries he can face in the Powerplay, the lack of aggression in that 'impact' cricket that technical consultant

Sridharan Sriram wants Bangladesh to embrace, becomes apparent.

Moreover, there is an obvious technical deficiency in Mehedi Miraz, which also negates the impact that an opener is expected to create in T20Is.

Shakib, on the other hand, came into bat at number seven in the New Zealand match. While Afif Hossain's number four position has merit, but by taking away number of deliveries Liton and Shakib can play in an innings reduces much of their impact.

Shakib's 2019 World Cup campaign, albeit in ODI format, shows his ability at the number three spot. One BCB director recently told this reporter how the left-hander had to be convinced to take the spot as he can dictate more from that position.

Shakib can either now choose to open and let Liton continue where he is or take the number three slot, a position from where he can 'establish the pattern of play' that Chappell insisted on.

Shakib has batted at number four in the recently concluded Caribbean Premier League (CPL) and batted at number three in Bangladesh's last tour of West Indies. It was Shakib himself who said after the New Zealand game that the 'top three must raise their hands up and bat till 15th or 16th over.' And now as the skipper, he has the opportunity to do that and raise competitive advantage heading to the World Cup, and the Bangladesh think-tank can begin again from the game against New Zealand tomorrow.

# Batting lets Tigresses down

SPORTS REPORTER

An inexplicable batting collapse saw Bangladesh suffer a three-run defeat (via DLS) in their Women's Asia Cup encounter against Sri Lanka at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on Monday.

The Tigresses made a mountain of a molehill as they lost four wickets in one over while in chase of a modest 41-run target in seven overs after rain interrupted proceedings in Sylhet yesterday.

With just 14 required off 12 deliveries and eight wickets in hand, Bangladesh lost all-rounder Rumana Ahmed, skipper Nigar Sultana, Sobhana Mostary, and Fahima Khatun in the penultimate over.

Sri Lanka spinner Inoka Ranaweera started the sixth over by having Rumana (8 off 9) caught at deep midwicket and then went on to remove Nigar (12 off 11) and Sobhana (1 off 2) in the third and fifth deliveries before Fahima was made run out trying to steal a double in the final delivery of the over.

Requiring 11 in the final over, Bangladesh lost the wicket of Salma Khatun and managed to score only seven runs as the Tigresses had to suffer a shocking defeat.

Bangladesh are fifth on the table with four points from two wins in five games. Nigar Sultana's troops will face the UAE in their final league stage game today at the same venue and, given rain doesn't play spoilsport, a win for the Tigresses would see them move to number four in the points table with equal six points as Thailand.

However, the Tigresses would progress to the semifinals courtesy of superior run rate.



# NCL starts with bowlers' domination

SPORTS REPORTER

Bowlers dominated the opening day of the 24th National Cricket League (NCL) as the trend of low-scoring affairs continued in the first-class competition across four venues in the country yesterday.

In Tier 1 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, defending champions Dhaka Division took a first innings lead of 30 runs and will resume the second day on 122 for 5 after Rangpur were restricted to 92 for nine in their first innings, courtesy of Dhaka pacer Sumon Khan's lifer.

After being sent to bat, Rangpur were reeling on 37 for six with Naeem Islam forced to retire hurt. Ariful Haque remained unbeaten on 34 runs.

In the other Tier 1 game, Tigers' ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal featured for Chattogram, top-scoring with 31 runs before they were bundled out for 141 in their first innings against Sylhet.

It was Sylhet's left-arm spinner Nabil Samad who did the damage, picking up his 16th five-wicket haul in first-class competition. Sylhet, trailing by 126 runs, will resume the second day on 15 for nought.

Hosts Khulna were all-out for just 131 runs in their first innings after being sent to bat by Dhaka Metro in the Tier 2 game at Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium. In reply, Sylhet ended the day at 37 for three, trailing by 94 runs.

Barishal posted 269 for nine, courtesy of fifties from Sohag Gazi and Abu Sayem Chowdhury against Rajshahi in the other Tier 2 game. Nahid Rana bagged four while Sunzamul Islam took two wickets for Rajshahi.

