

Youth Games begin today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Sheikh Kamal 2nd Youth Games are all set to roll out today across the country after the inaugural edition of the country's biggest-ever multi-sports extravaganza took place in 2018.

This edition, around sixty-thousand athletes from upazila level – an increment of ten thousand than last time – will fight it out for their places in their respective district teams before representing the divisional teams in the final phase in Dhaka.

The first phase is slated for January 02 to 10 with the participation of 495 upazilas, and most districts have taken their final preparation to host the inter-upazila competition at respective district headquarters.

The first edition of Youth Games was seen to be held without any preparation as evidenced by barefooted female athletes clad in salwar kameez participating.

"We are going to inaugurate the meet with a colourful opening ceremony. We have taken every preparation to make the event a success," Joypurhat District Sports Association (DSA) general secretary Mahbub Morshed Alam Lebu told The Daily Star yesterday.

Each upazila is allowed to take part in eight disciplines out of 24 – two team and six individual disciplines. Lebu further informed that 670 athletes from five Joypurhat's upazilas are taking part in the inter-upazila competition, eyeing 118 gold medals in eight disciplines – football, kabaddi, badminton, chess, karate, table tennis, swimming, and athletics.

"Ahead of the Youth Games, the athletes have been preparing for one-and-a-half months as the upazila sports associations arranged training for better performances," Narsingdi DSA general secretary Shahinul Islam Bhuiya told The Daily Star, adding the local administration, police and other wings are involved with the district-level competitions.

Six Narsingdi upazilas will be participating in as many disciplines – athletics, chess, karate, taekwondo, football and volleyball.

"In the competition's last edition, we grabbed 10 gold medals in karate and taekwondo. We are hopeful of producing good results in the final phase this time," said Shahinul.

Ashkur Rahman Miku, the joint secretary general of Bangladesh Olympics Association (BOA), informed the champion and runner-up in each of the events will be awarded 1500 and 1000 takas, respectively, with BOA, the federations and divisional bodies to monitor the inter-upazila competitions.



Mahedi Hasan pays attention to Mohammad Rafique, the former national left-arm spinner who is working as Rangpur Riders' team mentor, during a practice session at the Bashundhara Sports Complex yesterday ahead of the ninth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), starting from January 6.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Disappointed for not having DRS'

SPORTS REPORTER

The year 2023 begins with focus shifting to the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) as the franchise-based T20 tournament is expected to set the tone for Bangladesh cricket in the coming days.

Although the upcoming ninth edition of the BPL, set to begin from January 6, will be on a smaller scale compared to the previous occasions due to various reasons, the cricketers are gearing up to experience the familiar rivalry of the domestic circuit.

Much like the previous occasion, the upcoming edition of the BPL will not involve the Decision Review System (DRS) until the knock-out stage, and the issue has raised questions ahead of the competition's opening.

Comilla Victorians head coach Mohammad Salahuddin expressed his disappointment over not having the DRS. He stated that the absence of the technology can have a huge impact on results.

"It's a big tournament, so obviously disappointed for not having the DRS technology. You never know teams can go on to lose the tournament over a decision," Salahuddin told the media yesterday.

"Also, since there was enough time before the tournament and the board now has a lot of money, I feel having DRS was certainly expected."

Comilla are the most successful franchise in the history of BPL, winning



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NURUL HASAN SOHAN, Rangpur Riders captain.

it three times, and Salahuddin dreams of having another trophy in the cabinet.

"There are only seven teams, so there is no scope of becoming second. You have to go to the field with the aim to become the number one. So, if all members of the team have the same belief, it gets easier for everyone in the team to head towards the right direction," Salahuddin added.

The other teams have also stated their preparation. Meanwhile, Rangpur Riders have taken one step forward to become the first franchise who have started training at their own ground. The Nurul Hasan Sohan-led side trained on the first day of the new year at the Bashundhara Sports Complex yesterday.

"We are very excited. Previously we used to have two-three hours allocated for the training sessions. Even if we wanted to, we were unable to practice longer. Now, since we have our own ground there is no such barrier for us," Sohan told the media yesterday.

"We started our training in the morning and we can do whenever we want and every player is able to work on their skills," he added.

Sohan, who led Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi club to the championship in the Dhaka Premier League and also won the title for Khulna Division in the first-class league, will have to prove his leadership quality for Rangpur in the upcoming edition.

"Obviously it feels good (getting the captaincy) but I think it is important to do well as a team. Our team is a mixture of both youth and experience. I think this is a very good platform and a big opportunity for the players to prove their worth," Sohan said.

Rangpur will play a practice game against Khulna Tigers on Wednesday before taking on Comilla Victorians at BPL's opening day on Friday.

'BFF board, not Salahuddin, rejected the award'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin claimed that the decision to reject the BSPA award conferred on him was not a personal one, instead made by the BFF executive committee, which he neither supported nor opposed.

Bangladesh Sports Press Association (BSPA), one of the sports journalists' associations of the country, awarded the legendary footballer as the second-best sports person of the country behind cricketer Shakib Al Hasan during its 60-year anniversary celebration on Friday night. The BSPA selected eight other sporting personalities for awards through a panel of judges.

But the BFF rejected the award and sent back the trophy and prize money to the BSPA after a board meeting on Saturday, later saying through a press release that it felt the second-best award was an insult to Salahuddin and to the country's football.

"I did not discuss it at all at the board meeting. It was not my subject," Salahuddin told The Daily Star when asked whether the BFF board had the authority to reject an award which was given to him for his contribution as a footballer.

"A few members of the board said that since I was the incumbent president of BFF, they could directly interfere with it (the award). I asked them to refrain from such an act, but they said that they were not discussing about Kazi Salahuddin, rather they were discussing about the BFF president," Salahuddin said.

"At that time, I left the meeting, and the meeting took the decision and sent the letter, which didn't bear my signature. I told them to overlook the matter, but they didn't listen to me. It was a decision of the board," the BFF boss added.

Asked whether he supported the decision, the BFF president said, "They (BSPA) made the decision, but I didn't speak; I neither protested it nor supported it. I can't make any comment on the board's decision because I have to accept it whether I like it or not."

BSPA, meanwhile, condemned BFF's stance through a press release issued yesterday.

It said that since the award was given to Salahuddin for his contribution as a footballer, not as BFF president, the BFF board did not have the authority to reject it. It also mentioned that rejecting the award while terming it as a 'farical award' also undermined the other awardees.



Former New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson, who returned to form with a double hundred in the first Test, plays football during a practice session on the eve of the second Test against Pakistan at the National Stadium in Karachi yesterday. A draw last week having stopped a run of defeats, both sides will be seeking to go one better in the second and final Test in Karachi, starting today.

PHOTO: AFP

Decisive Odegaard leads Arsenal to new heights

REUTERS

Any doubts whether a young Martin Odegaard could shoulder the responsibility of the captain's armband for Arsenal have been erased in half a season after he guided them to the top of the Premier League with a seven-point lead.

Odegaard, who turned 24 last month, has been Arsenal's most influential player this season, oozing confidence in midfield and fuelling the club's first real title challenge in years.

He leads the club's scoring charts with seven league goals and has five assists to boot, eclipsing his overall tally from the last campaign in just 15 games.

He was front and centre again on Saturday as Arsenal extended their lead over reigning champions Manchester City with a 4-2 win at Brighton & Hove Albion to end 2022 on a high and underline their title credentials.

The Norwegian scored Arsenal's second but impressed even more with a jaw-dropping assist from his own half for the fourth goal: a first-time through ball that carved open the defence and set Gabriel Martinelli on his way.

"Martin Odegaard knows what he's doing before this ball comes ... A lot of people don't see that pass, he's probably the only player on the pitch who sees that," said Sky Sports pundit Paul Merson.

"(City's) Kevin De Bruyne sees it, Odegaard sees it. But I don't think any other player in the Premier League sees it open up."

Having initially signed the midfielder on loan from Real Madrid, the 35 million euros (\$37.46 million) Arsenal paid to make his move permanent now looks a steal.



The fee was cheaper than the 42.5 million pounds (\$51.40 million) Arsenal paid in 2013 to sign Mesut Ozil from the Spanish club - the same team where Odegaard was hardly given the opportunity to establish himself.

Mikel Arteta's side had lacked a genuine playmaker since Ozil's acrimonious exit but Odegaard gives the north London club much

more than just a creative outlet in midfield with a sharp eye for a pass.

The Norway international is not averse to dropping deep to help out the defence, be it by providing an escape route under pressure from the opponents' press or by getting his socks dirty in winning the ball back.

"He's doing what we want him to do, to decide football matches and work really hard and deliver to the team what it needs in each moment of every game, which is different," Arteta said.

Odegaard's transformation has drawn parallels with former club captain Cesc Fabregas, who was tasked with leading the side at the tender age of 21 by ex-manager Arsene Wenger.

"I was desperate to sign him (when he was 15), fortunately, he is here now. He really is like a young Cesc Fabregas," Wenger told TV2.

"He has developed into a complete player. He's a very calm player who analyses the game well. He has his feet firmly planted on the ground."

Arsenal had been looking to appoint a full-time captain after Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang was stripped of the armband over a disciplinary breach last season.

And Arteta had no qualms about handing Odegaard the responsibility despite the presence of more senior players.