

TOURNAMENT FACTS

- This is the inaugural edition of the tournament, being hosted by South Africa.
- All 41 fixtures will be played in two venues -- Benoni and Potchefstroom.
- A total of 16 teams, divided into four groups, will be participating.
- Top three sides from each group will qualify for the Super Six round, where teams will be pooled in two groups of six. Group 1 will comprise the three teams each from Groups A and D, while Group 2 will have three teams each from Groups B and C.
- Bangladesh will play the opening game against Australia in Benoni today.
- Both the semifinals and the final will be played in Potchefstroom. The semifinals will be played on January 27 while the final is scheduled for January 29.
- Fans can follow the World Cup via ICC Digital Platforms.
- Fans from Bangladesh can follow select matches on Rabbithole.



Captains of the 16 teams pose with the trophy as the inaugural edition of the ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup is all set to begin in South Africa today. Bangladesh, following victories in both their warm-up games against hosts South Africa and India, will begin their World Cup campaign by taking on Australia in the tournament opener at Willowmoore Park in Benoni. PHOTO: ICC

Chattogram pitch continues to impress

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

The Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium maintained its reputation for producing high-scoring encounters as Fortune Barishal registered the second 200-plus total in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League in the first game of the tournament's Chattogram phase against Chattogram Challengers yesterday.

It turned out to be a batting paradise, with Barishal posting 202 for seven after being sent to bat, powered by Pakistan batter Iftikhar Ahmed's blistering 57 off just 26 balls which was punctuated by five sixes and three fours.

Courtesy of Iftikhar's late carnage, Barishal managed to score 63 runs in the last five overs of their innings. Afghan batter Ibrahim Zadran also added a quick 48 off 33 balls after openers Anamul Haque (30) and Mehedi Hasan Miraz (24), promoted to an opening slot, provided a flying start.

The trust in the surface from the batters was evident although Chattogram skipper Shuvagta Hom opted to field and was looking to chase considering the positive nature of the Chattogram pitch.

In reply, Chattogram managed to put up a fight and reached 81 for two in 11 overs after Usman Khan's 19-ball 36.

Hard-hitter Ziaur Rahman raised the home support's hopes by raining down sixes and remained unbeaten on 47 off 25 balls with four sixes and three fours, but it was not enough. The hosts fell short by 26 runs, ending up on 176 for four after 20 overs.

Low-scoring encounters have always proved an issue in previous editions of the BPL, but Chattogram proved to be a lifesaver with the surfaces on offer. This



time around, the port city is living up to its reputation again.

Despite being on the losing side, Chattogram's Ziaur was full of praise for the surface, adding that such pitches could help foster batters willing to emerge as hard-hitters, which the Tigers have sorely lacked in the shortest format for a long time.

"I think the habit is important. Once the wickets are better, power-hitting will come automatically. But if the surfaces are not good enough, you won't be able to hit no matter how good your technique is because you need the ball to come to bat," Ziaur told the media after the game.

However, despite the sporting surface, Khulna Tigers were unable to post a

decent total against Rangpur Riders in the night game yesterday.

Tamim Iqbal disappointed with a tentative batting approach and handed a return catch to Azmatullah Omarzai after being caught in two minds on a length delivery after scoring just one run.

Khulna's poor batting approach was a stark reminder that a positive mindset from the batters is important even if the surface plays well and executing rather chancing the bat at every delivery is key.

They are still searching for a first win after three games and were reeling on 80 for six inside 13 overs after being sent to bat. Even the batting-friendly track could not inspire them to a fighting total as they were eventually bowled out for 130 in 19.4 overs.

Dorielton wondergoal lifts 10-man Kings

SPORTS REPORTER

A show-stopping bicycle kick from Dorielton Gomes steered hosts Bashundhara Kings to a 1-0 win against Bangladesh Police FC at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday while Abahani signalled their intention to remain in the title race with a 5-1 drubbing of their Chattogram namesakes at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

A hard-fought win meant defending champions Bashundhara Kings made it to five straight wins, despite having to fight with 10 men against a strong Police FC, who held Abahani to a goalless draw in their previous match.

However, they kept their winning run intact thanks to a 27th-minute strike from Brazilian forward Dorielton, who met a perfect cross from Rakib Hossain to the far post with a bicycle kick that bulleted home.

The defending champions then held onto their



lead after being reduced to 10 men for the last 24 minutes.

In Cumilla, hosts Abahani shrugged off the initial pressure from Chittagong Abahani and dominated proceedings to bounce back in the title race, raising their tally to 11 points from five matches, four behind Bashundhara Kings.

Eleta Kingsley made early inroads in the 11th minute with a clever drive from the top of the box before Nigerian defender David Ifeoku equalised in the 32nd minute with a free-kick from outside the box.

After resumption, Abahani got a stranglehold, scoring four more goals through Mehedi Hasan, Kingsley, Daniel Colindres and Nabib Newaj Jibon -- who struck one goal apiece in a 28-minute span.

In Mymensingh, visitors Muktiyoddha Sangsad tasted their first win after five matches, edging newcomers Azampur FC Uttar. Nigerian winger Najeem Junior netting the all-important goal in the 60th minute.

China's charge at Australian Open

AFP, Melbourne

Gifted 17-year-old Shang Juncheng will lead a historic Chinese charge at the Australian Open next week -- more evidence of the growing strength of tennis in the Asian century.

Three male Chinese players including the teenager will compete in Melbourne in the main draw, a first at any Grand Slam since the Open era began in 1968, officials at the tournament and Chinese media said.

Former junior number one Shang -- also known as "Jerry" -- battled through qualifying and faces Oscar Otte of Germany in the first round, where he will be joined by fellow Chinese athletes Zhang Zhizhen and Wu Yibing.

There will also be seven Chinese players in the women's singles draw in Melbourne, led by the fast-emerging Zheng Qinwen, 20, who is ranked 30th in the world and touted as a possible future major champion.

Resurgent United seek revenge against City

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester United were outclassed by Manchester City in the last local derby but the mood could not be more different as they prepare to host their city rivals in the Premier League on Saturday in the middle of a remarkable run of form.

League leaders Arsenal, meanwhile, face another test of their credentials in a derby of their own away to Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday on a weekend where local rivalries could have a huge say in the title race.

Arsenal lead the standings on 44 points after 17 games, five ahead of second-placed City. United are fourth on 35 points while Tottenham, who have played one game more, are fifth on 33.

Since being thrashed 6-3 by City on Oct. 2, United have won 15 out of 18 matches in all competitions while losing only once, while they are on a run of eight consecutive victories.

Their resurgence has been led by in-form striker Marcus Rashford, who has scored seven goals in his last six matches, and midfielder



Casemiro.

The Brazilian was surprisingly left out of the line-up for the last derby but has started all 10 of United's league games since then and has added some much-needed stability, as well as aggression, to Erik ten Hag's midfield.

He has made more tackles than any player in the league's top six this season, according to statistics website FBref.com, and has contributed three assists in two goals despite being the team's most defensive midfielder.

Another key influence in United's turnaround is coach Erik ten Hag, who has been firm with players on

team discipline, dropping Rashford to the bench when he turned up late to a team meeting and banishing the now departed Cristiano Ronaldo from the squad for leaving a match early.

"Nobody is bigger than the team, everybody has to contribute to the team. That's not about 11 players but the whole squad. It's the team around the team," Ten Hag told radio station Talksport this week.

"Everyone has one aim and they're contributing to that and working hard for that with togetherness. When we keep this going, we can achieve a lot."

City have rarely reached the heights of that sparkling performance in October and are in stuttering form ahead of the derby, dropping points twice in their last four league matches while they slumped to a surprise 2-0 defeat at Southampton in the League Cup on Wednesday.

Coach Pep Guardiola was scathing of his team after the result, declaring: "I know my players well and today was not even close to what we are."



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Planners' Cricket Tournament 2023 was held yesterday at the Clemon Indira Road Cricket Academy in Khamarbari, Dhaka. Organised by the Bangladesh Institute of Planners, the tournament featured seven teams, formed by the seven URP Alumni Associations of seven different public universities in Bangladesh. BIP President Fazle Reza Sumon and General Secretary SM Mehedi Ahsan were present, among others, at the opening ceremony.