

Kings make it six in six

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings continued their perfect start to the Bangladesh Premier League with a 3-0 win away to Chittagong Abahani at the Birshreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

Rakib Hossain, Dorielton Gomez and Yeasin Arafat scored the goals as the defending champions moved to 18 points from six matches, six clear of second-placed Abahani and Sheikh Jamal.

Rakib opened the scoring with a delightful chip from the edge of the box in the fourth minute before Dorielton made it 2-0 seven minutes later with a powerful attempt from inside the box after running on to a cut-back from Yeasin, who wrapped up the win in the 70th minute.

The defeat left the port city side second from bottom with two points from five matches.

The other match of the day between Muktioddha Sangsad and Fortis FC ended in a 1-1 draw in Gopalganj, leaving Fortis on six points from five matches and Muktioddha on four points from six matches.

Four U-19 players in WT20 WC squad

STAR SPORT REPORT

Four members of the Bangladesh U-19 team earned a place in the squad for ICC Women's T20 World Cup, which will be held in South Africa next month.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board announced a 15-member team including Disha Biswas, Marufa Akter, Dilara Akter and Shorna Akter - four players currently playing in South Africa playing in the U-19 Women's T20 World Cup. There was no place, however, for Afia Protash, the opening batter who made an impression in the tournament.

The team will leave for Cape Town on January 23 for a training camp and two practice matches against Ireland.

The Bangladesh side will also play two warm-up matches against Pakistan (February 6 in Cape Town) and India (February 8 in Stellenbosch) before they kick off their World Cup campaign against Sri Lanka on February 12.

SQUAD: Nigar Sultana Joty (Captain), Marufa Akter, Dilara Akter, Fahima Khatun, Salma Khatun, Jahanara Alam, Shamima Sultana, Rumana Ahmed, Lata Mondol, Shorna Akter, Nahida Akter, Murshida Khatun, Ritu Moni, Disha Biswas, Sobhana Mostary



Bangladesh's Marufa Akter gets stumped after being beaten by South Africa off-spinner Kayla Reyneke in their first Super Six game of the Women's U-19 T20 World Cup at Senwes Park in Potchefstroom yesterday. Reyneke was the destroyer in chief, scalping four wickets to restrict the young Tigresses to a modest 106-run total, which the hosts chased down with five wickets and seven balls to spare.

PHOTO: TWITTER

The inexplicable case of Argentina's second coming

ATIQUE ANAM

Bangladesh is a queer case of polar extremes.

While a majority of the population continues to live in hardship, barely making ends meet in the face of the global economic crisis stemming from the aftereffects of the pandemic and exacerbated by Russia's war with Ukraine, there is a section of people who continue to get richer, profiting from the crisis of essentials and holding people hostage to market manipulation.

This may be a global trend, but what sets Bangladesh apart from much of the developing and developed world is the utter disregard for the privileged few in society towards the plight of the common people.

Take the case of the Argentine football team's purported visit to Bangladesh in June this year and it will be crystal clear how indifferent some people are to the ongoing economic hardship.

Our banks are struggling to open credit lines to import daily essentials owing to a sliding foreign reserve, the government is withdrawing subsidies on oil and gas to industries, and the prices of power and gas in households are being consistently increased -- all putting more pressure on the middle-and-lower-income families as inflation keeps rising. Take a look at the ever-extending queues for the OMS commodities on the streets and there should be no doubt about what it is all leading to.

As the World Bank foresees a global recession in 2023 and our government adopts belt-tightening policies at all levels, the idea of hosting a football match between two foreign nations, however popular they may be, is not just perplexing but downright indecent.

What can we realistically achieve from such a match if it does really take place? Will it create a resurgence in our football as is preached by some of our football officials? Not an iota of a chance. We all know what happened the last time Argentina came to Bangladesh, back in

2011, towards the end of Kazi Salahuddin's first four-year term at the BFF helm.

Bangladesh's FIFA ranking at that time was 139. Twelve years later, Bangladesh are languishing at 192nd position -- just 19 places from the bottom of the table -- having endured a freefall in the intervening period and never really looking like taking an upturn.

Salahuddin has been re-elected to the top position of the country's football three times since, and all that he can boast about is regional successes in women's football and being able to stage the top-tier league regularly.



The men's team, which is what countries' footballing standing is identified mostly by, has not been able to make it to the semifinal stage of the SAFF Championship even once over these years.

However, the biggest failure of the Salahuddin-led committees has been a failure to produce quality footballers from the grassroots level, owing partly to a stagnant and irregular football scene outside the capital. The inability to set up a decent football academy due to a lack of funds is another issue that, experts believe, has stunted the potential growth of the country's football.

If the allegations of misappropriation of funds and the lack of transparency in audits of the accounts are thrown into the mix, we get a fair idea of what the country's football is going through and where it is headed.

While there was euphoria among the

masses regarding Argentina's match against Nigeria on September 6, 2011, the BFF was in a spot of bother when it was asked to clear the payments for the Argentina team on the eve of the team's arrival. IFIC Bank, whose chairman is the owner of Beximco Group -- the main sponsors for that match -- bailed the BFF out with a loan of Tk 8 crore.

12 years after that event, the BFF still owes IFIC Bank more than Tk 5.4cr in principal and interest, according to BFF high-ups. That match reportedly cost 40 crore taka. And, barring a mere pittance, most of that amount went out of the country as we did not have either the marketing tools or the ability to sell the match to foreign sponsors or broadcasters.

There is no reason to believe much has changed in that regard, except for the fact that Argentina will come this time as world champions, meaning their price tag is much higher.

Salahuddin recently told the media that it would take around seven million dollars at least to bring the Albiceleste to Dhaka, with the whole package, including expenses for the other team, very well seeing costs balloon to as much 10 million dollars.

While the BFF initially backtracked a bit after having announced that Argentina's visit was a sure shot, they have since claimed that the negotiations with their Argentine counterparts were on the right track. Salahuddin, along with his colleagues at the federation, has always remained confident that sponsorship for this match will not be an issue.

How can they be so certain of arranging sponsors for such an expensive venture when the federation struggles to find a half-decent sponsor to run the leagues or even a football academy? Isn't it time we lay the foundations to produce our own Messis and Di Marias instead of burning all that money for just a 90-minute spectacle?

It all begs the question whether the desperation over bringing Argentina to Bangladesh is just a case sportswashing for Bangladesh and Bangladesh football.

End of the Joy-ride?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced the 21-member central contract list for the year 2023 on Saturday, and although there were no major surprises in store, one particular choice did leave scope to wonder.

Youngster Mahmudul Hasan Joy and the 26-year-old Yasir Ali, who were handed central contracts for the first time last year, were dropped just a year later.

"Their performances were not up to the mark and that's why they were left out. But they do have the chance to get back in the list by performing in the domestic circuit," BCB chief selector Minhajul Abedin told The Daily Star about the four cricketers -- Shadman Islam, Mohammad Naim, Joy and Yasir -- who failed to retain their central contracts.

As Yasir yielded a total of only 337 runs at a 16.04 average in five Tests, seven ODIs and 10 T20Is in 2022, with single digit scores in eight of the 10 T20Is and a 55-run knock in a Test being his highest score across formats, the exclusion of the right-hander seemed justified.

However, the 22-year-old Joy, who only featured in the longest format for the Tigers so far, may feel hard done by. Joy featured in seven of the Tigers' 10 Tests last year and the youngster managed to grind out a few good knocks despite not having the most solid technique.

His 78 in Bangladesh's historic Test win over New Zealand at Mount Maunganui in January last year and a marathon seven-plus-hour long 137 -- his career-best score -- on the tour of South Africa in March provided glimpses into how the right-hander could make up for his gap in technique with his tenacity and determination.

Joy struggled with consistency, with only one fifty in the five Tests played since the century in Durban, and was understandably dropped for the final two Tests in 2022, against India.

His replacement Zakir Hasan did not fail to grab the opportunity, scoring a century on his Test debut and then following it up with a fifty in the second game -- performances that helped him land a central contract for the first time.

It could make one wonder whether Joy would still have squeezed into the 21-member list had Zakir not turned up with such performances.

However, from how things turned out for Joy, Zakir and Hasan Mahmud -- the two new inclusions in the contract list -- could take some lessons and take any and all the chances that come their way.

BCB CENTRAL CONTRACT (2023)		
» Test, ODI, T20I	Shakib Al Hasan, Liton Das, Taskin Ahmed and Mehedi Hasan Miraz	Islam and Mustafizur Rahman,
» ODI	Mahmudullah Riyad	» ODI
» ODI and Test	Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim	» T20I
» Test and T20I	Najmul Hossain Shanto, Nurul Hasan Sohan	Nasum Ahmed, Mosaddek Hossain, Mahedi Hasan, Hasan Mahmud
» Test	Mominul Haque, Taijul Islam, Ebadot Hossain, Khaled Ahmed and Zakir Hasan	» New inclusion
» ODI and T20I	Afif Hossain, Shoriful	Zakir Hasan and Hasan Mahmud
		» Excluded
		Yasir Ali, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Shadman Islam and Mohammad Naim

Murray runs out of steam

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Andy Murray's brave Australian Open run ground to a halt against Roberto Bautista Agut, the Spaniard fending off the fatigued former world number one 6-16-7(7)6-3-6-4 in the third round to advance on Saturday.

After back-to-back five-set wins over Matteo Berrettini and Thanasi Kokkinakis, a ragged Murray hung tough against the 24th seed but was gradually worn down over the course of a three-and-a-half hour slog at a floodlit Margaret Court Arena.

Murray's previous match against Kokkinakis, which ended past four in the morning after nearly five hours of play, left him with little sleep, a bad back and a slew of blisters that needed draining in his feet.

"My feet didn't feel great. My legs were actually OK ... but I was struggling with my lower back," Murray told reporters. "That was affecting my serve and that was really the main thing today."

It has been a long and punishing road back for the three-times Grand Slam champion since being fitted with a metal

hip. But he was encouraged by his week at Melbourne Park, if disappointed not to reach the second week.

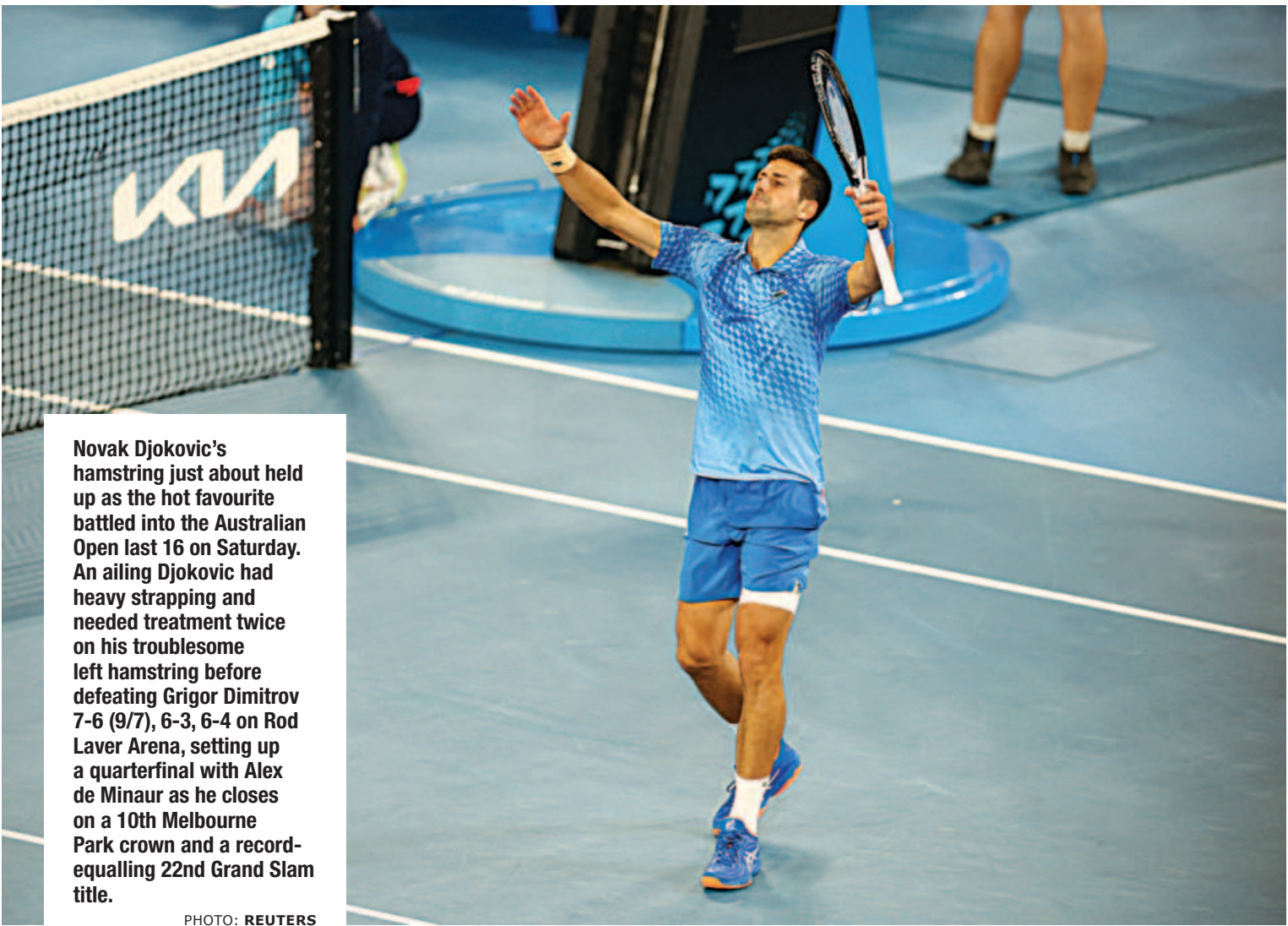
"Lots of mixed emotions, I feel like I gave everything I had to this event, so I'm proud of that," he said. "But, yeah, I'm also disappointed because I put loads of work into the beginning of this year and was playing well enough to have a really good run, have a deep run. I'm disappointed because I feel like I could have gone quite a bit further."

Earlier, an ailing Novak Djokovic said every moment counted now that he was in the "last stage" of his career, after battling past Grigor Dimitrov 7-6 (9/7), 6-3, 6-4.

Djokovic needed treatment twice on his troublesome hamstring.

"Every season counts I guess now, when you come to the last stage, the last quarter, of your career," the 35-year-old said. "Obviously you start appreciating and valuing each tournament more because you might not have a lot left in the tank."

"I've been truly fortunate to do what I love, I love the sport, I love competing. It's been almost 20 years now of professional sport. I can't be more grateful than I am."



Novak Djokovic's hamstring just about held up as the hot favourite battled into the Australian Open last 16 on Saturday. An ailing Djokovic had heavy strapping and needed treatment twice on his troublesome left hamstring before defeating Grigor Dimitrov 7-6 (9/7), 6-3, 6-4 on Rod Laver Arena, setting up a quarterfinal with Alex de Minaur as he closes on a 10th Melbourne Park crown and a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam title.

PHOTO: REUTERS