

# ‘Liton is the superstar of Bangladesh’

SPORTS REPORTER

Comilla Victorians batter Mohammad Rizwan is one of the big foreign inclusions in the ongoing edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), and how he plays the anchor role, allowing his team to build around him, has come under the spotlight in Bangladesh too.

The Comilla opener divulged on what he thinks of the role, citing that he often finds it embarrassing.

“It is a very difficult role. Sometimes it looks very embarrassing but I do what I know. Because what the team requires from me, I will do those things. Because my coach, my skipper, my owners, and my whole team at Comilla are happy with my performance,” Rizwan, who is ranked second in the ‘T20I batters’ list, told reporters today and also informed that his ideal batter is AB de Villiers.

“Same in Pakistan and everywhere. Whenever someone comes and hires you they have demands from you. I assess the conditions and discuss these kinds of things. Sometimes it is embarrassing because in T20s they love sixes and 35 or 40-ball 70 runs. But for me it is important that we can win the match,” Rizwan added.

Liton Das, who plays alongside Rizwan, has been on song at the other end for Comilla, putting up big scores recently. The Pakistan star was full of praise for Liton and their coming together has been good for the other teammates too, according to Rizwan.



“Everyone knows Liton is the superstar of Bangladesh. For the last couple of years he has been performing well and he is in form now. Me and Liton are trying to communicate things, although it is a short time (playing in BPL). We are trying to make things easier for others as well,” he said.

Rizwan was joined by fellow Pakistan star Naseem Shah at Comilla yesterday although Naseem had initially been roped in by Khulna Tigers. Rizwan said that although Naseem arrived, the atmosphere the players try to create is to bond as a family.

“You will make your team like a family and Naseem is obviously in rhythm with the Pakistan team and we have a good combination in Pakistan as well,” Rizwan said further.

Players like Rizwan coming here help out youngsters wanting to learn from them. Rizwan reserved praise for spinner Tanvir Islam.

“The guys from Bangladesh are very keen to learn. I am looking at many guys in the future for Bangladesh and that’s good. Tanvir, the left-arm spinner, is very good. The Pakistani players sit together and we talk about the players and Bangladesh guys. They said, Bangladesh guys come to us and ask about the questions and pressures and those kinds of things. And we are trying here to explain what we know and share with the guys,” he added.



**Bangladesh’s ace left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman was seen gearing up for a return at the Academy Ground in Mirpur under the supervision of former BCB physio Julian Calefatto, who has recently been appointed as head of BCB’s rehab centre. On Sunday, Mustafizur practiced for the first time since he had to walk out of the ground after bowling just a solitary over in their first Chattogram phase game against Fortune Barishal due to a hand injury. The pacer was also said to be suffering from a hamstring injury by the Comilla team management, forcing him to miss the rest of the Chattogram phase.**

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# Swiatek, Gauff out, Tsitsipas soldiers on

AFP, Melbourne

Stefanos Tsitsipas battled into the Australian Open’s last eight on Sunday but women’s top seed Iga Swiatek and a tearful Coco Gauff became the latest big-name victims.

Swiatek’s defeat to Elena Rybakina made it the first Grand Slam since the Open era began in 1968 to lose the top two seeds in both the men’s and women’s draws before the quarter-finals.

That left Greece’s Tsitsipas as the highest remaining men’s seed at three, and he avoided the fate of Rafael Nadal and Casper Ruud with a dogged victory over Jannik Sinner.

Tsitsipas, who is pursuing a first major crown, defeated the Italian 15th seed 6-4, 6-4, 3-6, 4-6, 6-3 to set up a quarter-final with the unseeded Jiri Lehecka.

“It was a long match, I felt like I spent an entire century on this court playing tennis,” said the 24-year-old Tsitsipas, who has seen the draw open up for him with six of the top 10 seeds out.

“What a great night. That was superb, ‘a ripper’ as they say here.”

Czech world number 71 Lehecka defeated sixth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime in four sets in yet another surprise result.

The 21-year-old Lehecka was knocked out in the first round at the four majors last year but was



too hot for the Canadian, winning 4-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/3).

“After losing in the first round last year, if someone had told me before the tournament that I would be playing like this, I wouldn’t have believed them,” said Lehecka.

“I’m super happy and excited.”

Giant-killer Sebastian Korda surged into a maiden Grand Slam quarter-final and faces 18th-seeded Karen Khachanov of Russia.

The American 29th seed came through a rollercoaster 10-point deciding tiebreak to beat 10th seed Hubert Hurkacz 3-6, 6-3, 6-2, 1-6, 7-6 (10/7).

Korda, whose father Petr won the title in 1998, produced one of the performances of his career to upset two-time Australian Open finalist Daniil Medvedev in the third round.

The women’s draw also has an unfamiliar look, after a day of shocks.

Wimbledon champion Rybakina swept past the 2022 French and US Open winner Swiatek 6-4, 6-4 in 1hr 29min at a stunned Rod Laver Arena.

Moscow-born Kazakh Rybakina, seeded 22, moves on to a last-eight encounter with Jelena Ostapenko.

World number one and hot favourite Swiatek admitted Rybakina deserved to win.

“I felt the pressure,” Swiatek, 21, said. “I felt that I didn’t want to lose instead of wanting to win.”

Swiatek, who dominated women’s tennis last year and is already a three-time major champion, added: “I felt today that I don’t have that much left to fight even more.”

She follows second seed Ons Jabeur out the Melbourne exit door, the Tunisian having gone out in the second round in another surprise.

Latvian 17th seed Ostapenko provided the second upset of a crazy few minutes by knocking out seventh seed Gauff 7-5, 6-3 on neighbouring Margaret Court Arena.

# ‘Perfect day’ for Cologne

AFP, Berlin

Fans of Bundesliga side Cologne were in full voice on Saturday, celebrating their 7-1 demolition of Werder Bremen, the team’s biggest Bundesliga win in 40 years.

The home fans sang “let’s take the lederhosen off those Bavarians”, a nod to Tuesday’s clash away at German champions Bayern Munich.

The win was the Cologne’s biggest in the league since they defeated Kickers Offenbach 8-1 in the 1983-84 season.

Playing their first game in 10 weeks after German football’s winter break, Cologne scored five goals in the first 36 minutes.

Bremen’s Germany striker Niclas Füllkrug pulled one back before the break, but Cologne added two more in the second half.

Former Borussia Dortmund striker Steffen Tigges and Tunisia international Ellyes Skhiri scored two apiece for Cologne, along with strikes from Linton Maina and Denis Huseinbasic.

An own goal from Bremen’s Marco Friedl completed the rout.

# Napoli edge closer to the dream

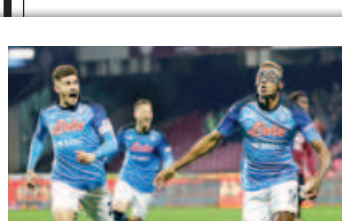
AGENCIES

Following their 2-0 win over Salernitana on Saturday, Napoli moved closer to achieving the dream of winning the Serie A for the first time in 33 years.

Napoli further extended their grip on the Serie A title race by beating local rivals Salernitana to temporarily move 12 points ahead of the chasing pack.

Goals from Giovanni Di Lorenzo and Victor Osimhen immediately either side of half-time made sure that Napoli will be at least nine points clear at the halfway point of the season after a straight-forward win in soaking Salerno.

“I’m proud to be the captain of this team. We have a group of amazing players who have had a brilliant first half of the season. We need to keep going with the same mentality to achieve our goal,” Lorenzo said.



Luciano Spalletti’s side now have to wait until their closest rivals AC Milan take on Champions League-chasing Lazio in Rome on Tuesday to know just how far in front they will be after

collecting 50 points in 19 matches.

Inter Milan are a further point behind their city rivals and will move provisionally into second place if they beat Empoli on Monday.

Napoli do not have to worry about Juventus who had been ahead of Inter on goal difference but were docked 15 points on Friday for illicit use of transfers to boost their balance sheet.

Save the ruling being overturned on appeal later this year, Juve are out of the race, making Napoli’s bid for a first league crown since 1990 that much simpler.

# FIFA bans Sri Lanka FA

AFP, Melbourne

Football’s governing body FIFA has suspended Sri Lanka’s national federation, it said Sunday, a month after issuing it with a “red notice” over governance issues.

That warning came after the Ministry of Sports introduced a raft of regulations that reportedly compromised the autonomy and independence of national sports bodies, including the Football Federation of Sri Lanka (FFSL).

This month the FFSL held an election, which reportedly fell short of standards agreed upon with FIFA and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), in which an ally of the sports minister became chair. In a letter Sunday, FIFA said the FFSL was suspended “until further notice”.

The suspension prevents Sri Lanka from taking part in international competitions.



Dhaka Twelve players try to catch a Matlab Thunder raider during the first match of the second round of Corporate Women’s Kabaddi League at the National Kabaddi Stadium in Paltan yesterday. The Dhaka outfit lead the table with 12 points from six matches, five of those wins coming in the first round held earlier in the month. State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Rasel had inaugurated the event in the evening.

PHOTO: BKF