

Super League to begin sans national stars

SPORTS REPORTER

The CCDM released the fixture list for the Super League phase of the Dhaka Premier League yesterday, with Abahani and Mohammedan set to face off on the first day of the fixtures on May 1.

In the 15 matches of the Super League, slated to be played from May 1 till 14th, each of the top six teams will meet each other once. Abahani finished the initial league stage with 20 points, as many as Sheikh Jamal, but lead the table courtesy of a superior net run-rate.

The Super League of the DPL will begin after the Eid-ul-Fitr vacation ends.

However, national-team players will be unavailable for the crucial stage, with the Tigers slated to start a short camp in Sylhet on April 26 or 27 ahead of their departure for England on May 1 to play an ODI series against Ireland, which is part of the ICC ODI Super League.

While most of national-team stars such as Shakib Al Hasan and Rony Taludkar of Mohammedan and Mushfiqur Rahim of Prime Bank will be away on national duty, Abahani can count on the experience of Afif Hossain, Mohammad Naim and Anamul Haque Bijoy for the Super League phase as they are out of the national set-up for the time being.

Liton Das and Mustafizur Rahman, engaged in the Indian Premier League, will join the team in England ahead of the series.

Middling finish for Pushpita, Ashikuzzaman

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Ashikuzzaman finished 41st among 86 archers in the qualification round of the compound men's event as the Archery World Cup Stage-1 got underway in Antalya yesterday.

Ashikuzzaman, the lone male compound archer from Bangladesh, scored 586, 13 behind top-placed Mathias Fullerton of Denmark.

Pushpita Zaman, the lone women's compound archer from Bangladesh, scored 570 to finish 48th among 65 competitors. India's Jyothi Surekha Vennam topped the table with 593 points.

The elimination round of both the men's and women's compound events will be held on Thursday while the qualification rounds of men's and women's recurve events are scheduled to take place today, with Hakim Ahmed Rubel, Sagor Islam, Ram Krishna Shaha and Abdur Rahman Alif taking part in the men's event and Diya Siddique featuring in the women's recurve event.



Are we destined only to watch the downfall?

BISHWAJIT ROY

Nowadays, hardly anybody shows interest in Bangladesh's declining football scene unless the women's or girls' teams deliver something special.

However, Bangladesh football took centre stage and dominated headlines for the last few weeks, but for all the wrong reasons.

It all started at the end of March, when the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), citing financial constraints, pulled its team from the 2024 AFC Women's Olympic Football Qualifying Tournament.

Following that, a FIFA-imposed suspension on BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag "for having used false and/or falsified documents to justify payments made by the BFF with FIFA funds" triggered intense criticism from every nook and cranny and lay bare the lack of proper governance under the leadership of federation president Kazi Salahuddin.

Yet, the Salahuddin-led committee appeared indifferent to any criticism and the way they washed their hands of the Shohag controversy after an executive meeting on Monday led many to question if they were destined to simply watch the downfall of the nation's once most popular sport.

During a 20-minute press meet, BFF senior vice-president and finance committee chairman Abdus Salam Murshedy was in an even more dismissive mood than his president regarding their responsibility.

He not only said that "if there is forgery, he [Shohag] did it individually" and that

"the finance committee would not take any blame". But he also reminded reporters about the difficulties of taking any decision against this elected body due to FIFA's strict supervision.

The BFF came to the conclusion that any wrongdoing happened on account of Shohag, as if the general secretary rather than the all-powerful BFF president was calling the shots. Still, they formed an inquiry committee with their own men to unearth, in their words, "what happened and why it happened".

Whispers about financial irregularities in the BFF have been prevalent for a while and this presented an opportunity for them to clear the air by inviting an independent inquiry committee.

An idea of what happened can be gleaned from FIFA's exhaustive 51-page findings, but for the greater interest of the game, there is a need to know why it happened and who was responsible.

The BFF, as a professional body, must have procedures in place to deal with any financial issue. One man cannot be solely responsible for everything.

Salahuddin also did not deny that there were faults in the system.

So how then can those involved in the system unearth the truth? If the BFF was sincere, they could have invited an independent inquiry committee to unearth the facts.

"I didn't even know that they bought a bus [for the women's football team] because it was purchased by the purchase committee. The cheque is signed by any two of three and I sign after Murshedy signs," Salahuddin told The Daily Star last Saturday when asked about the irregularities in repairing and installing water pipes at the BFF House.

"Everybody in the BFF knows everything hundred per cent," he added.

The statements clearly indicated that BFF followed a procedure when it came to handling such things and a professional like Murshedy, who is the managing director of a big corporate house, must know in detail how things happen in an organisation of such magnitude.

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Instead, the BFF executive committee has decided that Shohag will not get any opportunities to work with the federation in the future. But should they have first allowed him to give his explanations to an independent inquiry committee?

There was a lot of hope when Salahuddin came to the helm of the BFF as many believed the champion striker would be able to restore the game to its previous stature. Now serving his fourth consecutive term since 2008, he brought more misery than glory to the game.

Now the question is whether he further damages his image by sweeping the issue under the rug or shows bravery and clears the air by taking responsibility for the mess in Bangladesh football.

MSC storm into semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Falling giants Mohammedan SC stormed into the semifinals of the Federation Cup with an emphatic 4-1 win over Chittagong Abahani in their quarterfinal clash at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

Souleymane Diabate, captain of the Black and Whites, struck twice after Nigerian Emanuel Sunday and Uzbek Muzaffarjon Muzaffarov netted one apiece in the scorching heat to set a semifinal clash against Bashundhara Kings.

Nigerian Candy Augustine netted the consolation strike from the spot for former Fed Cup runners-up Ctg Abahani, who made it to the semis of the competition once in the last four editions.

Shrugging off their disappointing 1-1 draw against Bangladesh Police FC in the previous encounter in the Bangladesh Premier League, 10-time Fed Cup champions Mohammedan bounced back strongly against Chittagong Abahani to take the lead in 20th minute through a nice strike from Emanuel inside the box, capitalising on a superb cut-back from Emon Shahriar.

The motijheel-based outfit kept creating chances before Muzaffarov doubled the margin from a corner kick which took a slight deflection off Ctg Abahani defender Imran Hossain Rimon before finding it's way back into the net.

After resumption, Mohammedan widened the margin three minutes into the second half with a nice build-up through the wings. Spaniard Daniel Ricardo whipped a cross from the left flank and right-back Mehedi Hasan squared it to unmarked Diabate, who did not make a mistake to tap it into the near post. He struck from outside the box in the 70th minute to kill the match.

‘Criticism helps us work more’

REUTERS

Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi said he had no qualms being a lightning rod for criticism after their Serie A form nosedived as long as his players are protected ahead of a Champions League quarterfinal that could define their season.

Inter have not won in their last five league games, suffering four defeats to fall out of the top four and sit two points behind fourth-placed AC Milan, leading to reports Inzaghi could be sacked.

However, they have done well in the Champions League, advancing from the group stage at the expense of LaLiga leaders Barcelona before eliminating Porto in the last 16.

Inter have a 2-0 lead over Benfica ahead of the second leg at the San Siro on Wednesday as they look to reach the semifinals for the first time since they were crowned European champions in 2010.

"Before Barcelona, as before Porto, it (the criticism) was the same, personally I am used to it. Better they criticise me than the players," Inzaghi told reporters on Tuesday.

"Criticism helps us to work more and more. In the league we have made insufficient progress. Like other teams we had problems.

"Now we have to focus on giving our fans an important night that would allow us to finish among the top four in Europe and that would be an important milestone."

Several Inter players have contracts that expire at the end of the season but Inzaghi played down the significance of that.

"We have several players' contracts expiring but I see them working daily and working well," he added.

"Being criticised is part of our job, we have to be good and strong and think about the next match."

On-fire Haaland shows what Bayern are missing

AFP, Berlin

When Erling Haaland takes the field for Manchester City on Wednesday in Munich, the Norwegian will face the club who tried to sell the farm to buy him but failed.

Bayern's late first-leg capitulation in Manchester means the six-time winners need to overcome a 3-0 deficit to make it through to the semis.

Not only must Bayern do so against Europe's in-form team, but they need to somehow find the goals that the toothless front-line have lacked in 2023.

Midway through the second half at the Etihad, Bayern, 1-0 down after a Rodri wonder goal, were dominating possession and had carved out several chances, but failed to put any away.

Then, in a six-minute period, the brutally efficient Haaland showed what Bayern were missing up front, setting up a goal and then scoring another to put City on course for the semifinals.

While Haaland's flurry likely sunk Bayern's Champions League hopes then and there, the seeds for their struggles were planted late last season, when the German champions tried and failed to sign the Norwegian. Bayern sporting director Hasan



Salihamidzic was not alone in his desire to sign Haaland, but his open courting of the Norwegian put noses out of joint, particularly that of star striker Robert Lewandowski.

In 2021, a clip emerged of Salihamidzic on the sidelines of a Bayern-Dortmund clash, speaking with an assistant coach after Haaland scored twice in seven minutes.

"How good is Haaland? He's a machine. I'll call his agent tomorrow."

In that match, Haaland had given Dortmund a 2-0 lead, Bayern fought back to win 4-2 -- thanks to a Lewandowski hat-trick.

Bayern were willing to tear up their carefully constructed salary structure

to sign the Norwegian in the summer of 2022.

Lewandowski's camp said the striker felt slighted by the German club's failure to offer him a longer-term deal, with Bayern seemingly distracted by their pursuit of Haaland.

Lewandowski had scored more than 40 goals for Bayern in seven straight seasons, scoring a remarkable 344 goals in 375 appearances.

Ultimately, Bayern's wandering eye cost them both Haaland and Lewandowski.

Despite a history of scoring against Bayern -- Haaland has six goals and two assists in eight games against the Bavarians -- Tuesday's 3-0 victory was the striker's first win against the German champions. He lost seven from seven with Dortmund.

Since moving to City, Haaland has been spectacular, smashing records on the way to scoring 47 goals in 40 appearances.

Coming into Wednesday's clash, the Norwegian has somehow managed to up his form, with a scarcely believable 14 goals in his past six games.

Bayern have eight across the same period, four of which came in one match against a wilting Dortmund.



PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY

Even though goal-machine Erling Haaland scored one and set-up another for Bernardo Silva in Manchester City's Champions League quarterfinal first leg against Bayern Munich at the Etihad last week, it was the latter who drew more attention with his dribbling and overall flair. With City already 3-0 up in the tie, the Bavarians remain at the risk of an utter humiliation if the duo once again turn up with a similar performance at the Allianz Arena tonight.