

City now the favourites

STAR SPORTS DESK

Before Wednesday, Arsenal had things under control in the Premier League title race. All they had to do was to not relinquish that control was to travel to Manchester and beat defending champions Manchester City at the Etihad Stadium.

However, it definitely was easier said than done, proven how Pep Guardiola's men outclassed leaders Gunners in a dominant 4-1 win to cut the gap to two points while playing two games less than Mikel Arteta's troops.

As things stand, the equation for City is now simple. They can afford to lose one of their final seven games and still clinch their fifth Premier League title in six seasons with a one point cushion over Arsenal, given Arsenal don't drop any more points.

Guardiola's side can mathematically win the Premier League title by mounting five wins and two draws in their remaining seven games, courtesy of their superior goal difference.

For Arsenal, however, things are not in their hands anymore. Not only they need to win rest of their five games, but also hope for City to lose



Wednesday could have been one of those rare days when Manchester City triumphed and Erling Haaland did not make it into the scoresheet. But the Norwegian would not let that happen as he set a new record of 33 Premier League goals in a 38-game season deep into stoppage time to take his tally in all competitions for the campaign to 49. Haaland's late goal in City's 4-1 victory over Arsenal saw him surpass Mohamed Salah, who held the record for most goals in a 38-game Premier League season with 32 strikes in the 2017-18 season for Liverpool. With seven league games remaining, Haaland requires just two more goals to have the record outright by surpassing the joint record by Andrew Cole and Alan Shearer of 34 goals in 1993/94 and 1994/95 respectively, when the season comprised of 42 matches.

PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY



two or play three drawn matches.

Arsenal can't afford to drop points in this situation. If they win all remaining five games, they will finish at 90 points. They are winless from the last four games and they have to put on their best version because a couple of games are tricky like Chelsea and Brighton. Brighton are the side that will face both Arsenal and Man City. Arsenal can hope for an upset from the Seagulls and they have the ability to achieve this.

City travel to Fulham, Brentford, Brighton and Everton while they will be hosting West Ham United, Leeds United and Chelsea. It does not seem that City have any big thorn on their way to the summit.

However, the one thing that Arsenal could be hopeful about is how the Premier League has a history of not being decided till the final whistle of the final match of the league gets blown and that City have a tough schedule in the coming weeks as they face Real Madrid in the Champions League semifinals. But given the depth that Guardiola has in his squad, rotating the squad and still maintaining top gear seems to be the least of the worries for City, who boast a 49-goal (all competitions) Erling Haaland.

Arsenal can only do is focus on winning their last five games and leave it on Man City. If glory is written then it will automatically find a way to reach the Emirates.

'Have to understand how much the team requires Riyad'

SPORTS REPORTER

Having performed various roles with the national side over the years, Abahani coach and BCB director Khaled Mahmud has seen a change of seasons, changes in thoughts, colours and perceptions in and around the national team more than most.

However, he felt it was not curious that Mahmudullah Riyad was out of national-team contention with it being a World Cup year, fueling the media's speculation about whether the end of Riyad's international career had arrived.

Mahmudullah has not exactly shined with his performances in this year's Dhaka Premier League, scoring 284 runs at an average of 28.40 and a strike-rate of 88.47 in 11 outings for Mohammedan.

"I am not in the national set-up, so I don't know about the planning. Of course, Riyad is a very important player and has been witness to many performances and won many matches. But honestly, though I am not involved with the team, personally I don't see him in the World Cup team at the moment. Because if he was, he would have featured in recent series. There are not many days left until the World Cup," Mahmud said yesterday.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan had said after the England series that some players were to be 'rested' so new players could be tried in a bid to increase the pool of talent

Overall, we have to understand how much the team requires him [Mahmudullah Riyad] under the current circumstances or if his replacements are performing. If the team is satisfied [right now], Riyad will have less of an opportunity.

KALED MAHMUD SUJON
BANGLADESH CRICKET BOARD (BCB) DIRECTOR
on Mahmudullah Riyad's chances of earning his place back into the side.

for the World Cup.

Towhid Hridoy and Rony Talukdar came in to the side along with Yasir Ali, with Rony replacing the injured Zakir Hasan. Unable to get a game, Afif Hossain too faced the drop in the Ireland series.

There have been key performances especially from Hridoy and Mushfiqur Rahim, who found a new lease of life batting at number six.

For a major chunk of his career, Riyad had to perform the role of a finisher. If the team management was looking for options in that role, they are finding them.

Riyad's approach, despite crucial

knocks, did not impress due to the lack of consistency in terms of the approach the team required. Mahmud spoke of Riyad being able to fare well in the DPL's Super League stage, but more importantly, pondered whether the national team needed his services.

"Riyad batted at an important position, where you can become hero or zero. He got a taste of both. There have been matches where he single-handedly won Bangladesh the game. Overall, we have to understand how much the team requires him under current circumstances and whether his replacements are performing. If the team is satisfied, Riyad will have less of an opportunity."

"But if that doesn't happen, we all believe he is an experienced cricketer who, if backed, can perform. There is still time and it's not like Riyad is completely out," he opined.

He opined that it would be a mistake to suddenly call Riyad up before the World Cup, saying that if he was in the team's plans then the idea should have been to give him matches.

It has been communicated to Afif what is required of him for him to get into the team, but was the same done for Riyad? Mahmud does not know, but believed that players deserve a healthy exit and that if it had been explained to Riyad, the player would understand.

Match scenario simulations THE FOCUS IN SYLHET

SPORTS REPORTER

The first day of the closed-door training camp of the Bangladesh cricket team under head coach Chandika Hathurusingha was focused on adapting to match scenarios at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Liton Das and Mustafizur Rahman, who are playing in the Indian Premier League, were two of the absentees while Shakib Al Hasan is away on a break. However, the other remaining members of the squad sweated it out in the training session.

The access to cover the training session for the media was limited to just 30 minutes. The Tigers worked on specific areas keeping in mind the upcoming ODI series against Ireland in the United Kingdom next month.

Hathurusingha and the team management opted to hold the camp in Sylhet bearing in mind the relatively bouncy tracks which are similar to what the Tigers are expected to face in Chelmsford, England.

Pacer Mrittunjoy Chowdhury, who is the only new face in the Bangladesh squad, reiterated that aspect of settling the camp in Sylhet could help the Tigers as the pitches there have a reputation of offering adequate

bounce for preparation. The left-arm seamer also pointed out that there are still many areas the visitors will need to adjust in England.

"Look, as you said, the pitches in England are bouncy. So in that context, the pitches in Sylhet have a reputation [of being similar to the ones in England]. We practised today [yesterday] and there was bounce on the surface which might help us a bit to prepare for England. But it won't help entirely since it's not possible to have exactly the same pitches here. But so far, it went well for us," Mrittunjoy told the media yesterday.

The 21-year-old went on to elaborate on the activities done on the first day of the training camp, revealing that the batters, in particular, were given specific tasks during the session, with an onus on the batting in the first 10 overs and at the back-end of the innings.

"Today's [Thursday] practice session was about training within match situations; How to play in the first 10 overs and to play in the back end of the innings. The batters went according to their batting orders, and according to the plans assigned, and those who came later down the order were instructed to hit. We only tried to adjust with the match scenario today," he said.



Lionel Messi, whose contract at PSG is due to expire in June, returned to training for the Parisians on Wednesday following a sojourn in Barcelona with his family. Even though Messi's entourage made it clear that his trip had nothing to do with his possible return to Barcelona, it did fuel speculations as it remains unclear as to where he will be playing his football next season.

Junior hockey team to play 10 matches in India

SPORTS REPORTER

Keeping their sights on a berth in the FIH Junior World Cup, the Bangladesh U-21 national hockey team are all set for extended preparations in India before heading to Oman to participate in the Junior Asia Cup, scheduled to get underway from May 23. Mamunur Rashid's charges are expected to play 10 practice matches against teams from Haryana and Jalandhar as well as academies and universities during an 18-day stay.

The team was scheduled to cross the Benapole border today after starting their journey from Dhaka last night. They will then catch a train to Delhi before travelling to Haryana by bus.

The circuitous journey was a talking point of yesterday's press conference at the Bangladesh Hockey Federation.

"I think the journey will not have any impact on performance during their preparations in India because the journey is now more comfortable than before," head coach Rashid said.

"There is no scope for a luxurious trip given the country's economic condition. We see no problem sending them to India via bus and train. Besides, we don't have any sponsors at the moment. We, the officials together, are sending the team to prepare in India," said BHF general secretary AKM Momintul Haque Shaheed.

Bangladesh have been drawn in Pool B alongside Malaysia, South Korea, Uzbekistan and hosts Oman in the Junior Asia Cup. The team's target is to finish second in their pool and ensure a semifinals berth. That would also clinch a spot in the FIH Junior World Cup.

"The opening match against Oman is very important. We need a winning start and we then have to beat South Korea to meet our target because Malaysia are currently a very strong side," Rashid added.

Ceferin lays bare UEFA's pretense

AGENCIES

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin has admitted that his organisation "pretend" that at least one club playing in UEFA competitions does not share the same owners, although one entity owning more than one club is not in contradiction to any rules.

The complication, according to UEFA's laws, arises when two clubs owned by the same entity are participating in the same competition, such as the Champions League. Speaking on the football podcast Men In Blazers, Ceferin said: "For now we are just discussing it. There are clubs – or at least one – where we still pretend it's not the same owner [as another] but it's the same owner, and I will not tell you which. You can guess.

"One or two of those potential bidders for another club said to me, 'Look we have, like, 250 companies. We can do it [the takeover] from another company but we don't want to do that. Because it's us. We can circumvent the rules'. They don't want to do it. So we have to discuss things.

"You can be an owner of two, three, four, five clubs. That is not a problem for UEFA. The problem is you cannot play in the same competition."