

# Time for stalwarts to SET THE STANDARD

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a brilliant three-wicket win in the second ODI against Ireland, Bangladesh will be looking to seal the series when they take on the hosts in the third and final game in Chelmsford today.

There were a lot of positives to take from the second game, with Najmul Hossain Shanto hitting his maiden hundred and young Towhid Hridoy making a huge statement early in his career with yet another crucial half century.

The experienced Mushfiquir Rahim continued to deliver in his new role as a finisher as he came out to bat at No. 6, showing composure and guiding Bangladesh to their second highest successful chase of 321 runs on Friday.

However, while relatively younger



PHOTO: STAR

cricketers have started to step up, there remain concerns, chief among them skipper Tamim Iqbal's lack of form.

The experienced left-hander failed to make an impact in the first two ODIs, scoring 14 and seven. The 34-year-old,

who has been unable to reach even the 50-run mark in his last seven innings, is still searching for his first hundred in the ODI format since a ton against Zimbabwe in 2021.

According to prominent coach

Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, it will be crucial for Tamim to get back among the runs quickly. "Tamim must get into form quickly. It will not only give the team a bigger score, but also help him lead with more vigour. The team needs that badly."

Another experienced campaigner, Shakib Al Hasan, was also guilty of throwing away his wickets in the two ODIs despite getting starts.

Although the ongoing Ireland series is not being considered part of the preparations for the upcoming ICC ODI World Cup in India later this year, Fahim believed the ace all-rounder was probably waiting for a bigger occasion to shine.

"Shakib is probably waiting for bigger occasions. He's looking good but throwing it away. He must realise that batting at number four means partnerships. Today he had a good opportunity to play second to Shanto and gain confidence. However, he's probably not the person to play second to anyone, but the good news is that his form with the bat is okay and we may witness a big score any day now," he said.

The third and final ODI will begin today at 3:45pm (BST). Fans in Bangladesh can watch the match live on ICC TV app for free.

## ROLL OF HONOUR SINCE LIST A STATUS

- 2022-23 : Abahani Limited
- 2021-22 : Sheikh Jamal DC
- 2020-21 Cancelled due to COVID-19
- 2019-20: Abandoned due to COVID-19
- 2018-19: Abahani Limited
- 2017-18: Abahani Limited
- 2016-17: Gazi Group Cricketers
- 2015-16: Abahani Limited
- 2014-15: Prime Bank
- 2013-14: Gazi Tank Cricketers



**"There are many players who are knocking on the door to the national team, but our ODI team is quite stable. Hridoy (Towhid Hridoy), being a new player, has played well right away. I don't think there is much room for change in the team. I don't think Shanto (Najmul Hossain) went through a lean patch as a lot has been out of public sentiment. Shanto never went through extreme bad phase and I must say hats off to him as he was able to absorb the pressure."**

ABAHANI COACH  
KHALED MAHMUD SUJON

# DPL painted Sky Blue again

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani players and officials broke out into wild celebrations after Tanjim Ahmed struck the runs that clinched the club's 22nd Dhaka Premier League (DPL) title following a four-wicket win over defending champions Sheikh Jamal in the final round of Super League games in Mirpur yesterday.

It was Abahani's fifth title since the DPL received List A status in the 2013-14 season and the fact that no other team has managed to win more than once only reflected the giants' domination.

Their winning spree was halted by Sheikh Jamal last season as they pipped the Abahani to the DPL title, but the Sky Blues got sweet revenge in what had emerged as a virtual final to decide the fate of the prestigious tournament yesterday.

Left hander Naim Sheikh concluded a terrific season for Abahani by finishing as the tournament's leading run-getter. He hit his tenth 50-plus knock to finish with 932 runs in 16 games while another prolific run-getter, Anamul Haque,

With 932 runs, including 10 fifties and a century, in 16 games at an average of 71.69, Naim Sheikh was the leading run-getter of the DPL this season.

Sheikh Jamal's Indian recruit Parvez Rasool was the leading wicket-taker with 33 scalps at an average of 17.93.

also scored a fifty in the title-deciding encounter to finish second in the list with 834 runs.

Naim and Anamul combined for a 145-run opening stand which lay the platform for Abahani after Sheikh Jamal posted 283 courtesy of skipper Nurul Hasan Sohan's unbeaten 89.

Alif Hossain, who is looking to make a comeback to the national fold, played a crucial unbeaten 60-run knock that guided Abahani over the line with five balls to spare.

"Obviously it feels good to become champions. That was our target from the start. Our openers have given us good



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# All square in BPL

SPORTS REPORTER

Both matches of the Bangladesh Premier League ended in 1-1 draws yesterday as Muktijoddha Sangsad were held by Azampur FC while Rahmatganj MFS and Fortis FC shared the spoils at different venues.

Richard Maturana of Colombia gave Azampur a 16th-minute lead before Emmanuel Ikechukwu equalised for Muktijoddha six minutes after restart.

The result left Azampur right at the bottom of the table with four points from 14 games while Muktijoddha were in eighth position with 15 points from 15 matches.

Meanwhile, Fortis FC moved to 16 points from 14 matches in seventh position as Gaira Joof's 75th-minute spot kick cancelled out Ulysse Diallo's third-minute opener. Rahmatganj remained in ninth position with 14 points from 15 matches.



# Handball teams make flying start

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh made a flying start in the Bangabandhu IHF Challenge Trophy Women's (Youth & Junior) at the M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium yesterday.

The hosts beat Maldives by 48-10 goals in the junior (under-17) event before the youth team (under-19) beat their Maldivian counterparts by 38-21 goals.

Bangladesh's under-17 captain Mosammat Marfi scored highest 16 goals in this match while Runa Laila netted 10 goals and Dipa Rani scored seven goals.

In the under-19 section, Bangladesh's Sanjida Akter scored highest 12 goals.

India and Nepal are the two other countries participating in the four-nation meet, which features two events – one for under-17s and the other for under-19s.

# Cabrera brings two fresh faces

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national team's head coach Javier Cabrera expected good things from his squad as a 35-member preliminary squad for next month's FIFA friendly against Cambodia and SAFF Championship was declared yesterday.

Mohammedan Sporting Club's defender Murad Hossain and Fortis FC forward Rafiqul Islam are the two new faces in the squad, which will be trimmed to 27 members before the start of training camp on June 4.

"Our first target would be to qualify for the semifinals of the SAFF Championship. We know it's a challenge but we are hopeful we can overcome the challenge," Cabrera said during a press conference yesterday.

The red and greens will play away to Cambodia in the FIFA friendly on June 15 before the eight-team SAFF Championship in Bengaluru from June 21.

BFF's executive committee member Amer Khan has been named as the team manager for the two assignments.



Rasmus Kristensen kept Leeds United in contention to avoid relegation as his late leveller secured a dramatic 2-2 draw that dented Newcastle's bid to finish in the top four on Saturday. Leeds are still in the relegation zone but move up one spot to 18th on 31 points, one point behind Everton in 17th, while Newcastle remain third in the table on 66 points.

PHOTO: REUTERS

# Will Xavi's 'new era' begin tonight?

AGENCIES, BARCELONA

Barcelona could confirm their first La Liga title since Lionel Messi's departure with a win against cross-town rivals Espanyol tonight, but there is every chance that Xavi's team could take the field with the title already confirmed.

If Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid both fail to secure victory this weekend, Barça would already be champions before taking the field.

In any case, Barcelona need just two of the remaining 15 points on offer to win their first domestic league since title 2019.

That title capped a dominant run of eight league titles in 11 seasons, but the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated Barcelona's financial crisis and led to the loss of the world's best player and a subsequent decline on the field.

Barcelona managed to win the 2021 Copa del Rey – Messi's last title before leaving for Paris Saint-Germain – under Ronald Koeman, but the 2019-20 and the 2021-22 campaigns ended with no silverware.



**"He's [Sergio Busquets] the most intelligent player I have ever played with. It has been great to have him as captain. It's very important for him to leave the club having won LaLiga"**  
Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez

To turn this around this season, the club leadership made the controversial decision to sell off part of their future television revenues and other assets to inject new talent such as star striker Robert Lewandowski, winger Raphinha, and defenders Jules Kounde and

Andreas Christensen.

The end of the season will also see the last remnant of Pep Guardiola's all-conquering Barcelona leave, with Sergio Busquets set to depart the club.

Current coach Xavi Hernandez believed it would signal the start of a new era at the club, adding that he hoped the likes of Pedri and Gavi could beat anything he, Iniesta and Busquets achieved at Barcelona.

"We are working on forming a new (era)," Xavi told a news conference Saturday. "I hope players like Gavi, and Pedri, can even go beyond us, that is life, that is sport. I hope they can surpass us, I hope. There's a very good batch, home-grown players and midfielders especially. I hope they follow in Busquets' footsteps and can achieve as much success as he has, a new era is beginning."

However, Espanyol, in second-to-last place, will also be desperate for points as they look to stave off relegation. "We know that this is a life-or-death game," Espanyol midfielder Nico Melamed said. "We will treat this like a final."