

What to WATCH

T Sports and GTV
Indian Premier League
Mumbai vs Hyderabad
Live from 4:00 pm
Bangalore vs Gujarat
Live from 8:00 pm

Star Sports 3
English Premier League
West Ham United vs Leeds United
Live from 6:30 pm

Star Sports Select HD2
Manchester City vs Chelsea
Live from 9:00 pm

A new horizon for Bangladeshi cricketers

MAZHAR UDDIN

While top players around the world tend to test their skills and adjust to seam-friendly English conditions by playing county cricket, not many from Bangladesh have historically taken part in the prestigious first-class competition.

Shakib Al Hasan, who made his presence felt during his stint for Worcestershire in the early stages of his career, and star opener Tamim Iqbal, who featured for Nottinghamshire, are the only two Bangladeshi cricketers who have featured in the top league.

Former Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful and Enamul Haque Jr featured for minor counties in the past but there has been a rise in the lower-tier when it comes to the participation of the Bangladeshi cricketers recently.

The likes of Imrul Kayes, Shamsur Rahman, Junaid Siddique and Enamul are currently in England representing various minor counties and are reaping the rewards of playing in tough English conditions during the off-season in Bangladesh.

Imrul is featuring for Epping Cricket Club, owned by a Bangladeshi expat, in Division 1 this season. He opined that the facilities and conditions on the minor county circuit could be helpful for the Bangladeshi cricketers who are willing to work in the off-season.

"I must say the standard of cricket is pretty challenging even in the minor county. This is my first season here and



Arsenal's crumbling title challenge finally collapsed completely yesterday as they were beaten 1-0 by Nottingham Forest, handing Manchester City a third successive Premier League triumph. Manager Mikel Arteta was left burying his head in his hands, especially after insisting that the Gunners -- who managed just 15 points from their last 10 matches -- would 'not bottle' their remaining two games and challenge till the end.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CWAB top brass unchanged

SPORTS REPORTER

Naimur Rahman Durjoy and Debabrata Paul will continue to lead the Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) for the next four years after no other candidates challenged their positions at CWAB's first AGM in 10 years, held at the BCB headquarters in Mirpur on Saturday.

Naimur will continue to be the president of the association while Debabrata will serve as the general secretary.

"No one is willing to take responsibility. Nobody wants to be the leader. It is unfortunate," said BCB director Mahbub Anam, who served as election commissioner, after the meeting.

Senior cricketers like Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Mahmudullah Riyad, all of whom had demanded change in the CWAB leadership during the players' protest in 2019, were absent, raising questions from different quarters.

However, it was learned that a handful of women cricketers would be included in the committee, which is expected to be announced in the coming two months.

Arsenal slump hands City third straight PL title

AGENCIES

Manchester City were confirmed as Premier League champions for the fifth time in six seasons on Saturday without even having to kick a ball after second-placed Arsenal's challenge ended in defeat away at Nottingham Forest.

Arsenal, who enjoyed an eight-point lead over City as recently as mid-March, needed at least a point to stay mathematically in the hunt, but went down 1-0.

City, who host Chelsea on Sunday, have 85 points with three games to play, while Arsenal are on 81 with one game left.

"The Premier League is without doubt the most demanding and competitive league in the world so that tells you everything about what an achievement this is," said City captain Ilkay Gundogan in a club statement.

"This squad is so talented and so special and to have been captain this season has been an enormous privilege."

It is City's seventh Premier League title since they were bought by Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan in 2008 and they are now just two wins away from completing a treble only previously achieved by Manchester United in 1999.

City face Manchester United in the FA Cup final on June 3 and a week later take on Inter Milan in the Champions League final -- starting big favourites in both games.

While Arsenal have threatened to knock City off their perch this season, it all proved an illusion in the end as Pep Guardiola's side again proved relentless in the run-in.

This is Manchester City's third successive Premier League title and their fifth title in six seasons.

Only United under Alex Ferguson had previously won five titles in six years, between 1995/96 and 2000/01.

City can match the achievement of Ferguson's Manchester United if they complete a treble by winning the FA Cup final on June 3 and then beating Inter Milan in the Champions League final in Istanbul on June 11.

Should they win just two of their remaining three games, City will break the 90-point barrier for the fourth time in six seasons.

Since losing to Tottenham Hotspur on Feb. 5 they have taken 40 points from the next 42 on offer and have won their last 11 matches. They have also comprehensively beaten Arsenal home and away.

If City win their last three games they will reach 94 points, not as many as the totals they achieved in 2017-18 and 2018-19, Guardiola's first two league titles.

But the way they have finished the season suggests the gap between them and the rest is widening.

Arsenal will have to be content with the runners-up spot and a return to the Champions League after a five-year absence.

But manager Mikel Arteta will have much to ponder as he analyses how the Gunners buckled under City's relentless pressure. Defeat at Forest means Arsenal have won only two of their last eight matches in the league.



the conditions and pitches offer a lot for the seamers, so it's not easy," Imrul told The Daily Star.

"Some of their county players also feature in division 1. It is a platform for the others to make it to a major county side. I think you need to have good batting technique to be successful here. So from that point of view, players from Bangladesh can certainly come here during the off-season and experience such conditions."

On the other hand, Enamul started his journey on the minor county circuit in 2008 and since been a regular feature in England during the off-season. According to the left-arm spinner, minor counties can be a platform for young Bangladeshi players looking to gain experience.

"I think it's a great experience for players in Bangladesh to explore by playing minor county, especially young cricketers," said Enamul.

"I really feel if a youngster from Bangladesh comes here for at least one season, he will learn a lot about cricketing culture. I think there is a growing demand for Bangladeshi players in the UK, but we need good agents to communicate since we don't see our top stars playing county cricket."

'We only participate for the sake of it'

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

A three-member weightlifting team accompanied by a coach and two officials made their way to South Korea to take part in the Asian Weightlifting Championships 2023 in Jinju on May 3 and made their way back on May 13 empty-handed and in the same manner that they had left; without a fuss.

The championships offered participants an opportunity to qualify for the Paris Olympics in 2024, but that held little significance for Bangladesh's weightlifters, spearheaded by 2016 South Asian Games gold medallist Mabia Akter.

She said it seemed that they had made the trip just for the sake of it, citing the lack of preparation and planning ahead of such major events.

"They (Bangladesh Weightlifting Federation) send us to such events just for the sake of it. We have no real preparation and there is no vision heading into these events," Mabia told The Daily Star on Saturday.

Mabia competed in the women's 64kg category while Ashikur Rahman Taj competed in the men's 55kg and Smrity Aktar in the women's 55kg events. Mabia finished sixth



after lifting 96kg, her highest in the competition, in the third round. But it was well off the 118 kilos hoisted by Ganzorig Annuin of Mongolia as she took home gold.

However, more important than the results is the lack of planning and preparation, which players often have to whip up on their own to take part in such competitions.

Mabia discussed feelings of inferiority that Bangladesh's weightlifters experience when they arrive for major competitions and brush shoulders with athletes who have years of preparation and planning to fuel their ambitions and goals while Mabia and Co. often lacking the basics like diet and nutrition, gym facilities and proper coaching.

"We feel ashamed to be there because we know, when it comes to preparations for such a stage, we are

inferior compared to other athletes," she said.

Mabia also revealed that training camps ahead of competitions were mere formalities, arranged loosely for just a few days. According to Mabia, the athletes tend to plan long-term if success in championships is in mind.

"We are just there for the sake of it. We have no proper diet, gym, or coaching. When we ask the federation for change, they come up with the same excuse: lack of funds. If there are no funds, then what's the point of sending us to such events with almost no preparation?" she said.

"If you look at athletes from India, you would see a large number of people who are invested in preparing athletes for a championship. Those athletes have two-three year plans," she added.

With no real vision nor hope, the federation continues to send these athletes into war with wooden guns. The demands of modern-day sport, particularly in a physical one such as weightlifting, are at an all-time high but the status quo of maintaining outdated and short-sighted methods simply to make up the numbers remains with no real initiative in sight.



In his last appearance at Anfield before departing Liverpool, Roberto Firmino hit an 89th minute equaliser in their 1-1 draw against Aston Villa to keep Liverpool in contention for a top four spot in the Premier League. However, Manchester United's 1-0 win against Bournemouth made Liverpool's task infinitely harder.

PHOTO: REUTERS