

Lanka, Windies in opposing qualifier groups

ICC

Two-time winners the West Indies and 1996 champions Sri Lanka have been drawn in opposing groups for the upcoming ICC Men's Cricket World Cup Qualifier that will take place in Zimbabwe between June 18 and July 9.

The ICC revealed the fixture for the crucial three-week tournament on Tuesday, with the West Indies drawn in Group A alongside tournament hosts Zimbabwe, European side the Netherlands, emerging Asian nation Nepal and the ever-improving USA.

Shai Hope's charges will need to be at their best if they are to book a spot at this year's ICC Men's Cricket World Cup, with only the top two sides from the 10-team tournament earning a ticket to the 50-over showcase in India at the end of the year.

Sri Lanka also face daunting opponents in Group B in Zimbabwe, with the island nation scheduled to play matches against Ireland, Scotland, Oman and the UAE.



Although some media reports claimed vice captain Liton Das was reluctant to step up to the leadership role in absence of skipper Shakib Al Hasan, the wicketkeeper-batter now seems to have his head wrapped around the fact that he will be the one captaining the side during their one-off Test against Afghanistan next month. He started training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Kings find some consolation

SPORTS REPORTER

Last-gasp strikes courtesy of some Brazilian magic gave Bashundhara Kings the consolation of a third-place finish in the Federation Cup as they beat Sheikh Russel 2-1 in a place-deciding match at the Bashundhara Kings Area yesterday.

Kings were in high spirits as they looked set to achieve a rare domestic treble after lifting the Independence Cup and going on an imperious run in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League, which has seen them win 14 matches while losing one and drawing another.

However, the two-time Federation Cup champions failed to match the feat of Sheikh Russel's treble winners of 2012, losing to a rejuvenated Mohammedan in the semifinals.

Kings – who skipped last season's edition due to the poor condition of the artificial turn at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium – fielded a second-string team yesterday.

But the hosts were stunned in the eighth minute when Costa Rica forward Charles Didier converted a penalty to give Sheikh Russel.

In the second half, Kings sent the Brazilian duo of forward Dorielton Gomes and midfielder Robson Da Silva and the move eventually paid off in the 85th minute, with the latter hammering home a low shot.

Sheikh Russel's dream of avenging their Independence Cup final defeat against Kings were then put to rest in the first of the four minutes of stoppage time as midfielder Miguel Ferreira scored from outside the box.

'I realised my mistakes and worked on them'

Left-handed opener Naim Sheikh made a huge statement by finishing as the leading run-getter in the recently-concluded Dhaka Premier League, proving instrumental in Abahani's title-winning campaign by scoring 932 runs at an average of 71.69. The 23-year-old, who was dropped from the Tigers T20I side last year, is now gearing up for a comeback. He spoke about how he changed his game and lifestyle among other topics during an exclusive interview with **The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin**. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): You had a terrific time in the recently concluded Dhaka Premier League (DPL).

Naim Sheikh (NS): The Dhaka league went really well for me. More importantly, we became champions, which is why it is more special. As a batter, it feels great to finish as the highest run-getter of a tournament and boosts confidence.

DS: Do you want to share the areas you worked on specifically?

NS: I worked a lot on mental aspects and also on strength training in the gym. My eating habits were not proper so I tried to maintain a disciplined life and follow a process overall. I won't say I did it a hundred per cent but I am trying to maintain that standard which is required if I really want to compete at the top level, by which I mean international cricket. When you can properly maintain these aspects, there are greater chances of success.

DS: Did you feel the urge to work and improve after being dropped from the national team?

NS: I worked on training my mind and building up my physical condition as part of my individual plans. I was having issues with sleep since the Covid-19 pandemic so I worked on that as well. Overall, I feel it is important to follow a process. It's easy to



say, but tough to follow properly. I realised my mistakes once I was dropped from the national side and I worked on those areas. International cricket is not easy but I realised that it's important to have the ability to bat on all sorts of wickets. Experience matters in international cricket and I feel you should stick to your strengths and basics. Whenever I moved away from my process, I failed and that was reflected in my last few international games.

DS: There was plenty of noise about your strike rate in T20Is...

NS: Look, when the target is around 120, it's tough to expect a high strike-rate since the required run-rate does not demand an opener to score quickly. It's not easy to score singles frequently for openers in the Powerplay, everyone knows that. There was a negative vibe during that period and I think I deserved more support.

DS: Do you feel you are ready for international cricket again?

NS: If you talk about the one-day format, I have played just one game. It's hard to judge me based on that game. If I talk about T20 cricket, I have played over 30 matches and my performances were not that bad. What I realise now is that I tried whatever others suggested without thinking. It's more important to be able to make your own decisions in the middle. I have come out of that mindset and I know how to play T20 cricket. If you look at my List A record, my stats and my recent form have surely given me the confidence to do well in ODI cricket as well. After finishing as the highest run-getter in the DPL, I definitely expect to make a comeback to the national team. I think there is a huge value for performance in the domestic circuit and the selectors surely count that. DPL is the only platform for us to prove ourselves in one-day cricket and make a statement.

European ban awaits Juventus?

AGENCIES

A UEFA investigation into Juventus Finances will end in June and disqualification from European competitions is a possible scenario for the black and whites although it could change if they officially leave the mooted European Super League.

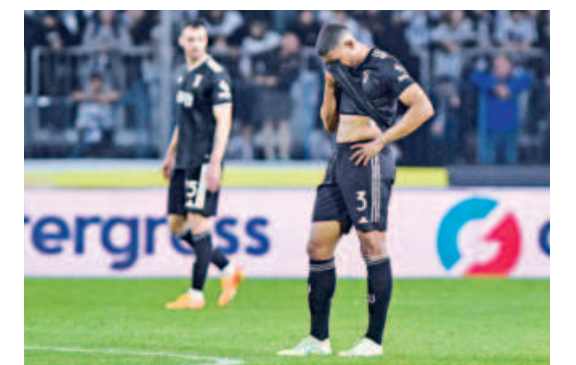
The Serie A giants have been hit with a new 10-point penalty for 2023-24 but more will follow as a new FIGC trial takes place in June, when UEFA also closes its investigation.

European football's governing body has two potential reasons for punishing the black and whites. First, violation of the Rules of Fair Play and sporting probity, second violation of the FFP regulation.

Now, investigations in Italy appear to show that Juventus artificially skewed their balance sheets, allowing their former managers to close a favorable FFP deal with UEFA. Juventus were only allowed to pay a 3.5m euro fine instead of 19.5m euro, but with the "real" figures in hand, the outcome would have been different, according to La Gazzetta dello Sport.

However, if Juventus do not step back, UEFA would not be willing to negotiate a reduced sentence. For this reason, UEFA would have been 'surprised' that 'no one from Turin has called' trying to open a dialogue.

The potential European ban would only start once the Bianconeri qualify for the Champions, Europa or Conference League, so it won't apply for 2023-24 if Massimiliano Allegri's men fail to earn a place in a European competition this season.



Fahad stuns two Grand Masters

SPORTS REPORTER

International Master Fahad Rahman took solo lead after the fourth round of Hanoi Grandmaster Chess Tournament 2 in Vietnam yesterday.

Fahad secured 3.5 points from four matches after back-to-back wins in the third and fourth round matches. Fahad, playing with white pieces in King's Indian Defence, beat Indonesian GM Priasmoro Navendra after 64 moves in the third round before beating Indian GM Swayams Mishra in the fourth round. This time Fahad chose the Semi Slav Defence against Mishra and won the match after 46 moves with black pieces.

A total of 12 players including three GMs, as many IMs from Bangladesh, India, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam are taking part in the tournament, said a Bangladesh Chess Federation press release.



Football's racism protocol obsolete, laments Ancelotti

AGENCIES

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said on Tuesday that FIFA's racism protocol in football was "obsolete" after Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior was abused by Valencia fans.

The 22-year-old forward suffered vile racist taunts at Mestalla on Sunday in La Liga.

Referee Ricardo de Burgos Bengoetxea activated the racism protocol after Vinicius squared off with fans, singling out one whom he saw abuse him.

FIFA's three-step process involves the match being paused until a stadium announcement is made asking for racist abuse to stop, which happened at Mestalla.

The second step, after any further abuse, is to temporarily take players off the pitch and the third step, if it continues, is to abandon the game and give three points to the opposition.

"The protocol is obsolete," Ancelotti told reporters.

"The protocol had to be applied when the team bus reached the stadium, because the insults started there.

Video emerged Monday of Valencia fans chanting "Vinicius,



The lights on Rio de Janeiro's iconic statue of Christ the Redeemer were switched off for an display of solidarity with Vinicius Jr.

PHOTO: AFP

you are a monkey," when Real Madrid arrived at Mestalla.

Vinicius was sent off later in the game for hitting Valencia's Hugo Duro.

The striker said Spain was viewed as a "racist country" in a statement he made on Instagram late on Sunday.

"Spain is not racist, I have to say that too, but there is racism in Spain, like in other places and that has to end," Ancelotti said.

Seven detained
Police detained seven men on Tuesday over separate alleged

racist incidents against Real Madrid football player Vinicius Jr as Spain's main soccer league urged changes to Spanish law that would enable it to take steps to curb racism in stadiums.

A hate crime investigation was opened after an inflatable effigy dressed in the No. 20 jersey of winger Vinicius Jr was hung from a bridge in front of the club's training grounds. Alongside it was a 16m (17.5-yard) red and white banner - the colours of rival team Atletico Madrid - that read "Madrid hates Real".

Three men were also arrested in Valencia for racist conduct aimed at Vinicius in a match between Valencia and Real Madrid, police said on Twitter.

More support pours in
Valencia's sponsors Puma offered their support for Vinicius.

"At PUMA, we do not tolerate racism, we condemn discrimination in any form and stand in solidarity with Vinicius Junior and the wider football community in condemning events yesterday," Puma said.

Spanish bank Santander, whose title sponsorship with LaLiga ends after this season, also voiced their support.



Afif Hossain's 34-ball 37 was the highest for Bangladesh A on the opening day of their second four-dayer against West Indies A at the Sylhet Academy Ground on Monday. On a day when rain delayed the start of play, Bangladesh yet again produced a disappointing batting display, losing five wickets for 175 runs in 49 overs.

PHOTO: BCB