

Grand rehearsal for Fed Cup final

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani and Mohammedan Sporting Club will have the chance to lock horns in a dress rehearsal for Tuesday's Federation Cup final as the two perennial foes play their Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) fixture at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla today.

Despite leaders Bashundhara Kings — with 43 points from 16 matches, 10 points ahead of nearest rivals Abahani — on the brink of ensuring their fourth league title with an outright win over Sheikh Russel KC today, the tie between Abahani and Mohammedan still promises to be a heated affair.

Mohammedan, who occupy fourth position with 22 points from 15 matches, has more at stake as they will look to exact their revenge of the 2-0 defeat against Abahani in the first-leg meeting as well as improve their position in the 11-team BPL table and overall head-to-head record over Abahani.

In 30 professional football league meetings between two sides, Abahani registered 15 wins and 10 draws against Mohammedan.



Skipper Nigar Sultana Joty hit a boundary-laden unbeaten 76-ball 100 during a mammoth 171-run third-wicket stand with Fargana Hoque Pinky, also unbeaten on 92, to propel Rupali Bank Krira Parishad to 286 for two against Gulshan Youth Club on the opening day of the Dhaka Premier Division Women's Cricket League 2022-23 in Fatullah on Thursday. Rupali Bank sealed a 148-run victory.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh A refuse to fold

SPORTS REPORTER

Pacer Tanzim Hasan Sakib was able to create a storm with the ball early in the morning session, picking up four wickets to stop West Indies A from taking a bigger lead and restricting them to 345 all out.

But Bangladesh A will have their work cut out for them as they look to avert defeat, having lost six wickets for 274 runs at the close of play on the third day at the Sylhet International Stadium Academy Ground yesterday.

The visitors were motoring along with Joshua Michael and Kevin Oswald, reaching 329 for six before Sakib castled the latter for 32. Windies A added just 16 runs after that wicket, with Sakib bagging all of the wickets yesterday morning with a new ball to finish with 59 for four.

Shadman Islam provided sturdy resistance, but wickets fell at intervals with Zakir Hasan, Saif Hassan and Mohammad Naim unable to spend much time at the crease.

First-innings saviour Shahadat Hossain Dipu once again steadied things, stitching a 68-run stand with Shadman, who eventually departed for 74. In the end, Shahadat's tenure at the crease lasted 68 deliveries and yielded 50 runs. Irfan Shukkur's scored an unbeaten 64 and stitched an unbroken 65-run stand with Nayeem Hasan.

Shahadat's 124-ball 73 in the first innings garnered praise from selector Habibul Bashar. "His batting was impressive. The wicket wasn't easy since there was 6 millimetres of grass in both games. They were seaming conditions."

With a 166-run lead, Bangladesh will look to pile up more runs on day four to make Windies A's task difficult.

Tigers have 'clarity' on home advantage

SPORTS REPORTER

Selector Habibul Bashar spoke about Bangladesh's confidence heading into the one-off Test against Afghanistan next month, but although that 'confidence' has never quite held up when judged by results in the longest format, there is a plan that the Tigers are focusing on.

National team stars such as Mominul Haque, Shoriful Islam, Nurul Hasan Sohan and Yasir Ali are in Sylhet attending the A team's game against their West Indies counterparts and may be included in the third four-day game at Sylhet. Pacer Khaled Ahmed is currently playing for the A side in the second four-dayer.

Meanwhile, the likes of Nazmul Hossain are batting on stone slabs in Mirpur. It seems there is an idea developing regarding Test stars getting some much-needed input on their performances according to various conditions.

"The A team's matches are very important, but this has gained more prominence this time around and benefitted us as it's before the Test against Afghanistan. That's why the Test players are here and it's a big opportunity. Not because of team selection but because they are getting practice," selector Abdur Razzak told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We aren't playing anyone without proper planning first. It's definitely not that we are playing someone without a motive. Some of them also need practice so we are ensuring that," he added.

The Sylhet outer stadium is hosting the A team's second and third four days

and Razzak believes the wicket was a 'good, friendly, sporting wicket'. While preparations continue, selector Habibul Bashar wanted to keep his cards close to his chest but mentioned that they had a clear plan.

"We have a good idea of how the surface in Mirpur will behave and the wicket will be prepared according to our needs," Bashar added.

The wicket in Mirpur will be in focus when Afghanistan play the Tigers on June 14, especially after the decision to curate a surface that slightly favoured spinners backfired in a defeat to Afghanistan last time around.

Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's absence from the Test due to injury will be another point of concern, especially as it brings the hosts' spin department into focus and in turn highlights Afghanistan's comparative spin strength. Without Shakib, the onus will be on the pacers, aided by spinners Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Taijul Islam.

Selection-wise, the biggest worry will be how to handle Afghanistan's spin threat given their past experience in Chattogram during a 224-run loss.

"Miraz and Taijul are bowling well in Tests. Our fast bowling department is rich so we will decide accordingly," Bashar remarked.

The team will be announced before Chandika Hathurusingha's arrival on June 3. Asked if determining where home advantage lies would be tough, Bashar remarked: "No it's not. I feel we are a confident team. We are clear about what wickets we should play on".



Asia Cup fate to be decided during IPL final

REUTERS, New Delhi

The fate of this year's Asia Cup, which may determine Pakistan's participation in the World Cup in India, will be decided on the sidelines of Sunday's Indian Premier League (IPL) final in Ahmedabad, Asian Cricket Council (ACC) President Jay Shah said.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), host of the eight-team Asia Cup in September, has offered a "hybrid" model to stage some matches at a neutral venue after India refused to tour the country.

Owing to their soured political relations, bilateral cricket between India and Pakistan remains suspended and they play each other only in multi-team events.

Pakistan has threatened to boycott the World Cup in India in October-November should they be forced to stage the entire Asia Cup in another country, which could be the United Arab Emirates.

Shah said cricket chiefs from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan would attend the IPL final in Ahmedabad on Sunday, where a final decision would be taken.

"We will hold discussions with them for outlining the future course of action in relation to Asia Cup 2023," Shah, also the secretary of the powerful Indian board, said in a brief statement on Thursday.

He was not immediately available to elaborate when Reuters contacted him.

PCB chairman Najam Sethi was likely to join the meeting virtually, a source said.

Bangladesh lose big against Malaysia

SPORTS REPORTER

On the back of a 2-0 win over Oman, Bangladesh U-21 hockey team failed to carry the momentum in their second match as they suffered a 5-1 defeat to favourites Malaysia in a Pool B encounter of the AHF Junior Asia Cup in Salalah, Oman, yesterday.

Malaysia, who beat Bangladesh 8-0 during the 2015 edition, converted four goals from penalty after opening the account in the eighth minute through an open play and, within a span of two minutes, had widened the margin further with two converted penalties by the 15th minute.

After resumption, Bangladesh had something to celebrate with Abdullaah converting a penalty in the 37th minute. Malaysia, however, did not allow Bangladesh to stage a turnaround as they struck two more goals in the third and fourth quarters and left the field with two wins in as many games.

Uphill task awaits U-23s

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are again set to face a tough challenge in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers as the men in red and green were pitted alongside Thailand, Malaysia, and Philippines in Group H during the draw held in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday.

A total of 43 nations, split into 11 groups, are taking part in the fifth edition of the tournament.

The qualifying round will take place from September 4 to 12, with Thailand hosting Group H. The top team of each group will advance to the final round, scheduled for April 15 to May 3 in 2024.

Since the introduction of the U-23 Asian Cup, Bangladesh never progressed to the final round. In previous four attempts, Bangladesh finished bottom on three occasions — managing one victory in 11 matches. They also drew against India in 2016 edition qualifiers held in Dhaka in 2015.



'RACISTS, OUT OF FOOTBALL'

In a show of support for Vinicius Junior, his Real Madrid teammates and Rayo Vallecano players posed next to an official LaLiga banner "Racists, out of football" ahead of their league encounter at the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday. Real's players took to the pitch wearing shirts bearing Vinicius's number 20 while the Brazilian forward, who was subjected to racial abuse during their 1-0 loss at Valencia on Sunday, joined his team mates on the pitch for a standing ovation after he was left out of the squad for the game on Wednesday due to a knee injury. Meanwhile, on Thursday, four men detained on suspicion of hanging an effigy of Vinicius from a bridge were banned from Spanish stadiums. The men, detained on Tuesday and being investigated for a hate crime, were released on bail and banned from coming within 1,000 metres of a La Liga stadium during matches.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

Tough road ahead for Alcaraz in French Open

REUTERS, Paris

World number one Carlos Alcaraz faces a tough path to a maiden French Open title after being placed in the same half of the draw as 22-times Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic on Thursday.

In the absence of 14-times winner and defending champion Rafael Nadal, who will miss the claycourt major through injury, all eyes are on Djokovic and Alcaraz.

The 20-year-old Alcaraz, who will play a qualifier in the opening round, could face some treacherous match-ups en route to a potential semi-final against world number three Djokovic with 2021 runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas, Lorenzo Musetti and Felix Auger-Aliassime in the top quarter of the draw.

Djokovic, who starts against Aleksandar Kovacevic, has a seemingly smooth journey to the last four with Russian seventh seed Andrey Rublev his main threat.

World number two Daniil Medvedev,

who plays a qualifier in the first round, is in the lower part of the draw and could face either last year's runner-up Casper Ruud or Norway's Holger Rune.

Sixth seed Rune won the Munich title on clay this season and reached the final in Monte Carlo and Rome, losing to Medvedev in the Italian capital.

No French man has won the singles' title since 1983 and it would take a miracle to see one of them lift the Musketeers Cup on June 11.

In the women's draw, defending champion and world number one Iga Swiatek will start against Cristina Bucsa, the world number 67.

She faces a potential quarter-final clash against Coco Gauff, the American she beat in last year's final.

French hopes will rest on the shoulders of fifth seed Caroline Garcia, who is on a quarter-final collision course with second seed Aryna Sabalenka.

Rome champion Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan is expected to have a smooth run to the last eight, where she could face Tunisian seventh seed Ons Jabeur.

Fahad throws away lead

SPORTS REPORTER

International Master Fahad Rahman slipped to second position in the Hanoi Grandmaster Chess Tournament-2 after suffering a defeat and a stalemate in the seventh and eighth round matches, respectively, in Vietnam on Thursday.

Fahad, who maintained the lead till yesterday after beating two GMs and one WGM, has now 5.5 points from eight matches and shared the second position along with Swayams Mishra. In the seventh round match, Fahad lost to IM Tran Minh Thang of Vietnam and then drew against IM Labog Eric Jr. of Philippines in the eighth round to throw away his lead. He will play GM Tran Tuan Minh of Vietnam in the ninth and final round today.

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