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Quicks run riot in Bogra

SPORTS REPORTER



The Duke balls being used in the National Cricket League (NCL) have tormented batters since last season and the pace did all the talking during yesterday's tier-1 game in Bogra as the third-round fixtures commenced.

At the Shaheed Chandu Stadium, early morning session saw pacers dominate, with all 10 Khulna Divisions batters falling prey to Barishal Division pacers. While a majority of Khulna's top-order had shone in this NCL, the likes of Mohammad Mithun or Anamul Haque had no answers.

Barishal's Kamrul Islam Rabbi bagged three while Ruyel Miah snatched a four-fer. A delivery from Salman Hossain tailed into left-handed Imrul Kayes so sharply before rattling the stumps that its trajectory had left the batter bamboozled.

Nahidul Islam (62) was the only batter who left any mark on the day as Khulna were skittled out for 142 in 52.1 overs. Soumya Sarkar did not manage much with the bat but he was amongst the wickets late in the day, picking up a four-fer as Barishal closed out the opening day at 80 for five.

"As you know, conditions do not favour swing in Bangladesh and the weather too is not cold yet. The wrist position and action are key to getting swing while you also need to look after the shine. Nahidul played well because he was playing the ball late," Rabbi told The Daily Star yesterday.

These kinds of bowling effort would be key to improving batsmanship around the country as well, many experts believe.

Elsewhere, the Sylhet Academy Ground saw runs as Rajshahi Division's Sabbir Hossen struck a 122-ball 123 against Chattogram to see his side reach 309 for eight. Shykat Ali and Nayeem Hasan bagged three wickets each for Chattogram.

In Khulna, Sylhet Division reached 267 for four as Shamsur Rahman remained unbeaten on 70 at stumps. Meanwhile, wet outfield following cyclone in Cox's Bazar meant that the opening day of Dhaka Division-Dhaka Metro match was abandoned.



The Bangladesh team had its first training session at the famous Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday under lights. Skipper Shakib Al Hasan missed the session as he joined the team that night after his two-day trip in Dhaka where the all-rounder had a couple of batting sessions with his childhood coach Nazmul Abedeen Fahim in Mirpur. Meanwhile, Mushfiqur Rahim, who was dismissed trying to cut pacers in the last two matches, was as diligent as ever during the practice session under the supervision of head coach Chandika Hathurusingha. Taskin Ahmed, who is set to return to the starting eleven after missing the last two games due to a shoulder injury, bowled at the nets with fast bowling coach Allan Donald as the Tigers seek a turn of fortunes in the mega event in India following just one win in five outings so far.

PHOTO: EKUSH TAPADER



Aich's 147 powers Emerging side in Dambulla

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Emerging side continued their solidity with the bat in the first innings on day two of the four-day match against their Sri Lankan counterparts at Dambulla's Rangiri Stadium yesterday.



Aich Mollah's 147 and Shahadat Hossain Dipu's 93 saw Bangladesh reach a commanding 472 for seven.

Bangladesh had ended day one on 167 for 1 with Aich on 74 and Mahmudul Hasan Joy on 49 before bad light ended play after 46 overs. Coming into day two, pacer Eshan Malinga accounted for Joy (66) to end a 120-run stand.

Afterwards, there was no respite for Sri Lanka as Dipu played himself in to put on a 150-run stand for the fourth wicket with Aich. Dipu was seven short of a ton when he fell for a leg before Eshan as well following a 156-ball 93, laced with six fours and two sixes.

Aich completed his ton in the 71st over before Nipun Premaratne removed him after a 299-ball 147, featuring 19 fours. Pritom Kumar remained unbeaten on 44 before bad light ended play.

Eshan was the pick of the Lankan bowlers with three for 97 while Premaratne scalped two for 84.

Tougher challenges bring greater rewards

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Lack of matches against higher ranked opponents has been a long-standing problem for the Bangladesh men's football team in the international arena.

But since June of this year, Bangladesh have enjoyed a rare spell of consistent matches against better ranked teams, which paved the way for them to reach their best standing in the FIFA rankings in over four years.

On Thursday, Bangladesh climbed six spots to reach 183 in the FIFA rankings - their best standing since July 2019 when they ranked 182.

The rise in the rankings was a direct result of their 3-2 aggregate victory over the Maldives in their FIFA World Cup Qualifiers this month and an indirect outcome of what they had been doing in the past five or so months.

Since June, Bangladesh have played thrice against the Maldives, twice against Afghanistan, once against Lebanon and Kuwait.

Although the matches against Lebanon and Kuwait, which were part of the SAFF Championship, ended in defeats, Javier Cabrera's men displayed a spirited show against teams that were miles ahead of them in the rankings.

Against Afghanistan, a team that's still 29 spots ahead of



Bangladesh climbed six spots to reach 183 in the FIFA rankings - their best standing since July 2019 when they ranked 182.

Bangladesh in the rankings, Bangladesh managed to secure a couple of draws at home last month.

Even though Bangladesh didn't win against the likes of Lebanon, Kuwait and Afghanistan, there was much to like from the team's performance as it seemed that the Cabrera's charges were consistently punching above their weight.

Bangladesh showed their best against the higher Maldives, defeating them 3-1 in SAFF, before the dramatic victory on aggregate that gave Bangladesh the ticket to the second round of the qualifiers.

The recent good performances have opened the doors for even bigger challenges for the national team.

They are now in Group I of the

FIFA World Cup Qualifier alongside teams like the 27th-ranked Australia, 96th-placed Palestine and 104th-ranked Lebanon.

The next stage of the qualifiers will begin on November 16, with an away fixture against Australia in Melbourne.

Till next year's June, Bangladesh will have the opportunity to play six matches against these three top sides, which is a great chance for them to test themselves against better teams and improve as a unit.

Cabrera also has a young team at his disposal with the likes of winger Rabib Hossain, goalkeeper Mitul Marma and forward Sheikh Morsalin.

A positive result against a side like Australia, who took on eventual World Champions Argentina in the second round of last year's Qatar World Cup, is out of the question for Bangladesh.

But if Cabrera's charges can put forth a good showing against the Aussies, against whom Bangladesh had suffered a 5-0 and 4-0 drubbing during the 2018 World Cup Qualifiers, that would be a great result.

A good showing will also give Bangladesh a boost before taking on Lebanon and Palestine, against whom Cabrera's men might fancy their chances and make an even bigger jump in the FIFA rankings.

Kings to remain unstoppable this season?

SPORTS REPORTER

Football season in the country is all set to get underway today with the Independence Cup. The focus, however, will be on the star-studded Bashundhara Kings.

On the opening day, three matches will take place in Gopalganj, Munshiganj and Dhaka.

13 teams, split into four groups, will be vying for the title. The previous 12 instalments of the tournament saw Mohammedan lift the trophy thrice. Abahani and Bashundhara Kings are two-time champions, while Muktiyoddha Sangsad, Sheikh Russel, Ctg Abahani, Farashganj SC and Arambagh KS won once.

Kings roped in 20 players from the national team's pool alongside some proven foreign campaigners. The season, thus, seems destined to be a one-way affair. Kings have a good opportunity to record a rare feat of winning all three trophies in the professional era's season after Sheikh Russel KC did so in the 2012-13 season.

Chittagong Abahani's technical advisor, Maruful Haque, also believes Kings are going to be an unstoppable force this season.

"A few other teams may express their desire to win the title but, realistically, they don't have strength to challenge Kings," said UEFA A license coach Maruf, who has been involved with the professional football league since 2008-09 season.

However, Kings coach Oscar Bruzon believes they will face their toughest season yet.

"It will be very challenging this time as many clubs seem to have reinforced their squads well and our team players have the toughest schedule," Oscar told The Daily Star.

"Apart from our AFC Cup commitments, we also provide the most players to the national football team who will face tough contests too this next year with the World Cup qualifiers to be played," the Spaniard added.



PSG forward Kylian Mbappe's brilliant strike inspired the French giants to a 3-0 win over AC Milan at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday, after which the Parisians moved to the top of Group F standings with six points in three matches. His 13th goal in as many matches in all competitions this season has made PSG's qualification in the UCL's Round of 16 easier following a 4-1 loss at Newcastle in their previous fixture, taking some pressure off coach Luis Enrique.

PHOTO: AFP

Guardiola praises 'incredible professional' Haaland

AGENCIES

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola said Erling Haaland is an 'incredible professional' after the Norwegian scored twice in his side's 3-1 win at Young Boys all but secured their spot in the Champions League knockout stage.

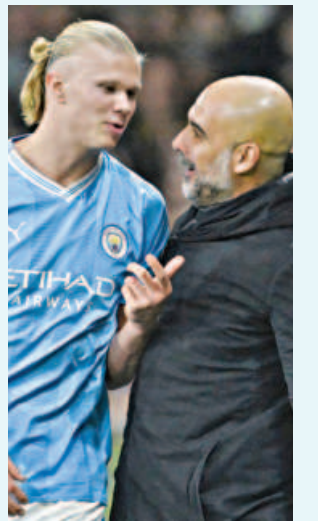
Haaland scored for the first time in six Champions League games with a penalty in the 67th minute after Mohamed Camara's tackle on Rodri in the box.

City's goal-scoring machine added a fabulous second goal when he moved the ball from his left foot to his right before firing it into the top corner in the 86th.

Haaland, who rewrote several scoring records last season, added another one on Wednesday, breaking Kylian Mbappe's mark as the youngest player to score 37 Champions League goals. The Norwegian striker, who is 23 years and 96 days, did it in 33 games.

"He has the pressure from what happened last season. Not just last season. He has to score seven goals every single game and it is impossible. He is happy. He scored a lot of goals. People want him to fail after scoring 52 goals," said Guardiola.

****City's 3-1 win over Young Boys extended their club-record run of unbeaten matches in Europe to 17. That form stretched back to the start of last season's Champions League, which saw them lift the trophy for the first time, involving 11 victories and six draws. **It also saw Pep Guardiola equal his longest unbeaten run in the Champions League as manager, drawing level with the 16 games without defeat during his Barcelona tenure between 2011 and 2012. ** Among English teams, only Manchester United had a longer unbeaten run in Europe - of 25 games between 2007 and 2009.**



"Maybe in the right moment of the season he will be there even better than now. In the Champions League again he is there. We are really pleased he is a guy with hunger. He is so humble. He is an incredible professional. He is a great competitor.

"He is involved in the games and participates more in our process. I

don't want him to just to be there in the box and score goals.

"If he is there involved when we arrive in the box he will be more clever. I have no doubts and he has a desire to improve."

Guardiola was delighted with the performance of his entire team, having had 26 shots and enjoyed more than 68% of the ball.