

Nasum claims five-for on rain-hit day in BCL

SPORTS REPORTER

East Zone left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed claimed a five-wicket haul against South Zone in Chattogram while the third day's play between Central Zone and North Zone got completely washed out on a rain-hit day in the first round of Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) yesterday.

Nasum claimed five for 75 while pacer Rejaur Rahman Raja picked up three wickets to bundle out South for 282, earning East a 120-run first innings lead at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

Fazle Mahmud top-scored with 81 while skipper Mohammad Mithun and Moin Khan made 49 and 41, respectively, for South.

South could bowl just five overs in a rain-affected third session, where they fought back by claiming three wickets for the cost of just one run.

Off-spinner Mahedi Hasan took two wickets while Al-Amin Hossain scalped one.

Meanwhile, the match between Central and North is heading towards a draw after rain prevented any action at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

North are trailing Central by 45 runs in the first innings, having reached 236 for eight with Towhid Hridoy unbeaten on 132 off 138 balls.



As bad weather was on course to entirely wash out the second day of the second and final Test between Bangladesh and New Zealand at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday, Kane Williamson and teammates made the most of the idle circumstances, engaging themselves over a card game in the dressing room. [Inset] Meanwhile, Mehedi Hasan Miraz – whose three wickets had the visitors reeling on 55 for five after the hosts were all out 172 in their first innings the day before -- was cut a frustrated figure.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Tigresses eye historic series win in SA today

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Bangladesh women's cricket team will look to seal their maiden series win over South Africa in any format when they take on the hosts in the final Twenty20 of the three-match series in Kimberly today.

Leg spinner Shorna Akter's five-wicket haul inspired the Tigresses to a 13-run win in the series opener on December 3 in Benoni, which was their first ever win in South African soil in any format.

With the second match ending in a no result due to rain on Wednesday, the visitors can't lose the series even if they slip up in the final T20I.

The Nigar Sultana Joty-led side would be looking to go all out for the kill today and mark their tour with a historic series win.

After the T20s, Bangladesh will play a three-match ODI series against the hosts starting on December 16 at the Buffalo Park in East London.

They would have an opportunity to prepare for the 50-over format with a tour match at the Mangaung Oval in Bloemfontein on December 12.

Umpires and Scorers Assoc files protest letter to BCB boss

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Umpires and Scorers Association has filed a protest letter to Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan yesterday, citing a lack of respect from Umpires' Committee chairman Ittekkar Ahmed Mithu.

The protest letter relates to leakage of information in the media regarding the six umpires who had recently been pulled off from Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) games following poor on-field decisions in the recently concluded NCL. The letter also accused the Umpires' Committee chairman of giving false information in a tournament committee meeting while also alleging that proper process was not maintained in suspending the umpires.

The six umpires in question are Syed Mozahiduzzaman Swapan, Mohammad Wahid, Joyanal Abedin, Shyful Islam Jewel, Shafiuddin Ahmed Babu and Asad Ur Rahman.

The umpires were to be called to give them a chance for 'self defence' and if further training was required, it may be availed, BCB umpires' committee had informed The Daily Star previously.

"The six [that were suspended from BCL] were called by us. They were not inquired [by the fact-finding committee] about what their fault was. They have not been spoken to," Mujibur Rahman, joint secretary of the Umpires and Scorers Association, told members of the media yesterday.

"We have to have the chance of self-defence. Usually verdicts don't come in the media and if they had to suspend, they should have done it discreetly," he added.

DOES 'PADDY FIELD-LIKE' wicket help in the long run?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Following the World Cup debacle, the Bangladesh Test side won against New Zealand in Sylhet in conditions where home advantage was present but there was a bit for everybody, including batters. The propensity to hide behind results are all too prevalent in Bangladesh cricket and this time a Test series win – first against a big Test nation – could be the antidote to World Cup's disaster, given the nature of the wicket prepared in Mirpur for the second Test.

A World Cup assessment committee was formed but only to question players and selectors, while the decision-makers, who are related to performance issues emanating from such wickets, were spared.

When talking about the Mirpur wicket in a video interview with a cricket website yesterday, one fan, disappointed by the fall of 15, said: "Sylhet's was not like a paddy field-like wicket. It was excellent."

The fan's frustration is quite understandable, and is perhaps shared by all fans and well-wishers of Bangladesh cricket.

The batters have so far found it difficult to get set in Mirpur. The ball often does not come onto the bat and new ball produces vicious turn, so much so that Tim Southee and Kyle Jamieson, the two Kiwi pacers, bowled just 9.2 overs between themselves during the 66.2 overs of the Bangladesh innings

that folded for 172. Their counterpart Shoriful Islam, the lone Bangladesh pacer, bowled just one of the 12.4 overs that Bangladesh bowled in New Zealand's first innings so far.

On one side, the home team's batters' performance does not exactly cry out home-advantage. On the other hand, the pace unit does not get proper acclimatisation for bowling long spells on more batting-friendly tracks at home, which in turn leaves them with skill and fitness gaps when playing away. For the spinners, when the likes of Mehedi Miraz and Taijul Islam can just bank on consistency, it does not push them to go the extra mile skill-wise and struggle in conditions where only accuracy is not enough.

This blueprint for this particular wicket was one seen in 2016 and 2017's wins over England and Australia in home Tests.

A 172-run first innings score does not spell home advantage. The approach needed is questionable too.

While New Zealand would get back to surfaces with true bounce and nip and seam for seamers, it will be the Bangladesh batters who would need to prevail on such surfaces if this blueprint continues. Mehedi Hasan Miraz argued on Wednesday that they were taking home advantage even though he put a counter-argument that they needed better wickets in white-ball cricket.

Even in the Sylhet Test where a better surface was present, Bangladesh batters

often looked to 'hit out' to release pressure. This kind of strategy will not allow long-term growth.

Winning at home was important in this Test Championship cycle, Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha felt. He also identified that the players have different skillsets now to choose from but it appears from day one's proceedings that only one was being prioritised as 15 wickets fell on Day One.

Taskin Ahmed and Ebadot Hossain's injuries may have further put Hathurusingha and the team management on their way to another spin-friendly surface but for the rest of the pacers, it is not exactly a confidence boost as the soul-searching continues for what is ideal way of playing Tests. Against Afghanistan, Bangladesh prepared a wicket with help for pacers but it was not part of the World Test Championship and the management perhaps felt at ease of Afghanistan's suspect ability to persevere against pace.

While talking to this reporter, Mirpur curator Gamini Silva once said 'I have been happy for 13 years' about preparing a particularly bouncy wicket in an NCL game, suggesting that wickets are prepared according to requirements. For internationals, the standards appear to be different from NCL's. Only time will tell whether such a blueprint will help in the long run, given that it has not paid dividends so far.

Academy footballers set to get competitive platform

SPORTS REPORTER

With lower-level competitions like school tournament, national age-group tournament being absent for a long time, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has taken an initiative to hold BFF Academy U-15 Championship with participation of residential and non-residential football academies across the country.

A total of 169 academies, which are accredited under the BFF Academy Scheme, will take part in the tournament starting on December 19, thanks to funding from FIFA talent development scheme.

With no football activities in most of districts, a lot of football academies have been playing a crucial role in producing players from the periphery. The game's local governing body brought them under a roof in 2021 by giving some 196 academies, which have certified coaches, recognitions under BFF Academy Accreditation Scheme.

Through this championship, the BFF will pick talented players for its Elite Academy, and dissolve the conventional talent hunt programme.

BFF's development committee chairman Ataur Rahman Manik said they got more than one crore taka from the FIFA talent development scheme.



Captains of the eight teams participating in the ACC U19 Asia Cup line up for a photo shoot with the trophy in the UAE yesterday. The tournament begins today.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK



Aston Villa's Leon Bailey celebrates in the 74th minute after scoring their first goal and the eventual winner against Manchester City in a Premier League fixture on Wednesday. The 1-0 victory let Villa climb up to third in the points table, overtaking the defending champions by two points. [Inset] Manchester United midfielder Scott McTominay struck twice in either half to give his side the lead in their 2-1 win against Chelsea FC at Old Trafford on the same night

PHOTO: AFP



Guardiola searching for solutions after Villa defeat

AFP, London

Pep Guardiola admits "struggling" Manchester City's unexpected stumble in the Premier League title race has left him searching for solutions to the champions' problems.

Guardiola's side crashed to a lacklustre 1-0 defeat at Aston Villa on Wednesday as their winless run in the league extended to four matches.

City are languishing in fourth place, six points behind leaders Arsenal and four adrift of second-placed Liverpool.

After successive draws with Chelsea, Liverpool and Tottenham raised alarm bells about City's title prospects, Guardiola had defiantly claimed this week that his team would definitely win the Premier League.

But the Spaniard changed his tune after Villa rocked the treble winners with the kind of dynamic display that has been City's trademark throughout Guardiola's reign.

"It is my duty, it is my job to find a way to come back. Many years now we are together and we are able to find a way to win games," Guardiola said.

"We know what's our level and as a manager we have to find a way to win. We're struggling a bit. I'm here to help them.



"We didn't have the feeling that we are going to do something and we missed it. We have to accept it when a team is better and recognise it."

City's mini-crisis has blown the title race wide open and Guardiola's acknowledgement that there are issues to resolve will give further encouragement to their rivals.

One of the keys to their bid for an unprecedented fourth successive top-flight crown is the Spaniard's ability to

motivate his players after so much success in recent years.

As their performances have swung between exceptional and erratic this term, Guardiola has conceded there might be a hangover from the incredible treble triumph.

Fixing that issue is essential because Arsenal and Liverpool, both playing with intensity and energy this season, look like formidable foes.

"The results are not good"

City looked drained for much of their chastening trip to Villa Park on Wednesday, a problem exacerbated by Guardiola's preference for a relatively small squad.

But there is little respite for his weary stars, with a trip to Saudi Arabia for the FIFA Club World Cup looming before the hectic Christmas schedule.

As well as trying to revive the mental and physical health of his players, Guardiola has tactical issues to tweak.

For the first time since 2017, City have gone four Premier League games without a win and their unusually creaky defence has been a major factor in that decline.

Writing off City has been a foolish move in recent years, but Guardiola has little margin for error if they are to extend their reign as the Premier League's preeminent force.