

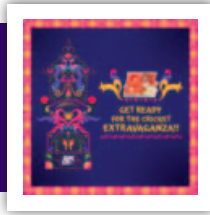
What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 2 & 5  
Australian Open  
Quarterfinal  
Live from 7:00 am  
T SPORTS  
Bangladesh Premier

League  
Rangpur Riders vs  
Sylhet Strikers  
Live from 1:30 pm  
Comilla Victorians vs  
Fortune Barishal

Live from 6:30 pm  
STAR SPORTS 1  
ICC U-19 World Cup  
South Africa vs  
England  
Live from 2:00 pm

BPL Mashup



## Concussed Gunathilaka gets '22-25' stitches

SPORTS REPORTER

Durdanto Dhaka's Sri Lankan opener Danushka Gunathilaka was left bleeding yesterday during his side's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) fixture against Chattogram Challenger, after his attempted lap shot against a delivery from Alamin Hossain took an inside-edge and hit his cheek.

As a result, Gunathilaka was retired hurt with concussion and replaced by compatriot Lasith Croospulle, triggering another fresh controversy in the BPL.

The controversy arose as Croospulle was not part of 15-man Dhaka squad submitted before toss. While it was initially being reported that Chattogram complained, the franchise's team management sources later verified they only wanted to inquire about the procedure of playing someone as concussion sub from outside team sheet.

"Match referee has the sole authority to allow a concussed player to be replaced by someone outside the team sheet because it's a like-for-like replacement...Chattogram had requested to know about the change," match referee



Although a majority of the games failed to produce high scores so far in this edition of the Bangladesh Premier League, Anamul Haque Bijoy and Evin Lewis managed to step up with half-centuries to drive Khulna Tigers to a comfortable victory in a chase of 188 runs against Fortune Barishal in the evening game in Mirpur yesterday. [Bottom] Meanwhile, a 49-run knock from young opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim helped Chattogram Challengers easily assail a low 137-run target and win by six wickets against Durdanto Dhaka in the day game.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Young Tigers bounce back

SPORTS REPORT

Bangladesh defeated Ireland by six wickets in their second match of the ICC Under-19 World Cup in Bloemfontein yesterday, bouncing back from their heavy defeat against defending champions India.

With the win, the young Tigers elevated their chances of reaching the Super Six stage.

Bangladesh batting was found wanting in their 84-run defeat against India but they recovered their composure against their Irish counterparts to reach 239-4 in 46.5 overs.

Three top teams from four groups will enter the Super Six stage, starting January 30. Two groups of six teams will clash to determine the semi-finalists.

Chasing 236, the Young Tigers were off to a confident start as Ashiqur Rahman Shibli (44) and Adil Bin Siddiq (36) put together 90 runs for the opening stand.

The departure of Siddiq triggered a mini collapse but Ahrar Amin (45) and Mohammad Shihab James (55) formed an unbeaten 109-run partnership to ensure a comfortable win.



Rakibul Hasan informed The Daily Star yesterday.

Gunathilaka was named as an all-rounder and there were three all-rounders in the team sheet while Croospulle is an opener. However, since Dhaka preferred an opener, the move was allowed.

Gunathilaka "was taken to Evercare hospital and needed 22-25 stitches on his chin", according to Dhaka, and he returned to team camp following treatment.

Rangpur to find Babar relief in Shakib's absence

Shakib Al Hasan is currently in Singapore as the Bangladesh ace all-rounder undergoes eye checkups, and his immediate future in BPL would remain under doubt until the matter is disclosed by BCB medical department.

Shakib played the first match for Rangpur Riders against Fortune Barishal and scored just two before being castled by pacer Khaled Ahmed before scalping two wickets.

"Shakib saw the doctor today (yesterday) but we haven't gotten a summary yet. The reports in India, Dhaka or England have all turned up pretty similar till now... Shakib would go through another checkup tomorrow [Tuesday]," a member of BCB medical team told The Daily Star yesterday, adding that there is also no certainty that Shakib would be returning after check-up on Tuesday.

However, a BCB official said on conditions of anonymity that "Shakib may need surgery". It is understood that surgery may see Shakib miss a few phases of the BPL's ongoing season.

While perhaps Rangpur are sweating it out without their key star player, they may find sweet relief with Pakistan's Babar Azam, slated to join them on Monday night, on the eve of their Sylhet Sixers fixture.

## Onus on batters to start applying

SPORTS REPORTER

Almost every season of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) starts with questions regarding its quality and experts and media pondering whether the franchise-based tournament that had started over a decade ago in 2012 with lofty goals would finally be able to match the global standards.

The 10th edition of the country's only franchise-based T20 tournament was no different. It did, however, begin with a lot of improvements with the availability of the Decision Review System (DRS) for the entirety of the tournament for the first time being a major upgrade.

But so far, despite Fortune Barishal piling up the highest total of this season so far -- 187 for four -- against Khulna Tigers in the evening game yesterday, the latest season of the BPL has not been able to provide the thrill and excitement that fans usually seek from the shortest format of the game.

But is it always the low-quality surface or the unavailability of high-end equipment that hinders the tournament from matching the global standards?

Shouldn't the players be up to the task as well?

The second game of the tournament saw Chattogram Challengers ease past Sylhet Strikers' 177 for two with seven

wickets and nine deliveries remaining. Except for this and the Barishal game yesterday, none of the other matches saw totals north of 150.

"I thought that this was a wicket that merited a total of 170-175. We just could not apply ourselves. I am not seeing any problem with the wicket," said Durdanto Dhaka skipper Mosaddek Hossain, who



was not able to open his account despite playing six deliveries when his side were restricted to just 136 for eight in their six-wicket defeat in the day game against Chattogram Challengers yesterday.

Mosaddek was the only one to realise that it is, in fact, the players who would need to apply themselves, instead of just blaming

the wicket for the low-quality cricket.

"I think the pitches so far played fine and you can't blame the surface for the lack of runs," opined former Sri Lankan middle order batter Russell Arnold, who is in the commentary panel of the BPL.

"Yes, the surfaces do have something both for pacers and spinners, and at times it is not easy for the batters to score freely. Especially, it's difficult for the batters to hit straight down the ground as there's some extra bounce in the surface and there's also a bit of turn for the spinners too. But at the same time, the batters also need to apply themselves in certain situations that demand them to adapt and adjust accordingly," Russell added.

One of the main reasons behind the low scores has been the lack of patience shown by the batters. When Rangpur Riders slumped to 31-4 in five overs against Barishal and Chattogram found themselves reeling at 32-3 in 4.2 overs against Khulna Tigers, it proved too difficult for both the teams to recover as they eventually lost their respective contests setting low totals.

With batters throwing their wickets away and being unable to read the surface and adjust accordingly, so far, the blame for the dip in the quality of cricket needs to be taken by the cricketers more than the wickets and conditions.



China's Zheng Qinwen outclassed France's Oceane Dodin 6-0, 6-3 under an hour in their women's singles match at Rod Laver Arena to move onto the quarterfinals of the Australian Open yesterday. Zheng will face Russia's Anna Kalinskaya in the last eight.

PHOTO: AFP

## Hockey clubs ready to splurge on national players

SPORTS REPORTER

The transfer window of the Premier Hockey League is set to open on January 31 and the title-aspirant clubs have already started vying for the top national team players, willing to splash more cash than the previous seasons to secure their services.

The league is set to return after a two-year hiatus and defending champions Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, Mohammedan Sporting Club, Abahani Limited and promoted Usha Krira Chakra have set their sights on forming a team to contend for the title.

Each team can rope in up to five national team players and sensing the interest of the teams, the players have reportedly hiked up their demand for remuneration by Tk 1-2 lakh on average.

"You know, the price of essentials has gone up in the last two years, so I have demanded a bit more than what I received the last edition in 2021," penalty-corner specialist Ashrafur Islam told The Daily Star yesterday.

National team defender Farhad Ahmed Shitul feels that the players are likelier to earn a bit more than the 2021 season, where the remuneration of the Bangladesh players ranged from Tk 5-9 lakh.

"As the transfers window draws closer, all teams, especially those who desire to stay in the title race, are communicating with the players. As three to four clubs want to form strong squads, there is a demand for national team players," Farhad said.

Arshad Hossain, national team forward, is also hopeful of getting a bigger purse this season.

"It seems to me that this year's players' transfer is going to be colourful. I have received offers from three big clubs and I have demanded more remuneration than the last edition. I haven't taken any decision yet," Arshad said.

Mariner Youngs Club, Mohammedan SC and Abahani are trying to retain the services of their players while trying to sign up new ones to strengthen their respective squads.

The defending champions and Mohammedan are also trying to fly in Indian and European players while Abahani are still undecided whether they will sign foreign players or not.

"We have been paying the highest remuneration to the hockey players in the last few editions," said Mohammedan manager Ariful Haque.

"We know the players will be demanding more and they can demand it. We will settle the issue after discussing it with the players," said the former national hockey player.

Mariner Youngs Club official Hasan Ullah Khan Rana also informed that the players are demanding more than the last edition and that they are ready to meet their demands despite the club's financial constraints.

Abahani hockey committee secretary Zaki Ahmed Ripon said they will take the final decision of payment after a club meeting.

## Xavi cries foul after Real's 'remontada'

AGENCIES

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez did not mince his words when asked about the state of refereeing in La Liga following his side's 4-2 victory away at Real Betis on Sunday.

"I've seen it... If we talk, we get sanctioned, but everyone saw it," Xavi said, referring to Real Madrid's contentious 3-2 comeback win over bottom dwellers Almeria which took place earlier, an encounter marred by questionable refereeing decisions and the application of Virtual Assistant Referee (VAR).

As it stands, Barcelona are seven points adrift of second-placed Real Madrid and eight behind table-toppers Girona who thrashed Sevilla 5-1 on the same night, playing one game more than Carlo Ancelotti's side.

Xavi rues the refereeing decision that went against the Catalan side of late but wanted to focus on his team's performance instead.

"I already said at Getafe that there were things that didn't add up for me in this league. There are things we don't control, and everyone saw it. I remember the penalty at Getafe, Joao's goal at Granada... and it's not talked about.

"We would already have six more points. They are not excuses. It's the reality. Luck is always against us. Today, we need to talk about the team," Xavi added.

Following the game, the Spanish



Football Federation published audio of the talks made during those controversial decisions that began with Real, down 2-0, reducing the deficit in the 56th minute with a Jude Bellingham penalty awarded for a debatable handball after a lengthy VAR check.

However, Almeria had a Sergio Arribas effort from a counter-attack ruled out a little later after another long VAR check as referee Francisco Maeso ruled there was an infringement in the build-up.



Five minutes later, Maeso first ruled out Real's equaliser for a Vinicius Jr handball before awarding the goal after deciding it was off the shoulder following another VAR review. The decision left Almeria's players and manager Asier Garitano fuming as the latter saw marching orders for complaining to the referee.

Bellingham also had a goal ruled out for a controversial offside in the build-up but, at the ninth minute of stoppage time, he worked his magic inside a crowded box

to lift a cross to Dani Carvajal who tapped in the winner at the far post to send the home crowd accustomed to 'remontada' (Spanish for comeback) into a frenzy.

Like Xavi, Almeria coach Garitano refrained himself from dissecting the refereeing decisions.

"You have seen the game and what happened. My opinion? It doesn't matter because then they sanction us for talking, and it's useless. I didn't say anything, but it's true that I protested a lot, logically."