

BPL Mashup

SPORTS REPORTER FROM SYLHET

Sylhet outfield a cause for concern

The picturesque Sylhet International Cricket Stadium (SICS) is gradually turning into an injury trap for cricketers due to its 'below average' outfield littered with unwanted grass.

The outfield at the SICS was recently given a below-average rating by the ICC after a Test match between Bangladesh and New Zealand.

The outfield has remained a problem during the Sylhet phase of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), which came to a close yesterday.

Local grass types, commonly found in the tea gardens, are growing just outside of the playing square. This type of grass does not have deep roots and comes off easily when trampled on. Hence, the ground staff at SICS were often seen scraping away mouldy grass from the pitch.

"Since it's a hilly area, bad seeds come into the area with the air or the birds bring them in," a ground staff said.

The local sandy soil and the high presence of iron in the water are also major factors behind the once lush green outfield at the SICS now looking patchy.

The ground staff believe that the whole outfield needs to be laid out with new grass to restore it to its past state.

Yesterday's first BPL game between Khulna Tigers and Fortune Barishal was also impacted by the outfield's quality with fielders risking injury almost every time they dived for the ball.

"One of our fielders, Faheem Ashraf, got his knees stuck into the turf while fielding. He's now okay though," a Khulna



Tigers official said after the game.

Officials at the BCB said they are keeping an eye on the situation and are ready to take the necessary steps.

"The dew in Sylhet has been a problem but we are keeping things under watch to see what we can do," Syed Abdul Baten, BCB grounds and facilities manager, told The Daily Star yesterday.

BCB sources said that new grass will be laid out at the venue ahead of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup, which will take place in Bangladesh in September. However, the Tigers are set to play in Sylhet in the Sri Lanka series in March, but the outfield is likely to remain more or less the same.

Malik's resurgence after controversial exit

Fortune Barishal's Shoaib Malik marked his return to the Bangladesh Premier League with a match-winning all-round display which helped his side to a five-wicket win over Khulna Tigers in Sylhet yesterday.

Malik had left the team under curious circumstances before the Sylhet phase. The franchise itself also courted controversy with how Malik's departure was handled. In addition to that, three no-balls and 18 runs in an over during Barishal's first game against Khulna Tigers brought a lot of negative attention.

Yet Malik was back again in the BPL with Barishal on Friday and played yesterday's game against Khulna, displaying all his T20 experience during a match-winning unbeaten 25-ball 41. In an unbroken 55-run stand with Mehedi Hasan Miraz, he clinched a nail-biting five-wicket win.

"Yes, I had a commitment in Dubai, prior commitments and now I am back," Malik said in the post-match interview. "I am glad that I did something for the team and that's what experience gives you."



Despite an unbeaten 21 from Rohanat Doullah Borson (inset), Bangladesh failed to chase down a meagre 156-run target in their final ICC Under-19 Super Sixes game against Pakistan in Benoni yesterday. Pakistan pacers kept getting wickets at regular intervals to inflict an agonising five-run defeat on the young Tigers.

PHOTO: X



Young Tigers suffer heart-wrenching WC exit

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh failed to hold their nerves, suffering a heart-wrenching five-run defeat in their final Super Sixes game against Pakistan, as the young Tigers were knocked out of the ICC Under-19 World Cup at Willowmoore Park in Benoni yesterday.

Chasing a meagre 156-run target, Bangladesh batters were constantly challenged by the Pakistani quicks, who not only kept things tight and bowled at a precise length but also were able to scalp wickets at regular intervals to eventually bundle out the young Tigers for 150 in 35.5 overs.

Rohanat Doullah Borson kept Bangladesh's hopes of progressing to the semifinals alive, scoring an unbeaten 21 off 24 balls during a 23-run final-wicket stand with Maruf Mridha. However, their resistance could not last till the end as Mridha saw his stumps shattered off a Mohammad Zeeshan delivery in the 36th over.

Bangladesh had to chase down the small target in 38.1 overs to better Pakistan's net run-rate in order to qualify for the semifinals alongside India from Group 1 of the Super Sixes.

However, despite a commendable job from the bowlers, led by four-wicket hauls from Borson and Sheikh Paevz Jibon, Bangladesh batters failed miserably. Shihab James' 26 off 43 remained the top score for the side.

Seamer Ubaid Shah starred for Pakistan with figures of five for 44. Pakistan will play Australia in the semifinal on February 8.

MOHAMMEDAN end Kings' home record

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club ended Bashundhara Kings' unbeaten home record with a 1-0 win in a fascinating Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday.

It took a spectacular goal from young Minhajur Abedin Rakib in the 40th minute of the match to break King's proud home record, which had stood for 30 matches and close to two years.

Since the inaugural match at the venue when Kings hosted Police in a Bangladesh Premier League match on February 17, 2022, the only stadium owned by a local club had developed the reputation of a fortress for the domestic champions, with no team from either domestic circuit or foreign teams in AFC Cup able to breach it before the Black and Whites ended the special record.

The win cut the gap between the defending champions and Mohammedan to one point as Kings now have 15 points from six matches to Mohammedan's 14 from same number of matches. Mohammedan's win will also serve as a boost for the other title chasers, Abahani in particular, who are in third position with 10 points.

The match between the top two teams lived up to the excitement from the get-go, with Mohammedan

making more impression on the opposition goal. Uzbek midfielder Muzaffarov's freekick missed the target by a few inches in the 20th minute before Rakib dealt the decisive blow five minutes prior to the lemon break.

The 22-year-old received the ball from Soleymane Diabate inside the

Rakib's first goal of the season, but a historic one and could only be compared to very few in Bangladesh football for its execution and elegance.

Kings had two glorious chances in the second half, the league's top scorer Dorielnton Gomes fluffing both efforts, heading wide off target



Mohammedan half and cleverly sped towards the opposition box. With three Kings players flanking him, the youngster was crammed for space yet the lanky forward unleashed a powerful shot off his left foot, even as he was losing his balance, past his marker Bishwanath Ghosh. The ball sailed over the flying Anisur Rahman at Kings goal and nestled perfectly at the back of the net.

in the 62nd minute and in stoppage time. The Brazilian then had an aerial collision with Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujon Hossain, who was later substituted by second-choice keeper Shakib Al Hasan.

Zico thwarted Diabate's effort in the 82nd minute before Shakib, true to his name, produced a couple of fine saves in the dying moments to help Black and Whites write history.



Real Madrid players will have extra motivation going into the derby at Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday as the only blemish for Carlo Ancelotti's side in LaLiga this season has been their loss to city rivals Atletico Madrid away from home in September last year. In fact, Digo Simeone's team are the only one to beat Real Madrid this season, with the latest one dumping Los Blancos out of Copa del Rey from last 16 and halting a 21-match unbeaten streak that had started after Real's loss to Atletico last year.

PHOTO: X

Emirates awaits vital showdown for title race

AGENCIES

Hosts Arsenal will try to narrow the five-point gap on league leader Liverpool while the visitors look to open up an eight-point lead in the Premier League title race when the teams meet for the third time in six weeks on Sunday.

Liverpool earned a 1-1 draw in league play against Arsenal at home last December, and the Reds beat the Gunners 2-0 in the FA Cup third round in London on January 7.

Boasting six wins from their last seven top-flight contests at the Emirates Stadium – the one aberration being a 2-0 defeat to West Ham United – vengeance will be the special dish on the North London menu this weekend as Arteta's men seek to right the wrongs of an identical FA Cup loss to their Merseyside foes.

Liverpool are on course to give their manager a glorious goodbye with Jurgen Klopp stepping down at the end of the season.

With 51 points from 22 games, Liverpool are five points clear of both Arsenal and Manchester City, who have a game in hand, and remain in the hunt for three other trophies in the League Cup, FA Cup, and Europa League.

The outcome at Emirates Stadium

- This is set to be the 200th league meeting between Liverpool and Arsenal.
- Jurgen Klopp's men have kept four clean sheets in their last five visits to Emirates Stadium in all competitions.
- Arsenal haven't kept a clean sheet in any of their previous 16 top-flight meetings with Liverpool, conceding 44 goals.
- Arsenal have only won two of their last 17 league games against Liverpool, with both coming at the Emirates in July 2020 and October 2022.

could potentially decide if the title race would boil down to a three-horse or a two-horse race at the business end of the league.

Victory over Arsenal could be a

knockout blow to the Gunners' chances of a first league title for 20 years.

But Klopp is more concerned by the lurking threat posed by City.

"What we learned over the years is if you want to be around Manchester City you better win all your football games because they are good," added Klopp.

Klopp also acknowledged how important this game is in the context of Arsenal keeping themselves in the hunt for the elusive trophy.

"Arsenal, they beat us, they are definitely there [in the title race]. They don't beat us, ask other people. But there are so many games to come," Klopp said.

Since their FA Cup loss to Liverpool, the Gunners have earned a dominant 5-0 home win over Crystal Palace and a gummy 2-1 victory on Tuesday at Nottingham Forest.

Now with a bit of momentum, Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta believes it's not about changing all that much against Liverpool aside from the end product.

"What we need to do is play the way we played in the last two games against them and be more efficient in the areas that are going to decide the game. We play at home, and what I sense is a real sense of positivity and enthusiasm around the place," Arteta said.

SHORT CORNER



Taskin wants to sit out from Tests

Bangladesh pacer Taskin Ahmed wants to sit out upcoming Test assignments against Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe owing to injuries he has been dealing with since the World Cup in India last year.

Jaiswal 209, Bumrah six-for put India on top

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal's 209 and six wickets by pace bowler Jasprit Bumrah put India firmly in command of the second Test against England on Saturday's day two. Bumrah returned figures of 6-45 and wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav took three wickets to bowl out England for 253 as the tourists conceded a first-innings lead of 143 in Visakhapatnam.

Iran stun Japan to reach Asian Cup semis

Iran will play hosts and holders Qatar or Uzbekistan in the Asian Cup semi-finals after Alireza Jahanbakhsh scored a 96th-minute penalty for a dramatic 2-1 win over Japan on Saturday. It was a stunning comeback from Iran, who were behind at the break but roared back to dump out the pre-tournament favourites and keep alive their dream of a first Asian title since 1976.

*Read full stories on The Daily Star's website.