

What to WATCH

T SPORTS  
Indian Premier League  
Chennai vs Lucknow  
Live from 8:00 pm  
STAR SPORTS

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(Wednesday)

## Three iconic clubs vie for top-flight re-entry

SPORTS REPORTER

Newer teams have often overshadowed the old guards in the landscape of Bangladesh football, especially since the advent of the second-tier professional football competition, Bangladesh Championship League (BCL), in 2012.

However, the resurgence of three iconic teams -- Fakirerpool Young Men's Club, Dhaka Wanderers Club, and PWD Sports Club -- has been taking place.

Two of these three clubs, with a rich legacy dating back to before the country's liberation war, are now on the cusp of reclaiming their spot in the top-flight arena, where they had once fared regularly to become household names.

Leading the charge is Fakirerpool, topping the BCL table with 24 points from 13 matches, one point ahead of PWD and Wanderers. As it stands, all three need points in their respective final matches to earn promotion.

Back in their heyday, Fakirerpool had earned the moniker of "giant killers" while they also produced many excellent and promising footballers for the national team, but the Motijheel-based club had ups and downs both on and off the pitch.

They navigated through challenges, including a damaging casino scandal around four years back, to emerge on their way to the top-tier Bangladesh Premier



Shoriful Islam and Taskin Ahmed – two of the cornerstones of Bangladesh's pace bowling – walk back satisfied after wrapping up the Prime Bank innings in Abahani's Dhaka Premier League fixture at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (Bottom) An umpire tries to get some respite from the searing heat by throwing water on his face.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Women's cricket league from May 17

SPORTS REPORTER

The Dhaka Premier Division Women's Cricket League is set to begin on May 17 after the end of the Tigresses' series against India. The players' transfer would take place on May 11 and 12, according to women's wing sources.

There will, however, be no players' pool this time around. Thus, the teams can pick any national team player without any quota restriction. In the last three seasons, only three national team players were allowed each side.

On Sunday, the Bangladesh Cricket Board sat with the clubs to discuss the quota and restrictions, although two clubs were not present during the discussion. Jabid Ahsan Sohel Cricket Club and Ansar & VDP are the newest teams in the league. Meanwhile, regular names such as Rupali Bank, Mohammedan, Kalabagan KC, Abahani, Khelaghar Samaj Kallyan Sangho, BKSP, Gulshan Youth Club and City Club are set to take part in the league.

The women's wing wants to end the league before the Asia Cup in Sri Lanka, beginning in late July.



League (BPL), where they had refused to play due to a financial crisis despite having won the BCL title in 2017.

This season, they formed a squad to stay alive with the goal of finishing in the middle of the table, but Imtiaz Khan Lablu's charges are on track to finish first if they can defeat another title challengers, PWD, today.

"We are very close to becoming champions... but we are worried about the arrangement of fund of how to form the squad for BPL," Fakirerpool general secretary Mostafizur Rahman Mainu told The Daily Star yesterday, adding that they will not waste the opportunity to play BPL this time if they qualify for the top-flight football.

Unlike Fakirerpool, PWD formed a squad with the hope of qualifying for the BPL after receiving support from club president Shamim Akhtar and general secretary Moshirur Rahman. At present, the 70-year-old club are level on points, 23, with second-placed Wanderers who are set to play BFF Elite Football Academy tomorrow.

Interestingly, while government-backed sports teams kept withdrawing one after another from different disciplines over the years, PWD remained determined to revive their lost glory.

"On the back of good preparation in our debut BCL appearance, we are expecting to finish in top two positions to qualify for BPL, but we are not satisfied with our current position," remarked PWD manager Iftekharul Islam.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Wanderers Club, with a legacy as seven-time league champions in the 1960s and rivals to the popular Mohammedan Sporting Club, are also in contention. Overcoming challenges, including repercussions from a casino scandal, the club remains steadfast in their pursuit of returning to the top flight.

"I have heard from the club officials, during the formation of the squad, that they want to bring back the past glories," said Wanderers head coach Abu Yousuf, adding that he would be happy if he can be part of the club's new journey in top-flight football.

## The DPL factor in players' workload management

SPORTS REPORTER

A club versus country debate is raging in Bangladesh cricket about the board's decision to recall Mustafizur Rahman from his stint at the Indian Premier League (IPL).

The decision was made to manage the pacer's workload ahead of the June's ICC Twenty20 World Cup, with Bangladesh playing a home series against Zimbabwe.

However, the same officials have adopted a very different approach for the other national team pacers who are currently taking part in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) in the sweltering heat and perhaps it is this difference in approaches that hold the key in understanding the crux of the matter.

In the ongoing DPL, Abahani Limited have completely dominated the proceedings, picking up victories in all 12 of their matches so far.

Majority of the national team players are playing for Abahani, which includes Mustafizur's fellow national team pacers Taskin Ahmed and Shoriful Islam.

While Mustafizur has enjoyed a lot of success this season for the Chennai Super Kings (CSK), Taskin and Shoriful have also bowled with fire in the DPL while a heat wave has been sweeping across the country.

On April 17, Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) cricket operations chariman Jalal Yunus made headlines when he said that Mustafizur has 'nothing to learn' from IPL and cited the need to manage the pacer's workload as one of the main reasons why the board wants him back in Bangladesh on May 2.

However, if Mustafizur, who has been busy playing in a T20 tournament, needs to be looked after to ensure he doesn't get burnt out ahead of the T20 World Cup in June, surely Taskin and Shoriful also deserve a similar consideration as playing 50-over matches in DPL cannot be the easier option.

Questions are naturally arising whether the fact that

Taskin and Shoriful are playing for Abahani, a traditional club where many BCB high ups are directly involved, has been a factor in this difference in approaches.

"It's very hot out here but that's what we have to play through," said Abahani pacer Shoriful about playing against Prime Bank Cricket Club in the searing heat in Mirpur yesterday.

"We didn't think about how hot it was because thinking about it might make us feel the heat even more. What we had in mind was that after every two-three overs we would take a break and then get into the field again," he added.

Taskin did not play in the Sri Lanka Tests while Shoriful was rested for the second Test of the series. Shoriful said he had been given an option to rest before Eid-ul-Fitr by Abahani coach Khaled Mahmud, but he refused it.

"Yes, he [Mahmud] told me that 'you could rest' but I told him that since there are no games immediately after Eid, it would serve my fitness better if I play one or two matches. There is a chance that Taskin bhai and I might get rested in the next match," Shoriful said.

Abahani management yesterday informed this newspaper that they are hoping to get Taskin and Shoriful till April 28 as they are two wins away from securing the title, the same date the Tigers have their first practice session at Chattogram to prepare for Zimbabwe.

Abahani management also informed that national team had requested them not to overplay the pacers. So far though, that request hasn't really been upheld and it remains to be seen when they or other national stars playing for influential DPL teams join the camp.

What is certain though is that no club versus country debate is complete without the DPL also factoring in. With the T20 World Cup just around the corner, the coming days will make it clear what importance does BCB really place on workload management.



### SHORT CORNER



#### Indian chess prodigy Gukesh makes history

Gukesh Dommaraju, a 17-year-old from India, will become the youngest player to challenge for the World Chess Championship crown after winning a major tournament in Canada. Gukesh will face reigning champion Ding Liren from China for another piece of history, after being the youngest player to win the prestigious Candidates Tournament.

#### BCB hands Mohsin two-year contract

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has appointed Mohsin Sheikh as the national team's performance analyst for a two-year term beginning in May 2024.

#### Djokovic skips Madrid Open

World number one and record 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic will not play at the Madrid Open this week. Media reports said the 36-year-old Serbian star had pulled out of the tournament and he was not included in the draw on Monday.

#### Palmer struggling to face Arsenal

Chelsea could be without top scorer Cole Palmer for Tuesday's clash away at Premier League leaders Arsenal with the forward struggling to recover from illness, manager Mauricio Pochettino said on Monday. "Today, no (he cannot play)," Pochettino told a press conference. "We will see tomorrow morning. Today, I don't believe he can be involved."

\*Read full stories on The Daily Star website



Jude Bellingham celebrates his winning goal as teammates Nacho, Federico Valverde and Joselu join him during their 3-2 victory against archrivals Barcelona in a LaLiga fixture at the Bernabeu on Sunday. The victory took Los Blancos 11 points clear at the top, with six games remaining.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'Bowlers with X-factor will hold key in T20 WC'

REUTERS

With T20 cricket becoming increasingly more batter-dominated, bowlers with the 'X-factor' could make all the difference in the World Cup in June, West Indies head coach Daren Sammy told Reuters.

The batting bias of cricket's shortest format is evident in the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL), where 200-plus scores have become a routine and 300 does not look impossible anymore.

Sammy, who captained West Indies to both their T20 World Cup titles, expected the batting carnage to continue in the June showpiece.

"Bowlers have been under the pump," the former all-rounder said in a telephone interview from his T20 World Cup trophy tour in Saint Lucia.

"It's not just the young bowlers, every single international bowler has been under pressure.

"Look at the IPL right now. Teams are scoring 200 and it's not a safe total. It tells you that the batsmen are really dominating T20 cricket now."

While teams would pack their squads with power-hitters, Sammy reckoned bowlers with unconventional skills or action could prove crucial in the June 129 tournament.

"The difference will be some X-factor bowlers," the 40-year-old said.

"Whether that's pace, whether that's mystery spin - you'd need that in your armoury in order to defend totals or restrict opponents."

The other way to silence the blazing bats would be with raw pace, he said.

"Pace is pace," Sammy said citing the importance of Lasith Malinga in Sri Lanka's victory in the 2014 T20

World Cup, and the roles Fidel Edwards, Jerome Taylor and Ravi Rampaul played under his captaincy.

"Whether the wicket is spin-friendly or seam-friendly, genuine pace will always create doubts in the batsman's mind.

"To have that in your armoury is always a plus," Sammy added.

From a batting point of view, Sammy said the current West Indies team were comparable to the sides that won the World Cups under his captaincy.

Their bowling, however, would depend a lot on how their all-rounders contribute.

"Obviously I'd love to have the 'X-factor' that I had in 2012 and 2016, when I had two bowlers ranked among the top five. We don't have that now.

West Indies will co-host the tournament with the United States.

