

What to WATCH

T SPORTS
Federation Cup final
Bashundhara Kings vs
Mohammedan
Live from 3:00 pm
IPL
Eliminator

Rajasthan vs Bengaluru
Live from 8:00 pm
SONY SPORTS 2
Europa League final
Leverkusen vs Atalanta
Live from 1:00 am
(Thursday)



Liton's quest to RECOVER COMPOSURE

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite having a high performance ceiling, Liton Das has had to prove his mettle over the last few years to be acknowledged as Bangladesh's top batter across formats. A slump in form eventually jeopardised his position as a guaranteed starter heading in to the T20 World Cup this year, but the wicketkeeper-batter's performance ceiling still weighed heavy enough for the team management in keeping him in the World Cup roster.

Something seems amiss with Liton. The same process that he followed, the level of calmness portrayed in a brilliant match-winning knock against New Zealand in the historic Mount Maunganui Test in early 2022, has not been exhibited for a while.

When it comes to the

performance ceiling, the knock against India at the T20 World Cup in 2022 serves as a case in point. It is a ceiling that any other batter from the national side would like to have scaled, given the quality of the bowling lineup India had and the destruction Liton conjured with ease.

That innings was, perhaps, also the beginning of improvised shots. It paid off during that knock but has often brought his downfall in the shorter formats.

Even last year, Liton had struck 323 runs in nine T20Is, averaging over 40. Those knocks coincided with Bangladesh's whitewash of England, Afghanistan and Ireland at home in the shortest format, and, despite looking out of sorts, he managed a 41 not out in New Zealand which handed the Tigers their first T20I win on Kiwi soil.

Liton may not be an automatic starter but Bangladesh's plans could change drastically after just one game at the main event in the USA and West Indies. His return to form would be crucial and Liton now feels that he might have overlooked preparations during a good patch.

"It is important to hold onto your performances in good times, because you are playing well in one match and a lot of things maybe be going around your head, like you are doing well and you start having a careless attitude," Liton said in a video posted by BCB yesterday.

Liton says that he will try to do better than he had done in the past two T20 World Cups. He still has the trust of head coach, who said: "He is one of our top

batsman; expecting big things from him at the World Cup."

Assistant coach Nic Pothas had earlier remarked that Liton was just one good innings from finding his groove.

The USA series and the two warm-up matches for the World Cup would present Liton with the chance. Liton, however, did not have the best of time in the middle in the T20I opener against the co-hosts yesterday as he departed after scoring a 15-ball 14. He got a couple of reprieves before his dismissal and then failed to capitalise on his good fortunes.

So, to ensure his hard work pays off, Liton needs to return to the basics. When it comes to getting back in his elements, he may just need to revisit what had clicked in his good times.

Ronaldo to play in sixth European Championship

REUTERS

Portugal's 39-year-old forward Cristiano Ronaldo will play in his sixth European Championship and veteran defender Pepe also made the cut as coach Roberto Martinez named his 26-man squad on Tuesday.

Ronaldo, who has scored in every Euros since his first appearance in 2004, has netted 14 goals in the finals. He also scored 10 times in the qualifiers last year.

Ronaldo now plays for Saudi Pro League side Al-Nassr where he has scored 42 goals and provided 13 assists in all competitions.

"Cristiano? It's better to talk about the data. He's a player who's scored 42 goals in 41 games for his club," Martinez said.

"That shows his continuity and physical ability to always be fit, as well as the quality he has in front of goal, which we really like and need."

However, Ronaldo will not be the oldest member of the squad with Martinez also calling up Porto defender Pepe who turned 41 this year.

Pepe was an integral part of Porto's team this year, making 38 appearances as they reached the Champions League last 16 and finished third in the league. They are also in the Cup final.

Kroos to retire after Euros

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid's German international Toni Kroos announced on Tuesday he will retire from all football after Euro 2024.

"My career as an active footballer will end this summer after the Euro championship," 34-year-old Kroos, who won the 2014 World Cup with Germany, said on Instagram.

Before the European Championship, Kroos has a chance to win the Champions League with Real for a fifth time when they face Borussia Dortmund at Wembley on June 1.

He also won the Champions League with Bayern Munich before joining the Spanish giants in 2014. He won four La Liga title with Los Blancos.

He announced he was quitting international football in July 2021 but reversed his decision in February after talks with Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann, who persuaded him to play on till the Euro 2024 on home soil.

Kroos, who has racked up 108 caps and 17 goals for Germany, was one of the key players when they won the World Cup in Brazil in 2014.

"My ambition was always to finish my career at the peak of my performance level," Kroos said on Instagram.

"I am happy and proud that in my mind I found the right timing for my decision and that I could choose it on my own."



Kings eye rare treble, MSC look for 12th

SPORTS REPORTER

Favourites Bashundhara Kings will look to add a new feather to their burgeoning cap when they take on defending champions Mohammedan in the final of the Federation Cup at the Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh today.

The match will get underway at 3:00pm, with T-Sports telecasting the match live.

Even though Kings have almost turned into an unstoppable force since their introduction to country's top flight football in 2018, they have not been able to win a treble. That feat is held solely by Sheikh Russel KC, who won all three domestic titles in the 2012-13 season.

With the season's Independence Cup and the Bangladesh Premier League titles in the bag, Kings have the chance to do the same, after failing to win three titles in the same season in six previous attempts.

However, Kings must overcome the hurdle of defending champions Mohammedan, who will look to end the season with a trophy and go on top of Federation Cup's overall winners' chart alongside archrivals Abahani with 12.

"We truly believe in ourselves, in the trust in each other, in the technical and tactical automatism and we will leave everything we have out in that final game," Kings coach Oscar Bruzon told reporters on the eve of the final. "We are eager to achieve all the club goals when they decided we are the main actors to go for it."

"Every game is different from the



Fed Cup titles won
MSC 11, Kings 2

Head-to-head this season

Played	Kings won	MSC won	Draw
3	2	1	0

Head-to-head overall

Played	Kings won	MSC won	Draw
15	10	3	2

Club's top-scorer this season

Kings: Dorielton Gomes (19)
MSC: Souleymane Diabate (15)



previous one due to multiple factors, but our rivals have been consistent in their game idea throughout the season. They have a packed defence, defend by numbers the central areas, use high wing-backs and mobile and physical players upfront," the Spaniard said, assessing the opposition's playing style.

Statistics put Kings much ahead of Mohammedan as they have won 10 matches, drew twice and lost only three in 15 meetings between the two sides. However, all three defeats against Mohammedan have in the last two years, under the guidance of Alfaz Ahmed.

"We all want to wrap up our campaign by winning the season's last trophy and

we will go to tomorrow's final with a determination to be champions," the Mohammedan coach told The Daily Star. "Everyone knows Kings are the best team in the country, but we know how to play against them and how to beat them."

Kings will rely on their three Brazilian forwards -- Dorielton Gomes (19 goals), Miguel Ferreira (10 goals), Robson Robinho (9 goals) -- as well as local forward Rakib Hossain (10 goals) in bid to win the treble while Mohammedan will be looking up to Souleymane Diabate (15 goals), Muzaffarov (9 goals), Emmanuel Sunday (6 goals) and local forward Jafar Iqbal (8 goals) to defend the title.

One down, two to go as Leverkusen face Atalanta in Europa League final

REUTERS

Bayer Leverkusen had won only two major trophies in their 119-year history before this season but on Wednesday the newly-crowned Bundesliga champions have the chance to claim a double when they face Atalanta in the Europa League final in Dublin.

Leverkusen broke Bayern Munich's 11-year monopoly of the title in Germany this term as Xabi Alonso's side became the first team in the Bundesliga's 61-year history to complete the season unbeaten. They have also reached the German Cup final.

Their undefeated run in all competitions this term has earned them the nickname Bayer 'Neverlusen' and Serie A side Atalanta will have their work cut out trying to beat a team that have not lost in a European record 51 matches since August.

Several sides have come close to handing Leverkusen their first defeat of the season but, with 17 goals scored in or after the 90th minute, they do not give up until the final whistle.

"We have been competitive in every game, whether we were playing well or poorly. We played well for the majority of the games, but we didn't give up in the ones where we didn't play well," Alonso



Leverkusen scored six goals in or after the 90th minute in the Europa League this season. This is the most ever a team has netted that late in a single campaign of a major European competition.

Xabi Alonso's side, unbeaten in 51 games in all competitions (42W 9D), can become the fourth side to lift the Europa League trophy with an unbeaten record after Chelsea (2018-19), Villarreal (2020-21), and Eintracht Frankfurt (2021-22).

Atalanta can become the first Italian side to win the Europa League, with previous winners only ever hailing from Spain, Portugal, England or Germany. This is Atalanta's first European final and they are the 11th different Italian side to reach one.

Gian Piero Gasperini has lost four finals as a coach, including three as Atalanta manager, and is yet to win a major trophy. He lost three Coppa Italia finals and a Supercoppa Italiana final.

Atalanta and Leverkusen have previously faced off twice in Europe, with the Italians winning both legs of a Europa League last-16 tie in 2021-22 (1-0 away, 3-2 at home).



said in an interview with UEFA.

"That says a lot about the commitment of this team when it comes to preparing for every game. We didn't take any game for granted."

Much like Alonso, coach Gian Piero Gasperini has changed Atalanta's fortunes, making the Bergamo-based outfit an ever-present club in European competition since his arrival in 2016 and will hope to end the season with their first major trophy in 61 years after losing to Juventus in the Coppa Italia final.

Atalanta play an enjoyable attacking style with high intensity and managers like Pep Guardiola and Maurizio Sarri have likened facing Gasperini's teams to "going to the dentist".

"Even if you come out unscathed, you still feel the pain," Sarri once said.

Just like Alonso, the match in Dublin will also be Gasperini's first European final.

"It's a great achievement and source of satisfaction, achieved with a really good season from this whole team," the 66-year-old Italian said.

"Is it the highest point of my career? Yes, in terms of accomplishment and prestige, absolutely. In terms of gratification, fortunately I've had quite a few, although perhaps not on the same level."

New T20 league on way with NCL teams

SPORTS REPORTER

The need for a change in Bangladesh's T20 fortunes had eventually spurred Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to make a move, and discussions have gone ahead for Bangladesh's newest T20 league for local players following yesterday's meeting between BCB's Tournament Committee and Technical Committee.

Cricketer operations chairman Jalal Yunus, Tournament Committee chairman Sajjadul Alam Bobby and chairman of selection panel Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu were among those present in the meeting.

Not long ago, just ahead of the recent Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), a few players just outside the periphery of the national team were discussing how difficult it was to find T20 rhythm before the BPL.



In franchise cricket there are foreign players so it was important to have a tournament for local players. So we have decided to have a T20 tournament in first week of December with the eight NCL teams.

Minhajul Abedin

BCB chief coordinator of programs

"It would be great if we can have another T20 league apart from BPL. It would really help with T20s and also help players grow," one of the players had said.

What appeared to be quite unlikely at that point, due to a packed domestic schedule, is now becoming a reality.

The new T20 league would take place in December, pending approval of the board. To open a slot for a new T20 tournament, the board had to make changes to tournament structure and schedules in the cricket calendar.

The National Cricket League (NCL) will begin on October 15 but this time the tournament will take place in single league format, meaning each team will play each other once -- unlike the previous two-tier system.

The NCL teams would also be the teams in the new T20 league. "The selection panel will pick the players for the eight sides. Everyone at the meeting agreed and we are awaiting the board's approval," chief coordinator of programs Minhajul Abedin said in a video message yesterday.

"In franchise cricket there are foreign players so it was important to have a tournament for local players. So we have decided to have a T20 tournament in first week of December with the eight NCL teams. Some 128 to 130 cricketers would get the opportunity to play and be able to overcome their deficiencies in this format, helping Bangladesh cricket," Minhajul added.

Also, the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), which is played in December during winter, will now be played between April and May to prioritise the preparations of facing hot and humid conditions in longer-version international matches. Longer-version cricket has been on the agenda and Minhajul said that consideration was given so that national team players can play more domestic red-ball cricket.

A fruitful meeting saw some changes in the calendar which can help Bangladesh fulfill shortcomings in the two formats -- Tests and T20Is -- that they have struggled to develop up to expectations over the years.