

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 2
Champions League
PSV vs Girona
Live from 11:45 pm
Real Madrid vs AC Milan
Live from 2:00 am (Wednesday)

SONY SPORTS 1
Liverpool vs Leverkusen
Live from 2:00 am (Wednesday)
SONY SPORTS 5
Sporting Lisbon vs Man City
Live from 2:00 am (Wednesday)

Farooqi threat looms over Tigers' left-handed top-order

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

If you are a left-handed top-order Bangladesh batter, you would not like the sight of Afghanistan's left-handed pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi steaming in at you with the new ball.

Just ask former ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal – Bangladesh's highest run-getter in the format – who was tormented and humbled down to the ground by Farooqi in a three-match series in Chattogram in 2022. Farooqi dismissed Tamim in all three matches and the southpaw, who was trapped lbw twice and castled once, had no answer to what Farooqi was dishing out.

Tamim won't be playing the upcoming three-match series against Afghanistan, starting on Wednesday in the UAE, but that does not mean that Farooqi won't be licking his lips as he gears up to wreak havoc when taking on Bangladesh, who have four left-handed top-order batters in their squad, three of whom are expected to play.

Let's look at what Farooqi's key strengths are with the new ball. The 24-year-old is an expert at swinging the ball both ways, particularly at nipping it off the surface. It's not like he can



PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED/AFP

conjure up extravagant swing but he deals expertly at extracting the minimal assistance on offer. Add that up with his ability to keep it accurate and you have a solid option to rattle oppositions in the Powerplay – all of which along with his death-bowling prowess he used to great effect

in the T20 World Cup earlier this year when he topped the wicket-takers' charts with 17 wickets.

Now, the current Bangladesh top order lot – Soumya Sarker, Tanzid Tamim, Najmul Hossain Shanto, and Zakir Hasan – is allergic to whatever Farooqi brings to the table. They are not

only prone to being asphyxiated against Farooqi's skillset but are also at risk of an anaphylactic shock, meaning a full-on top-order meltdown while trying to wriggle out of difficult situations – a trademark coping mechanism for the Tigers when under the pump.

In the eight matches he has played against Bangladesh so far, Farooqi has taken 15 wickets at an economy rate of 4.84. He averages 19.33 against the Tigers – his best against an opposition he played at least three times. And of the 15 wickets, seven were left-handed scalps.

Given the current form of Bangladesh's top order across formats or their overall batting form in general, the candidates selected for the Afghanistan series do very little to evoke a sense of confidence. One can never know what to expect from Soumya, who has already played international cricket for almost 10 years. Skipper Shanto has been under fire for his abysmal form in the other formats and Zakir's glaring weakness against strict lines and lengths in recent red-ball contests does not help the Tigers either. Tanzid is different in that regard as he shares little of those similar weaknesses but has largely blown hot and cold.

The silver lining to this has most definitely got to be the Sharjah Cricket Ground – as it has aided batters in recent contests. In the eight matches played at the venue since 2022, the average first innings score is 300.

England, Australia tours beckon Tigresses

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's cricket team will get to tour current and former ODI World Cup winners Australia and England for the first time in the next Future Tours Programme cycle (2025-2029). The Tigresses will also tour India and Pakistan during this cycle while host South Africa, West Indies, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe.



The next Future Tours Programme cycle will see almost 400 matches being played among 11 teams as part of an expanded ICC Women's Championship, ICC said in a press release on Monday.

All formats show a substantial increase from the previous cycle (2022-2025) and this FTP sees an ICC event each year with the inaugural six-team Champions Trophy scheduled for 2027. The other ICC events during the period are the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup in 2025 (India), the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in 2026 (the United Kingdom) and the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in 2028 (host yet to be announced).

In all, 132 ODIs will be played in 44 series of three matches each. Members have scheduled, by mutual agreement, tri-series in the lead up to and as preparation for ICC events. Members have also pencilled in more Test matches this time, according to the new FTP.

SHORT CORNER

Shakib's bowling action under scrutiny in English county

Bangladesh ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan faced an unforeseen predicament during his recent county stint with Surrey during the recently-concluded county season. In an international career spanning over 17 years, this was the first time Shakib's bowling action was questioned.

Series win over India eclipses my perfect 10: Ajaz Patel

Ajaz Patel said helping New Zealand wrap up a 3-0 series sweep in India on Sunday was even more special than his spectacular outing at the Wankhede Stadium three years ago when the Mumbai-born spinner picked up 10 wickets in one innings. Patel took 11 wickets in the third Test as the Black Caps sealed a 25-run win on Sunday.

Rohit, Kohli under fire

Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma came under fire Monday as India chewed over a 3-0 Test series home defeat to New Zealand, with critics calling the team ageing and low on confidence. With Australia looming large, the form of 37-year-old Rohit and superstar batsman Kohli, 35, is of particular concern to Indian cricket fans. Rohit made 91 runs in three matches. Kohli just 93.

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

Mijanur eager to grab opportunity with DABANG DELHI

SPORTS REPORTER

Mijanur Rahman is eagerly waiting to grab an opportunity for his debut in the Professional Kabaddi League (season-11) in India. The best raider of Bangladesh joined former champions Dabang Delhi KC last week after missing out on the first five PKL matches due to delayed arrival in India.

Dabang Delhi KC, the champions of the 2021-22 season, are in 10th position of the 12-team table with two wins and four defeats. They are set to face ninth-placed U Mumba today in their seventh match following three defeats in a row in Hyderabad.

"As the team is in a losing streak, coach Joginder Narwal has kept his faith on proven campaigners who started the league after a month and a half's preparation. I joined them on October 30 and was in the squad in the previous match against Patna



Pirates but did not get opportunity to play," Mijanur told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

"I have been waiting to get the opportunity to play and impress the coach, thereby cementing a place in the starting eleven," said Mijanur.

Mijanur said he has undergone only two training sessions so far, but aims to play at least 10 to 12 out of the remaining 16 to 18 matches.

Mijanur, who is one of 21 foreign players in the ongoing PKL, was

picked by Dabang Delhi for the first time after being overlooked in two previous editions. He was probably chosen due to the raiding skill he displayed in the 2023 Asian Games in China. Mijanur was twice named the most valuable player of Bangabandhu International Kabaddi tournament held in Bangladesh.

"The PKL matches are of better standard than international some international matches like Bangladesh vs Nepal or Nepal vs Sri Lanka. I think Bangladesh team will struggle against PKL outfits," Mijanur said. "So, if I get the opportunity to play, I will gain experience like international matches and try to improve my technique and skill."

Replying to a query, Mijanur said, "If Bangladesh can perform well at international level, then more players will get opportunity in the PKL, which will strengthen the national team."

Alonso's Anfield return; Milan eye Real duel

AGENCIES

Xabi Alonso returns to Anfield tonight as his Bayer Leverkusen side face Liverpool in the Champions League, rekindling memories of his pivotal role in their 2005 triumph, while AC Milan are preparing for a stern test against defending champions Real Madrid.

Alonso played 210 games for Liverpool between 2004 and 2009, with the highlight undoubtedly being the miracle comeback in the Reds' Champions League final win over AC Milan in Istanbul.

The Spaniard scored Liverpool's third goal in seven minutes to bring them level to 3-3 before they went on to win on penalties.

Alonso, 42, remains hugely popular with Liverpool fans and could have been in the home dugout had things gone differently.

Last season, after Jurgen Klopp's shock decision to leave the club, Liverpool fans – who had taken notice of Alonso's incredible run at Leverkusen – were hoping he could be headed to Merseyside. Alonso though knocked back the reported interest from Liverpool as well as from former sides Real Madrid and Bayern Munich to stay at Leverkusen, who he had on track for a first-ever German top-flight title.

Alonso still speaks fondly of his time as a player on Merseyside and after Friday's



scoreless draw with Stuttgart, he said he was eagerly awaiting his return.

"Champions League at Anfield? It doesn't get much better than that," said Alonso, who took Leverkusen to an unbeaten league and cup double – the first in German football history – as well as a Europa League final.

"The atmosphere is great. Liverpool is one of the best teams in Europe at the moment. It's a huge challenge but a

beautiful challenge for us."

Any regret at missing out on Alonso is likely to have subsided among Liverpool fans, given their impressive start under Dutchman Arne Slot.

With 13 wins and a draw from 15 matches – officially the best start of any new Reds manager – Slot has Liverpool sitting top of the Premier League table.

In Europe, Liverpool are alongside Aston Villa as one of only two sides to have won three from three.

MILAN COACH DOWNPLAYS REAL TEST

Despite their narrow 1-0 victory against lowly Monza on Saturday, AC Milan coach Paulo Fonseca did not think his team would be overawed at the prospect of facing 15-times European Cup champions Real Madrid.

"I am always fired up for every game and do not think that Real Madrid is any more important than what we played [against Monza] tonight," Fonseca told Sky Sports Italia.

Milan currently sit 25th in the Champions League standings, just outside the playoff positions, with defender Youssouf Fofana echoing his coach's sentiments regarding Real.

"It doesn't matter if it's Real Madrid or any other team; we need points to improve our position in the standings. I hope it will be a great night for all of us," he told DAZN.



Crisis manager Cummins rescues Australia

REUTERS, MELBOURNE

Pat Cummins proved once more he is the man for a batting crisis as he guided world champions Australia to a tense two-wicket win in their series-opening one-day international against Pakistan at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Monday.

Playing his first ODI since last year's World Cup in India, Cummins produced a nerveless knock of 32 from 31 balls to push the hosts past Pakistan's modest total of 203 with 16.3 overs to spare.

Cummins, who also took two wickets, burnished his record of guiding Australia to victory from positions of peril, having scored the winning runs during the Ashes Test at Edgbaston last year and twice hung tough with the bat at the World Cup.

"Tonight we got it done. I always much prefer

sitting in the change-room but a wonderful match," Cummins said. "It got a bit tighter than we would have liked in the end."

The hosts were in trouble at 155 for seven when Cummins came to the crease, with Pakistan snuffing their first win in Australia in nearly eight years and energised by a three-wicket burst by paceman Harris Rauf.

Tailender Sean Abbott was run out for 13 to leave Australia needing 19 runs with two wickets in hand but Cummins and Mitchell Starc (two not out) held on.

Cummins smashed a four straight past Pakistan quick Mohammad Hasnain to level the score then punched a single square to seal the win.

Pace spearhead Starc was named man-of-the-match with three wickets, including dismissing both Pakistan's openers.