


17TH BPL

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➤ Former champions Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel are not playing

➤ Abahani playing without foreign players

➤ 10 teams to play a total of 90 matches across five venues

➤ Only three teams have foreign coaches

➤ New venue Gazipur included with Dhaka, Mymensingh, Munshiganj, and Cumilla

➤ Players' payment reduced

➤ Dhaka Wanderers Club and Fakirerpool Youngmens are two debutants

Season reboots today amid challenges

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bashundhara Group Bangladesh Premier League begins today, amid concerns over diminished competitiveness due to the absence of two former champions, subpar pitch conditions, and reduced player wages.

On the opening day, five-time champions Bashundhara Kings face Chittagong Abahani at the Bashundhara Kings Arena in Dhaka, runners-up Mohammedan SC meet promoted Dhaka Wanderers Club in Gazipur, while Brothers Union host Bangladesh Police SC in Mymensingh.

The withdrawal of three-time champions Sheikh Jamal DC and one-time champions Sheikh Russel KC has added to the league's challenges. Meanwhile, six-time champions Abahani are competing without foreign players for the first time, further diminishing the league's competitiveness compared to last season.

Despite these setbacks, Kings technical director BA Jubair Nipu believes the league will remain competitive, despite the absence of two major clubs and Abahani's decision to forgo foreign players.

"It might seem that it's going to be easy [to win the league], but we lost some quality players this season. And the standard of local players of all clubs are almost the same," said Nipu, adding that Mohammedan, Abahani -- even without foreign players -- Fortis FC and Police are capable of going the distance.

Mohammedan coach Alfaz Ahmed noted that with the withdrawal of Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel, along with a redistribution of quality players, most teams -- except Kings and Mohammedan -- now have comparable strength.

"Our target is to improve on last season's second-place finish," Alfaz said.

Fortis coach Masud Parvez Kaiser, however, reckons "the financial crisis affecting most clubs" will make it "challenging for coaches to consistently keep players motivated."

Five of the league's venues, excluding the Kings Arena, are reportedly not up to professional standard. Kaiser, also a former national team assistant coach, added that "substandard" grounds in Dhaka will "make it difficult to distinguish between top-tier and lower-tier players".



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

"You know how special it is to play against a club that won this Champions League so many times, are the reigning champions and were a pain in the ass for Liverpool many times as well,"



Liverpool coach Arne Slot on what the win against Real meant for The Reds.

"It's a difficult moment for him, we've got to support him and give him our love, he'll soon be fine. People miss penalties, it happens a lot. It could be a lack of confidence maybe. You can't put too much grief on him for that,"



Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti on Mbappe's form.



LIVERPOOL

end 15-year Real drought

Second-half goals from Alexis Mac Allister and Cody Gakpo saw Liverpool register a 2-0 win in the Champions League over Real Madrid in front of a raucous home crowd at Anfield on Wednesday, ending the Reds' 15-year winless streak against the reigning European champions. The defeat saw Real drop down to 24th in the standings, the final spot to earn a place in the play-offs in the new-look Champions League format. Liverpool moved to the top and are well on course for being one of the top eight teams that will directly qualify for the round of 16.

➤ Liverpool are just the fifth side to win their opening five games of a Champions League campaign and concede no more than one goal after Milan in 1992-93, Juventus in 2004-05, Atletico Madrid in 2016-17 and PSG in 2017-18.

➤ Liverpool are also the only side with a perfect record in this Champions League.

➤ This victory marked Liverpool's first win over Madrid since 2009, breaking an eight-match winless run against the reigning European champions. Real had won seven times and saw one game end in a draw (in 2021) against the Reds in the previous eight matches.

➤ Arne Slot has led Liverpool to 17 wins in his first 19 games in charge and did something his predecessor Jurgen Klopp was unable to do in his

six attempts as a Liverpool manager -- beat Real Madrid.

➤ Kylian Mbappe's missed penalty in the 61st minute meant the French forward is still one shy of his 50th Champions League goal.

➤ Real Madrid are the first reigning champions in Champions League history to lose as many as three of their first five games of a campaign (W2).

➤ Each of Alexis Mac Allister's last four goals for Liverpool in all competitions have come at Anfield.

➤ Luka Modric is the seventh player to start 100 games for Real Madrid in the Champions League, the joint-most by a side in the competition's history along with Barcelona.

SHORT CORNER

Bangladesh go down 6-0 against Pakistan

A hattrick from Sufyan Khan saw Bangladesh suffer a massive 6-0 defeat to Pakistan in their second match of the Men's Hockey Junior Asia Cup in Muscat on Thursday. Bangladesh will face Malaysia on Saturday.

Swiatek suspended one month for positive doping test

World number two and French Open champion Iga Swiatek has accepted a one-month suspension after testing positive for banned substance trimetazidine (TMZ), the International Tennis Integrity Agency said on Thursday. "The player was provisionally suspended from Sept. 22 until Oct. 4, missing three tournaments, which counts towards the sanction, leaving eight days remaining," the ITIA said in a statement.

'My target's a secret'

Bangladesh women's team pacer Marufa Akter was confident that her team can carry the momentum from the comprehensive win over Ireland in the first WODI and seal the three-match series in the second game, set to take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur on Saturday. Marufa claimed more than one wicket in an ODI after a gap of eight matches in the first ODI against Ireland. When asked what she planned to do in the second ODI, the youngster replied, "My target's a secret".

42 all out: Sri Lanka crash to lowest Test total

Fast bowler Marco Jansen took 7-13 as South Africa skittled Sri Lanka for just 42 in their first innings on the second day of the first Test at Kingsmead in Durban on Thursday. It was the lowest innings total in Sri Lanka's history, eclipsing their previous lowest total of 71 against Pakistan in Kandy in 1994.

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Captains of the eight teams, including Bangladesh's skipper Azizul Hakim Tamim, pose with the ACC U-19 Men's Asia Cup 2024 trophy at the ICC Academy Ground in Dubai on Thursday. With hopes of defending the title, the young Tigers will take on Afghanistan in today's tournament opener at the Dubai International Stadium.

PHOTO: ACC

This NCL, I tried to give 200 percent: Anamul

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

For more than five months, pace bowler Anamul Haque had to patiently wait for an opportunity to play a professional game.

The 24-year-old, who had been a regular face in both the High Performance Unit and the Bangladesh Tigers' programme in the last few years, struggled to get matches in both white and red-ball domestic competitions last season.

Anamul featured in five first-class matches in the National Cricket League (NCL) and Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) combined in which he captured only 10 wickets.

In white-ball competitions, Anamul featured in three matches for Shinepukur in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) and could take only one wicket while he went wicketless in his lone appearance for Durdanto Dhaka in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

The right-arm pacer, without any hesitation, accepted that his poor performances led to him getting drop from the HP Unit and Bangladesh Tigers camps and also miss out on the HP team's tour of Australia and 'A' team's tour in Pakistan.

"I didn't play enough matches and also didn't perform well enough. That's why I wasn't part of their [selectors'] plans," Anamul told The Daily Star.

After some much needed self-reflection, Anamul focused all his efforts on maintaining his fitness and improving his skills so that he is ready when the next opportunity arrives.

"I maintained my processes properly so that I can give my all on the field. I always go to sleep early and after practice I take ice baths, I sometimes do swimming and sometimes I take a hot bath. My trainer and doctors are happy with my disciplined life," said the right-arm pacer.

"I tried to take tips from four to five top local coaches regarding different topics. I consulted one to develop my pace, I talked to another about my swing and even spoke to another coach to improve my bowling in different match scenarios.

"I even had a personal trainer with whom I worked on improving my fitness. I worked continuously in these five months under their guidance," he added.

When the opportunity finally arrived during the ongoing NCL 2024-

25, Anamul grabbed it with both hands.

Representing Dhaka Division, he is currently the leading wicket-taker in the competition with 32 wickets from six matches at an average of 14.93, with two five-wicket hauls to his name.

Anamul said that he had a plan to go to the next level in this year's NCL and so far, he has succeeded.

"Throughout my career, I have always tried to give my 100 percent. This year in the NCL, I tried to give my 200 percent.

"Those who saw me bowl can vouch that I bowled with the same aggression throughout the day. Sometimes I felt tired but still I tried to bowl with the same pace and aggression. Compared to previous years, this year my dedication is next level.

"Along with my inswing, I have improved my outswingers quite a lot. I have also learnt to bowl a delivery that goes straight after pitching... I hope that the selectors will look at my performance and give me an opportunity, seeing the variations in my bowling," he said, adding that he wants to finish the tournament with 40 wickets.

Anamul is likely to get an opportunity to do so when his side takes on Barishal Division in the last round match of the NCL in Bogura, starting on Saturday.

"When I started the tournament, I planned to be in the top three. Now I want to set a benchmark of 40 wickets this year. I will definitely try to take eight wickets in the next match," Anamul concluded.

Injury concerns pile up for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are dealing with a few injury crises ahead of the white-ball part of the ongoing series against hosts West Indies, with middle-order batter Towhid Hridoy the latest to be included in the list of injury concerns.

"We have a few injury concerns. Hridoy got injured yesterday [Wednesday] during a practice session [in Mirpur]. As only a short time has passed, we are still awaiting updates from the medical team," a BCB official told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Tigers' white-ball assignments in the Windies begin on December 8 with the ODI series and it is understood that Hridoy's injury might now delay the squad announcement.

Earlier, skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and experienced wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim were ruled out of the two Tests against West Indies due to a groin strain and a finger injury, respectively.

However, Shanto, who missed the third and final ODI against Afghanistan in the UAE due to his injury, was seen doing light running sessions at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The dearth of middle-order batters may see Bangladesh look to familiar faces for the three-match ODI series and as many T20Is against the Windies. Jaker Ali played the last two ODIs against Afghanistan following Mushfiqur's injury and may get the nod for the white-ball part of the Windies series after getting some runs in the first Test in Antigua.

Meanwhile, ace left-arm paceman Mustafizur Rahman, who returned to training in Mirpur yesterday, was granted leave from the Windies tour for family reasons.

"Mustafizur will not be playing the white-ball series," a BCB official confirmed.