



Bleak memories Head back for India

While racking up centuries and a 241 stand on Day 2 of their third Test at the Gabba on Sunday, Australia's Travis Head and Steve Smith gave India a repeat of their nightmare in the World Test Championship (WTC) final. At The Oval in June last year, the pair combined for 285 runs in the first innings to set a platform for Australia's maiden WTC title, Head smashing 163 while Smith made 121. The pair reprised their roles on Sunday, Smith making 101 off 190 deliveries and Head racing to 152 at nearly a run a ball. With the series level at 1-1, Australia finished day two at well in front at 405 for seven after rain restricted them to 28 for no loss on day one.

- Travis Head bounced back from a run of three golden ducks at the Gabba with a stunning 152.
- By striking his first Test ton in 18 months, Steven Smith overtook Steve Waugh on Australia's all-time list of century-makers, moving to 33 Test hundreds -- second only to Ricky Ponting's 41.
- Jasprit Bumrah's five for 72 in 25 overs helped him become the first Indian bowler to claim 10 five-wicket hauls outside Asia, surpassing Kapil Dev's record of nine.
- This marked the first time in 11 Tests across three home series that Australia posted a total exceeding 400 against India -- the previous instance being 572-7 declared at the SCG in 2015.

Habib hopes to bring joy to war-torn Lebanon

REUTERS

Hady Habib blazed a trail by taking Lebanon to the Olympic tennis tournament for the first time earlier this year and he is hoping another breakthrough at the Australian Open in January will bring comfort to his war-torn country.

The Texas-born 26-year-old enjoyed a special moment when, as a lucky loser, he went down 6-3, 6-1 to Carlos Alcaraz in the first round of the Olympic men's singles at Roland Garros in July. The experience fired his ambitions to get back to the biggest stages and he took a step towards that goal when he won a Challenger title in Chile earlier this month to clinch a spot in Australian Open qualifying.

"This was a goal of mine... being the first Lebanese to win a Challenger," he told The National newspaper. Habib, who moved back to Lebanon with his family at the age of six, will be able to count on some crowd support in Melbourne in January with around 1% of the Australian population having Lebanese heritage.

BCL RELEGATION REVERSAL BFF continues bad precedence

ANISUR RAHMAN

Farashganj SC and Uttara FC, teams that were relegated from the country's second tier football competition the Bangladesh Championship League (BCL) last season, have been given the green light to compete in the upcoming season as well by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) -- a development that highlights the absence of a proper structure at that level.

As per bylaws, Farashganj SC and Uttara FC, who finished seventh and eighth respectively in the 2023-24 season, should be relegated to the Senior Division League this season.

However, after an executive meeting on Wednesday, the BFF decided to allow both teams to stay afloat in the second-tier competition, following a bad precedent set by the previous committee.

Earlier, Swadhinata KS were allowed to compete in the 2019-20 season of the BCL in spite of finishing bottom of the table the previous season.

The 2019-20 season never got going due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but Swadhinata KS remained in the BCL in the 2020-21 season as well, and shockingly ended up winning the league in that edition.

The reason why BFF has stop teams from getting relegated is because unlike countries which have a well-established football structure with multiple tiers, in Bangladesh the federation asks for applications from clubs interested to compete in BCL, assesses them and then chooses which teams would compete.

So, if a relegated team applies for the following season and the BFF deems them fit to compete, they can return to BCL.

This system has been set in place since the 2015-16 season of the BCL, when the professional league committee headed



by Abdus Salam Murshedy started deciding who would compete in the BCL by assessing applications, focusing more on including teams that have a strong financial backing.

Clubs like Bashundhara Kings, Saif SC, NoFel SC, Karwanbazar PS and many others were brought into the BCL in this way.

While some of those inclusions proved to be a net positive for the country's football, like the current Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) champions Bashundhara, some new outfits got entangled in online betting and fixing controversies like Karwanbazar PS, who were found

guilty in 2022.

The BFF has also failed to fix the number of participants in BCL even after 11 completed seasons as the number of teams have fluctuated from seven to 13. There are also no secondary competitions available for second tier teams, meaning other than the BCL season which runs for three-four months the footballs at that level don't get opportunities to compete.

The fact that the newly formed BFF committee led by Tabith Awal followed the precedent set by the previous committee of keeping relegated teams afloat in BCL surprised and disheartened the country's football fraternity.

"It doesn't go with the sporting spirit, they should have relegated at least one team," BCL outfit PWD SC manager Itteharul Islam said. "After this decision, the competitiveness among the teams may decrease."

BCL outfit Wari Club general secretary Mohidur Rahman Miraz said, "I fought against this system for the last 10 years because many clubs, especially blessed outfits, went AWOL after getting direct entries. "I think BCL should be abolished because it has no standard and the federation should reform the whole footballing structure."

NEPAL KABADDI LEAGUE 6 Bangladesh players drafted

SPORTS REPORTER

Six Bangladeshi kabaddi players secured places in four different franchises in the inaugural Nepal Kabaddi League (NKL), as the draft of the franchise-based tournament was held in Kathmandu yesterday.

The six-team competition will kick off on January 17 before coming to an end on February 1.

The Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation (BKF) had nominated six players to the All Nepal Kabaddi Association (ANKA) for the NKL. Among them, all-rounder Monirul Islam and defender Sabuz Mia were picked by the Pokhara Lakers, while Yeasin Arafat was drafted into the Dhangadhi Wild Cats. Mijanur Rahman and Roman Hossain secured places in the Kathmandu Mavericks, and Sha Mohammed Shahan joined the Himalayan Raiders, informed BKF General Secretary Shah Newaj Shohag.

"As it is the first edition of the franchise-based kabaddi league in Nepal, they will provide daily allowances, accommodation, airfares, and nominal pocket money. We have decided to send the players to the NKL to gain experience from playing with foreign players," said Shohag yesterday.

The ANKA signed a 10-year agreement with sponsors to run the NKL in a bid to provide their players with a strong platform to compete, especially after Nepal women's team won a bronze medal in last year's 19th Asian Games.

Slot 'very, very, very happy' despite draw

REUTERS, Liverpool

Four days ago Liverpool boss Arne Slot was unhappy with a narrow Champions League victory at Girona but on Saturday the Dutchman was delighted with their resilience in a 2-2 draw against Fulham after his 10-man team twice fought back from a goal down.

Cody Gakpo and Diogo Jota scored for Liverpool, who remain top of the Premier League on 36 points from 15 games, five points clear of Chelsea, with Jota netting an 86th-minute equaliser to send the Anfield faithful into a frenzy.

"I think it's exactly the opposite from the Girona game, where I was pleased with the result (1-0), but not with the performance," Slot said. "Now I'm very, very, very happy about the performance. Couldn't have asked for more."

"Of course, not with the result, because if you drop points in a home game against Fulham that's definitely not what you expect and what you want, but being two times a goal down, so many things go against you, except for one thing, that is our players and our fans, they were outstanding today."

Liverpool were reduced to 10 men in the 17th minute after Andy Robertson's awkward lunging tackle on Harry Wilson denied a scoring opportunity. There was a lengthy VAR check to confirm the red card and that Wilson was in an onside position.

Slot said Robertson was still feeling the effects of taking an early knock to his knee and that contributed to the red card.



'Quality' emerges as Akbar, Salman, Jishan deliver

SPORTS REPORTER

For those wondering about Akbar Ali, who led Bangladesh to victory in the 2020 Under-19 Cricket World Cup, the 23-year-old batter made a statement in the ongoing NCL T20 yesterday as his blistering half-century helped table-toppers Rangpur Division chase down a challenging 190-run target against Rajshahi Division in Sylhet.

At the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium (SICS), Najmul Hossain Shanto was not among the big runs, but Sabbir Hossain stepped up with a 52-ball 73 to help Rajshahi post an imposing total of 189 for eight. However, as this tournament has shown, big chases are becoming a reality.

In reply, Rangpur's 33-year-old opener Tanbir Hayder gave them a solid start with a 45-ball 71, setting the stage for captain Akbar's dazzling innings -- a 29-ball 68, which included four fours and six sixes.

After his knock, Akbar emphasised the importance of focusing on performances rather than age.

"Whoever performs,



Hridoy, Mushy set to return

Rajshahi Division are set to get a boost in the NCL T20 as star national team batters Towhid Hridoy and Mushfiqur Rahim will be returning to competitive cricket through the tournament following injuries. Mushfiqur succumbed to a finger injury during the first Afghanistan ODI in the UAE last month, subsequently missing the West Indies tour. Hridoy suffered a groin injury before the Windies series and was left out of the ODI and T20I teams for the tour. Both are expected to play Rajshahi's next fixture against Chattogram on Tuesday at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

whether senior or junior, the focus should be on them. Experience obviously matters, but what's important is quality. I feel sometimes we over-emphasise experience," Akbar said. Meanwhile, quality and experience

also combined for Dhaka Metro as they secured a 19-run win over Dhaka Division, who were restricted to 171 for eight, courtesy of medium pacer Anisul Islam's four-for. This followed Naim Sheikh's 54-ball 69 and Shamsur Rahman's 22-ball 43, which took Metro to 190 for seven at Sylhet Academy Ground (SAG).

In the second game at SICS, Chattogram Division's Tamim Iqbal's 54-ball 91 against Barishal Division went in vain as Salman Hossain and Itteharul Hossain both struck fifties to help Barishal chase down Chattogram's 182 for seven in a last-ball finish. With 25 runs needed off the final over, Salman hit Ifran Hossain for three sixes and two boundaries -- one in the last ball with two needed -- to seal a thrilling victory.

The afternoon game at SAG saw Sylhet defeat Khulna by six wickets while chasing 145, riding on Jishan Alam's 48-ball 73, which featured four boundaries and six maximums. The 20-year-old Jishan now leads the run-scoring charts after four matches, with an average of 51 and a strike rate of 160.63, weighing in on the notion that quality alone, not age, matters as Bangladesh looks to unearth and nurture emerging T20 talents.



Indonesian shuttlers pose with gold medals after winning all five events of the Yonex-Sunrise Bangladesh Junior International Series 2024 at Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. It was an all-Indonesian final in the mixed doubles and men's singles events, while India challenged the champions in the women's singles and doubles and men's doubles. Hosts Bangladesh, meanwhile, were eliminated from the semifinals of men's doubles, women's doubles, and women's singles.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED