

BPL CORNER

I am thrilled to be playing in the Bangladesh league. When Tamim bhai called me to play for this team, I was excited from the start. For me, it was Tamim Iqbal's phone call.

SHAHEEN SHAH AFRIDI
on what made him sign for Fortune Barishal.

He [Mashrafe Bin Mortaza] is still in our squad. Mashrafe is part and parcel of the team. It depends on the situation -- how he feels and his fitness condition [regarding playing in the tournament]. If he is okay to play or the situation is good, of course he will play.

AKM MAHMUD EMON
Sylhet Strikers head coach

BPL is one of the biggest franchise cricket tournaments. I will try to play good cricket. It's not pressure, I will try to focus on my game. I will try to play well match by match.

JISHAN ALAM
Durbar Rajshahi batter

I think the key is he [Nahid Rana] got that (accuracy) and I have been impressed with him over the last two days. What I need to see now is how he is reacting in match situations because the skills are all there.

MICKEY ARTHUR
Rangpur Riders head coach on Bangladesh's latest pace sensation Nahid Rana



One of the star foreign recruits of the upcoming season of the Bangladesh Premier League, Pakistan's ace paceman Shaheen Shah Afridi shakes hands with premier Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Tamim, apparently, was the reason behind Shaheen's decision to agree for a maiden BPL stint, and the Pakistani pacer is set to feature for Tamim-led Fortune Barishal when they take on Durbar Rajshahi in the tournament opener in Mirpur tomorrow.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

‘Accent may sound different, but I’m very much an English’

Dhaka Capitals’ English wicketkeeper-batter Stephen Eskinazi has had a unique journey in cricket. Born to an English mother and a Zimbabwe-born father in Johannesburg, he was brought up in Australia and played for Western Australia Under-17s and U-19s before joining English country Middlesex. In an interview with The Daily Star’s Samsul Arefin Khan, the 30-year-old opened up on his cricketing journey and revealed that his international cricket aspirations revolve solely around England. The excerpts are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): This is your first time in BPL. But you were supposed to play in the last season as well, right?

Stephen Eskinazi (SE): I was really close. I was playing for Perth Scorchers and was signed to play for Chattogram Challengers after that. In a knockout game against Sydney Sixers, I got hit really badly on my index finger. I was out for three-and-a-half months. I was really disappointed I could not come. When the opportunity came again, I grabbed it with both hands.

DS: Before coming here, you played in the Nepal Premier League. How was the experience?

SE: It's insane over there. The support was something I knew little bit about. I

don't think anyone should underestimate Nepal. It was fantastic.

DS: You have played in franchise leagues in Australia and England. In comparison, how different is it to play in franchise leagues in the sub-continent?

SE: Firstly, it's such a great experience as a person to come here, to see the cultures of Bangladesh and Nepal. That's one of the beautiful things about playing cricket at the moment. Secondly, from a cricketer's perspective, it's so good for my development as a batter. There are so many experiences



that I will be able to take back and share with my teammates back home and share it with the people that I like to talk cricket about. I've been so excited to come over here and I expect a fantastic tournament on and off the field.

DS: Your journey in cricket has been

different to most cricketers. Personally, how do you feel about it?

SE: I've been fortunate to spend so much time with so many amazing people around the world with the sport. To be able to go back and play for Perth Scorchers which is my home town and play with the guys I grew up with was really amazing. I love playing at Lord's, Middlesex and also in the Hundred. I have got some fantastic mentors, coaches and leaders from whom I learnt a lot. This competition is no different. To be sharing a dressing room with players like Mustafizur [Rahman] and Liton [Das] and other guys who play at the highest level, I'm extremely grateful for it.

DS: You carry an Australian and an English passport. Who do you hope to represent in international cricket?

SE: My accent might sound slightly different, but I'm very much an English at the moment. I've been playing in England for 12 seasons now. I have represented England A, England Lions teams. Playing for England is still a massive goal of mine, particularly in the short formats.

DS: So, you don't see yourself playing for Australia?

SE: I don't think so. You never ever say never. But I think I'm English. I'm captain of Middlesex and I would love to represent Three Lions.

Navy, Air Force set up final clash

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force will square off in Monday's final of the Paragon Group Victory Day Hockey competition after winning their respective matches in Dhaka yesterday.

Star-studded Navy overwhelmed Hockey Players Welfare Unity (HPWU) 4-1, while Air Force thrashed BKSP 5-2 in the second semifinal at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium.

Navy took the lead through a penalty stroke from Ashraful Islam at the end of first quarter. Amirul Islam equalised for HPWU, made up of current and former national players, from a penalty corner in the 40th minute.

However, Navy proved too tough for HPWU in the final quarter as Ashraful scored again, before Roman Sarkar and Mahbub Hossain wrapped up the victory.

Later in the day, Air Force showed their prowess against the young BKSP side, with Sohanur Rahman Sobuj scoring all five goals for the winning side. The penalty corner specialist scored the goals in the 21st, 27th, 29th, 31st, and 43rd minutes of the match. The two goals of BKSP came from the sticks of Mehedi Hasan Ovi and Huzaifa Hosain.

Rahmatganj run riot again

SPORTS REPORTER

Rahmatganj Muslim Friends Society handed a 6-0 defeat to newly promoted Young Men's Fakirerpul Club in a Bangladesh Premier League fixture in Gazipur yesterday, continuing their superb start to the season.

Having thrashed Fakirerpul 6-1 in the Federation Cup last Tuesday, the local players shone again for Rahmatganj, who find themselves in second place with four wins in five matches.

At the Shaheed Barkat Stadium, Samuel Boateng and Rajon Howalder scored a brace



apiece for Rahmatganj, whose only defeat in the campaign has been a 4-1 loss against Bashundhara Kings in the third round.

Nabib Newaz Jibon and Taj Uddin scored one each for the Old Dhaka outfit, while Akobir Turaev converted a spot-kick to score a consolation goal for the losing side.

Six-time champions Abahani, meanwhile, kept pace with Rahmatganj, notching their fourth win in a 2-0 victory against Bangladesh Police.

Arman Faysal Akash opened the scoring for the Sky Blues, while Shahriar Emon wrapped up the victory in the 89th minute.

Both Rahmatganj and Abahani trail league leaders Mohammedan by three points.

Reddy defiance in front of record crowd

Helping India fight back from 221 for seven, Nitish Kumar Reddy scored a defiant maiden century on Saturday as India reached 358-9 on a rain-hit third day of the fourth Test against Australia in Melbourne. Reddy, unbeaten on 105, starred in a 127-run eighth wicket stand with Washington Sundar to reduce the first-innings deficit to 116 runs on a day that saw record third day attendance in a Boxing Day Test.

➤ Aged 21 years and 216 days, Reddy became the third youngest Test centurion for India in Australia – behind Sachin Tendulkar (18y 256d in Sydney, 1992) and Rishabh Pant (21y 92d in Sydney, 2019).

➤ It was only the second instance of India's number eight and nine batters hitting 50+ scores in the same innings of a Test in Australia. The first was in Adelaide in 2008 when Anil Kumble (87) and Harbhajan Singh (63) made 50+ scores.

➤ Reddy's 105-run unbeaten knock is now the highest score by an Indian batting at eight or lower in Australia.

➤ The crowd of 83,073 was a record for the third day of a Boxing Day Test, according to Cricket Australia, and the largest day three crowd at the Melbourne Cricket Ground since 1937.

➤ The record total attendance for a Boxing Day Test is 271,865, which looks certain to be smashed on Sunday after 255,462 spectators came through the gates on the first three days.

Joty extends hot streak

SPORTS REPORTER

Central Zone skipper Nigar Sultana Joty continued her remarkable form in the Women's Bangladesh Cricket League (WBCL) to help her side earn a draw against East Zone in Rajshahi yesterday.

After scoring an unbeaten 153 in her side's campaign opener, Joty smashed 171 off 322 balls at Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium. The national captain formed a massive 228-run partnership with overnight centurion Murshida Khatun, who also impressed with 170 off 286 balls, as Central reached 528-8 in reply to East's 354, leading to a draw.

Elsewhere in Rajshahi, South Zone tail held firm to secure a draw against North Zone. Chasing 276, South were reduced to 213-8 before Salma Khatun (24*) and Rupa Roy stayed unscathed at the Bangla Trac Cricket Academy Ground.

Earlier, North declared their second innings at 257 for five, with Sobhana Mostary making an unbeaten 118.

The third-round fixtures are expected to take place after the Tigrisses' West Indies tour in January.

Liverpool look to extend PL lead

AGENCIES

Liverpool will aim to go nine points clear at the Premier League summit in their final fixture of 2024 when they travel to London to take on West Ham on Sunday.

The Reds, currently on 42 points after their 3-1 comeback win over Leicester City, have a six-point advantage over second-placed Arsenal and lead third-placed Chelsea by seven points.

They have now come from behind to earn 12 points this season, with only struggling Manchester City (14) winning more points via that method, as they extended their unbeaten streak to 13 games in the Premier League.

And it would be a surprise if they did not continue that recent run, especially given they've lost their final league game of a calendar year just once in the last 10 years (W8 D1).

They are unbeaten in their last 10 Premier League away games (W6 D4).

However, West Ham may feel they have a reasonable chance, as

Slot's side have conceded 10 goals in their last four Premier League away matches.

Meanwhile, Manchester City's troubles continued over the festive period, but Pep Guardiola will be eyeing a positive finish to the year when they travel to Leicester City on Sunday.

It will be a landmark day for the Spaniard, who will be taking charge of City for the 500th time in all competitions, becoming just the second manager to hit that milestone.

He won his 100th, 200th and 300th matches in charge, and drew the 400th, but celebrations could be dampened given Man City's recent slump. They have

now won just one of their last 13 matches in all competitions, that run extending thanks to their 1-1 draw with Everton on Boxing Day.

City are just about clinging on to seventh place but perhaps 18th-placed Leicester are the perfect opponents for them to turn their fortunes around.

