

# Mirpur run-fests give BPL exciting start

SPORTS REPORTER

Friday marked the end of the Bangladesh Premier League T20's opening Dhaka phase where the expectation of high-scoring matches was fulfilled to a large extent.

There were a number of off-field fiascos taking place, most notably with the ticketing issue but the action on the ground seems to have suppressed those externalities.

A total of eight matches were held in the first Dhaka phase between December 30 and January 3. Although not too many matches delivered nail-biters, the majority of the matches gave the fans what they crave for in T20 cricket -- high-scoring affairs.

In the opening seven games, the average score was 156 runs with three of those 14 innings witnessing scores of 200 or more. Among the rest of the innings, teams scored 150-plus on seven other occasions and the average first innings total in those matches was 180.43 -- much higher than last year's first innings Dhaka phase total of 157.25.

"This year we had given only one instruction to the curators, which was to prepare sporting wickets. On previous occasions, the curators received three

to four types of instructions which confused them," Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Faruque Ahmed told reporters in Mirpur yesterday.

Meanwhile, BCB's ground's committee chairman Mahbubul Anam credited the batters for the high scores



while attributing the rest for the ground as a key reason for high scores.

"Batsmen are performing really well this year," Mahbubul told the Daily Star over phone from Australia yesterday.

"We always try to provide good wickets. This year, we got an advantage that we had a lot of rest for the wickets. We didn't let people play for about a month. Last year, we hosted BPL after

having 160 days of play. If you give the wicket rest, it will do good for you. You can't play in a stadium for more than 60 days whereas you play here for 180 days.

"Mirpur hosted the record number international matches in the shortest possible time. The Mirpur wickets were originally prepared by Richard Winter, who also prepared the wickets of Perth. If it's given rest, Mirpur can provide best possible wickets," he added.

As the BPL is shifting to its second phase which will be held in Sylhet between January 6 and 13 and then in Chattogram for the third phase between January 16 and 23, the board is expecting similar outcomes from those two venues.

"The requirement was as usual. But it's great to see high-scoring matches in Mirpur. Hopefully we will get similar matches in Sylhet and Chattogram as well," BPL governing body's member secretary Nazmul Abedeen Fahim told Daily Star.

As the tournament will return to Mirpur on January 26, the venue will get 22 more days to prepare for the business end of the league and it is expected that the venue will provide similar high-scoring matches in that period too.



PHOTO: DHAKA CAPITALS

Dhaka Capitals' American all-rounder Shubham Ranjane celebrates after trapping Khulna Tigers batter Afif Hossain lbw in a Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. After scoring eight in his first game against Chittagong Kings, Afif could only make one off two deliveries. However, Khulna managed to post a challenging 173 for eight.

## 'Will try to bring Shakib back in team'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Faruque Ahmed has said that he would try to bring Shakib Al Hasan back in the team.

"I will try to bring back Shakib from my position. But you guys know, the whole thing is up to the government," Faruque told reporters at the press box in Mirpur during the second BPL game yesterday.

Shakib has not played for the Tigers since he was unable to come to the country to play what would have been his farewell Test against South Africa last October.

"Shakib hasn't retired yet. If he had retired by now, then we could say that he was not available anymore. He has some issues where I cannot do much about it. If the government can solve the issues then there will be a possibility. Then his fitness, mental state needs to be looked at and after that selection panel will think about it," the BCB president remarked.

The upcoming Champions Trophy is set to be played in a hybrid model in Pakistan and the UAE, and when asked that it would mean there would be no security issues for Shakib, Faruque said: "I think during this BPL we will sit with the selectors and take a decision."



## Arteta wants to 'FLIP THE COIN'

Three points on City's agenda

AGENCIES

Mikel Arteta says Arsenal must "flip that coin" as they hunt down Premier League leaders Liverpool in a quest to be crowned champions of England after two agonising near-misses.

The second-placed Gunners, runners-up to Manchester City over the past two seasons, are six points behind Arne Slot's rampaging Liverpool, who have a game in hand. The north London club will be looking to turn up the pressure on the leaders and cut that gap with a win on the road over 10th-placed Brighton on Saturday.

Stumbles in October and early November left Arsenal playing catch-up and Arteta on Friday pleaded for consistency from his men.

"We have to show the same level of consistency and a bit more, because the last year we have been the best team in the league, broken various records and still haven't won a major trophy, so something is missing," said the Spaniard.

"It's going to be very thin, small details, you can pick up certain games and situations. But at the end, we're so close and we just have to flip that coin to the other side to make it happen.

Meanwhile, struggling champions Manchester City will host West Ham and look to reinforce their attempt at reviving a troubled season.

City ended a topsy-turvy calendar year by seeing off Leicester City 2-0 -- their first win in five matches across all competitions and their first away success in over two months. They had endured a chastening eight game winless run



on the road prior to their King Power triumph - losing seven of those encounters - but just a second victory in 14 matches in all tournaments has lifted Guardiola's men back into the top six.

Midfielder Bernardo Silva, however, admitted that City's title hopes are all but over.

"Right now, it's about accepting reality. I'm not looking at Liverpool. I'm sixth in the league, I cannot be looking at Liverpool or Arsenal," Silva told Sky Sports in an interview published on Thursday.

"I'm looking at the next game to try and win three points... I wouldn't say it's impossible because in football there are no impossibles but right now Manchester City is completely out of the title race, no question about that, it's too late for us.

"People say you cannot win the league until January, but you can lose it. This season the reality is that we have lost it."



BOLAND'S BUNNY: Australia's Scott Boland yet again dismissed India star batter Virat Kohli on the opening day of the fifth and final Test in Sydney yesterday. The Australian quick managed to get the wicket of Kohli four times in the six innings that they came up against each other.

PHOTO: AFP

- Scott Boland was the chief destroyer with 4-31 while Mitchell Starc took 3-49 as Australia bundled out India for 185.
- In reply, Australia lost Usman Khawaja for two, leaving them at 9-1 with Sam Konstas on seven.
- Boland got Virat Kohli caught at third slip yesterday, and each of the four times in six innings that the Australian pacer dismissed the Indian pacer has been caught either by wicketkeeper or in the slip cordon.
- In those six innings against Boland, Kohli managed to score just 32 runs off 98 deliveries.
- Kohli was dismissed after a 69-ball 17 -- the longest in an innings (in terms of balls faced) in his Test career he has batted without a boundary.
- India survived 72.2 overs yesterday, making it the seventh time in last eight Tests that they have been bowled out inside the first 80 overs in their first innings.
- India's stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah dismissed Khawaja for the sixth time in eight innings that they faced each other. There's only one other instance of an Indian bowler dismissing an opposition batter as many times in a series -- Alistair Cook six times by Ravindra Jadeja in India in 2016.

## Hamilton 'excited for year ahead' with Ferrari

AFP, London

Lewis Hamilton said Friday he "could not be more excited for the year ahead" as the seven-times world champion prepares for his first Formula One season with Ferrari.

Hamilton has joined the Italian giants from Mercedes, with whom he won six of his drivers' world titles.

But the lure of racing for Ferrari, arguably the most celebrated team in Grand Prix history, proved too strong, with Hamilton hoping his move inspires others to seize new opportunities.

"I could not be more excited for the year ahead," Hamilton wrote on LinkedIn. "Moving to Scuderia Ferrari, there's a lot to reflect on.

The Englishman, who turns 40 on Tuesday, added: "To anyone considering their next move in 2025: embrace the change. Whether you're switching industries, learning a new skill, or even just taking on new challenges, remember that reinvention is powerful. Your next opportunity is always within reach.

"Here's to 2025 -- a year of embracing new opportunities, staying hungry, and driving forward with purpose. Let's make it one to remember."

Hamilton ended his post with the hashtag, "new job", alongside a picture of him karting in a red crash helmet as a child.

## Kings back to winning ways

SPORTS REPORTER

Five-time defending champions Bashundhara Kings showed their scoring prowess for the first time this season with a 5-0 thrashing of Bangladesh Police in their Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Shahid Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh yesterday.

The Valeriu Tite-led side, who had lost two of their first four games, found their mojo back with a virtuoso performance on a cold day in Mymensingh, with Jonathan Fernandes finding the back of the net twice.

Bashundhara Kings, whose only victory this campaign was a 4-1 win against Rahmatganj, also saw Mojibor Rahman Johnny, Rakib Hossain and Miguel Figueira get on the scoresheet in the one-sided affair.

This was a second consecutive win in all competitions for the star-studded side, who had beaten the same opposition 3-2 in a Federation Cup fixture on Tuesday.



The win lifted Kings to fifth position with 10 points from six matches while Police remained in seventh position with six points.

Title aspirants Abahani, meanwhile, dropped points in a goalless draw against Fortis FC at the Bashundhara Kings Arena.

The Dhanmondi-based outfit would have caught up with league leaders Mohammedan with a victory but could not break the resistance of Fortis FC, instead enduring their first draw of the campaign alongside four wins and a defeat.

The draw left the six-time professional league winners in second place with 13 points from six matches, two behind Mohammedan who have a game in hand.

Fortis, meanwhile, moved up to sixth position with six points.

In the day's third match at the Birshrestha Ft Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj, rejuvenated Brothers Union thrashed Young Men's Fakirerpul Club 3-0, with Mustapha Drammeh, Cheikh Sene and Sazzad Hossain Shakil scoring the three goals -- all in the first half.

The win lifted Brothers to fourth position with 11 points while newly-promoted Fakirerpul remained a place off the bottom with three points.

