

Smaller boundaries, bigger problems

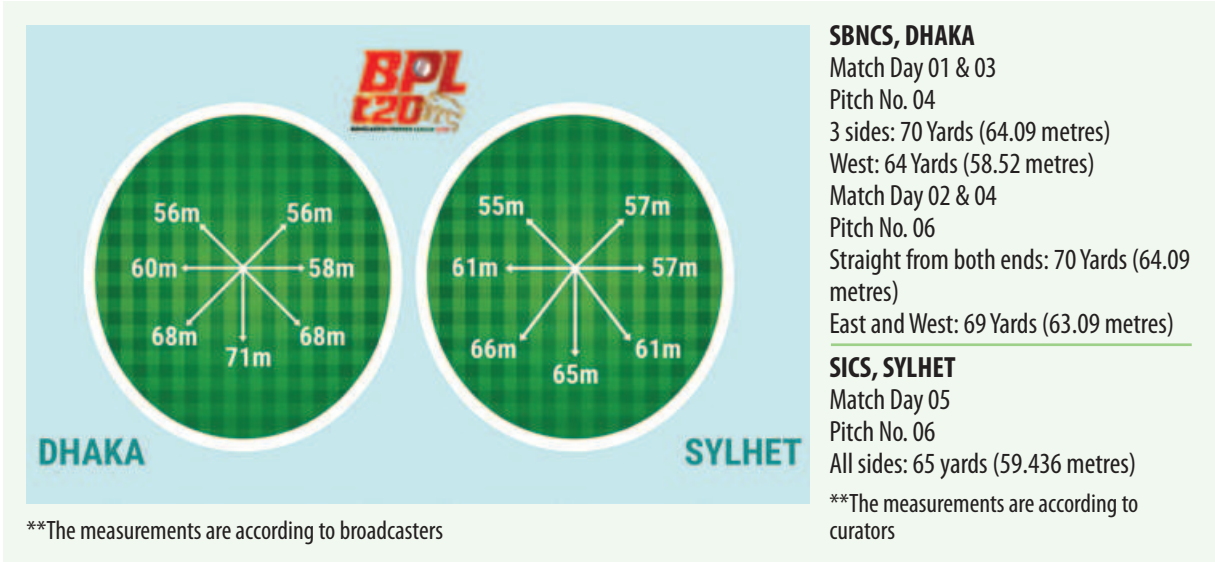
SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN *from Sylhet*

High-scoring fixtures have been one of the highlights of the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) with the wickets in both Dhaka and Sylhet receiving applause from all corners for providing exciting contests so far in the meet.

Sixes and fours have been raining down at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium and the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium with the record for the most number of sixes in a BPL match broken twice within the first 10 games of the tournament.

Although the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is currently struggling with many off-field issues, the BCB officials can pat themselves on the back for ensuring that the wickets in BPL this year have been up to par so far, which hasn't always been the case in this competition.

However, after Fortune Barishal skipper Tamim Iqbal expressed discontentment regarding the boundary length of the venues after their match against Durbar Rajshahi in Sylhet on Monday, fresh doubts



gave crept up about whether the high scores are all cooked up.

Tamim said in the post-match presentation: "The way grounds have been prepared is very good. What I would like to see are bigger boundaries. I don't know why we are playing with 58-60 metre boundaries when there is space available."

According to the International Cricket Council's (ICC) playing conditions guidelines, in men's T20 cricket, the maximum boundary length is 90 yards (82.29 metres) while the minimum is 65 yards (59.43 metres) from the centre of the pitch.

According to a list obtained by The Daily Star, till match Day 5 of BPL on

Monday, the maximum boundary length was 70 yards (64.09 metres) while the minimum was 64 yards (58.52 metres).

The list is provided by the curators in Dhaka and Sylhet. However, the players' and others present at the ground have expressed doubts about the accuracy of the information.

During Monday's match between Rajshahi and Barishal, broadcasters measured a six that travelled only 52 metres.

The broadcasters also provided separate figures about boundary dimensions, according to which the shortest boundary length at the Sylhet venue was 55 meters. So how could a shot travel three metres less than that and still be counted as six, is a puzzling question.

When contacted, BCB Grounds Committee Manager Abdul Baten denied having any knowledge on the matter although he insisted that the boundary lengths adhere to the international standards.

"The boundary lengths follow the international rule. I have to check it again, but I don't agree with what you are saying," Baten told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, Mirpur curator Gamini de Silva and Sylhet venue manager Joydeep Das denied speaking on the matter.

BPL governing council member secretary Nazmul Abedeen Fahim told The Daily Star that he had expressed his dissatisfaction to the curators after seeing the truncated boundaries

and said he has no knowledge about anyone from his department giving any such instruction.

"I told him [pitch curator] that the boundary lengths should be increased. I don't know if anyone from the BPL governing council had given any such instructions [about reducing boundary length]. I certainly didn't give any such direction."

Fahim also talked about the problems that can stem from having shorter boundaries.

"It will create a false sense of confidence among the batters. Spinners will have no impact in the matches and pacers will also lose confidence. There are many effects of it and none of them are positive.

"There are some venues where the grounds are small or a particular area is small and it can be an exception. But as we have space here, my question is why should we shorten the boundary? We will gain nothing out of it," Fahim concluded.

As neither the BPL governing council nor the grounds committee is accepting the blame, the question arises, did the boundary ropes just magically shrunk themselves?

“I think it will be terrible for all those countries who worked so hard to get the Test status. Now they'll be playing among themselves in the lower section. How are they going to make it to the top? When you play against better teams. We were the cash cows for a lot of countries over the years ... people must recognise that. But we are at that situation now where we need the help, and we can't get it.”

West Indies great
Clive Lloyd

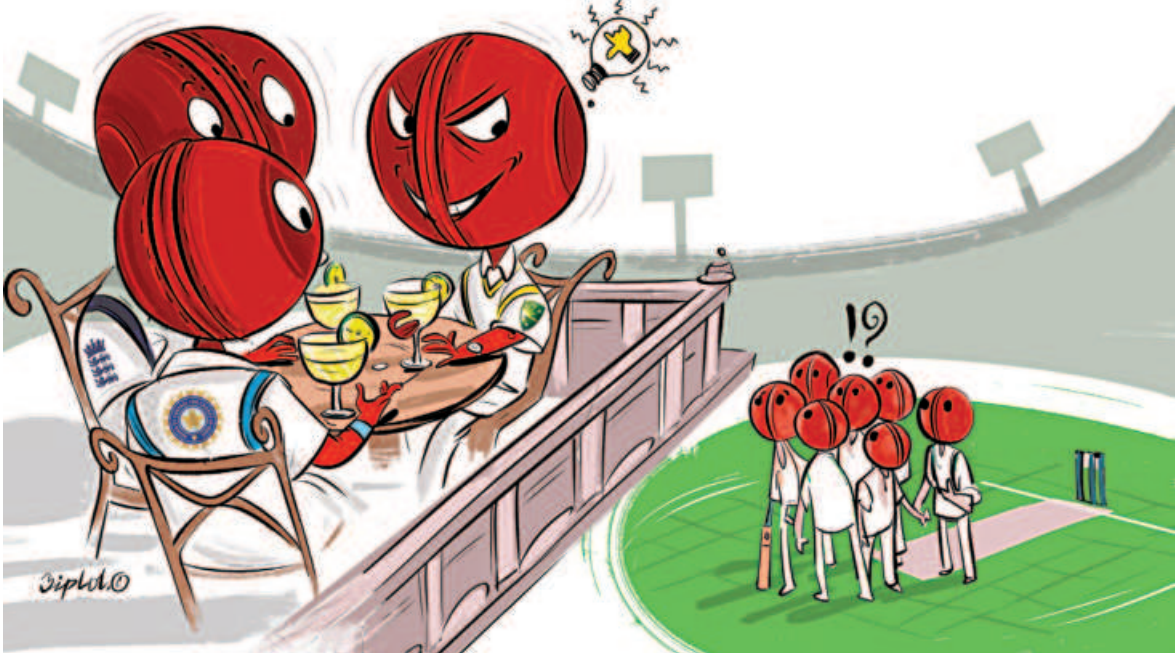
“If you don't create a two-tier system, you'll continue to have unmatched teams up against each other and then it's very unlikely they'll be able to take a game into the fifth day. Then there'll always be talk of four-day Tests.”

Former India coach
Ravi Shastri

“I was delighted to read in this masthead the ICC are considering a two-tier structure from 2027 which could see the Ashes staged twice every three years. I have been saying for a long time this is the way to keep Test cricket relevant by ensuring the best play the best as often as possible, and we get fewer mis-matches.”

Former England captain
Michael Vaughan

TWO-TIER TESTS Revival or setback?



ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The International Cricket Council (ICC) had shelved the two-tier system in Tests in 2016, but arguments in its favour have been gathering steam of late.

During the recently concluded Border-Gavaskar Trophy, Ravi Shastri and Mark Taylor voiced in favour of the two-tier system, due to the enormous crowds and broadcast audiences making the series between the "two best teams" reportedly the most-watched Test series.

Test cricket, far from needing a revival through the two-tier system, has hardly ever been more exciting. There were just two drawn Tests last year, and West Indies have beaten Australia in Australia, while Bangladesh have swept series against Pakistan in Pakistan. However, both West Indies and Bangladesh are likely to be placed in tier two if the system is implemented after the 2025-2027 World Test Championship (WTC) cycle.

How does the exclusion of certain countries from playing the top nations help with the expansion of cricket or Test cricket? Ideally, it serves fewer games in the calendar for Tests but opens slots for shorter-version formats.

In 2016, Bangladesh Cricket Board had BCCI and others on their side when opposing the two-tier system.

"During former BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon's first

tenure, I was the first one to object to the two-tier proposal in a board meeting, when most of my colleagues were in favour of it," former BCB director Sajjadul Alam said.

"I've said this before, and I'm saying this again, that this will completely destroy our cricket, because we will lose our ground for development. If we can't play against big teams, the interest from our sponsors, fans, and media will gradually fade away. As a result, we will end up depending on ICC's development fund."

Back in 2016, Sajjadul had fellow director Tanjil Chowdhury by his side.

"This time it's more serious," Tanjil echoed Sajjadul's sentiments. "This is counterproductive if you want to make cricket inclusive, because if you see recent times, the notion that Test cricket is dying is being broken," the former BCB director argued.

Asked how will competitiveness between nations come through if the lower-tier teams don't play in Australia or England, Tanjil responded, "Even after you have

climbed from the lower tier, you [smaller teams] will be dominated by teams when you make the upper tier because you don't have the experience.

"We are going back to square one, and I don't see anything but the spirit of revenue at play. If you talk about revenue from attendance, then maybe India and Australia are able to generate," Tanjil said.

"The cricket calendar year is dominated by shorter formats, so if you make WTC a two-tier thing, where will competitiveness come? You see that India, Australia, or

England are generating most revenue because their TV and media rights are most expensive, but it's not creating a democratic process geared towards cricket's development," he added.

Tanjil has specific remedies he feels could factor in to help stave off a two-tier system. For instance, he argues about a league system where Tests are played in neutral venues.

"Bangladesh and West Indies playing in England can help both boards earn revenue... More Pink Tests could be on the cards to match TV prime time. We can exhaust options before thinking of a two-tier system," he added.

Even under the existing WTC system, Bangladesh have not played Tests in Australia so far. Even without a two-tier system, in reality, a two-tier system was sort of in place, and it will find a structure if ICC takes the decision.

One source claimed that BCCI had put in a lucrative offer to BCB during the previous regime to be on their side in return for some revenue as "development cost". Such instances already put the two-tier system within reach.

Former BCB director Sajjadul remarked on the matter, "I have thus one request to the ones in the board, that they should do whatever it takes to prevent this two-tier system from being a reality; otherwise, our survival will be threatened. Also, it's crucial that we do not give in to the financial impetus to be in favour of two-tier system."



AC Milan players celebrate after staging an incredible comeback to win 3-2 from two goals behind against defending champions Inter Milan in the final of the Italian Super Cup in Riyadh on Monday. The win capped off an extraordinary first week at AC Milan for Sergio Conceicao, who replaced the sacked Paulo Fonseca as manager last Monday, as he managed to help Milan, placed eighth in Serie A, to their first silverware since their Seria A title in 2022.

PHOTO: AFP

Ibrahim drives Abahani against Mohammedan

SPORTS REPORTER

National team discard Mohammedan Ibrahim has been struggling in the Bangladesh Premier League, but the forward is shining in the Federation Cup, the latest of his efforts was the all-important goal which guided Abahani to a 1-0 victory over archrivals Mohammedan in Cumilla yesterday.

After watching his team play out a goalless draw against Fortis FC in their last league match due to an injury, the lad from Cox's Bazar scored the decisive goal yesterday which doubled his tally in the current Federation Cup campaign.

The winger tapped home a square-pass from Shahriar Emon in the 74th minute -- a goal that consigned Mohammedan, who have won all six matches in the league this season, to their second defeat in three Federation Cup matches, all but ending their chances of qualifying for the next stage.

It was also Abahani's first win against Mohammedan in two years following a 2-0 win against their archrivals in a league match in January, 2023.

"This squad features talented players who have speed. Today the boys executed the plan in right way as they stopped the two key players of the opposition -- midfielder Muzzafarov Muzzafarjon and forward Soulemany Diabate -- before finishing the task with a quick attack," Abahani coach Maruful Haque told The Daily Star on the way back to Dhaka.

With this victory, Abahani joined Group B leaders Rahmatganj with six points from two matches while Mohammedan have three points from three matches.

Dhaka Capitals in disarray

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka Capitals made six changes but could not improve their fate as they succumbed to a fourth straight defeat in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) following a seven-wicket loss against league leaders Rangpur Riders in Mirpur yesterday.

Thisara Perera's side got a serious boost with the arrival of English opener Jason Roy and the inclusion of local heavyweights Mosaddek Hossain and Sabbir Rahman but it could not stop their slide as they stayed bottom of the table.

After being put into bat first, Dhaka were bundled out for 111 in 16.3 overs. Regular opener Tanzid Tamim, who came in at three on the day, top-scored with a 16-ball 20, while Roy (18 off 12 balls), Liton Das (9 off 12 balls), Sabbir (2 off 7 balls), and Mosaddek (12 off 9 balls) fell cheaply.

Dhaka's change in personnel was also accompanied by a change in tactics as both openers -- Tanzid and Liton -- were pushed back in the lineup. It was the first

time in six years that Liton played outside the top three.

On the other side of the coin, Rangpur were firing on all cylinders. Pace sensation Nahid Rana's sizzle proved too much to handle for Dhaka as the 22-year-old starred with three wickets, while Pakistan's left-arm pacer Aqib Javed scalped two.

With the bat, Alex Hales, who scored a blistering century in his last match, smashed a 27-ball 44 and Khushdil Shah took Rangpur across the finish with a 13-ball 27 to chase down the paltry total in 13.2 overs.

The losing streak seems ominous for Dhaka as in the last edition, the Dhaka franchise, then called Durdanto Dhaka and captained by Mosaddek himself, made a world record of losing the most matches on the trot in franchise cricket with 11 defeats in 12 matches.

"Everyone is trying but until you get that momentum, it's difficult. Perhaps, the momentum will come if we win a match," Mosaddek told reporters after the match.

