



Dhaka Capitals' Liton Das continued his merry run of form since being snubbed from Bangladesh's Champion Trophy squad as he scored a 48-ball 70 -- his third fifty-plus score in four matches -- to help his side set up a six-wicket win against Sylhet Strikers in a Bangladesh Premier League group-stage fixture at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Cabrera focused on performance over results

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation, led by new president Tabith Awal, perhaps reappointed coach Javier Cabrera with the big dream of progressing beyond the Asian Cup Qualifiers. However, the 40-year-old Spaniard, now in his third stint, has chosen a more of a pragmatic route, focusing on consistent performances rather than lofty expectations.

Bangladesh have been drawn in a relatively easier group in the 2024 Asian Cup Qualifiers, facing India (ranked 126), Hong Kong (155), and Singapore (160) -- a contrast to the 2022 edition, where they were grouped with stronger teams such as Bahrain and Kyrgyzstan. While Cabrera's last campaign saw



Bangladesh lose all matches in a centralised venue, this edition will follow a home and away format.

"It is a strong group, but not as strong as it was in the 2022 edition. Still... we do think we have options to compete against them and win if we perform, especially at the level we are able to perform at home," Cabrera told reporters at the BFF premises yesterday, after being handed a contract extension till April 2026.

Asked whether there is any plan to uplift the performance of the national team, who had a lean year in 2024, Cabrera said, "Honestly, performance-wise, I am not looking at the results... If you focus on the results, there is always an opportunity to criticise. The truth is that the team were able to perform against very strong teams [like Australia, Palestine and Lebanon] in the FIFA World Cup Qualifiers, and we were able to maintain that level of performance against Maldives. I am sure we are going to achieve something important from the Asian Cup Qualifiers."

Bangladesh managed only two wins in eight matches in 2024, beating Bhutan and Maldives. Looking ahead, Cabrera plans a four-week training camp, potentially in Saudi Arabia, to prepare for their Asian Cup Qualifiers opener against India in March. He stressed the importance of a match-by-match approach, noting that both the qualifiers and the upcoming SAFF Championship in June will be pivotal for the team.

"It is [going to be] a huge challenge against India, and I am now focused on that," he said.

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Wide yorkers are one of the key weapons in the arsenal for bowlers trying to stem the flow of runs in T20s. Dhaka Capitals had a set Liton Das at the crease and skipper Thisara Perera has the knack for incredible cameo knocks. Both plundered runs with some scintillating bat speed during their game against Sylhet Strikers in Chattogram on Monday.

However, those two were not the only difference-makers in the game, for Sylhet had conceded 25 runs in extras during the last six overs alone -- including sixes hit off no balls -- which significantly helped in their bid to end the innings as close to 200 as possible.

Dhaka had reached the end of the 14th a 101 for three at a cumbersome pace. Liton and Thisara got into the act and notched a whopping 81-run stand off just 28 deliveries. While credit goes to both batters, 20 of those runs came through extras in that partnership and they were just the ignition Dhaka needed to reach the eventual score of 196 for six.

Sylhet bowlers bowled 11 wides during the game. Spinner Tipu Sultan alone bowled four wides. Left-arm pacer Ruel Miah matched him with four more. Two of

those came in the 16th over against Liton, one producing a bye run as well. Ruel bowled two wides, one producing bye runs again in the 19th over. 19 runs had come off that over.

Bowling had been pretty ordinary and it allowed for 95 runs to be scored off the last six overs. With pacer Al Amin Hossain getting injured during warm up, Sylhet could not replace the player, leading to a diminished bowling attack.

The game did get tight in the end though as Sylhet fought tooth and nail but with

23 needed off the last over, they fell short by just six runs. Afghanistan's Samiullah Shinwari was one of the batters in that final over. He did not quite get the number of extras right but said it made the difference.

"Yes of course, upset because we were very close to the match and it was very near. We played really well, I think we gave 15-20 runs in extras, that's where the main point is. We bowled very well, we fielded very well and we batted very well. But it's a part of the game, we still have four games to play. So we believe that we can do our best in the

coming matches," Shinwari said after the game.

Opposition skipper Thisara was happy to win what was only his side's only second victory. He felt players are not robots and extras can happen.

"Sometimes it can happen, we are not robots. So failure can happen. But if we can minimise the extras, it will definitely help the team," he said.

Wides have been aplenty in the BPL this season and many of those have way too misdirected that wicketkeepers have often struggled to keep them from running for boundaries. This issue has been a point of contention since the beginning, something which gained wide traction after Australian cricket writer Jarrod Kimber the issue in one of his podcasts.

He brought into notice a game where Dhaka's Alauddin Babu conceded eight runs in one delivery, conceding three wides in a row. Apparently, a lot of money had been bet on the score being over 78.5 and after 9.5 overs in that game, the score was 72. It had seemed impossible for the batting side to get over 78.5 run threshold after 9.5 overs, yet it happened.

Whatever, the suggestions are the extras do not bode well either on BPL's more formidable stars nor the tournament itself.

Reigning champions Real Madrid are also in a slightly uncomfortable position. They lie 20th with nine points having lost half their six games.

Games against Red Bull Salzburg and

French upstarts Brest should allow them

to advance, but Real will likely also

have to prepare for a two-legged play-off in February, as only the top eight progress directly to the

last 16 in March.

Inter Milan, Borussia Dortmund, Bayern Munich, Atletico, Juventus and Benfica are also challenging for

Champions League knockout berths while having the Club

World Cup to come.

Contrast that with Liverpool and Barcelona, the only teams that have already guaranteed places in the knockout phase.

They both look set to skip the

playoffs in February and neither will be at the Club World Cup.

The consequences could be significant

going into next season, as clubs who have been able to give their players a full close-season break could have a big advantage.

This Champions League has created

space for outsiders to impress, most

notably Brest, who are poised to progress.

The top 14 places in the standings

are nevertheless occupied by clubs from

Europe's "Big Five" leagues in England,

Spain, Germany, Italy and France.

Seismic weekend in PL title race

AFP, Manchester

Liverpool extended their lead at the top of the Premier League in dramatic fashion as two late Darwin Nunez goals beat Brentford before Arsenal stumbled at home to Aston Villa.

At the other end of the table, Manchester United and Tottenham are looking over their shoulders at the relegation zone after dismal defeats on Sunday.

On an emotional day at Old Trafford, United paid tribute to one of their all-time greats in Denis Law. The home support then witnessed another example of how far United have fallen as Brighton stormed to a third consecutive victory -- this time by a 3-1 margin -- at the Theatre of Dreams, where they had never won prior to 2022.

Tottenham, meanwhile, are two places below United in 15th after a 3-2 defeat at Everton. Yet, the struggles of the three promoted clubs -- Southampton, Leicester City, and Ipswich Town -- looks set to save both fallen giants from a relegation battle.

Manchester City's 6-0 stroll against Ipswich at Portman Road took them back into the top four, but only five points separate the champions from Fulham in 10th, while Bournemouth brought fifth-place Newcastle's winning streak to a stunning halt to further their case for a first ever European campaign next season.

Nottingham Forest may still harbour dreams of a title challenge. A 3-2 win over Southampton on Sunday took Nuno Espirito Santo's team level with second placed Arsenal. But third-placed Forest are unlikely to last the course to leave Liverpool closing in on just a second league title in 35 years.

Champions League giants scrap for knockout spots

AFP, Paris

A year of unprecedented pressures on the global football calendar begins with a Champions League first, as two rounds of matches in Europe's elite club competition take place in January and some of the continent's biggest names face a scrap to avoid a humiliating exit.

There is no bigger game this week than Paris Saint-Germain against Manchester City, with two clubs who have transformed the face of football over the last 15 years at risk of early elimination.

Qatar-backed PSG and Abu Dhabi-backed City, the latter winners of the Champions League two years ago, have stumbled their way through this first season since the tournament's expansion.

City have taken just one point from their last three Champions League games and lie 22nd in the 36 team standings.

PSG, semi-finalists last season, are a point behind City in 25th place, and therefore in greater danger of going out given that only the top 24 advance to the knockout phase.

That would be deeply embarrassing for them, and particularly humiliating for Nasser al-Khelaifi, PSG's Qatari president. He was instrumental in driving the changes to the Champions League as chairman of the influential European

It has not turned out that way, and PSG have been hampered by a difficult draw that has already seen them play Arsenal, Atletico Madrid and Bayern Munich, and lose to all three.

If PSG lose to City, they will be under severe pressure in their last game against Stuttgart on January 29, when 18 matches take place simultaneously.

City will similarly be in grave danger if they lose in Paris, although one win from their last two matches may suffice to reach the play-off round, with 10 points

expected to be enough.

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Sinner defies dizziness to reach quarterfinal

AFP, Melbourne

Jannik Sinner battled dizzy spells on Monday to reach an Australian Open quarter-final against Alex de Minaur, admitting a long interruption when he accidentally broke the net was "big, big luck".

The world number one and defending champion dropped a set before coming home 6-3, 6-3, 6-2 against Danish 13th seed Holger Rune on Rod Laver Arena.

Sinner struggled in the hot Melbourne conditions, his hand visibly shaking and his heart rate taken in the third set before he left court for a medical timeout.

There was then a bizarre 20-minute delay when Sinner demolished the metal brace that secures the net to the floor with a thunderous serve early in set four.

"I was not feeling really well. You know, I think we saw that today I was struggling physically,"

QUARTERFINAL LINE-UP

MEN'S SINGLES

Tommy Paul (USA) v Alexander Zverev (GER)
Novak Djokovic (SRB) v Carlos Alcaraz (ESP)
Lorenzo Sonego (ITA) v Ben Shelton (USA)
Jannik Sinner (ITA) v Alex de Minaur (AUS)

WOMEN'S SINGLES

Coco Gauff (USA) v Paula Badosa (ESP)
Aryna Sabalenka (BLR) v Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova (RUS)
Madison Keys (USA) v Elina Svitolina (UKR)
Iga Swiatek (POL) v Emma Navarro (USA)

said Sinner, 23, who is bidding to become the first Italian man to win three Grand Slam crowns.

He refused to say exactly what was wrong with him, only that he was "not there health-wise" and had been "a bit dizzy at times".

He admitted that the time off court in air-conditioning while officials repaired the net helped him refresh.

"I was lucky today that... 20 minutes off court, you know, trying to get back physically, putting some cold water in my head, it was very helpful. It was big, big luck to me today."

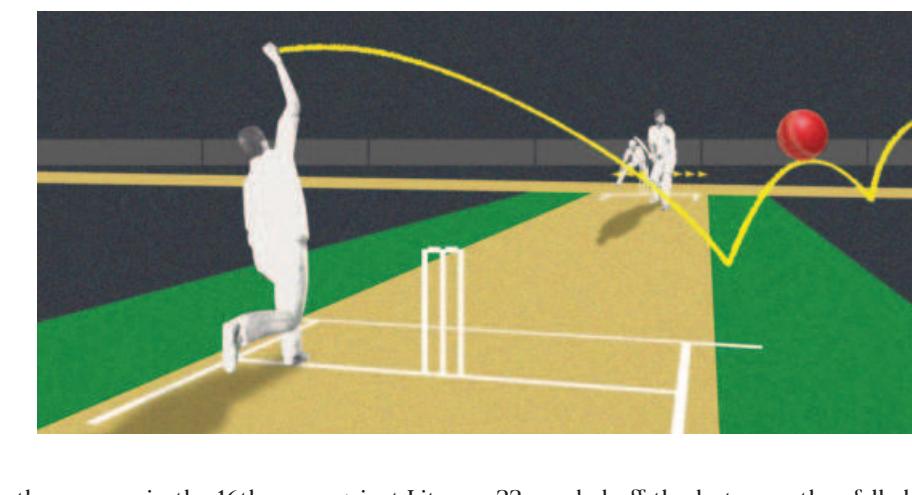


"We are being the worst team, maybe, in the history of Manchester United. I know that you want headlines, but I'm saying that because we have to acknowledge that and to change that. Here you go, your headlines."

Manchester United coach Ruben Amorim said after a 3-1 defeat to Brighton & Hove Albion on Sunday, a result which left the Red Devils in 13th place and on course for their lowest finish in the Premier League.



BPL's wide problem becomes 'main point' in Sylhet's loss



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