

Tigers' BPL woes a concern for Champions Trophy?

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With shorter boundaries, flatter wickets and weaker bowling attacks, there have been plenty of runs on offer for the batters in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and many local batters have cashed in, evidenced by the fact that eight of the top 10 run-getters so far are Bangladeshis.

But out of the eight, Tanzid Tamim is the only batter who is in the Bangladesh squad for the ICC Champions Trophy, scheduled to start in less than a month, raising doubts about the prospects of the Tigers for the forthcoming global showpiece event.

Dhaka Capital's Tanzid is leading the run-getters chart with 420 runs in 10 innings and has impressed all with his aggressive batting.

After him, Mehedi Hasan Miraz is the next most successful batter from the Champions Trophy squad, who is 13th on the list with 258 runs to his name.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto has struggled to consistently get into the Fortune Barishal playing XI, as has Chittagong Kings' Parvez Hossain Emon. Shanto has even played as a wicketkeeper in a few games for Barishal but still has failed to warrant a position for himself.

Soumya Sarkar played his first match this season for Rangpur Riders this



Sunday after a long lay-off due to injury while Jaker Ali, Towhid Hridoy, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah have played some good innings but overall find themselves in the middle of the pack in most metrics.

Things look better in the bowling department by comparison, with three Bangladesh team bowlers in the top 10 wicket-taker's list. Prior to yesterday's second match between Durbar Rajshahi

and Sylhet Strikers, Rajshahi's Taskin Ahmed was ruling the chart with 24 wickets while Sylhet's Tanzim Sakib and Rangpur's Nahid Rana were seventh and ninth with 11 and 10 wickets respectively.

Mustafizur Rahman and Miraz have had an average tournament with the ball while the performances of spinners Rishad Hossain and Nasum Ahmed have been underwhelming at times.

Many experts don't feel that playing in

the BPL should be regarded as preparation for the Champions Trophy but as the Tigers don't have any ODIs scheduled before the marquee tournament, the BPL is their final chance to generate some momentum before the ICC event.

"It will be wrong if anyone thinks that BPL will be an ideal preparation. There are no quality foreigners in this year's BPL. The teams don't have quality bowling attacks as well," opined former Bangladesh skipper and current assistant coach of the Rangpur Riders Mohammad Ashraf.

"If anyone scores runs, I don't think it will give him much confidence. But it's true that if anyone fails to score runs, it's bad for him because you are failing to score runs against such bowling attacks," he added.

Another former Bangladesh captain Habibur Bashar was of the opinion that just being among matches would help the players in the Champions Trophy and felt the poor performances in the BPL is not a cause for concern.

"It's important to play matches rather than to be just in practice. If anyone continuously plays matches, he remains ready for everything... In these tournaments, there will be players who will be in form and while some would struggle, that's very normal. I don't think it will have an impact on the next tournament," Bashar said.



Sabina & Co to play two matches in UAE

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team are set to play two FIFA friendly matches away to United Arab Emirates in late February, close to four months after retaining the SAFF Women's Championship crown.

The women in red and green, ranked 132nd in the world, will play their first match on February 26 and the second one on March 2.

"In the post-Covid era, we don't get response from other countries for friendly matches. Global economic crisis is another reason for not getting adequate response. Considering everything, we have agreed to play two matches against UAE, the first of which will be during FIFA window and the second one will be played outside the window," BFF women's committee chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiron said yesterday, adding that the matches will help the team prepare for the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers in June.

Since the SAFF win on October 30 last year, the Bangladesh players enjoyed a long vacation before starting to return to Dhaka on January 2 for the national camp, which got underway on January 5 at the BUET ground.

Though the junior players joined the camp from the start, seniors started joining from January 15 while defender Anai Mogini stayed home after getting married and Shamsunnahar Jr joined two days ago after attending to her sick father.

Head coach Peter Butler is expected to take over the training sessions from assistant coach Mahbubur Rahman Litu today after arriving in Dhaka from Britain.



Barcelona snapped their four-match winless streak in LaLiga with an emphatic 7-1 victory over Valencia on Sunday, with Fermin Lopez scoring an impressive double and adding two assists. Hansi Flick's side sit third in the standings with 42 points, three behind second-placed Atletico Madrid and seven adrift of leaders Real Madrid. PHOTO: REUTERS

League impasse over, but what about reforms?

SPORTS REPORTER

The uncertainty surrounding the holding of the First Division Cricket League is over, as the chairman of the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM), Salahuddin Chowdhury, yesterday confirmed that the competition will start on Thursday.

The league was suddenly postponed following the protest of club officials regarding leaked proposals from the five-member BCB constitution reform committee, headed by Nazmul Abedeen Fahim. The proposed changes included dissolving the CCDM, reducing Category-2 councillor positions from 76 to 30, and cutting the number of directors representing Dhaka-based clubs from 12 to four.

Dhaka-based clubs' demands held sway, as Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had to shelve ideas of proposed reforms, thus casting doubt over whether the decentralisation of Bangladesh cricket would ever see the light of day.

There have been many questions over whether the Faruque Ahmed-led board did enough homework to form this very important committee, as it needs to break the barrier of an age-old problem of

Bangladesh cricket.

But the BCB's surrender to club officials made it clear that it is a far cry for Bangladesh cricket to come out from the grip of club cricket.

In the end, what suffered was Bangladesh cricket's need for decentralisation, which would put a stop to notions that "Dhaka's club cricket is Bangladesh cricket".

A question about the culture of cricket in Bangladesh - where clubs are prioritised, but regional cricket is not thriving - was posed to the organisers during a press conference in Mirpur yesterday, while a Bangladesh Premier League match was ongoing.

Veteran cricket organiser Rafiqul Islam Babu, a frontman in protests against the proposed reforms, came up with the following reply: "We believe that Dhaka cricket is Bangladesh cricket, since in Dhaka's club cricket, not only Dhaka-based organisers are involved but everyone in Bangladesh is involved. In every nook and corner of Bangladesh, players wait for when they can play club cricket in Dhaka."

"The cricketers who have come through have all come from playing in Dhaka club cricket. They haven't only come from Dhaka but from all the regions of the

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Veteran cricket organiser Rafiqul Islam Babu

country. So, we had a demand that the number of directors coming from club cricket be increased to 16. The rest is up to BCB to do what it wants to do."

The question is raised: will this board be able to bring any major changes to the constitution to make it a 'Bangladesh cricket' rather than 'Dhaka cricket'?

BCB went through changes following the fall of the Awami League government, but ideas of reforms remained just ideas

even before those reforms were proposed. It gives an indication of the ineffectiveness of the reform plans, which did not take into account how the board still runs under the influence of club cricket.

That influence has always been there because a huge number of cricketers' livelihoods are provided by the 76 clubs from Dhaka, which operate from the Premier Division right down to the Third Division.

Many inconsistencies in the Dhaka leagues have been seen over the years. The irregularities have seen the directorships from club cricket questioned. Many players in club cricket still complain of having their payments postponed. Thus, the idea that club cricket is functioning well by providing for the players and should continue to be prioritised is also questionable.

Still, without serious consideration for how cricketers would be harmed if Dhaka clubs boycott leagues, any reform was bound to fall flat on its face.

But one must understand that if only Dhaka cricket continues to represent Bangladesh cricket, the standard of the country's cricket will be stuck to its present, pessimistic state.



TIGERS GAIN AS WINDIES end 35-year wait in Pakistan

West Indies beat Pakistan by 120 runs in the second and final Test in Multan yesterday, achieving a Test win in Pakistan for the first time in nearly 35 years. Resuming on 76 for four and chasing 254 on day three at Multan Cricket Stadium, the home side were bundled out for 133. The series ends 1-1 as a result.

The defeat sent Pakistan crashing to ninth and last in the World Test Championship (WTC) table, while the West Indies finished eighth, allowing Bangladesh to occupy the seventh spot - the Tigers' best-ever finish in WTC.

The last time the West Indies won a Test in Pakistan was in Faisalabad in November 1990, having gone winless on their 1997 and 2006 tours.

Jomel Warrican, who scored 36 not out in the West Indies' first innings of 163, took five wickets in the second innings to finish with nine wickets in the match - 19 in the series. He bagged both the man of the match and player of the series awards.

Sensational Sinner seeks 'complete player' status

REUTERS, MELBOURNE

Double Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner set his sights on mastering clay and grass courts to make himself a complete player after the Italian claimed his third hardcourt Grand Slam title on Sunday.

The world number one retained his Melbourne Park crown with an emphatic 6-3, 7-6(7-4), 6-3 victory over Alexander Zverev in Rod Laver Arena, four months after his US Open triumph, to further underpin his status as the hottest player on the surface.

Sinner has reached the semifinals at the French Open and Wimbledon in the last two seasons but the 23-year-old said he hoped to assert his authority on clay and grass this year.

"You have to be a complete player, not only on one surface but on also the other two," Sinner told reporters.

"I believe last year wasn't a bad season at all on clay and on grass. I can do better, yes, but let's see. I mean, these are questions that I can answer by playing."

Sinner, who has won 37 of his last 38 matches on hardcourts, said he would dedicate his time and

energy to going far in the other Grand Slams. "I'm still young and I have time to adjust, especially on grasscourts, because I've never played the juniors. It was new when I arrived on the tour," Sinner added.

"It's exactly that what I like; the difficulties trying to understand where I can improve. Hopefully I can show that when the season arrives." Sinner's latest triumph showed his ability to stay fully focused despite a doping case stemming from two failed drug tests in March last year that is hanging over his head.

Cleared to continue playing by tennis anti-doping bodies, the Italian could face a ban of up to two years after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) and a hearing is set to start on April 16.

"I'm very proud," Sinner said about his ability to shut out the noise and let his tennis do the talking.

"It's tough to describe. Many things happen off the court, what you maybe don't know. When I go on court, even if sometimes it's very difficult to block these kind of things, I have the team and people who are close to me who trust me."

