

## Milestone man SMITH stands tall

Steve Smith stood unbeaten on 104 after crossing 10,000 Test runs as he and fellow centurion Usman Khawaja, also unbeaten on 147, helped Australia pile up 330-2 in 81.1 overs before rain stopped play on Day 1 after the tourists elected to bat first against Sri Lanka in Galle at the start of the two-match series yesterday.

- Smith took the crease in the first session with 9,999 runs and calmly nudged his very first delivery to mid-on for a single off Prabath Jayasuriya.
- He became the 15th batter to 10,000 Test runs and only the fourth Australian to achieve the feat after Allan Border, Steve Waugh and Ricky Ponting.
- This was Smith's 35th Test hundred and the right-hander is now just next to Alastair Cook in the list of most Test hundreds in Asia by a visiting captain. Cook leads the chart with six tons in



PHOTO:AFP

26 innings in Asia while this was Smith's fifth century in 22 innings in the continent.

Smith and left-handed opener Khawaja put on an

unbeaten stand of 195 for the third wicket -- just five runs short of the highest third-wicket stand by an Australian duo in Sri Lanka. Adam Gilchrist and Damien Martyn's 200-run stand in Kandy in 2004 is the highest in this regard.

## 'They paid me nothing'

SPORTS REPORTER

In the latest episode of the country's most popular cricketing soap opera, also known as the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), Sri Lankan all-rounder Lahiru Samarakoon has left the Durbar Rajshahi camp, claiming to have received "nothing" in the form of payments.

The 27-year-old left for Sri Lanka on Wednesday after warming the bench for Rajshahi since playing in their opening fixture against Fortune Barishal on December 30 in which he conceded 64 runs from his four overs in Mirpur.

"They [Durbar Rajshahi] have given me nothing, zero," he told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

Durbar Rajshahi have been at the centre of the payment-related drama, failing to make player payments on several occasions. The players had boycotted a practice session in Chattogram over payment issues and upon returning to Dhaka, they played a match without any foreign players -- an unprecedented event in the history of the tournament -- after they refused to take the field for not being paid.

Samarakoon had already filed a complaint to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on January 21, saying that he had not received "a single penny".



## Rangpur's rough run reshapes playoffs race

SPORTS REPORTER

Rangpur Riders' late-tournament slump, while not jeopardising their top two finish in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), has created opportunities for Durbar Rajshahi and Chittagong Kings.

Rajshahi have completed their 12 league matches, securing back-to-back wins over high-flying Rangpur to reach fourth place. Chittagong -- another team at the heart of this BPL's players' payment issues -- following yesterday's five-wicket win against Rangpur are now in contention for a top-four spot with two matches remaining.

Khulna Tigers, meanwhile, are the only other side vying for a playoff place alongside Rajshahi and Chittagong.

Despite having started the league phase with eight wins on the trot, Rangpur lost a bit of firepower as Englishman Alex Hales left for ILT20, Pakistan's Khushdil Shah departed for the Champions Trophy camp, while Soumya Sarkar only returned following an injury.

At Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, the game hung in the balance when Chittagong needed 20 runs from three overs. However, Haider Ali's four consecutive sixes off Akif Javed sealed the game.

Asked if the departure of foreign stars hampered their momentum, Rangpur batter Saif Hassan said, "We won three matches even after Alex Hales went back. I think we've lost our momentum a bit.

We have to bring back the momentum. We've got a match left, that's very important. If we can win that, I hope we will get through to the final straight."

However, it will be difficult to find an immediate replacement for Khushdil, who played important knocks in Rangpur's early forays this season. The franchise will now look to finish on a high with their last match against Khulna Tigers today, a do-or-die affair



for the latter.

While Khulna face an uphill task against Rangpur, Chittagong can ensure third spot in the table with a win against Sylhet Strikers, a franchise already out of contention for the playoffs.

Damage control on agenda

Rajshahi and Chittagong have been through extraordinary circumstances that have highlighted the mismanagement of the ongoing BPL. Yesterday, the BPL governing

council once again sat with the franchise owners over payment issues. However, Chittagong's representatives were unable to attend.

It was learned that incentives would be given to all four teams that make the playoffs. "The tournament's prize money was increased," a BCB source said. Asked if it would help with payments for the franchises, the source obliged by saying, "Something like that."

It is also likely that ticket sales money will be shared with the franchises, but it could not be determined whether all seven franchises would get a share.

The board's leniency and struggle to get the BPL on to the field have led to intense criticism. The board may have reminded the owners about their commitments and responsibilities, but damage control appears to be of importance as the BPL nears its conclusion.

## United, Spurs eye Europa League last 16

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United and Tottenham are among the sides aiming to ensure direct passage to the Europa League last 16 in Thursday's league phase finale with nine places in the knockout stages up for grabs.

The struggling English giants are labouring in the bottom half of the Premier League table but do sit in the top eight of the Europa League.

United boss Ruben Amorim is desperate to have two free midweeks for extra time on the training field to try and imbed his ideas after a turbulent first two months in charge.

United have found Europe's second-tier competition much easier to negotiate than domestic duties with four consecutive wins meaning they just need a point away to FCSB.

The Romanian champions, though, can also secure a top-eight finish should they pull off a famous victory.

"We have to surpass ourselves, but we have done this before many times, so we will do it again," said FCSB striker Florin Tanase.

Spurs manager Ange Postecoglou is clinging to his job by a thread after a disastrous run of six Premier League defeats in seven games plunged Tottenham into a relegation battle.

A mounting injury list has been a major factor in their troubles and victory over Elfsborg in north London could buy Postecoglou time to get some of his star names back for the last 16.

## Women's training rocked by boycott

SPORTS REPORTER

The endless loop of hope and despair of Bangladesh women's football team took a turn for the worse on Wednesday after some senior players boycotted the planned first training session with head coach Peter Butler, who returned to Dhaka following a contract extension recently.

According to sources inside the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), a section of senior players of the team skipped the training session, which was supposed to be held at the BUET ground, after having declined to sit for a meeting with the English coach.

Butler had guided the women's team to successful defence of SAFF Women's Championship in October last year, despite having been at odds with the senior players throughout the campaign in Kathmandu.

Despite the public rift between the coach and the senior players, BFF's women's wing chairman and executive committee member Mahfuza Akter Kiron had repeatedly insisted that Butler was the right person for the job. Eventually, Butler, a former English Premier League footballer, was handed a contract extension for two more years, which will see him guide the team AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers in June this year, the SAFF Championship and the Asian Games next year apart from FIFA friendlies.



The team comprising 30 players had started their preparation under assistant coach Mahbubur Rahman Litu from January 15 as part of preparation for two FIFA friendlies against hosts UEA on Feb 26 and March 2.

None of the players could be reached for a comment on the issue, but it was learnt that the players had also demanded a renewal of contracts, which had expired in October last year.

"I am working on this matter [dispute between players and the coach] and I can't tell you anything more until tomorrow," women's wing chairman Kiron told The Daily Star.

Asked whether they sat with the senior players before reappointing Butler following the dispute, Kiron said, "It is better to ask the BFF president about this because the BFF president reappointed Butler."

While it is true that Tabith, also a businessman and a politician, did make the final call on the coach's reappointment, women's football is Kiron's portfolio and it was her job to ensure the thaw between the coach and the senior players is broken before he takes charge of the team again.

Whether Butler is the sole reason for the training boycott or the fact that the unresolved issue of the contract extension of women footballers is involved here, the situation is a sad one for the players because they are the ones who are suffering. They are suffering because they are not treated with enough respect, whether in terms of meeting their financial demands or in terms of taking their opinion into consideration.



PHOTO: FORTUNE BARISHAL

Left-arm spinner Tanvir Islam was the wrecker-in-chief yesterday as he finished with figures of three for just two runs in his two overs, including a wicket-maiden, to help Fortune Barishal bundle out Dhaka Capitals for 73 in 15.3 overs -- the lowest total in this edition of the Bangladesh Premier League. Barishal chased the total down in just 6.3 overs -- a BPL record fastest chase -- to win the contest by nine wickets in Mirpur, confirming a top-two finish.



Nigeria players celebrate after closing out their Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup campaign with a hard-fought six-run win over Ireland on the final day of the Super Six stage in Bangi, Malaysia yesterday. Having qualified as the first West African nation to feature in the competition, Nigeria finished third in Group 2 with just a point less than second-placed England -- who made it through to the semifinals along with unbeaten group champions South Africa. Nigeria also recorded their first-ever win in the tournament with a dramatic two-run victory over New Zealand earlier in the group stage.

PHOTO: ICC