

STAR SPORTS SELECT

HD1

Premier League
Nottingham Forest vs
Man City
Live from 6:30 pm
Liverpool vs

Southampton
Live from 9:00 pm
Brentford vs Aston Villa
Live from 11:30 pm
Wolves vs Everton
Live from 2:00 am
(Saturday)



Historic medal for women's kabaddi team

On the eve of the International Women's Day, Bangladesh women's kabaddi team brought good news from Iran, ensuring a first-ever bronze medal in the Asian Women's Kabaddi Championship. The Bangladesh team beat Thailand by 42-27 points in their last group stage match yesterday to confirm their last four birth, thereby ensuring a bronze medal. Although Bangladesh eventually lost the semifinal against favourites Iran by 41-18 points, the bronze medal was worth the celebration for the Bangladesh team.

PHOTO: BKF

BCB plans to be more selective in issuing NOCs

SPORTS REPORTER

Word around the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is that it will be more selective from now on in giving no objection certificates (NOC) to national team players and will do a "qualitative assessment" to ensure players don't compete in questionable leagues.

NOCs have been a tricky subject in Bangladesh cricket, with some players regularly getting those from the BCB while others having to pass up lucrative opportunities as the board does now allow them to compete.

Pacer Taskin Ahmed has been the biggest victim of the board's inconsistent NOC policy in the past.

Taskin was denied an NOC in 2023 for a stint with the Yorkshire County Cricket Club because the BCB wanted to keep him fresh ahead of the ODI World Cup.

Last year, Taskin and Shoriful Islam were denied NOCs for the IPL, however, pacer Mustafizur Rahman was allowed to compete in the same event.

Instead of the IPL, both Taskin and Shoriful played 50 over cricket for Abahani in the Dhaka Premier League in sweltering heat even as the T20 World Cup was on the horizon.

One source claimed that "the previous board president [Nazmul Hassan Papon] did not give NOC to Taskin to keep him for Abahani's matches."

During the board of directors meeting on Monday, the NOC issue was discussed and board members decided how they would go about the issue from now on.

"We will be more selective regarding NOCs moving forward. Rather than quantity, a qualitative assessment, as in how much the cricketer can gain in experience by playing in a certain league, will be prioritised," a BCB director, on conditions of anonymity, said.

The board is not in favour of giving NOCs without some assessment.

"We don't want to give out wholesale NOCs. For instance, T10 tournaments have been a stage of blatant corruption. The board will advise cricket operations on what to do about these tournaments," a source claimed.

Lanka T10 and Abu Dhabi T10 tournaments are part of those T10 tournaments that the BCB feels players can do without.

There are other tournaments such as Global T20 in Canada, for which the board may not give NOC to its best assets. In the past, Shakib Al Hasan and Liton Das played in this tournament.

"We will obviously encourage players who get opportunities in county cricket. There are proper T20 tournaments like IPL or CPL, and if the players are free, the board will be positive about those," a BCB official said.

Previously, the board had decided to allow two NOCs per year for players but this time it has not made any decision on number of NOCs yet. Given the international calendar and the fact that not many Bangladeshi players get opportunities to play in top foreign leagues, it remains to be seen whether the scenario improves if they do get lucrative opportunities in future.

Factors that could decide CT final's fate

AGENCIES



The stage is set for an exciting Champions Trophy final between India and New Zealand at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium on Sunday. With game-changers on both sides, the title clash is expected to be a battle of nerves and strategy. Here are five crucial factors that could determine the winner.

Henry's Opening Burst

New Zealand are banking on pace bowler Matt Henry to recover from his shoulder injury, as coach Gary Stead remains optimistic about his availability. Henry injured his right shoulder while taking a catch in the semifinal against South Africa on Wednesday.

Henry has been instrumental in New Zealand's campaign, leading the bowling charts with 10 wickets.

His previous encounter with India saw him dismantle their top order, dismissing Shubman Gill and Virat Kohli early to leave India struggling at 30-3. Although his five-wicket haul (5-42) came in a losing effort, his ability to strike in the Powerplay could give New Zealand a strong edge.

Chakravarthy's Mystery Spin

India's surprise weapon, wrist-spinner Varun Chakravarthy, has made a sensational impact since being added to the squad. His spell of 5-42 against New Zealand earlier in the tournament rattled the Black Caps, proving his effectiveness on the Dubai track.

Chakravarthy continued his good form in the semifinal against Australia, taking two key wickets. His unorthodox variations and ability to deceive batters could be crucial in restricting New Zealand's middle order. If India include him in the XI, he might be the game changer on a surface assisting spin.

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Ravindra and Williamson Threat

The combination of young sensation Rachin Ravindra and veteran Kane Williamson provides New Zealand with stability and firepower. The duo stitched together a 164-run stand in the semifinal against South Africa, with both scoring centuries.

Williamson's ability to anchor innings and Ravindra's aggressive stroke play make them a formidable challenge for India's spinners. Having already troubled India

consistency, head coach Gautam Gambhir emphasized Rohit's impact beyond just numbers. A solid start from Rohit in the final could set the tone for India's batting lineup and put pressure on New Zealand's bowlers.

The Pitch Factor

The Dubai International Cricket Stadium has played host to all of India's matches due to political reasons, giving them an advantage in understanding the conditions. The pitch has been slow,



earlier in the tournament, their presence at the crease could be pivotal in determining New Zealand's fate in the final.

Rohit's Start

Indian captain Rohit Sharma has struggled to convert his starts into big scores in the tournament, with a highest score of 41. However, his aggressive approach at the top has provided India with quick fire starts, allowing the middle order to build on the momentum.

While some have criticized his lack of

assisting spinners and making high scores difficult.

New Zealand, on the other hand, have played on high-scoring pitches in Pakistan, including their record-breaking 362-6 against South Africa. Their adaptability to Dubai's sluggish surface will be tested in the final. However, all-rounder Rachin Ravindra remains confident in their ability to adjust, stating, "We pride ourselves in adapting and playing the situation in front of us."



Yasir Ali stole the show in the Dhaka Premier League yesterday, smashing an unbeaten 121-ball 143 to help Dhanmondi Sports Club go top of the standings after beating Legends of Rupganj by 24 runs at BKSP-3. En route to his third List A ton, Yasir stitched a 146-run fifth-wicket stand with Moin Khan to propel Dhanmondi to 332 for seven in 50 overs. Rupganj, who lost a number of early wickets, could only manage 308 for nine.

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FIFA lifts restricted financing on BFF

SPORTS REPORTER

FIFA lifted restricted financing on Bangladesh Football Federation on Friday, six years after football's world governing body imposed the restrictions over lack of financial transparency and expenditure of FIFA money outside of specific sectors.

"After six years, the BFF has come out of the restricted financing from FIFA, which just informed us of the development today," BFF president Tabith Awal told The Daily Star.

"We have been able to do it in four months, something that was not done in past," said Tabith, who was elected as BFF president in October last year. After becoming the BFF president, Tabith met with FIFA president once and AFC president twice; he even visited FIFA and AFC headquarters to bring forward the visit of FIFA's audit team.

FIFA usually allocates US\$1.25 lakh per year to member nations in two or three instalments but it had allocated the same amount to BFF in 12 allotments each year over the last six years.

"Now BFF can apply for special projects to FIFA and run its activities smoothly," Tabith added.

Booters 'excited' to face Chhetri again

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera and the players have expressed their excitement rather than scare at the news of the retirement U-turn of Indian legend Sunil Chhetri for the March FIFA window.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) on Thursday night announced that Chhetri had decided to return for national duty and then announced him as part of its 26-member squad for the FIFA window, which will feature a friendly against Maldives on March 19 before the Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture against Bangladesh on March 25.

According to a statement from the AIFF, India coach Manolo Marquez asked the forward to return, given the importance of the upcoming fixtures.

The 40-year-old forward, who had announced his retirement from international football in June last year, has scored six goals in six matches against Bangladesh.

However, Cabrera feels that the presence of Chhetri will instead motivate the Bangladesh players to give their best.

"Obviously all of us know Sunil (Chhetri). He's having a very good season with Bengaluru FC. So I think it's very normal that they have decided to call him back, but I think it's going to make the team more excited and motivated for the match," the Spaniard said in a video message from Taif, Saudi Arabia where the Bangladeshi team spent their second day of 11-day training camp yesterday.

Defender Saad Uddin, who had scored a famous goal in a 1-1 draw against India during a World Cup Qualifier in Kolkata in 2019, said it would be a good experience facing the Indian talisman again.

"He's a great player and it will be good for us facing him," said Saad.

Meanwhile, young forward Sheikh Morsalin, who could be playing against India for the first time, said: "I feel it's (Chhetri's return) good for us because there would have been something missing without him."