



Players of the BKSP women's hockey team run for joy following their 8-0 win against Kishoreganj in the final of the Brac Bank Women's Development Cup Hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium yesterday. BKSP dominated the 11-team tournament, winning all their matches and scoring 82 goals while conceding just one. Arpita Pal, captain of the team, emerged as the top-scorer of the tournament with 30 goals while Kishoreganj forward Fardia Akter Ratri was adjudged the best player for scoring 11 goals and setting up many more en route to the final.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Ratri hopes for more tournaments in women's hockey



Even though Kishoreganj lost the final of the Brac Bank Women's Development Cup Hockey tournament to a star-studded BKSP, Fardia Akter Ratri made her mark by scoring 11 goals and setting up many on her way to taking the team to the final. In an interview with The Daily Star's Atique Anam following the final, the forward spoke of the tournament and status of women's hockey in the country. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

**The Daily Star (DS):** How was the feeling after you were adjudged the player of the tournament?

**Fardia Akter Ratri (FAR):** I was surprised because I didn't expect it. You know we didn't get to do much training ahead of this tournament.

**DS:** Do you think your 11 goals played a key role in taking the team to the final?

**FAR:** I didn't count the goals really. But I did score goals and created for others, which is why probably we were in the final. But we know BKSP would win the final because they have facilities and experienced players. Most of the players of the national team come from BKSP.

**DS:** Your experience of representing Bangladesh in international hockey must have helped.

**FAR:** I have played in the 2019 AHF Cup and then was the captain of the Five-A-Side World Cup in 2023. Those experiences obviously helped.

**DS:** Could you tell us about the sporting lineage of your family?

**FAR:** My brother, Rakibul Hasan Rocky, is a national hockey player. Two of my sisters play volleyball.

**DS:** Do you want to take hockey professionally?

**FAR:** There is no hockey matches, as far as I know, up next. There is U-21 AHF Cup in June probably, but I'm overaged for that. Despite that, I am serious about hockey and want to take the sport professionally. The authorities have said that there will be tournaments arranged. So we are hoping those happen soon. Now I'll be going back home tomorrow and continue my studies.

## BCB likely to defer BCL due to packed schedule

SPORTS REPORTER

A Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official yesterday said that the upcoming season of the first-class competition Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) might get deferred due to the packed schedule of the national team, A team and High-Performance Unit in May.

The BCB initially planned to hold the next edition of BCL, which is usually held in November-December, in May but is now likely to postpone it as majority of the country's top players will be engaged in different series at the same time.

"We planned the tournament [BCL] as these tours weren't finalised before. But now we have called a meeting [to reschedule the event]," Akram Khan, BCB's tournament committee chairman, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We will sit with the selectors as well. If we don't get sufficient players, the tournament can be delayed. We want our top players to participate in the league," he added.

New Zealand A team will arrive in Bangladesh on May 1 to play three one-dayers

and two four-day matches against their Bangladeshi counterparts between May 5 and 24. The series was initially scheduled to take place in September last year, but the touring side postponed the series due to travel restrictions following the ouster of the Awami League regime.

Meanwhile, South Africa's Emerging Team are also scheduled to arrive here in early May to play three one-dayers and two four-day matches against the HP unit while the Tigers have a white-ball away series against Pakistan in the same month where they will play three ODIs and three T20Is.

"We will have a jam-packed schedule from May 1. I see it as an opportunity for our players," chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu told The Daily Star.

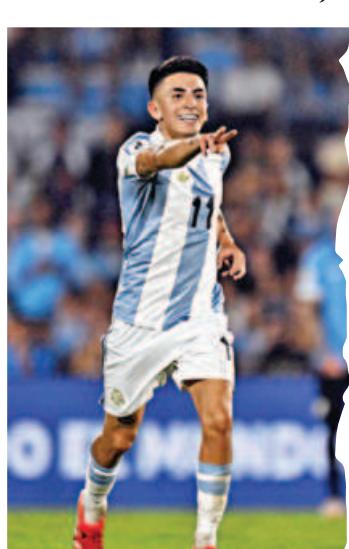
"There were doubts regarding some of these series. Due to the non-availability of the South African team, the HP Unit had to compromise with the schedule and host the series at this time. Otherwise, they might not have been able to play the series," he concluded.



## Almada fires Argentina towards qualification

Argentina took a major step towards securing their place at the 2026 FIFA World Cup with a hard-fought 1-0 win over Uruguay in Montevideo on Saturday, thanks to a sensational winner in the second half, firing into the top corner from the edge of the box. The reigning world champions are now on the verge of becoming the first South American team to officially qualify. The top six teams qualify automatically for the 2026 World Cup in the USA, Canada, and Mexico.

- Argentina avenged their earlier 2-0 home defeat to Uruguay with a tense but vital away win.
- With 28 points from 13 games, Argentina tops the 10-team South American qualifying table.
- The victory ensures Argentina can finish no lower than seventh, securing at least an inter-confederation playoff spot.
- A win or a draw over Brazil on Wednesday in Buenos Aires would guarantee Argentina's direct qualification.
- Uruguay remain fourth with 20 points, just behind Brazil (21 pts) and Ecuador (22 pts).



Rakib steers Partex to last-ball win

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Rakib's unbeaten 80 off 103 balls powered Partex Sporting Club to a thrilling one-wicket victory over Agrani Bank Cricket Club in a last-ball finish in the ongoing Dhaka Premier League in Mirpur yesterday.

Chasing a below-par target of 219 runs at Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, Partex were cruising to victory after they reached 203-5 in the 46th over.

However, Agrani off-spinner Nayeem Hasan then took two wickets in three deliveries, while two of the Partex tail-enders were dismissed through run-outs, reducing them to 209 for nine.

Needing 10 runs to win in last over, Rakib smashed left-arm spinner Taibur Rahman for two boundaries in the first four deliveries.

Partex's last batting pair then took two cheeky singles in final two deliveries to hand Agrani Bank their second loss in seven rounds.

Earlier, Marshall Ayub struck 64 off 87 balls as Agrani were bowled out for 218 in 50 overs after being asked to bat first. Naeem Islam Jnr was the pick of the bowlers for Partex, finishing with three wickets for 41 runs.



## Foreman's final bell rings at 76

AGENCIES

George Foreman, the legendary boxer and unlikely American icon who rose from poverty to global fame, died Friday at age 76. A two-time heavyweight champion and beloved pitchman, Foreman's life was a tale of second chances -- and triumph.

Born in 1949 in Marshall, Texas, and raised in Houston's tough Fifth Ward, Foreman overcame a troubled youth through the Job Corps, which introduced him to boxing. At just 19, he captured Olympic gold in 1968. His ferocious style brought him 37 consecutive professional wins and a 1973 knockout of Joe Frazier to claim the heavyweight crown.

But it was his 1974 defeat to Muhammad Ali in the historic "Rumble in the Jungle" that etched Foreman into boxing lore.

Devastated, he left the sport in 1977, finding solace as a Christian minister.

Then came the comeback. He returned to the ring a decade later -- heavier, older, but full of fire -- and shocked the world by regaining the heavyweight title at 45, becoming the oldest ever to do so.

Beyond boxing, Foreman became a cultural phenomenon, famously lending his name to the George Foreman Grill, a product that made him a fortune and symbolized his transformation from fierce fighter to smiling salesman.

"George's journey from the streets of Fifth Ward to boxing and business success was an inspiration," said Houston Mayor John Whitmire.

Married five times and father to 12 children -- five sons all named George -- Foreman lived large but remained grounded in faith and family.

"By George," he once wrote, "I've had two lives, and I'm grateful for both."

In and out of the ring, George Foreman proved that it's never too late for a comeback -- and never too early to believe.



## Can Hamza help Bangladesh exorcise the Chhetri curse?

India talisman Sunil Chhetri has been a nightmare for Bangladesh in recent contests. While stopping Chhetri is no easy task, Hamza Choudhury's inclusion in the Bangladesh squad adds an unpredictable dynamic to the Asian Cup Qualifiers encounter between the two sides on March 25. A disciplined midfield performance could cut off the supply lines to the Indian great and perhaps, for the first time in over a decade, neutralise the Chhetri effect.

\*\*Read full story on The Daily Star website.

## Lewis-Skelly lights up Wembley

AGENCIES

At just 18 years old, Myles Lewis Skelly didn't just step onto the pitch at Wembley -- he stamped his name into England's history books in front of 80,000-plus crowd.

On a night brimming with anticipation, the Arsenal academy graduate became the youngest player to score on his senior debut for England, helping the Three Lions secure a 2-0 victory over Albania in their World Cup qualifying opener. His calm 20th-minute finish set the game's tone.

"He's an asset for us now," Declan Rice said post-match. "He's 18 years old and has got a long career."

It's been a meteoric rise for the young left back, who only received his first England call-up after a standout season with Arsenal's senior side. Yet nothing about the moment seemed too big for him.

"Week-on-week he's shown how good he is, and the fearlessness he has in his performance," Rice added. "He didn't even know he was starting until today, and I just knew he was going to have a good performance. He has that belief in himself."

That self belief was on full display in front of a roaring Wembley crowd, but it's also been evident behind the scenes. According to new England boss Thomas Tuchel, the teenager has quickly won over teammates and coaches alike.

"Amazing player. Amazing personality," Tuchel said with a smile. "He came into camp and showed straight away that it's normal to fall in love with him. Everything you see on the pitch you see off the pitch -- full of confidence, humour, and maturity."

With Monday's fixture against Latvia on the horizon, Tuchel hopes the milestone moment can ignite inspiration within the squad.