



Barca look to stretch LaLiga lead

LaLiga leaders Barcelona have the opportunity to extend their advantage atop the standings when they visit Leganes on Saturday. Barca, with 67 points from 30 games, are four points clear of second-placed Real Madrid, while Leganes are 18th with 28 points, two points below the safety zone.

‘Would feel great if I score a ton at home’

Over a short span in Test cricket, Mahmudul Hasan Joy has been able to find his spark from time to time. With Zimbabwe coming in for a series, Joy and the other young guns in the side approach this series to build momentum in their careers. The 24-year-old opener discussed his career, approach and the Zimbabwe series during an interview last week with **The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi**. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): What's your feeling regarding Test cricket and how are you going to approach the Zimbabwe series? **Mahmudul Hasan Joy (MHJ):** The number of Tests I have played in, we got some good results in those but in some we didn't do well. So with the Zimbabwe series ahead, although they are comparatively not as competitive as the other Test sides, we have to dominate.

DS: Will this also be a series where the team will look for some solidity? **MHJ:** The last time we played the West Indies series, it was a pretty similar team. Mushfiqur (Rahim) bhai wasn't there due to personal reasons and (Najmul Hossain) Shanto bhai wasn't there due to injury. The last two years, this has been

the team. The team is organised and if we can do well here, it would help us get some confidence before the other big series. It could be the start of turning things around.

DS: Do you feel this is a series where you too have an opportunity to stake your claim?

MHJ: This would be a good opportunity for the openers to perform and solidify our positions. It would not mean that I would feel pressure but it would be about enjoying our cricket.

DS: You are Bangladesh's only batter to score a Test ton in South Africa but you haven't managed a ton at home yet. Are you looking forward to getting one here? **MHJ:** I think it would feel great if I score a ton at home because when I scored that ton outside the country, it was the greatest moment for me.

DS: It's evident from your batting that you try to play a lot of deliveries. Could you discuss what process you follow when building an innings?

MHJ: The new ball moves both ways, so if I survive that, it becomes easier. So I focus heavily on surviving the new ball. The focus is to play out the first 15-20 overs and then go for something bigger.

DS: Top-order collapses have bugged Bangladesh for a while. Do you think it would be the openers' contributions that could thwart such instances?

MHJ: Yes, the openers and the top-order will have to take that responsibility. When you play bigger sides, it's a must since they don't give you many chances. So when the top-order collapses, all the pressure falls on the middle-order. If the openers provide a good start, the middle-order can play well and contribute to a big score. Given our bowling attack, we can be in a good position if the top-order bats well.

DS: Is this a template you feel Bangladesh has tried to execute from Mount Maunganui?

MHJ: Yes, that's true. There we got a good start from the top-order and then the middle-order controlled things and we won the match.

DS: How would you term the transition from playing DPL to Test cricket?

MHJ: No, it would not be a big issue. We are moving seven days before the game, so we can take our preparations.



Bayern, Dortmund look for respite in Bundesliga

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's home 'Klassiker' clash with Borussia Dortmund takes place on Saturday against the backdrop of potential Champions League elimination for both sides.

The clash, which has emerged as the Bundesliga's showpiece rivalry over the past 15 years since Dortmund won back-to-back titles under Jurgen Klopp, falls in between the two legs of both clubs' Champions League two-legged quarterfinals.

On Tuesday, an injury-decimated Bayern lost 2-1 at home against Inter Milan in the first leg.

In the second leg, Vincent Kompany's side will need to win by two goals to avoid extra time, or by one and hope to triumph on penalties.

The situation for Dortmund, who were Champions League finalists last season, is far more dire.

Niko Kovac's men were thumped 4-0 in Barcelona and will need to pull off one of the biggest turnarounds in the competition's history to reach the semifinals.

Complicating matters for both Bayern and Dortmund is that there is still plenty at stake in the league.

With six games remaining, Bayern could be just three points clear of second-placed Bayer Leverkusen at kick-off, should Xabi Alonso's side beat Union Berlin earlier on Saturday.

Bayern cannot afford a slip against Dortmund as Leverkusen have won 14 of their past 18 games and have lost just once.

Wanting to keep their slim hopes of Champions League qualification alive, Dortmund, who sit eighth, five points off the top four, will go to Munich to fight for every point.

Fresh from the humbling in Barcelona, Kovac warned his side could expect more of the same on Saturday, saying: "Bayern are on the same level as Barcelona. We need to do better defensively."



Bangladesh cricketer Mehedi Hasan Miraz was presented the Sportsperson of the Year and the Cricketer of the Year awards at the Kool-BSPA Sports Award 2024 held at a city hotel in Dhaka on Friday. Pace sensation Nahid Rana was named Emerging Sportsperson of the Year, while women's footballer Ritu Porna Chakma received the Popular Choice award through fans' online voting.

WOMEN'S WC QUALIFIERS

Pakistan, WI notch victories

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan rose to the top of the ICC Women's Cricket World Cup 2025 Qualifiers with a six-wicket win against Scotland yesterday -- their second win on the trot.

Chasing 187, the hosts closed the game with six wickets in hand in Lahore, and now have four points from two outings.

Pakistan elected to field after rain reduced the contest to 32 overs a side. Skipper Katherine Bryce constructed a gritty knock of 91 runs off 96 deliveries while Alisa Lister scored 31 as Scotland managed 186 for nine.

Pakistan skipper Fatima Sana led the charge with the ball, nabbing four wickets in the Scotland innings.

In the other match of the day, West Indies registered a thrilling six-run win against Ireland to get into the points tally after having lost their first match against Scotland.

Batting first at the Gaddafi Stadium, Stefanie Taylor and Chinelle Henry (46 each), as well as Zaida James (36), had helped avert an early collapse after Ireland removed in-form skipper Hayley Matthews and Qiana Joseph in the Powerplay.

West Indies eventually posted 181 for six in 33 overs before Matthews' four wickets stifled Ireland's chase.

DPL first phase ends today with Abahani-Mohammedan clash

SPORTS REPORTER

Perennial rivals Abahani Limited and Mohammedan Sporting Club will face off in Mirpur while Agrani Bank Cricket Club and Prime Bank Cricket Club will vie for the final spot in the Super League as the 11th and final round of the first phase of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) commences today.

The lustre of the Abahani-Mohammedan rivalry right now is not what it used to be during the heydays of DPL, but the game still carries significance due to top names taking part.

The last time tempers flared in an Abahani-Mohammedan clash was in 2021, and it was instigated by Mohammedan captain Shakib Al Hasan, who kicked down the stumps in a fit of rage over a leg-before appeal being turned down by the umpire.

"It was not the best of incidents, it's better if these kinds of things don't happen," Najmul Hossain Shanto, Abahani and Bangladesh captain, told reporters in Mirpur with a smile when asked about the incident yesterday.

Shanto acknowledged that fanfare surrounding the rivalry has decreased quite a bit but claimed the players still feel excited for the match.

"The excitement is similar to every other year and at the end of the day it's another match. People always have extra



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

expectations surrounding an Abahani-Mohammedan match and hopefully tomorrow's [today's] match will be exciting," he said.

MSC, Kings square off in high-stakes tie

SPORTS REPORTER

Title contenders Mohammedan SC will look to strengthen their lead in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) when they face five-time champions Bashundhara Kings at the Bashundhara Kings Arena today.

With nine wins in ten matches, league leaders Mohammedan have boosted their chances of clinching their first-ever professional league title. However, they now face a tough challenge against the Kings in their first match following a lengthy seven-week break.

Though Mohammedan had less training during the break compared to the Kings, the Black and White outfit remain confident of picking up where they left off.

Both teams bolstered their squads by signing new foreign players, and today's fixture is expected to be a thrilling encounter. The outcome could play a decisive role in the title race, with Mohammedan currently leading the Kings by seven points in the 10-team table.

"Every match is very important for us. Of course, Kings are a big hurdle, and we'll need to give extra effort on their home ground, especially after the long break,"

said Mohammedan head coach Alfaz Ahmed. He added that the Mohammedan are aiming for victory, having previously defeated the Kings 1-0 in their first league meeting.

The Kings, on the other hand, have struggled with inconsistency, mainly due to underperformance from their forwards. During the break, they strengthened their attacking line by signing new foreign forwards. Although these additions did not yield results in the Federation Cup -- where they lost to Abahani in a penalty shootout -- the reigning champions are determined to bounce back in the league as they pursue a record sixth straight title.

Meanwhile, fellow title contenders Abahani, who are four points behind Mohammedan, will also be in action today against Dhaka Wanderers Club.

In yesterday's fixtures, Rahmatganj defeated Chittagong Abahani 2-0 in Mymensingh, with Tamvir Hossain and Samuel Boateng scoring in the 28th and 45th minutes, respectively. In Gazipur, Bangladesh Police FC thrashed Farashganj Young Men's Club 3-0, with MS Bablu netting a brace and Dipok Roy adding one.



Mohamed Salah ended months of speculation over his future by signing a new two-year contract with Premier League leaders Liverpool yesterday. His previous deal, understood to be worth more than £350,000-a-week, was scheduled to run out in the summer and there had been doubts he would stay with the Reds, who rejected a £150m offer from Saudi Pro League side Al-Ittihad for the 32-year-old in 2023. The Egyptian, who has scored 243 goals and 109 assists in 394 appearances for the Reds since joining from Roma in 2017, will now have the chance to add to his stellar numbers. He has netted 32 goals and 22 assists in all competitions this season; 27 goals and 17 assists have come in the Premier League as Liverpool close in on a record-equalling 20th top-flight title.

PHOTO: LIVERPOOL