



Tigresses close in on WC qualification

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh skipper Nigar Sultana Joty is enjoying the form of her life as yet another blistering 59-ball 83 from the wicketkeeper-batter, alongside fifties from Fargana Hoque (57 off 84) and Sharmin Akhter (57 off 79), helped the side to a 34-run victory over Scotland in their third match of the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier in Lahore yesterday.

The victory helped the Tigresses inch closer to qualifying for next year's World Cup in India as they moved top of the table with their third straight win.

BRIEF SCORES

Bangladesh: 276-6 in 50 overs (Joty 83*, Sharmin 57, Fargana 57; Bryce 2-53)

Scotland: 242-9 in 50 overs (Priyanaz 61, Slater 61*; Nahida 4-40, Sumona 2-43)

Result: Bangladesh won by 34 runs

Player of the match: Nigar Sultana Joty

A win against West Indies in their next game on Thursday will ensure Bangladesh's qualification before they play their final game against Pakistan next Saturday. However, even if they lose their final two matches, the Tigresses have a good chance of qualifying as one of two teams from the six-team competition due to their healthy net run-rate of 1.494.

With 11 fours and a strike rate of 140.68, it was Joty's unbeaten knock that helped Bangladesh post 276 for six – the Tigresses' highest total in Women's ODI, surpassing their previous best of 271 for three against Thailand. The Tigresses then restricted Scotland to 242 for nine, despite a 115-run eighth-wicket stand between Priyanaz Chatterji (61 off 63) and Rachel Slater (61 off 73*). Bangladesh left-arm spinner Nahida Akter stood out with the ball, scalping four for 40 in 10 overs.

Meanwhile, it was the only time when Joty, who notched up her maiden ton in their opening match against Thailand and then scored a fifty against Ireland, scored three successive 50-plus innings in her international career.

Arsenal target CL glory

AFP, London

Arsenal face Real Madrid on Wednesday with one foot already in the Champions League semifinals, but with the added pressure of knowing their entire season hinges on the result at the Bernabeu.

Mikel Arteta's men last week demolished the defending champions 3-0 in the first leg of their quarterfinal in London and are favourites to reach the last four of Europe's top club competition for only the third time.

But all their eggs are now in one basket as they seek to end their trophy drought, with leaders Liverpool almost out of sight in the Premier League.

Arsenal, who have never been crowned European champions, have become used to battling for the English league title -- narrowly losing out to Manchester City in the past two seasons.

This year it has been their misfortune to be competing against a Liverpool team that flew out of the blocks in Arne Slot's first season at Anfield.

Arsenal have had chances to put the pressure on the runaway leaders but 12 draws in the Premier League, and just two wins in their past



Arsenal are unbeaten in three Champions League meetings with Real Madrid and could become the first team to ever keep three successive clean sheets against them in the competition.

Only four teams have lost the first leg of a Champions League tie by at least three goals and advanced -- Deportivo (vs Milan in 2004), Barcelona (vs PSG in 2017), Roma (vs Barcelona in 2018), and Liverpool (vs Barcelona in 2019).

The other fixture of the night -- Bayern Munich vs Inter Milan -- will also demands a comeback as Bayern lost the first leg 2-1 at home against the Italian side.



seven games, have cost them as they are 13 points behind Liverpool.

Arteta made five changes for their 1-1 draw at home to mid-table Brentford last Saturday, and the Spaniard was clear about where his priorities now lie.

"We still have six games to play in the Premier League, which are going to be really important, for sure," he said. "But, for now, it's all about Wednesday."

Arsenal will travel to Madrid in high spirits, even though the 15-time European champions regularly defy logic in the competition, meaning Arteta will not breathe easily until the final whistle.

Meanwhile, Real will be hoping to do something that they have not done so far in the competition -- overturning a 3-0 deficit -- and will rely heavily on Kylian Mbappe, who was brought in exactly for such nights.

"Of course we can," said Mbappe on his way out of the Emirates last Tuesday.

Will Mbappe be able to add to Real's rich history of European comebacks, or will Arteta's men be able to take a step closer to their first-ever Champions League glory? The answer will be known in just a few hours.

Bangladesh-India series fixtures confirmed

India are set to tour Bangladesh in August for a series comprising three ODIs and three T20Is -- marking their inaugural bilateral T20I series in the country and their first white-ball-only visit since 2014. Scheduled during the off-season, the series recalls previous off-season tours, such as India's 2014 visit in June and Australia's tours in 2017 and 2021. Additionally, this tour will act as final preparation for this year's T20 Asia Cup, which India will host in September.

ITINERARY

India arrive in Dhaka -- August 13
1st & 2nd ODIs, Dhaka -- August 17 & 20
3rd ODI, Chattogram -- August 23
1st T20I, Chattogram -- August 26
2nd & 3rd T20Is, Dhaka -- August 29 & 31

DPL MSC get Fizz boost for Super League games

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman is set to feature for Mohammedan Sporting Club in their Super League matches of the ongoing Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League, confirmed the club manager, Sazzad Ahmed, to The Daily Star yesterday.



Sazzad added that they have included a few more cricketers, including Nabil Samad and Farhad Hossain, after a few of their registered cricketers like Mushfiqur Rahim, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Taijul Islam joined the national team in Sylhet ahead of the Tigers' two-match Test series against Zimbabwe, starting on April 20.

Mohammedan also have injury problems to deal with as pacer Taskin Ahmed has been sidelined due to a left Achilles tendon issue. Their skipper, Towhid Hridoy, has also been suspended for two matches due to his misbehaviour with umpires during the last league match against Abahani.

Mohammedan are currently leading the table with 18 points, on par with Abahani, but ahead due to a better head-to-head record.

Meanwhile, the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) yesterday confirmed the itinerary of the opening three rounds of Super League matches, scheduled to take place on April 17, 20 and 23.

Mohammedan will take on Legends of Rugpang in Mirpur, while Abahani Limited and Gazi Group Cricketers will face Agrani Bank Cricket Club and Gulshan Cricket Club at BKSP-3 and BKSP-4, respectively, during the opening round matches.

Meanwhile, the relegation league -- featuring Partex Sporting Club, Shinepukur Cricket Club and Brothers Union -- will begin on April 18.

BFF to receive \$1m from AFC

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is all set to receive US\$ 1 million from Asian Football Federation's (AFC) new Stadium Project, which was approved during its 35th Congress in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on April 12.

BFF president Tabith Awal, vice-president Wahid Uddin Chowdhury, general secretary Emran Hossain as well as BFF EC member and AFC member Mahfuza Akter Kiron attended the congress where they also held bilateral meetings with Japan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

"AFC has sanctioned US\$ 0.25 million per year for a four-year circle under the Stadium Project. The BFF president also sat with the AFC president [Shaikh Salman] to seek help for the academy as well as referees' development," Wahid told reporters at the BFF headquarters yesterday.

Emran informed that the annual amount of US\$ 250,000 was previously of US\$ 200,000 per year. Bangladesh had previously availed a few more projects to buy two vehicles for BFF, ERP software for the finance department and other things.

"This project involves improving infrastructure which includes renovation, floodlights, training facilities and many other things," Emran told The Daily Star.

ACC raids BCB headquarters

SPORTS REPORTER

In light of various irregularities and corruption allegations, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) conducted a raid at the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) headquarters in Mirpur on Tuesday. A special three-member team from the ACC carried out the operation at around 12pm.

Later, in a press briefing, ACC official Mahmudul Hasan told media: "The main issue of the complaint was corruption in the selection process of various cricket leagues under the Bangladesh Cricket Board. This enforcement operation is being conducted based on allegations of illegal transactions and various other irregularities."

"We had specific complaints today, particularly regarding the 2023 team selection for the Third Division Qualifying round. In previous years, the application fee was set at 5 lakh taka. At that time, only two or three teams would apply, and one or two would be selected from those. This time, when the fee was reduced to 1 lakh taka, 60 teams applied. We have collected the documents and will now verify and investigate these matters," he added.

The ACC official also brought forward the ticket sales issue of the Bangladesh Premier League.

"From the 3rd to the 10th season of the BPL, BCB had income from ticket sales. It was shown that the revenue from those eight seasons amounted to 15 crore taka. But in the 11th season, when BCB sold tickets themselves, the income was reported to be around 13 crore taka," Mahmudul said.



FEDERATION CUP Little-known Insan takes Kings to final

SPORTS REPORTER

Teenager Insan Hossain emerged as Bashundhara Kings' saviour as the three-time champions came from behind to hand a 2-1 defeat to Rahmatganj MFS in the Federation Cup Qualifier-2 fixture in Dhaka yesterday, moving into the final of the competition for the fifth time.

Smarting from a 4-2 defeat in a penalty shootout at the hands of Abahani in Qualifier-1, Kings were seemingly heading to another shootout with only seven minutes left of extra time, until substitute Insan -- who replaced Argentine forward Juan Lescano in the 105th minute -- struck at Bashundhara Kings Arena.

Having spent most of his time playing as a defender for Brothers Union last season and featuring in only 18 minutes of two Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) matches for Kings, the 19-year-old met Rakib Hossain's pinpoint cross with a glancing header in the 113th minute to spark wild celebrations



in the stands.

Kings, who lost to title contenders Mohammedan in the BPL on Saturday, were on the toe in the beginning of the match, as Rahmatganj were deprived of taking a 10-minute lead with a

shot coming off the crossbar, before Kings saw Sheikh Morsalin miss the near post from a free-kick in the first half.

Lescano, who played for the Real Madrid youth team, also rattled the crossbar in the second

half, before Solomon King broke the deadlock with a left-footer inside the box in the 76th minute after centre-back Tapu Barman failed to stop a cutback from Nabib Newaj Jibon.

Kings, however, took only six minutes to level the margin, courtesy of an unexpected equaliser from Saad Uddin, who saw his left-side cross embrace the far net in the 82nd minute -- though he attempted to provide it for forward Rakib Hossain inside the box.

Kings kept up the pressure for another one, but the match rolled into extra time where Insan ensured the efforts of his teammates -- such as Lescano, Ghanaian Evans Eiti and Uzbek midfielder Asror Gafurov -- did not go in vain.

Out of seven seasons, Kings had skipped one Federation Cup in the 2021-22 season, citing unplayable ground, and then they were ousted by Mohammedan from the semi-final in the 2022-23 season.



Experienced batter Mushfiqur Rahim, who missed Bangladesh's last Test tour of the West Indies last year due to injury, is all set to make a return in the Tigers' upcoming two-Test series against Zimbabwe at home. Bangladesh have already begun their camp in Sylhet, where the first Test is scheduled to start from April 20, while [Inset] Zimbabwe arrived in the country's capital yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR/BCB