

## Depleted MSC still eyeing DPL triumph

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club will miss several of their top cricketers in the Super League phase of the ongoing Dhaka Premier League (DPL), but are still hopeful of becoming champions.

Mohammedan roped in several top players such as Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah, Towhid Hridoy and Taskin Ahmed in this year's tournament.

But as the Super League phase starts today, Mohammedan will be without many key players for different reasons.

Still, their manager Sazzad Ahmed Shipon is optimistic of winning their first DPL title since the 2009-10.

"Four of our players left to represent the national team... So, it's become difficult for us to form the playing XI," Shipon told reporters yesterday, a day before their match against Legends of Rupganj in Mirpur.

"The boys have the determination and target of finishing the tournament as champions," he added.

To bolster the depleted squad, MSC have roped in Mustafizur Rahman for the Super League phase.

# Tigresses look to seal WORLD CUP BERTH

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national women's team will look to confirm their spot in the main event of the ICC Women's World Cup, scheduled to be held in India next year, when they face the West Indies in their penultimate qualifier at the LCCA Ground in Lahore today.

The Tigresses are currently in excellent form, having won all three of their matches so far to sit atop the six-team table.

Even if Bangladesh lose today's match, they will still have a chance to qualify as one of the two teams from the tournament. However, they then might need to beat hosts Pakistan -- the other unbeaten team in the tournament -- in their final game on April 19.

With the best net run rate in the tournament (1.494), Bangladesh could also qualify even if they lose both their remaining matches, provided their net run rate does not suffer a significant blow.

Before the tournament began, Bangladesh were aware that every match would be crucial. They have delivered accordingly, notching wins against lower-ranked teams Thailand, Ireland, and Scotland.



Their path to securing a second consecutive World Cup qualification has also been eased by the underwhelming performance of the West Indies, who have lost two of their three matches so far.

Despite the favorable qualification scenario, Bangladesh captain Nigar Sultana Joty -- currently the tournament's leading run-scorer with 235 runs in three innings -- remains focused on her team's game.

"We plan to go match by match. Yes, we're looking forward to the game, but we play as a team," Joty said following their 34-run win over Scotland on Tuesday.

"We need to concentrate on the things

we've done well as a team. The way we've played in the last few games, we just want to continue that," added Joty, who has been thrilled with her side's batting performances throughout the qualifiers.

Bangladesh have posted two of their highest-ever totals in this format during the tournament -- 271 for three against Thailand and 276 for six against Scotland. They also successfully chased a 236-run target against Ireland -- their highest successful chase to date.

"Batting had been our most visible weakness over the past few years. Our bowlers performed well, but the batting often didn't click," she noted.

"But in this tournament, our batters have played wonderfully. They've been getting runs in the top-order and they've been very consistent."

Bangladesh have faced the West Indies four times in this format, winning just once and losing three. Their sole victory came earlier this year, when they beat the Caribbean side by 60 runs in St Kitts, boosting their direct qualification hopes -- only to fall short with a loss in the final game of the series.

This time, the Tigresses will be hoping for a different outcome.

## Foreign flavour in U-19 camp after Hamza's debut

SPORTS REPORTER

Following Sheffield United midfielder Hamza Choudhury's debut for Bangladesh against India last month, interest among expatriate footballers in representing the national team has seen a notable rise. Canada-based midfielder Shamit Shome has already expressed his desire to play for Bangladesh.

While Denmark-based Jamal Bhuiyan blazed the trail over a decade ago, Hamza's recent appearance for the senior national team seems to have reignited enthusiasm among foreign-born players, including those at the youth level.

Head coach Golam Rabbani Choton has named three foreign-based players -- Abdul Kadir (Italy), Elman Matin (UK), and Farzad Aftab (USA) -- in the 35-member preliminary squad of the Bangladesh U-19 football team, who are set to start their preparations at Shams Ul Huda Football Academy in Jashore today for next month's SAFF U-19 Championship.

These players were not selected solely based on their overseas background. Instead, they underwent rigorous training alongside the BFF Elite Academy



(From L-R) Elman Matin, Abdul Kadir and Farzad Aftab. PHOTO: STAR

players, who recently completed the first phase of the Bangladesh Championship League.

The exclusion of UAE-based goalkeeper Uzeayear Chowdhury from the preliminary squad underscores that expatriate status alone does not secure a spot on the team.

Under coach Choton's guidance, most players -- except two, each from BKSP and Bashundhara Kings -- arrived at the academy in Jashore last night to begin nearly two weeks of training. The team will then return to Dhaka for final preparations at the BKSP artificial turf before departing for India on May 6.

Among the expatriates, Abdul Kadir has participated in various youth tournaments in Italy and currently plays for Serie D club Fermana. He prefers to play as a right winger or midfielder and claims to have recorded eight goals and two assists.

Both Matin and Aftab have also competed in different youth-level tournaments in the UK and the USA.

"They joined the Elite Academy players for the Bangladesh Championship League training in the first week of this month. They looked good in training," coach Choton told The Daily Star after a session at the Dhanmondi Club ground on Tuesday.

"I'll be able to assess them more thoroughly when they train alongside players from the Bangladesh Premier League and Bangladesh Championship League during the residential camp," Choton added. He plans to finalise a 23-member squad after training at BKSP's artificial turf.

Bangladesh, the defending champions of the 2024 SAFF U-20 Championship, have been drawn in Group A alongside Maldives and Bhutan. Group B comprises hosts India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals of the tournament, scheduled to be held in India from May 9 to 18.

# A rivalry on its last legs

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

Bangladesh's two-Test series against Zimbabwe is set to commence in Sylhet on Sunday at a time when fan interest on any sort of cricketing engagement between these two sides is arguably at an all-time low.

The days when the entire country took notice of a Bangladesh-Zimbabwe series are long gone. The level of interest has dipped so much that the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has not been able to find a broadcaster for the series at the time this report was filed.

Even though this rivalry has degraded to such an extent that calling it a rivalry feels like a stretch, Zimbabwe, as opponents, have played an important role in Bangladesh's cricketing journey.

In Bangladesh's initial decades as a cricketing nation, it was always playing catch up with Zimbabwe, trying to follow in the footsteps of their African counterparts.

But as the Tigers gained the upper hand, every match against Zimbabwe has become an opportunity to improve their overall record in international cricket, and if one takes the Zimbabwe matches out of the equation, Bangladesh's poor record becomes even poorer, especially in Tests.

**Evolution of a rivalry** Bangladesh's dynamic with Zimbabwe in cricket has changed in every decade.

In the 1980s, when Bangladesh were just starting out, Zimbabwe were a top side at the Associate level, having won the ICC Trophy three consecutive times in 1982, 86 and 90.

In the following decade, the Tigers first ventured into the big leagues, having won the ICC Trophy in 1997 to qualify for the



Bangladesh players run for joy following their 226-run win against Zimbabwe in the first of a two-match Test series against Zimbabwe -- their first ever victory in the format. PHOTO: AFP FILE

World Cup the following year and earning their Test status in 2000 -- eight years after Zimbabwe had entered the Test arena.

In the noughties, Zimbabwe were Bangladesh's worthy adversaries, a tough opponent but not a team that can't be beaten, until the mass exodus of top Zimbabwean cricketers in protest of government interference which preceded Bangladesh's historic maiden Test and series win in 2005.

Soon after that defeat, began Zimbabwe's self-imposed six-year sabbatical from Tests that same year, after which Bangladesh gained the upper hand.

Since the 2010s, the Tigers have mostly dominated the African side with some hiccups along the way, and the scale of the dominance has grown larger with time, especially in Tests.

Bangladesh have won seven out of the last eight Tests they have played against the Zimbabweans, with the only defeat coming in Sylhet in November 2018.

With these victories, the Tigers stamped their authority over Zimbabwe in the five-day format and have also somewhat improved their sorry stats in the format.

**Bangladesh in Tests with and without Zimbabwe**

Barring Afghanistan and Ireland, among teams that are still new to the Test arena, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe are the worst in the format by a stretch.

Overall, Bangladesh's win percentage in the format is just 14.67, only better than Zimbabwe's 10.74 percent.

But when it comes to draws and losses, Bangladesh have done worse than Zimbabwe overall as the Tigers have drawn 12 percent of their matches to Zimbabwe's 24.79 and have lost 73.33 percent games to Zimbabwe's 64.46.

However, Bangladesh's stats have hugely benefited from the 18 Tests they have played against Zimbabwe as without those matches, they are far worse off in the format.

Bangladesh have won eight, lost seven and drawn three Tests against Zimbabwe so far. If one takes away the wins against Zimbabwe, the Tigers' win percentage in Tests dips to 10.61 and draw percentage becomes 11.36.

**A chance to stat-pad?**

With the forthcoming series not even being a part of the ICC Test Championship, the only benefit Bangladesh can get out of it is to win both games and slightly improve their overall stats.

However, if Bangladesh slip up against a team that has not won a Test since 2021, it would cause much alarm and maybe spice up an otherwise stale rivalry.

## Onana faces date with destiny

AFP,London

Andre Onana faces a potentially make-or-break match for his Manchester United career against Lyon in the Europa League on Thursday as the English giants battle to keep their season alive.

The Cameroon international goalkeeper made himself the main talking point ahead of the first leg of the quarter-final in France, which ended in a 2-2 draw, boldly claiming United were "way better" than their opponents.

That prompted a salty reply from former United midfielder Nemanja Matic, now with Lyon, who labelled him "one of the worst goalkeepers in Manchester United's history".

Onana was given a hostile reception by fans in France and his words came back to haunt him when he was at fault for both of the goals United conceded. United manager Ruben Amorim dropped him for Sunday's trip to Newcastle, bringing in back-up goalkeeper Altay Bayindir, but the game ended in a 4-1 defeat, with the Turkey international at fault for the fourth goal.

Amorim now has a potentially season-defining decision to make -- does he bring Onana back in or pick Bayindir again?



The stakes are high. Defeat at Old Trafford would effectively end United's season, with nothing left to play for in the Premier League.

Victory would keep them on track to win the Europa League, which would be a passport into the lucrative Champions League for next season.

United, with Erik ten Hag then at the helm, paid around £47 million (\$62 million) to sign Onana from Inter Milan in 2023 as a replacement for David de Gea.

The 29-year-old has shown flashes of brilliance but has lacked consistency and has developed an unwanted reputation as a calamity keeper.

According to Opta figures from before the latest round of matches, since the start of last season no Premier League goalkeeper had made more errors leading to goals in all competitions than Onana (8).

Amorim still has a chance to end United's turbulent campaign with a European trophy, which could prove transformative as he rebuilds.

But whether Onana remains central to his plans both in the short term and the long term remains to be seen.

- Dortmund snapped Barcelona's unbeaten streak across all competitions in 2025. In this period, The Catalans won 20 matches and drew four before losing at Dortmund.

- Serhou Guirassy's 13 Champions League goals this season is the most ever by an African player in a single campaign in the competition. He scored more goals than any other Dortmund player in a single edition of the Champions League, beating Robert Lewandowski and Erling Haaland's joint record (10).

- Villa's debut Champions League campaign ended with eight wins from 12 games (D1 L3) -- the joint-most wins for a side in their first-ever appearance in the competition alongside Lazio and Valencia in 1999-00.

- PSG failed to win a Champions League game despite leading by 2+ goals for the first time since March 2001 (4-3 loss vs Deportivo de La Coruña), having won 56 successive matches before the loss at Villa.



Borussia Dortmund's Guinean forward Serhou Guirassy celebrates one of his three goals against Barcelona during a 3-1 win in their UEFA Champions League quarterfinal second leg fixture in Dortmund on Tuesday. Despite the Guinean's hat-trick, Barcelona advanced to the semifinals of the competition for the first time in six years with a 5-3 aggregate victory. PHOTO: REUTERS