



Injuries, fatigue add to decisive Oval Test's intrigue

final Test with a shoulder injury, with vice-captain Ollie Pope to lead England in the final game. The all-rounder bowled 140 overs across the four Tests, the most in any series in his career. "It's emotional when you find out what you've done," said Stokes.

England and India head to The Oval today for the fifth and decisive Test of a tightly contested series, with both sides grappling with mental and physical fatigue.

A packed schedule of five Tests in under seven weeks has taken a toll, particularly on fast bowlers, with each match going the distance.

India, trailing 1-2, managed to draw the fourth Test at Old Trafford by batting 143 overs in their second innings. Tensions rose when Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar completed their centuries after England captain Ben Stokes had offered to end the match, adding further intrigue to the decider.

Injuries and selection dilemmas

Stokes has been ruled out of the

Shubman Gill on the eve of the final Test.

England have also rested Jofra Archer for the game after the injury-prone pacer already played back-to-back Tests at Lord's and Old Trafford in what is pacer's first Test series in four years.

Gill eyes record-breaking series

Gill, previously inconsistent, has thrived in his debut series as captain. He scored his fourth century at Old Trafford, a gritty 103 off 238 balls after India were left reeling at 0-2 in their second innings.

He has now scored 722 runs in the series, surpassing Yashasvi Jaiswal's record of 712 runs in a series against England by an Indian batter. At The Oval, he could break Sunil Gavaskar's all-time India record of 774 runs in a series, set against the West Indies in 1971.

One downside for Gill is that he will be without vice-captain and prolific runscore Rishabh Pant, who sustained a foot fracture in Manchester.

We will take a decision [on Bumrah] tomorrow; the wicket looks very green. So we will see how it turns out.

India captain **Shubman Gill**

India are yet to confirm whether Jasprit Bumrah will play, as he was initially expected to feature in only three Tests – which he already did. "We will take a decision [on Bumrah] tomorrow; the wicket looks very green. So we will see how it turns out," said India captain

18th Ascent Corporate Cup kicks off today

SPORTS REPORTER

The 18th edition of the Ascent Corporate 5-A-Side Football Cup 2025 is set to begin on Thursday at the STM Hall of Scholastica's Uttara campus in Dhaka.

Known as the Ascent Cup since its inception in 2006, the tournament has grown into one of the most anticipated and longest-running corporate amateur football competitions in Bangladesh.

At a press conference held at Gulshan Club on Wednesday, the organising committee officially launched the tournament by distributing team jerseys to all 30 participating sides. The teams were also divided into two divisions to ensure a balanced competition: Premier League, featuring 14 stronger and more seasoned teams, and the Championship League, comprising 16 teams made up of emerging football enthusiasts.

Ascent Group has served as the title sponsor of the tournament since 2008, taking over from BRAC Bank, which sponsored the event in 2006 and 2007. The 2025 edition is powered by EC Organic, a concern of the East Coast Group.

Speaking at the event, Farhan Quddus, a member of the Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) Futsal Committee and the convenor of the press conference and organising committee, expressed satisfaction over the tournament's evolution.

"We are pleased to have initiated such a tournament. It feels good to see the enthusiasm we've been able to generate through this event," he said.

"Now it feels especially rewarding that the BFF has officially recognised futsal in Bangladesh, a country where it has long thrived in the underground scene."

'Players have to upskill to keep up with global strike-rate standard'

English power-hitting coach **Julian Wood** is no stranger to Bangladesh cricket, having coached Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) sides Chattogram Challengers and Sylhet Sunrisers before. But his forthcoming stint in the country will be different as for the first time he will be working with the national side for a three-week camp on power-hitting from August 10 to September 3. In a conversation with *The Daily Star's* **Abdullah Al Mehdi**, the coach talked about what he hopes to achieve through the upcoming camp. Following are the excerpts:



PHOTO: AI GENERATED

The Daily Star (DS): Are you excited about the Bangladesh camp?
Julian Wood (JW): Yes, absolutely. It's something that I thought was going to happen earlier. I did the BPL twice and there was talk about it back then but nothing really came off it. So, it's good to get things up and running.

DS: What changed for the BCB to acquire your services now?
JW: I think if you look at how the game is going now, the big nations like Australia, India, England are pulling ahead in white ball cricket. So, I think the other nations are starting to fall behind a bit. And I think they realise that they need to do something about it.

DS: What is your assessment on someone like Tanzid Hasan Tamim, who appears to be a natural six-hitter?
JW: Yes, Tanzid looks natural. I think they're going the right way, doing the right things and definitely there are players out there who have the ability to do it and he's obviously one of them. I think the way the game is going now, there is basically a way that players have to evolve their game. It's like there is a global

strike-rate standard in T20 cricket which is why players have to upskill and evolve to keep up with the other nations.

DS: Right now, you are conducting a week-long camp in Sri Lanka. Do you feel players in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka need a fundamental shift or minor tweaks in technique for power-hitting?
JW: Size is a thing. If you look at both Bangladesh's and Sri Lanka's players, they're not that big. Whereas the West Indian, English players are big and strong. Bangladesh or Lankan players need to do things slightly differently. Whereas West Indians or English batters rely heavily on power.

While you can add power to a player's game but with the guys who are smaller, it's basically about rhythm and timing of their movements and the sequencing. That's how smaller guys can hit big sixes.

DS: You are probably referencing someone like Kusal Mendis. What is his secret?
JW: He's got fantastic hand-eye coordination. If you combine that with good skill, he's got enough

power, obviously, because he hits sixes. It's the sequencing of his movements, the rhythm and timing of his movements.

He's not just about power, he has superb skill levels. And that's how I see a lot of the Bangladeshi players. They will have enough power, but you can always add power.

DS: How do you actually go about adding power to your game?
JW: Obviously, strength and conditioning is massive. I'll do lots of overload training with heavier bats. Everything I do is very functional. It's not just going in the gym and just lifting loads of weights. It's actually using the muscles and recreating the movements you do when you hit a ball.

DS: What kind of changes do you want to see after the camp?
JW: I'll be looking at the World Cup potentially since they would be exposed to these methods as time wears on. Mindset is key. It's not just about physicality, it's a mentality thing as well. With power-hitting, you have to have that trust with the players and if you can do that, you are already ahead of what you want to start working towards.

Table tennis teams fall apart

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh table tennis teams' bid to finish second in South Asian Regional Championships in both men's and women's sections fell apart as both suffered miserable defeats in all of their first day matches in Kathmandu yesterday.

Bangladesh women's team, comprising Sonam Sultana Soma, Sadia Rahman Mou and Khoi Khoi Marma suffered a 3-1 defeat, with only Khoi Khoi winning her match. They later suffered a 3-0 defeats against India and Nepal.

In men's section, Bangladesh lost to Maldives 3-2. Following the demoralising defeat, Bangladesh made a meek surrender in a 3-0 defeat to India. Bangladesh were scheduled to take on Nepal in the day's last match.

Both teams will play their respective last matches against Sri Lanka today. The top teams from each section of the five-nation championship will progress to World Team Table Tennis Championship.

AFC WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP 2026 PREPARATION

BFF seeks monthly friendlies with top sides

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is planning to arrange at least one international match per month for the national women's football team in the lead-up to the AFC Women's Asian Cup final round in Australia next year.

Mahfuza Akhter Kiron, chairman of the BFF women's committee, shared the development at the BFF House yesterday, a day after Bangladesh were drawn into a tough Group B alongside nine-time champions China, DPR Korea, and Uzbekistan. The tournament kicks off in three Australian cities from March 1.

Preparations are set to begin in September, with 19-year-old Sweden-based forward Anika Siddiqui likely to come to Bangladesh for a trial prior to it.

"Our target is to start the senior camp from September and then play at least one international match every month," Kiron told reporters. "But things may not go exactly as planned because the opponents we are targeting also have their own schedules."

Kiron, after getting approval from BFF president Tabitha Awal, has reached

out to the Japan and Korea Football Associations to propose month-long training camps and two friendly matches in each country.

"South Korea can't host us due to their domestic schedule, and their national team will be in Europe from September to March for their own Asian Cup preparations," she said. "Japan hasn't responded yet, but we're hopeful."

Kiron, also a member of the AFC Executive Committee, stressed the urgency of preparing for top-tier opponents. "We don't want to waste time. We're taking every possible step to ensure the team is ready. We will also contact Spain and other top Asian teams not in our group."

She added that match schedules would be finalised once they align with other teams' calendars. "We want to keep the programme running until next March and ensure we play every month."

Kiron sees Bangladesh's tough group not as a burden but an opportunity. "It's good to face strong opponents – we rarely get that chance."

She also appealed to the corporate sector for financial support to help realise the preparation plans for the national women's team.

