

Joty, Marufa set for WBCL return

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The Women's Bangladesh Cricket League T20 tournament (WBCL) is set to begin on Monday, with national team skipper Nigar Sultana Joty and pacer Marufa Akter returning to the domestic fold after sitting out the Women's National Cricket League.

The tournament, which ends on December 25, will be held across six match days, with all matches scheduled to be played at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium in Rajshahi.

Central Zone will take on North Zone, while East Zone will play South Zone on the opening day. The morning match between Central and North Zone will get under way at 9:00am, while the latter match will begin at 1:30pm.

Bangladesh skipper Joty, spinner Nahida Akter and pacer Marufa Akter had sat out the recent NCL to recuperate from injuries following the ODI World Cup in India. Joty will lead Central Zone, while Marufa has been named in the South Zone squad.

BCB selector Sazzad Ahmed informed that spinner Nahida's chances of appearing in the tournament are slim as she is currently undergoing recovery work.

U-17 National C'ship begins on Dec 22

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The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is all set to launch the U-17 National Championship on December 22 across eight venues, involving all 64 districts. Jhenaidah will host the opening matches, while other venues include Rajbari, Rangpur, Pirojpur, Sirajganj, Jamalpur, Sylhet, and either Feni or Chattogram. The final venue is yet to be confirmed.

The 64 districts are divided into eight zones, each split into two groups. Teams will play round-robin league matches, with the top two sides from each group advancing to the zonal semifinals and finals. The eight zonal champions will then meet in the final stage of the championship.

The details were revealed at a logo unveiling and grouping ceremony on Sunday. Only players who are not yet registered in the FIFA Connect system will be eligible to participate in the two-month-long tournament.

"Under the Youth Festival project, with support from the ministry and the NSC, we have already completed the U-14 Women's National Championship and the U-15 National Championship. The U-17 event is a continuation, aiming to spread football at grassroots level in all districts," said Sayeed Hasan Karon, chairman of the tournament and BFF executive committee member.

GOATs meet at Wankhede



World Cup winners, iconic number 10s, and GOATs of two different sports -- football legend Lionel Messi and cricket great Sachin Tendulkar -- came together in one frame at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday. Following a chaotic experience in Kolkata the previous day, Messi's ongoing three-day, four-city GOAT tour of India found its rhythm again in Hyderabad and Mumbai. The crowd, which had gathered at the stadium since the afternoon, erupted with excitement as Messi, Sachin, and India's football great Sunil Chhetri shared the stage at different points during the event. Messi, accompanied by Inter Miami teammates Rodrigo de Paul and Luis Suarez, received a gift from Sachin -- the former Indian skipper's iconic jersey from the 2011 Cricket World Cup -- in the presence of Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. Sachin described it as a "golden moment for Mumbai and India," and the fans' reaction reaffirmed the great batter's words, with chants of "Messi... Messi... Sachin... Sachin" rising from every corner of the stadium.

PHOTO: X

Tigers eye gains from 'different' skill camp

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It was already evening at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, but that did not deter the national team stars as their practice continued under lights, with head coach Phil Simmons also present. The aim of the skill camp, which ended yesterday, was to place a sharp focus on the development of a few players in specific areas, while others were participating in the recently-concluded National Cricket League (NCL) or were on vacation.

Tanzid Tamim, Parvez Hossain Emon, and Saif Hassan had been regularly undergoing sessions with Simmons, senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin, and batting coach Mohammad Ashraf. Ground shots and effective shot selection during the Powerplay had been on the agenda for the openers over the past week. Yesterday, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Shamim Hossain, and Jaker Ali Anik joined the rest of the batters during the afternoon session.

Simmons is expected to leave the country on Monday to spend time with his family, while the players will undergo a short break before the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) practice sessions begin.

Yesterday, handling short deliveries was also on the agenda. One by one, Sohan, Shamim, and Jaker were tested with short balls, with the task being to clear the infield and hit the ball into the target zones not manned by fielders. Slashes and slogs



against short deliveries were prevalent.

Later, spin trials were set up, during which the batters were challenged to drive through the off side along the ground.

For Sohan, it was a rare opportunity to work on his game in a more specific manner ahead of important assignments such as the BPL, followed by the ICC T20 World Cup.

"Over the last few years, the international and domestic schedules have been very busy, so we didn't really get the opportunity to have camps like this," Sohan said while attending the Rangpur Riders-Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA) Media Cup event. "But

the seven or eight days we have spent in this camp will definitely help us because we finally got time to work on our skills."

Sohan has looked largely out of form in his last few national team assignments. He made scores of five and one in the West Indies T20I series, and in his only appearance in the Ireland series, he scored one.

He felt that the practice sessions were different this time, as the focus was placed more acutely on individual shortcomings.

"Look, in a specific sense, this was quite different. We are usually accustomed to practising together or doing things collectively. But here, you can see that the work is being done in specific groups, sometimes focusing on one or two individuals. So I feel this is a bit different. And the batsmen are also getting the opportunity to work on certain specific aspects of their game," he explained.

The focus was not just on the basics of the game but on sharpening specific skills, as was evident throughout the camp. Sohan noted that ahead of upcoming assignments, the camp allowed players to focus on areas where improvement was still possible.

"There is a gap before the BPL, but once the BPL starts, the World Cup comes almost immediately. After that, everyone will be busy playing matches. This camp has allowed players to focus on areas where they can still improve," he concluded.

First Division League begins with four no-shows

SPORTS REPORTER

The new season of the Dhaka First Division Cricket League was inaugurated in a jovial mood yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka. However, the mood was different elsewhere as four teams no showed their respective matches at other venues while cricketers who are suffering because of the conflict between the board and clubs protested right outside the gates in Mirpur.

The four teams who did not turn up and will get relegated as per the by-laws according to the officials, are -- Partex Sporting Club, Gazi Tyres Cricket Academy, Kalabagan Krira Chakra and Amber Sporting Club.

Gazi gave a walkover to Dhaka United Sporting Club at BKSP Ground 3. Partex Sporting Club did not show up for their match against Baridhara Dazzlers at PKSP, while neither Kalabagan nor Amber turned up for their match at BKSP Ground 4.

"Since it's a case of walkover, they are out of the tournament," a CCDM official told The Daily Star.

"There will be no relegation league this time around. If a team wants to participate later, that's a separate issue... But they can't return under normal procedure," he added.

Match referee Sujit Kumar, who was supposed to officiate the match at BKSP 3, told The Daily Star that the officials waited till 10:15am for the teams to turn up before deciding to leave. The matches were scheduled to begin at 9:00am.



The four teams that did not show up belong to the 44 clubs who are boycotting all domestic leagues, alleging irregularities in the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) elections in October. There are four more clubs in this 20-team league who are part of the protesting outfits.

Meanwhile, some 60 cricketers staged a human chain at Gate 2 of the Mirpur Stadium, protesting the ongoing conflict, which has robbed them of the opportunity to compete.

Inside the venue, Bangladesh Police Cricket Club beat Old DOHS Sports Club by eight wickets. In Aminbazar, Dhanmondi Sports Club won by 57 runs against Lalmatia Club.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Organisers and sponsors hold jerseys of participating teams on the eve of the Rangpur Riders-BSJA Media Cup cricket tournament, which will get underway on Monday at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium. The six-a-side tournament, organised by the Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA) and powered by ACE Developers, will feature 32 reputed media houses. The tournament is co-sponsored by Nabil Group, ACME and Ispahani Group.

'A truly historic World Cup for Bangladesh'

As the Bangladesh under-21 hockey team were making history in their debut Junior World Cup campaign in India, two umpires -- Salim Lucky and Shahbaz Ali -- were also becoming part of history as the first officials from the country to officiate at a World Cup. In an interview with The Daily Star's Atique Anam, Lucky, a hockey player-turned umpire, spoke about learning elite-level protocols, earning praise from the FIH and global peers, the challenges of limited domestic competition, and his plea for greater institutional support to secure the future of Bangladeshi umpires. Following are the excerpts:

The Daily Star (DS): Tell us what the experience of officiating in the World Cup for the first time was like.

Salim Lucky (SL): It was truly historic for us. We learned and experienced many new things -- new friendships, a completely different environment, and the opportunity to meet people at such a big global event. We gained invaluable experience and learned various modern techniques of officiating. Beyond on-field duties, we observed how elite umpires conduct themselves. We also learned how video

referral discussions are handled.

DS: How many matches did you and Shahbaz Ali officiate?

SL: I officiated 15 matches in total -- six as a field umpire, two as a video umpire, and around seven as a reserve umpire. Shahbaz bhai officiated 13 matches -- eight as a field umpire, three as a video umpire, and two as a reserve umpire. Together, we were involved in 28 matches out of roughly 72 in the tournament.

DS: You officiated many high-pressure matches. How challenging was it?

SL: The pressure was immense. Nearly 10 World Panel umpires were present, which naturally raised the standard. Although we are a couple of levels below them, officiating alongside such elite umpires was a fantastic feeling.

DS: How did the two of you earn this opportunity?

SL: We have been involved in international hockey since 2012.

Over the years, we officiated at major tournaments such as the Asia Cup, Asian Games, European Tour, African Olympic Qualifiers, and even India-Pakistan matches. Through consistent hard work and performance, we reached a stage where the FIH trusted us with a World Cup assignment.

DS: What feedback did you receive from the FIH and fellow umpires?

SL: They acknowledged that this was our first FIH event and advised us to further increase our confidence to reach a higher level. They were

happy with our improvement and effort, especially considering our limitations back home. Since we lack regular leagues, games, and proper umpire protocols in Dhaka, adapting to different environments is difficult. I felt extremely proud every time I heard the emcee say, "Salim Lucky from Bangladesh," before the matches.



Barcelona forward Raphinha celebrates with winger Lamine Yamal after scoring his second goal in a 2-0 home win over Osasuna in a LaLiga fixture yesterday. The visitors made the star-studded Catalan giants sweat, thwarting Barca's attack for 69 minutes before Raphinha broke the deadlock in the 70th. The Brazilian added his second in the 86th to give league leaders Barcelona a healthy cushion at the top of the table.

PHOTO: REUTERS