



Shakib’s tips work wonders for Waseem

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Sylhet

UAE opener Muhammad Waseem carried his ILT20 form into the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), hitting a blistering half-century on his return to the tournament to help Rajshahi Warriors beat Noakhali Express by four wickets at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on Thursday.

Ahead of BPL 12, Waseem featured for MI Emirates -- the runners up in the recently concluded ILT20 -- where he finished as the second-highest run-scorer with 370 runs in 13 matches at a strike rate of 131.67.

The 31-year-old opener joined Rajshahi on Wednesday as a replacement for Pakistan's Sahibzada Farhan, who left for Sri Lanka due to national team commitments. Waseem made an instant impact in his first appearance, smashing 60 off 35 balls, an innings laced with four fours and four sixes.

With this knock, he not only earned his maiden player-of-the-match award in the BPL but also redeemed himself after a disappointing debut in the league two years earlier.

In the 2023-24 season, Waseem had managed just one run off seven balls for

Chattogram Challengers in his only innings. This time however, he showcased his class and played a decisive role in Rajshahi's victory.

"I am very happy with my performance and contribution to the team, and also with my first player-of-the-match award in the BPL. Inshallah, I will try to carry this momentum into the upcoming games," Waseem told reporters after the match.

Waseem revealed that advice from Bangladesh veteran Shakib Al Hasan, who was his teammate in MI Emirates, played a key role in his successful return.

"Shakib bhai is like a big brother to me. I have played a lot of cricket with him, and he has served Bangladesh immensely. He is a true legend. I learned many things from him both on and off the field. Before coming here, I asked him what I should do in Bangladesh. He gave me some tips, and I used them today [Thursday]," Waseem said.

He also credited Rajshahi's bowlers for restricting Noakhali to 151 for five. "I think after the first 10 overs the wicket played a bit better. I give full credit to our bowlers -- they bowled excellently in the last 10 overs. After that, we got a good start while chasing, which helped us maintain the momentum."

Juairiya earns maiden call-up for T20 WC qualifiers

SPORTS REPORTER

Uncapped wicketkeeper-batter Juairiya Ferdous earned a maiden callup while the experienced Farzana Haque Pinky returned as Bangladesh announced a 15-member squad for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup Qualifiers, set to begin on January 18 in Nepal.

Juairiya, who featured in last year's Under-19 World Cup, was rewarded for her impressive showing in the Women's National Cricket League (WNCL) T20, where she made 189 runs at a strike-rate of 131.25 while Farzana returned to the

T20I fold for the first time since May 2023.

A total of 10 teams divided in two groups will compete in the qualifiers. Bangladesh is in Group A and will begin their campaign against the USA on January 18 before playing Papua New Guinea, Namibia and Ireland on January 20, 22 and 24 respectively.

The top three teams from Group A will advance to the Super 6s, where it will clash against the top 3 teams from Group B. The top four teams in the Super 6s will qualify for the World Cup, scheduled to be held in England and Wales in June and July this year.

Bangladesh squad: Nigar Sultana Joty (c), Nahida Akter (vc), Sobhana Mostary, Farzana Haque, Sharmin Akter Supta, Dilara Akter, Juairiya Ferdous, Ritu Moni, Fahima Khatun, Shorna Akter, Rabeya Khan, Marufa Akter, Fariha Islam Trisna, Shanjida Akther Maghla, Sultana Khatun.

Nat'l Table Tennis C'ships return after 30 months

SPORTS REPORTER

After a two-and-a-half-year hiatus, the 40th National Table Tennis Championships will begin today at Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium in Dhaka, featuring over 450 paddlers -- double the number from the last edition in July 2023.

Like before, there will be two groups, with 309 paddlers, including 72 women, competing across eight events: men's singles, men's doubles, men's team, women's singles, women's doubles, women's team, and mixed doubles. Junior paddlers will also get four new events in the eight-day tournament: boys' doubles, boys' team, girls' doubles, and girls' team. Also, as many as 58 U-19 girls are set to participate.

Participants include 41 districts, Bangladesh Army, Bangladesh Ansar, Jail Police, Bangladesh Biman, Sher-e-Bangla Medical College, Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology, Jagannath University, and BKSP.

BTTF president Shamsu Ahmed admitted the federation is struggling to secure sponsors, some of whom backed out citing the sport's limited popularity.

He further informed BTTF president Shamsuzzaman Nasim stepped in to provide an estimated budget of 25 lakh taka. However, no prize money has been allocated, Ahmed noted, as funds are needed for participants' accommodation, food, and transport.

Australia turn Bazball hype into 4-1 reality check

AGENCIES

Australia sealed a commanding 4-1 Ashes triumph with a five-wicket win in Sydney on Thursday, in a series that exposed England's fading Bazball aura, highlighted Australia's depth and discipline, and reaffirmed the enduring class of two modern greats.

BAZBALL UNDER FIRE

England arrived brimming with belief in their fearless, attacking brand of cricket. But Bazball quickly collided with harsh Australian conditions and elite bowling. Heavy early defeats left England chasing the series, and criticism poured in from former players and pundits. Even Ben Stokes was forced into unusually patient batting, signalling that pure aggression alone was no longer enough. The England and Wales Cricket Board confirmed it had launched an immediate and "thorough" review following the tourists' defeat in the fifth and final Ashes Test.

MCCULLUM IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Brendon McCullum now faces serious scrutiny over England's approach, preparation, and discipline throughout the tour. Questions have been raised about whether England were mentally and structurally ready for such a demanding contest. Stokes, however, remains firmly behind his coach, urging stability rather than knee-jerk reactions.

HEAD RISES, KHAWAJA BOWS OUT

Australia found a new opening spark in Travis Head. Promoted unexpectedly to the top, he smashed a defining century

in Perth and followed it up with more commanding innings, seemingly securing his place moving forward. Meanwhile, veteran Usman Khawaja returned briefly before announcing his retirement after his 88th Test, closing a storied chapter. Jake Weatherald, however, struggled to cement the second opener's role, leaving that position still open for debate.

execution and consistency.

CLASS AT THE TOP

The series also reminded everyone that true quality endures. Joe Root finally broke his drought with a first Ashes century in Australia and added another for good measure, drawing level with Ricky Ponting on 41 Test tons. Steve Smith captained confidently for most of the series



PHOTO: AFP

AUSTRALIA'S BOWLING POWERHOUSE

Perhaps the clearest difference between the sides was depth. Despite missing Josh Hazlewood and having limited appearances from Pat Cummins, Australia's bowling remained relentless and precise. Mitchell Starc led the attack brilliantly, supported by Scott Boland and a capable rotating cast including Brendan Doggett, Michael Neser, and Jhye Richardson. Stokes openly admitted England were outplayed in

and produced another Ashes century of his own, reinforcing his dominance in the rivalry. With over 24,000 combined Test runs, the pair again proved decisive.

There was plenty of criticism over the two-day Tests in Perth and Melbourne, but Australia were sharper, deeper, and more disciplined when it mattered. England leave with major questions about direction and identity, while Australia move forward reassured, refreshed, and firmly in control of Ashes supremacy.

Mohammedan's forever 12th man, Ata Bhai, no more

ANISUR RAHMAN

Every powerhouse football club has its legends. Some wear boots, some wear armbands. Then there are those who never step onto the pitch. They sit in the stands, season after season, rain or shine, victory or humiliation. They sing when the stadium is full and shout even louder when it is empty. For Mohammedan Sporting Club, that voice belonged to Ataur Rahman, affectionately known as Ata Bhai.

That familiar figure will no longer be seen in the heart of the Black and Whites' stands. Ata Bhai passed away on Wednesday night at the age of 82, leaving a silence that will be hard to fill.

Former Mohammedan and national team captain Imtiaz Sultan Jonny, still involved with the club, spoke of him with emotion: "From my playing days, I saw how deep his dedication was to Mohammedan. It's very hard to find a die-hard supporter like him nowadays. He inspired players and fans alike."

"Losing Ata Bhai feels like losing a



brother. My heart feels heavy."

Founded in 1936, Mohammedan is one of Bangladesh's oldest and most successful football clubs, with a storied history of domestic titles and fierce rivalries, particularly with Abahani. During some of Mohammedan's leanest years in the professional league, Ata Bhai could still be heard roaring from the National Stadium. His sharp words for underperforming players and officials became part of the matchday theatre. Rival fans were not spared, but beneath the anger was fierce, unshakable love.

Even after the top-tier league moved outside Dhaka following National Stadium renovations in 2021, his connection to the club never faded.

"It is also tough to describe him. He was obsessed with Mohammedan, more than anything, even more than his own family," said journalist Arifur Rahman Babu.

"He became known in the late 1980s. He once told me he watched Pakistani footballer Ali Newas from the gallery, which means he had been watching matches even before the Liberation."

Around the world, football fans remember Spain's Manolo el del Bombo, Argentina's 'El Tula', or Liverpool's lifelong supporters, whose devotion is woven into the history of their teams. In Bangladesh, Mohammedan had its very own.

The club paid tribute by draping his coffin in the iconic black-and-white flag at his residence in Tikatuli, Motijheel.

Woven into the living memory of the club, Ata Bhai's chant has just ended, but it will continue to echo in the gallery he never abandoned.



"We could have played much better than what we did. The time for reflection is not right now. We've got a long time away to reflect on it. Come June when we next play, hopefully we can put the wrongs right."

England captain Ben Stokes

"It was nice to finish on a high note and we know the importance of every Test match in terms of the World Test Championship. We have an experienced side, we have played good cricket in the last four or five years, we have been a part of two World Test Championship finals, it's a great team to be part of. We know how to play on these surfaces."

Australia skipper Steve Smith



PHOTO: REUTERS

Raphinha netted twice as Barcelona strolled into the Spanish Super Cup final with a dominant 5-0 semi-final win over Athletic Bilbao on Wednesday in Saudi Arabia. The La Liga leaders have now won nine matches in a row across all competitions. Last season, Barca went on to win La Liga and the Copa del Rey after Flick's side claimed the Spanish Super Cup -- the first trophy of the German's reign -- and the coach said he wanted to use the competition as a springboard for more success again.