DHAKA TUESDAY OCTOBER 13, 2026, ASHWIN 28, 1433 BS

SPORT



"It's been a fantastic season for me winning in Paris and New York and knowing that I will finish the year on top of the rankings is just a dream come true."

Tennis player **Alexander Zverev**



PHOTO: **ACB**

Rhythm behind the stumps helps Litton break batting slump

SPORTS REPORTER

When the runs dried up, Litton Das still had his gloves to fall back on. His wicketkeeping remained sharp through a difficult run with the bat, helping him stay involved in the game and read the conditions. In Abu Dhabi, that rhythm behind the stumps finally translated into runs as Litton put four consecutive ducks behind him with a hundred that could prove timely for the Tigers ahead of a crucial stretch of their World Test Championship (WTC) calendar.

Three of his four consecutive ducks had come in red-ball cricket, following a hundred and a fifty against Pakistan in Sylhet. The three successive failures against Australia piled pressure on the wicketkeeper-batter, but he responded in Abu Dhabi in style, following a first-innings fifty with his seventh Test hundred. With Bangladesh's upcoming World Test Championship assignments against West Indies and South Africa carrying significant weight, his return to form offers the team management some much-needed relief.

Litton also made the most of fortune being on his side.

Dropped on 16 and 26, he survived another scare when Afghanistan, having exhausted their reviews, could not challenge a loud caught-behind appeal following an inside edge. His on-drives, in particular, reflected his comfort at the crease as he batted with increasing authority. It may not have been a match-saving knock, but the way he persevered after his recent struggles was encouraging.

While his bat finally came alive, Litton's work behind the stumps had already been a standout feature of the Test. He has taken eight dismissals so far, five in Afghanistan's first innings and three in the second. His tally puts him among the leading Bangladesh wicketkeepers in a Test match, surpassing Khaled Masud Pilot's seven dismissals against Zimbabwe in Harare in 2004.

He is now within sight of the world record of 11 dismissals by a wicketkeeper in a Test match. He needs three more to reach the mark, with Afghanistan having seven wickets in hand heading into the fifth day.

Litton's contribution has gone beyond routine catches. When Hasan Mahmud completed his hattrick in the first innings, Litton made a telling contribution with a low, diving catch to his right to dismiss Qais Ahmad for the second wicket of the hattrick, recovering after initially diving the wrong way.

Later, when Mehidy Hasan Miraz produced a gem of a delivery to beat Hashmatullah Shahidi, Litton's lightning-quick reaction was needed to complete the stumping.

At the end of the fourth day, Litton acknowledged how wicketkeeping had helped him remain centred when runs were hard to come by.

"Yes, it [wicketkeeping] definitely helps. Because from behind the wicket, I can understand a lot of things and get a good idea about the wicket. That helps my batting a lot," he said.

A tale of two trajectories

AGENCIES



PHOTO: **REUTERS**

Manchester United's Champions League trip to Atletico Madrid tonight offers a chance for a much-needed victory, but it also serves as a stark reminder of the stability the English giant has lacked since Sir Alex Ferguson's retirement.

Diego Simeone took charge of Atletico in December 2011 – over a year before Ferguson ended his 26-year, trophy-laden reign in May 2013. In the years since, United have cycled through seven permanent managers and various caretakers, failing to win a single Premier League title while missing Europe's premier competition multiple times.

Conversely, Simeone has anchored Atletico among Spain's elite, defying the financial might of Real Madrid and Barcelona to win La Liga in 2014 and 2021. They have qualified for the Champions League every season since 2013-14, reaching two finals and two semifinals. While evolving into a more attack-minded unit, Simeone's side has never lost its non-negotiable grit. United, meanwhile, remain defined by a dizzying clash of managerial philosophies and a culture of constant upheaval.



Even the stadiums reflect this divergence. Atletico's modern Metropolitano will host June's Champions League final, adding to the 2019 showpiece won by United's rivals Liverpool, while a decaying Old Trafford was overlooked for Euro 2028.

On the pitch, the contrast in current form is just as sharp. Despite summer turbulence surrounding Julian Alvarez – the former Manchester City striker tried forcing a move to Barcelona before staying put – Atletico are flying, clinching a a fourth consecutive victory with Saturday's late 2-1 win at Alaves.

Sitting second in La Liga, Simeone's men even toppled Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid before the recent international break.

Michael Carrick's United, by comparison, are languishing in 13th place, enduring their worst domestic start since 1986-87. Saturday's draw against Tottenham only intensified the scrutiny on Carrick, leaving the Red Devils with just two wins from eight matches across all competitions.

History offers Carrick little comfort, either. United have never beaten Atletico competitively (D2, L2). Conversely, Atletico have won only two of their last 15 clashes with English clubs (D3, L10), yet remain undefeated against United.

Their last UEFA meeting was a March 2022 last-16 tie, where Renan Lodi's Old Trafford strike sealed an aggregate victory for Atleti after a 1-1 first-leg draw.

United hammered Azerbaijani side Sabah 4-0 in their Champions League opener. However, visiting the Metropolitano is a vastly different proposition. While Atletico lost their European opener 2-1 away to Liverpool last month, they head into tonight's clash with the wind in their sails and a formidable culture of resilience forged over more than a decade.

TONIGHT'S MATCHES

10:45pm starts
Lens vs SCP
Sabah vs Slavia Praha

1:00am starts
Galatasaray vs Barcelona
RB Leipzig vs PSV
Arsenal vs LOSC
Atletico Madrid vs Man Utd
Villarreal vs Napoli
Viking vs Bayern
Inter vs Club Brugge



Australia's Matt Renshaw gives the thumbs up on day four of the first Test against South Africa at Kingsmead in Durban on October 12. After scoring a patient 190 in the first innings, Renshaw struck a brisk 82 off 99 balls in the second innings before Australia declared, setting South Africa a target of 421. PHOTO: **AFP**

SAFF camp on Oct 25, overseas players likely to miss opener

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will begin preparations for the upcoming SAFF Championship on October 25, just 10 days before the regional tournament kicks off in Dhaka, with several overseas-based players likely to miss the opening match.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the National Teams Committee (NTC) yesterday, attended by the chairmen of the federation's development and technical committees.

"We will try to hold a preparatory match either on 31st October or 1st November," BFF president and NTC chairman Tabith Awal told reporters.

"We think we really need a preparatory match to bring back the team's [match] temperament."

Tabith said Bangladesh would have to begin their group-stage campaign without Hamza Choudhury, Shamit Shome and several other overseas-based players, who would not be available until the next FIFA international window opens on November 9.

"We may get 90 percent of the players who play abroad after the ninth."

The NTC reviewed Bangladesh's performance at the recently concluded ASEAN Cup, with a further analysis expected at its next meeting after reports from the team management and coaching staff become available.

"We are also thinking of continuously making national team stronger.

"From now on in every FIFA window, we will keep a separate Under-23 team in training and they will also play friendly matches against some country, even if unofficially," Tabith said.

The BFF boss added that the federation planned to organise tournaments and a training camp in the United Kingdom to identify players from the Bangladeshi diaspora, in order to improve the national team.

"For the future, we are mulling to hold two tournaments and a camp in UK in every year with the diaspora footballers aged 14 to 17."

IN BRIEF

Preliminary squad named for Asian Champions Trophy

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday announced a 26-member preliminary squad for the Men's Asian Champions Trophy in Punjab, India, from Oct 27 to Nov 5.

The selection committee retained all players from the Asian Games squad except midfielder Mainul Islam Kaushik and added nine players from outside the squad.

They will attend a nine-day camp at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium from Wednesday before Bangladesh leave for India on October 23 with an 18-member team.

Bangladesh will compete in the continent's top-tier tournament, launched in 2011, for the second time, having last featured as hosts in 2021. They earned their place after finishing seventh at the recently concluded Asian Games and following Pakistan's withdrawal from the six-nation event.

NCL matches drift towards draws

SPORTS REPORTER

Batters dominated day three of the National Cricket League yesterday, leaving three of the four matches destined for draws.

The lone exception is in Cox's Bazar, where Chattogram are closing in on an innings victory over Barishal. Centuries from skipper Irfan Shukkur (112) and Shahadat Hossain Dipu (109) powered Chattogram to a massive 576 and a 294-run lead. Left-arm spinner Ashraful Hasan then struck three times, leaving Barishal reeling at 149 for four and still 145 runs behind.

In Mirpur, Rajshahi showed immense grit against Khulna. Staring at a 365-run deficit, blistering knocks from Habibur Rahman Sohan (90) and Sabbir Hossain (88) guided them to 300 for three. Meanwhile, massive run-fests in Sylhet ensured the remaining two fixtures are meandering toward inevitable stalemates.

WHAT TO WATCH

T Sports
One-off Test, Day 5
Afghanistan vs Bangladesh
Live from 12:00 pm
World Championship of Legends
South Africa vs England
Live from 7:30 pm
India vs West Indies
Live from 9:30 pm
La Liga
Levante VS Sevilla
Live from 1:00 am (Wednesday)
Ptv Sports
3rd T20I
Pakistan vs Sri Lanka
Live from 7:00 pm

Sony Sports 1, 2, 5
UEFA Champions League
Live from 1:00 am (Wednesday)
Atletico vs Man Utd
Arsenal vs Lille
Galatasaray vs Barcelona



Fortis to fly out to Kuwait with big dream

SPORTS REPORTER

Fortis FC are all set to fly out for Kuwait on Tuesday morning to take part in the AFC Challenge League, hoping to make history by qualifying for the knockout stage of the 20-team competition.

In their debut appearance in Asia's third-tier club competition, Fortis have already taken their first step by beating Uzbekistan's Muras United in the preliminary stage in August to reach the group stage. They now hope to make further history by reaching the knockout stage, a feat achieved by only Abahani in the AFC Cup in 2018.

Fortis have been drawn in Group C alongside India's FC Goa, Kuwait's Al-Qadsia Sporting Club and Uzbekistan's Regar-TadAZ. The three group winners from Groups A, B and C, along with the best runners-up among the three groups, will advance to the quarterfinals from the West Region. The remaining four quarterfinalists will come from the East Region.

"We have set an ambitious target of reaching the quarterfinals, although all our opponents are better than us. But they are not unbeatable," Fortis head coach Masud Parvez Kaiser told The Daily Star on the eve of the departure.

"We don't want to be out of the race before playing our third match against Regar-TadAZ, so it is very important for us to produce good results in the first two matches against Al-Qadsia SC and FC Goa," said Kaiser, adding that Al-Qadsia have an advantage over the other teams because of their familiarity with the local weather, while Regar-TadAZ are in good form in their domestic league, which is nearing its end.

Fortis have also been in good form domestically, winning all three of their league matches and scoring 15 goals. However, Kaiser is not getting carried away by those results, pointing out that their local opponents are yet to offer a stern challenge.

"I think playing three domestic matches will help us determine our playing style, as well as how to build up the game and protect the defence. However, I think we have to perform better than we did against Muras United FC in the preliminary stage," said Kaiser.