DHAKA SATURDAY NOVEMBER 14, 2026, KARTIK 29, 1433 BS

SPORT



Fast bowler Mahli Beardman took 6-24 to steer Australia to a seven-wicket win over England, who were bowled out for 131 in Perth yesterday, in the first of three ODIs. He became the first Australian since Tony Dodemaide in 1988 to take five wickets on debut.

DURBACHARA'S DARING GIRLS CONQUER NATIONAL STAGE

ANIS MONDOL

Stepping onto the school field in Durbachara on a weekday afternoon, roughly 20 kilometres from Kushtia town, sounds arrive before sights: a chorus of joyful chatter ringing with the confidence of world-beaters.

Here in Ujanpara Union in the country's western region, after-school practice is no longer a mere pastime. For the girls of Durbachara Bohumukhi High School, they play to win everything in their path.

And they keep winning. For two consecutive years, students from this remote village school have claimed the crown as national handball champions.

The ripple effects have transformed the district. Teachers from prominent town colleges now queue up at school gates, eager to secure these trailblazers for higher secondary classes. Career paths in services teams like the Bangladesh Army are opening up, with players earning coveted spots at BKSP and direct call-ups to the national squad.





A relentless ascent

The path to glory proved steep. When sports teacher Saidul Islam joined around 2022–23, his initial goal focused on a boys' team. When that stalled, a wider net caught 40 girls. Today, 16 form the bedrock of a fierce squad.

"Resistance came from everywhere," Saidul recalls. Yet, with a headmaster standing "like a shield," barriers tumbled down.

Headmaster Billal Hossain notes the shift: "People viewed sports as a distraction." Once national titles followed, "public perception flipped overnight."

Financial constraints proved daunting as buying kits out of limited school funds required scavenging support from local leaders and the administration. Behind the scenes, training was punishing. "We skipped every holiday through Ramadan, Eid, and Puja," Saidul notes. "The girls worked day and night."

That grit paid off at the 53rd Summer Handball, where Durbachara tore through the four-team competition without dropping a game, scoring 75 goals and conceding only five along the way.

Breaking moulds, changing minds

For the players, victory represents a personal revolution against traditional expectations.

Maimuna Khatun commutes seven kilometres daily by van from Naturiya village. Reflecting on the local skepticism, she recalls: "Harsh words greeted us at first. Family and neighbours would ask what a girl expected to achieve by playing games." Today, champions earn universal smiles, with former critics now pushing their own daughters onto the pitch.

Team captain Mst Korobi shares the pitch with her younger sister, Tasfia Akter Kuheli. While their mother harboured early doubts, their father offered unshakeable backing. "My mother had her doubts, but father always told us to stand tall," Korobi says. With eight team members earning national call-ups, "focus remains locked on books and the ball".

Her father, Abdul Mannan, beams with a profound sense of pride rooted in the realities of rural society: "I have no son; my daughters are my world. I want them to fulfil their dreams."

He adds: "They have loved sports since childhood. They always dominated the running races and did well in cricket, too. Now, they have received national team call-ups for handball.

"Every worthy pursuit faces hurdles, and they had theirs."

Ratna Khatun, already bound for the national squad, highlights the pull of the sport over immediate security: "Job offers landed on the table, but keeping the game alive matters most. My father supports this path wholeheartedly."

Her father, Latif Molla, adds softly, capturing the sheer improbability of their ascent within the community: "Hurdles belong to life; pushing past them brings growth. People still pinch themselves in disbelief that a daughter wears the national colours."

A new horizon for Kushtia

Local leaders have taken notice. Engineer Zakir Hossain Sarkar, a district BNP executive committee member, supplies vital support, hinting at plans to invite State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque for a celebration. District Commissioner Touhid Bin Hasan echoes this, guaranteeing complete administrative backing should they choose sports professionally.

Sporting history is familiar to Durbachara -- boys excel in district cricket, and football prospects climb steadily. Yet handball delivered the gleaming crown of a national championship, its sporting landscape redrawn by village girls who refused to stay on the sidelines.



Scaloni's 'new Argentina project' awaits legendary records

AGENCIES

Lionel Scaloni has already carved his name into Argentina's football history, but the Albiceleste boss is far from finished. With his contract extended until after the 2030 World Cup, the 48-year-old manager is now preparing for another ambitious chapter, one that could see him break some of the most remarkable records in the national team's history.

Argentina Football Association president Claudio Tapia confirmed Scaloni's renewal, ending months of uncertainty over his future following the team's heartbreaking 1-0 defeat to Spain in the 2026 World Cup final on July 19.

"A new project begins now," Scaloni declared, insisting that his enthusiasm remains as strong as it was on his first day in charge.

And this project comes with historic possibilities.

If he remains at the helm until 2030, Scaloni will become the first Argentina coach to lead the national team in three World Cups. Legendary managers Cesar Luis Menotti and Carlos Bilardo each guided Argentina in two editions, winning the trophy in 1978 and 1986 respectively.

Scaloni could also rewrite the record books for the most matches managed by an Argentina coach. Having taken charge of 107 matches since his debut against Guatemala in September 2018, he is just 17 games away from matching Guillermo Stabile's remarkable record of 124 matches, set between 1940 and 1960.

Stabile remains Argentina's most decorated national team coach, having collected seven trophies, including six Copa America titles and one Pan American Championship.

Scaloni, meanwhile, has already delivered an extraordinary collection of silverware. Under his guidance, Argentina won the 2021 and 2024 Copa America titles, the 2022 Finalissima and, most significantly, the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

His transformation of a struggling side into a world-beating unit remains one of the greatest coaching achievements in Argentine football.

However, the next challenge may be his toughest yet. With Lionel Messi having retired from international football after serving as Argentina's talisman for two decades, Scaloni must build a new generation capable of carrying forward the country's winning tradition.

'Complete Nonsense': Cummins rejects Khawaja's allegations

AGENCIES

Australia captain Pat Cummins has vehemently rejected allegations made by former teammate Usman Khawaja in his autobiography about the 2018 ball-tampering scandal in South Africa, describing claims of his involvement as "complete and utter nonsense".

Speaking at a 68-minute press conference in Sydney on Friday, Cummins denied knowing about the plan to use sandpaper on the ball, insisting that the entire team was not aware of the plot. "When he says we all knew, if by that he means that we knew sandpaper was going out in the field, he's 100% wrong. I've said that consistently for the last eight years," Cummins said.

Khawaja, whose autobiography was released this week, alleged that the entire team knew about the plan and claimed that some players had resisted his suggestion to take collective responsibility rather than leaving Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft to face the consequences. Cummins, however, said he could not recall any such discussion or team meeting.





He also strongly rejected Khawaja's suggestion that his skin colour and background had prevented him from becoming Australia's captain, calling it one of the most serious claims in the book.

Taking exception to the allegations, Cummins said: "Usman's a friend, but friends aren't casual with each other's lives and reputations." Although he received legal advice that some remarks could be defamatory, he ruled out taking legal action, saying it was time to move forward after eight years.

The controversy intensified when Warner publicly backed Khawaja, criticising Cummins for his response.

"I still stick by Uzzie and what he has written in that book. That is the truth," Warner said during television commentary ahead of Australia's one-day international against England. He accused Cummins of throwing Khawaja "under the bus" and said he was disappointed with the captain's remarks.

Warner also revealed that the scandal had taken a devastating personal toll, claiming his wife Candice had lost a baby in its aftermath. He maintained that the three players punished for the incident had already paid a heavy price.

In 2018, Smith and Warner received 12-month suspensions from Cricket Australia, while Bancroft was banned for nine months. Smith was also removed as captain.

Former head coach Darren Lehmann and batting coach Graeme Hick have also rejected Khawaja's allegations, while Mitchell Starc reiterated that the bowlers were unaware of sandpaper being taken onto the field. Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon have remained silent on the latest claims.

Cummins acknowledged that Australia's culture at the time had an unhealthy win-at-all-costs mentality, with arrogance towards opponents and umpires. However, he said the environment had improved significantly under his leadership.

Cricket Australia chairman David Boon has ruled out reopening the investigation. Cummins maintained that he had been truthful during the original review and insisted his position had never changed.

"I did get advised this week that some of the things that've been said are probably defamatory, but I won't be doing that," he said, adding that he would not discuss the incident again.





Italy striker Pio Esposito celebrates after netting his second goal in a 3-1 win over France at the San Siro in the UEFA Nations League yesterday. Meanwhile, at Wembley Stadium, England's Harry Kane poses with his children and holds up the Ballon d'Or trophy ahead of their Nations League match against Croatia. PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

Italy stun France, Spain stay perfect as Kane makes history

AGENCIES

Italy came from behind to beat France 3-1 in Milan, handing Zinedine Zidane his first defeat as France coach, while Spain continued their winning run and Harry Kane inspired England to a Nations League quarterfinal spot on Thursday.

Spain lead Group A3 with 15 points after a 2-0 victory over the Czech Republic in Prague, extending their winning streak in the competition to five matches.

Alex Baena opened the scoring from the penalty spot before Marc Pubill sealed the win with a goal in the dying seconds, as Spain overcame a 10-man Czech side.

The victory also extended Spain's unbeaten run in competitive matches to 44 games. Having already secured their place in the quarterfinals, the defending champions will host England in Madrid on Sunday in their final Group A3 fixture.

In Milan, France, who were without injured forwards Kylian Mbappe and Ousmane Dembele, took the lead in the 10th minute when Michael Olise capitalised on a loose pass from Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Francesco Pio Esposito restored parity by steering home Nicolo Cambiaghi's pass, before France came close to regaining the lead as Bradley Barcola and Rayan Cherki both struck the woodwork.

Italy missed a second-half penalty through Sebastiano Esposito, who blazed his effort over the bar, but Davide Frattesi made amends by powering home Federico Dimarco's cut-back to put the hosts ahead.

Meanwhile, England booked their place in the quarterfinals with a 2-1 win over Croatia at Wembley, as captain Harry Kane marked his record-breaking 126th international appearance with a goal.

Croatia, determined to avoid a repeat of their 7-0 humiliation against England in Rijeka last month, looked far more organised from the outset.

However, goals from Morgan Rogers and Kane, who converted from the penalty spot, secured the victory for Thomas Tuchel's side.

England now have an opportunity to avenge their 3-2 defeat to the world champions in their Nations League opener when they travel to Madrid for Sunday's showdown with Spain.