

BU-MSC 2nd semi today

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Brothers Union face the last hurdle to reach the final of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League when they take on a desperate Mohammedan Sporting Club in today's second semifinal.

The match will kick-off at the Bangabandhu National Stadium at 3pm.

Brothers, winners of the Federation Cup and the Dhaka Premier League, are chasing a rare treble under veteran coach Wajed Gazi but their opponents are also hungry to end the drought of trophies.

Mohammedan have not reached any of the finals this season but gave Brothers a run for their money in the Premiership, forcing a play-off after finishing level on points.

"We went too close to the league title but could not overcome the challenge of Brothers. We drew the last league match but lost the play-off. Now we want to give the effort to reverse the situation and reach the final," said Mohammedan manager Imtiaz Sultan Johnny.

Happy about the team's discipline and return of the national booters including captain Alfaz, Johnny said that they had recovered from the early season crisis.

Mohammedan changed three coaches before appointing Shaiful Islam Manik who has only got the full-strength side for previous two matches.

Brothers manager Amer Khan said that playing against a big name and crowd-puller like

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Did U Know?

South Africa's 451 for nine wickets declared in the first innings of the third Test is their second best total against Australia at SCG, next only to 452 in 2001-02.



Mithali Raj

(India cricket captain)

"It is a fantastic win for us. Although we proved stronger than Pakistan and Sri Lanka we were never complacent in the tournament, which helped us win."

After beating Sri Lanka in the Asia Cup final.

Joy for Abahani

ABAHANI 2: MUKTIJODDHA 1

SPORTS REPORTER



Goals by Arif Khan Joy and Abdullah Parvez in extra time helped Abahani knock last year's runners-up Muktiyoddha Sangsad out of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League and reach the final with a thrilling 2-1 win at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The first semifinal, marred by poor refereeing with none of the cautious teams prepared to lose, was boring to say the least in regulation 90 minutes but came alive in the second half of the extra time with three goals inside four minutes.

Skipper Joy headed in a corner to break the 112-minute deadlock and substitute Parvez made it 2-0 within two minutes before Muktiyoddha's Nigerian midfielder Adafa pulled one goal back in the 116th minute.

Inaugural NFL champions Abahani, who reached their first final of the season and overall third in the championship, began lively before a 10,000-strong crowd but Farhad failed to tap in a rebound after his Ghananian partner Ibrahim's powerful drive came off goalkeeper Aminul 30 seconds after kick-off.

Muktiyoddha blanketed their backline with seven defenders including national booters Titu, Hassan Al Mamun and Rajani who was surprisingly playing leftback and broke a rival off-side trap with a long pass after 15 minutes. But inspired defending by Cameroonian Marshall defied Muktiyoddha's rookie forward Enamul from a shot at Nizam's goal.

The towering Marshall, who

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Skipper Arif Khan Joy (L) rises above all else to head in the first goal for Abahani during their semifinal of the Nitol-Tata NFL against Muktiyoddha at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Thursday.

PHOTO: STAR

Refereeing blamed

SPORTS REPORTER



Both Abahani and Muktiyoddha officials criticised referee Abdul Hannan for his 'faulty' handling of their yesterday's NFL semifinal.

Abahani beat Muktiyoddha 2-1 and the losing coach George Kottan burst out at the post-match conference at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Although many early decisions by the referee went against Abahani when he ignored numerous fouls committed by Muktiyoddha's foreign midfield duo of Adafa and Rachid, Kottan was angry.

"You can't win against a force or cheating," the Austrian said.

"Two good teams were playing today but we were deprived of a certain penalty in the dying moments," said Kottan referring to a foul against Rachid inside the Abahani penalty area after the Muktis went 2-0 down.

"First, our player Jeremiah was suspended for two games and then this cheating on the field. We cannot work against evil forces," added Kottan, who is also a former Bangladesh national coach.

It can be mentioned that Hannan was not allowed to conduct a single match in the SAFL Championship after his inferior conducting of the Maldives-Sri Lanka international in Pakistan last month.

Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu complained that the opposition intentionally killed Abahani's attacks with rough tackles but the referee did not bother to caution them.

Moroccan Rachid was lucky to be on the pitch after a serious foul on rival centre-back Marshall while Adafa was given only one yellow card despite being in an attacking mood throughout the game.

And that was not all, referee Hannan showed red card to Muktiyoddha midfielder Biduy for hitting assistant referee Ramkrishna Ghosh after the midfielder had been substituted.

Muktiyoddha's suspended Nigerian striker Jeremiah, watching the game from the VIP stands, assaulted Mansoor Azad -- the referee who had sent him off during a Super Six game -- after yesterday's match but Muktiyoddha officials said they were unaware of the incident.

"I am happy that I have contributed in the team's win as a captain," said Abahani and national team captain Joy, who was

adjudged man-of-the-match.

"I think we have given our fans something to cheer about after a long time. Now we want to win the title," added the shaven-headed midfielder.

Coach Amlesh Sen admitted that Abahani were not as attractive as they had been in the tournament.

"We did not want to concede a goal. Moreover, they were playing rough. The two fullbacks were instructed not to overlap much. We knew that our midfield and attack would be able to score if they got chances. Now we have to concentrate on the final," the veteran said.

For a change, cheerleaders were introduced for the semifinal and they will back their teams with enthusiastic displays also in the remaining two matches, but at times they were causing distractions.

"We were disturbed by the cheerleaders who were standing too close to the bench. I have no problem about having them in the field but they were blocking our view of the game. Also, we could not instruct the players during the match due to the noise created by the supporting brass band," Rupu complained.

'Indo-Pak series is the biggest in the world'

Cricket

APP, New Delhi

India coach Greg Chappell said Thursday his team is looking forward to Pakistan's challenge in the upcoming Test series, which he described as the "biggest in world cricket".

"The Ashes (Test series between England and Australia) is there from a very long time, but going by the enthusiasm and interest I think an India-Pakistan series is the biggest in world cricket," Chappell told reporters.

India, led by Rahul Dravid, leave for the seven-week tour later on Thursday to play three Tests and five one-day internationals, their second tour of Pakistan in as many years.

"It's the marquee series of the sub-continent and promises to be exciting as both teams are in good form," said Chappell, a former Australia Test captain.

"The Pakistan team is playing with confidence and on the way up. We have had a few good results of late and hope to continue in the same vein."

Both teams enjoyed successes

at home recently, with Pakistan taming Ashes-winning England and India meeting out the same treatment to Sri Lanka.

Chappell said India would continue their policy of trying out different players in different roles.



GREG CHAPPELL

"We have tried to build some flexibility into our side to cover certain eventualities and hope to implement some of those strategies in the next few weeks," he said.

Dravid conceded he had never

thought he would lead India in such a big series, his first overseas as full-fledged captain.

"A tour to Pakistan is special," he said.

"I did not think I would captain India when I made my Test debut in 1996. All I thought of was to establish myself as a batsman. After some years I got the vice-captaincy and then the captaincy."

Dravid said he did not believe that captaincy would affect his batting, saying his aim had always been to deliver as a batsman in different conditions.

"I have always thought it was important to play well abroad in different conditions and I think I will aim for the same this time," he said.

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ITINERARY

Jan 7-9	3-day	Lahore
Jan 13-17	1st Test	Lahore
Jan 21-25	2nd Test	Faisalabad
Jan 29-Feb 2	3rd Test	Karachi
Feb 6	1st ODI	Peshawar
Feb 11	2nd ODI	Rawalpindi
Feb 13	3rd ODI	Lahore
Feb 16	4th ODI	Multan
Feb 19	5th ODI	Karachi

Pegasus snatch thrilling win

SPORTS REPORTER

Prantik Krira Chakra came agonisingly close to put an end to Young Pegasus's all-win record in the First Division cricket league but lost by two runs to the league leaders at the Dhaka University ground yesterday.

In reply to Pegasus's 213, Prantik needed three runs to win with four wickets in hand but lost four batsmen in the final over to crash to 211.

Pegasus all-rounder Sony, who made 45, captured six wickets for 18 to steer his side to their 12th win in as many matches. Prantik stuck to their previous collection of 10 points.

At the City Club ground, Paltu hammered a blazing 132 off 99 balls to help Gazi Tank (263-6) hand a four-wicket defeat on Dhanmondi Club (259). Mostafizur scored 136 for Dhanmondi.

In the day's other match, Lalmatia (155-5) defeated Uttara Sporting Club by five wickets at the Jagannath Hall ground.

India will stay in Pakistan

CRICINFO, undated

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has dismissed rumours in the local media that the Indian team would return home after the first ODI in Peshawar on February 6 to avoid staying in Pakistan during the last four days leading up to Ashura during the month of Muharram.

A PCB source told United News of India that the Indian players would travel straight to Islamabad and remain there for the Rawalpindi ODI on February 11.

He said: "The Indian officials have not made any such request and it is not possible for them to return home for four days and then come back to play the remaining ODIs."

He also said the BCCI had not clarified as yet if their team would be accompanied by their own security officers.

Wins for Menjis, Bhattritto

SPORTS REPORTER

Menjis Krira Chakra and Bhattritto SKS won their respective Super Four matches in the Bactrol First Division Men's Handball League at the Outer Stadium handball ground yesterday.

Menjis outplayed Mansoor Sporting Club 21-6 after leading 12-2 at the break while Bhattritto beat Prime Sporting Club 27-10 after taking a 15-3 first-half lead.

DOHS unstoppable

SPORTS REPORTER



There was no stopping for holders Old DOHS as they ambled to their ninth straight win in the Aktel Premier Cricket League at the expense of Bangladesh Biman on Thursday.

While DOHS, after successive close shaves against Mohammedan and Abahani in the previous rounds, comfortably beat the national flag carrier by 41 runs, their nearest challengers Victoria Sporting Club suffered a painful one-run defeat against Abahani in an exciting match at Fatullah Stadium.

Victoria's defeat meant a four-point lead for DOHS with two more games to go in the first phase.

Mohammedan, after two demoralising defeats, returned to winning ways in a most empathic fashion, flooring last year's runners-up City Club by nine wickets to join Biman in the third position behind surprise package Victoria with six wins from nine games.

Brothers Union also scored an impressive six-wicket win against lowly Orient SC to join City Club and Sonargaon Cricketers in the crowded fourth position -- all having five wins against four defeats.

For a big-spending Sonargaon, hefty fines on their key players brought the best out of them for a second successive game as they thrashed fellow newcomers Agrani Bank by eight wickets.

Kalabagan also continued to impress in their return to the Premier League with a 49-run victory over Indira Road Krira Chakra. It was their fourth win to join their more colourful Dhanmondi neighbours Abahani in the fifth place.

DOHS-BIMAN

A vintage Steve Tikolo struck his sixth half-century as DOHS piled

up a commanding 264-6 against Biman at BKPS.

The former Kenyan captain hammered a blazing 87 off 84 balls that contained nine fours after the holders lost both openers with only eight runs on the board. National left-arm spinner Manzarul Islam (40), batting at number three, led the early recovery operation putting on 112 runs for the third wicket with wicketkeeper Shahin (44). Skipper Akram Khan also returned to runs with a 51-ball 40. But the former national captain's celebration was spoiled by a 5,000 taka fine slapped by the match referee for his heated argument with umpire Nadir Shah over the run-out decision of Manzarul. Khaled Mahmud, who inspired the champions to crucial victories against Mohammedan and Abahani, entertained the BKSP students with a 12-ball 25.

Biman's pursuit to chase the challenging total got an early setback when national opener Javed Omar departed for five. Humayun Kabir scored a fine 53 but Biman's hopes of winning the match was dashed when Mushfiqur Rahman (70 off 82 balls) and wicketkeeper Sajjad Kadir (59 off 51 balls) departed in quick succession in the last ten overs.

Steve Tikolo was adjudged man-of-the-match for his fine fifty followed by two wickets including the prized scalp of Mushfiqur.

ABAHANI-VICTORIA

Abahani have recently flown in former Sri Lankan off-spinner Kumara Dharmasena in an effort to bolster their mediocre team and it augured well for the fallen giants at Fatullah, where the slow bowler pulled off a dramatic win by dismissing the last Victoria batsman.

Victoria, chasing Abahani's modest 203, were left with two more runs to win in the final two deliveries with a wicket in hand. But Dharmasena bowled Shuvro with the penultimate delivery to

overshadow a virtuoso all-round show of Sakib Al Hasan.

The young left-arm spinner took five wickets for 31 to contain Abahani to a modest total after opener Jahurul Islam struck 48 and Imran Ahmed 63 off 108 balls. The southpaw also scored a fluent 28 off 21 balls to win the man-of-the-match award.

MSC-CITY CLUB

Opener Hannan Sarker was denied a deserving century for one run but the right-hander fashioned an easy nine-wicket win for Mohammedan after off-spinner Sabbir Khan spun City Club out for a modest 187 at Bogra.

Hannan was stranded on 99 when Mohammedan reached the target of 188 in 37.5 overs. He struck a dozen fours and two mighty sixes in his 123-ball undefeated knock. Mohammedan's victory was never in doubt after Hannan and on-song Indian Sandeep Sharma (48 off 60 balls) produced 111 runs for the opening stand.

Earlier, national opener Shahriar Nafees batted with a purpose for City, who never built partnerships after being sent into bat.

Left-handed Nafees scored 69 off 82 balls that featured eleven fours and six sixes.

BROTHERS-ORIENT

National opener Nafees Iqbal returned to action as a super-sub after two-match injury lay-off with a half-century as Brothers thrashed a pointless Orient by six wickets.

Nafees scored 56 and Pakistani Rashed Hanif struck an unbeaten 60 as Brothers toppled a not-so-impressive Orient total of 186 with eight more overs to spare.

SONARGAON-AGRANI BANK

Sonargaon chased even a smaller target when Agrani Bank were bundled out for 133 in the face of some controlled bowling from

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Rain dashes SA hopes

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Rain hit South Africa's hopes of squaring their series with Australia after only 20 overs of play were possible on the fourth day of the third cricket Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday.

The Proteas, who lost last week's second Melbourne Test by 184 runs after the first match was drawn, advanced from an overnight four for one to 94 for three when rain washed out play after tea.

South Africa have only a 186-run lead heading into Friday's fifth day and more showers are forecast, almost certainly condemning the match to a draw.

In that eventuality, Australia will win the home series and renew Test hostilities in South Africa in another series next month.

"We are in the hands of the weather. We just want to give ourselves the best chance of winning the game," South African pace spearhead Shaun Pollock said.

"If there's a full 97 overs tomorrow we want to try and get as many runs as quickly as we can and give ourselves the right amount of over to bowl them out."

Pollock said playing to avoid defeat on Friday would still mean a loss series. "We've got to come out tomorrow and give ourselves a

chance to win the game."

When play was abandoned for the day at 5:15 pm (0615 GMT) first-innings centuries Jacques Kallis (114) and Ashwell Prince (0) were at the wicket.

The Proteas lost the wickets of skipper Graeme Smith and Herschelle Gibbs on Thursday.

Gibbs threw away his wicket when he was run out for 67 in a mix-up with Kallis over a quick single. He was beaten back to the non-striker's end by a direct throw from Brad Hodge.

Gibbs, who scored 94 in the first innings of the second Test loss, had boosted the Proteas' run-rate - striking 11 boundaries in his lively 74-ball knock.

Shortly afterwards rain sent the players from the field for an early tea and there was no further play.

Smith had been offered the bad light by the umpires after just four balls of the day's play, but chose to bat on. He paid the price three balls later when he was out for five.

Smith played across the line from Glenn McGrath and was hit high above the knee roll but was given out by umpire Aleem Dar, in another questionable leg before wicket decision by the Pakistani match official.

Dar controversially turned down two big lbw appeals against Mike Hussey and Ricky Ponting on Wednesday.

The dismissal completed a disappointing series for Smith, who has had scores of 34, 30, 22, 25,

39 and five.

It left the South Africans on six for two, but Gibbs and Kallis steadied the innings with an 86-run partnership in 91 minutes.

Gibbs had a 'life' on 34 when he was put down by Shane Warne at first slip off McGrath. Warne got his left hand to the low chance but the ball did not stick.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard after the fourth day of the third and final Test between Australia and South Africa at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday:

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 451 for 9 declared (Prince 119, Kallis 111; Lee 3-82)

AUSTRALIA: First innings 359 (Ponting 120, Gilchrist 86; Nel 4-81)

SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings (overnight 4-1)

Smith lbw b McGrath	5
De Villiers lbw b Lee	1
Gibbs run out (Hodge)	67
Kallis not out	14
Prince not out	0
Extras: (lb-4, w-1, nb-2)	7
Total: (For 3 wickets in 22 overs)	94
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-6, 3-92	

Bowler	O	M	R	W
McGrath	11	2	41	1
Lee	10	3	48	1
Warne	1	0	1	0

Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-6, 3-92

Bowler O M R W
McGrath 11 2 41 1
Lee 10 3 48 1
Warne 1 0 1 0



The Sydney Cricket Ground pitch is under heavy covers after rain set in during the fourth day's play of the third and final Test between Australia and South Africa on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

What to WATCH

BTV

Nitol-Tata Nat'l Football League
Second Semifinal
Mohammedan vs Brothers Union
Live at 3:00 pm

ESPN

New Zealand vs Sri Lanka
Fourth ODI
Live at 7:00 am

STAR Sports

Australia vs South Africa
Third Test, Day Five
Live at 5:00 am



Nitol-Tata Fifth Nat'l Football League
Second Semifinal
Mohammedan vs Brothers Union
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium