

## Tenth round of Premier Cricket today

SPORTS REPORTER

The crucial tenth round of the Aktel Premier Division Cricket League will take place today at six different venues across the country.

Defending champions Old DOHS will face second-placed Victoria at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium in a bid to continue their unbeaten run, while giants City Club, Brothers Union, Sonargaon and Abahani will be looking to keep SuperSix hopes alive.

Current runners-up City Club will meet Bangladesh Biman at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium. The national flag bearers share the third spot along with Moha-mmedan Sporting Club, which take on Kalabagan at BKSP.

At the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra, popular Aba-hani and start-studded Sonargaon will battle it out to keep their Super Six hopes alive. Sonargaon have ten points while Abahani secured eight from their nine matches.

Brothers, with ten points, have a  
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## Did U Know?

New Zealand's triumph by 21 runs in the fourth ODI at Wellington is their first against Sri Lanka at this venue. New Zealand had lost the first ever encounter against Sri Lanka at this venue by 3 wickets on 3.2.2001.



## Rahul Dravid

(India cricket captain)

"We have the firepower and the balance to counter anything and I am confident that we are up to the Pakistan challenge."



**BTV**  
Nitol-Tata Fifth Nat'l Football League FINAL  
Mohammedan vs Abahani  
Live at 4:00 pm

**ESPN**  
New Zealand vs Sri Lanka  
Fifth ODI  
Live at 5:00 am  
FA Cup  
Albion vs Man United  
Live at 9:55 pm

**STAR Sports**  
Chennai Open  
Men's Singles Final  
Live at 5:30 pm



**Nitol-Tata Fifth Nat'l Football League FINAL**  
Mohammedan vs Abahani (4:00 pm)  
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

**Aktel Premier Div Cricket League**  
Old DOHS vs Victoria  
Venue: Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium  
City Club vs Biman  
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium  
Abahani vs Sonargaon Cricketers  
Venue: Bogra Dist Stadium  
Mohammedan vs Kalabagan  
Venue: BKSP-2  
Agrani Bank vs Orient SC  
Venue: Comilla Dist Stadium  
Indira Road vs Brothers Union  
Venue: BKSP-1



PREPARING FOR SUNDAY SHOWDOWN. (L) Mohammedan players practice ball control at the Motijheel Government School ground while their (R) Abahani counterparts drill at their club ground in Dhanmondi ahead of their Sunday's mouth-watering Nitol-Tata NFL final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

# A dream final after 3 years

## Abahani, Mohammedan face off today

SPORTS REPORTER



Bitter rivals Abahani and Mohammedan will face off in a major domestic football final after three years when they clash for the glory of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National League today.

The grand final will kick-off at 4pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium with state-run Bangladesh Television providing live coverage of the two most popular outfits' mouth-watering clash from the big bowl.

The final is expected to draw a full-house crowd with supporters of both teams dying to relish a major trophy after two forgettable seasons that saw a re-born Brothers Union claiming a major stake of glory.

While Mohammedan saw a dip in their fortune in last two seasons after a delightful treble, their archrivals Abahani have been starving for success since 2001 when they lifted the Premier League title.

Sunday's final will also end a long wait for fans, who have grown up seeing the supreme dominance of the two giants since the rivalry started in the 70s. The two perennial foes last played a final in the same competition in 2002.

Mohammedan might have won that last battle, but it is Abahani who holds an amazing record of four wins (including a tie-break victory) against a draw over their Motijheel rivals in their previous five meetings this season.

Abahani, unbeaten in their last 18 matches, stormed into the final with 2-1 win over Muktiyoddha in the first semifinal.

Mohammedan dumped last year's champions Brothers in the other semis on Friday by a solitary goal.

Mohammedan coach Shafiqul Islam Manik, who is desperately looking for success on his first assignment with the club, admitted that Abahani are playing brilliant football at the moment.

"But I am delighted that country's two most popular clubs are going to clash in a final. Believe me, this is completely a different battle

where nerve plays bigger role than sheer skill," said Manik.

He was however concerned about injuries of his key players.

"Alfaz, Emeke, Peter Odaf, Hasan and Biplol were injured in the semifinal but I hope they will be okay before the match. Abahani's midfield attack is very strong but we will try not to allow them any space," he said.

The Mohammedan coach said that he was upset at the assault on referees by the unsporting Brothers players and officials on Friday.

"I believe that players can ensure a good match showing sporting attitude on the pitch. I specially make a humble request to our senior players not to show any arrogance for greater interest of the game," appealed Manik.

Abahani will miss their inform midfielder Abdullah Parvez, who picked up his second yellow card in the first semifinal against Muktiyoddha.

Coach Amalesh Sen however is upbeat with his team's recent performance and confident to beat Mohammedan and win a major

trophy after a long time.

"My boys are in fine form and we hold an impressive record against Mohammedan this season. I just want them to play their own game and avail those chances to complete a dream run," said Amalesh, whose side demolished Mohammedan 5-1 in the Federation Cup.

Bangladesh and Abahani captain Arif Khan Joy promised to present the trophy to the loyal sky blue supporters as a New Year gift.

"If we have got a little luck then there is no reason to lose the final. I think we have an edge over Mohammedan. We beat them quite convincingly on a number of times this season, so why not in the final again," said the shaven-headed midfielder.

President Dr. Professor Iajuddin Ahmed will witness the final as chief guest and distribute the prizes.

The winners will receive Tk 5 lakh as prize money and the runners-up will be richer by Tk 3 lakh. The player of the tournament will pocket Tk 50,000 and a motor bike while Tk 25,000 is up for grabs for the top scorer.

## Dungarpur denies Ganguly lashing

CRICINFO, undated

A day after the controversial remarks that got India's tour of Pakistan off to the worst possible start, Raj Singh Dungarpur, the former BCCI chief who is manager of the squad, emphatically denied that he had made disparaging remarks about Sourav Ganguly. Calling it "irresponsible journalism of the worst kind", Raj Singh told Cricinfo that the footage shown had not involved live quotes, but merely indirect ones.

"I have tremendous respect for Sourav, and he has tremendous experience," he said. "My job is to make every member of the side as comfortable as possible. I have been manager of the Indian team four times and would never compromise on my integrity. I am really amazed. I'm sad and I'm sorry. I've made no such statements. My picture has been shown on the television channel and I'm not speaking anything, and they're saying that this is what he has said."

"This is not the first time I am managing an Indian team, this is the fifth time that I have been made the manager of the side. How could I have ever said that? Until now, I never had any such experience

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# Liton, Arif punished heavily

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday came down hard on trouble-happy officials and players of Brothers Union and Muktiyoddha for creating anarchy during the two semifinals of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League.

The disciplinary committee of NFL banned Brothers midfielder Liton from any competitive football for five years for kicking referee Tayeb Hasan after getting the marching order during the second semifinal against Mohammedan.

The committee also slapped a similar punishment on Brothers football secretary Sabir Ahmed Arif, who stunned everybody by flexing his muscles on hapless

linesman Mahabubur Rahman during the injury time of Friday's semifinal that the Gopibagh outfit lost by 1-0.

Liton, the talented but ill-tempered midfielder from Narayanganj, was also fined with Tk 20,000 while Arif, who was responsible for resurfacing a bad image that Brothers is in-famous for, was fined Tk 50,000.

Brothers manager Amer Khan was suspended for one year while reserve goalkeeper Atiqul Haque was fined by Tk 10,000.

The disciplinary committee also suspended Muktiyoddha midfielder Azmol Hossain Biddyt for one year for assaulting the referee during the first semifinal against Abahani on Thursday.

Besides, the committee slapped fine on former Bangladesh and Muktiyoddha coach George Kottan,

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# Sachin shines in tour opener



AFP, Lahore

Sachin Tendulkar and skipper Rahul Dravid showed early form as four touring batsmen hit half-centuries against Pakistan 'A' at Bagh-e-Jinnah ground here on Saturday.

Tendulkar played delightful strokes in his 74 while Dravid was as stubborn as ever during his knock of 63 as India reached 298-4 at close on the first day of their three-day match.

Venkatsai Laxman (25) and Yuvraj Singh (11) were at the crease when bad light stopped play six overs before schedule on a day when all the Indian batsmen got good starts but failed to score big.

The little master, who has a world record of 35 Test centuries, looked well set for another hundred before he was bowled by medium pacer Yasir Arafat in the fading light. Tendulkar hit 10 boundaries during his 102-ball knock and added 67 for the third wicket with Dravid and 59 for the fourth wicket

with Laxman. India's top order batsmen, more importantly their openers Gautam Gambhir (53) and Waseem Jaffer (58), had a good work out in the middle after India won the toss and decided to bat first on an easy paced pitch in chilly weather.

The openers put on 81 before Gambhir cut straight into the hands of point off Mohammad Irshad.

He hit nine boundaries in his 84-ball knock.

Jaffer and Dravid added 72 for the second wicket before Test hopeful Umer Gul forced an edge off Jaffer for a regulation catch behind the stumps.

Dravid then fell to part-time spinner Imran Farhat, caught off a miscued drive at short mid-off after hitting seven boundaries.

India play Pakistan in the first of three Tests here from January 13.

**SCOREBOARD**  
Scoreboard on the first day of the three-day match between India  
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# 'India tougher opponent'



AFP, Lahore

Pakistan coach Bob Woolmer warned his team Saturday that India would be tougher opponents than England in both Tests and the one-day series.

Woolmer told the Pakistani team, which had a net practice session ahead of the first Test against India which starts January 13, that last month's 2-0 Test series win against England counted for little now.

"Indians are more used to playing in these conditions, they have some quality batsmen and also have better spinners than England," said Woolmer, a former England batsman.

"I always say that yesterday is history and today is a mystery," said Woolmer, who also coached South Africa from 1994 to 1999. "We can win any series if we play well."

Woolmer took over as coach in

June two years ago, after Pakistan sacked Javed Miandad following a home series defeat against India in 2004, their first series in Pakistan for 14 years.

Woolmer said Pakistan was improving with every series.

"When you start a series, its always 50-50 but after battling hard



BOB WOOLMER to win against England we have

improved. Indians too are also confident after beating Sri Lanka," said Woolmer, referring to India's 2-0 win at home last month.

Pakistan beat the Ashes-winning England side 2-0 in a three-Test series and 3-2 in a five-match one-day series at home.

"I personally think the Indians will be harder to beat because the conditions are similar in Pakistan and India," said Woolmer, who blamed lack of disciplined bowling for Pakistan's defeat against India in 2004.

"From what I know the last time India came to Pakistan the bowlers were not disciplined. This time we will try to ensure their batsmen are not given too much freedom," Woolmer said.

He did not think Pakistani fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar would be the difference between the two teams.

"We have a varied pace attack and I think, no one player can make a difference. One player can have a good day but I look to all the bowlers to deliver and that makes a team win," he said.

## Div I cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Jatrabari Krira Chakra thrived on half-centuries from Rony and John to set up a five-wicket victory over Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club in the First Division Cricket League at the Dhaka University ground yesterday.

Rony hit 65 while John added 54 as Jatrabari cruised to 223-5 in 42.2 overs.

Earlier Mariners managed 220 for nine in their stipulated 50 overs with Rana Hossain making 95.

Rony took three wickets for 27 runs while Younus and Jony bagged two wickets each for 32 and 56 runs respectively.

It was the fifth win for Jatrabari while Mariner suffered their eighth defeat in 12 matches.

## Zim cricketers call off strike

REUTERS, Durban

Zimbabwe's cricketers suspended their indefinite strike on Saturday the day after the government appointed an interim board to run the game.

Players' representative Clive Field told Reuters from Harare the decision had been made at a players' meeting on Saturday.

The players walked out on December 22 in protest at financial issues, transport problems and the continued presence in office of Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) chairman Peter Chingoka and managing director Ozias Bvute.

The government intervened on Friday by dissolving the ZC board and naming an interim body to be led by Chingoka.

Brigadier Gibson Mashin-gaizde, the army brigadier who chairs of the Sports and Recreation Commission that announced the takeover, said on Friday a contractual impasse between the players and ZC should be resolved by January 31.

"The players have committed themselves to continuing to at least until the end of the month in the light of what was made clear at the meeting yesterday that they should expect their contracts to be resolved by then," Field said.

Field said the players did not  
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Star Indian batsman Sachin Tendulkar sweeps one fine on the opening day of their three-day practice match against Pakistan A at the Bagh-e-Jinnah Stadium in Lahore on Saturday.

# One last hurrah for little master in Pakistan?



AFP, Lahore

Sachin Tendulkar plays possibly his last Test series on Pakistani soil this week, leading India's challenge in the country where his remarkable career began 16 years ago.

When Tendulkar made his debut in November 1989, the world was not yet connected to the Internet, the Soviet Union was still intact, George Bush's father was the US president and golf prodigy Michelle Wie was a month old.

Now at 32, Tendulkar has been in the game longer than any contemporary cricketer with a world-record 35 Test and 38 one-day centuries to his credit and has more than 10,000 runs in both forms of the game.

He is not expected to quit for a few more years despite a spate of injuries in recent times, but there is no certainty he will still be playing at 37 when India tour Pakistan again in 2010.

"We must enjoy his cricket as long as it lasts, because there may never be another like him again," legendary Indian all-rounder Kapil Dev told AFP.

Tendulkar's wicket will be treasured the most by Shoaib Akhtar and company when the first Test opens at the Gaddafi stadium here on Friday, followed by the second Test in Faisalabad and the third in Karachi.

"A series between India and Pakistan is always special because it is followed so closely by fans on both sides," said Tendulkar. "The interest and hype is amazing."

Tendulkar has come a long way since he took guard as a 16-year-

old against the fiery pace attack of Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis in the Karachi Test in 1989.

Having been bowled by fellow-debutant Younis for 15 in the first innings and not given a chance to bat a second time in the drawn Test, Tendulkar feared he might never play Test cricket again.

Not only did Tendulkar continue playing, but he also emerged as one of the finest batsmen to grace the game and was regarded by the great Don Bradman as his modern reincarnation.

Statistics reveal his genius with the bat but a career-span of more than 16 years amidst the pressure of living up to the expectations of a billion cricket-crazy fans in India tells the story of his dedication to the game.

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