

**HOCKEY LEAGUE**  
**Title to go to**  
**first-leg**  
**leaders**

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday called off the Super Five stage of the Premier Hockey League in an extraordinary move to end the stalemate and decided to declare the table-toppers of the first-leg as champions.

The decision, taken by BHF president and Air Chief Air Vice Marshal Fakhru Azam, got the confidence of all the members of the executive committee in its yesterday's meeting.

Abahani and Usha were level on 21 points after eight matches of the first-leg but the former enjoy an edge by virtue of better goal difference and head-to-head record.

The EC has asked the league committee to submit the first-leg standing for approval.

There are, however, doubts that whether the title would be handed over to one team -- Abahani -- or the federation would go for joint-championship.

The bylaws say that the goal difference of the first-leg would not be carried to the Super Five although the league committee put Abahani on the top of the Super Five for better goal difference.

An explanation from the league committee was not available till filing of this report.

The Super Five was postponed after just one match when Mohammedan Sporting Club and Mariner Youngs Club refused to play in demand of the punishment of a few players of Abahani and Usha Kira Chakra.

The league committee's bid to continue the league failed as both the teams did not turn out for their scheduled matches ignoring the threat of relegation from the Premiership.

The BHF in its last week's meeting postponed the Super Five but called another emergency meeting

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**Did U Know?**

On September 20, 1973 in a match titled 'Battle of the Sexes' women's tennis star Billie Jean King beat former men's champion Bobby Riggs in three straight sets after he challenged her to a match where he boasted of his superior male attributes.



**Frank Lampard**  
(England midfielder)

"I think we've got a good chance of winning the series, but it's going to be very tough. You have to say Australia are favourites, but with the players we've got, and the experience we've got, who knows?" On England's chances in the Ashes series that starts today.



**ESPN**

Australia v England  
First Ashes Test, Day Two  
Live at 6:00 am (Friday)

**TEN Sports**

Pakistan v West Indies  
Second Test, Day 5  
Live at 10:30 am

**ZEE SPORTS**

UEFA Cup  
Bayer Leverkusen v Tottenham  
Live at 1:30 am (Friday)



Mohammad Ashraful of Dhaka drives one on way to scoring an unbeaten 166 on the second day of their National Cricket League match against Chittagong at the Divisional Stadium yesterday.

**Ashraful lights up the day**

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

In his first match after getting a surprise axe from the national team, Mohammad Ashraful responded in the best possible way as he scored a magnificent 166 not out against Chittagong on the second day of the four-day match of the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea 8th National Cricket League at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Dhaka rode on Ashraful and young Marshall Ayub's 103 not out during a 274-run stand to end the day at 332 for four.

In a clear message to his detractors, Ashraful smashed the Chittagong bowlers to bits on way to his second successive hundred in the first-class competition after his 121 against Barisal last Thursday. The innings also took light out of his 'inconsistency' bane

as for the second consecutive match, he pulled Dhaka out of trouble.

But at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium, it was a different story as eleven wickets fell. Khulna, having bowled Barisal out for 286 in the first innings, failed to capitalise as they trailed by 105 runs. At stumps, Khulna were at 181 for 8, with Mohammad Salim batting on 34.

Runs from Farhad Hossain, Naeem Islam and Mushfiqur Rahman gave Rajshahi a 147-run first innings lead as they scored 328 in the first innings. Sylhet were precariously placed at 6-2 in their second essay at stumps.

**CHITTAGONG v DHAKA**

Dhaka again had a top-order failure as their openers Uttam Sarkar and Anwar Hossain fell by the first hour and the next two -- Mahmudullah Riyad and skipper Ali Shahriar -- failed once again, leaving them wobbling at 58-4.

Ashraful, at the crease when

Riyad fell to left-armed Elias Sunny, was joined by young Ayub and the two right-handers negotiated the rival attack till lunch but were set soon after.

Ashraful, clearly dominant of the two, struck the ball sweetly on a wicket made for batting. But having restrained himself for another session when he and Ayub added a further 103 runs, Ashraful unravelled his full repertoire of shots. He reached his hundred off 164 balls and then cut loose to hit nine further boundaries in the next 48 deliveries.

Young Ayub ably supported him all along, as they reached their 250-run partnership. Milestones came thick and fast as Ashraful reached his 150 soon after. The last act of a magnificent day came when the young batsman from old-Dhaka reached his first century of the season right at the end of the day. He hit eight boundaries and two sixes while his senior partner

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**Habibul content**  
**Zimbabwe due today**

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricket team wrapped up their preparation for the coming home series against Zimbabwe at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The Southern African nation led by Prosper Uteyaya will arrive in Dhaka this evening to play a Twenty20 International and five one-day internationals across the country.

Under the guidance of coach Dav Whatmore, the 13-member team, which was announced on Sunday for first three games leaving out ace batsman Mohammad Ashraful, went through extensive sessions on the last two days.

The Tigers, excepting skipper Habibul Bashar, all-rounders Forhad Reza and Mehrib Hossain, will fly for Khulna this morning to play the Twenty20 match on November 28 and the first ODI on November 30.

The three will join the team on November 27 after playing the lone warm-up match against the visitors on November 26 at BKSP.

Bashar was satisfied with the preparation and said that nothing could have been better than they have done for the important series ahead of next year's World Cup.

"This time we can not give any excuses because we have had enough match practice in the domestic competitions besides routine preparation in the camp. I am highly satisfied with the homework," said Bashar after the final day's training.

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**Zia wins two**  
**out of two**

SPORTS REPORTER

Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman won his second successive match in the Commonwealth Chess Championship 2006 in Mumbai on Tuesday but his Bangladeshi compatriot GM Niaz Murshed dropped points.

In the second round of the 10-round Swiss League competition, Zia beat Tuvveer Gillani of Pakistan while Niaz drew with WFM Mary Ann Gomez of India.

Zia stretched his collection to maximum two points while Niaz to 1.5 points.

**Hype takes backseat**  
**Ashes series gets underway at Gabba**

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Even the colossal Mount Everest would feel a little shy when it sees the massive build-up to this year's Ashes. And as it all culminates at the Gabba, all talks would be put to rest, and test.

England and Australia renew their age-old rivalry that began only as a satire. Now, a billion people are going to watch what is most likely to be another superb Test series featuring some of the best talents that cricket has ever seen.

Australia's captain Ricky Ponting has urged his already cricket-mad nation to show its true colours. His counterpart also years for his kingdom's full support but in all honesty, what these two cricketers would have loved was a little more peace and quiet. Not for themselves, as both thrive on the big stage, but for those lost souls who could crack any moment.

The talk here is about those

players who influence their team's balance. England have had a history of using up more than 20 players in an Ashes series, especially in the last 15 years of Australian dominance. So Andrew Flintoff would dearly love his Collingwoods and Andersons to stay focussed on the job and not on what the slip fielder is saying about their existence!

So what does Ponting have to worry about? He has a team oozing with talent and one that has proven everything that needs to be proven.

Yet, they have a unique challenge that starts today: Can his men, at this age and time of their respective careers, win back what was always theirs?

Like Flintoff, Ponting would want some of his older teammates to be as encouraged as they can in this very last minute of preparation.

Let alone the age, Ponting now has to win back the Ashes. So if Flintoff's men decide to shut up shop on a critical day of the series, Ponting could very well go down in infamy.

The series, from the very onset,

is on a butcher's knife's edge.

Nobody knows which way it will swing, cut or spin for that matter. Shane Warne could be the biggest block standing for all English batsmen as it has been since 1993. With the ball in his grip, he has the ability to turn matches, balls, etc anywhere he wants to.

Australia could face an uphill task if England's two talismans -- skipper Flintoff and the maverick Kevin Pietersen -- get stuck. Even an Australian fan cannot forget his one over at Michael Clarke in that magnificent Edgbaston Test last year. And how about that Pietersen! Could be somewhat of a stumbling block for Australia, just like last year, in crucial scenarios.

But England lost their edge over Australia with inspirational supremo Michael Vaughan missing as well as his trump-card Simon Jones. Australia have a Ponting and four other world-class bowlers to show for in that regard. But it all works when you hit the right spot or the ball runs off your blade as you want it to.

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West Indies captain Brian Lara is about to play a pull shot as Pakistan wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal (L) and captain Inzamamul Haq (R) looks on during the fourth day of the second Test match between the sides at the Multan Cricket Stadium on Wednesday.

**Pakistan fight back**

Lara goes on to hit another double ton

Cricket

AFP, Multan

Imran Farhat and Mohammad Yousuf led Pakistan's efforts to avoid defeat in the second Test Wednesday after West Indian captain Brian Lara hit an epic double century at Multan Stadium.

Opener Farhat with 71 not out, Yousuf unbeaten on 56 and Younis Khan with 56 boosted Pakistan's hopes of salvaging a result as the home team finished the fourth day on 213-2. They still need 21 runs to avoid an innings defeat.

Earlier West Indies added 82 runs to their overnight total with Lara scoring a masterly 216 to help the tourists score 591 runs in the first innings.

The West Indies, who trail the three-match series 1-0 after they lost the first Test by nine wickets in Lahore last week, gained a healthy 234-run lead.

Farhat put on an invaluable 89 runs for the unbroken third wicket stand with Yousuf and 100 runs for

the second wicket with Younis after Pakistan lost opener Mohammad Hafeez (18) early in his innings.

Stylish left-hander Farhat held the innings together with nine boundaries during his 279-minute stay at the crease. Yousuf, who survived a confident leg-before appeal off fast bowler Jerome Taylor on 51, has so far hit eight fours.

Younis hit fast bowler Dwayne Bravo for his sixth boundary to race to his second half-century in the match and also completed his 4,000 runs in 49 Tests. He is the tenth Pakistani batsman to achieve the milestone.

But he fell in the second over after tea, edging left-armed Dave Mohammed to wicketkeeper Denesh Mohammed after scoring 56. He hit seven boundaries during his 75-ball knock.

During the innings, Lara surpassed legendary Australian batsman Don Bradman's record of 18 scores of 150 and above and came

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prompting Harbhajan to fire in a ball down the legside that went for five wickets.

The over cost 17 runs.

De Villiers went for one ambitious shot too many when he lost

his balance and was stumped attempting a reverse sweep against part-time left-arm spinner Dinesh Mongia.

Mark Boucher then helped

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India's Zaheer Khan (R) receives a congratulatory hug from teammate Suresh Raina after the paceman dismissed South Africa captain Graeme Smith in the second ODI at Kingsmead yesterday.

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