

SPORT



Khulna Tigers and former South Africa batsman Hashim Amla walks back to the pavilion following a dismal debut in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) while Chattogram Challengers pacer Mehedi Hasan Rana celebrates the prized scalp in yesterday's first match at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

PHOTO: **FIROZ AHMED**

Rana boosts Chattogram to play-off spot

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI from Sylhet



The wicket of Mehedi Hasan Miraz cannot be considered a prized scalp by any measure, although it was just the kind of early breakthrough that Chattogram Challengers needed from Mehedi Hasan Rana as they romped to a six-wicket win over Khulna Tigers yesterday.

The ball came in at an angle from the left-arm seamer and landed on a middle stump line. What happened next should give Bangladesh fans looking for a left-arm pacer who can shape the ball into the right-hander much cause to rejoice.

The ball shaped in beautifully after pitching and rapped the knee roll of Miraz's back foot as he entertained thoughts of whacking the ball towards midwicket. The umpire raised his finger immediately but Miraz, deceived by the swing, felt the ball would have missed leg stump and asked for a review only to find that the ball would have hit middle stump.

Rana's next scalp can actually be called the most prized scalp of the ongoing Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL). Regarded as one of best openers of all time, Hashim Amla's off stump was castled by Rana just three deliveries later with another ball that jagged back. Two top-order wickets, one of them being Amla's, was a great feat and continued the trend

of Rana breaking team's backs by disposing top-order and key opposition batsmen this tournament.

Chattogram bowled out Khulna for just 121 with Rana striking one more time, picking up the crucial wicket of Robbie Frylinck, who failed to get his bat out of the way of a cutter and edged it through to the wicketkeeper. The Challengers picked up their seventh win of the tournament to ensure a playoff spot, becoming the first team to do so in this BBPL.

In many ways, Rana resembles Bangladesh's ace pacer Mustafizur Rahman, who hails from

STATS			
Mehedi Hasan Rana	Mustafizur Rahman		
17	Wickets		16
8	Innings		10
12.29	Average		15.43
6.96	Econ		6.76

the same U-19 batch.

He picked up his third player-of-the-match award in this tournament and his three-wicket haul saw him once again take over as the top wicket-taker in the BBPL with 17 wickets, displacing none other than Mustafizur. The rivalry between him and Mustafizur is exciting and just as important is the competitive aspect between these top two wicket takers in this

SCORES IN BRIEF

KHULNA TIGERS: 121 all out in 19.5 overs (Rosaou 48, Mushfiqu 29; Rubel 3-17, Mehedi 3-29, Williams 2-21)

CHATTOTRAM CHALLENGERS: 124-4 in 18.1 overs (Simmons 36, Junaed 38, Imrul 30 not out; Frylinck 2-20)

Result: Chattogram Challengers won by six wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Mehedi Hasan Rana.

season's BBPL.

Was Rana enjoying this rivalry?

"Yes, I am," he replied before saying that he 'didn't focus on whether he was crossing Mustafizur's wicket haul'.

"I am not counting my wickets. I am going match by match and thinking of how to bowl well in each match," he replied during the post-match press conference yesterday.

His form has been a revelation this season. He said this time he was taking his chances in the BPL. "I was the same [before] but opportunities didn't come. I waited and was prepared so it's going well now."

"When bowling at a batsman I don't think about who he is and whether he is Amla or not. I am just looking to bowl to a certain standard and that's how I have gotten success," Rana said when asked about Amla's wicket.

Sorry Sylhet keep on losing

Gayle to join Chattogram on Monday

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet



The Sylhet leg of the ongoing Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) had begun in despair for Sylhet Thunder as they had already been eliminated from the playoffs race after losing seven of eight matches. It did not get any better for Herschelle Gibbs's men in their home town as they succumbed to three more defeats.

The Sylhet side has been riddled with controversy from the beginning and also one built to fail. Crises have come one after another and they have been under the microscope from the start. Reports surfaced at the beginning of the tournament that there were arguments between Sylhet's sponsors and team director Tanjil Chowdhury about irrelevant player selection during the players' draft.

Their first match brought further controversy when Krishmar Santokie bowled a no-ball so big that it immediately raised suspicions of spot-fixing. Mohammad Mithun, one of the locals, complained that a lack of opportunities did not help the local players to perform as West Indian recruits Andre Fletcher and Johnson Charles were favoured to bat in the top order.

Fletcher's form withered after he hit

an unbeaten ton at Chattogram -- Sylhet's only win so far -- while Rutherford failed to inspire. Sylhet coach Gibbs then revealed his frustration regarding communication issues with the players, saying that a lot of the local players 'didn't understand English'.

They still managed to play closest match of the tournament against Cumilla Warriors on Thursday, when the result was decided by a Super Over. The problems for this Sylhet outfit have remained the same from the start. The lack of cohesion, squad balance and intensity on the field was there for all to see. When the BBPL began with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) deciding to have no franchises and instead arrange the tournament on their own accord, it should have been a case of all teams being weighted equally based on strength but problems in Sylhet's management has shown the fallacy of that idea.

Meanwhile, Chattogram Challengers were at the other end of the spectrum having already sealed their playoffs berth on the last day of the Sylhet leg and will be boosted by the arrival of T20 kingpin Chris Gayle, set to arrive on Monday. Rajshahi had also confirmed their playoffs berth with a six-wicket win over Sylhet last night while Cumilla Warriors, Dhaka Platoon, Khulna Tigers and Rangpur Rangers will all vie for a playoff spot in the business of the tournament in Dhaka.



Rajshahi Royals' Afif Hossain guides the ball towards on side during his 46-run innings in yesterday's second BBPL encounter against Sylhet Thunder at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. Afif and Liton Das (36 runs) made a flying start in chase of Sylhet's 143, sharing 59 runs in 5.4 overs as Rajshahi won the match by six wickets.

PHOTO: **STAR**

Riyad's recovery seemingly on track

SPORTS REPORTER



Chattogram Challengers skipper Mahmudullah Riyad, who has been missing in action following a hamstring injury, is on track to make his return during the Dhaka leg of the ongoing Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL).

With the Sylhet phase of the seven-team tournament having ended yesterday, play will resume at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka on Tuesday. So far, Mahmudullah has only been able to feature in three matches due to his recurring hamstring injury, which was sustained during Bangladesh's first day-night Test against India in Kolkata in November last year.

Mahmudullah incurred the damage while batting during the historic Test and the 33-year-old has been unable to bat ever since.

He did seem to have recovered when, after missing the first two matches of the BBPL, he returned for Chattogram to play the following three fixtures. However, the injury recurred once again during the encounter with Dhaka Platoon at Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram on December 18.

While the team travelled to Sylhet, Mahmudullah opted to remain in Dhaka to undergo an intensive rehab programme with the BCB medical team.

Yesterday, the right-hander was seen participating a running session at the Bangladesh Cricket Board Academy Ground before bowling in the nets.

The Tigers' T20I skipper seemed optimistic about making his comeback soon.

"I want to come back in the Dhaka phase. I am doing both batting and bowling and there is no pain. Rest depends on the physio," said Mahmudullah.



Kohli joins debate: are four-day Tests a future or a farce?

Ever since the International Cricket Council (ICC) made the proposal to reduce the existing five-day format to a shorter four-day one for the 2023 World Test Championship, the cricketing world has been divided by discussions on the matter. India captain Virat Kohli was the latest to join the debate and strongly opposed the idea. Like Kohli, a number of current and former players have already shared their thoughts on the matter. Meanwhile, Cricket Australia (CA) said they will seriously consider the concept while the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) will back making it mandatory from 2023. The cash-rich Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) are yet to declare their stance.

NOT IN FAVOR

I am not a fan. I think the intent will not be right then because then you will speak of three-day Tests, I mean where do you end? Then you will speak of Test cricket disappearing. I don't endorse that at all.

-- **Virat Kohli**, India captain

Ridiculous ... I'm not a fan of four-day Test matches. I believe you'll get so many more draws and day five is crucial.

-- **Nathan Lyon** Australia off-spinner. Five days are the ultimate Tests. We may not have seen the results we saw in England [during the 2019 Ashes] without the extra day. It plays a lot with the wicket and brings spin into play, so I would like to see it stay as five days.

-- **Travis Head**, Australia batsman. There's always weather and other stuff around, you can lose a day. If you look at the Test matches that have gone five days and into a last session, they're some of the most exciting Tests in history - and there's been quite a few in the last year or so. -- **Neil Wagner** New Zealand pacer.

Five for me. It might be over four days anyway but five for me.

-- **Brett Lee**, Former Australia pacer I think this is going to gain some momentum. I wouldn't be surprised if this happens in the future they're doing a lot of work on it. But personally for me, I'm five

days as well.

-- **Michael Hussey**, Former Australia batsman.

I'm very much a traditionalist. I like the game the way it is.

-- **Glenn McGrath**, Former Australia pacer

IN FAVOR

I think the administrators and broadcasters have got to look at the best way to preserve Test cricket. It's the best form of the game, so how can we maintain that and keep moving the game on? If that's the option, moving it to four days, that has to be looked at.

-- **Jos Buttler**, England wicketkeeper batsman.

If you actually dissect a five-day Test match, the fifth day is costing the game a lot of money. Apart from those of us who already love Test cricket, I don't think Test cricket has done enough to reach a new audience. So we need to make it more relevant and more appealing.

-- **Michael Vaughan**, Former England captain.

Cricket took a major step forward in keeping its traditional format relevant with the introduction of day-night Tests. The next move should be a reduction in length from five days to four. It is the right length for Test matches in this era.

-- **Mark Taylor**, Former Australia captain.



India skipper Virat Kohli stretches during a practice session on the eve of their first T20I of a three-match series against Sri Lanka at Assam Cricket Association Stadium in Guwahati today. Kohli is on the verge of achieving massive T20I world record as the right-hander needs just one more run to surpass fellow teammate Rohit Sharma and become the highest run-scorer in the shortest format. Currently, Kohli is tied with Rohit, who has been rested from the series, for the top spot with both the players having scored 2633 runs. India are coming into this contest on the back of a T20I series victories against Bangladesh and West Indies respectively.

PHOTO: **AFP**