



Bashundhara Kings players celebrate Argentine striker Raul Becerra's (2nd from L) all-important goal against Chattogram Abahani yesterday's Walton Federation Cup match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Kings ride on Becerra

SPORTS REPORTER



Holder Bashundhara Kings advanced to the quarterfinals of the Walton Federation Cup as Group C champions following a hard-fought 1-0 win over Chattogram Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Argentine striker Raul Becerra scored the decisive goal four minutes into the second half to ensure Kings' third consecutive last-eight berth in season's curtain-raising tournament with an all-win record. Chattogram Abahani, too, qualified for the last eight, but behind Kings as runners-up from this group with a win and a defeat.

Having already confirmed quarterfinal berths beating last edition's runners-up Rahmatganj in their previous matches, both teams had the target of getting the better of the other. Star-studded Kings pressed from the start against a team they had lost 4-3 in the abandoned Bangladesh Premier League encounter last season.

Despite playing with one less foreigner, the port city outfit kept the defending champions at bay in the first half with an impenetrable four-man backline, which brilliantly thwarted every attack while generating moves to launch attacks on the break.

The first half was fought almost equally with neither side creating clear-cut chances except for one by Kings, who saw Mahbubur Rahman

Sufil provided with an excellent through-ball with only goalkeeper Mohammad Nayeem to beat in the stoppage time of the first half. But the national team forward tried to make space instead of chipping it over the goalkeeper, resulting in a missed opportunity.

Chattogram Abahani were on the backfoot immediately after the restart as their Brazilian forward Nixon Guylerme limped off with an injury. Kings started to press and earned a corner four minutes into the second half which resulted in the decisive goal. Brazilian forward Robson Da Silva curled the corner towards the far post and with Nayeem completely misjudging the flight of the ball, Becerra was at hand to head it in.

Sufil narrowly missed the target from a counter-attack eight minutes

later before Mannaf Rabbi failed to equalise for Chattogram Abahani on the hour-mark. Substitute Rakib Hossain had whipped in a terrific cross for Rabbi, who, despite a lunging dive, could not connect to the ball in front of goal.

Right-back Mohammad Rocky then delivered a well-judged cross for onrushing Charles Didier, but Kings' Iranian defender Khaled Shafei cleared the danger for a corner. Kings coach Oscar Bruzon sent Masuk Mia Jonny and Mohammad Ibrahim in place of Bipli Ahmed and Emon Mahmud to strengthen the forward-line, but there were no more goals in the game as the reigning champions left the pitch satisfied with a single-goal victory following their emphatic 3-0 win over Rahmatganj in their opening match.

SLC proposes shifting Tigers' tour to April

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board and Sri Lanka Cricket are in talks to reschedule the twice-postponed tour of Sri Lanka to April next year.

The tour of Sri Lanka was originally scheduled for July-August, 2020, with Bangladesh scheduled to play a three-Test series under the ICC Test Championship. The tour was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Later, the two boards were in discussions about arranging the series in October, but the BCB did not agree to the strict quarantine protocols set by the hosts of staying in a mandatory 14-day quarantine after the Tigers reached the island nation.

"We are in talks with the Sri Lankan cricket board and basically the proposal came from their side. When we were in talks about the Sri Lanka tour in the first stage --

which didn't happen at that time -- we were principally in agreement to play the Test series under the ICC Test Championship in Sri Lanka," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told reporters yesterday.

"We are working on finding a window according to the Future Tour Programme and at this stage, we are targeting this tour in April as both countries have an available slot during that time." Meanwhile, the board is also confident about hosting the West Indies in January in a bio-secure bubble by drawing from the experience of hosting two domestic competitions recently.

According to the BCB CEO, the board has been working on a smooth health safety plan to bring international cricket back to Bangladesh as the visitors are scheduled to play a two-match Test and three-match ODI series. Nizamuddin also said the BCB have almost finalised the Tigers' new batting consultant ahead of the West Indies series and will make an announcement soon.



Federer pulls out of Aus Open

REUTERS, MELBOURNE

Six-times champion Roger Federer has withdrawn from the Australian Open as he continues to work his way back to fitness from two knee operations earlier this year, his agent said.

The 39-year-old Swiss last played a competitive match at the season-opening Grand Slam in January before he had to undergo surgery on his knee. He later required a second operation.

The start of the 2021 Australian Open has been delayed for three weeks until February 8 due to the country's strict border rules to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Federer, who had been training at his off-season base in Dubai, had told organisers that the delayed start to the tournament could benefit him.

However, his agent Tony Godsick said Federer was not quite ready to return.

"Roger has decided not to play the 2021 Australian Open," Godsick said in a statement. "He has made strong progress in the last couple of months with his knee and his fitness."

"However, after consultation with his team, he decided that the best decision for him in the long run is to return to competitive tennis after the Australian Open."

Godsick added that he was looking to build a playing calendar for Federer from late February.

Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley said they were disappointed to lose Federer for next year's event.

India close in on victory

AGENCIES



A depleted Indian attack shrugged off an injury to paceman Umesh Yadav to rout Australia's batsmen and give themselves a platform for a series-levelling victory on day three of the second test on Monday.

With Umesh lost to a calf strain after lunch, spin-bowling all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja chipped in two wickets and seamers Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj took one apiece to leave Australia 133 for six at stumps, clinging to a lead of two runs at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Ajinkya Rahane paid tribute to his bowlers but said there was work still to be done. "The bowlers bowled really well and bowled in the right areas. We still got four wickets to go, the game is not over yet," he told broadcasters.

The Australia batting that failed to reach 200 in the two previous completed innings of this series lurched further into crisis today to be 6-133 and, with fine weather forecast for Melbourne over the remaining two days, in need of another

Adelaide-like miracle to prevent India levelling the battle 1-1.

Leading the side just days after a humiliating defeat in the series-opener at Adelaide Oval, Rahane earned praise from the cricket fraternity for the manner in which he handled his bowlers and his field placements at Melbourne.

"Captaincy is all about backing your instinct. You've got to back your gut feeling. Credit to the bowlers, they bowled in the right areas," he added.

India, anchored by stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane's inspirational century on day two, were bowled out for 326 before lunch in reply to Australia's first innings 195.

"It was really special. Getting a century always is. Still feel that my hundred against England at Lord's is my best," Rahane said after the day's play.

The unassuming Indian entered the Lord's Honours Board when he struck an elegant 103 off 154 balls during the Indian team's tour of England in 2014.

India's batsmen are highly unlikely to produce another Adelaide-style horror show where they dismissed for 36.

New Zealand tighten grip on Pakistan

REUTERS, WELLINGTON

New Zealand's bowlers took a couple of rain and hail shower delays in their stride and slowly broke down Pakistan's stubborn resistance to help the hosts take control of the first Test on Monday.

Faheem Ashraf was dismissed for 91, his highest Test score, just before the close of the third day's play at Bay Oval as Pakistan were bowled out for 239, still 192 runs behind New Zealand's 431.

The tourists had been facing the prospect of being asked to bat again after captain Mohammad Rizwan's run out but

Faheem saw them past the follow-on.



A MIGHTY KNOCK ENDS JUST SHY OF FULFILLMENT

Faf du Plessis celebrated his first hundred in two years by raising both arms in the air and unleashing a beaming smile in the direction of his teammates sitting outside the dressing room during third day of first Test against Sri Lanka in Centurion yesterday. He was just one run shy of his maiden double hundred but his career-best 199 in his first Test since giving up the captaincy gave South Africa a stellar first-innings total of 621 and a lead of 225.

PHOTO: AFP

'No plans to become a coach'

REUTERS, BARCELONA

Lionel Messi has no plans to become a coach when he retires from playing, saying he is more interested in being a director of football than working in the unforgiving world of football management.

The 33-year-old Argentine forward has about six months left on his contract with Barcelona and the football world is on tenterhooks over whether he will stay at the club where he has spent the last 20 years or look for a new challenge.

"I don't see myself as a coach, perhaps a sporting director to hire players I want or that the club that I'm at needs," Messi said in an interview with Spanish network La Sexta on Sunday.

Messi will wait until the end of the season before making his mind up but said he would like to return to Barca, regardless of what he does next.

"I would like to tell the Barca fans that I'm not sure whether I'll leave or not," he said.

Kohli, Perry dominate ICC decade honours

REUTERS, Dubai

India captain Virat Kohli topped two men's categories and Australia all-rounder Ellyse Perry swept the women's maiden test series victory in Australia under his captaincy two years ago as special moments. "I have relished all the battles in the last decade," Kohli said.

Kohli was declared the best male player of the decade, as well as the top ODI player. Prolific Australia batsman Steve Smith bagged the Test award to deny Kohli a clean sweep.

Perry, 30, was adjudged the best woman player as well as the premier ODI and Twenty20 player. "It has been tremendous to develop the women's T20 game and take it forward," Perry said. "Amazing to see where it's come from when I was introduced to it."

"It's a great honour for me to receive this award," Kohli, who returned from India's ongoing tour of Australia to attend the birth of his first child, said in

a video.

Kohli listed India's triumphs in the 2011 ODI World Cup and 2013 Champions Trophy as well as the team's maiden test series victory in Australia under his captaincy two years ago as special moments. "I have relished all the battles in the last decade," Kohli said.

"I played against some great bowlers in the past and continued to play some quality bowlers even today." "I take a lot of pride in competing against the best, testing myself out against the best in tough conditions."

Afghanistan spinner Rashid Khan was named the best male Twenty20 cricketer of the decade and former India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni bagged the spirit of cricket award.

A nomination panel shortlisted the candidates based on their performances between January, 2011 and October, 2020, and the winners were decided by votes from fans and experts.

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