

Column One

SPORTS TALK



Abahani add three more

Sports Reporter

Abahani Krira Chakra walked into the second round of the eight Asian Cup Winners' Cup championship when the sky blues recorded a 3-0 win over Old Benedictines of Sri Lanka in their return-leg match at the flood lit Mirpur Stadium yesterday.

Halilin Rifat, one of the two fresh Uzbek recruits of Abahani, scored all the goals in the first half to give the local giants an impressive 8-0 aggregate victory over the beleaguered Sri Lanka outfit, who had earlier guiped five goals against none in the first leg match at the same venue on Saturday.

Rifat, who marked his Dhaka football debut along with Matveyev Anatoly with a spectacular goal in the previous match, must owe a nervous Benedictine custodian Nassara for his rather fortuous hattrick in a match, which turned out to be an eye-sore battle between two unequal opponents.

The Uzbek midfielder struck the first goal from a free-kick even before the Sri Lankan Federation Cup champions could have settled in the middle. Thanks to some bizarre exhibition of goalkeeping from Nassara, who was only to blame for failing to tip the ball over the cross-piece.

An ever nervous Benedictine custodian then set the stage for yet another free-kick on the edge of the box, which Rifat did no mistake to send home with a powerful grounder in the ninth minute.

To add to the misery of his side, the first possible choice of the visitors under the bar, completed a nightmarish performance when he let loose a rather innocuous 30-yarder from Rifat in the 35th minute.

But apart from the shaky presence of Nassara, who was withdrawn by his dejected coach in the second half, Old Benedictines appeared a more cohesive force than their first head-on clash with Abahani.

On the other hand, Abahani after an impressive first match seemed to have lost their way

coach. "May be a rest for only 48 hours was not enough to go into action. But I must add that they seriously lacked the general fitness level," quipped Cerniai adding that his players were running out of gas.

But his counterpart Sooriya looked a relieved man in a post-match briefing claiming that his boys has played according to a plan.

"I don't know what went wrong with Nassara. But he is the best available goalkeeper of our team. But still I'm happy about the outcome of the match," said Sooriya.

"But I must say the others had done a very good job in neutralising Abahani in the midfield," claimed Sooriya.

Replies to a query the Benedictine manager Anthony, who was also attended the briefing, attributed the dwindling standard of football in Sri Lanka to a lack of patronisation and the meteoric rise of their cricketing brothers.

"The kids do not feel the interest to play football. They are more keen to play cricket nowadays after the World Cup triumph," said the soft-spoken manager.

The Benedictine manager, who had full praise for Abahani, however, said that they were misquoted by the local press about something which they did not utter on Saturday after a 5-0 thrashing.

"We did not come up with any lame excuse after the defeat. We were beaten fair and square on that night," claimed Anthony.

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against a defensive ploy adopted by Benedictines, who had hardly allowed their opponents any space to build the attacks.

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