

Star Sport

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Column One

SPORTS TALK



Azam Iqbal hammered his second hundred in the National League to propel Chittagong to a massive 335 for six against Rajshahi on the opening day of their three-day match at the Rangpur Cricket Garden yesterday.

The young opener, who scored 105 against Barisal early this month, hit an uncharacteristically aggressive 188 off 182 balls to take the League leaders at a position from where they can start an early celebration of the title with their two games of the League still remaining.

Chittagong started the tenth round needing four more points to take an unassailable lead in the six-team meet. Realistically, even a draw would suffice for their bid for the first-ever National League title. The chasing teams now only can go level with the runaway leaders if miracle happens, that is if they lose their next two matches and other aspiring Divisions-Dhaka and Sylhet--win theirs.

Although the visiting captain Minhalzul Abedin failed to call the coin correctly, Azam gave his side a dream start on a day, where the willow reigned

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super over the cherry.

The diminutive right-hander, known as slow starter, hit back at his critics with scintillating 188, which is also the highest individual knock in the League so far erasing the previous mark of 187 by Dhaka and national opener Javed Omar.

It is the tenth century of the League and the fifth for Chittagong. Akram Khan (118 not out against Khulna), his nephew Nafees Khan (173 against Sylhet) and Minhalzul Abedin (113 against Barisal) are the other centurions of the port city.

Azam gave Chittagong a flying start putting on 72 runs with Ehsanul Haq before the latter departed for 37. The dismissal of Ehsanul however paved the way for the most enterprising 127-run stand for the second wicket between Azam and one-down Jahangir, who chipped in with 50.

But that was the beginning of a tall Chittagong batting order as former national captain Akram Khan joined Azam to take the score 260. Azam eventually fell 18 runs short of what could have been a unique double century.

Akram scored a breezy 59 off 67 balls. The portly right-hander was out in the 86th over, but not before Chittagong reached

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Premier League last year, was the toast of his teammates on the day, former national right-arm seamer Saiful Islam with two vital wickets including the scalp of in-form Jamaluddin played the pivotal role in restricting Khulna to a meagre total.

After the good work of Fahim, Dhaka got off to a resounding start with Shahriar Hossain and Javed Omar producing 51 runs for the opening stand.

Shahriar was first to go after scoring a fluent 38 off 48 balls. Javed, who hammered a brilliant 187 in the previous match

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard on the opening day of the three-day National League match between Dhaka and Khulna at the Shams-ul-Haq Stadium, Jessore yesterday:

CHITTAGONG: First innings

	O	M	R	W
Azam run out	188			
Ehsanul c K Masood b Ripon	37			
Jahangir c Tomab b Mushfiq	50			
Akram c Rokon b Ripon	51			
Ehsanul c Mushfiq b Ripon	22			
Minhalzul batting	2			
S Mehmed c Farid b Ripon	1			
Extras: (b-1, lb-7, nb-10, w-11)	36			
Total: (For 6 wickets in 89.4 overs) 335				
Fall of wickets: 1-72; 2-199; 3-260; 4-321; 5-328; 6-335				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Aminul Islam	5.5	4	44	
Mushfiqur	12	2	40	1
Uzzal	6	0	22	
Ripon	24.4	3	77	4
Saifulullah	16	2	46	0
Mustadir	16.1	1	81	0

Total: (For 6 wickets in 89.4 overs) 335

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Bowler

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