



Muktijodha striker Kanchan (C) trying to dodge past Russel Kirra Chakra's Moroccan defender Burdeep during their super six match of the Nitol-Tata National League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Mukti march, Russel bow out

SPORTS REPORTER



Defending champions Muktijodha Sangsad stormed into the semifinals of the Fourth Nitol-Tata National Football League when they blanked Sheikh Russel Kirra Chakra 2-0 in yesterday's final phase match at the Sher-e-Bangla Mirpur National Stadium.

The second successive defeat in the super-six all but ended premier-ship runners-up Russel's path to the last four. The dark horse will now need a miracle to keep their hopes alive.

The result also confirmed Abahani's passage into the last four before the blood and thunder clash against Mohammedan Sporting Club at the same venue today.

Muktijodha sealed their victory

even before the game reached the halfway mark thanks to strikes by Saifur Rahman Moni and Saiful Islam in the 26th and 41st minute respectively.

The win increased Muktijodha's tally to ten points with a match in hand against Brothers Union. Abahani, who still have two games to play, were guaranteed a place among top four with seven points.

Moni celebrated his return to the field after serving a one-match ban for a red card in the previous match. The Reds, who were in their defensive shell throughout the first phase and even in their last game against Mohammedan that they won 2-1, but for a change they came out all guns blazing last afternoon. And it was no surprise they scored twice in the first 45 minutes on a waterlogged pitch.

Moni got his fifth goal in the run

when he tapped in a rebound after Kanchan's placing shot on a left-flank cross by captain Matur Munnna bounced off the sidepost.

Muktijodha then utilised a half chance to seal the game when man-of-the-match Saiful drilled in a low drive from the top of the box past the blind-sighted Russel goalkeeper after the defenders partly cleared a corner.

Russel had his chances too but they missed their Moroccan marksman Younnes, who was serving a one-match ban for two yellow cards. Bulbul and Asif threatened to score for the National League newcomers but both wasted two good moves.

While the Reds looked ran out of gas after the break Russel picked up the pace and pressed hard after the one-hour mark. Bulbul and substitute Maruf tore the Muktijodha defence during a ten-minute assault but their forwards wasted five easy

chances including Jalal and Royal failing to beat national number one goalkeeper Aminul in one-on-one situations.

Russel KC coach Wajed Gazi rued the missed chances in the second half and said that he badly missed his 'finisher' Younnes.

"We should have scored from those chances. I admit that our boys did not compete well in the first half but we came back strongly in the second. I think we are out of the race," said a frustrated Gazi whose side have only one point with a match left against Chittagong Mohammedan.

"So many things will have to go our way that I don't see any chance of us qualifying for the semifinals," he added.

Muktijodha coach Shafiqul Islam Manik was happy to see his boys make it to the last four with a

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Shantoo brimming with confidence



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under 17 football team's coach Shahidur Rahman Shantoo is confident that his boys had what it takes to make a mark in the AFC Under-17 Football Championship in Japan next week.

The former national custodian has prepared the U-19s for the last one year for the 16-team final round of the competition. The team leaves Dhaka tomorrow for Tokyo. Bangladesh have been placed in Group D. Their first match is against Uzbekistan on September 5 followed by meetings with Qatar and Iraq on September 7 and 9 respectively.

Shantoo, who harbours bitter memories of a brief unsuccessful stint with the predominantly Thai 23 squad at the Islamabad SAF Games is still disturbed by that experience. But he believes his

teenaged charges will make him forget that disappointment.

"I can assure you that they will not stand with hands on waist after only forty minutes like some of their senior brothers. They will fight all the way in the competition because they are superior in stamina and technique than the national players," said Shantoo who guided the side to the finals with wins over two legs against Kyrgyzstan last October.

Assistant coach Hasanuzzaman Khan Bablu also echoed Shantoo's optimism.

"I have been involved in coaching for the last fifteen years and from my experience I can tell you that this team has the ability to challenge and play neck-to-neck against any senior combination of Bangladesh."

Shantoo was not unduly concerned about the team's performance in warm-up matches in Thailand where they lost three games out of four.

"We gained experience in Thailand where our focus was on finding the right combination,"

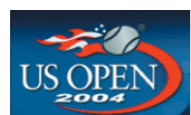
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WOW WHAT A POINT! World number one Roger Federer of Switzerland shows his approval against Spain's Albert Costa in their US Open first round match in Flushing Meadows, New York on August 30.

Serena, Federer fly

AFP, New York



Former world number one Serena Williams' march towards reclaiming her US Open title began in stunning fashion on Monday when she overpowered Sandra Kleinova 6-1, 6-3 in a first round match.

Williams made quick work of Kleinova, taking just 53 minutes to finish off the 26-year-old from the Czech Republic in front 23,000 at the Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"I think everyone out here would prefer to win all their matches really easy," Williams said.

"I know I do. It saves my energy."

There were no major upsets on opening day of the 17.8 million dollar Grand Slam event as men's top seed Roger Federer hammered out a 7-5, 6-2, 6-4 win over 2002 French Open champ Albert Costa and sixth seed Andre Agassi

defeated Robby Ginepri 7-6, 6-4, 6-2.

Williams advances to the second round where she will square off with American countrywoman Lindsay Lee-Waters.

The 22-year-old Williams had more winners (35-3) and aces (7-0) than Kleinova and won 83 percent of her first serve points.

"I am finally getting to a point where I'm actually playing better and focussing better," Williams said.

"I think I performed at a decent level."

This was Williams' first singles match in a month as she embarks on a mission to re-emerge as the best female player in the world.

"This (US Open) is my favourite (Grand Slam tournament) because it's the first one I ever won," she said.

Williams, who has won this event twice before (2002, 1999), skipped last year's US Open after undergoing surgery to repair a damaged left knee that kept her sidelined until March.

With both Serena and her sister Venus absent due to injuries, Belgium's Justine Henin-Hardenne captured the 2003 title.

Serena made a last-minute decision to pull out of the Athens Olympics but said her knee started feeling better the day after she decided not to get on a plane to Europe.

Asked how her knee felt during Monday's match, she said: "I am feeling pretty good out there."

Serena, who lately has been spending more time talking about what she plans to wear on the court than how she plans to beat her opponents, hasn't won a major in over a year.

On Monday, she warmed up with a pair of knee-high black boots but decided not to discard them for a regular pair of sneakers in the match.

"It is like a rebel look. I am being really rebellious," she said.

Federer avenged one of his few

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Dhaka derby at Mirpur

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani Krira Chakra and Mohammedan Sporting Club will renew their rivalry today in the final phase of the fourth Nitol-Tata National Football League.

State-run Bangladesh Television will provide live coverage of the Dhaka derby from the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur at 4pm.

But the mood in either camp ahead of clash was contrasting.

While Mohammedan will consider it a do-or-die battle Abahani could relax with a place in the last four guaranteed.

Smarting from a 1-2 defeat against Muktijodha in their last game the Black and Whites need to avoid another defeat to keep their hopes alive in the last four.

Mohammedan captain Jewel Rana knows the task ahead and said that his side was only thinking about victory.

"We need a win and we are ready to achieve it. May be the odds are against us but we are playing good football. We might have lost to Muktijodha but it won't be everyday when we play well and still end up on the losing side," said the ageless central defender.

The two sides last met in the Premier League twice and honours were shared with Mohammedan winning the first-leg 1-0 and Abahani responding 2-1 in the return-leg.

But after having won the first match against Sheikh Russel Kirra Chakra the Sky Blues are the more confident of the two sides.

"My players are in good touch and definitely deserve to be favorites. But our only concern is biased refereeing. We want fair judgement on the field," said Abahani manager Monem Munnna.

He however lamented the absence of Nigerian striker Colly Barnes, who will miss the match because of injury.

Easy in the end for Tigers



INTERNET SOURCE

Bangladesh were steered to victory in their second ICC Champions Trophy warm-up game in Ireland on Monday by the man known as 'Pilot'.

Khaled Mashud won the acclaim of his countrymen with a maiden Test century against West Indies in St Lucia in June as the newest Test-playing nation came of age with a deserved draw.

Of less significance but still important to Bangladesh's morale as they prepare for the ICC in England was his rescue act at Limavady with his side on the verge of collapse at 116 for six against some spirited Irish bowling.

Nafis Iqbal, hero of the previous day with a century, was one of those who went cheaply as Ireland threatened to repeat their early summer victories over Surrey and the West Indies.

Wicketkeeper Mashud shared a stand of 79 with Mohammad Rafique to put his team on course for a final score of 231 all out, which ultimately proved beyond the Irish batsmen.

Mashud was undefeated on 51 at the close, while Rafique will be pleased with his defiant 42 before becoming Gordon Cooke's second victim.

Ireland will rue a series of dropped catches by wicketkeeper Jonathan Bushe, the crucial one coming with Rafique on 13.

A wicket then would have left Bangladesh on 144 for seven and staring defeat in the face.

Medium pacer Cooke had figures of five for 55 after mopping up the Bangladeshi tail and off-spinner Kyle McCullan weighed in with three for 33 to give the tourists a serious examination of their batting ahead of the ICC Trophy.

Accuracy, however, was not an Irish feature as they conceded 40 extras, 30 of them from wides or no-

balls, in the blustery early conditions.

Cooke will be particularly pleased with his haul. He came out of retirement to join the Ireland squad for the two games with West Indies this summer but injured his ankle in the first match and has struggled to regain his place since then.

In reply, Ireland were in a promising position at 130 for four after 33 overs but were worn down by the Bangladesh attack and collapsed to 177 all out, with Jeremy Bray top-scoring on 46.

Pick of the Bangladeshi bowlers was Khaled Mahmud with four for 34, while Rafique's two for 30, coupled with his bright batting, earned him the man-of-the-match award.

It was Bangladesh's second win in two days on their Irish tour, though considerably more comfortable than the scrambled last-ball victory the previous day at Stormont. Bangladesh continue their warm-ups with two more one-day matches against Scotland today and tomorrow in Edinburgh.

Ireland coach Adrian Birrell said: "On both days we had great opportunities to make a mark, but catches were dropped at vital times and that cost us dearly."

"It's a harsh lesson, but we have to be sharper in the field. We didn't reach the standards we have achieved this summer."

"It has been a good season, with

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PHOTO COURTESY: BARRY CHAMBERS (CRICKETIRELAND) Mohammad Rafique receiving the man-of-the-match award from Dessie O'Donnell of the series sponsors Gallery Bar and former Irish President Roy Torrens after the second one-day match against Ireland at Limavady on August 30.

Lanka keep it clean



REUTERS/AFP, Colombo

Upul Chandana and Sanath Jayasuriya shared eight wickets as Sri Lanka cruised to a 49-run victory and a 5-0 series whitewash against South Africa in the fifth and final one-day international on Tuesday.

The confident hosts seized control of the match soon after being put into bat on a flat batting pitch, piling up a huge 308 for eight in their 50 overs, before bowling out South Africa for 259 in 48.1 overs.

Opener Jayasuriya top scored with 79 from 85 balls and was well supported by Saman Jayantha (51), Kumar Sangakkara (72) and Mahela Jayawardene (39).

South Africa soon fell behind the required run rate after the early loss of Herschelle Gibbs, who was bowled off his inside edge for 11, and some tight work from Sri Lanka's new bowlers.

Sri Lanka's clean sweep condemned South Africa to their tenth successive defeat. The last and only time that South Africa lost 10 straight matches was in 1994 under Kepler Wessels' captaincy.

Jacques Kallis led a fight back, first adding 48 runs with skipper Graeme Smith, who was eventually run out for 25 by a brilliant flat throw from the boundary by Chandana.

Kallis then added 114 from 137 balls with Jacques Rudolph (48), frustrating Sri Lanka's underdog of slow bowlers and giving the tourists a sniff of an improbable victory.

But leg spinner Chandana knocked South Africa back when Rudolph was caught at short mid-wicket and Mark Boucher, who crashed 24 from 19 balls, was stumped.

When Kallis, who finished with 101 from 127 balls having hit seven fours and one six, top edged a slog-sweep with 88 runs still needed from 47 balls the game was effectively over.

Chandana snapped up another two wickets to finish with career best five for 61, while Jayasuriya took three for 48 after mopping up the tail.

Sri Lanka started the morning badly, with Avishka Gunawardene chopping the third ball onto his stumps, but they then stole the initiative as Jayasuriya and Jayantha added 125 in 132 balls.

The second-wicket pair started cautiously, scoring 13 runs from the first five overs, but then exploded as 79 runs were plundered off the next 10 overs.

After the fielding restrictions were lifted, the run rate dipped slightly as South Africa turned to their slower bowlers and Sri Lanka consolidated on their fine start.

Jayantha, playing because normal skipper Marvan Atapattu

needed to be with his sick young daughter, was finally caught behind off a Lance Klusener out-swing.

Jayasuriya and Sangakkara maintained the momentum, adding 39 runs in 38 balls, before Jayasuriya popped up a simple catch to short cover off Graeme Smith's part-time off breaks.

But Sangakkara and Jayawardene, who ticked along comfortably at a shade under a run-a-ball before launching an all-out assault in the final ten overs, kept going with an 84-run stand.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard of the fifth and final one-day international between Sri Lanka and South Africa at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground on Tuesday:

SRI LANKA
Gunawardene b Pollock 0

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Pollock	10	0	58	2
Ntini	6	1	36	0
Langeveldt	7	0	31	3
Smith	7	0	48	1
Boje	9	1	41	0
Klusener	6	0	42	1

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MAN-OF-THE-SERIES: Sri Lanka batsman Kumar Sangakkara flicks on way to scoring a solid 72 against South Africa in the fifth and final one-day international in Colombo yesterday.

Bashar's departure delayed

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricket captain Habibul Bashar could not leave for Australia yesterday as he did not get the visa.

"The necessary medical documents from my hospital in Melbourne have not yet arrived. Those papers are required for the visa. So until I get them I can not say for certain when I might be able to fly," said a frustrated Bashar who is due to undergo an operation on his injured right thumb in Melbourne.

The country's premier batsman, who had to miss the ICC Champions Trophy in England because of the injury, is desperately looking forward to the surgery as he wants to return to action before a grueling international schedule at home starting with New Zealand's tour in October.

NatWest Challenge Eng, India want to buck trends

AFP, Nottingham

England cannot win a one-day international batting first while India coach John Wright reckons his team are having trouble chasing totals.

So it seems something will have to give when the teams meet in a three-match NatWest Challenge limited-overs contest, a warm-up for next month's ICC Champions Trophy tournament in England, later this week.

Wednesday sees the start of the mini-series, here at Trent Bridge, with India already minus Sachin Tendulkar.

The master batsman has been suffering with tennis elbow and after a practice session on Monday was ruled out of the series.

Tendulkar missed the triangular series in Holland because of the problem with his left elbow but has not been ruled out of the Champions Trophy, which starts on September 10.

Team manager Goutam Dasgupta said no replacement had been sought for Tendulkar at Trent Bridge, or at The Oval on Friday and Lord's on Sunday.

And in the likes of Virender Sehwag, Venkatesh Laxman and Rahul Dravid, not to mention captain Sourav Ganguly and hard-hitting youngsters Yuvraj Singh and Mohammad Kaif, India have plenty of batsmen who can turn a match on its head.

"Injuries are a part of our life... we've won big cricket matches without Sachin before," said Wright

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What to WATCH

- BTV**
Nitol-Tata National Football League
Abahani vs Mohammedan
Live at 4:00 pm
- ESPN**
NatWest Challenge
India vs England
First ODI
Live at 3:45 pm
- STAR Sports**
US open Tennis
Men's & Women's First Rd
Live at 5:00 am
NatWest Challenge
India vs England
First ODI
Live at 3:45 pm (Hindi)
US open Tennis
Men's 1st Rd & Women's 2nd Rd
Live at 1:00 am (Thursday)