

Sharif returns and ruins Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammad Sharif made a dream return to competitive cricket after recovering from a career-threatening groin injury to inspire Bangladesh Biman to a 34-run victory against Abahani in their opening match of the Green Delta Premier Division Cricket League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The 19-year-old pacer from Narayanganj, who has been out of action for two and a half years, celebrated his first competitive match with a run-a-ball 68 and then took two vital Abahani wickets to ensure an intriguing finish.

The battle of the two local giants started brightly for Abahani when they had Biman at one stage reeling at 92-7 before Sharif staged a magnificent recovery operation in company with national all-rounder Musfiqur Rahman.

The pair added 92 runs for the eighth wicket as the national flag carrier eventually finished on 219.

Coming into bat at number eight

Sharif took the Abahani spin trio to the sword, hitting six fours and a huge six over long-on off left-arm spinner Manzurul Islam, the lone national cap for the Dhanmondi outfit.

Musfiq on the other hand played a responsible knock of 55 off 70 balls. Manzurul however had the last laugh when he removed both batsmen in successive overs.

But more Sharif surprises were to come when Abahani, after a bumpy start, looked set to topple the modest target with Naimur Rahman and newcomer Hasanuzzaman Rosel (off 91 balls) at the crease.

Naimur, who is leading Abahani after Akram Khan parted ways with the club he has served for 16 years, could not have asked for a better start with a captain's knock of exactly 50.

While Sharif basked in glory, it was another disappointing day for national star. Mohammed Ashraful scored only four before becoming the first of the three run out victims in the Biman innings.

Ashraful was the third wicket to fall with Biman on 23 after Gazi Alamgir sent back both openers Rashedul Haque (14) and Sajjad Ahmed Shipon (1).

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Sanwar to break Abahani's backbone.

Manzurul scored a sedate 28 off 41 balls but the run-rate kept on climbing and the Abahani innings eventually folded in 47.4 overs.

Sharif, who was later named man-of-the-match, was excited with his first real performance back from injury.

"My coaches have always inspired me to concentrate on my batting and I did that during the two-and-a-half year gap due to injury. It was a reward for my hard work. I think I'm fully recovered and also enjoyed bowling in a big match," said Sharif, whose last international appearance was against Pakistan in Chittagong in 2002.

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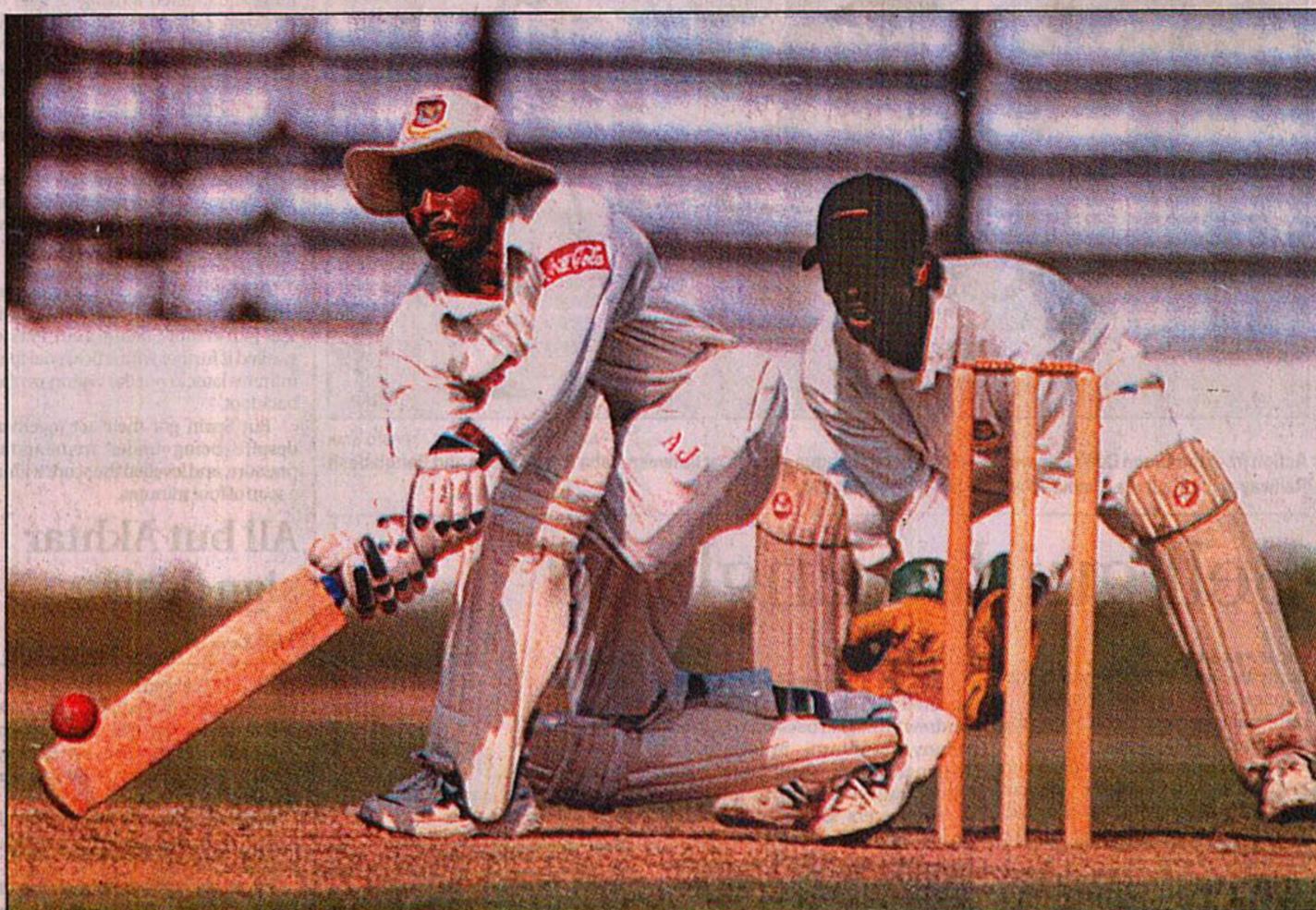


PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN
THE NEW IDENTITY: Mohammad Sharif, the Bangladesh paceman who has recently returned to competitive cricket after more than a year out through injury, sweeps on his way to a decisive 68 at number nine against Abahani yesterday.

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Coming into bat at number eight

Kallis ton steadies SA

Cricket

AFP, Kolkata

brought India back in the match by getting the ball to reverse-swing.

South Africa were also lucky as de Bruyn was ruled not out by umpire Simon Taufel when replays clearly showed he had nicked a ball to wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik off Harbhajan Singh when he was on just two.

Earlier, left-hander Rudolph and Kallis did the repair-work after the cheap dismissals of openers Smith (zero) and Andrew Hall (seven) had reduced South Africa to 21-2.

Smith threw away his wicket chasing a fairly wide ball to give Patahan a success on only the second

delivery of the match.

Hall, who scored a century in the drawn opening Test in Kanpur, went a little later when Zaheer induced an edge and Karthik took his second catch to reduce the visiting side to 21-2.

Patahan, who took 3-61, was brought in for left-arm spinner Murali Kartik in the match.

For South Africa, Amla made his debut while all-round Justin Ontong got to play his second Test. Martin Van Jaarsveld and Robin Peterson made way for them.

Smith passed a fitness test

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Young Pegasus joined the Premier Cricket League's giant-killers' list when they snatched a thrilling two-wicket win over title chasers Brothers Union at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Despite fielding three Pakistani recruits, including captain of the Athens Olympic team, the title aspirants failed to make a flying start like Abahani, Mohammedan and Mariner Youngs.

Defender Yamin Hossain salvaged the giants netting the all-important goal in the 38th minute from a penalty-corner.

In was a dull and drab first half. Usha got only one clear chance to break the deadlock before the breather but Moududur Rahman Shuvo missed an open net chance. Nadeem set up Shuvo but the Usha captain's hit went wide of the mark with only Railway custodian Imran Hossain to beat.

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