

MSC-Abahani crucial NFL tie today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Dhaka giants Abahani and Mohammedan Sporting Club meet in a crucial second round match of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League at the Rangpur Stadium today.

Placed in Group-B -- the so-called group of death also involving Muktioddha Sangsad -- the two sides renew their rivalry with the target of winning their only trophy in a prize-less season.

Abahani have not lost to their archrivals in four meetings this season and look in a better shape as they have lost only three players to the national squad. They will be boosted by the return of fullback Wali Faisal, who was not considered for the Pakistan-bound SAFF squad.

Mohammedan, on the other hand, have five players on national duty. Although Faisal Mahmud and Asad were released on Thursday, the two have yet to contact the Black and Whites management till last night.

Abahani coach Amlesh Sen told yesterday that absence of three key players to the national team would not affect much. He, however, was worried about in-form striker Bulbul who trained with fever.

Bulbul, a guest player from Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra, scored twice against the national team in an exhibition match and slammed a hat-trick in their 5-1 first-round win against Feni Soccer Club.

In case Bulbul is ruled out for today's game, Abahani will rely on four foreign players, defender Marshall, midfielders Ndem and Egir Mohammed and forward Ibrahim.

And it would turn into a battle of Africans as Mohammedan also will field four from the Dark Continent.

Mohammedan, who drew goalless with Muktioddha in the first match, have strengthen their squad by including Nigerian players Divine and Francis, who inter

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Army, Town Club split points

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Army and Khulna Town Club shared a dull and goalless draw in the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League at the Rangpur Stadium yesterday.

Army, looking forward to reach the Super Six from Group-A, came to the match on the back of a 1-0 win over Kacharipara SC but had to remain satisfied with one point.

For Khulna Town Club, who were downed 2-0 at home by holders Brothers Union, it was the first point in the run.

Jumratul Islam Mithu of Town Club was adjudged man-of-the-match.

Three new faces in SAFF squad

Cruciani picks final 20

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Argentine coach Diego Cruciani will take six strikers to Pakistan in Bangladesh's defence of the SAFF Championship which kicks off in Karachi four days later.

The Bangladesh national coach, who delayed the announcement of the final squad for minor injury problems, finalised his 20-member team for the eight-nation meet over Thursday's dinner at the BKSP.

Expectedly, fullback Wali Faisal, midfielder Faisal Mahmud and goalkeeper Atiqul Islam Tarek were dropped but Brothers Union's young forward Zahid Hossain Emily was given the opportunity to make his national debut. Midfielder Asad was the other player dropped from the 24-member list.

Emily, who has scored some wonderful goals for the Premier League champions, is the youngest

member of the squad that includes mostly tested players. Mohammedan's Arman Aziz and Brothers' Abul Hossain are the other freshmen.

According to the team management, the in-form marksman is capable of beating any of Cruciani's favourite striking pair, Farhad and Kanchan. Shahajuddin Tipu, whose fabulous strike against India in the 1999 SAF Games semifinal helped

Bangladesh ultimately win the gold medal, has returned to the national fold after five years for his experience and big-match temperament. Alfaz and Ujjal are the other two specialist attackers in the side but Cruciani has other jobs for them.

The Argentine, who took charge of the national team about two months earlier, prefers a 4-3-1-2 line-up and Alfaz and Ujjal fit in as the role of a 'free-midfielder'. In the first phase of training, he started with Ujjal but Alfaz is now his first choice in the crucial attacking midfielder position with Arman, Joy and Matiuur Munna beside the veteran.

Skipper Joy, however, remains an injury concern. The defensive midfielder is nursing a hurt knee and is under treatment.

Jubair Nipu, who has been assisting Cruciani as local expert, informed yesterday that Joy has

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SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Aminul Haque, Biplab Bhattacharyya; **Defenders:** Faisal Ahmed, Mohammad Sujan, Rajani Kanta Barman, Parvez Babu, Firoz Mahmud Titu, Nazrul Islam, Hassan Al Mamun; **Midfielders:** Arif Khan Joy (captain), Arman Aziz, Arman Mia, Matiuur Munna, Abul Hossain; **Forwards:** Alfaz Ahmed, Mehdi Hasan Ujjal, Ariful Kabir Farhad, Shahajuddin Tipu, Rokonzaman Kanchan and Zahid Hossain Emily.



PHOTO: STAR

Sri Lanka U-19 batsman Sachithra Serasingha flicks the ball during their tri-series match against England at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium on Friday.

First day washed out

Ganguly return delayed

Cricket

AFP, Chennai

Sourav Ganguly's return to international cricket was put on hold after heavy rain washed out the opening day's play in the first Test between India and Sri Lanka here on Friday.

The rain, a prelude to a cyclonic

storm hovering in the region, pounded the Chepauk ground since Thursday night and drenched the uncovered parts of the outfield.

Umpires Daryl Harper and Mark Benson called off play during the scheduled lunch break at 11.30am when the weather showed no signs of clearing.

Both camps will not announce their playing XIs till just before the toss, but Indian team sources told

AFP that former captain Ganguly was certain to play.

Ganguly, sacked as captain and also from the one-day squad, will bat at number six, leaving both middle-order batsmen Yuvraj Singh and Mohammad Kaif out of the Test, the sources said.

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NAT'L CRICKET LEAGUE Third round begins today

SPORTS REPORTER

The third round of the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea Seventh National Cricket League will begin today with the one-day fixtures at three different venues across the country.

Star-studded Dhaka are the only side to go into the third round with an all-win record but they will definitely face more challenge from formidable Chittagong at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

First-class champions Dhaka are jointly leading the one-day table with Rajshahi securing maximum four points but the formers are the only team to win both their previous four-day fixtures to enjoy solo lead with 12 points.

When Dhaka enjoy their third successive match in their own den, Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar led Khulna got the first opportunity to play at home against pointless Barisal at Khulna Divisional Stadium. Rajshahi and Sylhet lock horns at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra.

Khulna outplayed Rajshahi in just over two days in the previous round to taste their first victory in the first-class competition while Sylhet had double delight against Chittagong after their first round disappointment against Dhaka.

ACA worried about Australia's tour of Bangladesh

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The first historic Test tour by world champions Australia to Bangladesh scheduled for next year has cast doubts over the escalation of terrorist bombings.

Cricket Australia and the Australian Cricketers Association will monitor events, the players' union is becoming increasingly concerned about developments, reported Fox Sports.

"There's no doubt that we think the risk has escalated in recent times," said ACA chief executive Paul Marsh said.

"There has never been suicide bombings in Bangladesh until recently and that's a huge concern for us, as is the fact they have occurred in the two areas where the matches will be played."

Australia are due to play a Test match and two one-day internationals in Dhaka as well as a Test and one-day in Chittagong between April 9 and April 28. Although it is more than five years since Bangladesh were granted official Test status by the ICC and almost eight years since they achieved one-day international legitimacy, Australia have yet to tour Bangladesh for a full series.

Representatives from Cricket Australia, the ACA and security experts will conduct a pre-tour inspection of conditions and facilities in Bangladesh late next month or early February. A decision is then expected to be made on whether the three-week tour goes on.

Concerns also exist as to whether the construction of a new

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England in dire straits

Cricket

AFP, Lahore

Ashes-winners England faced Friday their first series defeat in nearly two years after Pakistan's batsmen broke several records on their way to a massive 636-8 declared.

At stumps on the fourth day of the final Test in Lahore, England were still 227 runs adrift and facing the serious prospect of an innings defeat after Pakistani paceman Shoaib Akhtar claimed two vital scalps.

Ian Bell was unbeaten on 60 with all-rounder Paul Collingwood on 37 when bad light stopped play with 23 overs remaining and England, who could only muster 288 in their first innings, on 121-2.

England have won six consecutive Test series under Michael Vaughan's captaincy but trail 1-0 against Pakistan in the current three-match series after losing the opening Test by 22 runs at Multan.

The second Test ended in a draw at Faisalabad.

Pakistan's batsmen were supreme on Thursday and Friday with Mohammad Yousuf leading the way with a career-best 223, his third double-century in 62 Tests.

Twenty-three-year-old wicket-keeper Kamran Akmal hit 154, his second Test century, and skipper Inzamamul Haq was run out just before the declaration three short of his third consecutive ton.

In contrast, England struggled as they lost Marcus Trescothick for nought and skipper Michael Vaughan for 13 thanks to an incisive opening spell from Akhtar.

Bell and Collingwood steadied the innings with an unbeaten 91-run partnership, but their team still face an uphill task if they are to save the game on the final day on Saturday.

"It still is a very good wicket to bat

on and our target is to bat long for the whole day tomorrow," said Bell.

"The pitch dries out quickly in the morning and it is not easy to turn the ball. Honestly, we did not get enough runs in the first innings but we will try and fight tomorrow."

Bell, struck on the forearm by an Akhtar beamer, survived some anxious moments before reaching his fifth Test half-century which included nine fours.

England began their second

innings shakily as they lost Trescothick, trapped leg-before for a second-ball duck. Akhtar then deceived Vaughan with a slower full toss and took an easy return catch.

Pakistan earlier feasted on a listless England attack, plundering 190 in less than 29 overs after resuming at 446-5. Their total was the highest by a Pakistan team

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PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan skipper Inzamamul Haq plays a pull shot during his 97-run knock on the fourth day of the third and final Test against England at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore on Friday.

Milestones for Inzy

Cricket

AGENCIES, Lahore

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq, who became the 14th player in cricketing history to score 8,000 Test runs on Friday, is keen to carry on playing for another two years.

"I am very happy to reach this milestone of 8,000," the 35-year-old said.

"It is a good feeling and I want to continue adding more runs to my tally for my team until the 2007 World Cup."

Inzamam, retired hurt on 35 after being struck on the right wrist by fast bowler Steve Harmison on Wednesday, achieved the milestone when he reached 45 with a straight six off Udal.

Having made his Test debut against England at Birmingham in 1992, he became only the second Pakistani batsman after former captain Javed Miandad to join the 8,000-club.

Two years ago Inzamam, strug-

gling for form, decided to retire from cricket but a century against Bangladesh and the chance to captain his country persuaded him to play on.

Since then he has become his country's most prolific centurion and fell just three runs shy of extending his record to 25 on Friday as his side turned the screw on England.

Inzamam was run out for 97 on

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TOP RUN-GETTERS

Name	Country	Matches	Runs	100s
Brian Lara	West Indies	121	11,204	31
Allan Border	Australia	156	11,174	27
Steve Waugh	Australia	168	10,927	32
Sachin Tendulkar	India	123	10,134	34
Sunil Gavaskar	India	125	10,122	34
Graham Gooch	England	118	8,900	20
Javed Miandad	Pakistan	124	8,832	23
Viv Richards	West Indies	121	8,540	24
Alec Stewart	England	133	8,463	15
David Gower	England	117	8,231	18
Geoff Boycott	England	108	8,114	22
Gary Sobers	West Indies	93	8,032	26
Inzamamul Haq	Pakistan	105	8,052	24
Mark Waugh	Australia	128	8,029	20



DD Sports

India vs Sri Lanka

First Test, Day Two

Live at 10:00 am

TEN Sports

Pakistan vs England

Third Test, Day Five

Live at 10:50 am

ESPN

New Zealand vs Australia

First ODI

Live at 7:00 am

English Premier Football League

Liverpool vs Wigan

Live at 6:40 pm

Bolton vs Arsenal

Live at 8:55 pm

Man United vs Portsmouth

Live at 11:10 pm

STAR Sports

English Premier Football League

Chelsea vs Middlesbrough

Live at 8:55 pm

DAY'S EVENT

National Cricket League (One Day)
Dhaka vs Chittagong
Venue: Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium
Rajshahi vs Sylhet
Venue: Bogra District Stadium
Khulna vs Barisal
Venue: Khulna Div Stadium
U-19 Tri-Series Cricket
Bangladesh vs England
Venue: FCS



PHOTO: AFP

India captain Rahul Dravid inspects the rain-washed pitch on the first day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai on Friday.

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