

## NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE Abahani Group B champions

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani emerged Group B champions when they handed Rangamati Mohammedan Sporting Club a 5-0 thrashing in their final second round match of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Double strikes from Ghanaian striker Awudu Ibrahim and Moroccan medio Ighir Mohammed powered the popular sky blues, who had already reached the Super Six, to register their third victory while Abdullah Parvez netted the other.

Abahani finished with ten points from four outings and they were followed by second-placed Muktiyodha Sangsod, who almost confirmed their Super Six berth with five points from three matches.

The other Dhaka giants Mohammedan bagged four points from three matches and they will play their last group match against Feni Soccer Club, who also kept their hopes alive securing three points from as many matches.

In the day's match, although the Dhamondi outfit dominated the first-half 4-0, but they had to wait until the 34th minute to break the deadlock when Ibrahim's close-range shot found the net.

It was Ibrahim again who then took only one minute to double the margin with an angular shot while after two minutes an unmarked Ighir Mohammed connected an Ibrahim right-side cross to further extend the lead.

Ighir made it 4-0 five minutes before the breather when he headed home a Parvez left-flank corner.

After the break, Parvez sealed the fate of the match in the 74th minute with a placing shot.

Munshiganj Samabesh Club meet Bangladesh Army in a crucial Group A encounter at 6:30pm at the same venue today.



PHOTO: STAR  
Bangladesh football captain Arif Khan Joy speaks to reporters while team leader Ashrafuddin Chunnun (C) and coach Diego Cruciani look on during a press conference at the BFF Bhavan on Wednesday.

## Joy ready to start anew

### Bangladesh, Pakistan meet in Asia Cup qualifier today

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will take today's Asia Cup qualifying play-off match against Pakistan as an opportunity to erase their final disappointment against India in the SAFF Championship in Karachi last week.

The battered and bruised boys of Argentine coach Diego Cruciani who returned home on Tuesday night from Pakistan will also be out to prove that their meek surrender to India in a 2-0 defeat on Saturday was one of those rare bad days.

The match kicks off at 4pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

"Honestly speaking, our team morale was shattered after the final debacle. So, it is a challenge for us to beat Pakistan again like we did in the SAFF Championship semifinals and get back the rhythm," said Bangladesh captain Arif Khan Joy at a press conference yesterday.

ference yesterday.

"It is impossible to erase the bitter memories, but we can still find some solace if we can win tomorrow's match against Pakistan," said the midfield workhorse.

Bangladesh eliminated Pakistan in the second semifinal with a solitary goal victory but this time they need a better result before travelling back to Karachi for the return leg on December 26.

Cruciani, who had earlier said that his boys had gone through an absolute 'bad day' in the final against India, once again dismissed that his team was a choker. The Argentine however admitted that the whole team collapsed under pressure while playing four games inside a week.

"We played our worst game in the SAFF final and India played their best match but I hope my boys will bounce back against Pakistan tomorrow. I still believe the players have improved a lot in recent times," said Cruciani.

The 42-year-old admitted that he

only understood after the final disaster that none of his charges was mentally strong enough like a Latin American player and that's why they failed to play their natural game under pressure.

"It was a mistake that I thought the Bangladeshi players were mentally tough like the players of my country but now I understand that I need a lot of work to do on this area. I promise you that you will see a different Bangladesh team after one year. It is not easy to get accustomed to the beautiful Latin-style of football but they are learning it quickly," he said.

Cruciani also promised that he would present a vibrant new batch in the national team before the AFC Challenge Cup trophy in Bangladesh next March.

While Bangladesh exuded confidence to win the home leg, Pakistan manager UF Tariq Lutfi considered it

SEE PAGE 13 COL 5

## DOHS get past Brothers Union

### Victoria's dream run continues

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Old DOHS crossed the big Brothers Union hurdle with an exciting seven-run win while Victoria Sporting Club continued their fairytale run with an upset five-wicket victory over Bangladesh Biman to maintain their all-win record in the Premier Division Cricket League.

The fourth round on Wednesday also marked a surprisingly easy win for Mohammedan Sporting Club against a big spending Sonargaon Cricketers and their bitter rivals Abahani's stunning six-wicket success over runners-up City Club after two demoralising defeats.

Mohammedan, who lost their unbeaten tag to Victoria in the previous round, won an embarrassingly low-scoring affair at the BKSP against star-studded Sonargaon, who were un-

bled out for only 67 batting on a difficult wicket. Mohammedan crawled to the target in 35 overs and for the loss of six wickets.

Victoria also bowled Biman out for 86 in another low-scoring match at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra.

After three straight defeats, Indira Road and Agrani Bank tasted their first wins when they beat Orient and Kalabagan respectively.

DOHS-BROTHERS  
Kenyan Steve Tikolo continued his rich vein of form with the bat hammering 79 as the holders recovered from a nervous 3-20 to post a challenging 234 for 8 in 50 overs at BKSP.

The right-hander struck eight boundaries for his third half-century in four games while Manjarul Islam chipped in with a breezy 37-ball 35.

Brothers captain Ehsanul Haque with a blazing 70 almost matched the fire-works of Tikolo but it was not just enough for the Gopibagh outfit to avoid their second successive defeat. Brothers finished their quota of 50

overs at 227-9. Left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak Raj was the most successful DOHS bowler with 4-42.

VICTORIA-BIMAN  
Medium pacer Al-Amin returned career-best figures of 6-15 as Victoria shot a formidable Biman out for 87 in 34 overs.

National opener Javed Omar (25) and captain Sanwar Hossain (17) were the only batsmen to reach double figures in an innings that contained four ducks.

Victoria also got off to a disastrous start losing two wickets for nine runs but they rode on an unbeaten 31 by wicketkeeper-batsman Sagir Hossain to race to 92-5 in 31.2 overs.

Pacer Mohammad Sharif took two wickets for 29 runs.

MOHAMMEDAN-SONARGAON  
Down after a 34-run defeat against Victoria in the previous match, title aspirants Mohammedan killed off any Sonargaon hopes to cause another

upset on their Premier League debut.

The star-studded Sonargaon were all out for only 67 in 34.3 overs with Elias Sunny making highest 30.

Opener Al-Shahriar made 8, Mohammad Ashraful scored a duck and Mohammad Rafique, opening the innings, fell for 1.

Off-spinner Sabbir Khan was the most successful Mohammedan bowler with three for five while Alamgir Kabir, Monjurul Islam and Indian Sandeep Sharma captured two wickets each.

Sharma also scored a plucky 32 as Mohammedan raced to 68-6 in 20.5 overs.

Tapash Baisya, playing his first competitive match after the Sri Lanka tour in September, caused the Mohammedan early damage

SEE PAGE 13 COL 2

JFA CUP

### Seven in zonal semifinals

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Dhaka, Gazipur, Chittagong, Jyopurhat, Jhenidah, Khulna and Nilphamari moved into the zonal semifinals of the second JFA Cup U-16 football tournament beating their respective rivals at different venues across the country yesterday.

Dhaka made a flying start with a 6-0 victory over Rajbari at Manikganj Stadium while Gazipur outplayed Jamalpur 7-0 at the Tangail Stadium.

In the other matches, Jhenidah registered a hard-fought 3-2 victory over Magura at Saikhira Stadium, Chittagong recorded a lone-goal victory over Feni at Rangamati Stadium, Jyopurhat beat Sirajganj 1-0 at the Gaibandha Stadium, Khulna thrashed Jessore 3-0 at Bagherhat Stadium and Nilphamari defeated Naogaon 7-6 in tiebreaker at Kurigram Stadium.

## Nafees in trouble

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is going to serve a show-cause on opener Nafees Iqbal for not complying with the board's order.

It was learnt that national team physio Paul Close had advised the Chittagong batsman to take four days' rest for an ankle injury.

But the Brothers opener, who sustained the injury during their third round match of the Premier League against Kalabagan on Monday, played against Old DOHS in the tournament yesterday.

## Some solace for England

Cricket

AFP, Rawalpindi

Paceman James Anderson took four wickets to author England's narrow six-run win over Pakistan in

the fifth and final match here Wednesday but the hosts clinched the five-match series 3-2.

England, who won the first match, managed 206-9 in their allotted 50 overs and then restricted Pakistan to 200-9 in their 50 overs.

England, who came here on the

back of their Ashes win over Australia, earlier lost the three-Test series 2-0, and lost three consecutive one-day matches before ending the tour with a win against a reshuffled Pakistan.

Besides Anderson, left-arm-spinner Ian Blackwell took three wickets.

Chasing a modest target, Pakistan lost openers Salman Butt (six) and Kamran Akmal (11) by the seventh over, but recalled Yasir Hameed (57) and Mohammad Yousuf (54) put Pakistan back on track.

Hameed-Yousuf stand yielded 101 and brought Pakistan within 85 runs of victory before England hit back by claiming eight wickets in the space of 78 runs.

Veteran Shaun Udal provided the tourists with the breakthrough, enticing Hameed to step out and had him stumped by wicketkeeper Geraint Jones and that opened the gates.

Blackwell then accounted for stand-in captain Younis Khan (15), Yousuf and Shoaib Malik (eight) in the space of 12 balls to derail Pakistan to 170-7.

Anderson further hit the home team by dismissing Shahid Afridi and Abdul Razzaq (four each) and Navedul Hasan (13) before Pakistan failed to score 11 in the last over.

When England batted they lost openers Marcus Trescothick (one) and Matthew Prior (nine) with the score reading 21.

Asif, who turned 23 on Tuesday and was one of three changes Pakistan made to rest their players, then accounted for Prior (nine) in his third over as the batsman flicked straight over to the hands of square-leg.

England had crawled to 52 before off-spinner Arshad Khan

SEE PAGE 13 COL 3



PHOTO: AFP  
England paceman James Anderson celebrates the wicket of Pakistan opener Kamran Akmal during the fifth and final ODI at the Pindi Cricket Stadium on Wednesday.

## India four wickets away

Cricket

AFP, Ahmedabad

India were on the brink of a 2-0 series victory against Sri Lanka after rattling the tourists with spin for the second time in the third and final Test here on Wednesday.

The hosts were four wickets away from a win as Sri Lanka, set an improbable victory target of 509, tottered on 235-6 in their second innings at stumps on the fourth day. Jehan Mubarak (18) and Farveez Maharoof (two) were the batsmen at the crease, hoping for a miracle when the hosts return on Thursday to complete the formalities.

Anil Kumble, whose 10-wicket match haul gave India a 188-run victory in the second Test in Delhi last week, proved Sri Lanka's neme-

sis again in his 100th Test match.

The leg-spinner sparked Sri Lanka's downfall with the wickets of Kumar Sangakkara, Upul Tharanga and Thilan Samaraweera in the space of 16 balls, reducing the tourists from a comfortable 84-1 to 96-4.

Kumble, India's most successful Test bowler, took his career tally to 483 wickets. He has claimed 18 victims in the series so far.

Mahela Jayawardene and Tillekeratne Dilshan resurrected the innings with battling half-centuries during a fifth-wicket stand of 105, but the revival faded after tea.

Jayawardene had made 57 when he fell to a disputed return catch off seamer Ajit Agarkar that was referred to TV umpire Ivaturi Shivram.

Jayawardene stood his ground, believing the ball may have bounced off the ground after hitting

the bat, but TV replays showed Agarkar had taken the catch straight from the bat.

Dilshan (65) snicked Irfan Pathan to wicketkeeper Mahendra Dhoni, apparently losing concentration after holding up the bowler when an intruder ran across the sightscreen.

India earlier added 29 runs in 20 minutes to their overnight total of 287-9 before stand-in captain Virender Sehwag declared the second innings at 316-9.

Kumble and Harbhajan Singh had boosted India's score with an entertaining last-wicket stand of 69. Harbhajan was unbeaten on 40 off 51 balls which included four boundaries and a six. Kumble

SEE PAGE 13 COL 6

## Benaud wants Warne to keep spinning

Cricket

AFP, London

Former Australia captain Richie Benaud has urged Shane Warne to prolong his Test career until the next Ashes series in England in 2009.

Warne, the most successful bowler in Test history with 651 wickets in 133 games, will turn 40 during that tour.

"I was talking to him the other day and said to him 'You can do this'," Benaud told BBC TV.

"He is bowling better now than I've seen him for years and years. It's been wonderful to watch."

Warne took 40 wickets in a losing cause during this summer's Ashes series and earlier this week established a new record for the most Test wickets in a calendar year when he surpassed Dennis Lillee's total of 85 in 1981.

Benaud believes if Warne continues his policy of not playing one-day

internationals, despite pressure for him to relent in time for next year's World Cup, he will still be a force to be

going across there for the next Ashes battle?"

"He looked at me for a long time and just turned and said 'Thanks', though whether that's 'Thanks, but no thanks' or 'Thanks, thanks, I don't know,'" said Benaud, who called time on his own Test career at the age of 33.

Warne had a number of injuries between 1998 and 2001, and was banned for a year in 2003 after failing a drugs test.

But he remains at the peak of his powers and has confirmed he wants to help Australia regain the Ashes on home soil next winter.

"My record in my last 40-50 Tests has probably been better than at any stage of my career," he said recently.

"If I'm enjoying my cricket and bowling injury-free, then I hope I am playing in the next Ashes series."

"I have no immediate plans to retire. I'm enjoying my cricket, simple as that," he said.



SHANE WARNE

reckoned with when they next visit England.

"I told him 'They thought they'd seen the back of you, now why don't you give some serious thought to



## Did U Know?

Anil Kumble became the second spinner after Shane Warne to have appeared in 100 Tests.

## What to WATCH

### DD Sports

India vs Sri Lanka  
Third Test, Day Five  
Live at 10:00 am

### ESPN

Football Crazy  
Live at 5:00 pm  
Sportscentre  
Live at 8:30 pm



Asia Cup Qualifying Playoff Football  
Bangladesh vs Pakistan (4:00 pm)  
Venue: Bangabandhu Nat'l Stadium  
Fifth Nitol-Tata Nat'l Football League  
Samabesh Club, Munshiganj vs  
Bangladesh Army (6:30 pm)  
Venue: Bangabandhu Nat'l Stadium



## Luis Figo

(Portuguese soccer star)  
"As a player I expect to take part in a great championship. As far as the team is concerned, I believe Portugal can win the World Cup in Germany, although the big favourite is Brazil."