



(L) Muktiyoddha's Nigerian-recruit Adafa (R) tries to get past a defender of Samabesh Club during their Nitol-Tata National Football League clash at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Tuesday.
(R) The Reds Austrian coach George Kottan is in tears for his mother who died yesterday in Hungary.



PHOTO: STAR

DOHS atop alone

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Old DOHS as expected raced to their sixth straight win in the Aktel Premier Division Cricket League when they defeated Agrani Bank by 41 runs at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

Left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak Raj fashioned the victory with a five-wicket haul after late fireworks from Khaled Mahmud gave the holders a fairly defendable total.

The win was a good warm-up for the league leaders ahead of their crucial engagement against second-placed Mohammedan Sporting Club, who thrashed Indira Road Krira Chakra by ten wickets at the BKSP for their fifth victory.

Surprise-package Victoria Sporting Club, who along with Mohammedan are breathing down the neck of DOHS, continued to turn

the form book upside down in a stunning 158-run victory over Kalabagan Krira Chakra at Comilla.

Big-spending debutants Sonargaon Cricketers kept their Super Six hopes alive with a 13-run victory over runner-up City Club at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

But Abahani continued to disappoint their loyal band of followers when Brothers inflicted a five-wicket defeat on the giants at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra. It was Abahani's third defeat in six games.

Biman cruised to a seven-wicket victory against pointless Orient Sporting Club at BKSP to share the third spot with Brothers on eight points.

DOHS-AGRANI

Former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mahmud hammered a 43-ball 56 after opener Golam Rahman's fifty as Old DOHS posted an impressive 259-9 after deciding to bat on a placid wicket.

Mahmud entertained the sparse

crowd with flurry of shots that included four boundaries and as many sixes after Rahman, who also opens the innings for Sylhet, scored an 83-ball 52. In-form Kenyan Steve Tikolo missed what could have been his fifth fifty when he was out for 39. Skipper Akram made only 13 but the burly Chittagonian perhaps has preserved his best for the next match with Mohammedan, against whom he won a lot of games while playing for Abahani.

Agrani Bank showed a lot of heart while chasing a demanding total and looked impressive at the early stage with Bangladesh Under-19 batsman Rakibul Hasan at the crease. Batting at number three, the young right-hander scored a composed 59 but the bankers lost the plot during the middle-overs in the absence of a quality batsman capable of keeping the scoreboard

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Security fear or something else

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

The final of the Manik Sarker Challenge Gold Cup, a popular football tournament in Phulbari Upazila here in the northern district, was suspended following security fears.

The mysterious security fear came from none other than the Officer in Charge of Phulbari police station, Fazlul Haque, who himself filed a GD with the Phulbari Police Station on December 25 citing the possibility of subversive activities from Islamist outfit Jama'atul Mujahid-deen Bangladesh (JMB).

The suspension of the December 31 final of the eight-team meet sparked uproar among thousands of football fans while the SP of Dinajpur expressed his ignorance about the security alert on a football ground by his subordinate.

It was however learnt that Fazlul Haq took the football match as a hostage in an attempt to stop a rally organised by the Cole Mine Protest committee on the same day.

Muktis off with a bang

SPORTS REPORTER



Muktijoddha Sangsad began their Super Six campaign in the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League with a confident 5-2 defeat of Samabesh Club of Munshiganj at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Tuesday.

Although the scoreline suggests an emphatic victory, the last year's runners-up toiled to maintain a slim lead against a stubborn Samabesh, who threatened to level the scores after Jahangir converted two penalties.

Deen Mohammed and Adafa put Muktijoddha ahead before Jahangir pulled one back on the stroke of the first half. Two-goal Jeremiah's first strike widened the margin for the Reds once again but Jahangir made it 3-2 for the rank outsiders and missed the mark narrowly before goals from Moroccan midfielder Rachid Bishahi and Nigerian striker Jeremiah in the last 15 minutes ensured three points for the title chasers.

Jeremiah wasted two chances before Muktijoddha, who dominated the early show with robust runs from four African booters, took the lead in

the 23rd minute. It was Deen Mohammed who scored his first goal in the tournament when the unmarked centre-back nodded the ball into the net after meeting a right-flank freekick by Saiful.

Adafa, fresh from a hat-trick in their last match against Rangamati Mohammedan, doubled the lead when he blasted a right-footer into the roof of the net after slicing through the rival defence with a pass from compatriot Jeremiah.

Samabesh narrowed the margin in the 45th minute when Jahangir neatly placed the ball into the top left corner of goalkeeper Titu from the spot after rightback Enamul brought down Monir Hossain in the penalty area.

A defence lapse saw Jeremiah tap a rebound into the open net on the hour mark after Rachid's close-range shot came off rival goalie Ujjal.

Referee Azad Rahman did not hesitate to give a second penalty to the Munshiganj outfit after a clumsy challenge by Deen Mohammed on Sohag in the 65th minute. Jahangir's second spot-kick was not as accurate as the first one but the power behind it was good enough to beat Titu's outstretched right hand.

Minutes later, Muktijoddha survived a close call when Jahangir's long-range effort sailed inches over the crossbar.

Rachid then made it 4-2 with an

angular shot from 25 yards in the 76th minute but Samabesh kept on the pressure with Moloy forcing a fine save by Titu before Arafat kicked the ball wide from handshaking distance.

Jeremiah relieved the Muktijoddha tent in the 90th minute when his scorching drive from the top of the box took a wicked deflection of Samabesh captain Nahid, giving substitute keeper Sushil no chance to react.

Muktijoddha climbed to second place in the six-team table with five points while Samabesh, who have a remote chance to finish among the top four, stay at the bottom with one.

Yellow cards: Titu, Enamul, Deen Mohammed (Muktijoddha)

TEAMS

MUKTIJODDHA: Titu, Enamul (Azizi Arman), Ghansah, Deen Mohammed, Saiful, Rachid, Adafa, Biddity, Tanvir, Amin Rana and Jeremiah.

SAMABESH: Ujjal (Sushil), Faruk (Mamun), Dulal, Nahid, Ripon, Prashanta, Moloy, Jahangir, Arafat (Apu), Sohag and Monir.

Kottan mourns

SPORTS REPORTER

Although Muktijoddha Sangsad rallied to a 5-2 victory in their Super Six opener in the National Football League yesterday, there was no victory celebrations for the local giants.

They did not have their Austrian coach George Kottan at the bench who was mourning the death of his mother.

Bondar Isabella, mother of the former Bangladesh national coach, died of old age complications at a hospital in Hungary on Monday. She was 80.

Kottan was merrily welcoming the Bangladesh football team at the Zia International Airport in the morning on their return from a successful Pakistan trip but got the bad news in the afternoon.

The Austrian, who has decided not to leave his team in the crucial stage of the league to attend the funeral, was watching the game from the opposite side of the bench. But the match officials did not allow him his solitude for regulation and he had to retire to the stands.

A minute's silence was observed before the start of the Muktijoddha-Samabesh match and the Reds were wearing black badges.

DIV I CRICKET

Massive win for Tarun

SPORTS REPORTER

Surjo Tarun Club romped to a ten-wicket victory against Rupali Bank in the First Division Cricket League at the Jagannath Hall ground yesterday.

Rubel struck 59 and his opening partner Babu 51 as Surjo Tarun raced to 117 without loss in 24 overs in reply to the bankers' 116 all out in 29 overs.

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SA resist Aussie attack after Hussey heroics

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

South Africa dug in for a war of attrition after Mike Hussey revived Australia's chances with a dynamic rearguard century on the second day of the second cricket Test here Tuesday.

The South Africans lost both openers, skipper Graeme Smith (22) and AB de Villiers (61), after Australia ended their first innings on 355, bolstered by a fighting 122 from number five Hussey in a record last-wicket stand.

Australia were staring at a meagre innings total after going into the second day on 239 for eight, but left-hander Hussey combined in a 107-run 10th wicket partnership with Glenn McGrath to frustrate the Proteas.

Hussey turned things around for Australia with his third century in an impressive debut year in Test cricket. He dominated the partnership with McGrath, who remained 11 not out after two defiant hours at the crease.

"I must admit when Glenn came to the crease and I was on 27 I didn't think I would score a hundred," Hussey said. "But it was a great partnership and it put us into a good position."

"It was a cat and mouse game trying to frustrate them for as long as possible and the big thing was showing faith in your batting partner. I was lucky things went my way today."

Hussey was finally bowled by Makhaya Ntini in the 120th over of the innings, ending his four-hour resistance which featured 14 boundaries and four sixes.

Once again the South Africans were their own worst enemies, with Jacques Kallis fumbling a high chance at second slip off Shaun Pollock when Hussey was on 27.

That followed Andre Nel's expensive mistake when Ricky Ponting was dropped on 17 on the way to his 117 on Monday. The South Africans

have dropped 10 catches so far in the series.

At stumps the tourists had grafted their way to 169 for two with Herschelle Gibbs persevering with an unbeaten 54 and Jacques Kallis on 17, 186 runs in arrears.

"It's evenly poised at the moment," South African coach Mickey Arthur said. "We had a good two sessions after lunch and the first session tomorrow is going to be crucial."

"It was huge morale-sapping (to drop Hussey) but the guys came back, showed great character and we took a really positive frame of mind into the batting and the guys came back beautifully after the morning session."

It was only the fourth time in Tests that Australia had achieved a

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PHOTO: AFP

CRISIS MAN: Australia's middle-order batsman Mike Hussey celebrates his century against South Africa on the second day of the second Test at the MCG on Tuesday.

Booters back home Happy Cruciani goes on vacation

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

When Diego Cruciani boarded a home-bound flight, he was a happy man. The reason behind his delights was not only to go for a deserved vacation, but the way the Bangladesh team have recovered from the hangover of losing the SAFF Championship crown.

"The boys deserved it because they had done hard work for the past two and half months," the Argentine said at the Zia International Airport yesterday between flights to Buenos Aires and from Karachi.

The Bangladesh team, who defeated Pakistan by a solitary goal in Karachi on Monday night to reach the 2007 Asian Cup qualifiers with

an aggregate 1-0 victory, returned to Dhaka yesterday morning.

Cruciani, who left for Argentina along with trainer Ariel Colman to enjoy a delayed Christmas vacation within a couple of hours of their arrival from Karachi, said that he was inspired by the team's comeback in such a short time.

"They looked broken after the loss to India in the SAFF final. But I saw them work hard for pride yesterday," said the Bangladesh coach, who had to watch the game from the stands due to an AFC ban on him for charging a referee after the goalless draw between Bangladesh and Pakistan in the Dhaka-leg.

"This will help us prepare for a better future," hoped Cruciani adding, "I had told you earlier that Pakistan would be under pressure on their home soil. It happened and

my boys utilised the opportunity."

Manager Sayeed Hassan Kanan said that the coach was very depressed before the start of the game and had to cool his nerves taking medication.

"The officials tried to stop him from going to the dressing room too but we convinced them to get the coach inside because it was not the playing area. He told the players during his briefing that we are all under pressure and the only way to relieve it is to win and make the nation proud," said Kanan.

"He was a relieved man after we won," he added.

Cruciani and Colman

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Kerry Packer no more

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australia's richest man Kerry Packer, a pugnacious media mogul with a passion for sport and gambling, died overnight in Sydney, his television network said Tuesday. He was 68.

Channel Nine gave no cause of death but Packer had been plagued by ill health for more than a decade, cheating death in 1990 when his heart stopped for several minutes while playing polo.

"He died peacefully at home with his family at his bedside," the television station said.

Packer built a multi-billion-dollar broadcast and publishing empire, as well as transforming the way international cricket is played to make it more television-friendly for the media age.

His success in business was matched by a devil-may-care attitude, whether mocking the mistakes of competitors or shrugging off reports of his own heavy losses in casinos from Las Vegas to London.

"He was a man who you could truly say was larger than life," said business rival and fellow tycoon Rupert Murdoch.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard also paid tribute to the mogul, who was ranked by Forbes magazine this year as the 94th richest man in the world with a

fortune of some 6.9 billion (5.2 billion US) dollars.

"He was a great Australian. He was a larger-than-life character, and in so many ways he left his mark on the Australian community over a very long career in business," Howard told reporters.

Born on December 17, 1937, Packer inherited the family business, Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd (PBL), from his father Frank, a legendary newspaperman who was so penny-conscious that he sometimes refused to buy chairs -- or notebooks -- for his reporters.

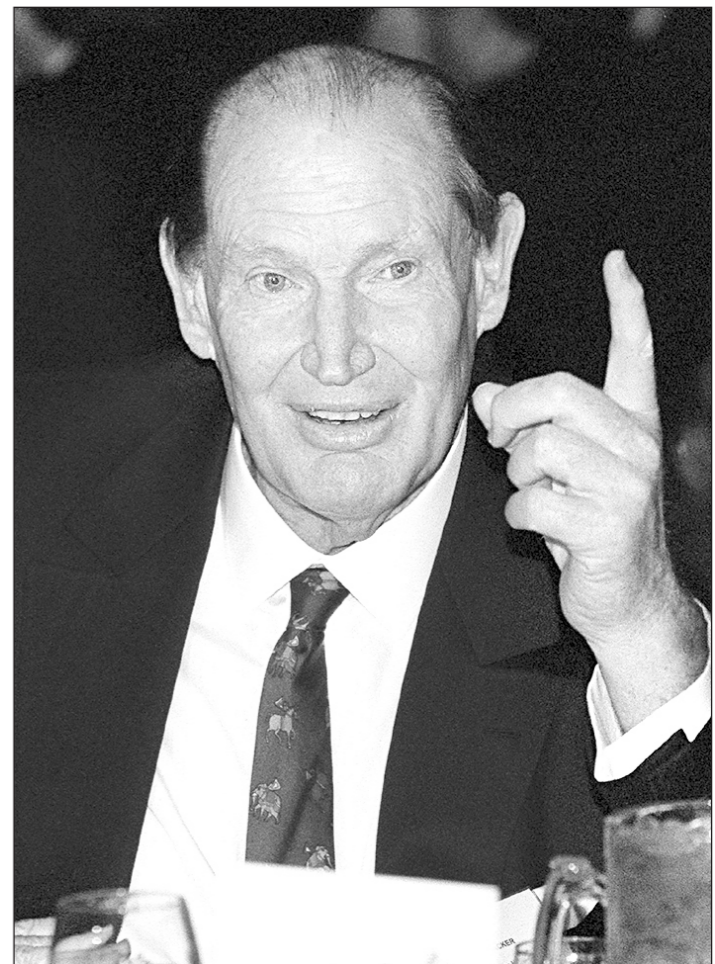
Packer was not the type to back down from a challenge and when he was refused the broadcast rights to Australian Test cricket in 1977, he launched his own World Series Cricket, poaching some of the game's greatest stars.

It popularised the one-day version of the game although critics dismissed the colourful uniforms as "pyjamas" and an insult to tradition.

But he was hailed after his death as the greatest Australian contributor to the game since Donald Bradman.

"He knew that the players were being in a sense financially downtrodden and it was his job to put it right, and put it right he did," said former Australia captain Richie

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KERRY PACKER (1937-2005)

What to WATCH

ESPN
English Premier Football League
West Ham vs Wigan
Live at 1:40 am (Thursday)
STAR Sports
Australia vs South Africa
Second Test, Day Four
Live at 5:30 am (Thursday)
English Premier Football League
Everton vs Liverpool
Live at 1:45 am (Thursday)

TALK TURKEY



Sir Alex Ferguson

(Manchester United manager)
"Despite people suggesting my time is up as manager of United, I'm determined to carry on. I will stay until I am happy this club is back on track."

DAY'S EVENT

Fifth Nitol-Tata Nat'l Football League (Super Six)
Bangladesh Army vs Abahani (4:00 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu Nat'l Stadium