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Muktijoddha take sweet revenge



SPORTS REPORTER

Muktijoddha took revenge of their away defeat to Chittagong Mohammedan in the B. League when the Dhaka giants recorded a 2-1 win over the visitors in the opening match of the second leg at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Veteran Alfaz Ahmed opened the account after 12 minutes while Parvez Babu doubled the lead midway through the first half as the Reds took lead in the table with 21 points. It could well be temporary as a win will put either Mohammedan or Sheikh Russel on the top of the table by the end of the ongoing 12th round.

The Chittagong side, who had upset Muktijoddha 1-0 in the first leg, pulled one goal back through Asif Yusuf's 58th minute penalty and stuck to 17 points.

Abu Yusuf left a number of veterans in the bench and got immediate reward for fielding a younger team as young Enamul Hossain's lively display created early openings for Muktijoddha.

Hassan Al Mamun and skipper Moni both served the bench while Arman even failed to find a place in the first 18 for the Reds, who lost

stand-in captain Ghansah just 20 minutes after kick-off.

The Ghanaian centre-back limped off the ground shortly after Alfaz latched on a right-side cross by Titu to score his fifth league goal. However, it was Enamul who was in the heart of the counter attack, picking up the ball from deep before feeding overlapping rightback Titu.

Muktijoddha, however, could have gone ahead in the fourth minute when Matur Munna's 30-yard powerful drive beat Mohammedan goalie Tito but came off the base of the sidebar.

Tito once again showed his weakness in low balls when the keeper conceded the second goal at his near post when leftback Parvez drilled the ball through a forest of legs after Enamul's effort was cleared by the rival defenders out of their area.

The black and whites from Chittagong hardly looked like the outfit that impressed everyone in the first leg but showed signs of a comeback when Asif's freekick from the right curled away from the far post on the stroke of the breather.

Enamul should have scored 12 minutes after resumption but the young striker miskicked the ball from ten yards after hard work by Titu.

In the very next minute, the tourists got a lifeline when their Liberian striker Momolu earned a penalty when he was tripped inside the box by substitute defender Deen Mohammed.

Asif coolly fired the ball into the top right corner from the spot, giving goalkeeper Titumir no chance to react.

Asif left the ground three minutes later and his replacement Pavel wasted a chance in the 73rd minute, failing to keep his shot under the crossbar. The pressure continued and Muktijoddha, running out of steam, survived again a couple of minutes later when Sohail's header on a corner went just wide.

Yusuf pushed fresh legs and Kanchan set a chance for Titu who failed to test the opposition custodian near from the penalty spot, submitting a feeble shot straight to Tito.

In injury time, both sides invaded the rival boxes but Momolu lost possession and an exhausted Alfaz, kept on the pitch as the coach ran out of options having made all three changes, took a pathetic effort that flew miles over the bar.

Yellow cards: Munna, Maruf, Kanchan (Muktijoddha) and Saikat, Camara (CTG Mohammedan)

TEAMS

MUKTIJODDHA: Titumir Titu, Ghansah (Deen), Rajani, Parvez, Ibrahim (Kanchan), Arman Aziz, Maruf, Munna (Moni), Alfaz and Enamul.

CTG MOHAMMEDAN: Tito, Tareq (Jashim), Sohail, Saikat, Sanwar, Towhid, Asif (Pavel), Camara, Zahid, Momolu and Yusuf (Dipu). Referee: Tayeb Hassan.



Chittagong Mohammedan stopper Saikat (R) tries to thwart an attack from Muktijoddha striker Enamul during their B. League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



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Sports command the biggest television audiences, led by the summer Olympic Games, World Cup Football and Formula One racing.



John Major
(Former British prime minister)
"I suffered one or two defects... I wasn't good enough."
On his abilities as a cricketer.



ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30 pm
Star Sports
French Open
Third Round
Live from 3:00 pm
Brazil v England
International Football Friendly
Live at 12:55 am (Saturday)



Day's Event
B. League
Chittagong v Khulna Abahani
Venue: Khulna Stadium
Time: 4:00 pm
Brothers Union v Farashganj
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Time: 4:30 pm

ESPN-Star's rescue act

Afro-Asia Cup to go ahead

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

The Afro-Asia series in India will go ahead as scheduled next week after the ESPN-Star network stepped in to save the beleaguered event, the Asian Cricket Council said on Thursday.

The series, featuring three one-dayers and a Twenty20 match between Asia and Africa from June 5-10, was in jeopardy after the original rights holder pulled out citing lack of public interest.

But ACC chief executive Ashraf Haq told the Cricinfo website that the pan-Asian ESPN-Star network had agreed to telecast the series for an undisclosed fee.

"The circumstances were such that the tournament could not be cancelled, considering that the matches were designated as official one-dayers," the Kuala Lumpur-based Haq was quoted as saying by Cricinfo.

"We're happy that ESPN-Star have agreed to telecast the event."

While ESPN-Star was not willing to reveal the financial details, Cricinfo said "it is understood the

deal will be significantly lower than the original sum."

The series begins with a Twenty20 match on June 5 in Bangalore, which will also host the first one-dayer on June 6.

The remaining two one-dayers will be played in Chennai on June 9 and 10.

Mumbai-based Nimbus Sports, which held the marketing and TV rights for the event, withdrew late Wednesday, saying the absence of top stars was making it difficult to find sponsors.

Top Asian stars like Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid of India, Muttiah Muralidaran, Chaminda Vas, Kumar Sangakkara and Lasith Malinga of Sri Lanka, as well as Pakistan's Shoaib Akhtar, have all declined to play.

The African side will also be missing their nominated captain, Graeme Smith of South Africa, and teammate Jacques Kallis.

The Asia v Africa series, the brainchild of former world cricket chief Jagmohan Dalmiya of India, was sold to Nimbus for 12 million dollars for a three-year period in 2005.

The first edition was held in Johannesburg in August, 2005, but it was not played last year due to a

lack of suitable dates in a crowded international cricket calendar.

The decision by Nimbus came a day after India's Zee network withdrew from telecasting a three-match series between India and South Africa in Northern Ireland in June-July.

The matches were part of the Indian Cricket Board's plan to play 25 one-day internationals at off-shore venues over a five-year period, for which Zee had bought the rights for 219 million dollars.

The first event was held in September last year when India took on world champions Australia and the West Indies in Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur.

Zee said it had scrapped the entire five-year deal because the Indian board was not willing to negotiate a revised price after a government directive to share the TV feed for all India matches with state-run broadcaster Doordarshan.

The Indian board may be forced to cancel the series against South Africa - scheduled for June 26, 29 and July 1 in Belfast - if it fails to find an alternative broadcaster.

"The series cannot be held if there is no television coverage," said Indian cricket board secretary Niranjan Shah.

Asoka fails ump's test

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's first-class umpires have failed to pass a competitive examination conducted in English by the cricket governing body to rank them for international matches.

Umpires who lacked English knowledge protested and walked out blaming the authorities for not holding the test in Sinhalese, an official language on par with Tamil in this former British colony.

"We felt that we were discriminated by not having the examination in Sinhalese," an umpire who boycotted the exam told AFP.

"Had we gone to courts based on the fundamental and the constitutional right of citizens to conduct business in the language of their choice, we could have obtained an order to annul the examination."

Just five out of the 28 first class umpires who sat the examination late last month were able to obtain pass marks.

Among those who failed were Asoka de Silva, an ICC international panelist who had also served on the elite panel of the world governing body.

The exam was conducted by Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) umpires committee to rank the first three local umpires in order to be nominated for the ICC's international panel.

Currently only two Sri Lankans, SEE PAGE 22 COL 1

Kaif's brush with fate

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

It is the house at the end of the road. The black gates are firmly barred; the security guards outside look suspiciously at every passer-by. They can't be bothered to do more than glare though -- it is far too hot on Tuesday, even in the shaded avenues of this posh colony.

When you state you're there to meet Mohammad Kaif, one guard ostentatiously mops his head, creaks himself up and lets you in after checking on the intercom.

The house is beautiful, an interior decorator's dream in muted cream and bronze, a sudden splash of colour lending it an artist's touch. It is a different world from the 6 feet by three pigeonhole, separated from the rest of world by a threadbare piece of cloth, that was Kaif's home for several teenage years his piece of a tacky Green Park hostel room in Kanpur. Kaif walks in, in the familiar royal blue of India's training kit.

You ask how it feels to call a veritable mansion like this home. He smiles. "It is home." And what of Allahabad and the crowded, familiar sights and sounds of the town he once lived in? "That is home too, it is different of course, but they are both home." And then he adds, looking around anew, "I have been

blessed." And smiles wryly. The feeling is genuine, the smile perhaps a tad self-deprecatingly, after all, he is well aware that it is exactly six months to the day that he played his last one-day international for India. November 29, 2006, at Port Elizabeth.

"It's been very tough," he agrees, asked the obvious question. "It's been my longest ever break from the team. The last year-and-a-half hasn't been good. I've not been in the XI consistently, played a couple of games and then been out for a few, it's been a rollercoaster ride, a time of ups and downs, I've had to come to terms with a lot of things, learnt some things about myself."

He insists though that it hasn't got him down. "I would be lying if I said it hasn't affected me at all, of course it has, but I've decided to use this time to just work harder, work on things I think needed to be worked on."

So what does he think went wrong? "I'm not sure. I hear this and that but unfortunately, have never been told specifically that this was the exact problem. That would have really helped. But being out of the team is also beneficial if you take it in the right spirit. You can sit back and take stock, play state and company matches, train, have the time to experiment, work on you game. On my eldest brother Asif's advice, I've adjusted my grip slightly, a minor shift that

gives me far greater power, done a little bit with my stance. I made 151 not out against Rajasthan in a one-dayer for UP hitting a few sixes, I'd never made 150 in my life! It is a power game now and I needed to work on that and what I've done seems to be working."

Kaif says that while he's happy with whatever he's contributed so far to India's cause, he's also realised that there were some things he could have done better. "Life is so unpredictable. There have been times when I've been doing really well, feeling in the zone, getting some runs, but for some reason or the other, I've found myself not in the playing XI for the next game. Positions have moved up and down, you lose that rhythm. Every batsman wants to bat when he's feeling good about it. Then again, there have been times when I could have used an opportunity better and did not. Having said that, these things happen in cricket."

And, he's decided to be philosophical about it. In fact, as he says, his getting his first big break itself (making the eventually World Cup-winning U-15 India squad), was by chance. "When you go for these age-group trials, luck plays a huge part. You have 700 (now about 2000) boys each facing about four balls each before someone decides if they move to the next round. One unplayable ball somewhere and

SEE PAGE 22 COL 2

Whatmore leaves today

SPORTS REPORTER

Day Whatmore will leave Dhaka today after a four-year stay with the Tigers. The 53-year-old will be off to Australia this afternoon by a Thai Airways flight.

Yesterday, Bangladesh Cricket Board accorded the outgoing national cricket coach a farewell at its Gulshan office.

Captain Habibul Bashar, BCB general secretary Mahubul Anam, vice-president Shah Nurul Kabir Shaheen, joint secretary Rafiqul Islam, other officials and employees were present during the simple ceremony.

Whatmore was presented with a bat signed by all eleven players of Bangladesh's first-ever Test win and a Bangladesh team jersey signed by the entire squad that played in this year's World Cup.

"I am overwhelmed. All my life I have been associated with nice people and I think I have been blessed in that respect. I have had four very good years in Bangladesh," said Whatmore to the BCB officials and employees.

"I leave Bangladesh on a very happy note and I might return again, even as a coach. I think the door will remain open," hoped Whatmore.

SEE PAGE 22 COL 8



PHOTO: TIGERCRICKET.COM

Outgoing Bangladesh coach Day Whatmore (C) receives a bat signed by members of Bangladesh's first Test winning team from captain Habibul Bashar (L) and BCB general secretary Mahubul Anam at the board's office yesterday.

SEE PAGE 22 COL 8

Indian tennis star Sania Mirza is a picture of dejection during her second round match against Serbian Ana Ivanovic at the French Open at Roland Garros on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP