



PHOTO: STAR

WE ARE THE CHAMPS: Abahani footballers celebrate their B. League triumph yesterday after a 2-0 win over Sheikh Russel at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

## B. League Abahani's

SPORTS REPORTER

Dark clouds overhead and an expectedly muddy ground after daylong showers gave the Bangabandhu National Stadium a gloomy look but the conditions could not spoil Abahani's championship party as they lifted the inaugural professional football league title yesterday.

Zahid Hasan Emily and Awudu Ibrahim found the mark either side of halftime as the sky-blues blanked Sheikh Russel 2-0 to ensure the B. League trophy with a match in hand.

Abahani, however, will have to wait to lay their hands on the new trophy as the Bangladesh Football Federation is expected to crown the champions on August 6 in grandeur.

It was the Dhaka heavyweights' first major domestic success after a six-year drought, which saw their worst run ever after winning the first version of the National Football League in 2000 and the Dhaka Premier League next year.

With 13 wins in 19 outings, Abahani who play Muktijoddha in their last match on Monday, took an unassailable lead in the 11-team table with 44 points.

It also dashed the slim title hopes of their archrivals Mohammedan, who now settle for runners-up with 39 points with one match remaining against Arambagh on August 1, the concluding day of the league.

Russel, who drew their first leg match against Abahani 0-0, stuck to 32 points with a hope of a third-

place finish. They had three Moroccan players on the unplayable pitch but without the steel of captain Bourdif in the backline and his fellow Moroccan Younes's skill up front, were reduced to mediocre.

The credit, however, should go to the rival midfield, which probably produced their best game of the season under the leadership of Arif Khan Joy. The holding midfielder and Abahani captain not only killed Russel moves but also generated a series of attacks for Ujjal, Abul and Abdullah Parvez who supplied regularly for striking duo Emily and Ibrahim to put constant pressure on the opposition.

Ibrahim fired a low drive wide and Emily was denied by Russel rightback Aminul in the first ten minutes but the sky-blues really threatened to score when Ibrahim got behind the opposition backline after 16 minutes. However, the Ghanaian forward, who came dangerously close, was dispossessed by an onrushing Zia and the waterlogged strip.

Emily then headed a chip by Ujjal just wide after hard work by Ibrahim and Abul, who failed to keep the ball on target minutes later.

Ibrahim, Parvez and Emily again frustrated the 5,000-strong Abahani fans fluffing opportunities on one-on-one before the latter broke the deadlock in the first half stoppage time.

Emily, whose constant rushing unsettled the rival defence throughout the first half, met a superb centre by leftback Mintu to put a glancing header past Zia from 15 yards for his 12th league goal.

Four minutes after resumption, Abahani sealed the victory with their first attack of the second session. It was Abul who created the chance with exquisite skill, dodging past two defenders outside the area before releasing Ibrahim free at the left side and the Ghanaian completed the job hammering in a low drive for his sixth goal.

The two-goal cushion put

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### POINTS TABLE

| Teams          | M  | W  | D | L  | GF | GA | Pts |
|----------------|----|----|---|----|----|----|-----|
| Abahani        | 19 | 13 | 5 | 1  | 35 | 8  | 44  |
| Mohammedan     | 19 | 11 | 6 | 2  | 39 | 12 | 39  |
| Muktijoddha    | 19 | 9  | 6 | 4  | 29 | 18 | 33  |
| Russel         | 19 | 8  | 8 | 3  | 22 | 12 | 32  |
| Brothers       | 19 | 7  | 5 | 7  | 28 | 18 | 26  |
| Ctg MSC        | 18 | 7  | 4 | 7  | 17 | 21 | 25  |
| Arambagh       | 18 | 7  | 2 | 9  | 17 | 20 | 23  |
| Farashganj     | 20 | 5  | 7 | 8  | 17 | 22 | 22  |
| Ctg Abahani    | 19 | 4  | 3 | 12 | 17 | 35 | 15  |
| Khulna Abahani | 19 | 3  | 4 | 12 | 18 | 43 | 13  |
| Rahmatganj     | 19 | 3  | 4 | 12 | 15 | 45 | 13  |



### Did U Know?

The last wooden racquet was used at Wimbledon in 1987.



**Shane Warne**  
(Australian legend)  
"If I was chasing 400 in a day then I would probably take Brian because of his flair and placement. Otherwise, Sachin's technique under relentless pressure to perform would give him the edge."  
**When he was giving a verdict in the case of who's the best contemporary batsman between Sachin Tendulkar and Brian Lara.**



**B. League**  
**Arambagh v Ctg Mohammedan**  
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium  
Time: 4:15 pm

## Mali greets Twenty20



AFP, Johannesburg

New International Cricket Council supremo Ray Mali hailed Twenty20 as the game of the future Thursday at the official launch for September's inaugural world championships in South Africa.

With dwindling crowd numbers for both Test match and one-day internationals, the ICC is placing huge stock on the first ever championships for a shorter version of the game that Mali said would capture everyone's imagination.

"Without any doubt this is a great concept, it is a game of the future," Mali said at a glitzy launch party in Johannesburg.

"Within the next five to 10 years, every South African will be playing this kind of game," added Mali who has recently succeeded the late Percy Sonn.

Dancers and a laser show at the launch provided a taste of the high-octane atmosphere that can be

expected in Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town when the three cities play host to the 12 teams playing in the tournament.

Mali said he was looking forward to the event with a mixture of pride and excitement, knowing South Africa -- one of the pioneers of the game -- would do a great job of showcasing the game in the best possible light.

"And excitement because the event marks a first for cricket -- the first time this format of the game will have been played on a truly global scale."

South African skipper Graeme Smith said Twenty20 was a hit with players who had managed to rack up previously unimaginable scores.

"T20 cricket has helped the game move with modern times, its broken moulds -- even in terms of our own thinking, and targets that seemed impossible are now possible," said Smith whose big-hitting style is perfectly suited to the game.

"I think I have lost more patience since I've started playing Twenty20," he admitted.

Dave Richardson, the ICC's cricket manager, insisted that the tournament would not diminish the longer versions of the game.

"I think this format is going to show the public exactly how good these guys are," he said.

"You have the freedom to play like you have never played before."

The 13-day, 27 match event, is billed as one of the most exciting developments in cricket in 30 years.

"It will bring many of the best international players from around the world together for a short, sharp event we believe will capture the public's imagination both in South Africa and around the world," said ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed.

Having learnt from the poor turnout at the World Cup in the West Indies in March, tournament director Steve Elworthy said ticket prices had been kept as cheap as possible, ranging from R20 (2.84 dollars) for a place on the grass in

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## Eng struggle in rain-hit 2nd Test

STAR SPORT MONITOR

England were 94-3 at tea on the opening day of the rain-hit second Test at Trent Bridge on Friday after being put into bat by Indian captain Rahul Dravid.

Zaheer Khan did the early damage, utilising the damp conditions to tempt Andrew Strauss (4) and Michael Vaughan (9) into edges to first slip.

India also captured the prized wicket of Kevin Pietersen for only 13 as England slipped to 47-3 at one stage.

Pietersen had initially been fortunate to get an edge onto pad to prevent an lbw.

But in the next over he was beaten by one shaping back in from left-arm paceman RP Singh that trapped him in front.

Alastair Cook (35) and Paul Collingwood (25) repaired some of the damage with an unbroken 47-run partnership for the fourth wicket.

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## U-19 CRICKET Bangladesh face India in final today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh under-19 cricket team take on their Indian counterparts in the final of the tri-nation tournament at the Colts Cricket Club ground in Colombo today.

India finished top of the table with eight points while Bangladesh, who beat hosts Sri Lanka in a group match, were soundly beaten twice by India U-19s, last of which was by the margin of 129 runs on Thursday.

India piled up 264-9 despite spinner Nasir Hossain's four-wicket haul. Rain forced Bangladesh to chase a revised target of 212 in 29 overs and they were restricted to 82-7 with Tapash Ghosh scoring 29.

Bangladesh, who split points with Sri Lanka after their first match was washed out, crashed to India by 97 runs earlier, before beating the home side by 43 runs in the second round robin game.

## A sporting treble

### Cruciani remembered



SPORTS REPORTER

Amalesh Sen had done it before during his long association with Abahani as player and coach. He has done it again.

Having won the first ever National Football League title in 2000, the veteran coach delivered Abahani another first edition of a new tournament -- the B. League or

the inaugural professional football league.

Abahani's 2-0 defeat of Sheikh Russel in both sides' penultimate match yesterday added another trophy to the showcase of the 11-time Premiership champions, who also won the right to represent Bangladesh in next year's AFC Cup.

The triumph also marked another rare feat for the Dhanmondi-based club, who lifted football-cricket-hockey league titles in the same season for the third time after 1974 and 1983.

Abahani's bid to end a six-year trophy drought, however, began under Argentine coach Diego

Cruciani, who left shortly before the mid-season break in the competition.

They were top-of-the-table when Cruciani, also a former Bangladesh national coach, departed but the sky-blues slipped to third place at the end of the first leg following their only defeat in the league so far: a 2-1 upset by visiting Khulna Abahani, which eventually was the Argentinian's last match in charge.

"Cruciani shaped the team well. But he gave priority on having one of his three Argentine recruits up front. But (Hernan) Parodi could not deliver goals. In defence, (Mariano) Caporale was outstanding and probably the best foreign player we have had in recent times," said Amalesh after the triumph at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

"We began to field more local players and the finishing got better after Cruciani, preferred a three-man attack. We switched to 4-4-2 to strengthen the midfield," said the former national midfielder, who began his coaching career in the late 70s as a playing member of the sky-blues.

Amalesh, who also had to take over from Russian coach Yuri in the middle of the 2001 Premiership on road to title, did a similar job this time using only one foreigner in the latter part of the league.

The three Argentines were unavailable in the second leg and the replacements were not good enough to compete with the locals, who got better match by match to stretch their unbeaten run to 11 games under Amalesh's guidance.

Despite winning a title after a long gap, Abahani's celebrations were repressed.

"We are happy but can't enjoy this success much as our Chief Patron (Sheikh Hasina) is in jail," said captain Arif Khan Joy, who had earlier announced his retirement from domestic football after this season for political ambition.

"Now I can't say my football career is over. I feel I can play a few more years. Give me some time to decide," said Joy adding that Cruciani should also get some

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PHOTO: STAR

Abahani's Ghanaian striker Ibrahim (L) fights for possession with Russel defenders Mishu and Hassan (R) during their yesterday's B. League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.