



## Football's triumphant return

### Mohammedan lift title with a 3-2 tiebreak win over Abahani

**Citycell FEDERATION CUP '08**

AL MUSABBIR SADI

It is too early to say if country's football has got its soul back. But after an eventful week that culminated in a grand final between two soccer giants on Monday night, signs are evident that the soul-searching effort has started with all the subjects so important in bringing passion back to this great game making a spontaneous presence at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

A deafening roar from the stands just to confirm an attack has just taken place, passion running high as the high-voltage drama enters into a tiebreaker after 120 minutes of absorbing football were all there.

In the end it produced a winner. And it was Mohammedan this time

over their magnificent rivals Abahani. But it was football in the country that made a victorious return.

Three substitute Mohammedan booters played the pivotal role in the final act when they showed no nerves to convert their spot kicks in a 3-2 victory in the shootout.

The regulation 90 minutes ended 1-1 with Robin cancelling Abahani's lead given by Emily and both the archrivals failed to change that in extra 30 minutes as the season's curtain raiser entered the nerve wrecking shootout before a 25,000-strong comeback crowd at the Big Bowl.

It was evident after the first two shots that Abahani were under pressure as their tournament top scorer Emily's effort from the spot was saved by rival goalkeeper and national number one Aminul.

After Nigerian substitute Dami Emmanuelle put the black and whites ahead, Mamun put his chance over the bar but

Mohammedan lost the initiative when veteran Rajani followed the same route.

#### ROLL OF HONOUR

Year	Winner
1980	Mohammedan and Brothers
1981	Mohammedan
1982	Mohammedan and Abahani
1983	Mohammedan
1985	Abahani
1986	Abahani
1987	Mohammedan
1988	Abahani
1989	Mohammedan
1991	Brothers
1994	Muktijoddha
1995	Mohammedan
1997	Abahani
1999	Abahani
2000	Abahani
2001	Muktijoddha
2003	Mohammedan
2004	Muktijoddha
2005	Brothers
2008	Mohammedan

Waly Faisal and Pranotosh scored to keep Abahani in the game but so did Maruf and Komol for Mohammedan. The show was over when Abahani's regular penalty taker and captain Nazrul, surprisingly taking the last shot, hit the sidebar to spark celebration in the Mohammedan line behind him as well as the northwest gallery.

Mohammedan may have enriched their showcase with the record ninth Federation Cup trophy -- two more than Abahani -- but in the end, everyone was happy to see return of big crowd to the most popular game in the country.

The scene might have been easily dwarfed by the crowd of 70s, 80s and the 90s, but after a long drought, it was sight for sore eyes. It just proved that passion for football has not died and if there is quality product, people will not look elsewhere for entertainment like the recent past, when football-lessness virtually killed the fan.

The two unbeaten teams of the

meet began cautiously, trying to weight each others' strength during a rather lacklustre first half.

Abahani paid heavily for fielding Joy, the holding midfielder who was nursing a groin injury and had to be replaced by Pranotosh after 13 minutes. A few more injuries during the match put more pressure on sky-blues coach Amalash Sen, who perhaps waited too long to bring other substitutes.

Abahani, who won their last Federation Cup back in 2000, started with a three-man central defence to accommodate Nazrul, who returned after a two-match suspension while Mamun was chosen ahead of Ujjal and Zahed Parvez at the right of the midfield.

Still, the first ten minutes belonged to Maruful Haque's men who surprised by picking up Arman Aziz, who had 11 stitches on his right foot, as captain instead of injured Jewel Rana.

The only real chance before the



(Clockwise from top left) Abahani striker Zahid Hasan Emily (C) tries to skid past two Mohammedan defenders, a partial view of the near packed Bangabandhu National Stadium, Mohammedan players set off to celebrate their title triumph moments after Abahani captain Nazrul (not in the picture) had missed the decisive penalty in the tiebreaker, the victorious Mohammedan team on the podium with the Citycell Federation Cup that they won with a 3-2 shootout win yesterday.



### Did U Know?

Goran Ivanisevic of Croatia is best remembered for being the only person to win the men's singles title at Wimbledon as a wildcard. He achieved this feat in 2001.



### TALK TURKEY



**Usain Bolt**  
(Jamaican sprint superstar)  
"My start was not too good. I concentrated on winning, and as I am starting to get a cold, I was not able to think about any faster a time." After winning the 100 metres sprint gold at the Zurich Golden League on Friday.



### What to WATCH

**ESPN**  
Sportscentre India  
Sports News  
Live at 8:30pm

**TEN Sports**  
US Open Tennis  
Day News  
Live from 9:00pm

## A-Rod, R-Fed imperious

AGENCIES, New York



Former champions Roger Federer and Andy Roddick turned in impressive straight-set wins, throwing down a challenge to rivals as they powered through into the second week of the US Open on Sunday. Four-time winner Federer took a step closer to lifting his first major title of a subdued season as he turned in a near-flawless performance to crush Radek Stepanek 6-3, 6-3, 6-2.

Roddick, the 2003 champion at his home Grand Slam, rolled Italian Andreas Seppi 6-2, 7-5, 7-6 (7-4).

"I feel good," said the 26-year-old. "It's just a matter of getting into physical and mental shape. I'm excited, I cannot wait for the fourth round."

Roddick had his way in "the most intimidating court in the world" against the number 31 who has stalled in the third round at past slams.

Federer, seeded second behind French Open, Wimbledon and Olympic champion Rafael Nadal, is

bidding for his fifth straight trophy at Flushing Meadows. The Swiss earned revenge after losing to Stepanek in straight sets in Rome last May. "That loss hurt, but it's a good win for me. I'm moving on, and that's what I care about right now."

Federer's efficient New York victory quieted the annoying, strutting style of the Czech number 30, still never past the third round at the event.

"It's good for me to not waste any energy," said the 12-time winner of major singles titles. "I'm playing well and moving on in the draw. At the end of the day, what counts is winning the tournament."

Federer's comprehensive victory was his 30th straight at the Open, his last loss coming to David Nalbandian in 2003.

Federer squares off against Russian Igor Andreev who put out Spanish 13th seed Fernando Verdasco 6-2, 6-4, 6-4.

Russian fifth seed Nikolay Davydenko, a semifinal loser to Federer at the last two editions, advanced into the fourth round over fellow Russian Dmitry Tursunov 6-2, 7-6 (7-3), 6-3.

Former junior champion Gilles Muller took well over three hours to complete a marathon victory against Spain's Nicolas Almagro 6-7 (3-7), 3-6, 7-6 (7-5), 7-6 (8-6), 7-5.

On the women's side, Jelena Jankovic continued her bid to wrest the number one ranking from compatriot Ana Ivanovic, reaching the second week over Dane Caroline Wozniacki 3-6, 6-2, 6-1.

Olympic champion Elena Dementieva, the losing 2004 finalist, stretched her Beijing dream, starting with a 4-0 lead on the way to a win over China's Li Na 6-4, 6-1.

The Russian faces off for the 18th time against Swiss Patty Schnyder, who came back to beat Slovenian Katarina Srebotnik 4-6, 6-3, 6-3.

Jankovic as well as Dementieva have chances reach the number one spot depending on tournament results. Jankovic held the spot last month before losing it to Ana Ivanovic.

"Little by little every day I feel that I'm getting better and better," said the Serb. "Physically I'm moving much better. My condition is getting better and better."

Jankovic had to rally past the

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Andy Roddick of the United States serves during his US Open third round match against Andreas Seppi of Italy at the Flushing Meadows in New York on Sunday.

## Rokibul down and out

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh batsman Rokibul Hassan will miss the remaining two one-day internationals against Australia due to injury.

The decision was taken after a specialist doctor suggested that while the injury does not require a surgery it will be necessary to be protected in a splint for four to six weeks in order for it to heal.

Rokibul had injured his right thumb while batting in the first ODI at the TIO Stadium on Saturday which the Tigers lost by 180 runs.

The batsman will stay back in Australia and return to Bangladesh with the rest of the squad on September 7.

The team management didn't ask for any replacement of the middle-order batsman.

"The series is over for Rokibul. But there is no chance to send any replacement because of travel time. We think it's better to give a chance to someone who is currently with the squad and has played the practice matches," said selector Naimur Rahman.

## Batting is a battle for Hussey

AFP, Darwin

He may rank among the world's best batsmen, but Australian cricketer Mike Hussey Monday described staying at the crease as a "real battle."

Hussey, who recently undertook a re-assessment of his batting, said he had often felt unable to hit the ball confidently during his time on the Australian team.

"To be honest I feel like my batting's been a real battle for two years," he said.

"I've just been sort of hanging in there and grinding away and it feels like every innings has been a real vigil and it didn't feel like I could play a lot of shots with a lot of power or conviction."

The 33-year-old, who boasts a Test average of 68.38 after 25 matches and the highest one-day international average of any player, with 55.62 after 91 matches, said he was constantly aware of his faults while batting.

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## Arman does it for his mom

SPORTS REPORTER



Arman Aziz had a wound during Mohammedan's 3-1 semifinal victory over Chittagong Mohammedan that needed 11 stitches to mend.

According to coach Maruful Haque, the Mohammedan midfielder had five percent chance of playing in the final.

The national booter not only played against the odds but also led Mohammedan to win yesterday's Federation Cup final against perennial enemies Abahani.

"My mother told me to play. I obeyed her," said Arman before rushing to the podium to take the trophy at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

His bravery was all Mohammedan needed to unite the side after they lost captain Jewel

Rana through injury. Aziz was inspirational in the midfield, battling almost alone as Sharif and Egyptian Hazem Khaled failed to provide good support under pressure from their counterparts.

"It was Arman's decision to play and I am happy that he ended up without aggravating his injury," said coach Maruf, who was happy to win a title in his first season with a top club.

The 40-year-old Maruf is more famous for being theoretically rich but he also proved that he is as able practically.

"I am happy at the team's performance but the job is only half done. I would be able to say that I am successful only at the end of the season."

In reply to a question, he said that his boys followed the instruction to let Abahani attack in the first half. "We played the waiting game. Abahani played consistently well in the tournament but they looked tired and many players had injuries in the final."

"Although playing matches with

little gaps and poor ground condition due to rain has taken toll on our players, we played well and hoped to win the game in regulation time," added Maruf.

His Abahani counterpart, veteran Amalash Sen, was understandably upset.

Despite finishing undefeated, B. League champions Abahani fumbled on the final barrier when three players shot their penalties poorly.

"The match should have not gone to the tiebreakers. Robin was offside when he scored the equaliser. Our defenders were waiting for the assistant referee's signal and hesitated to clear," said a fuming Amalash after the final.

He, however, rued the injuries in the final.

"Joy was declared fit by the physician but he picked up an early injury. We also lost Sujon, which left us with only one more replacement."

"After going one up, we had absolute domination but could not bring another attacker because

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## Undermined by mentality

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The game development committee of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has identified a lack of mental toughness and fitness as the key problem afflicting the Bangladesh cricketers.

"Skill and talent wise our cricketers are as good as any other player from the top countries."

But the problem lies in fitness level and lack of mental toughness and that's why we want to emphasise on these areas to prepare our players properly," said development committee chairman Shakil Kasem yesterday.

Shakil made the comments during a press conference arranged to announce the 15-member GP-BCB National Cricket Academy squad for the upcoming Sri Lanka tour where they will play two four-day and three one-day games besides a two-day warm-up match.

The development committee has taken different measures to overcome these problems and are in line to engage the services of former

Indian skipper Sourav Ganguly, who was highly respected for his toughness during his tenure as captain, to help the young players.

"We are planning to arrange a workshop to focus on the patience, skill level and mental toughness and we are trying to provide some international input in this regard. The good news is that former Indian captain Ganguly has agreed to present a lecture in this regard. And I think there can be none better than Ganguly to lecture on this issue," informed Kasem, adding that Ganguly has agreed to help out of goodwill.

"Our cricketers can't survive in a pressure situation because of poor fitness level and that's why we have to improve our fitness level. We think diet is a very important issue and we definitely take a look at it," he added.

In another attempt the committee invited former national team manager ASM Faruque to exchange his views with the Sri Lanka-bound cricketers about cricket etiquette while in a significant departure from customary practices they have requested the selectors to have a one-on-one session with the players.

Individual players will be told why he is selected and what role he is expected to perform on the tour. This is an attempt by the management to make the players more focused and aware of his contributions to the team.

Selector Akram Khan explained the reason behind the changes in the team from the last team which had toured South Africa last month.

"We made few changes as per our rotation policy," said the former national skipper.

The team will leave for Colombo on September 4 for a 22-day tour.

Selector Naimur Rahman, academy operations manager Khaled Mahmud and Mir Nawab Ali, head of marketing communications of Grameenphone were also present on the occasion.

### SQUAD

Nayeem Islam (captain), Marshall Ayub (vice-captain), Shamsur Rahman, Imrul Kayes, Forhad Hossain, Mahbubul Karim, Nasir Hossain, Sohrwardi Shuvo, Arfat Sunny, Sajidul Islam, Delwar Hossain, Mahbubul Alam, Rubel Hossain, Ziaur Rahman and Ashiqul Islam.