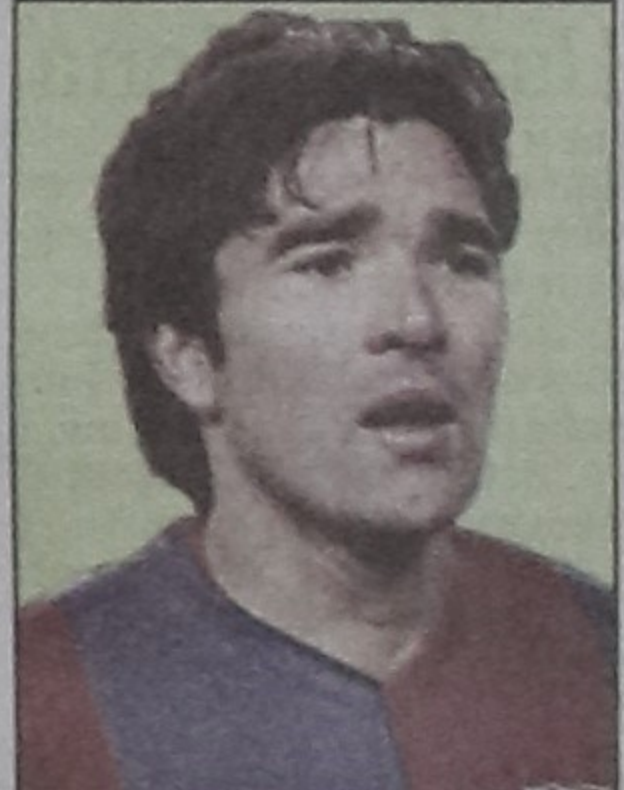




Mohammedan striker Robin (3rd from left) celebrates his dying-minute equaliser as dejected Abahani players (right) hang their heads low after a 2-2 draw in yesterday's Citycell B. League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.



Did U Know?
Sri Lanka bowler Ajantha Mendis took four wickets in a match for the fifth time in the second one-day international against Zimbabwe on Saturday and became the leading wicket-taker in 2008.



Deco
(Chelsea's Portuguese star)
"It is good for us to have him back because he is a great, great player."
On Michael Ballack's return to action.



What to Watch
ZEE Sports
UEFA Champions League Arsenal v Dynamo Kiev Live from 2:30am (Wednesday)
ESPN
Sportscentre India Sports News Live at 8:30pm
TEN Sports
ICL World Series Bangladesh XI v India XI Live from 8:00pm



Day's Event
Naf'l Cricket League (Four-Day, Day 2) Khulna v Barisal Venue: Khulna Divisional Stadium Chittagong v Rajshahi Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium Dhaka v Sylhet Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium Mirpur Citycell B. League Brothers Union v Sheikh Russel Time: 4:30pm Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Robin's rescue act

AL MUSABBIR SADI



A sublime strike by Hedayetullah Robin gave Mohammedan a last-gasp 2-2 draw against archrivals Abahani in an entertaining B. League clash at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

In a seesaw battle that kicked the restart of the competition after two weeks, holders Abahani looked set to snatch a come-from-behind victory when Nigerian midfielder Emeka Christian scored either side of the break to put the defending champions in driver's seat after Alamu Bukola's 20th minute opener for the Black and Whites.

But Abahani paid for lack of reserves that pushed them into a defensive shell on the night as rookie national striker Robin equalised from an acute angle in the first minute of the stoppage time.

Despite their first league draw, the Sky Blues stayed atop the table with 16 points from seven matches while Mohammedan remained four points behind with one match in hand.

The advantage, however, will be Mohammedan's as Maruful Haque's still unbeaten side have completed their quota of big matches while Abahani still have to face title contenders Brothers Union and Sheikh Russel.

Although Jewel Rana attended an official pre-match briefing on Sunday, the

Mohammedan captain was not even in the 18-member list but Hassan Al Mamun returned from a long injury lay-off to play in an unfamiliar role as leftback.

In front of a frustratingly low 7,000-strong crowd, Mohammedan began brightly with their midfield stringing a series of neat short-passes and Robin came close after ten minutes only to be denied a final shot by rival captain Nazrul's inspired defending.

But Bukola made no mistake 10 minutes later when the Nigerian capitalised on some slack defending against Mohammedan's superior ball possession to race past Ghanaian defender Samad Yussif with a pass from Sharif and put the ball past an outrushing goalkeeper Biplab for his fifth goal.

Abahani began to slice through the rival defence after conceding the lead and appealed for a handball inside the opposition penalty area without success before Zahid misdirected a close range effort.

A minute after Emeka failed to keep Ghanaian playmaker Ibrahim's superb chip under the bar from six yards, Abahani suffered a setback as defensive midfielder Pranotosh left the field with a head injury.

Coach Amalesh Sen gambled with Joy, taking the decision to send the former national and Abahani captain in as replacement. But even before a half-fit Joy -- who joined camp just two days earlier after failing to get a nomination for the coming general elections -- entered the ground, Abahani levelled the score in the

39th minute.

Zahid ignited the move at the right and Ibrahim helped on the ball with an overhead pass to Emeka, who evaded Saikat's challenge at the left side of the box and neatly placed the ball into the far corner with a left-footed volley.

Mohammedan still could have gone one up at the break but Robin's placing shot on one-on-one was brilliantly saved one-handed by Biplab in the injury time.

After Biplab made another important save four minutes into the second half, palming away Bukola's angled drive from the top of the box, the roles reversed as Abahani came out as the dominating force.

The league leaders went ahead in the 55th minute when Emily and Ibrahim exchanged passes at the left to set up Emeka inside the area. The Nigerian's first effort was blocked by custodian Aminul but three Mohammedan defenders surrounding the Abahani midfielder failed to stop his second-time touch roll across the line. It was Emeka's fifth goal in the run.

Zahid blasted a chance over the bar on the hour as Abahani looked to maintain the edge in the midfield with Joy giving a nice performance in only his second appearance of the league this season.

However, things began to swing the other way after a struggling midfielder Abul was taken off. With Mamun suffering from fever, Amalesh had no other option but to send another defender in as Abahani played the last 10 minutes with a five-man backline.

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Usain, Yelena honoured

Athletics

AFP, Monaco

Triple Olympic sprint champion Usain Bolt and Russia's pole vault queen Yelena Isinbayeva were confirmed as IAAF athletes of the year for 2008 here on Sunday.

The 22-year-old, world-record breaking Bolt captured the 100m, 200m and 4x100m gold in Beijing where Isinbayeva held the Bird's Nest stadium enthralled when she defended her Olympic title with a world record 5.05m.

"He is invincible," said IAAF president Lamine Diack when asked to describe Jamaican sensation Bolt who became the third sprinter in succession to win the best athlete award after compatriot Asafa Powell (2006) and America's Tyson Gay (2007).

Bolt, who was rebuked by IOC president Jacques Rogge for what he believed was disrespect towards his fellow competitors something which Bolt rejected, said that his Olympic achievements would remain with him for ever, though, he threatened he could go even faster than the 9.69seconds he ran in Beijing.

"It is something that will remain with me for the rest of my life, and something that will remain with the people who saw it," confessed Bolt. "And I am still surprised when I see the 100m again. That also pushes me to

improve even more.

"What are my limits? I don't know really. "Perhaps 9.52sec. But I must make progress in different areas, especially at the start."

Bolt said to be athlete of the year was a special occa-

sion for him.

"To be named athlete of the year, is an extraordinary feeling," he said.

"I know that I can reach the heights that people expect of me."

"All the people that welcomed me home after the

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Russian pole vault queen Yelena Isinbayeva (L) and Jamaican sprint sensation Usain Bolt pose with their respective IAAF athlete-of-the-year trophies in Monaco on Sunday.

4TH SA SHOOTING More medals for shooters

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh added a silver and a bronze on the third day of the 4th South Asian Shooting Championships in Islamabad yesterday.

Veteran shooter Sabrina Sultana and her younger teammates Tripti Datta and Sharmin Akhter won the team silver in women's 10m air rifle.

Bangladesh won another team bronze in pistol event, Mahendra Kumar Singha, Mohammed Alamgir and Shahrar Chandra winning the men's 50m pistol medal.

CHESS OLYMPIAD Bangladeshis win in 10th round

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh men's team returned to winning ways at the 38th Chess Olympiad defeating team El Salvador 2.5-1.5 in the 10th round in Dresden, Germany on Sunday.

Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman and FM Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagar won their boards against IM Leyva Hector and Martinez Nelson respectively while GM Abdullah Al Rakib drew with IM Arias Lemmys.

FM Abu Sufian Shakil lost to Chavez Ricardo Ernesto but

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Mushfiq wants to stay

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY in Johannesburg

Like most of his teammates Mushfiqur Rahim holds a poor batting average in both Test and one-dayers but still many believe he has got the potential to be a better batsman. However, the dapper wicketkeeper's major has remained a real concern for the team ever since he took over the specialised job from former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mashud.

It was not pleasing to watch the way the young stumper fumbled behind the wicket and missed some regulation chances both in two one-day matches and in the first Test of the ongoing series. He missed a simple stumping chance against South Africa captain Graeme Smith who eventually went on score 157, a costly let off indeed.

"It's not so easy to keep in such a seaming and bouncy condition but I'm not taking it as an excuse. There were a few regulation chances that I shouldn't have missed," said Mushfiqur, who took 12 catches in 11 Tests and 23 catches, six stumping in 40 one-dayers.

"It's not unlikely that a top-class keeper even miss sometimes. As a keeper I was nervous at the initial stage but now I am more comfortable and confident. And I feel that day-by-day my rhythm is getting better," he added.

Asked whether he felt relaxed with no competitor around him after the departure of Dhiman Ghosh, who joined rebel Indian

Cricket League and was subsequently banned by the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

"There is no scope to be relaxed in international cricket. It's only a matter of time that an alternative will come if I fail to deliver," he explained.

"I want to be an international figure and this is my ultimate goal. I am preparing myself to achieve the goal," said a confident Mushfiq.

The 20-year-old Bogra cricketer however admitted that his current figures were far away from what he wanted to achieve in his career.

"I think someone's average ultimately shows how good he is as a player. And my average in both one-day (19.10) and Test (17) is hardly satisfying. I have a target to achieve an average of 40-plus in Test and 35 to 40 in one-day matches," said Mushfiq.

"I'm trying to be consistent in my batting. I had a problem with gripping the bat and leaving the ball and worked with these in the Premier League and got the result. I scored few runs in the last few series but I have to play some long innings," he said.

Mushfiq also echoed his coach Jamie Siddons's sentiment that they need proper schooling if they are to survive and play good cricket in the bouncy pitches like South Africa.

"It's really new experience for all of us to play in South Africa. It was really tough out there in the middle with the ball bouncing and swinging like anything. But the problem is that we rarely come across such deliveries on flat tracks at home," said Mushfiq while reflecting on the first Test that Bangladesh lost by an innings and 129 runs in Bloemfontein.



MUSHFIQUR RAHIM

Rajin's near miss

SPORTS REPORTER



If 250 runs are standard targets in a day's play then the seventh round of the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea 10th National Cricket League almost got off to a perfect start at different venues across the country yesterday.

Sylhet were a bit better scoring 256-5 after 90 overs against Dhaka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Leaders Barisal scored 240-8 against host Khulna. Rajshahi, who dropped to second place after the sixth round, also scored 240 against host Chittagong but lost all their wickets.

The day was marked by as many as seven half centuries with Sylhet enjoying the better share of them. And it could have been a hundred had not Rajin Saleh missed the magical mark for just six runs.

Still, Rajin who had failed to board the Bangladesh plane to South Africa after a disappointing performance against New Zealand at home, led the Sylhet charge against an under-strength Dhaka with a fine 94 off 218 balls that featured a dozen boundaries. Opener Imran (58) and Kamrul Islam (56 not out) also played their part in the impressive Sylhet total which is set to prosper with five wickets still standing.

Rajin shared 134 runs for the fourth wicket

with Kamrul after being sent into bat by Dhaka captain Javed Omar. Kamrul struck seven four in his undefeated 179-ball knock.

It was hard all day for Dhaka bowlers with Azim getting some sort of success, claiming three wickets for 46 runs.

BARISAL-KHULNA

League leaders Barisal rode on fifties from opener Nasiruddin Faruque (61) and wicketkeeper Shaheen Hossain (58) on their way to a fighting 240-8 against Khulna at the Khulna Divisional Stadium.

Faruque gave Barisal a sound start but a middle-order collapse saw the visitors slump to 130-6 before Shaheen's fighting innings salvaged them. Coming in to bat at number seven, the right-hander struck eight fours in his patient 134-ball knock. Robiul Islam with 3-48 was the most successful Khulna bowler while medium pacer Dollar Mahmud picked up two wickets for 46 runs.

RAJSHAHI-CHITTAGONG

At the Chittagong Divisional Stadium Sohrwardi Shuvo scored a battling 56 to give Rajshahi a face-saving total against a disciplined Chittagong attack.

The visitors got off to a good start with Jahurul Islam (31) and Hamdul Islam (24)

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Sylhet's Rajin Saleh sets off for a single after driving the ball to the offside during his knock of 94 on the first day of the National Cricket League seventh round four-dayer against Dhaka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

SL clinch series

Cricket

BBC ONLINE, undated

Zimbabwe gave Sri Lanka a major scare before a late collapse saw them lose the third one-day international by five runs in Harare on Monday, and with it the series.

Sri Lanka went 3-0 up with two dead rubbers left to play later in the week.

In a match reduced to 28-overs-per-side Sri Lanka were restricted to 171-7, a target that looked within range while Hamilton Masakadza was at the crease.

He struck 77 off 71 balls but once he was out, Zimbabwe felt the pressure and ultimately lost by five runs.

With the scoreboard reading a healthy 134-1, Masakadza had already hit two boundaries in Thilan Thushara's last over when he tried another lusty strike from the final ball of the over, with 38 needed off 37 balls.

But the edge flew down to third man, and two more wickets, including that of Tatenda

Taibu for 31, left 21 needed of the last two overs, with demon spinners Ajantha Mendis and Muttiah Muralidaran to bowl them.

Zimbabwe threatened again after Stuart Matsikenyeri struck Mendis for a six and a four to leave 11 wanted from the last 10 balls.

But the innings imploded as Mendis gave up just one single from the final four balls of the penultimate over, and bowled Justice Chibhabha into the bargain.

Muralidaran then had Matsikenyeri lbw with the first ball of the last over, and Tawanda Mupariwa was unable to hit the final delivery for six.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the third one-day international between Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka at Harare Sports Club on Monday:

SRI LANKA

Udawatte lbw b Mupariwa	1
Tharanga c Taibu b Chigumbura	29
Sangakkara c Mupariwa b Chigumbura	57
Jayawardene c Taibu b Chigumbura	4
Kapugedera st Taibu b Mupariwa	28
Mubarak c Price b Mupariwa	22

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