

Muktijodha's second draw

SPORTS REPORTER

For the first time in the season, Muktijodha kept clean sheets in two successive matches when the struggling giants drew goalless with Arambagh in the Citycell B. League yesterday.

Having beaten Chittagong Abahani 1-0 in the previous match, Muktijodha raised their collection to eight points after 12 rounds but remained second-from-bottom and two points adrift of Arambagh, who had won the first-leg 2-1 despite trailing 1-0 till 85 minutes.

Muktijodha have now drawn two matches and won two in a campaign that looks better in the second leg with no losses, inspired by the arrival of two more foreign players.

Still, they were on the receiving end most of the time at the Bangabandhu National Stadium and Arambagh midfielder Nayan fluffed a one-on-one chance after 24 minutes.

The Reds' best chance came in the 54th minute when Walid put the ball near the six-yard box but Kanchan failed to keep his volley under the bar.

Arambagh wasted a great chance when Imrul's freekick went to Tutul off the rival wall but the latter shot the ball over the open goal in the 70th minute.

Five minutes later, Jalal forced a fine save by Arambagh custodian Mitul and the deadlock could not be opened as Imrul's first-time shot on a Tutul cross hit the side netting five minutes from time.



Did U Know?

In 1988 Dave Beasant of Wimbledon became the first goalkeeper to save a penalty in an FA Cup final and also the first keeper to captain an FA Cup winning team.



What to WATCH

BTV

Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
 Second Test, Day One
 Live from 9:30am

STAR Sports

Primera Liga
 Barcelona v Real Mallorca
 Live from 2:00am (Sunday)

STAR Cricket

Australia v South Africa
 Third Test, Day Two
 Live from 5:30am (Sunday)



TALK TURKEY



Sourav Ganguly

(Former India cricket captain)
 "India has a very good team but I believe this team's real test would be overseas, when India go to New Zealand and when they start travelling abroad. If you look at the last year, India has played a lot of cricket at home."



DAY'S FIXTURES
 Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
 Second Test, Day One
 Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium
 Time: 9:30am
 Citycell B. League
 Khulna Abahani v Sheikh Russel
 Venue: Khulna Divisional Stadium
 Time: 2:30pm
 Ctg Abahani v Brothers Union
 Venue: MA Aziz Stadium, Chittagong
 Time: 2:30pm

Tigers to fight on

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong



Bangladesh will take inspiration from the fighting spirit in the Dhaka Test when the home side take on Sri Lanka in the second and final Test at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium here today.

However, Tigers captain Mohammad Ashraf will focus on having a 'better' first innings for the team, who were dismissed poorly in their first essay but put the visitors under real pressure by getting beyond the 400-run mark while chasing a massive 521 for a world-record win.

"We are starting the new year with a lot of confidence because of our second innings performance in the first Test in Dhaka. We are getting better as a team and the boys believe that and this year we will have plenty of opportunities to show our improvement," said Ashraf, who contributed 101 in the fourth innings of the first Test.

"We need to bat four sessions at least in the first innings. If we do that then we'll have a decent score on the board. That's the pre-requisite for us getting a positive result in Test matches and a positive result can be a win also."

While talk of the runs is a norm, the home side are tempted to play a second spinner in Enamul Haque after seeing no

grass on the wicket.

"It's very dry and devoid of grass, very different from the one in Dhaka but almost similar to the track we played on against New Zealand here in October. It looks like a pitch where the spinners may play a role. We have retained the same 12 we had given before the first Test with Rajin (Saleh) and Sajidul (Islam) sitting out.

"There is a good chance that Enam

might come in. I think he deserves to play on this track. If he plays, (Mahbubul Alam) Robin will be left out.

Sri Lanka's mystery spinner Ajantha Mendis has been included in the Test squad but Ashraf's response about his presence was indifferent.

"Some of us have played him in the Asia Cup. But one-dayers and Tests are different. Mushfiqur (Rahim) and Rokibul (Hasan) played him quite well. We have seen footage of him bowling against India.

"It is important not to think of him or Muralidaran too much and just try to play ball by ball. He has taken a lot of wickets recently but our focus will be on playing each ball by its merit," said the ace Bangladesh batsman, claiming that they have started reading Muralidaran better despite the champion off-spinner's huge success against Bangladesh.

"He is world class and takes wickets against every opposition. Still I think that we are reading him better but we have to show that over a long period of time. Too often we have only done that for short periods," added Ashraf.

For Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene, a landmark approaches as the stylish batsman is set to appear in his 100th Test.

"I can't say that I'm not emotional. I'm

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PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER
 Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraf hits out in the nets at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

'Pitch to help batsmen'

NUR UDDIN ALAMGIR, Chittagong



Buoyed by the good show in Dhaka, Bangladesh will meet visiting Sri Lanka today in the second Test amid optimism to clinch the win they had come close to in the first Test.

The Tigers will play the 14th Test match on the soil of the port city where they got a 226-run win against Zimbabwe at MA Aziz Stadium in 2005, their lone Test victory so far.

In 2006, the Tigers drew with touring India at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium where today's match will be held.

In the last meeting against Sri Lanka at the same ground in 2006, Bangladesh lost the match by eight wickets after scoring 319 in the first innings and 181 in the second.

Though the visitors were bundled out for 338 in the first innings, they completed the chase conceding only two wickets.

It is mentionable that the highest score in the first innings had come from Mohammad Ashraf, who made 136 off 185 balls featuring 15 boundaries and three sixes in the last match against Sri Lanka here.

And the Bangladeshi batters may also be happy enough to see a batting friendly wicket.

Pitch curator Shafiqul Alam yesterday hinted that the batsmen might take benefit from the wicket.

"There is no major difference between the wickets in Dhaka and Chittagong. The basic difference is in colour. Wickets in Dhaka are made of black clay while here, wickets are made of brown clay," Alam informed yesterday.

"The match will be held on the third wicket of the ground and we are expecting runs from this wicket," added Alam.

The cricket fans here also hope that patient batting by the Bangladeshi batsmen would help the team to bring positive result.



PHOTO: STAR
 Kumar Sangakkara (R) and some of his teammates jog at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Riyad leads from front

SPORTS REPORTER



Dhaka captain Mahmudullah Riyad's rich vein of form in domestic cricket helped Dhaka to an easy seven-wicket victory over Sylhet in the National Cricket League at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Dhaka cruised to 163 for three in 40.5 overs with the all-rounder taking two wickets and then hitting an unbeaten half-century. Sylhet were bowled out for a lowly 162 in 46.3 overs.

Rajshahi wicketkeeper Hamidul Islam also turned in an all-round performance as he struck 59 and dismissed four batsmen with his quick hands behind the stumps. His side also had an easy outing, defeating Chittagong by 57 runs in Dhanmondi. In the other match of the day, Khulna beat Barisal by six wickets.

All six teams are on two points each after winning and losing a match each.

DHAKA-SYLHET

Sylhet were involved in a second successive one-sided match in a couple of days but this time they were in the receiving end.

They suffered a collapse after opener Saikat Ali and Mohammad Mithun added 53 for the second wicket. At one stage they were 90 for six before Sharifullah and Taposh Ghosh added 40 for the seventh wicket. Captain Riyad took both their wickets to terminate the innings with 3.3 overs remaining. Arafat Sunny and Elias Sunny also took two wickets each.

Dhaka had a disastrous start losing Javed Omar and Rashedul Haque going early. But Riyad, who struck 65 off 90 balls, and Marshall Ayub, who also scored 65, added 117 for the fourth wicket.

RAJSHAHI-CHITTAGONG

The match was in a fine balance with Masumuddin and Rezaul Karim scoring 49 and 59 respectively. They added 82 for the third wicket before Masum was run out by Jahurul Islam before he could reach yet another fifty.

Then tall left-arm spinner Saqlain Sajib triggered a collapse in the Chittagong line-up, taking four wickets for just 17 runs. He was helped by wicketkeeper Hamidul who took two catches and affected two stumpings off the left-arm.

The young wicketkeeper had earlier struck

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Salman knows how to play Ajantha

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan opener Salman Butt claims to have found the key to success against Sri Lankan mystery spinner Ajantha Mendis after watching him bowl during the Indian Premier League trials for Kolkata Knight Riders.

"He bowls like the typical finger tape tennis bowlers you find playing on the streets of Pakistan and his success comes from the fact that he has a very good faster ball without any visible change to his bowling action or grip on the ball," Butt told PTI. Butt said he would now be more comfortable while facing up to the unorthodox off-spin of Mendis during Pakistan's upcoming series against Sri Lanka.

"At the end of the season,

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Abahani topple Ctg MSC

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong



Chittagong Mohammedan's unbeaten home run in the Citycell B. League came to an end when the local giants suffered a solitary goal defeat to defending champions Abahani from Dhaka here yesterday.

Nigerian midfielder Emeka Christian separated the two sides after 20 minutes at the MA Aziz Stadium, where a 5,000-strong crowd enjoyed the keenly contested 12th round match of the league.

The Sky-Blues, who had won the first-leg match in Dhaka 2-0, remained atop the table with 26 points after eight wins while Chittagong Mohammedan stuck to 17 points after their overall third loss.

Both the sides looked attacking from the very beginning and kept the holiday crowd warm on a chilly afternoon with a lively match.

Chittagong Mohammedan got a golden chance in the 16th minute when Towhidul capitalised on a defence lapse to race inside the rival area but he fluffed the opportunity, allowing Biplab to rush out of the Abahani goal and clear the ball.

The visitors went ahead four minutes later when Emeka, now sharing the league's top-scorer's position along with Sheikh Russel's Alfaz Ahmed and Rahmatganj striker Idris Kasirye, utilised a through-pass from Emily. Having controlled the pass well inside the penalty area, the Nigerian made no mistake to slam home near from the penalty spot.

Emeka was close to double the margin minutes later but his left-footed low drive from 15 yards hit the woodwork to keep the hosts in the game.

The local side, who had their Guinean captain Saifo Camara sent off in the second-half injury time for a second bookable offence, created chances but their forwards lacked the cutting edge.

And they lost tempers that saw Camara receive an early first booking. In the end, the midfielder got his second yellow card for a foul on Abahani's Ghanaian defender Samad Yussif. Camara, who was behind most of the Chittagong chances, will miss their next match against Rahmatganj.

Abahani had skipper Nazrul back in the side after a long lay-off due to injury and Amalesh Sen's midfield seemed to shrug of the lethargic display they showed in a dull goalless draw

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Dead rubber full of life

Australia-S Africa 3rd Test starts today

Cricket

CRICINFO, Sydney

Graeme Smith has been surprised by Australia's lack of clarity, but the only possible cloudiness in the South African camp has been caused by the celebrations from the peaks of success over the past two weeks. While the visitors have worn the smiles of hard-earned triumphs either side of Christmas, the hosts have been scrooging their way through the festive season while losing a rare series at home.

The SCG is usually a parade ground for the Australians, but this time it will be a desperate fight to avoid a first clean-sweep defeat in a three-Test series in their backyard. While South Africa look down, Australian supporters are wondering how long it will take before they can stop peering up. For the third Test in Sydney, which is starting a day later than usual to give the players more rest, the evolution of the struggling side continues with two debutants in Doug Bollinger and Andrew McDonald.

In the professional climate where the shoe size of every international is known alongside

their favourite hitting areas, the South Africans are entering a blind date with Bollinger, the opening bowler, and the all-rounder McDonald. It is a situation that is so unfamiliar to Smith that it is giving him flashbacks to his junior days.

"It's not often in world cricket that you arrive at a game and don't know too much about the guys you'll be facing with the new ball," Smith said. "It takes you back to the days at school and club cricket when there was no television around."

Bollinger is a left-arm fast bowler who will start on his home ground and is capable of swinging the new and old ball while McDonald -- the South Africans have seen him playing Twenty20 on television for Victoria -- is a batsman who chips in with the ball. The selections were a shock for the visitors. "Having Ben Hilfenhaus in (the squad in) Melbourne and now picking Bollinger here probably shows a little bit of lack of clarity in terms of where they want to go," Smith said. "That has surprised us."

Smith is not a man who would admit to fear, and given the recent performances of Australian players considered better than Bollinger and McDonald there is no reason to

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PHOTO: STAR
 Abahani midfielder Emeka Christian, who scored the side's match winner against Chittagong Mohammedan, shoots to hit the bar during their Citycell B. League match at the Chittagong MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.