

Premier cricket begins today sans a sponsor

MOHAMMAD ISAM

If cricket officials of the country were proud of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Mohammad Ashraful on Friday, they should now be thankful to the duo for bringing some much-needed buzz into this year's domestic competition and lure a sponsor that they are yet to get for the premier club event.

The Premier League proper begins today with Mashrafe's Abahani taking on debutants Cricket Coaching School at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Kolkata Knight Riders' latest recruit Mashrafe, who will lead the defending champions, would bring in any crowd that turns up for the league opener after being dramatically bought by the franchise co-owned by film superstar Shah Rukh Khan. The Narail Express was bought for 600,000 dollars at the auction of the Indian Premier League held in Goa on Friday. News of the bidding war between Knight Riders and Kings XI Punjab has definitely sparked a frenzy among the cricket fans in Dhaka and it is expected that there would be interest for at least the first few rounds when the Tigers would be available for the various clubs.

Abahani, a popular club by their own right, could definitely do with some positive news after their semifinal exit from the Twenty20 competition last week. The defending champions, who also won the league in 2006-07, will hope to have opener Tamim Iqbal fit and after the departure of several prominent names of last season to the rebel Indian Cricket League.

Gazi Tank, the impressive outfit in the Twenty20 competition, are the other promoted side in the league and they take on Bangladesh Biman at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium. Runners-up last year, Biman would certainly hope to cash in on Shakib Al

Hasan's presence but they are up against a strong unit led by Ashraful, a proven player for newly-promoted teams. His captaincy skills were first put to test when he led Sonargaon Cricketers' surge in the Premier League only a few seasons ago and it is expected that he do the same for Gazi Tank, another big-moneyed newcomers.

Mohammed Sporting Club, who bagged this year's Twenty20 trophy, will also play on the opening day. They take on last year's survivors Young Pegasus. The Motijheel giants have made their most promising side in years with the likes of Shamsur Rahman, Marshall Ayub and Nasiruddin Faruque adding strength to the batting that already boasts of Rokibul Hasan, the man-of-the-final last week.

It is well-known in the club circuit that Abahani always gets it right when it comes to team combination but this time it seems that the Motijheel giants' officials have made a good fist of it.

Tomorrow, last year's surprise package BKSP take on Partex, rumoured to have recruited Mushfiqur Rahim in Mirpur while Shurjo Tarun face Victoria at the BKSP. The first round encounters would be complete when Mehrab Hossain's Old DOHS face City Club in Fatullah.

PARTIAL FIXTURE

February 8:	Abahani v C.C.S. at Mirpur
	Biman v Gazi Tank at Fatullah
	Mohammedan v Pegasus at BKSP
February 9:	BKSP v Partex at Mirpur
	Shurjo Tarun v Victoria at BKSP
	City Club v Old DOHS at Fatullah
February 11:	Abahani v Gazi Tank at Mirpur
	Biman v Young Pegasus at BKSP
	Mohammedan v Partex at Fatullah
February 12:	BKSP v Victoria at Fatullah
	Shurjo Tarun v Old DOHS at Mirpur
	City Club v C.C.S. at BKSP



PHOTO: THE TELEGRAPH

RED CHILLIES TOO HOT FOR KINGS: Bollywood belles Priety Zinta (L) and Juhi Chawla had an intense 'tug-of-war' over Tigers paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. Chawla, co-owner of Kolkata Knight Riders finally won the battle offering 600,000 dollars for the pacer after 83 bids, which is also the longest in the IPL history.

Battle of Bollywood

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The phrase 'when the going gets tough he gets going' perhaps fits more appropriately for Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. A cricketer with both his knees operated on and has been fighting against freakish injury ever since his Bangladesh debut in 2001 added another daring chapter in his never-say-die career on Friday. He entered the auction of the Indian Premier League (IPL) with a minimum floor price of 50,000 dollars and made a triumphant return with a mind-boggling cheque of 600,000 dollars.

Not only that it was perhaps for the first time a Bangladeshi player hogged the spotlight in the Indian media that have been unwittingly indifferent and to some extent bitter regarding cricket across the border.

The Telegraph certainly provided the biggest coverage of Mashrafe with a banner headline: 'Ladies fight for Bangla boy', referring to the tug-of-war between Bollywood superstars Juhi Chawla and Priety Zinta.

Its reporter Samyabrata Ray Goswami wrote:

"Two Bollywood beauties fought over a baby-faced boy next door at the Indian Premier League auction today (Friday), with Juhi Chawla finally bagging

Bangladesh pacer Mashrafe Mortaza for the Kolkata Knight Riders.

"Juhi and Kings XI Punjab franchisee Priety Zinta -- leading ladies in many a film opposite the Knights' co-owner Shah Rukh Khan -- went for the unassuming Mortaza as if Kal Ho Naa Ho, with 83 bids needed to settle the issue."

Telegraph also gave a vivid description of the bid for the 'Narail Express'.

"An electric half-hour had passed by then and the 25-year-old's price had shot to \$600,000 from the listed base of \$50,000. It was the longest bidding in IPL history, and the 12-fold improvement on the base price the steepest ever."

"The beginning, however, had as much action as a dot ball."

Knight Riders sources had hinted that Mortaza was on their wish list apart from South African batsman JP Duminy and Australian quick Shaun Tait. Yet when auctioneer Richard Medley announced the Bangladeshi's name, the ladies, in true Bollywood heroine fashion, feigned initial indifference.

The newspaper also quoted a source regarding how the event transpired.

"There was utter silence; no one raised (the electric sabre used for bidding). Then, just before the hammer went down, KKR made a bid. Till then, it had seemed like Mortaza might go unsold."

"Priety's Kings XI immediately joined the fray. The bids went up by \$5,000.

When KKR touched \$400,000 (on the 71st bid), Medley asked Priety if she was game for \$410,000. She was quiet for a while and then nodded.

"The bids rose by \$10,000 till the Knights touched \$500,000 on the 81st. The next bid, from Kings XI, was for \$550,000."

"(Then) KKR hit the match-winning sixer: a \$50,000 jump over Punjab's last offer."

"The whole thing was very dramatic - there was pin-drop silence in the room and Medley made it even more frenzied by quickening the pace of bidding. It was like speed chess."

The Navhind times in Goa termed bidding for Mortaza like a 'war' between Knight Riders and the Punjab Kings.

"The bidding for Mortaza intensified and literally it seemed as if Ness Wadia's Kings XI Punjab and Juhi Chawla's Kolkata Knight Riders, were at wars when they raised the mark to astronomical sums."

The Herald in Goa went a step further managing a quote from Kings XI stakeholder Priety Zinta.

"Mortaza is a great player, an all-rounder and we wanted him. But you win some, you lose some," the Bollywood star was quoted by the newspaper.

The Indian Express explained how important Mashrafe was for Knight

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6



Did U Know?

George Foreman is the only heavyweight champion to win title on birthday in 1973.



What to WATCH

STAR Cricket

Australia v New Zealand
Third ODI

NEO Cricket

Sri Lanka v India
Fifth ODI

TEN Sports

West Indies v England
First Test, Day Five

ESPN

English Premier League
Tottenham v Arsenal

STAR Sports

West Ham v Man United
Live from 9:00pm

STAR Sports

Primera Liga
Osasuna v Valencia

STAR Sports

Live from 2:00am (Monday)



Premier Div Cricket League
Abahani v Cricket Coaching School
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur
Biman v Gazi Tank
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
Mohammedan v Young Pegasus
Venue: BKSP



TALK TURKEY



Kyle Mills

(New Zealand bowler)
"A year ago I was bowling to Adam Gilchrist and Matthew Hayden; now we're bowling to David Warner and Shaun Marsh. A big difference."
On why they fancy their chances against Australia.

SL's winning start

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka got off to a sound start in the Grameenphone women's tri-nation cricket tournament when they handed a three-wicket defeat to Pakistan in a low-scoring match at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra yesterday.

Sri Lankan bowlers led by player-of-the-match Chamani Seneviratne did an excellent job as Pakistan, who won their first game against hosts Bangladesh by seven wickets, were bundled out for 103 in 41.5 overs after being sent into bat.

New-ball bowler Seneviratne claimed three wickets for 26 runs

to cause an early damage while Chamari Polgampola, Sripali Weerakkody, Hiruka Fernando, Sashikala Siriwardane and Suvini de Alwis took one wicket each.

Pakistan were able to cross the hundred-run mark because of the efforts from tail-enders Arman Khan (25) and Almas Akram (19).

Middle-order batswomen Sana Mir (15) and Javeria Khan (11) were the other batters to reach double digits.

In reply, Sri Lanka made a poor start when Asmavia Iqbal removed opener Polgampala with the scoreboard reading eight, but Dedunu de Silva and Hiruka repaired the early damage with 31 runs for the second wicket.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

Satkhira blank Dhaka

SPORTS REPORTER

Satkhira and Khulna reached the zonal finals of the Citycell Women Football Championship beating their rivals in Buriganga Zone yesterday.

The winners will meet in the zonal final today at Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS) at 3pm.

At the Birshreshtha Shaheed Sepoy Mohammad Mostafa Stadium in Kamalapur, Satkhira drubbed hosts Dhaka 6-0.

Sabina scored a hatrick while Salma struck twice and Jannatul Ferdous netted the other goal for the winners.

In the day's other match at the BNS, Khulna blanked Tangail 3-0. Sumi Akter struck twice while Rubina Sultana scored the other goal for Khulna.



PHOTO: BANGLARCHOKI.COM

Sri Lanka cricketers celebrate the fall of yet another Pakistan batter in the second game of the Grameenphone tri-nation women's cricket tournament at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra yesterday.

Ashraful stays skipper

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Ashraful and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza got another good news a day after their IPL achievements as they were retained as captain and vice-captain respectively till the next tour of West Indies in July-August.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) took the decision in its directors' meeting at Mirpur yesterday as the game's governing body decided to give them more opportunities despite huge criticism over the batting form of Ashraful.

"The selection of captain and vice-captain was an important issue in the meeting and after a discussion the board decided to continue with [Mohammad] Ashraful and Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza] as captain and vice-captain until the next tour of West Indies in July-August," informed BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus.

"We also considered Mashrafe in terms of seniority and Mushfiqur Rahim for his maturity as prospective candidates for the captaincy. Both are captaining their respective club sides in the Dhaka Premier League this season, but the board wants to give them more time to grow in the role. Their captaincy in the Premier League will be monitored and observed by the board," informed Yunus.

He also said that they felt that it's better to give

Ashraful more time and it would be really good if he could show improvement during this time.

Although there has been a lot of talk about inform Shakib Al Hasan, the board however was not ready to burden the number one ranked all-rounder with captaincy.

"He [Shakib] is now in good touch and it would not be wise to disturb him anyway. We don't want to give him any additional burden," Yunus reflected on the board's sentiment.

On the other hand coach Jamie Siddons also assured the board during a presentation in the marathon meeting that Ashraful and few other players like opener Tamim Iqbal and Zunaed Siddiqui would start to deliver very soon.

"The board saw a presentation from Jamie Siddons on the team's progress and the coach's plans for the future. One of the key features of the presentation was Shakib's transformation with the bat over the last year. The coach showed us Shakib's backlift when he [Siddons] first came in and his present state which is more technically correct and allows him to play shots more comfortably and freely," Yunus told.

Ashraful was a relieved man after the decision but said that he had to be consistent as a batsman to silence his critics. Beside the full tour in the Caribbean, the 24-year-old right-hander will lead the team in the five-match one-day series and two Twenty20 matches against Pakistan in March at home and the Twenty20 World Cup in England in June.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

Brothers survive a scare

SPORTS REPORTER

Brothers Union survived a scare to secure a 3-2 win over Rahmatganj in the Citycell B. League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

With the outcome, the Gopibagh outfit improved their tally to 31 points while Rahmatganj remained on 21 points, both having played 18 matches.

Captain Mehdi Hasan Tapu put Brothers ahead in the 12th minute but Rahmatganj bounced back through a 25th minute strike from Nigerian Francis. They however went to the break happy as they took a 2-1 lead in the first-half when Atiqur Rahman Meshu struck the second goal in the 37th minute.

Idris Kasirye brought real excitement in the match when he levelled the score for Rahmatganj by converting a penalty in the 75th minute.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Gayle, Sarwan take Windies in front

Cricket

AFP, Kingston

Skipper Chris Gayle and Ramnaresh Sarwan hit centuries as West Indies edged into a 34-run lead, with three wickets remaining, at stumps on the third day of the first Test here on Friday.

Sarwan hit the top score of 107 and Gayle, 103, his first Test century on his home ground, to help their side reach 352 for seven, replying to England's first innings total of 318, at close of play at Sabina Park.

England appeared to have control of the match, when they removed World Cricketer of the Year Shivnarine Chanderpaul about 15 minutes before tea to leave West Indies on 254 for five.

But they again met resistance in the form of a sixth-wicket stand of 66 between Brendan Nash and Denesh Ramdin.

Ramdin was one of two wickets England claimed in the final session, when he became Monty Panesar's first wicket in the 37th of the left-arm spin bowler's 45 overs, leaving Nash to shepherd the tail until the close with 47 not out.

Stuart Broad was England's most successful bowler with three wickets for 61 runs from 24 overs, and Andrew Flintoff supported with two for 57 from 27 overs.

"It means a lot to me to score my first century on my home ground. It's just unfortunate I couldn't carry on," said Gayle. "It will be nice to get a lead of at least 60 on this pitch. Hopefully, the spinners can come into play for us."

Broad said he had to work hard on a tough pitch.

"It's flat and slow. The surface here is a bit like the sub-continent. You have to use the cutter and try and

deceive the batsman."

England failed to make early inroads into West Indies' batting, after the home team continued from their overnight total of 160 for one.

But Broad struck twice in the penultimate over before lunch to bring England back into the contest, after Gayle and Sarwan reached their landmarks.

Broad snared Gayle and then fellow hometown boy Xavier Marshall for a second-ball duck in the space of three balls, as West Indies reached 224 for three at the interval.

England's successes only came following a second

wicket stand of 202 between Gayle and Sarwan.

Broad got a delivery to keep low to Gayle, and the West Indies captain played back, and was bowled when he inside-edged the ball into his stumps.

Gayle batted for a little over five and three-quarter hours, faced 193 balls, and struck five fours and five sixes.

Clearly energised, Broad sprinted in to deliver his next delivery which rushed into the front of new batsman Xavier Marshall, but his and England's loud appeal for an lbw verdict was turned down

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6



PHOTO: AFP

West Indies vice-captain Ramnaresh Sarwan celebrates after completing his century on the third day of the first Test against England at the Sabina Park in Kingston on Friday.