



Abahani booters jog at their club ground in Dhanmondi yesterday in their final practice session for the first-leg semifinal of the Citycell Super Cup against Brothers Union.

ABAHANI-BROTHERS SEMIFINAL TODAY

Target first leg

SPORTS REPORTER



The battle for the Tk one-crore top prize gets damn serious as the Citycell Super Cup enters the knockout stage today.

Abahani will take on Brothers Union in the first of their double-leg semifinals at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. The match, which kicks off at 5 pm, will be telecast live by BTv.

Abahani have won their all three group stage matches convincingly to finish champions and will start as strong favourites to make the March 27 final.

Brothers, after a poor start during a goalless draw against Farashganj, routed Chittagong Abahani 3-0 before another draw, 1-1, against eventual group winners Mohammedan.

Amal Sen's B. League champions, however, cannot take victory for granted despite winning their last 12 matches in a row including nine in the B. League, as

Brothers have showed significant improvement, especially the fighting spirit they had shown against Mohammedan.

And both teams have decided to go on full assault in the first leg semifinal to take advantage in the return-leg clash scheduled for March 23.

"The first match is crucial. The team that win the first leg will have the advantage and can relax in the second," told Brothers manager Amer Khan.

The Oranges had beaten Abahani 2-0 in the first leg of the B. League but the Sky Blues from Dhanmondi took revenge with a 3-0 second-leg victory.

"It could be anybody's game but we have to remember that we are playing two matches, which is something new for us. Abahani have retained almost the same side for three seasons now but we have a young side with a few experienced ones. So we expect a very competitive match," added Amer, who will rely on his side's speed, which is increasing gradually.

"Refereeing has had been a problem and we hope that the semifinals would be

exception," said the former Brothers midfielder who lost temper during their group match against Mohammedan but regretted his actions.

"Abahani are a team in form and their attack is one of the best. But if we can mark some of their key players, it would be tough to score against us."

While Abahani have been a free scoring team with Nigeria's 5-goal marksman Emeka, Bangladesh international Emily and Ghana's Ibrahim showing top form, the trio would be a headache for Brothers, who might have to use a third-choice fullback in Akramuzzaman Liton.

Coach Wasim Iqbal, who will form a 3-5-2 line, has yet to confirm the availability of rightback Arup or Ashraf.

"The difference between the two teams is in foreign recruits. Abahani's foreign collection is really good," said Wasim, whose side have suffered in absence of a regular goal getter.

Ghanaian Henry Quaye and local boy Tapu make their strike line but Abahani have the tightest defence, which has

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Did U Know?

A Manchester City fan was banned in 1995 from bringing dead chickens into City's Maine Road ground. He used to celebrate City goals by swinging the birds around his head.



TALK TURKEY



Roberto Carlos

(Brazilian defender) "If Florentino Perez comes and says 'Roberto, come back', I will have to think about it and talk about it. I have never said I won't come back."

While expressing his desire to move back to Real Madrid.



What to WATCH

- BTv**
 - Super Cup Football (Semifinal, First-Leg) Abahani v Brothers Union Live from 5:00pm
 - Neo Cricket**
 - New Zealand v India First Test, Day Two Live from 4:00am
 - TEN Sports**
 - South Africa v Australia Third Test, Day One Live from 2:30pm
 - ESPN**
 - Sportscentre India Sports News Live at 8:30pm

Partex dent Torun

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Partex put an end to Surjo Torun's fairytale run in the Premier Cricket League with a five-wicket victory at the BKSP ground in Savar yesterday.

Former national opener Mehrab Hossain's unbeaten half-century after Omar Faruk's four-wicket haul in the low-scoring match fashioned the facile win for Partex who toppled giants Mohammedan in the points table.

Surjo Torun's third defeat made sure that Abahani go into the Super League with a four-point advantage. Surjo Torun and Biman finish the first-stage level on 16 points.

On the other hand, Partex finished fourth as they stretched their collection to 14 points from eleven matches, one point ahead of Mohammedan.

Away at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium, BKSP secured an exciting two-wicket victory over Young Pegasus to end their league campaign. BKSP, who have missed the super league, finished with 10 points while Pegasus, who will play the relegation league along with Victoria and City Club, remained on five points.

PARTEX-SURJO TORUN

Mahbub Alam and Zunaed Siddiqui got off to a flying start after Surjo Torun decided to bat first but the rot began quickly with the dismissal of Mahbub in the third over with the scoreboard

reading 23.

Second-placed Torun then lost wickets like ninepins before being bundled out for 132 in 38.1 overs with national opener Zunaed making team highest 28 off 33 balls that featured four boundaries.

Left-arm spinner Faruk mopped up the tail by taking four wickets for 14 runs.

Partex rode on Mehrab's unbeaten 62 to reach 134 for five in 38.5 overs. The right-hander smashed eight fours in 110 balls.

Tariq Ahmed contributed 33 off 55 deliveries with five hits to the fence.

BKSP-PEGASUS

Pacer Niyamul Hasan initiated an early collapse by claiming four wickets for 48 but still, Pegasus posted a respectable total of 224, thanks to number eight batsman Jubair Ahmed who scored 44 off 45 balls after Rahat Sadeq's half-century.

Rahat made 50 off 72 balls that saw four boundaries.

In reply, Saikat Ali and Shoumya Sarker gave BKSP a blistering start as the opening pair added 47 runs in 4.4 overs. Shoumya smashed five fours and a six to make 30 off 16 balls while Saikat hit 81 off 91 balls laced with six boundaries and four sixes.

One down Asif Ahmed was the other notable scorer with 65 off 82 balls with ten fours and a six before BKSP's innings suffered a hiccup.

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Cricketers get 30% pay rise

SPORTS REPORTER

Salary of the national cricket team players and the local staff of the team management has been increased by thirty per cent.

The decision was taken at a marathon meeting of directors of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) last night at its Mirpur headquarters. The issue of the pay rise was long overdue as the last payroll expired in November last year.

In another major move, the BCB will purchase land suitable for cricket stadiums from across the country on a priority basis.

BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus after the meeting informed that the board observed a minute's silence in memory of the deceased members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and civilians in the Pikhana tragedy on February 25.

"The board also took some significant decisions, notably an increase in the salary of national players and local staff of the national team management and in regards to approval of the BCB HR Policy and Media Protocol," said Yunus.

The contracts of national team operations manager Shaiful Haque Hira, fielding coach Mohammad Salah Uddin and computer analyst Nasir Ahmed have been extended by another year. The contract of national team bowling coach Champaka Ramanaayake has been extended until the end of Bangladesh's tour of the West Indies later this year.

To expedite the ICC Cricket World Cup organisational aspects and to coordinate with various government and other concerned agencies a four-member committee has been formed. The board also formed a three-member committee to organise the BCB AGM. Director Dewan Shaiful Arefin has been named convener of both committees.

"We are yet to get the guideline for the local organising committee for the World Cup

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Brothers Union footballers stretch before their training session at the club ground in Gopibagh yesterday on the eve of today's first-leg semifinal of the Citycell Super Cup against Abahani.

A great setback: Younis

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan captain Younis Khan expressed disappointment Wednesday after Bangladesh postponed Pakistan's tour over security fears, saying Dhaka has deprived his team of valuable cricket.

"I am greatly disappointed," Younis said of the Bangladesh government decision to delay the five one-day and two Twenty20 matches tour.

"The decision has deprived us of some valuable cricket once again," he said.

Pakistan had been due to tour Bangladesh this month but the dates were put on hold after gunmen attacked the Sri Lankan team in Lahore on March 3, killing eight policemen, and wounding seven players and an assistant coach.

The attacks ended Pakistan's chances of hosting international matches in the near future and the Bangladesh postponement further jolted cricket in a country obsessed with the sports.

"It is a great setback especially when we needed practice for the Australia series," said Younis, adding that the tour would have been a chance to try out some youngsters.

"We had some newcomers in the team for Bangladesh who we wanted to try out before our series against Australia next month, but now the tour is off we have lost that opportunity

and its demoralising for a captain," said Younis.

Pakistan's next assignment is a five one-day and one Twenty20 match series to be played in Dubai and Abu Dhabi from April 22 to May 7.

Younis said team performance would be affected by successive postponements.

"Our team is unfortunately very short on cricket and if mishaps like this happen, our performance will decline in important series," said Younis.

Pakistan were left without a Test last year after Australia postponed a full Test and one-day tour to the troubled country over security fears.

Efforts by the Pakistan Cricket Board to arrange interim series bore little fruit, as the West Indies, South Africa and New Zealand refused to send their teams over security fears.

India also refused permission for its team to tour Pakistan after relations between the arch-rivals worsened in the wake of last November's attacks on Mumbai, which New Delhi blamed on Pakistan-based militants.

Last month a proposed tri-series in Dubai was also cancelled after Sri Lanka said it was unavailable. Bangladesh was the third team in the tri-series, to be played in late April.

"We have suffered a lot from tour cancellations, mainly the India and Australia series, so we badly need cricket. I hope we get some good cricket later in the year," said Younis, who took over as captain from Shoaib Malik last month.

Ryder, Vettori rescue NZ

Cricket

AFP, Hamilton

A defiant captain's century by Daniel Vettori and a maiden ton for Jesse Ryder rescued New Zealand on the opening day of the first Test here Wednesday but India finished on top.

The home side were dismissed for 279 on a batsman-friendly wicket and at stumps the tourists had reached 29 without loss off seven overs with the explosive Virender Sehwag not out 22 and fellow opener Gautam Gambhir on six.

Indian captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni won the toss and elected to bowl, gambling on his bowlers capitalising on the overcast conditions and a green-tinged wicket.

His choice paid off, with New Zealand in dire straits at 60 for six just before lunch when Vettori joined Ryder in

the middle to begin the fightback.

The pair produced a record-breaking 186-run partnership to take the score to 246, and New Zealand added just 33 more runs before they were all out.

The skipper's 118 was his third century in 90 Tests, while Ryder's 102 was his maiden ton in his seventh Test.

But that partnership aside, the day belonged to India and Vettori was the first to admit it.

At times the match was a battle of wits between the captains, with Vettori looking for runs and forcing Dhoni into frequent field adjustments.

Ryder, at the other end, showed his versatility, shelving his big-hitting one-day role to play a watchful knock.

Between them they blocked out the spin of Harbhajan Singh at one end while picking off the quicks at the other as the afternoon sun

baked the wicket, the ball aged, and conditions became more batsman-friendly.

Vettori brought up the New Zealand 100, hooking Zaheer Khan for six, and in the first hour after tea the home side raced along at more than five an over with the skipper belting Sehwag over the ropes.

Vettori's immense effort came to an end after 197 minutes at the crease when Dhoni moved smartly to take an inside edge off Munaf Patel.

The 164-ball innings produced two sixes and 14 fours, with his century arriving off a single when he top-edged Harbhajan to fine leg.

He survived two close calls, diving to make his ground when sent back by Ryder two balls before tea and then on 77 he was dropped by Rahul

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Gazi take no punitive action

SPORTS REPORTER

Gazi Tank team management denied reports of stripping Mohammad Ashraf of captaincy following their shocking defeat against Mohammedan by 174 runs at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium on Tuesday.

Rumours were flying high about Ashraf losing the captaincy and players being fined, due to their disconsolate performance on Tuesday.

"When a management forms a good team comprising of national players and other good players from the domestic circuit they aspire to win. No doubt we are shocked beyond our imagination but for the time being Ashraf will remain the

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New Zealand batsman Jesse Ryder celebrates his maiden century on the first day of the first Test against India at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Cricket

AFP, Cape Town

Just three weeks after the start of a series in which they started as favourites, South Africa go into the third and final Test against Australia starting at Newlands Thursday seeking to show their series win in Australia earlier in the season was more than a flash in the pan.

After two successive defeats -- three if a loss in the final Test in Australia is included -- it is a South African side which seems to be in some disarray.

Regular captain Graeme Smith was ruled out with a broken bone in his right hand and there is apparent discord between the selectors and team management.

Veteran Jacques Kallis will lead the side after a messy controversy which followed the appointment of Ashwell Prince as skipper.

The decision of the selectors, headed by former star all-rounder Mike Procter, was overruled by Cricket SA chief executive Gerald Majola.

Explaining the decision, Majola said Prince had not been a member of the team in the previous five Tests against Australia -- and that he had a tough enough job already after being chosen as an opening batsman.

Prince, normally a middle order batsman,

will open with Test newcomer Imraan Khan in what seems a major selection gamble.

The selectors did not want to tamper with a settled combination in the positions from three to six in the batting order.

Prince made a double century and fellow left-hander Khan hit a century -- his fifth of the season -- in domestic first-class matches last weekend.

But they will face a tough battle against in-form Australian fast bowlers Mitchell Johnson, Ben Hilfenhaus and Peter Siddle.

Johnson's new-found ability to swing the ball in to right-handed batsmen and away from left-handers has confounded the South African batsmen, who found run-scoring easy in Australia but have struggled at home.

Siddle has been outstanding, bowling at pace with consistent accuracy, while the right-armed Hilfenhaus' ability to swing the new ball has made him an ideal partner for the left-armed Johnson at the start of an innings.

South Africa's fast bowlers, meanwhile, have been disappointing.

Strike bowler Dale Steyn has failed to hit top form, Makhaya Ntini has been steady but largely unthreatening, while Morne Morkel's inconsistency caused him to be dropped for the final Test.

Albie Morkel, 27, three years older than Morne, will replace his brother and make his

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- Premier Div Cricket League City Club v Victoria Venue: BKSP
- DOHS v Cricket Coaching School Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium Super Cup Football (Semifinal, First-Leg) Abahani v Brothers Union Time: 5:00pm Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka