

Abahani clinch a classic

SPORTS REPORTER



Zahid Hassan Emily struck twice inside two minutes to keep Abahani's Tk 1-crore Super Cup dream alive with a thrilling 3-2 win over Brothers Union in the first-leg of the first semifinal yesterday.

Having produced numerous memorable matches in the past, the two local giants produced yet another classic at the Bangabandhu National Stadium to give a 10,000-strong crowd full satisfaction.

Although a few poor decisions by the referee and his assistants marred the beauty of the game, it never failed to entertain the fans who were on the edge throughout the 90 minutes.

In a seesaw battle, Abahani took early lead through a sublime overhead strike by Ghanaian forward Awudu Ibrahim but Wasim Iqbal's side were 2-1 up by the hour with goals either side of halftime by Henry Quaye and Shakil Ahmed.

Abahani's evening, however, was ruined when Ibrahim received his third yellow card of the competition to miss the return-leg semifinal.

Brothers looked interested to hold onto the slim lead and went on the defensive, a mistake that inspired the B. League champions to hit back with Emily's efficiency converted into two poacher's goal in the 79 and 81 minutes.

Brothers, who had given up a 2-0 lead to lose by same margin in the crucial 1985 Premier League match against the same oppositions, will get the opportunity to correct their mistakes when the two sides meet in the second-leg semifinal on March 23 at the same venue.

The Sky Blues began brightly but Nigerian midfielder Emeka's sixth minute goal was disallowed for a foul by Ibrahim, who had

forced his way into the rival area dashing four defenders before getting a rebound of goalkeeper Zia.

By far the best player of the first half, Ibrahim then stunned the Oranges with a spectacular goal in the 15th minute. Emily showed superb skill during a counter attack to chip the ball from their own area to Ibrahim, who headed the ball to go beyond his marker Ariful, saw the goalkeeper out of his position, and slammed a first-time right-footed volley from 40 yards into the far corner from a tight angle.

Referee Tayeb Hasan ignored a handball by Abahani fullback Waly Faisal in the area three minutes later as the Brothers booters pressed for a penalty.

Oranges captain Shuvra was cautioned for his illegal actions against the match official as the game resumed after four minutes.

Amal Sen's side did well to cut the Brothers passes in the midfield and defence but Zahid tormented the Abahani defence with his jinking runs at the right flank.

The speedy winger mounted heavy pressure and forced a half-hearted save by Abahani goalie Biplob from a freekick in the 38th minute. Mishu collected the rebound but he was unfortunate to see a goal bound shot deflect for a corner.

Ghanaian striker Henry came alive during the flagkick but failed to keep his header under the bar before Abahani were denied off a penalty on the break.

Ibrahim set Emily with a through but the national striker was felled by Ariful -- the last man in the line -- from behind just inside the area.

Brothers finally got the reward for their superior ball possession towards the end of the half when Henry pounced home from seven yards after Zahid's powerful shot from 20 yards

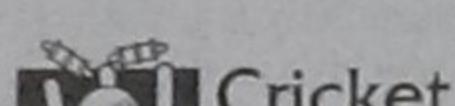
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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

THIS ONE IS SPECIAL: Abahani striker Zahid Hassan Emily (L) takes a decisive side-footed shot past an advancing Brothers goalkeeper Zia (not in picture) for his second and the winning goal of a thrilling Citycell Super Cup semifinal first-leg at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Abahani won the match 3-2.

Ignominy for City



SPORTS REPORTER

City Club completed a dubious perfect eleven as the curtains fell on the first round of the Premier Cricket League yesterday.

City's eleventh defeat in as many matches was confirmed when Victoria handed them a 50-run thrashing at the BKSP ground in Savar.

While City hit the low, Cricket Coaching School (CCS) scored a consolation win against Old DOHS by six wickets at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium on the final day of the firstround.

The defeat served the final nail in City's coffin even before they join their yesterday's victors and Young Pegasus in the three-team relegation playoffs later this month. With two bottom finishers to be demoted to the First Division, the fight for survival in the Premier League between Victoria and Pegasus would be very close with the former enjoying one point

advantage over Pegasus's four.

The dates for the relegation playoffs have not been fixed yet but it would take place after the start of the Super League on March 23.

Defending champions Abahani will start the Super Six battle with a four-point advantage from their nearest challengers Surjo Torun and Bangladesh Biman who have 16 points each. While participations of Partex, Mohammedan and Gazi Tank who have 14, 13 and 12 points respectively could be best described as 'also run' in the title race.

Old DOHS, BKSP and CCS however would be mere onlookers as they are neither in the Super League nor in the relegation playoffs.

VICTORIA-CITY CLUB

It was an important match for Victoria as a win meant that they will carry an edge over City Club in the relegation playoffs and they were at it as soon as they won the toss. A typical bright sunny morning at BKSP prompted them to bat

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Slow going at Hamilton



AFP, Hamilton

unbeaten on 70 and Yuvraj Singh on eight, and with strong batting to come, India look set to rack up a substantial lead.

New Zealand, who could muster just 279 on a placid wicket, had an early success when dangerous opener Virender Sehwag was run out early for 24.

But they took just three more wickets during the day as Gautam Gambhir and Rahul Dravid both posted half-centuries and VVS Laxman chipped in with 30.

Chris Martin, dropped for the West Indies series early this year, was the most effective of the bowlers, dismissing

Gambhir and Laxman to produce figures of two for 53 off 20 overs.

Veteran batsman Dravid said India would be setting their sights on a lead of at least 150, although he said the third morning could prove pivotal.

"The first session is going to be critical. If we can bat well in the first session, build on our lead, I think we should be able to put the pressure on them in the third innings," said Dravid.

"If we can get 150 ahead it will be fantastic. If Sachin and Yuvraj can get us through the new ball tomorrow we can put some serious

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Blame it on the ref

Emily sparkles in time

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani and Brothers Union both claimed they could have had a penalty and blamed the referee for his poor conducting of the first-leg first semifinal of the Citycell Super Cup yesterday.

Brothers coach Wasim Iqbal said that his side were denied of a genuine penalty after rival fullback Waly Faisal handled the ball inside the area.

"Everyone saw what happened. But we lost the game due to conceding two goals against run of play. Our goalkeeper was partly responsible for those," said the former national winger, whose side gave away a 2-1 lead to lose 3-2 to Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

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IPL not a worry for Mashrafe

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh vice-captain and star paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza said that the Indian Premier League (IPL) is not first and foremost on his mind at the moment.

The IPL, which now runs the chance of not taking place on schedule despite revised schedules and venue amendments, features Mashrafe for

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Mohammedans battle today

SPORTS REPORTER

Not so long ago, a team from outside the capital could not claim to be favourites to reach the final of a major tournament ahead of one of the two top clubs of the country.

But two seasons of professional league has matured Chittagong Mohammedan enough to have the belief that they have the capability to beat their more illustrious Dhaka namesake and make the final pairing of the country's richest football tournament.

The battle of Dhaka and Chittagong Mohammedans will start at 5 pm at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today and the port city side's recent form worries the mighty side from the capital.

Moreover, the local side will go into the first-leg second semifinal without their midfield stalwart Arman Aziz, the captain suspended with three bookings, and Enamul Haque Sharif, who was sent off in the last group stage game.

"Chittagong Mohammedan are a very organised team and we haven't justified our strength in the tournament so far," Mohammedan coach

Maruf Haque said yesterday. The Dhaka Black and Whites, who finished runners-up in the B. League, will have to rely on the firepower of Nigerian striker Alamu Bukola, newcomer John Goodwin and fit-again after two months Hedayetullah Robin.

"We failed to win the B. League in spite of our efficiency and strength. The

players are very excited to win this tournament and perhaps, this is the reason they have failed to flourish.

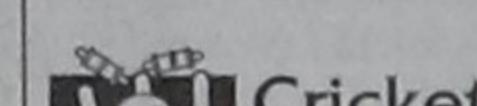
"I have asked them to calm down and put on their best. We are not on the backfoot for missing two key players and hope to play well and win tomorrow," added Maruf, who will have to fill the midfield

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PHOTO: STAR
HE WILL BE THE KEY: Mohammedan's Nigerian striker Bukola (sporting number 10 shirt) trains with his teammates ahead of their Citycell Super Cup semifinal first-leg against their Chittagong namesake at the BUET ground yesterday. The two Mohammedans lock horns in the second semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Proteas dominate



AFP, Cape Town

South Africa dominated the first day of the third Test at Newlands Thursday, bowling out Australia for just 209 before reaching 57 for no wicket at the close.

Left-arm spinner Paul Harris made crucial breakthroughs for South Africa, ending the two most productive partnerships of the innings when he dismissed Phil Hughes and Simon Katich, and then dismissing the dangerous Brad Haddin.

Harris took three for 34, while fast bowler Dale Steyn took four for 56.

Hughes and Katich put on 58 for the first wicket after Australian captain Ricky Ponting won his sixth consecutive toss in Tests between the two countries before Hughes missed a sweep against Harris and was leg before wicket.

It was the start of an Australian collapse in which four wickets fell for 23 runs.

Katich, who made top score of 55, revived the Australian innings in partnership with Haddin, putting on 71 for the fifth wicket.

But Katich played a rash stroke shortly before tea when he top-edged a sweep against

left-arm spinner Paul Harris and was caught by debutant Imraan Khan at midwicket after batting for 229 minutes and facing 160 balls. He hit seven fours.

Katich also survived two referrals by the South Africans, both for leg before wicket appeals by Ntini. It meant South Africa had used up their referrals for the innings.

South Africa have had only two successful referrals out of 13 during the series.

Harris struck another key blow when he trapped Haddin leg before for 42 four balls after tea.

Steyn took two wickets in the first five overs after lunch, bowling Mike Hussey and Michael Clarke, and finished off the tail by dismissing Mitchell Johnson and new cap Bryce McGain in the space of four balls.

Johnson made an aggressive 35 and survived a dropped catch by Khan at deep midwicket off Harris when he had 30.

With Australia having clinched the series by winning the first two Tests, it was a much-improved performance by the South African bowlers.

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PHOTO: AFP

Master Indian batsman Sachin Tendulkar plays an exquisite front-foot drive during his unbeaten knock of 70 on the second day of the first Test against New Zealand at Seddon Park Stadium in Hamilton yesterday.