



Super Cup bits

SPORTS REPORTER

All eyes will be on Abahani and Mohammedan in today's Super Cup final that is worth Tk 1.20 crore but Brothers Union and Chittagong Mohammedan will try to entertain the crowd during the third-place playoff, which starts at 3 pm.

Both the losing semifinalists, however, could consider themselves unfortunate not to make the final pairing. Brothers gave Abahani a run for their money before losing 3-2 on aggregate while Chittagong Mohammedan went out after losing 3-2 on penalties to Dhaka Mohammedan.

And it would be a battle between two strong teams, who unlike the

finalists, will not feel the heat of the huge difference of the prize moneys between the winners and losers.

The incentives for the third and fourth place finishers are Tk seven lakh and Tk six lakh respectively.

AWARDS

It seems that three Abahani players, Ghana's Awudu Ibrahim, Nigerian Emeka Christian and Zahid Hasan Emily lead the race along with Mohammedan goalkeeper Aminul Haque.

Emeka is the top scorer with five goals, Ibrahim has been in tremendous form and also scored arguably the best goal of the tournament when he struck in a first-time volley from 40 yards against Brothers in the

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Battle of 1cr today

AL MUSABBIR SADI



Welcome to this year's super heavyweight championship bout.

At one corner of the lush green of the Bangabandhu National Stadium are Abahani in their famous sky blues. At the other end stand Mohammedan in their traditional black and whites.

The stage is the Citycell Super Cup, the richest tournament in the country's history, where the two archivals would be ready to reveal all their skills, techniques, claws and tricks to be the number one because the winners are guaranteed to take away Tk one crore. For the losers, the consolation purse is a mere Tk 20 lakh.

Today's final, which has already been billed as the biggest fight ever for a sporting silverware in Bangladesh, is expected to produce a houseful stadium after a long time as the previous matches showed signs of the game's good old fans returning to the ground.

It could put pressure on the class of 2008, most of who are not used to the presence of such big crowds. And the nerves of the 22 men who will start at 5 pm would be put to the test, especially with key players either missing or not at their best.

B. League champions Abahani, still undefeated in five matches of the tournament, will be without both their holding midfielders, Arif Khan Joy and Pranotosh Das, who are suspended after receiving too many cards.

Sky Blues coach Amalesh Sen was yet to decide who would be his choice as the defensive midfielder as his remaining players are all made in the attacking mould.

Ghanaian central defender Samad Yussif or attacking midfielder Abul

Hossain could fit in the role as Amalesh has other options to make up for their absence at the back and attack. But he could well be tempted to change his favourite 4-4-2 formation in a bid to make the most out of the team.

Maruful Haque, the young Mohammedan coach who has managed a troubled team well throughout the season, has no suspension cases but his attackers are half-fit only.

Marksman Alamu Bukola from Nigeria, top scorer for the B. League runners-up with 18 goals, missed the second leg of the semifinal against Chittagong Mohammedan but will start today despite not fully recovering from dehydration.

Robin has not shown his full strength since returning from a three-month lay off due to injury while Komol looked unfit during his brief appearance last time out after suffering from typhoid.

Defender Saikat, with five stitches over one eye, is also not going to make the first eleven as Maruf's options have become squeezed.

However, before their fourth meeting of the season, both coaches sounded positive about the grand finale.

And form and strength will not matter, as it never had during battles of these two giants in any final of a tournament.

"I am thinking about the defensive midfielder's position as I have one or two options. But my attack has regained the strength as (Awudu) Ibrahim returns after missing the second leg semifinal against Brothers," said Amalesh, whose side came from a 2-1 deficit to edge an inspired Brothers Union 3-2 in the first leg semifinal and drew the second leg 0-0 to make the final.

"There would be pressure because it is a final but the Super Cup has inspired the players to give their best shot at the title. I think the players will prove that during the match," hoped the former national

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The Citycell Super Cup final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today will be a personal battle between Mohammedan goalkeeper Aminul Haque (top left) and his Abahani counterpart Biplab Bhattacharya (top right) while (above) rival captains Arman Aziz (L) and Nazrul Islam pose with the trophy prior to the mouth-watering clash.

PHOTOS: STAR



10,000 tickets sold

SPORTS REPORTER

About 10,000 tickets were sold in advance for today's final of the Citycell Super Cup.

This has never happened in history of local football and Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) sources confirmed that it sold tickets of about Tk 3 lakh yesterday from three different booths.

The amount surpassed the highest sale for a day in the tournament so far, which is Tk 2.70 lakh during the first leg semifinal between Dhaka and Chittagong Mohammedans.

The turnout throughout the competition has proved that football has not its attraction and the passion has return,

especially after poor crowd presence during the B. League.

The organisers are expecting more spectators than last year's Federation Cup final, the season's curtain raiser where a 25,000-strong crowd enjoyed the match, between the same two teams.

Tickets for today's final will cost Tk 30 for western gallery and Tk 20 for eastern gallery. Tickets for the international gallery, under the torch on the north side will be open for public for the first time, will cost Tk 50.

The BFF will reserve 400 tickets for women and school students, providing they show their IDs, will get free entry.

All the tickets sold in the whole competition will go into a lottery with the winner getting a pickup truck.

PROBABLE TEAMS

Abahani: Biplab, Nazrul, Sujan, Samad, Waly, Zahed, Abul/Siraji, Emeka, Mamun, Ibrahim and Emily.

Mohammedan: Aminul, Nasir, Rajani, Emmanuel, Kamal, Godwin, Sharif, Arman, Hazem, Robin and Bukola.

FOREIGN REFS

Three Iranian referees will be in charge of the Super Cup final. Faghani Alireza, Sokhandan Reza and Fouroughi Rasoul have already arrived in the city to conduct the match as BFF's bid to avoid controversy in the battle of country's two top clubs.



John Buchanan
(Kolkata Knight Riders coach)
"If you want to make a big deal out of it, go ahead."
While insisting there's no rift between him and Sourav Ganguly over the team's captaincy.



BTV
Abahani v Mohammedan
Final, Super Cup Football
Live from 5:00pm

Neo Cricket
New Zealand v India
Second Test, Day Two
Live from 4:00am

TEN Sports
West Indies v England
Third One-Day International
Live from 7:30pm

South Africa v Australia
First T20 International
Live from 10:00pm



Super Cup Football
Brothers v Ctg Mohammedan
Third Place Decider
Time: 3:00pm

Abahani v Mohammedan
Final
Time: 5:00pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka

Taylor-Ryder record

Cricket

AFP, Napier

A record-breaking partnership brought centuries for Ross Taylor and Jesse Ryder to steady New Zealand after a shaky start on Day One of the second Test against India here Thursday.

At stumps New Zealand were 351-4, with Ryder not out on 137 and Taylor back in the pavilion for 151 after the pairing put on 271 for the fourth wicket.

It was a record New Zealand fourth wicket stand against any country, and a record for any New Zealand partnership against India.

There was an air of vulnerability about the Indian side for the first time in the series, as catch opportunities went begging and sloppy fielding gifted New Zealand boundaries.

It was a sharp turnaround in fortunes after India cleaned up the first Test by 10 wickets with a day to spare, and had New Zealand reeling at 23-3 at the start of the second Test.

The three wickets fell in the space of just two runs and had Zaheer Khan on a hat-trick when Ryder joined Taylor in the middle.

India could have had New Zealand at 31-4 but Yuvraj Singh dropped Taylor at third slip when he was on four.

It proved a costly miss. Taylor and Ryder added a further 263 before

Yuvraj made amends by catching Taylor off Harbhajan Singh -- but only just.

After waiting an age, he miscalculated where the skied ball would come down and ending up diving to take the catch just above ground level.

Ryder continued with James Franklin, who was 26 not out at the close after being dropped by Yuvraj at slip when on seven.

New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori won the toss earlier and said it was a straightforward decision to bat on a flat brown pitch that offered the bowlers nothing.

But it looked early on as if New Zealand were in danger of repeating their first Test flop as three wickets fell in quick succession.

The erratic Tim McIntosh was given out caught by replacement wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik off Ishant Sharma for 12 while the recalled Jamie How lasted 11 deliveries before he was bowled by Zaheer for one.

Zaheer took Martin Guptill for eight with the first ball of his next over which was fended to a diving Virender Sehwag, the stand-in Indian captain, at gully.

Then the fightback started, Taylor favouring his trademark square cut which brought most of the 26 boundaries in his 262 minutes in the middle.

In between the sublime were also several nicks through the slip cordon as Taylor rode his luck.

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WAIT FOR ANOTHER ONE: New Zealand middle-order batsman Ross Taylor (L) celebrates after scoring his century while his partner in crime in a record fourth wicket stand of 271 Jesse Ryder, who later scored his century, looks on during the first day's play of the second Test against India at the McLean Park in Napier yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

INDEPENDENCE DAY MATCH GP-BCB NCA better U-19s

SPORTS REPORTER

GP-BCB National Cricket Academy defeated the Bangladesh Under 19 team by 49 runs in an Independence Day in a low-scoring limited overs exhibition match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Before the match commenced a minute's silence was observed in memory of the Liberation War martyrs, the members of the Bangladesh Armed Forces and innocent civilians deceased in the Palkhona tragedy along with former national cricketer Tanveer Haider whose sixth death anniversary was also commemorated.

Batting first the GP-BCB NCA were all out for 178 in 46.5 overs. Vice Captain Shamsur Rahman Shuvo top-scored with 42 while skipper Marshall Ayub and Nasiruddin Faruque contributed with 32 and 30 runs respectively. Nasir Hossain and Sabbir Rahman Rumman took four wickets each for the Under 19s.

In reply NCA's left-arm spinner Suhrawardi Shuvo bagged four wickets for nine while Arafat Sunny scalped three as the youth team were bowled out for 129 in 32.2 overs. Opening batsman Amit Mazumder hit 66 and fellow opener Mohammad Mithun made the only other notable contribution with 33.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Twenty-four players are sharing the top position in the points table with two points each after the second round of games ended in the preliminary phase of the Mercantile Bank 35th National Chess Championship at the chess federation hall room.

In the second round, Khairul beat FM Nasir, Masum beat Monir, Shakil beat Momin, Amin beat Amir, Taibur beat Shameem, Emon beat Mehdi, Younus beat Mainuddin, Debaraj beat Sharif, Shafiq beat Badrul, Reza beat Mujibur, Shamsul beat Elin, Ity beat Jewel, Delwar beat Shamim, Hasan beat Kabir, Polash beat Sohel, Moshafa beat Zainul, Uten got a walk-over against Eva, Rani beat Tophy, Anwar beat

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Yousuf parting with ICL?

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Mohammad Yousuf and a few other Pakistan players may be heading towards a tricky legal wrangle with the Indian Cricket League (ICL) after reports have emerged that they are planning to end their association with the unauthorised Twenty20 league and return to international cricket.

Yousuf, Abdul Razaq, Imran Farhat, Imran Nazir, Mohammad Sami and Navedul Hasan are the players who might walk away from the ICL, the News reported. The Pakistan establishment, led by Younis Khan, the captain, is keen that Yousuf, in particular, returns to the national team as early as next month for the one-day series against Australia starting on April 22 in Abu Dhabi, the report said.

Yousuf had rejoined the ICL last year after developing serious differences with Shaob Malik, the then Pakistan captain. But the situa-

tion appears to have changed after Younis, known to be close to Yousuf, became Pakistan captain this year. The News quoted sources as saying that "the breakthrough was achieved following a series of meetings between Yousuf and Younis".

When contacted by Cricinfo, ICL officials said they had no contact with Yousuf in this regard but added their contract with the Pakistan batsman enables him to play for the national team. The problem, of course, arises if Yousuf and the other players insist on cutting all ties with ICL, which is what the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has insisted on if they are to be considered again for the national team. In such a situation, the ICL might take the legal route, officials suggested, particularly because Lahore Badshahs, the ICL team for which these cricketers play, is one of the main attractions of the league.

Another reason why the Pakistan players are said to be considering such a move is that the ICL has suspended its March-April tournament

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Ganguly not convinced

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Sourav Ganguly has made it clear that he is not completely convinced about John Buchanan's multiple-captain theory for Kolkata Knight Riders, the Indian Premier League (IPL) team he led last year.

Ganguly claimed that he was not consulted about the plan and said he doubted whether other players in the team were aware of the new theory.

On Wednesday, Ganguly had said at a press conference that he was not upset with Buchanan's plans that would drastically dilute his powers as a sole captain. But later, the former India captain indicated in interviews that he did not fully back the idea.

"Tomorrow I can jump out and say we need four batting coaches, four John Buchanans and Shah Rukh Khan can say we need six Andy

Bichels," Ganguly told NDTV. "These are all opinions; these are the way they are thinking how Twenty20 cricket can be played. We'll have to wait and see because it's completely new, it has never happened in sports."

Ganguly said that he came to know of his team coach's plans through the media. "On Tuesday, John mooted the idea to me," Ganguly told Times of India. "All I can say is that I was not consulted on this. Frankly, it's a new concept. It may work, it may not. There are no guarantees in sport."

Ganguly, who retired from international cricket last year, said he hoped to discuss the concept with the other international players in the squad, including Chris Gayle and Brendon McCullum, before the IPL starts in South Africa on April 18. Buchanan has identified Gayle, McCullum, Brad Hodge and David Hussey as the potential leaders in the side, apart from Ganguly.

"Frankly speaking, I doubt whether the likes

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Players and officials of the GP-BCB NCA and Bangladesh Under-19 team observe a minute's silence before the start of the Independence Day exhibition match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY