

Super Cup Mohammedan's

AL MUSABBIR SADI

Mohammedan Sporting Club ended the 2008-09 season on a high when Maruful Haque's side clinched the richest prize ever in the history of domestic football yesterday, beating archrivals Abahani 1-0 in the Citycell Super Cup final.

Before an electrifying crowd at the jam-packed Bangabandhu National Stadium, Nigerian import John Godwin struck the only goal of the match after 21 minutes to sink B. League champions Abahani as Mohammedan took away the Tk one-crore prize money.

Abahani, who suffered their maiden defeat in the competition and also their first loss after a 15-match unbeaten run in the season, settled for the consolation runners-up trophy and a Tk 20 lakh cheque.

In the end, football was the real winner as a 40,000-plus crowd enjoyed the high-voltage drama between the country's top two teams.

It was the highest attendance in a domestic match since the mid 90s and the last time the national number one stadium was brimming with fans was during the 2003 SAFF Football final between Bangladesh and Maldives where the hosts lifted the regional football title.

The battered Mohammedan, with the regular players half fit, and depleted Abahani, missing holding midfielders Joy and Pranotosh, both started with 3-5-2 formations.

However, Abahani suffered the biggest setback when start striker Emily, who was adjudged the most valuable player of the meet to win a mini red car, damaged a hamstring before the match was one-minute old. He finally limped off the ground after 34 minutes but Amalesh Sen's side, who controlled the rest of the show, especially the entire second half, with brilliant build-ups, missed their penalty area specialist very badly.

Abahani though, began brightly and Ibrahim forced a fine save by tournament's best goalkeeper award winner Aminul at his near

post in the sixth minute.

Mohammedan fullback Nasir's low cross three minutes later ran harmlessly across the Abahani goal as the lack and Whites threatened to score.

Maruful's midfield kept the pressure as skipper Arman Aziz, Egyptian Hazem Mahmud and Sharif enjoyed superior ball possession and opened the rival defence with a counter attack.

Hazem picked up Alamu Bukola at the right side with an across-the-field lob and the Nigerian dodged past Sujon to cut the ball back for an unmarked Godwin who rifled a shot from 15 yards into Biplab's top right corner.

It was the only shot on rival goal by Mohammedan that eventually sealed the fate of the grand finale.

Abahani, who also lost last year's Federation Cup final to Mohammedan, on penalties, after starting with three-centre backs, never found their natural rhythm in a changed formation that they applied nearly after a year.

Emeka Christian, the top scorer in the tournament with five goals, was wasted as a holding midfielder but once he went up after the resumption, a sky blue tide swelled Mohammedan's goal.

Having wasted four freekicks just outside the opposition area either side of halftime, Abahani came alive stringing passes together and Emeka should have done better than volleying the ball over from close in the 54th minute.

Abul, who replaced Emily, helped on a long ball by Nazrul to the Nigerian who went round a defender but blasted his effort over the unguarded near post.

Two minutes later, Aminul pulled off a spectacular save on Abul's 22-yard shot but it was Dami Emmanuelle, who denied Abahani an equaliser midway through the second half.

Zahed Parvez exchanged passes with Ibrahim to break down the right and his left-footer inside from the area would have not given Aminul any chance, only for Emmanuelle to deflect it to safety from the goalmouth.

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WE ARE THE CHAMPIONS: Mohammedan players and club officials celebrate with the Super Cup after receiving the trophy from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina following yesterday's final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

A RARE SIGHT: A bird's eye view of the Bangabandhu National Stadium, which is all but full hours before the Citycell Super Cup final between Abahani and Mohammedan yesterday.

Brothers finish third

SPORTS REPORTER

Two penalty goals either side of the break helped Brothers Union finish third in the Citycell Super Cup yesterday with a come-from-behind 3-1 win against Chittagong Mohammedan.

Chittagong Mohammedan went ahead before the third-place playoff was 30 seconds old when Guinean forward Raphael Sagnio picked up a long pass and made most of the misunderstanding between rival defender Ariful and goalkeeper Shakil to slot a low drive into the far corner.

Brothers equalised in the tenth minute when Ghanaian forward Henry Quaye scored from the spot after Khan Sharif

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BISHWAJIT ROY



This was not a dream, rather it was reality--a screaming Big Bowl packed to the rafters watching intently as the final of the biggest domestic tournament to date, the Citycell Super Cup final, was being played out by the country's two most popular outfits -- Mohammedan and Abahani.

After how many years had football returned to the public sentiment? It was not so easy to recall for anybody. But undoubtedly it took more than a decade to experience this kind of enthusiasm with a domestic football match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The teams produced quality football in the middle to fit the mega occasion but without any doubt the talk of the topics was none other than the turnout of the crowd, the ear-deafening roars from all corner of the stadium, the festivities all around the match.

A game which has been on a downward spiral for numerous years suddenly got a life and it took only a little time to make many nostalgic. "I don't know when I last came to the stadium to watch a domestic football match but its no less than a decade ago. Today everything made me nostalgic," a bearded man named Atiqur Rahman,

who came along with his grandson, responded. The man was in a rush because only early entrance could ensure a place inside the bowl as the queue was so long that many lined up three-four hours before kick-off.

So, who blew the whistle to bring back the crowd into the field? It was none other than Kazi Salahuddin, the year-star turned the game's boss of the country, who made the things happen due to a Tk 1 crore tournament which was his brainchild.

He should have been the happiest man after the mega success of his dream tournament, the meet for which many was raised

their eyebrows initially but the leader was guarded in his brief reaction and why not, when he has the sky as his limit with the country's football.

"What I can say, it's just the beginning of a dream," said Salahuddin.

Mohammedan was over the moon after clinching the richest tournament in the subcontinent while their archrivals Abahani's tent was understandably deflated after losing the final despite playing the better game.

But both the captains were common in one sentiment, in their generation it was their first experience playing football in front of such a jam-

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Neo Cricket

New Zealand v India

Second Test, Day Three

Live from 4:00am

ESPN

FIFA WC Qualifier

Uzbekistan v Qatar

Live from 5:55pm

STAR Sports

FIFA WC Qualifier

Japan v Bahrain

Live from 4:25pm

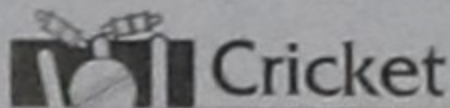


Michael Vaughan

(Former England cricket captain)

"I believe Andrew Strauss is the right man and a very, very good leader. I hope he is going to be captain for the Ashes and well beyond that, because he creates a stability about the team."

Giants clash today



SPORTS REPORTER

Table-toppers Abahani will meet arch-rivals Mohammedan in the second round of the super league phase of the Premier Cricket League at the Sher-E-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

It will be the second time in two days that the traditional rivals will lock horns after yesterday's Super Cup final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Abahani defeated the black and whites by five wickets when the two last met at the same venue on March 14 in a league match. Back then, Abahani were a depleted side with injuries to as many as five of their leading bowlers.

Mohammedan were a much-strengthened side with Lankan luminary Sanath Jayasuriya playing for them but despite his 42, the Motijheel outfit fell short of a win.

Injury concerns have subsided in the Abahani camp although opening batsman Rony Talukdar is suffering from a bone fracture in his index finger and is set to be out of action for at least two weeks. Talukdar is currently number eight in the list of highest run getters in the league with 390 runs which includes one century.

Mohammedan are tipped to play the same side which played and lost their last match to Surjo Torun.

"We will be playing our full strength side although some of our key players are not firing which explains our fifth position in the points table.

We have derived a lot of inspiration from Mohammedan's win today in the Super Cup and should carry it to the field tomorrow and will look forward to a good win," said former national paceman and Mohammedan's bowling spearhead Tareq Aziz.

Abahani has 22 points from 12 games while Mohammedan have 13 points from an equal number of matches.

In other matches of the super league, Surjo Torun play Partex at BKSP and Biman meet Gazi Tank at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

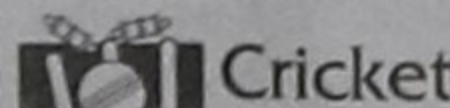
Premier Division Cricket
(Super League)

Abahani v Mohammedan
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur

Biman v Gazi Tank
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium

Surjo Torun v Partex
Venue: BKSP

NZ firmly in control



AFP, Napier

A Jesse Ryder double ton and centuries from Ross Taylor and Brendon McCullum put New Zealand in a commanding position at the close of day two in the second Test against India here Friday.

New Zealand declared their first innings at 619-9 and then took three quick wickets to have India 79-3 at stumps.

Spinners Daniel Vettori and Jeetan Patel did the damage as India ended the day 540 runs in arrears.

With three days remaining,

the New Zealand century-makers, backed by half-centuries from Vettori and James Franklin, had taken New Zealand from a faltering 23-3 to a position from where they should not lose.

New Zealand needed a morale-boosting performance after being thrashed by 10 wickets in the first Test and reeling early on a placid track here.

Ryder stepped up, casting aside the swashbuckling approach that has made him an impressive one-day performer, and knuckling down in a stand of sublime concentration that lasted just over eight hours.

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Suvastu Imam Square (5th floor)
65, Gulshan Avenue, Gulshan-1, Dhaka-1212.