

Abahani closing in on crown

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani go to play the third super league match of the Premier Division Cricket League against Partex today to all but confirm their third consecutive title.

A win will almost confirm the title as Abahani have a four point advantage from their nearest rivals Surjo Torun who take on Biman at BKSP.

The defending champions has not only won their first round game against Surjo Torun but also possess much better run-rate from their nearest rivals.

The match between Abahani and Partex was originally scheduled at Fatullah but now it will take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

There was good news for Abahani as their inspirational captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is fit to play the important match.

"I got the MRI report today and there is no major problem in my back. I will play tomorrow's match against Partex. This is a vital game for us as it will almost confirm the title," said Mashrafe.

But the pace spearhead was frustrated with the fact that inform off-spinning all-rounder Nasir Hossain will miss the match because he has been suffering from jaundice.

"He (Nasir) is a very important player for us. Anyway our pace attack would be improved with the return of Talha Jubair. We are confident to win the match because we won big games with an understrength bowling attack," he added.

On the other hand, Partex boosted by the inclusion of national left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak who returned to action after the withdrawal of suspension by ICC with the match against Surjo Torun.

In the other match Mohammedan meet with Gazi Tank at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.



India batsman VVS Laxman (L) drives through the covers as New Zealand's Jamie How takes evasive action during the fifth and final day's play of the second Test at McLean Park in Napier yesterday.

India salvage draw

Cricket

AFP, Napier

A heroic stand of 137 in nearly 11 hours at the crease by Gautam Gambhir ensured the second Test between India and New Zealand ended in a draw on Monday.

When Gambhir's match-saving, marathon performance came to an end he had batted through three days' play and rescued his side from a perilous situation.

After New Zealand made 619-9 declared, India were in strife when they were rolled for 305 in their first innings and lost their opening second innings wicket at 30 when asked to follow on.

But Gambhir, in his 24th Test, was unfazed by the carnage and set about a rescue mission that lasted 642 minutes and ended with India all but safe.

It was left to VVS Laxman on 124, the 14th century of his Test career, and Yuvraj Singh on 54 to bat out the last two hours and get India across the line.

They were 162 runs ahead and their 1-0 series lead was intact when time was called 70 minutes early.

India, who won the first Test by a handsome 10 wickets, have not won a series in New Zealand in 40 years.

New Zealand have one chance left to salvage a draw from this three-game series when the final match starts in Wellington on Friday.

The second Test was played on an extremely placid wicket with the bowling damage concentrated in one 26-over burst on the third day when New Zealand ripped out six wickets for just 58 runs.

With conditions against the bowlers, the five days of cricket produced 1,400 runs including a double century, four centuries and seven half-

centuries.

Jesse Ryder, who made 201 and was on the field for all but three hours of the Test, was the man-of-the-match, but Gambhir's second innings response for India, when he came in on Saturday and departed on Monday, was exemplary.

That he scored 64 fewer runs than Ryder mattered little to India. Of more importance was that he soaked up 153 more minutes of playing time than the New Zealander.

His dogged fifth Test century was the seventh longest stand by an Indian, though it was also the lowest score among the top 30 innings of endurance by Indian batsmen.

"He's the only one who saved the game for us," said Indian captain Virender Sehwag.

"I think we can call him 'the second wall'," he added, acknowledging also veteran run-maker Rahul Dravid, with

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BFF appoints physio

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has appointed a physio-therapist for the national team on temporary basis.

Dalir Rahman, who has taken special training in Australia, will join the national squads for next month's AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers to be held in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, BFF's National Team Management Committee (NTMC) chairman Badal Roy informed yesterday that all the 25 members of the squad have been paid their working allowance of Tk 10,000 for a month and Tk 15,000 in addition to by gear.

Argentine trainer Ariel Colman, who has already joined Brazilian coach Edson 'Dido' Silva's charges, will get a one-year contract within this week.

The team's star striker Zahid Hassan Emily, who limped off the ground during the Abahani-Mohammedan Super Cup final with a hamstring injury, has been given a week's rest according to the team staff's suggestion.

The team began their training on Sunday for the April 26-28 Group A qualifiers in Dhaka.

Bangladesh will fight for a place in the Challenge Cup finals with Myanmar, Cambodia and Macau/Mongolia.

The Macau-Mongolia home and away pre-qualifying matches are scheduled for April 7 and 14.

Bangladesh's Davis Cup starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Zone Group IV qualifiers will begin today at the Ramna National Tennis Complex.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarkar will declare the meet open at 4.30 pm.

Bahrain, Yemen, Qatar and Myanmar arrived in Dhaka yesterday to join Turkmenistan, Vietnam, Jordan and hosts Bangladesh.

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IPL-styled T20 planned

Cricket

SHAHIDUL ISLAM, Chittagong

The sports organisers of Chittagong are planning big with a Twenty20 cricket tournament styled as Port City Cricket League (PCL).

Taking inspiration from two Indian mega events IPL and ICL, the organisers of Chittagong Divisional Krira Sangstha (CDKS) had recently initiated to launch a lucrative Twenty20 league in the port city.

In this regard, the PCL officials met with two Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials yesterday in Dhaka and the BCB officials agreed in principle to lend their hands to hold such a tournament and gave a green signal to a five-member delegation of the CDKS to 'go-ahead' with their initiative.

"This is a very encouraging initiatives by the regional organisers. They informed us about their planning but we requested them to give us a concrete proposal in this regard before placing it to the board's working committee as well as the board meeting," said Gazi Ashraf Hossain, BCB's tournament committee chairman.

"They have a plan to offer a lucrative prize

money as well as there would be also an auction like in the IPL. They are planning to launch the tournament with eight teams where two national players are available for each team. They are not too much concerned about financial support from the board rather they sought assistance for coaches, umpires etc," Ashraf added.

The PCL organisers gave a tentative date of April 29 to May 10 for the tournament and it will be held under floodlights at the MA Aziz Stadium.

"We have to talk with our national coach Jamie Siddons before confirming the date because our national interest always comes first. And we have to consider whether this tournament conflicts with any other BCB tournament. But again we want to see this kind of tournament take place in the country," said Ashraf.

PCL organising committee chairman AZM Nasir, also president of Chittagong Brothers Union club, led the team and the other members of the delegation were CDKS vice president Ali Abbas, Secretary of Chittagong Jela Krira Sangstha (CJKS) Cricket Committee Abdul Hannan Akbar, and CJKS members

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Strauss steers England

Cricket

AFP, Bridgetown

Andrew Strauss gathered 79 from 61 balls to lead England to a nine-wicket victory over the Duckworth-Lewis Method over West Indies in the rain-affected fourth One-day International at Kensington Oval on Sunday.

Fortune and the D/L Method again smiled on England, following a two-hour long delay for rain which left the tourists with a victory target of 135 from 20 overs.

They got over the line with nine balls to spare, when Strauss guided Dwayne Bravo to third man for his ninth four.

The result means the series is now tied 2-2 and sets up a thrilling conclusion on Friday at the Beausejour Cricket Ground in St. Lucia, if the West Indies players back down from their threat to strike in protest to outstanding issues with the West Indies Cricket Board.

The rain started during the interval between innings, after England sent West Indies in to bat and the home team made 239 for nine from 50 overs.

When play resumed, England were given a solid base of 108 off 87 balls from their captain Strauss and fellow opener Ravi Bopara.

Strauss reached his 50 from 41 balls, when he chipped Kieron Pollard into square leg for a single.

Once he and Bopara set things up with a volley of handsome strokes and nimble running between the wickets, the rest was academic, although they lost Bopara for 35 skying a catch to deep fine leg off Pollard, when 27 were needed from 33 balls.

Earlier, England had been upstaged when Bravo gathered 69 from 72 balls to give a late boost to the West Indies total.

England had recovered from another hammering from Chris Gayle and looked in control when West Indies slumped to 145 for six in the 35th over.

But the tourists were again put on the defensive, when

Bravo boosted the West Indies total with an innings that included seven fours and two sixes.

Had Andrew Flintoff held a sharp return chance, when Bravo was on 32 in the 42nd over the script could have been slightly different.

England paid for Flintoff's miss in the late over, when Bravo smote James Anderson over mid-wicket for four to reach his 50 from 61 balls and then struck the next ball in the same direction for a six before Stuart Broad skied Stuart Broad to deep mid-wicket in the 48th over.

England's bowlers had again been savaged early, when Gayle raced to 46 from 39 balls in an opening stand of 72 before Broad made the breakthrough in the 13th over, having caught by keeper Matt Prior.

England then reduced West

Indies slipped to 83 for three in 16th over, and then Dimitri Mascarenhas claimed Denesh Ramdin for 26, Shivnarine Chanderpaul for 27, and Kieron Pollard for a duck to leave the innings in tatters.

But England failed to get on top of Bravo, and the runs flowed towards the end for the West Indies innings, but fortunately for England, so too did the rain.

Mascarenhas was England's most successful bowler with three for 26 from 10 overs, and Stuart Broad took three for 62 from 10 overs.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard in the fourth one-day international between West Indies and England at Kensington Oval on Sunday:

WEST INDIES	
Gayle c Prior b Broad	46
Simmons run out	29

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England opener Andrew Strauss whacks one over mid-on during his unbeaten 79 from 61 balls in the fourth ODI against West Indies at the Kensington Oval in Bridgetown on Sunday.

Javed back as PCB DG

AFP, Lahore

Former cricket great Javed Miandad was Monday reinstated as director general of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), barely a month after resigning in an argument about lack of powers, an official said.

The 51-year-old Miandad met PCB chairman Ijaz Butt before agreeing to take back the senior position.

"I can confirm that Miandad will be re-appointed director general of the PCB from April 1 after meeting the PCB chairman. All his terms and conditions have been settled," PCB director human resources Wasim Bari told AFP.

Miandad had differences with Butt over the scope of his work, which he felt had been confined to domestic affairs.

Pakistani media reported at the time, however, that Miandad resigned from his position in a row over pay.

Miandad said he was happy to be back and vowed to help Pakistan cricket.

"I never had any issues before, nor will I now. I am at the service of Pakistan cricket and will do that to the best of

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Sandip fires Thakurgaon

THAKURGAON, Correspondent

Sandip hit 104 as Thakurgaon Cricket Coaching School got off to a flying start with a massive 108-run victory over Hazipara Krira Shikha Parishad (HKSP) in the opening match of the First Division cricket league yesterday.

Thakurgaon Cricket Coaching School amassed 263 for seven in 45 overs after deciding to bat first. In reply HKSP were bundled out for 155 in 37 overs. Shimul made an unbeaten 53.

A total of 12 teams are taking part in the league.

National Shooting from tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

The IFIC Bank National Shooting Championships will start at the BKSP Shooting Range tomorrow with 218 shooters from 23 clubs taking part in the top domestic event.

National Shooting Federation (NSF) officials hoped that with the 11th South Asian Games (SAG) coming to the city next year, the shooters would be concentrating on bettering their performance to make most of the championships, where ten events including four for women will be held.

"We hope that the national level shooters will put on their best ahead of 2010 SAG," said NSF general secretary Istiaq Ahmed at a press conference at the NSC conference room yesterday.

"Only the shooters who have the match arms will be eligible for the meet,"

informed Istiaq adding that the match arms have been upgraded day by day.

The men's events include air rifle, three position, 50m prone, air pistol, standard pistol and pre-pistol while the women's events are air rifle, three position prone, air pistol and sports pistol.

The NSF will also host the 5th SA Shooting Championships from July 3-9 with marksmen from India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka joining Bangladesh.

"We are waiting for India's confirmation the event will lose attraction in absence of the best team in the region," Istiaq said.

The NSF chief executive informed that shooting's governing body in the country has taken all steps to modernise the facilities at the National Shooting Complex before the SAG.

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South Africa's Roelof van der Merwe plays a pull shot during the second Twenty20 international against Australia at Centurion Park on Sunday.

SA clinch T20 series

Cricket

AFP, Centurion

New cap Roelof van der Merwe and captain Johan Botha took South Africa to a series-clinching 17-run win in the second Twenty20 international against Australia at Centurion Park Sunday.

Van der Merwe hit 48 off 30 balls as South Africa struggled to 156 for five after being sent in.

Then Botha produced a miserly spell of off-spin bowling, taking two for 16 in four overs, as Australia were restricted to 139 for eight.

Van der Merwe, selected mainly as a slow left-arm bowler, was surprisingly sent in at number five and initially he struggled to find his timing.

But he chanced his arm and slammed four sixes and two fours, with two sixes and both fours coming in one over from Nathan Bracken, usually one of the world's most economical bowlers in limited overs cricket.

The Australian bowlers varied their pace and

lengths skillfully and the South African batsmen were unable to maintain a consistently quick scoring rate.

Australia made a good start, with Michael Clarke and David Warner putting on 37 for the first wicket.

But Warner was bowled by Albie Morkel and one run later Australian captain Ricky Ponting was caught behind off left-arm pace bowler Yusuf Abdulla, a second new player in the South African line-up.

Clarke and David Hussey put on 25 for the third wicket before the game changed dramatically when Clarke was bowled by Botha and Callum Ferguson was run out first ball.

Botha's teasing spin prevented the Australians from recovering their momentum and wickets fell as the batsmen went for big shots.

David Hussey followed up his 88 not out in the first match with 27 and threatened to swing the game Australia's way when he hit Van der Merwe for six and four off successive balls in the 15th over, only to be caught at mid-off the next delivery.

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Did U Know?

In the space of five minutes at Sunderland in November 1998, Barnsley striker Ashley Ward scored missed a penalty and was sent off.

Talk Turkey



Diego Maradona
(Argentina soccer coach)
"This was better than I expected, reality has overcome fiction."
After beating Venezuela 4-0 in the World Cup qualifier on Saturday.

What to Watch

ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

Premier Division Cricket
(Super League)
Abahani v Partex
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur
Mohammedan v Gazi Tank
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
Surjo Torun v Biman
Venue: BKSP