

Abahani start celebrations

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza produced yet another dazzling display as Abahani all but confirmed their hat-trick of titles with an emphatic 76-run victory over Partex in a rain-hit Premier Division Cricket Super League match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Mathematically it may not be possible to declare Abahani champions at the moment but the players, fans and officials of the popular Dhanmondi outfit joined in an on-field celebration after their victory that not only gave them a four-point advantage from their nearest rivals Surjo Torun with two more matches in hand but also enabled them to enjoy an unassailable 'better run-rate'.

Even if Surjo Torun finish on equal 26 points with Abahani, which is an unlikely proposition, it is virtually impossible for them to reduce the gulf of difference of run-rates. Besides, they will have to beat Abahani, who not only won the first round clash between the two teams but also have lost only one game, against Gazi Tank, in the entire league so far.

It was a job well done and Abahani's inspirational captain Mashrafe, who will not take any further part in the league due to his commitments in the IPL, said after the match that he was very happy for winning the title for Abahani twice.

"We confirmed the championship by winning today's (Tuesday's) game. I'm really

delighted because it's a major success in my career as a captain," said an excited Mashrafe, who also won the League for Abahani as a player two years ago.

The Bangladesh vice-captain, who is expected to fly to India tomorrow to join the Kolkata Knight Riders, made sure that he was part of his side's celebration with an explosive 33-ball 62 that was followed by two wickets in front of the jubilant Sky Blue

fans that created a festive atmosphere by beating drums throughout the match.

But credit also must go to Indian batsman Rashmi Ranjan Parida who provided the platform for his skipper's late fireworks with a polished knock that saw Abahani recover from 61-4 to a challenging 238-6 in a reduced to 41-over-a-side affair.

Pacer Mohammad Azim caused the early damage by picking up the first four wick-

ets but once again Parida showed his character during an unbeaten 91-ball 89 that featured eye-pleasing seven boundaries and a six.

Right-hander Parida got company from Arafat Sunny to repair the damage. The pair put on 70 runs for the fifth wicket and then it was Mashrafe who joined the Indian to put the opponent bowlers to the sword.

Fresh from a hurricane 69 against Mohammedan that contained seven sixes, the right-hander smashed four sixes and as many boundaries yesterday and it was amazing to watch the way he whacked left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak over extra-cover.

Razzak was however unlucky as Ariful Haque failed to hold on to an easy catch at mid-on when Mashrafe was 38.

In reply, Partex got off to a confident start before Shahadat Hossain gave the breakthrough by removing former national opener Mehrab Hossain who offered a catch to Tamim Iqbal at square leg after scoring a run-a-ball 17 that contained three fours.

Ariful Haque joined Pakistani Fahad Ul Haque to threaten Abahani but again Mashrafe provided the much-needed breakthrough by removing Ariful for 36.

Fahad, who scored 63 off 80 deliveries with six boundaries, held one end up but with wickets falling like ninepins at the other end Partex were bundled out for 162 runs in 33.2 overs.

Partex, however, fell victims to two poor umpiring decisions against national wicketkeeper Mushfiqur



Abahani captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza whacks one over the top during his gusty 62 off 33 balls against Partex in the Premier Cricket Super League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

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PARTY BEGINS ALREADY: Players and officials of Abahani flash victory signs after their big win over Partex at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Abahani are all but officially crowned the Premier Division Cricket League champions this season.

PHOTO: STAR

Tamim, Rezaul fined, Javed cautioned

SPORTS REPORTER

Tamim Iqbal and Rezaul Haque Nayeem were fined as both were found guilty of showing dissent after they were given out.

After a hearing following the match between Abahani and Partex at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday, match referee Zahid Razaque imposed a fine of Tk 5,000 on each player.

National and Abahani opener Tamim and Partex all-rounder Rezaul have been disciplined for breach of BCB Code of Conduct and ICC Rules of Conduct.

On the other hand, former national and Biman batsman Javed Omar was reprimanded for showing dissent during his side's Premier Division Cricket Super League match against Surjo Torun at BKSP yesterday.

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SABBIR STRIKES AGAIN

Torun get by Biman

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Surjo Torun leg-spinner Sabbir Rahman snared a hat-trick on way to his second consecutive five-wicket haul as his side beat Bangladesh Biman by 11 runs via the D/L method in a rain-interrupted match of the Premier Cricket League at BKSP yesterday.

Sabbir struck in the 43rd over of the innings to remove Zahid Niaz, Mahbul Alam and Sajjad Kadir to restrict Biman to 198 in their stipulated 50 overs. Torun then managed to reach 174-6 in 42.3 overs earning themselves the win and thus retaining a slim chance of winning the league title ahead of runaway leaders Abahani, with two rounds left to play.

Away at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium, rain

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STAR Sports
FIFA WC Qualifier
Australia v Uzbekistan
Live from 2:55pm
South Korea v North Korea
Live from 4:55pm
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
Channel i
FIFA WC Qualifier
Brazil v Peru
Live from 7:10am (Thursday)



Kevin Pietersen
(England batsman)
"At the moment, being part of the England squad is a pretty damn lonely place to be... the only game we've won this winter was down to the fact the West Indies couldn't add up properly."
Reiterating the misery he currently feels as England's tour of the Caribbean is drawing to a close.



Premier Division Cricket (Super League)
Mohammedan v Gazi Tank
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur

CHALLENGE CUP Kyrgyzstan first in finals

THE-AFC.COM, Kathmandu

Kyrgyzstan reached the AFC Challenge Cup 2010 finals after a 1-1 draw with Palestine in a qualifying match here on Monday.

The result enabled the Central Asian side to finish top of Group C thanks to a better goals for and against record than second-placed Nepal and Palestine.

The three teams finished with two points each with all three matches ending in draws. Kyrgyzstan emerged top because of their 2-2 goals for-against record, while Nepal and Palestine had goal records of 1-1.

Hosts Nepal were handed second place because they had fewer yellow cards during the qualifiers.

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Aus shift focus

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Ricky Ponting has arrived in Durban ahead of Friday's first one-day international confident that Australia can turn around their form after losing the Twenty20 series 2-0. The squad will train on Wednesday and Thursday at Kingsmead, where some of the players enjoyed wrapping up the Test series victory less than a month ago.

Shane Harwood and David Warner have flown home after the Twenty20 matches while South Africa have also named a slightly different group for the 50-over format. They are hoping to have Graeme Smith and Jacques Kallis available after they missed the Twenty20s through injury and Ponting felt the changes would mean a fresh start for both teams.

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"I've been on the record for a number of years saying I don't really take much from series to series as far as momentum goes," Ponting told AAP. "Quite often you've got a vast changeover of personnel from each team."

"I'd be surprised if the South Africans go into the first one-day game with the same team. Sure you want to win every game that you play and you give your absolute best to win every game that you play. But as far as any of this carrying over to Friday, I'd be surprised if they are even talking that way about it."

The five-match one-day series presents Australia with a chance to regain their No. 1 ranking after South Africa claimed the top spot by winning 4-1 in Australia. A key factor for the visitors will be the form of Nathan Bracken, who was uncharacteristically expensive in Sunday's

52 enter for Nat'l Club Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Fifty-two district clubs have enrolled for the inaugural National Club Championship, which will begin later this month.

The tournament, a new event in the calendar of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), will replace the National Football Championship, which was abandoned after three seasons.

Dhaka Senior Division champions Youngmen's Club Fakirpool and Chittagong Mohammedan Sporting Club

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ICL may let 'em go

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

The Indian Cricket League (ICL) is willing to release some of its foreign players from their contracts so they can play international cricket but expects them to return when the league restarts its international Twenty20 programme in October-November. The unauthorised league is also gearing up for a major legal battle if its application for recognition is turned down at an International Cricket Council meeting next month, a senior ICL official said.

"We came to know that some of our players from New Zealand and Pakistan would be considered for their national teams if they obtain a release from their contracts," the ICL official told Cricinfo. "We are happy to oblige because having players from our league playing international cricket only adds to our value. We expect these players will play for us again when we restart our programme this year-end."

The official also said the ICL expected the ICC to take a decision on the league's request for recognition at its board meeting in Dubai on April 17. "If there is no satisfactory resolution at the meeting, we will take the legal route as we

have stated all along," he said. The ICL had cancelled its March tournament due to the deepening global recession and the non-availability of Pakistani players due to diplomatic tensions between India and Pakistan, following the Mumbai terror attacks. "There are certain vested interests within the official establishment who are spreading the word that we are broke, and that we have no money to pay our players," the official said. "Payments are on track and, in the case of some players, have been put on hold pending a performance appraisal, which we have stated before."

The ICL hit the headlines last weekend after New Zealand's Sunday News reported that New Zealand players involved in the ICL have received an e-mail from the league stating that they will be released from their contracts if they request for a termination. Justin Vaughan, the chief executive of New Zealand Cricket (NZC), told the paper if these players end their association with the unofficial league, they will be immediately available for selection to the New Zealand national side.

Earlier, there were also reports from Pakistan that a few of their ICL players, including Mohammad Yousuf, were planning to end their association with the unauthorised

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Giants face tricky ties

AFP, Montevideo



With only one point between them in the race for four Latin American World Cup qualifying berths Argentina and Brazil, seven world crowns between them, face stiff midweek challenges.

Brazil have yet to find their best form, winning only four of their opening 11 matches on the long road which they hope will lead to South Africa.

Sunday's draw in Ecuador left the five-times winners in the last qualifying slot with Uruguay, who saw off group leaders Paraguay 2-0, only two points adrift.

Argentina and Chile are now joint second on 19 points, one clear of the Brazilians but four behind Paraguay.

With Colombia still in the mix four points behind Brazil there can be no complacency for the 'auriverde', as coach Dunga acknowledged Monday before defending the form of Ronaldinho, who gave way to goalscorer Julio Baptista on Sunday.

"Ronaldinho has not played that much of late," said Dunga in allusion to the samba star, twice a world player of the year, being left in the shade by David Beckham's arrival at AC Milan.

"The altitude of Quito made matters difficult," added Dunga by way of mitigation in a news conference Monday.

Nonetheless, with Milan teammate Kaka in the squad following his recent injury woes, Ronaldinho could be benched for Wednesday's match in his home city Porto Alegre against group tailenders Peru.

Despite Dunga's support critical voices have been raised against the former Barcelona star.

"Ronaldinho, an unresolved problem," was how the website of O Estado de Sao Paulo headlined their view on the Ecuador match.

"Ronaldinho had a chance to redeem his latest showings - but failed once again," the report opined.

Despite their less than stellar form, however, Brazil should have no trouble polishing off the Peruvians.

With just one win to their credit to date,

the Peruvians are a far cry from the vintage of three decades ago, when a side led by the swashbuckling Teofilo Cubillas reached the second phase of the finals in Argentina.

Argentina face a tough trip up into the thin air of La Paz. Diego Maradona's side will have noted how Brazil struggled to shine at 2,850 meters above sea level in Quito.

Bolivia's Estadio Hernando Siles venue is some 750 metres higher.

The Bolivians have successfully managed to stave off FIFA's best efforts to scrap competitive internationals in La Paz owing to the high altitude with President Evo Morales insisting any ban would "run counter to the universality of sports."

Maradona has spoken out in favour of the Bolivians, who managed to beat Paraguay at home but whose away form is by contrast simply dreadful.

"We have to face up to the altitude and just not be afraid," said Maradona, who played and scored in a gala match last year against a Morales presidential eleven.

Given the altitude factor, the Argentines may calculate that they can content themselves with avoiding defeat.

Following their loss in Uruguay, Paraguay must get swiftly back on the rails with a win in Ecuador knowing that in the event of another defeat their lead

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Brazil forward Robinho (R) and goalkeeper Julio Cesar relax in a swimming pool in Porto Alegre on Monday ahead of their today's 2010 World Cup qualifier against Peru.

PHOTO: AFP