



PHOTO: STAR

Abahani's Nigerian striker Sheriff Deen Mohammad (R) is under pressure from a host of Beanibazar defenders during the opening match of the Bangladesh League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Sheriff struck twice in Abahani's 3-1 win over the newcomers.

Sky Blues off on right foot

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Abahani started their pursuit of a hattrick title campaign of the professional football league with a convincing 3-1 win over newcomers Beanibazar SC on the opening day of the Bangladesh League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Ghanaian striker Sheriff Deen Mohammad struck a brace and fed Mehdi Hasan Ujjal for the other for the Sky Blues.

Toufiq Hasan Gafur pulled one goal back for the Sylhet outfit, who also went down against the giants 4-1 in the Federation Cup semifinals.

The victory also means two-time champions, Abahani, extended their unbeaten run in the professional football league to 12 matches as the Dhanmondi-based outfit remained unconquered in the last 11 matches of the second edition league since their 2-0 loss to Brothers Union on December 1, 2008.

Abahani, who became Federation Cup runners-up losing to bitter rivals Mohammedan 4-1 in the shootout, took to the field with a depleted side as key players

like striker Awudu Ibrahim, midfielder Pranotosh Kumar Das and defender Rajani Kanto Barman were ruled out due to injuries. Things got worse for Abahani when Ghanaian playmaker Mohammad Awal was forced to leave the field with an injury just after the start of play.

Without the trio, the supporters of the popular Abahani might have recalled their beloved outfit's nightmare against Rahmatganj MSF in the opening B. League game last season where they were stunned 2-1 by the minnows, but Sheriff, who had a good game in the Federation Cup final, dissolved the apprehension putting Abahani ahead in the very fifth minute.

The tall striker picked up a pass from striker Enamul Haq evaded a challenge from defender Ashraf Karim to enter the danger zone before curling a shot to the far post that found the back of the net.

Two minutes later, Sheriff and Enamul played a cute one-two to advance into the Beanibazar box, but Enamul floated the ball over the crosspiece from close range.

Abahani midfielder boosted by substitute Motiur Munna, Shahedul Alam and Zahid Parvez Chowdhury kept on creating chances and Sheriff broke the offside

trap to run down the left before releasing a low drive for Ujjal in front of the open net and the winger did not hesitate to double the advantage in the 34th minute.

After going two goals down, Beanibazar looked energetic especially after the breather and pulled one goal back from a scramble in the 56th minute with Gafur reducing the margin.

With 20 minutes left, Beanibazar pressed hard to equalise and sometimes split the Abahani backline, but they could not defeat the last man, goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharjee, who looked more confident yesterday after his shaky show in the Federation Cup final.

Abahani sealed the match five minutes from time when Sheriff capitalised on a through pass from Shahed beat one defender and goalkeeper Sultan Ahmed to place the ball home from an almost impossible angle.

Abahani coach Amalesh Sen expressed his satisfaction over the team's winning start and thought his charges performed well compared to the Federation Cup final.

"Without three key players, the boys played well in the first half and we should have taken at least a 4-0 lead in the first

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Bangladesh start with Bhutan

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts Bangladesh will begin their SAFF Championship campaign taking on Bhutan in one of two opening day matches on December 4 as the South Asian Football Federation yesterday revealed the fixtures of the sixth edition of the regional football meet.

All 15 matches including the semifinals and final will be played at the Bangabandhu National Stadium with two matches of the group stage to be played each day from December 4 to 9.

Both semifinals are scheduled for December 11 while the final will take place on December 13.

Bangladesh had earlier been drawn in Group B along with Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bhutan while Group A included holders Maldives, runners-up India, Afghanistan and Nepal. Top two teams from each group will qualify for the semifinals.

Bangladesh, who were eliminated from the group stage in the fifth edition in Colombo in 2008 after a 1-1 draw against Bhutan, a 2-2 draw against Afghanistan before going 1-0 down to Sri Lanka, will play the second match against Pakistan on December 6.

The hosts' third and group final match against Sri Lanka will be held on December 8.

FIXTURES

- Dec 4: Sri Lanka vs Pakistan
- Dec 5: Bangladesh vs Bhutan
- Dec 5: Maldives vs Nepal
- Dec 6: India vs Afghanistan
- Dec 6: Sri Lanka vs Bhutan
- Dec 6: Bangladesh vs Pakistan
- Dec 7: Maldives vs Afghanistan
- Dec 7: India vs Nepal
- Dec 8: Pakistan vs Bhutan
- Dec 8: Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka
- Dec 9: Afghanistan vs Nepal
- Dec 9: Maldives vs India
- Dec 11: Semifinals
- Dec 13: Final

BCB's board meeting held

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday formed a three-member committee to explore the possibilities of introducing franchise concept in the domestic first-class league.

Directors of the game's governing body Enayet Hussain Siraj, Gazi Ashraf Hossain and Aziz Al Kaiser were named on the committee at a board meeting with new president AHM Mustafa Kamal in the chair.

The meeting also endorsed the appointments of Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim as captain and vice-captain respectively for the Grameenphone Cup ODI series against visiting Zimbabwe.

It also decided to involve

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Wasim's wife Huma dead

AGENCIES, New Delhi

Huma, the wife of former Pakistan captain Wasim Akram, has died on Sunday after developing heart and kidney complications. She was admitted to the Apollo Hospital in Chennai last Tuesday after her condition deteriorated on board an air ambulance flying from Lahore to Singapore, where she was due to be treated at the Mount Elizabeth Hospital.

She breathed her last around 9:45am, hospital sources informed.

Huma, 42, is survived by two children, Taimur and Akbar, and arrangements are underway to fly her body back to Pakistan. A trained medical practitioner herself, she had stints with some of the leading hospitals in Pakistan as a psychologist and a hypnotherapist.

In the mid-1990s, during her husband's second stint as captain, Huma also worked with the Pakistan team for a while as a psychological counselor, helping players such as Saqlain Mushtaq, Wasim also regularly credited her for helping him mentally, especially in the aftermath of the

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Aussie nerve wins the first game

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

If the best way to spark interest in a seven-match ODI series is to stage a brilliantly tense opener, then Australia and India achieved their goal in Vadodara on Sunday. Ricky Ponting and Michael Hussey set up what looked like being a comfortable Australian win until a lively, crowd-lifting partnership from Harbhajan Singh and Praveen Kumar threatened to snatch victory for India.

In the end, nine were required from the final over and Peter Siddle held his nerve to confirm a four-run margin in Australia's favour in the first one-day international of the seven-game series.

The key moment came when Harbhajan (49) was bowled from the second ball of the 50th, trying to launch a boundary off Siddle. Six from the last ball was too much for Ashish Nehra to produce.

The feisty 84-run stand from Harbhajan and Praveen was unexpected after India fell to 201 for 7 with ten overs remaining, when they needed more than nine an over. Shane Watson won't want to watch the replay of his final overs; he became predictable with his full tosses outside off and when he sent down the 49th of the innings it cost Australia 20 runs.

Ultimately, Australia got off the hook, largely because India had let themselves down in the field and through the middle overs of their own innings. Although Praveen, with his unbeaten 40 from 32 balls nearly got them home, his ten overs earlier in the day had cost 77 and Australia's batting contributions were even and widespread.

Ricky Ponting thinks a seven-match one-day series is too long; Michael Hussey would play cricket 365 days a year if he could. Both men looked sharp at the start of this tour in setting up the challenging total of 292 for 8. Ponting and Tim Paine built the platform before Cameron White and Hussey drove the total higher, and all four men posted half-centuries.

In reply, only Gautam Gambhir fired up properly out of India's top order. Gambhir had fought his way to 68 from 85 deliveries when he fell to the first ball of the batting Powerplay, which was also the first delivery with the changed ball after 34 overs. Mitchell Johnson found some dip and a hint of swing that trapped Gambhir in front of middle stump and the chase was threatening to derail.

The runs had been well restricted by Brett Lee and Peter Siddle in the middle overs and Gambhir and MS Dhoni were under pressure to make full use of the Powerplay, with the required rate climbing to 7.87. A pair of wickets

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PHOTO: AFP

India's lower-order batsman Harbhajan Singh (R) almost pulled off a stunner with a terrific late assault along with Praveen Kumar. Here he walks back to the dressing room after being bowled by Australian paceman Peter Siddle (L) in the final over of the opening one-day match at the Reliance Cricket Stadium in Vadodara yesterday. Australia scored a nervy four-run win.

NZ don't need a vice-captain

Cricket

ANI, Wellington

Brendon McCullum has been stripped of the vice-captaincy of the Black Caps, following the decision of New Zealand cricket authorities to make the position redundant.

The reasons for McCullum's demotion are complicated, although no replacement will be appointed.

NZ Herald reports there is a suggestion that convenor of selectors Glenn Turner was uncomfortable with the power wielded by captain Daniel Vettori and McCullum, as witnessed by last week's evisceration of coach Andy Moles.

Some sources suggest it was felt McCullum dominated the dressing room too much.

However, a well-placed source said McCullum was effectively sidelined from the decision-making process on the tour to Sri Lanka in August, and his role in Moles' downfall was overstated.

New Zealand Cricket's Justin Vaughan said a decision was made that there was no absolute need for a second in charge.

Instead they want to see several senior players, like Kyle Mills, Shane Bond and Jacob Oram, take a more active leadership role.

"Brendon being Brendon, he will lead. That's his nature. At the moment he needs to be focusing on several areas but primarily that is around fulfilling his potential with the bat," Vaughan said.

McCullum said when contacted by the Herald on Sunday: "It's disappointing, obviously, in many respects but the fact is I can now concentrate on my roles of scoring runs and keeping wickets. I still have some fairly big goals I want to achieve for New Zealand, including the captaincy, and this has not changed that."

McCullum was seen as the natural heir apparent to Vettori, and was endorsed by the man himself in this newspaper back in January.

'Indo-Aussie series will be hard fought'

ANI, Chennai

Former Australian wicketkeeper Adam Gilchrist has said that the seven-match one-day series between India and Australia would be "hard fought".

The first game, a close fought series. India would be trying their best back from their disappointment in Champions Trophy and Australia would be on a high from it. So a great rivalry is formed between the two countries and India do play well in their home country. There would be intriguing battle between the spinners of India and batting of Australia," said Gilchrist.

World champions Australia won a second successive Champions Trophy in South Africa, reaffirming their superiority in the one-day game after a 6-1 series victory over England following their Ashes defeat.

World number two India exited in the first round of the Champions Trophy. Gilchrist

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Michel Platini

(UEFA president)
"I think that the player I like best at the moment is an Argentine who plays for Barcelona. I like Lionel Messi very much and I think he will win all the trophies for best player at the end of the year. He deserves it."



ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live from 9:30pm



Citycell Bangladesh League
Mohammedan v Feni Soccer Club
(5:30pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
BD U-19 v Eng U-19
Second Youth ODI
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium

Zimbabweans strike hard

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Zimbabweans shrugged off Friday's shock-loss with a 192-run thumping of the BCB XI in their second and last practice match at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Even if only a practice match, the Zimbabweans made sure they had a good time out in the middle as they first put on a huge total of 335 for 5 on the board and then led the rollers on the BCB XI batsmen.

Most of the Zimbabwean batsmen got runs in the game, the most coming from opener Brendan Taylor who hammered 139 off 137 deliveries that consisted half-a-dozen sixes and nine boundaries.

It was his 188-run partnership for the second wicket with Tatenda Taibu that laid the foundation for a massive total. Taibu contributed 68. After the departure of the two, Elton Chigumbura and Malcolm Waller took the charge and finished with flurries to give the BCB XI something of a mountain to climb.

And that mountain looked insurmountable when the BCB XI lost their opener Imrul Kayes off the first delivery of the innings from Chris Mpofu. The innings never really got going as the Zimbabwean bowlers, both seamers and spinners, kept coming away with important breakthroughs just when someone looked to be settling down.

The limping innings came to an end in the 37th over with only 143 runs on the board. The highest individual score of the innings was 30 and that came

from the bat of veteran all-rounder Faisal Hossain who seems to have been having a purple patch off late. Chamu Chibhabha was the most successful bowler for the Zimbabweans with three wickets while Prosper Utseya was the most impressive with figures of

two for ten in seven overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Zimbabwe 335 for 5 (Taylor 139, Taibu 68, Chigumbura 45; Faysal 2-52) beat BCB XI 143 all out (Faysal 30, Shamsur 29; Chibhabha 3-29, Utseya 2-10) by 192 runs.



PHOTO: STAR

A DRESS REHEARSAL! Zimbabwean opener Brendan Taylor (R) and recalled former captain Tatenda Taibu had a field day at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday. The pair added 188 runs for the second wicket against BCB XI in the second practice match ahead of the first one-day international against the Tigers tomorrow.