

Abahani, Mohammedan set for super finale

SPORTS REPORTER



It is all set for a humdinger of a final round in this season's Premier Cricket League as traditional rivals Abahani and Mohammedan will face off in the final round for the title. Both sides won their penultimate round games yesterday to set up this fantastic finale.

Left-arm spinner Saqlain Sajib's five-for gave leaders Mohammedan a comfortable five-wicket victory against Kalabagan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur while holders Abahani rode on Pakistani all-rounder Abdul Razzaq's stroke-filled 71 to secure a four wicket win against Cricket Coaching School (CCS) at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

With the outcome, the gap remains on one point between league leaders Mohammedan and their old foes Abahani and a win or an unlikely tie in the Monday's final round match at Mirpur can end the eight years title drought of the Motijheel outfit while a win will make sure of Abahani's fourth title in a row.

Back to the Mirpur encounter, Saqlain made it a mismatch as the Kalabagan batsmen succumbed to him, being bundled out for 120 runs in 34 overs after being sent to bat first.

Mohammedan skipper Khaled Mashud brought the spinner on as early as the third over and he took three wickets in the fifth over as Kalabagan were reduced to 26 for four at one stage.

Number eight batsman Fariduddin Masud made unbeaten 32 off 66 deliveries to add some respect to the total.

Mohammedan posted 124 for five in 30.4 overs but their top order batting also looked uncomfortable especially against left-arm spinner Enamul Haque, who picked up three wickets for 25 runs.



PHOTO: STAR
Mohammedan left-arm spinner Saqlain Sajib is in his delivery stride during his venomous 5-wicket haul against Kalabagan in their Super League match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Aus have slight advantage

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Doug Bollinger was responsible for a sudden swing from flooding runs to raining wickets before West Indies surged back to remain in contention at the end of fourth day of the deciding third Test in Perth. Despite failing to a worrying 8 for 137 in their second innings, Australia still managed an enviable position and will enter the fourth day with a 345-run lead following the scare.

Bollinger grabbed 5 for 70 and ensured an advantage of 208 for the hosts before Ricky Ponting did not enforce the follow-on and ordered his team to provide a match-winning total. That assignment became a severe struggle when West Indies were inspired by Dwayne Bravo and Suleiman Benn on a cracking surface that is becoming less predictable. The turnaround was a shock just 24 hours after Chris Gayle blazed a 70-ball century, with the highest score of the day a gritty 44 from Brendan Nash

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as 16 wickets fell for 235 runs.

Australia were surprised by the ferocity of the fightback and Ponting, who retired hurt on 23 in the first innings, decided to walk out an hour after saying he wouldn't bat unless it was absolutely necessary. He is not used to such dramatic changes. Ponting suffered tendon damage in his left elbow when hit by Kemar Roach on Wednesday and until his batsmen started disappearing he would have been more worried about being in doubt for the Boxing Day Test against Pakistan.

At 7 for 125, following Mitchell Johnson's dismissal, Ponting arrived and lasted six balls for 2 before his discomfort forced a pushed catch to short leg off his new nemesis Roach. There was some consolation in him leaving knowing Australia's lead is still significant and that only South Africa have scored more to win in Perth. Although the voices of the West Indians grew happier with each breakthrough, the pitch will deteriorate further and the tourists will need a Gayle-inspired masterpiece to level the three-game series.



PHOTO: INTERNET
Aussie paceman Doug Bollinger was the star of the third day as he took 5 for 70 in the Perth Test against West Indies yesterday.

Div I Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Uttara Sporting Club registered a 47-run victory against Eskaton Sabuj Sangha in the First Division Super League match at BKSP yesterday.

After an early hiccup, Nantu Kumar hit 61 off 75 balls with five fours and a six as Uttara posted 212-9 in stipulated 50 overs.

Mustafizur Rahman claimed four wickets for 22 runs while Sarfaraz Alam and Mahfuzur Rahman took two wickets each.

In reply, Eskaton were all out for 165 in 45.5 overs with number seven batsman Ayub Ullah making team highest unbeaten 59.

Mahmudul Islam captured four wickets for 28 runs and Shafiqul Islam Gary claimed three wickets for 30 runs.

Everton sign Donovan on loan

AFP, Liverpool

English Premier League side Everton announced Friday they had signed United States striker Landon Donovan on a short-term loan.

Donovan will join the Merseysiders in the January transfer window.

The 27-year-old forward is a team-mate of England midfielder David Beckham at Major League Soccer side Los Angeles Galaxy, who have allowed this latest loan move in their off-season.

Beckham is currently in his second loan spell with Italian giants AC Milan.

Everton's season has been hampered by injuries and manager David Moyes welcomed the upcoming arrival of Donovan by saying: "Landon Donovan will join Everton. It is all agreed and done now and hopefully he will be with us on January 1 or 2.

"Hopefully he is the first of two or three we want to bring in January.

"We need to strengthen our squad to make sure we are not in a situation like we have at the moment with so many injuries."

Moyes added: "Landon will certainly add pace, he is a good finisher."

"He was voted best player, yet again, in the American league and is captain of the USA national team."

"I need players who can hit the ground running, who I think can go into the team quite quickly and make an impact."

DAY'S EVENT
Citycell Bangladesh League
Abahani v Mukti Joddha
6:00pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Ctg Abahani v Sheikh Russel KC
3:30pm
Venue: MA Aziz Stadium

Bangladesh League resumes today

SPORTS REPORTER

The local football arena will be abuzz again after a one-and-a-half month break when the Citycell Bangladesh League returns to action today. Defending champions and current joint leaders

in the table Dhaka Abahani will take on Muktijoddha Sangsads at the Bangabandhu National Stadium while Chittagong Abahani will take on Sheikh Russel KC at the MA Aziz Stadium in the afternoon kick-off.

Dhaka Abahani currently lead the table, along with Dhaka Mohammedan, with a maximum of nine points from three matches while Muktijoddha languish at the bottom having failed to register a point till now.

The Sky Blues will be looking to stretch their hundred percent record when they take on bottom-placed Muktijoddha. Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu however thinks that the previous results don't count for much and he is looking for a fresh start. "The league was on a break for a long time. It doesn't matter much that we have won our previous three games. We are taking this as a new beginning and a fresh challenge."

Abahani have nine players in the squad from the recently-concluded SAFF Championship, which Rupu thinks might work both as an advantage or a disadvantage. "This can be an

advantage when one considers that they were amongst play all this time. But again, it might work against us as they are tired from playing at a stretch."

Abahani will likely be missing the services of veteran defender Rajani Kanta Barman who sustained an injury during the SAFF Championship match against India and is still recovering. They may also have to do without another defender Atiqur Rahman Mishu who is also nursing an injury.

Muktijoddha coach Golam Sarwar Tipu also wants to forget the performances of the past and is looking towards the challenge that is ahead, "I've told my boys to forget the previous results and concentrate on this game. They know their strengths and weaknesses. And I've told them to play accordingly."

Acknowledging the task at hand, the veteran coach wants his charges to put up a good fight. "Abahani are the defending champions. And they are a very strong side. But we will play our best too".

The tie at MA Aziz stadium between Sheikh Russel and Chittagong Abahani is expected to be a tough battle. Sheikh Russel have seven points in their three matches while Chittagong Abahani have five points with a win and two draws.

The Bangladesh League went into the long break after the first week of November with Eidul-Azha followed by preparations for the SAAF Football and the tournament proper.

Dhoni lifts India

Cricket

AFP, Nagpur

wicket-keeper Kumar Sangakkara while attempting to cut seamer Chanaka Welegedara in the match's first over.

The hosts suffered another blow a few overs later when Gambhir (two) was caught short of the crease after colliding with bowler Welegedara while going for a single.

Tendulkar fell in a bid to step up the run-rate, stumped by Sangakkara while trying a big shot off Mendis.

Kohli fell after completing



PHOTO: AFP
India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni plays a pull shot during his stroke-filled hundred in the second ODI against Sri Lanka at the Vidarbha Cricket Association Ground in Nagpur yesterday.

KO battlelines drawn

AFP, Nyon

David Beckham is set to return to Old Trafford after Manchester United were drawn with AC Milan on Friday for the knockout stages of the Champions League.

The England midfielder, who won the Champions League with United in 1999 before joining Real Madrid in 2003, will return to Milan in January for a second round spell from Los Angeles Galaxy.

Beckham has not yet come up against the club where he made his name.

United's director of communications Phil Townsend was pleased with the draw. "It will be fantastic," he told Sky Sports News. "I think everyone at Old Trafford will be absolutely delighted, it's what the Champions League is all about."

He (Beckham) will get a fantastic reception, as players coming back usually do at Manchester United. He was a terrific servant for the club and we all hope he will be playing."

Chelsea take on former manager Jose Mourinho after being drawn against his current club Inter Milan.

Mourinho was dubbed the 'Special One' when he lead Chelsea to Premier League titles in 2005 and 2006 before leaving early in the 2007/2008 season.

Chelsea chief executive Ron Gourlay

was delighted with the high-profile clash. "It's fantastic, it was the talk when we arrived here this morning and it's happened," he said.

"It's fantastic for the fans and for neutrals and it will be quite spectacular, I'm sure."

"I'm sure Jose will get a fantastic reaction from our fans. But at the end of the

LAST 16 BATTLELINE

INTER MILAN	v	CHELSEA
LYON	v	REAL MADRID
AC MILAN	v	MAN UNITED
OLYMPIAKOS	v	BORDEAUX
FC PORTO	v	ARSENAL
CSKA MOSCOW	v	SEVILLA
STUTTGART	v	BARCELONA
BAYERN MUNICH	v	FIorentina

First leg: February 16/17, 23/24

Second leg: March 9/10, 16/17

day he is the opposition and we'll look to go through over the two games."

Arsenal take on Portuguese side Porto as all three English clubs play the first leg of their ties away from home after winning their groups.

Arsenal secretary David Miles believes manager Arsene Wenger will be satisfied with a two-legged tie against Porto.

"I think he will be relatively pleased," he said. "We have played Porto three times in four seasons so they are a team we know well."

Spanish clubs avoided the big names with reigning champions Barcelona drawn against German side Stuttgart and Real Madrid up against French club Lyon.

Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas admitted they were facing a tough task against the club of their former striker Karim Benzema.

"It's an extremely difficult draw," Aulas told Eurosport.

"They're a fantastic team and the final will be played in Madrid, we know how that motivates."

Aulas added: "He (Benzema) was a great player for us and it's going to be something special for him to play against his former club."

German giants Bayern Munich meet Serie A club Fiorentina and CSKA Moscow were drawn with Spanish club Sevilla.

Sevilla president Jose Maria del Nido admitted that the greatest danger for his side would be the freezing Moscow weather.

"We're satisfied with this draw. I think the biggest handicap for Sevilla will be the cold, we could play in temperatures of minus 18," said del Nido.

"CSKA Moscow is a great team but we're happy that we're not up against Milan, Inter or Bayern Munich," added Sevilla vice-president Jose Castro.