

Can Mohammedan end drought?

ATIQUE ANAM



Will it be Abahani once again to lift the supreme domestic trophy for the fourth time on a trot, or will Mohammedan be able to end their eight-year drought and bring it back to their Motijheel tent? Will it be the current stand-in skipper of national side Shakib Al Hasan to have the last laugh or will it be battle-hardened Khaled Mashud to have the last say?

We'll have to wait for a few more hours to learn all that when the perennial rivals of domestic cricket face off in the title-deciding Premier Super League clash at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today.

Prospect of small battles within the big one are ensuing. One between the two captains, Abahani's skipper having the world on his feet while his Mohammedan counterpart looking perhaps for a perfect swansong after having been through all

these for years now.

It will be a battle of a very strong batting against a crafty spin attack, and vice versa. Personal performances are priorities too as the last chance to impress national selectors are at hand.

The two Pakistani all-rounders, Abdul Razzaq and Navedul Hasan, both ICL-ers and out of their national side, will have a chance to outshine the other in a battle of pride. So, whatever the end result, the match bills up to be a mouth-watering prospect for the cricket-lovers.

The two sides are separated by a single point and a win or an unlikely tie in today's final round match can end eight years of title drought for the Motijheel outfit while a win will make sure of Abahani's fourth title in a row.

Mohammedan looked pretty indomitable winning their first ten matches in a row, including a six-wicket victory over Abahani in the first phase. But since then their performances have gone off the boil a bit as

they lost to an eventually relegated Khelaghar and then went down to a spirited Biman in the Super League stage. The sky-blues have pounced on those slip-ups from Mohammedan to turn the title race into a close affair. They have dropped just a single point in their last four matches, that drop came against Biman, and now find themselves away from holding the title.

Abahani's opening pair have been amongst runs throughout, but the inclusion of Pakistani all-rounder Abdur Razzaq has added the arrogance and flair that they lacked earlier. Mohammedan's batting has not stood up as they did in the first phase. The loss of explosive opener Tamim Iqbal to injury has no doubt been a huge blow to them. Mohammedan's Pakistani recruit Navedul Hasan has done ok with the ball but his performances with the bat disappointed the Mohammedan faithful. However, both teams have quality spinners in their side and the spin

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PHOTO: STAR

Striker Zahid Hasan Emily (C), who fired almost blank in the just concluded SAFF Championship, returns to his club duties with a brace in Mohammedan's 2-1 win against Arambagh Krira Sangha during a Bangladesh League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

No Bangladesh League matches at BNS

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation suspended today's fixtures of the ongoing Bangladesh League after Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) requested to the football's governing body to vacate the venue for renovation work at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The BNS will host the opening and closing ceremony of the 11th SA Games to be held from January 29-February 9 next year and the ceremonies committee of the SA Games has a vast task left at the country's premier venue with only one-and-a-half month remaining and that is the reason for requesting BFF to shift the Bangladesh League matches to other venues.

"The Bangladesh League's match between Rahmatganj MFS and Brother Union will remain suspended tomorrow (Monday) and the league will resume the next day either at Army Stadium or Kamapur Stadium as the BFF has responded to the national

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Emily staves off Arambagh

SPORTS REPORTER



A late brace from Zahid Hasan Emily powered title contenders Mohammedan to a 2-1 win over a tough Arambagh KS in the Bangladesh League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The fourth win in as many matches meant the Black and Whites joined leaders Abahani with 12 points each, seven point clear of Arambagh, who tasted their first defeat in four matches to remain on five points.

It seemed that Arambagh were going to hold their mighty opponents like the way they did against Sheikh Russel and Brothers Union in their previous two matches and the hosts parried Mohammedan till the 77th minute before national striker Emily gave Mohammedan a deserved lead. Three minutes later he struck his 11th goal of the season to make the result safe.

Arambagh, however, pulled one goal back in the stoppage time through a stunning goal by Nigerian striker Subair Mohammed.

Though Mohammedan appeared disorga-

nised right from the beginning, but they gradually gained in confidence to assert authority in the midfield against a side, who creditably snatched points against powerhouses like Sheikh Russel and Brothers Union.

The Motijheel-based outfit, Mohammedan, produced the first real scoring chance in the 13th minute when Nigerian striker Alamu Bukola Olalekan headed a Wali Faisal cross wide from close and three minutes later, he again frustrated all as the tall striker having shrugged off his two markers advanced into the box, but saw his curling shot to the far post miss the target narrowly.

Arambagh mustered their first shot on target on the half-hour mark, but the country's number one goalkeeper Aminul Haque faced no problem to grab a header from Subair.

Though Arambagh appeared working hard in the first half to fight equally against their neighbouring club, they adopted a defensive strategy from the beginning of the second half in the face of tremendous pressure from Mohammedan, who went all-out and yielded

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PHOTOS: STAR

A vintage Mohammad Rafique (L) bowls in the nets during Abahani's practice session at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium while Mohammedan batsman Mohammad Ashraf (above) tries to take a catch at the Dhanmondi No. 4 ground yesterday. Abahani and Mohammedan face off in the Premier League title-deciding match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today.



ETV
Mohammedan v Abahani
Premier Cricket Super League
Live from 10:00am
Neo Cricket & SuperSport2
India v Sri Lanka
Third ODI
Live from 4:00pm
ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 9:30pm
ESPN & SuperSport6
FIFA World Player Gala 2009
Live from 2:00am (Tuesday)
STAR Sports & SuperSport3
English Premiership
Wigan v Bolton
Live from 2:55am (Tuesday)



Did U Know?
Former Australia captain Allan Border was the first Test cricketer to score 150 or more in both innings of a match.



Premier Super League
Mohammedan v Abahani
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium
Biman v CCS
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
Kaibagan v Victoria
Venue: BKSP-2

BOA assures 'em

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) has assured chief de missions from participating nations that all the venues would be ready much before the start of the 11th South Asian Games.

The regional Olympic jamboree will be held in Bangladesh from January 29 to February 9.

The renovation work at different venues and venues under construction like wooden-floor gymnasium, boxing stadium and handball stadium were scheduled to be completed in November.

But the National Sports Council is already running behind the schedule with the BOA announcing a fresh cutoff time to the high-profile dignitaries from eight out of the nine participating nations.

"We ensured them that all venues of the Games will be ready by January 15," said BOA vice-president and Bangladesh contingent's chief de mission Mizanur Rahman Manu after a meeting of chief de missions at Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

The chief de missions also visited Bangabandhu National Stadium, which will host the opening and closing ceremonies, Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium, Volleyball Stadium, Kabaddi Court, Boxing

Stadium, Wooden-Floor Stadium and the NSC Gymnasium after the meeting.

They are also scheduled to visit the National Shooting Complex, Kurmitola Golf Club, Mirpur Indoor Stadium, National Swimming Complex in Mirpur and Bangladesh Krira Shiksha Protisthan today.

The meeting also discussed the Games' technical aspects, accreditation, anti-doping and media related matters. Besides, some visiting officials also raised the issue of holding non-Olympic event like cricket. However, the meeting finally stuck to previous 23 disciplines for the 12-day spectacle.

The meeting also ensured the leaders that the final scheduled would be ready soon after the participating nations send their entries by December 30.

BOA president and Army chief General M Abdul Mubeen, who graced the meeting as the chief guest, said that the event would be an opportunity to intensify the bond among the South Asian countries. He also stressed that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been backing them tremendously to make the SA Games a success.

BOA secretary general Kutubuddin Ahmed, ceremonies sub-committee convener Major General (ret'd) Amin Ahmed Chowdhury, accreditation sub-committee convener Major General Rafiqul Islam and venue sub-committee convener Major General Moinul Islam were among other present on the occasion.

Aussies do it easily

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Australia needed 21 balls on the last day to win the third and final Test and take the Frank Worrell Trophy with a 2-0 victory over West Indies at the WACA in Perth on Sunday. The result was virtually assured as soon as the day broke sunny, with the hosts wanting one wicket and it came when Kemar Roach was ruled caught behind via an umpiring review.

Roach and Gavin Tonge had added 15 when Doug Bollinger and the Australians were certain Roach had got an edge to Brad Haddin. The batsman immediately called for a review: there was a noise but no replay showed a clear nick and there was nothing on Hot Spot. Everyone was standing around for a couple of minutes before Billy Bowden finally raised his finger for a second time following consultation with Asad Rauf.

"He smashed it," Bollinger said. "He hit it, he was out." Bollinger finished with 3 for 71 and eight wickets for the game.

Roach (17) and Tonge (23 not out) started the last day chasing 51 to reach the victory target of 359 after putting on 29 from 30 balls on the fourth evening. Roach played and missed a couple of times in Shane Watson's first over before Bollinger was taken for five runs by the aggressive Tonge. Tonge then inside-edged Watson for four and drove over mid-off for two before the fielding mood changed when Roach sliced a four over gully. They were soon celebrating again in a mixture of relief and satisfaction.

The reason West Indies still had an outside chance on the final morning was due to the 128-run partnership between Narsingh Deonarine (82) and Brendan Nash (65), but their hopes diminished when they lost six wickets in the final session. Mitchell Johnson bowled through the discomfort of an illness to take three victims yesterday while Watson gained two.

The game will be remembered mostly for the man-of-the-match Chris Gayle's 70-ball century on the second day, his second hundred of a series which started with a three-day loss

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'Dhoni factor may hurt India'

CRICINFO, undated

Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara believes the absence of his Indian counterpart Mahendra Singh Dhoni for the third ODI in Cuttack on Monday is likely to hurt the home side, as both teams look to take the upper hand in the five-match series.

Dhoni was banned with immediate effect for two ODIs following India's failure to maintain the over-rate during the second match against Sri Lanka in Nagpur, which they lost by three wickets. While virender Sehwag will be leading the side for the games in Cuttack and Kolkata, Dhoni will return only for the final ODI in Delhi.

"I hope it [Dhoni's absence] is a factor. He has been one of the players who has been in form, so obviously it's a blow to lose him," Sangakkara said.

Dhoni been in great touch in the series scoring 72 and 107 in the first two matches, and the dual pressure on Sehwag as opener and captain is something Sri Lanka is hoping to cash in on. "The only edge we can take is if we get him out early," Sangakkara said. "We will go all out and make sure that he is out cheaply."

Not that Sri Lanka have less worries of their own. Sangakkara rued the loss of his in-form all-rounder Angelo Mathews, who returned home on Sunday morning after straining his right quadricep muscle during the Nagpur game. "We too have received a setback. We lost out on Angelo Mathews. He has gone back home," Sangakkara said.

Sangakkara also clar that in

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INDIA V SRI LANKA, 3RD ODI Big guns absent

Cricket

CRICINFO, Cuttack

The build-up to today's third one-day international between India and Sri Lanka has been dominated by the two-match ban handed down to captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni for India's appallingly slow over-rate in Nagpur.

With Dhoni out of the fray, Sri Lanka's own woes have been obscured. Angelo Mathews, who clinched victory in Nagpur, is the latest to join the incapacitated list, with Thissara Perera flying in to take his place, and it's still uncertain whether Lasith Malinga will be risked after missing the first two games.

The missing-in-action theme has affected India too, though Yuvraj Singh is expected to be fit to shore up a middle order that will sorely

miss Dhoni's remarkable consistency at the Barabati Stadium.

The bigger concern for India is the fielding, or lack of it. The number of catches dropped has gone into double-figures, and the ground-fielding was equally dismal in the last game. Both seniors and juniors have been equally culpable, and Mike Young would have watched with some horror from the dressing room as even the basics were ignored.

Sri Lanka haven't been exceptional in the field either, but they do have two batsmen, Tillakaratne Dilshan and Kumar Sangakkara, in prime form. There was also a fine debut for Suraj Randiv, and a moderately successful return to the limelight for Ajantha Mendis, whose dismissal of Sachin Tendulkar set India back in Nagpur.

India's bowling woes are more focussed on

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PHOTO: AFP

PADDING UP FOR A THIRD! Sri Lanka opener Tillakaratne Dilshan pads up during a practice session at the Barabati Stadium in Cuttack yesterday, ahead of the third one-day international against India today. Dilshan scored centuries in the first two ODIs.