

Rangers ambush Kings to lift title

BISHWAJIT ROY

In front of a capacity crowd, Rajshahi Rangers put up a clinical display to emerge champions of the Destiny Group National Cricket League T20s with a six-wicket victory over the Kings of Khulna in an entertaining final at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Seasoned campaigner Khaled Mashud, for the second successive occasion in this season, came up trumps against his young counterpart Shakib Al Hasan after a dramatic win in the Premier Division League deciding match at the same venue. It came as a double delight for Mashud as under his leadership Rajshahi also became champions in the four-day competition of the National Cricket League.

Contesting the tournament's average total, Khulna set a challenging target of 162 for their opponents after deciding to bat first on a slow pitch.

However, Shuvogoto Hom (62) and Pakistani Kaiser Abbas (61 not out) shared 109 runs in a fourth wicket stand to reach the target of 163 with four balls remaining.

Shuvogoto holds the record of the fastest fifty in the tournament, and his innings was instrumental in the game. When the man from Mymensingh departed in the last ball of the penultimate over of the match, Rajshahi just required another seven runs for victory.

The right-hander offered a return catch to Elias Sunny and departed after a 49 ball knock that contained four boundaries and two sixes.

Khulna pacer Dollar Mahmud stood in the way but a misfield from Elias Sunny gifted a boundary to Abbas in the very first delivery of the over, all but killing Khulna's last hope. Left-handed Abbas finished the job in style hitting a boundary through point off the second delivery to set Rajshahi players dancing to celebrate their success.

Initially however, Australian Aiden Blizzard and Junaid Siddiqui had set the tone in the chase of a tricky target as the southpaw openers collected 14 runs from the first over of spinner Forhad Hossain.

Shakib brought back his side in contention removing dangerman Blizzard who offered a catch to wicketkeeper

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6



CLASS OF 2010: Jubilant Rajshahi Rangers players hold aloft the Destiny Group NCL T20s trophy after beating Kings of Khulna by six wickets in the final of the Destiny Group NCL T20s at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

TEN NCL FACTS

1. Mohammad Rafique bowled four maiden overs in the tournament, from the six matches he's played. The 42-year-old left-arm spinner is also the most economical bowler, giving away a miserly 4.48 runs per over.
2. One of the three bowlers who share the top spot among the wicket-takers along with Rafique and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is Mohammad Ashraful, the ace batsman. Ashraful took ten wickets with his leg spin but his high profile bat did hardly talk in the meet.
3. There wasn't much of a surprise for the highest six-hitter. Tamim Iqbal smashed nine sixes. The dashing left-hander also has the tournament's highest score, a 91 against Sultans of Sylhet.
4. The Sultans, one of the form teams in the group stages, scored the highest in a match, 182 against Rajshahi Rangers.
5. Little-known Shuvogoto Hom notched up the fastest fifty, off 23 balls, for Khulna against Sylhet.
6. Though a build-up tournament for the Tigers, lesser stars picked up more prizes than the national team players. Muktar Ali and Farid Uddin Masud might be unknown quantities but both picked up two man-of-the-match awards in the tournament.
7. Pakistan speedster Shoaib Akhtar is the biggest flop of the event. He took a single wicket giving away 95 runs in the three matches he played. It was quite expensive for Cyclones of Chittagong who have reportedly paid the crest-fallen paceman 15,000 dollars.
8. But Australian Twenty20 specialist Aiden Blizzard was a hit, batting at an amazing strike rate of 170.11 although he failed to deliver in the final for Rajshahi.
9. While the domestic cricket has always seen the dominance of Pakistani cricketers, different nationalities thronged the NCL T20s. Khulna brought in South Africans Alviro Petersen and Ryan Bailey for the final while Rajshahi had Aiden Blizzard for the entire tournament. But Sri Lankans like Mahela Udawatte, Nuwan Zoysa and Indika De Saram were the most popular among the franchises. Pakistanis did come. But Shoaib, Imran Nazir and Khurram Manzoor failed to make any lasting impression.
10. This is the lowest scoring Twenty20 tournament since its inception in 2003. There were also little fireworks and it could be blamed on the pitches in Mirpur, which have been overused for the entire season.

Fans beat the heat

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Sweltering heat be damned. The lure of the day-night NCL T20s final between Shakib Al Hasan's Kings of Khulna and fellow underdogs Rajshahi Rangers brought the spectators swarming to the home of cricket.

Even two hours before the start of play, large crowds

were gathering in front of the ticket counters but most were crowding the different gallery gates of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

"I have come from Tongi just for the final but I still don't have a ticket to go in," said college student Shamim.

There were many like Shamim who made a last-minute decision to watch the final. Tipu, a Class IX student from a Mirpur school, saw a few matches of the tournament, especially those held in the late afternoon or evening.

"I liked the timing but frankly, I really didn't enjoy the matches. I hope the final is a bit better," commented Tipu.

There were many like Tipu and Shamim without tickets but that wasn't the only problem. The entrances of Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium are still a jigsaw puzzle for cricket-watchers in the city. Most do not know the galleries from the clubhouses, and the problem is compounded, as the entrances of these stands are quite far apart.

Families could be seen enquiring around the main gate of the BCB offices, asking for their gates, most of which do not have a number.

This was never a problem with the Bangabandhu National Stadium as most had the gate names and numbers memorised.

But it was a heartening sight -- the huge crowds -- and most got through before the first ball was bowled by Sohrawardi Shuvo.

Some however were quietly disappointed that their favourites Dhaka and Sylhet were not the two teams in the final.

"It would have been so much better if it was a Ashraful-Mashrafe match but still we will get to see Shakib (Al Hasan)," quipped Ali.

A local cricketer, the young man took pride in the fact that Mirpur is now such a big part of Bangladesh cricket. "It is so much easier for me to watch cricket now," said Ali.

The enthusiasm in the earlier matches, even the semifinals, were nowhere to be found but cricket's popularity, like the game itself, is proving to be funny.

After the success of the Dhaka Premier League Twenty20s, the cricket board should have latched on to this tournament and enticed bigger crowds but it had failed, till the final came around.

Shakib's helm extended

SPORTS REPORTER

Shakib Al Hasan's captaincy of Bangladesh national team has been extended up to the England tour in June.

The mercurial all-rounder will be leading Bangladesh in the Twenty20 World Cup and then in the tour of England while Mushfiqur Rahim remain as his deputy for the two tours, an emergency meeting of the Bangladesh Cricket Board approved of this decision yesterday.

The meeting also appointed

SEE PAGE 18 COL 7

Rajshahi thrive on spirit

SPORTS REPORTER



Rajshahi Rangers captain Khaled Mashud predictably pointed out his team's commitment and spirit as the decisive factor but said he preferred Khulna to Dhaka as finals' opponents of the Destiny Group National Cricket League T20s.

"We regained our confidence after the semifinal win over Dhaka and once we did that, I always knew we could beat Khulna. Actually we preferred Khulna as the final opponents than Dhaka," said Mashud while speaking to the reporters after the enthralling final match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur last evening.

"Any total, be it 140, 160 or 180 is achievable here if the team can bat well, so I was always confident we could chase down their target. Our team was always 100 per cent committed to the cause," he said.

"We always plan ahead of every game and look out for opponents' strengths and weaknesses," added the man popularly known as Pilot.

Mashud also praised his batsman Aiden Blizzard for giving them a rapid start in all the important matches and final heroes Kaiser Abbas and Shuvogoto Hom. The two middle-order batsmen added 109 for the fourth wicket in a display rarely seen in local Twenty20 cricket. "They batted beautifully, especially Shuvogoto. I thought he batted in an excellent manner," commented Mashud.

Shuvogoto, the strong middle-order batsman who hails from Mymensingh, pointed how this season was a sort of comeback for him after suffering from jaundice in the last season.

"I missed the Premier League last season because of jaundice so I was always looking to score lots of runs in this season," said Shuvogoto, who made 62 off 49 balls. He added that he was always convinced that they could chase the target set by the Kings of Khulna.

His teammate Mukhtar Ali, who won the best bowler of the tournament, said how he felt very comfortable bowling at the death.

"My team knows I bowl in the slog overs and they used me then. Actually I bowl very well at that time and pick up a lot of wickets. To be honest, its easy to pick up wickets in the slog because batsmen are always going after the bowling," said

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6



PHOTO: STAR

Large crowds gather outside the gates of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday hours before the start of the final match of the NCL T20s between Kings of Khulna and Rajshahi Rangers.

Mumbai march into final

STAR SPORT DESK



Kieron Pollard's all-round show helped Mumbai Indians to beat Bangalore Royal Challengers by 35 runs in the first semifinal of the Indian Premier League at the Dr DY Patil Sports Academy in Mumbai yesterday.

Bangalore managed 149 for nine in their stipulated 20 overs in reply to Mumbai's 184.

Earlier, Saurabh Tiwary hit an enterprising fifty and Kieron Pollard (33 not out) played a delightful cameo to charge Mumbai to a strong 184 for five.

The game actually changed in character twice: first after the first time-out was taken at the end of seven overs, and second from the 15th over onwards. Mumbai had recovered after the early falls of in-form skipper Sachin Tendulkar (9), other opener Shikhar Dhawan (12) and Abhishek Nayar (22), courtesy a impish knock from Ambati Rayudu (40 in 38 balls) who counterattacked initially before settling down, to reach 62 for 2 in seven overs, but were gradually choked by the onset of the slower bowlers. In the next six overs, before the second time-out was taken, only 31 runs came with the addition of two wickets. Things looked desperate for Mumbai when Tiwary looted 17 runs from the 16th over bowled by Jacques Kallis to turn things around.

The first delivery, a slower one, was swung over the midwicket boundary, the fourth was bludgeoned to midwicket for a four and the fifth ran away to fine-leg boundary via an inside-edge. Mumbai had broken free and continued to indulge themselves in the end overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

MUMBAI INDIANS: 184 for 5 in 20 overs (Nayar 22, Tiwary 52 not out,

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

What to WATCH

Max & SuperSport2
Indian Premier League
Second Semifinal
Chennai v Deccan
Live from 8:30pm

TEN Sports & SuperSport3
UEFA Europa League
Atletico v Liverpool
Live from 12:45am (Friday)

SuperSport7
UEFA Europa League
Hamburg v Fulham
Live from 12:45am (Friday)

DAY'S EVENT

GP-BCB NCA v SA Cricket Academy
1st 4-day Match, Day 1
Time: 9:30am
Venue: Zahir Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Chittagong

NCL T20s

RAJSHAHI RANGERS

Tide of Padma knows only to win

Our heartfelt greetings to the first NCL T20 Champion Rajshahi Rangers

CO-SPONSOR: AB Bank

FRANCHISEE: National Cricket Board

Zoom Citycell

COPIRIGHT/AVI 2010