

Rajshahi the only winner

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi was the only winner out of this round as they beat Barisal by 126 runs while the other two matches ended in a draw yesterday in the National Cricket League's second round held across the country.

Centuries also seem to be the order of this round with three more coming from the bat of Myshukur Rahman of Rajshahi, Alok Kapali of Sylhet and Elias Sunny of Dhaka.

DHAKA-SYLHET

It was Kapali's day as he scored a big hundred to steer the game away from Dhaka's hand. His 153 not only earned him the man-of-the-match award but made Sylhet reach a total of 390 for seven before they declared.

Nadif Chowdhury also scored 68 runs. Mosharraf Hossain and Sunny took three wickets each for Dhaka.

Needing 302 runs to win, Dhaka's openers Anamul Haque (62) and Sunny (101) gave them a brilliant platform to chase the score adding 160 for the first wicket.

Left-arm spinners Shaker Ahmed and Nabil Samad then made things hard for the Dhakaites as they both picked up three wickets.

Dhaka managed to score 260 losing six wickets before the match ended in a stalemate.

KHULNA-CHITTAGONG

Heavy rain overnight caused very little to play for in the fourth day of the match.

The match started at half past three local time with Taposh Ghosh and Sahagir Hossain in the crease for Khulna at 155 for three. Taposh and Sahagir both got out to paceman Tareq Aziz.

The match was called off as a draw within half hour of play with Khulna at 148 for five. First innings centurion Nazimuddin was adjudged the man-of-the-match.

BARISAL-RAJSHAHI

Resuming the day at 130 for one, Myshukur scored an unbeaten century to take Rajshahi to a very comfortable score of 235 for five before they declared their innings, leaving Barisal a big task ahead of scoring 393 runs to win.

Barisal's batsmen looked out of touch once again as they failed to score

runs except Arafat Salahuddin, unlucky to miss out on his century, was not out at one end on 94.

Left-arm Saqlain Sajib who picked up five wickets in the first innings, took another four in the second, as Barisal were all out for 266 thus losing the match by 126 runs.

BRIEF SCORES

SYLHET: First inns 234 all out and second inns 390-7 dec (Kapali 153, Nadif 68; Mosharraf 3-60, Sunny 3-112).

DHAKA: First inns 323 all out and second inns 260-6 (Sunny 101, Anamul 62; Shaker 3-38, Nabil 3-64).

Result: Match drawn.

RAJSHAHI: First inns 434-9 dec and second inns 235-5 dec (Myshukur 107*, Avishek 48; Fazle 2-32, Ariful 2-34).

BARISAL: First inns 277 all out and second inns 266 all out (Arafat 94*, Shahin 40; Sajib 4-108, Farhad 3-30).

Result: Rajshahi won by 126 runs.

KHULNA: First inns 359-9 dec and second inns 148-3 (Sahagir 53, Taposh 29; Tareq 2-27, Mahamudul 2-32).

CHITTAGONG: First inns 395-9 dec (Nazimuddin 137, Faisal 88, Taposh 2-27, Rasel 2-66).

Result: Match drawn.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh striker Sabina Khatun (C) dribbles the ball past an India player during their Women's Olympic pre-qualifiers at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Thanks to a Bala Devi hat-trick, India won the match 3-0.

Bala treble pips Bangladesh

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Ngangom Bala Devi struck a hat-trick to guide India to an emphatic 3-0 win over hosts Bangladesh in the Women's Olympic pre-qualifiers at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

After a barren first half, Bala Devi grabbed all three goals in the second half to secure full three points from this opening fixture of Group B. This was however a better performance from the hosts compared to their previous results against India, losing 6-0 on two previous meetings in South Asian Games and SAFF Women's Championship last year.

The hosts played relatively better in the first half keeping their physically and skillfully superior opponents at bay and even creating a scoring opportunity on

the half-hour mark.

India went close to taking the lead a minute before the break, but Oinam Bemben Devi's free-kick hit the woodwork to end the first half goalless.

After resumption, Bangladesh looked tired and failed to restrict the Indian attacking pair of Tababi Devi and Bala Devi. The latter broke the deadlock in the 52nd minute as the tall striker danced past a defender to enter the box before slotting it past goalkeeper Sabina Khatun to the back of the net.

Bangladesh looked totally on the backfoot in the second half and India cashed in on that and doubled the lead in the 76th minute and this time too the scorer was Bala, who headed home a Suprava corner-kick.

Bala sealed the fate of the match and completed her hat-trick in the stoppage time of the second half, this time too heading in a Suprava corner-kick.

"I am happy with the overall performance of the girls, who had only two weeks to prepare them. Even though they could not carry out my plan of playing counter-attack based football, they played reasonably well," said Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton.

Despite an easy win against Bangladesh, India coach Shahed Jabbar was not satisfied with the performance of his charges.

"We practised for two months for this tournament, but there was no reflection of that in first half of the game. However, the hosts must be given credit as they have improved a lot and played well in the first half," said Jabbar.

Bangladesh will play their second and last match against Uzbekistan on Sunday while India will take on Uzbekistan on March 22 in the last game of Group B.



PHOTO: AFP

Benfica forward Nicolas Gaitan celebrates his goal against Paris Saint-Germain during their Europa League encounter at Parc des Princes on Thursday.

English sent packing

AFP, Paris



Big-spending English giants Manchester City, Liverpool and Rangers crashed out of the last 16 of the Europa League on Thursday to end Britain's interest in the competition.

Roberto Mancini's City side, bank-rolled from Abu Dhabi by Sheikh Mansour's £500 million investment, beat Dynamo

Kiev 1-0 at Eastlands but bowed out 2-1 on aggregate. At Anfield a lacklustre Liverpool eked out a goalless draw with Sporting Braga to put the plucky Portuguese side through 1-0 on aggregate.

Scottish giants Rangers, the finalists of the then UEFA Cup in 2008, had been in a strong position after coming away from their first leg at PSV Eindhoven with a scoreless stalemate.

But a 13th minute goal from Jermain Lens meant it was the Dutch visitors rather than Rangers whose name went into Friday's draw.

Joining PSV, Dynamo and Braga in the last eight were Benfica, FC Twente, Spartak Moscow, FC Porto, Villarreal.

In Manchester, City were cut to 10 men in the 37th minute after Italian Mario Balotelli was shown a straight red for a dreadful, high one-footed lunge at Goran Popov in a bad-tempered clash that also saw seven yellow cards brandished.

But the home side rebounded immediately after Balotelli's rash challenge through Aleksandar Kolarov, the Serb scoring from an indirect free-kick through a congested

area. Over at Anfield, Liverpool striker Andy Carroll made his first start since his £35 million move from Newcastle in January. But Kenny Dalglish's men failed to find their spark against Braga who were progressing to the last eight of a European competition for the first time in their history.

Liverpool's sorry tally of only one goal in their last five Europa run-outs ultimately cost them dear.

PSV qualified when catching Rangers on the break, with Lens sliding home Balazs Dzsudzsak's cross from the left.

PSG went out 3-2 to Portugal's Benfica after the two teams finished 1-1 on the night. Nicolas Gaitan bagged that all-important away goal for the Lisbon-based club in the 27th minute, an ambitious left-footed shot swerving past the static Apoula Edel in goal.

PSG responded eight minutes later, Mathieu Bodmer sending in a screamer of a right-foot volley into the corner of the net, but the Portuguese side held out.

In Moscow, Spartak wrapped up a comprehensive 4-0 aggregate victory over toothless Ajax, the Russians winning 3-0 on the night courtesy of goals from Dmitri Kombarov, and Brazilian duo Welliton and Alex.

There was no such luck for Spartak's domestic rivals Zenit St-Petersburg, whose 2-0 defeat of Dutch side FC Twente was not enough to overhaul a first-leg 3-0 deficit.

And another Russian club, CSKA Moscow, lost 2-1 at FC Porto to go out 3-1 on aggregate, while Villarreal beat Bayer Leverkusen by the same scoreline to qualify 5-3 over the two legs.

Title chase resumes

AFP, London



After being dumped out of three competitions in 13 days, deflated Arsenal will turn their attention to their last remaining route to a trophy on Saturday as the Premier League title chase resumes.

The Gunners travel to West Brom on Saturday with manager Arsene Wenger putting a brave face on what has been a grim fortnight for the Londoners, with defeat in the League Cup final followed by Champions League and FA Cup exits.

On paper, Arsenal remain perfectly positioned to launch an assault on league leaders Manchester United as the title race enters the home straight.

They are just three points behind United, who face Bolton at home on Saturday, and have a game in hand over Sir Alex Ferguson's side.

But Arsenal ended up well-beaten by United in the FA Cup last weekend, when all the old doubts about the fragility of Wenger's side resurfaced.

And while only four members of Wenger's current squad - Cesc Fabregas, Robin van Persie, Emmanuel Ebou, Gael Clichy -- have won a trophy with Arsenal, United's ranks are packed with title-winning know-how.

United have continued to roll along in three competitions with relative ease. Last week's quarterfinal win over Arsenal was followed by a 2-1 Champions League victory against Marseille in midweek.

Although Ferguson was hit with a five-match ban for improper conduct this week, the United manager's biggest problem has been a mounting injury crisis that has left his defence on its last legs.

Rio Ferdinand remains out with a long-term calf injury, while John O'Shea and Rafael both limped out of the win over Marseille.

Loew names team

AFP, Frankfurt

Germany coach Joachim Loew on Friday named the following squad for a Euro 2012 qualifier against Kazakhstan on March 26.

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Manuel Neuer (Schalke 04), Rene Adler (Bayer Leverkusen), Tim Wiese (Werder Bremen)

Defenders: Arne Friedrich (Wolfsburg), Dennis Aogo (Hamburg), Holger Badstuber (Bayern Munich), Philipp Lahm (Bayern Munich), Jerome Boateng (Manchester City/ENG), Mats Hummels (Dortmund), Per Mertesacker (Werder Bremen), Marcel Schmelzer (Dortmund)

Midfielders: Mario Gotze (Dortmund), Sven Bender (Dortmund), Mesut Ozil (Real Madrid/ESP), Sami Khedira (Real Madrid/ESP), Bastian Schweinsteiger (Bayern Munich), Christian Träsch (Stuttgart), Toni Kroos (Bayern Munich), Andre Schurrle (Mainz 05)

Strikers: Mario Gomez (Bayern Munich), Miroslav Klose (Bayern Munich)

Smith knows

FROM PAGE 16 South Africa will take the top two spots and Bangladesh the third spot. India will edge out England for the fourth position barring a huge defeat against West Indies.

In that case, it would be expected of the Englishmen to support South Africa, a state of affairs that goes right up Smith's alley. "I think English fans are getting used to supporting South Africans these days," he said with roars of laughter all around.

"As a team you try not to get too caught up in that stuff. It is hard to contemplate the amount of people are watching and supporting."

Shakib relaxed

FROM PAGE 16 well if we bat second," observed Shakib.

The Bangladesh captain did not reveal their team combination but it was learnt that off-spinning all-rounder Naem Islam will return to the team in place of left-arm spinner Sohrawardi Shuvo, who played the last game against Netherlands in Chittagong.

Real eye derby joy

AFP, Madrid



With a Champions League quarterfinal place secure, Real Madrid switch their attention back to the league with a testing derby match against rivals Atletico Madrid at the Vicente Calderon on Saturday.

Real are five points behind leaders Barcelona in the Spanish first division and will hope to continue their remarkable run over neighbours Atletico who have not won a derby match since 1999 and have already lost three times to Real this season.

Madrid will be full of confidence after their 3-0 home win over Lyon on Wednesday saw them reach the last eight of the Champions League for the first time since 2004 having fallen at the last 16 stage for six successive seasons.

Madrid beat Atletico 2-0 in the league at the Bernabeu and then won 1-0 and 3-1 in the two legs of the Kings Cup quarter-final so the omens don't look good for Atletico.

Real also have Cristiano Ronaldo back fit after the Portuguese star came through the Lyon match unscathed and Atletico will be aware of in-form Karim Benzema who has scored twice in each of his last three league matches.

Atletico lie down in eighth, three points off the top six, after a disappointing league campaign so ending the derby hoodoo would be a real highlight for the suffering fans.

Champions Barcelona dropped two

points in a 1-1 draw at Sevilla last time out and hope to get back on track with a home win over Getafe on Saturday.

Barca hold a five point cushion over Real at the summit and will be keen to maintain that lead ahead of the second 'El Clasico' at the Santiago Bernabeu on the weekend April 16/17.

Valencia host Sevilla on Sunday looking to put last weekend's 4-0 humiliation by Real Zaragoza to the back of their minds.

Valencia have wobbled of late with the Champions League last 16 exit to Schalke followed by the Zaragoza fiasco, however, the club are well-placed in third, three points ahead of Villarreal.

Villarreal missed the chance to close in on Valencia last weekend and have a tough trip to face Athletic Bilbao on Sunday.

Bilbao lie sixth largely on the basis of their strong home form with ten wins from their 14 outings at San Mames.

At the bottom the three teams in the relegation zone, Malaga, Hercules and Almeria, are all level on 20 points.

Malaga prop up the table, despite winning at Real Sociedad last weekend, and

have a tough match at home to fifth-placed Espanyol on Sunday.

Third from bottom Almeria travel to fellow strugglers Sporting Gijon, three points above them, on Sunday in a crucial six-pointer.

Hercules, the only team to beat Barcelona in the league this season, are the only promoted side in the bottom three and host Osasuna on Sunday.

Picking up the pieces

AFP, Berlin



Bayern Munich captain Philipp Lahm says his team must pick up the pieces of their wrecked season at Freiburg on Saturday as they come to terms with their disappointing Champions

League exit. Bayern were floored by Inter Milan on Tuesday, the Italians' late goal sealing a 3-2 win which put the holders into the Champions League quarterfinals on the away-goal rule after it finished 3-3 on aggregate.

Defending Bundesliga champions Bayern are 16 points behind leaders Dortmund, who host fifth-placed Mainz on Saturday night, and seven points from second which will give them a Champions League place next season.

Having been dumped from both the German Cup and now the Champions League, Bayern face the prospect of a season without silverware.

"We're still hugely disappointed," admitted Lahm.

"We have to try to put Tuesday behind us, we were determined to make the next round, but conceding a goal in the 88th minute always leaves a very, very bitter taste."

"We're in action again at the weekend, and there's a lot still at stake in the Bundesliga."

"We want to play in the Champions League again next season."

"It's still wide open, but it won't be easy against Freiburg, especially after you've had a shock. We're in a difficult and critical position."

Bayern are used to playing for titles, but second-best will have to be good enough for the Bavarian giants.