

Rajshahi on the verge of win

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi are on the verge of victory against Khulna while Dhaka and Barisal strengthened their grip over Chittagong and Sylhet respectively at the close of the third-day of the third round of National Cricket League.

Sylhet's pacer Shaker Ahmed was the highlight of the day as he cleaned up Barisal's batting by picking seven wickets.

RAJSHAHI-KHULNA
Rajshahi need only six wickets to taste victory on the final day at the Sylhet Divisional Stadium, as Khulna were tottering at 53 for four, chasing a massive target of 457 to win.

Muktar Ali picked up two wickets while Sanjamul Islam and Saqlain Sajib shared one each.

Earlier, Rajshahi, who made 318 in the first innings, declared their second innings at 292 for eight, riding on two half centuries from Nasir Hossain (76) and Dhiman Ghosh (51).

Shahagir Hossain (0) and Amit Mojumdar (4) were unbeaten at the close of the day.

Khulna were all out for 154 in the first innings as Saqlain Sajib grabbed five scalps for 25.

DHAKA-CHITTAGONG
Starting the day with three runs away from a century, Mehrab Hossain scored 125 hitting 17 fours and Amanul Haque struck an unbeaten 87 as Dhaka piled up a huge total of 461 against Chittagong after having resumed the third day on 308 for three at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi.

At the end of day three Dhaka now have a healthy lead of 199, as Chittagong finished the day scoring 112 losing one wicket having made 227 in the first innings.

After losing Nafees Iqbal (43), Mahbubul Karim (62*) and Mahmudul Hasan (4*) made sure they didn't lose any more wicket in the day.

BARISAL-SYLHET
Starting the day with a comfortable overnight score of 210 for three, Barisal were looking for a big score. Shaker had other ideas as he ran down the batting line up claiming seven wickets for just 87 runs before Barisal declared their innings at 264 for nine.

Barisal despite taking a slim lead of

68 runs looked in good position in the match after Sylhet lost five wickets in their second innings for 172.

Openers Imtiaz Hossain (33) and Shoikat Ali (34) gave Sylhet a good start sharing a partnership of 67 runs. Sohag Gazi (3/53) and Fazle Rabbi (2/34) shared five wickets to halt the Sylhet batsmen from scoring.

Rajin Saleh and Golam Mabud were batting on 51 and 27 respectively at the close of the third day.

BRIEFScores
RAJSHAHI: First inns 318 all out and second inns 292-8 dec (Nasir 76, Dhiman 51; Nizamuddin 3-44, Dollar 2-46).

KHULNA: First inns 154 all out and second inns 53-4 (Robiul 26; Muktar 2-25, Sanjamul 1-5)

SYLHET: First inns 160 all out and second inns 172-5 (Rajin 51*, Shaikat 34; Sohag 3-53, Fazle 2-34).

BARISAL: First inns 264-9 dec (Shahin 79*, Nasiruddin 70; Shaker 7-87)

CHITTAGONG: First inns 227 all out and second inns 112-1 (Mahabubul 62*, Nafees 43; Sunny 1-19).

DHAKA: First inns 461 all out (Shuvogoto 125, Mehrab 123; Kamrul 3-91, Aftab 2-29).

OLYMPIC WOMEN'S QUALIFIERS

Uzbekistan advance

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Uzbekistan qualified for the round 2 of the Olympic Women's Qualifiers by thrashing India 5-1 in the play-off match at the Bishreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Uzbekistan came from a goal behind in the first half to score five times against their South Asian counterparts. Some goalkeeping from India's Sita Sharma made it easier for Uzbekistan as she fumbled on number of occasions to give Uzbeks an easy win.

However it was India midfielder Bem Bem Devi who broke the deadlock in the 42nd minute with a superb freekick from 25 yards out that left the Uzbek keeper a mere

spectator.

But the Uzbeks' superior skill and stamina made the difference in the second half as India crumbled under pressure. Substitute winger Elena Lagutkena levelled the margin in the 57th minute with a nudge from close range.

Three minutes later Sita, instead of gripping a Sadiya Khadamova free-kick, tried to clear the ball with her feet and an unmarked Elena LagutKena placed the re-bounce at the farpost.

India went further behind in the 72nd minute when Sita allowed a regulation long ranger from Lyudmila Karachik slip through her hands to concede the third.

Midfielder Feruza Turdiboeva struck the fourth in the 75th minute with a powerful free-kick before Makhliyo Sarikova completed the rout with a solo effort in the 77th.

Robson set for Asian tour

for Asian tour

AFP, Hong Kong

Manchester United and England legend Bryan Robson will take part in a three-city Asian charity tour despite recent surgery for throat cancer, organisers said Wednesday.

United's longest serving captain said he was "extremely lucky" after his successful operation on March 3, and would attend fund-raising dinners in Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Hong Kong next month.

"The prognosis is good, so I count myself extremely lucky and am even more committed to raising funds to help improve the lives of vulnerable youngsters," Robson said.

"I have been overwhelmed by the support of United fans and well-wishers, and I hope everyone in Asia joins me in supporting these events."

Former United striker Andrew Cole said it was "fantastic" that Robson was joining the tour, which will raise money for the club's charitable foundation and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

"It is fantastic news that Bryan will be joining me on the tour. We are both looking forward to seeing all our fans across Asia, and really making a difference to the children there who need help the most," said Cole.

The gala dinners are in Bangkok on April 6, Kuala Lumpur on April 8 and Hong Kong on April 9.

New Zealand

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the World Cup, having won three out of the five matches they played against the Proteas since the 1992 World Cup.

"We are hoping to continue the good record against South Africa by preparing well before the match," said McCullum who believed both spin would play big roles in the game.

The Kiwis' key left-arm spinner and captain Daniel Vettori, who missed two group matches due to knee injury but is recovering rapidly, might be the ace up New Zealand's sleeve as he was already declared fit for the quarterfinal. Though the Kiwi skipper was seen tottering during the practice session, he bowled a couple of overs and batted in the nets.

Terry slams critics

Football

AFP, Watford

John Terry has hit back at the critics who slammed his reappointment as England captain by insisting he should never have been stripped of the armband in the first place.

Terry has regained the leadership of Fabio Capello's team just over a year after the England coach deprived him of the honour following an alleged affair with the partner of team-mate Wayne Bridge and reports that he was exploiting the captaincy for financial gain.

Capello's decision has been criticised in some quarters because it is felt Terry's distasteful activities off the pitch showed such a lack of respect for the captaincy that he should not have been given a second chance.

Much to Terry's consternation he has become regarded as one of the poster boys for everything that is wrong with English football and he could have gone some way to changing that perception with a contrite tone when he met the English media at the team's hotel ahead of Saturday's Euro 2012 qualifier against Wales.

Instead Terry insisted that, although he has made a conscious effort to avoid negative headlines of late, he still felt he had been harshly treated by Capello last year.

"Change my ways? That's a difficult word," Terry said. "When I spoke to Fabio, and we can't go into too much details, but when he knew the facts, he knew."

"As I said to the manager at the time, I accepted their decision. It doesn't mean to say I agreed with it, and I never will. That's me being very proud and having been honest with them."

"Over the last year I'd like to think I've personally kept my head down and done the right thing."

"As we get older, we live and learn. We move on. As a man, as a player, we can see I've moved on, on and off the field."

But I've never tried to cash in on the England captaincy," he said.

Another black mark against Terry was a perceived attempt to destabilise Capello by publicly questioning him during the World Cup as revenge for taking away the captaincy.

On that subject, Terry was ready to admit he had gone too far, but he was adamant he was just trying to do the best for his country.

"I just wouldn't come out publicly and say what I said. It would stay in-house. That's what I learned from that," he said.

"Looking back, certain things I shouldn't have said, but I can still hold my head up high."

"Certainly, I wasn't trying to upset the apple cart, the squad, the manager. That's not me."

With first-choice captain Rio Ferdinand too often injured and Steven Gerrard regarded by Capello as too timid a leader to galvanise the squad, the Italian has taken the substantial gamble of giving Terry a second chance.

However, he made such a mess of switching the armband that the situation reached farcical levels as Capello sat in the same directors' box as Ferdinand without being able to talk to him.

That led to claims of an England dressing room potentially divided into factions supporting both players, but Terry tried to head off those disruptive suggestions as he invited team-mates to approach him in person if they had any grievances.

"Anyone who's been around the squad for five or 10 games, I'd feel they should have the confidence to say what they feel," Terry said.

"I don't want to get into too much detail about 'moving on', but it's a massive thing for me today. The emotion is quite overwhelming."

"I had the worst night's sleep ever, actually. I was pretty nervous to be honest. Coming out and having to deal with the questions and stuff like that. It was like the first day back at school really. An intimidating thing, even though I've been in this position many times before."

"The England captaincy comes with a responsibility. I totally understand that but it's just so important for me to have it back now and to concentrate on the right things."



Germany coach Joachim Loew (L) and forward Andre Schuerrle take part in a training session in Wiesbaden, Germany on Wednesday. Germany will face Kazakhstan on Saturday in Wiesbaden.

PHOTO: AFP

Udinese dreaming of title

AFP, Rome



While Italy awaits with baited breath for the presumed 'title decider' between AC Milan and Inter Milan at the San Siro on April 2, an unfashionable little outfit continue to close in on their quest for history.

The Serie A title race seemed set to boil down to a straight fight between the Milan giants until Milan picked up only a solitary point from their last two games, allowing Napoli back into the picture.

The top three are separated by just three points and that could be one if Inter beat Milan and Napoli win when the league resumes following this weekend's international break.

And yet sitting quietly in fourth place, six points off the lead, and in the best form of anyone is a little team from close to the Slovenian border that has every right to also dream.

First of all, the statistics suggest Udinese have as much right as anyone to aspire to the title.

They are joint top scorers with Inter on 56 goals and their goal difference of +26 is bettered only by Milan (+29).

They are the only side unbeaten since the turn of the year with 10 wins and three draws from their 13 matches.

Only Inter have picked up more points but that from 15 games and they have lost two of those, including a 3-1 defeat at Udinese.

Francesco Guidolin's side have not conceded a goal in seven matches and their last three away from home have yielded 14 goals -- they beat Palermo 7-0, Cagliari 4-0 and Cesena 3-0.

And before that run they won 2-1 at Juventus, 4-2 at Genoa and drew 4-4 at Milan.

In fact it is only some little slips at home, drawing 1-1 with Bologna and 0-0 with Brescia, that has prevented them from being even closer to the top.

What's more, this is a team that began the season with four straight

defeats and then a draw -- since those first five matches, they have picked up more points than anyone else.

Those are the numbers but the how is even more eye-catching.

Inter are a side based on power with some consummate professionals such as Javier Zanetti and Maicon and the flair of Samuel Eto'o and Wesley Sneijder.

Milan are built around a formidable attack including Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Robinho with bags of experience throughout the rest of the team such as Clarence Seedorf and Alessandro Nesta.

Napoli have a simple game-plan in trying to keep things tight and let their talented attacking triumvirate of Edinson Cavani, Ezequiel Lavezzi and Marek Hamsik settle things on their own.

For Udinese, it is even simpler. Their team is entirely based around nippy forward Antonio Di Natale and Chilean wing-wizard Alexis Sanchez, a target for many of Europe's big-guns.

Di Natale leads the Serie A scoring charts with 25 goals and Sanchez is in the top eight with 12 -- the best of the rest of the team has managed just three.

Those two provide the flair and the goals while Ghana midfielder Kwadwo Asamoah gives steel to the midfield and Colombian full-back Pablo Armero is a Roberto Carlos-style threat down the left.

But one of the finds of the season has been French-born Morocco centre-back Mehdi Benatia, who grew up with Arsenal's Samir Nasri at Marseille, although he never played for the club.

He joined Udinese after two years in the French second division with Clermont but his reputation has soared ever since breaking into the team midway through the season.

Like all his team-mates, though, he refuses to get carried away by their success: "Just qualifying for Europe would be great. It would be difficult to make it to the Champions League, even if we have the quality."

Playing for a side whose best ever finish was third in 1998 such modesty is hardly surprising.

Udinese's most significant silverware was an Inter-Toto Cup in 2000 and an Anglo-Italian Cup in 1978, not to mention the Mitropa Cup (for the second division winners across Europe) two years later.

They may not be adding to those with a Serie A crown this season but at the very least they should be able to match their achievement in 2005 when a fourth-placed finish saw them qualify for their one and only Champions League season.

Pakistan delighted

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through ups and downs. I think that gave us belief. It is hurting us that there's no cricket in Pakistan, but I think it will be great if we do even better now. And you know today is Pakistan Day," said Waqar, who also thanked the crowd for supporting them in the match, something they will definitely miss when they play the semifinal in India.

On the other hand his West Indies counterpart Ottis Gibson was understandably disappointed with his boys' performance and he expressed his disappointment over the performance of the senior players.

"Yes, I am here because the captain was not up to the press conference. We came in good spirit with good young players but now we are looking to April 21 when we host Pakistan. We will have to take some tough decisions about players," said Gibson.

"I'm not especially happy with the senior players. Our performance was based on the seniors but they didn't do well. But it is hard to say it is the last game for the seniors. We need them as it won't happen with only youngsters," he opined about the senior players' performance in the tournament.

He made it clear that there was no scope to blame the wicket for the poor showing. "The wicket didn't get anyone out. It was a combination of poor batting and a lack of confidence."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS**
- 1 Ostrich's cousin
 - 4 Obi, e.g.
 - 8 Luminary
 - 12 Police officer
 - 13 Look lasciviously
 - 14 Sulk
 - 15 Against the current
 - 17 Eject
 - 18 Bill
 - 19 Studied primarily, with "in"
 - 21 Light blond
 - 24 Enthusiast
 - 25 Journal
 - 26 AAA job
 - 28 Avoids
 - 32 Worked with
 - 34 Slight touch
 - 36 Lover's quarrel
 - 37 Make less bright
 - 39 Pouch
 - 41 Coll. transcript no.
 - 42 Luminox
 - 44 Follower of a pair of hips?
- DOWN**
- 1 Old French coin
 - 2 Swab
 - 3 Stole the attention from
 - 4 Fruity ice
 - 5 Time of your life?
 - 6 Bridge coup
 - 7 Macho type
 - 8 Gets even?
 - 9 Go sight-seeing
 - 10 Church area
 - 11 Pensioned (Abbr.)
 - 16 Strain
 - 20 Roast's drippings, in a sense
 - 21 Blunder
 - 22 Mislaid
 - 23 Affirmative action
 - 27 Existed, as software
 - 29 Improved, as
 - 30 California wine
 - 31 Go no farther
 - 33 Bishop's bailiwick
 - 35 "Hum-bug!"
 - 38 Long March leader
 - 40 Strong greenish blue
 - 43 Lucky accident
 - 45 "— the ramparts ..."
 - 46 Bushel fraction
 - 47 Press
 - 48 Give as an example
 - 49 Pundit's column
 - 53 Early Chinese dynasty
 - 54 Caustic solution
 - 55 Archery bow wood

Solution time: 25 mins.

J I B N O V A P R O P
A R E O P E D L A V A
B A A S T E A L L A W A Y
S Q U A W M A G
M E T H P U P A E
C A S T A W A Y E L S E
H U E T A B O O O I L
E T A L S I G N A W A Y
P O L I O T I E D

T A P E D I C T
B R E A K A W A Y D U O
I C O N R O L E E R G
Z A N Y T O L D A B A

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CRYPTOQUIP

J Y R S W F P S G R V Q Y J B G V V T F V
W F G H G P X I B O Q H O B Q P X
O P F X B U I X I H F R V S G Z
I Q F Z Z F Q V R : T H V - F S Q I F R R H H G .

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: I ONLY LOVE SOUTH AMERICAN MEAT DISHES SERVED HOT. I PARTICULARLY DESPISE CHILLY CHILE CHILI.
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: I equals B