

INDEPENDENCE CUP FOOTBALL

# Muktis survive Feni scare

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh League leaders Muktijoddha Sangsad survived a scare to beat Feni Soccer Club 2-1 in Group C opener of the Independence Cup football tournament at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

James Moga and Alamu Bukola Olaleken struck one goal apiece for Muktijoddha Sangsad while Dominic Kabuya scored the solitary goal for Feni.

Most of Muktijoddha's attacks came through Nigerian winger Bukola, who kept changing flank with Mithun Chowdhury while Moga played as a lone striker.

Muktis took the lead from one such attack in the 21st minute when Bukola ran down the right to enter Feni box before being brought down by Cameroonian Jean Eric. Moga stepped up and duly dispatched the ball on the back of the net with a low drive.

But, Feni Soccer Club, buoyed by the inclusion of three new signings from Nigeria and Cameroon made their illus-

trious opponents sweat.

Feni stepped up the attack after the breather and found the equaliser from a spot-kick in the 55th minute. Nigerian Rowland Ekechukwe was tackled from behind by Muktis' defender Dami Emmanuel inside the danger zone. Ugandan striker Kabuya converted the penalty to equalise.

But their joy lasted only seven minutes as Bukola availing a throughpass from Moga advanced into the box, shrugged off his marker and fired home from the right-side into the back of the net.

Feni were then denied an equaliser when Touhidul Alam's effort rattled the crossbar in the 65th minute. Few moments later he again came close to levelling the margin, but this time goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharjee foiled the powerful shot taken from the top of the box.

Touhidul proved unlucky again as his header came off post in the stoppage time of the second half depriving Feni of any points.

## Test is top: Bopara

### Cricket

CRICINFO,

England batsman Ravi Bopara has insisted that Test cricket is "the pinnacle" after putting his county ahead of a lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL) contract in order to strengthen his claims for an England Test spot. Bopara, who made a low-key start to the County Championship for Essex against Kent at Chelmsford, was one of a host of players left unsold during the IPL auction in January.

Rajasthan Royals, on the lookout for a replacement for Paul Collingwood, whose knee surgery ruled him out of the Twenty20 tournament, subsequently contacted Bopara with a 100,000-pound offer but he turned them down in order to focus on his return to the Test side.

"It was a tough decision [to turn down IPL offer], but my ambition as a youngster has always been to play Test cricket and to play for my country," Bopara told ecbs.co.uk. "Not everything's about money. I've got to make sure I fulfil my ambitions and my talent as a cricketer. Although Twenty20 is a very important part of the game, Test cricket is always going to be the pinnacle."

Bopara, whose last Test was against Australia at Headingley in 2009, consulted Ronnie Irani and Graham Gooch prior to making his decision. "It's important for me to get back into that Test side," he said. "I recognise this is a great opportunity with a

spot available, so I spoke to Graham Gooch and Ronnie Irani and they thought the best decision was for me to stay and perform for Essex and push for selection."

"Nothing's going to get me in that side apart from numbers. Wickets, runs, anything I can contribute to Essex will make a difference in me being selected. Every season is a big season, but this is my opportunity to get back into that team. There are spots available now, and somebody's got to take it."

The first Test of the English summer is on May 26, against Sri Lanka, and there is a vacancy to be filled in the middle order following Collingwood's retirement. Eoin Morgan is generally regarded as the favourite for the position having been the spare batsman in Australia, but he will spend the next five weeks at the IPL so a strong start from Bopara in the Championship will keep the selectors interested.

Bopara also comes with the advantage of being able to offer some useful overs which would replace the part-time medium pace of Collingwood and supplement a likely four-man attack from England.

Gooch, batting coach for England and Essex, agreed that Bopara could only force a return through good returns in the Championship. "I think he has made the right decision," he said. "He is very motivated to achieve and if he wants to make his mark on the Test side he will only do that with championship runs. He can't further his cause in the IPL, however many runs he gets."

## Pune's powerful show

ANI, Mumbai

Pune Warriors' new-ball pair of Alfonso Thomas and Shrikant Wagh reduced Kings XI Punjab to 9-4 in the fourth over.

There was extra bounce and movement at the DYP Stadium wicket and there were a couple of bad shots. The chase for 112 was completed in the 14th over for the loss of three wickets. But the contest had already ended ten minutes into the match.

Yuvraj Singh's return to IPL captaincy and Pune Warriors' debut couldn't have been scripted better. Set 113 for the win, Pune lost three wickets in the process with Yuvraj and Robin Uthappa taking them home.

Alfonso bounced Gilchrist fourth ball of the game. Gilchrist gloved it to Robin Uthappa and then walked. In Wagh's first over, Shaun Marsh flicked a loose ball straight to fine leg.

### The mystery

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general public; 19,900 were expected during the first match, while around 13,000 passed through the turnstiles yesterday. During most of the second ODI, all the seats in the lower tiers of the Grandstand remained empty, filling up much later.

That is where the confusion and murkiness lie, giving rise to some questions about the process of distributing tickets.

The most important of these questions is: If none of the matches were sold out, why were people being turned away from Grameenphone centres? The crowd of people at the gates and the myriad stories of distributors running out of tickets, point to a sell-out crowd, which was obviously not the case.

Something does not add up.

In his next over, Alfonso bowled a short one to Paul Valthaty. The ball bounced higher than expected and Valthaty couldn't keep it down as the ball went for an easy catch to point. In the next over, Wagh bowled a short, wide one to Dinesh Karthik, who too couldn't control the upper-cut as it flew into third-man's lap for another easy catch. Wagh celebrated by pointing a finger to his head. He had outthought the batsman.

Ryan McLaren, the South African all-rounder, prolonged Kings XI's fight by making 51. The left-handed batsman and right-arm seamer had found no takers at the player auctions in January. But after Stuart Broad and Dmitri Mascarenhas pulled out of the IPL with injuries, Punjab bought him. For this game, it proved to be an invaluable move.

McLaren 35 with Piyush Chawla after they had slipped to 45-6. Some late big hitting took them into three-figures which had looked unlikely earlier.

Pune's chase began poorly when, first ball, Graeme Smith drove an out-swinging, full delivery from Praveen Kumar to cover's hands. The only period where Pune were in some discomfort was during Abhishek Nayar's spell. The seamer was getting some movement and he had Mithun Manhas caught behind.

Punjab then dropped two catches off Nayar. Uthappa was put down in the cover by Nathan Rimmington. Yuvraj was missed by Karthik at slip. Having survived a couple of tight overs from Nayar, Yuvraj and Uthappa quickly completed the chase.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

KINGS XI PUNJAB: 112-8 in 20 overs (McLaren 51 not out; Wagh 3-16, Thomas 2-27)

PUNE WARRIORS: 113-3 in 13.1 overs (Manhas 35, Ryder 31, Uthappa 22 not out, Yuvraj 21 not out)

Result: Pune Warriors won by seven wickets.

## Misbah too wants Indo-Pak cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's Test skipper Misbahul Haq on Monday joined calls for a cricket revival with India, saying millions of fans are missing out from match suspensions over strained political ties.

"Cricketing relations between the two countries should normalise because millions of people are missing real cricket played between the two nations," Misbah told local media.

India severed cricket links with Pakistan after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which killed 166 people and which New Delhi blamed on militants based across the border in Pakistan.

But a high-profile World Cup semifinal between the two nations in India two weeks ago raised hopes of a revival, albeit at neutral venues.

The semifinal, won by India on their way to clinching the world title, was watched by prime ministers of both countries at an occasion that quickly became dubbed "cricket diplomacy".

The 2009 US Open.

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"The draw has to fit, I have to play well for two weeks, things like that all have to work together," Wozniacki said.

She showed her toughness this week. She dropped just one set in five matches, to Yanina Wickmayer in the quarterfinals, and defeated former number one Jelena Jankovic in straight sets to reach the final here for the second time.

Wozniacki saved all four break points she faced against 56th-ranked Vesnina, including two in the seventh game of the second set to douse the Russian's best chance to mount a challenge.

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Vesnina Russian managed to hold

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PHOTO: INTERNET

World number one Caroline Wozniacki kisses the winner's trophy after beating Russian Elena Vesnina in the Family Circle Cup final in Charleston on Sunday. Wozniacki won 6-2, 6-3.

## Caroline's 3rd this year

### Tennis

AFP, Charleston

World number one Caroline Wozniacki captured her third title of 2011 Sunday, launching her clay court season with a victory over Elena Vesnina in the Family Circle Cup final.

The top-seeded Dane defeated Vesnina 6-2, 6-3 to add the title to those she won at Dubai and Indian Wells, California, and admitted the triumph on Charleston's green clay had her looking ahead to the red clay of Roland Garros.

"I feel confident and I know I can win a Slam," said Wozniacki, who has climbed to number one without triumphing in one of tennis' four major championships.

"It's all about getting everything together," added Wozniacki, whose best Grand Slam finish was runner-up

at the 2009 US Open.

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### PM's posh

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Sbetween the South Asian nuclear rivals.

"I praise the team's manners, and although Pakistan lost the semifinal they won hearts," Gilani said in his speech.

"Because of this match, both the countries have been able to start the process of bringing our relationship onto the right track."

Gilani announced cash awards of one million rupees (\$11,750) for each playing member and half a million rupees (\$5,850) for management staff.

"Despite a lot of problems faced by the team I think they performed very well and have made us proud. I hope they will keep doing that in future," he said.

The absence of Chittagong Abahani meant both Sheikh Russell and Mohammedan SC qualified for the quarterfinals who they will now face each other for a place-deciding game on Jamaruddin Bulu.

Explaining the reason behind not taking part in the tournament, Bulu said they released all their players after the first-leg of Bangladesh League due to financial constraints. Even their camp is closed and they could not assemble the players most of whom are from the Jessore-Khulna region.

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## A Watson whirlwind

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like that, I'm just trying to back myself and if it comes off like it did today then it's brilliant.

"As I walked off I thought I was close to Matt Hayden's, I actually played in the game and got 60 in the game Matt Hayden got 18," he continued.

He hit Abdur Razzaq and Sohrab Shuve for five sixes each while Shakib Al Hasan was nailed thrice through mid-wicket.

"Some of the balls I did hit over the leg-side they weren't that (leg-side). It was more so the length that meant I could hit over the leg-side. But then also I was targeting the short side as well, so I was batting on off-stump to try to get it over to the leg-side.

"When the ball's not turning and bouncing like it can here, it makes that shot a lot easier to execute. If it's turning and bouncing that

shot's a lot harder to execute," he explained.

A shell-shocked Bangladesh camp sent the well-versed Shahriar Nafees to take questions in the press conference to everyone's surprise.

The left-hander, who hit a steady 56, heaped praise on Watson, calling it an innings of a lifetime and one that only a powerful man like Watson can pull off.

"He can hit any ball. I think he hit 15 sixes because he's stronger than us. If I was there in his place, maybe I would have hit 10 boundaries and three sixes. This is the difference," said Nafees.

### CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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