

Star SPORT

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Ronaldo set for farewell

Brazilian football star Ronaldo will bid his farewell to the national side in a friendly against Romania on June 7, national coach Mano Menezes said. The Romania game will be the final match for 34-year-old former Inter Milan and Real Madrid star Ronaldo. "We're not asking a lot of him (Ronaldo), it will be a moment of friendship, of joy for him more than being on the pitch," said Menezes. "He'll come on in the first half, he'll play a few minutes and during the break he can make his farewells."

- AFP



PHOTO: STAR

Rajshahi players celebrate winning the 31st Inter-District Cricket Championship at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

A third crown

Rajshahi win inter-district trophy

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi put another feather on their cap when they became champions in the 31st Inter-District Cricket Championship with a massive 108-run victory over Mymensingh in a one-sided final at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Rajshahi emerged as a superpower in the domestic cricket as they earlier won a hattrick of titles in the National Cricket League (longer-version) after Mukti Sangha, a club from Rajshahi, clinched the title of the Club Cup Championship.

Promising all-rounder Sabbir Rahman was the hero in the final as he picked up three wickets for 29 runs from ten overs after making 54 off 65 balls that featured three fours and a six. Predictably, he was later adjudged man-of-the-match.

Rajshahi made a poor start after deciding to bat first as they lost three wickets for 62 runs but Shahriar Islam joined Sabbir to steady the ship as they shared 83 runs for the

fourth wicket. And it was then Ishrul Islam who along with Habibur Rahman guided Rajshahi to put up a challenging total of 269 for six in their 50 overs.

Shahriar made 40 off 53 balls with the help of three boundaries while highest 68 runs came from Ishrul who smashed four boundaries and two over boundaries in his 57-ball knock. Habibur hit an unbeaten run-a-ball 48 that contained two fours and as many sixes.

In reply, Mymensingh lost wickets at regular intervals before they were bundled out for 161 runs in 44 overs. No 8 Arafat Salahuddin top-scored with 50 off 78 balls that saw five boundaries while national all-rounder Mahmudullah Riyad added 34 off 57 balls with two fours.

Rajshahi captain Rezaul Karim said that determination was the key behind their success of regaining the title after eighteen years. "What we heard before the match was that Rajshahi didn't win the title in the last eighteen years. It encouraged us to do something in the final. It is a great thing that Rajshahi

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Rajshahi: Different champions

The 12th National Cricket League has concluded on May 14, bringing an end to the country's first-class season. Eight months ago, The Daily Star Sport ran previews of all six divisional sides taking part in the competition and now as part of its evaluation of the campaigners, today it is publishing the final episode that of champions Rajshahi's.

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

In the final analysis, Rajshahi transcends every cricketing height in the country.

The 2010-11 National Cricket League champions are not just the most well-drilled unit, but arguably the best cricket team in Bangladesh.

From their fitness, discipline, skills and planning, to their unity, depth and dedication to the cause, Rajshahi can serve as a fine example for not just cricketers and cricket teams, they are a perfect blueprint for the Bangladesh Cricket Board to follow.

We seldom compliment Premier League clubs for the amount of money they spend, the performances and performers, the ability to create drama and create pressure.

The big clubs, over the years, have evidently been more inclined to "buy" the best talent rather than nurturing it. There was a time when the bulk of the national team was made up of Abahani and Mohomedan players but it was clear that

the two Dhaka giants hardly developed those talents from scratch.

Of course it is not their job since the club structure is not built that way. But the NCL too is not built to develop talent. In fact it is far worse.



DHIMAN GHOSH

RAJSHABI
Position in 2010-11: Champions (6 wins)
Top scorer: Dhiman Ghosh (593 runs)
Most wickets: Saqlain Sajib (29 wickets)
High point: Second-string team beating Dhaka
Low point: Inability to win the final

After players have performed in the Premier League or First Division or for that matter in their respective divisional competitions, they get called up for the different NCL sides.

But this is where Rajshahi rises above the rest.

Khaled Mashud, the former national captain and father figure of Rajshahi cricket, casts a keen eye on trials during the off-season. This has been happening for the best part of the last decade despite the wicketkeeper's busy international schedule.

He found time to train with the local talent in his hometown and slowly, built a community of cricketers who could shape the core of the Rajshahi side.

Players like Jahurul Islam, Junaid Siddiqui, Forhad Reza, Farhad Hossain, Anisur Rahman, Delwar Hossain and Mohammad Shahjada formed the core of the side with Naeem Islam, Saqlain Sajib and Shafiqul Islam giving the team an edge.

Mashud ensured fitness was the first criteria the players had to complete before their skills would be

tested. Through tough fitness workouts and long hours in the nets, the team gathered itself through unity that can only grow from staying together.

Camps throughout the year also gave the divisional team a depth that can only be dreamt in other divisions. Though Dhaka has always matched Rajshahi man for man, trophy for trophy, the planning and execution has always eluded the country's biggest division.

This season, Rajshahi won six games, four more than their closest rival, but unsurprisingly, they won just a single individual honour. Dhiman Ghosh won the best wicketkeeper of the tournament award but it was clear that his performance in front of the stumps had swayed the organisers.

He deserved some recognition for his three centuries and equal number of half-centuries when the writing was on the wall for the "rebel" cricketer. Typically, the dependable Farhad Hossain also made more than 500 runs while youngster Maishuqur

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Condolences pour in for Sadi

SPORTS REPORTER

Different organisations and persons expressed their deepest condolence at the death of prominent sports journalist and Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) general secretary Al Musabir Sadi, who was suffering from cancer.

"The untimely death of Sadi means it is an immeasurable loss for the country's sports," State Minister for Youth and Sports, Ahad Ali Sarker, said in his condolence letter.

Sarker and Zahid Ahsan Russel, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on youth and sports, extended their heartfelt sympathies to the family of the deceased and prayed for his departed soul.

Bangladesh Sports Journalist Association, Asian Football Confederations, BFF, Bangladesh Cricket Board, Bangladesh Sports Journalist Community, Bangladesh Sports Writers' Association, Bangladesh Kho Kho

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AFC PRESIDENT'S CUP Abahani take on Neftchi today

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Three-time Bangladesh League champions Abahani begin their AFC President's Cup campaign today when they take on Kyrgyzstan league champions Neftchi Kochkor-Ata at the National Olympic Stadium in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Abahani, who had earlier failed to make it to the finals in their three previous attempts, set their sights this time on the six-team final round from Group A which also comprise Crown FC of Phnom Penh and Don Bosco Sports Club of Sri Lanka.

Before leaving here for Colombo, Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu said they would play against Neftchi with a target of winning even though they had little idea about their oppositions.

Neftchi Russian coach Krestinin has also targeted qualification for finals, whether by becoming group champions or runners up.

"We have minimal information about our rivals and will therefore will build on our own style," Krestinin was quoted as saying to the AFC official website.

He, however, felt that they would need to show a lot of character and fighting qualities in the tournament.

Both Abahani and Neftchi have qualified for Asia's third-tier club competition as champions in their respective leagues but they have been struggling in their ongoing domestic leagues as both of them are in third position.

Two top teams from Group A will join Yadanarbon of Myanmar, Istiklol of Tajikistan, Taiwan Power Company of Chinese Taipei and FC Balkan of Turkmenistan in the six-team finals.

Big win for Rajasthan

AFP, Mumbai

Australian leg-spin wizard Shane Warne quit professional cricket on Friday after leading Rajasthan Royals to a 10-wicket win over Mumbai Indians in his farewell Indian Premier League match.

Rajasthan, already out of contention, rode on Shane Watson's all-round show (3-19 and 89 not out) to achieve a 134-run target and finish their campaign with six victories in 14 games of the Twenty20 tournament.

Australian Watson smashed six sixes and nine fours in his explosive 47-ball knock, while Rahul Dravid remained unbeaten with a 32-ball 43.

Mumbai, with eight wins in 13 matches, now need a victory in their last game to make sure of the play-offs.

A capacity crowd at the Wankhede Stadium also witnessed Warne's last battle with Rajasthan Cricket Association.

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Warne's last act

AFP, Mumbai



Australian spin legend Shane Warne on Friday brought the curtain down on his stellar cricket career stretching over two decades, bowing out with a final appearance in the Indian Premier League.

A capacity crowd at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai witnessed Warne, captain of Rajasthan Royals, walk out for the toss for the last time and cheered the bowler who waved back sporting a broad smile.

The last chapter in the career of one of the game's finest ever players has been typical of Warne, with the Australian charming and shocking the Indian public during a frustrating final season in charge of the Rajasthan Royals.

On the field, the 41-year-old has struggled for rhythm with his bowling and has suffered the indignity of being repeatedly hit over the ropes by youngsters looking to make their mark in the money-spinning tournament.

And as with so much of his turbulent career, attention has often focused on his off-field exploits, including a bitter row with Rajasthan Cricket Association.

secretary Sanjay Dixit over a choice of wicket, which led to a fine this week of 50,000 dollars.

"I think it was a bit silly and immature from both of our parts," said the father of three, whose rumoured face-lift and romantic link with British model Liz Hurley kept him constantly in the Indian headlines.

He also had a tiff with superstar Sachin Tendulkar and caused embarrassment in conservative India with his public kissing of Hurley -- which could have landed him in trouble under India's strict anti-obscenity laws.

"He (Warne) caused quite a sensation with his long lip-lock in full public view," Dixit wrote in a column. "I had to quieten things down to make sure that the matter did not reach the courts."

The bleach-blond bowler took the field for the last time Friday in an away game against the Mumbai Indians that pitted him against another icon of the modern cricket era -- 38-year-old Tendulkar.

The two players appeared to clash earlier in the season after the Indian batsman complained about the Rajasthan pitch, but the tension was laid off by Warne, who insisted they were "mates".

After scripting a title triumph with a

rag-tag team in the first edition of the Twenty20 competition in 2008, Warne's final season as captain has offered few rewards, with the team failing to make the playoffs.

Despite the fizz at the end of an explosive career, he will be remembered as one of the greatest players of all time -- and in the eyes of many second only to legendary batsman Don Bradman in Australian cricket.

On his Test debut in 1992 he posted inauspicious figures of 1-150 but he then knuckled down under his mentor Terry Jenner and 18 months later caught the cricketing world's attention with the "ball of the century" against England.

The delivery, Warne's first in an Ashes Test, turned dramatically to bamboozle England's Mike Gatting and herald the arrival of a cricketing superstar.

Warne retired from international cricket in 2007 after resurrecting the art of leg-spin and becoming the first player to take 700 Test wickets.

Along the way, the cigarette-puffing, beer-swilling "Warney" survived drug and bookmaking scandals and pursued an energetic love life which is

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Rajasthan Royals captain Shane Warne gestures towards teammates during their IPL Twenty20 match against Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP