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Shakib's footie passion

In a recent interview to ESPNcricinfo, Shakib Al Hasan revealed his love for the beautiful game which he says he enjoys more than cricket. "I like football more than cricket, seriously. I am football-crazy. I would stay up late to follow soccer in Europe. Barcelona, always. If the team hotels do not have football on TV, I will follow it on the internet. I have never been to Camp Nou yet. Maybe next year. I would like to watch Barca play Real Madrid," Shakib said.



Super League dates released

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) released the schedule for the remainder of the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket Super League yesterday.

The Super League will resume on May 31 after a suspension of two months as the lengthy deadlock ended following BCB president AHM Mustafa Kamal's meeting with the six Super League clubs' representatives on May 15.

The stalemate came to an end after Victoria agreed to replay their match against Abahani and the BCB boss convinced the clubs that it would be wise to move past the registration issues surrounding Victoria batsman Mohammad Yousof, considering its legal complications.

The league was suspended since March 28 following the controversy over the legality of Yousof's registration as Abahani

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FIXTURES

Date	Match	Venue
May 31	Abahani v Victoria	Fatullah
June 2	Old DOHS v Abahani	BKSP
	Victoria v Gazi Tank	Bogra
	Sk Jamal v Mohammedan	Fatullah
June 5	Old DOHS v Gazi Tank	Fatullah
	Victoria v Mohammedan	Bogra
	Abahani v Sheikh Jamal	BKSP
June 8	Old DOHS v Victoria	Fatullah
	Gazi Tank v Sheikh Jamal	BKSP
	Abahani v Mohammedan	Bogra



PHOTO: REUTERS

Spanish tennis star Rafael Nadal holds the Rome Masters trophy aloft after beating Serbian Novak Djokovic in the final yesterday.

Nadal rules in Rome

Tennis

AFP, Rome

Rafael Nadal won his sixth Rome Masters title in a rain-postponed final against Novak Djokovic here on Monday, defeating the world number one 7-5, 6-3.

It was sweet revenge for a straight sets loss to the Serb in last year's final and the win means that he will move back ahead of Roger Federer at number two in the world rankings.

It was also the perfect preparation for the defence of his French Open title with the tournament due to get underway in Paris on Sunday and takes his career head-to-head with his rival to 18-14 in his own favour.

It meant that Nadal won claycourt titles in Monte Carlo, Barcelona and Rome with his only loss coming in Madrid where he went down to compatriot Fernando Verdasco.

Djokovic failed to win a claycourt title as he prepares to go into Roland Garros where he is aiming to make it four Grand Slam titles in a row after winning Wimbledon and the US Open crowns last year and the Australian Open early this year.

In a final held over from Sunday because of rain, Nadal immediately pounded out two break points on the opening Djokovic serve, but the Serb saved both with powerful backhands.

There were two more break points for the Spaniard in the fifth game as Djokovic made a mess of an overhead smash and Nadal converted the second of these, easily running down a poorly-executed Djokovic drop-shot.

But just as Nadal seemed to be taking command, Djokovic earned his first break point of the match in the following game which he took as an out-of-position Nadal flopped a forehand into the net.

And two games later he had Nadal backpedalling again with a series of punishing drives from the baseline only for a bad line-call to rob him of a first set point.

Nadal levelled at 5-5 and then, on the back of some stupendous defending, he grabbed a second break of serve and made good on it by outgunning Djokovic in a thrilling exchange of shots at the net.

Still riled by the line-call, Djokovic smashed his racquet at the exchange of ends and was warned by the umpire before Nadal comfortably served out to pocket the first set in 76 minutes.

Nadal took up in the second set where he had left off in the first and he had the Serb scrambling from side to side in a failed attempt to prevent the five-times champion from grabbing an early break.

Djokovic had an immediate chance to get back on level terms in the set but he failed to capitalise on four break points in the next game allowing Nadal to move 2-0 ahead.

The defending champion stopped the rot by holding serve to make it 2-1 and he had two break-back opportunities in the next game only to squander both with unforced errors.

He was made to pay the price for those missed opportunities as Nadal slammed shut the door on his following serves and then broke again to become the first player to win six Rome titles.

Wraiths and Flame Boys victorious

SPORTS REPORTER

Wraiths defeated Josephites 66-35 in the Citycell Basketball League at the Dhanmondi Basketball gymnasium yesterday. Adib and Shuvo were the top scorers for Wraiths with 13 and 12 points respectively while Jubair was the top scorer for the Josephites with 11 points.

In the second game on Sunday Flame Boys defeated Old DOHS 81-41 with Sakib and Monil top scoring for the Flame Boys with 27 and

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Feni cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Feni Cricket Institute defeated Bengal Club by four wickets in the second division cricket league at the Shaheed Salam Stadium yesterday. Batting first, Bengal Club scored 152 losing all their wickets which Feni chased down losing six wickets.

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Abahani, MSC face off today

SPORTS REPORTER

League leaders Abahani will be the favourites when they take on old foes Mohammedan SC in an eagerly-anticipated contest of the Grameenphone Bangladesh Premier League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

The three-time champions lead the 11-team table with 30 points from 12 matches and are eager to maintain the gap with second-placed Muktijoddha Sangad (who have 27 points from 13 matches) with a win over their arch-rivals, who have been struggling at seventh position with 14 points from 11 matches.

The points table clearly indicates there is huge difference between the two perennial foes in terms of strength and quality, and that is also reflected in the recent statistics. The Sky Blues hold a 3-1 lead over the Black and Whites in the nine meetings so far in the five editions of professional football league, with five of them ending in draws.

Despite the gulf of difference between the two sides, there is no reason to think this would be a dull affair. In fact, N Abahani versus Mohammedan encounter is a cake walk for either side, there ought to be some tense, exciting and entertaining moments on the pitch. The most recent meeting between the two sides, in the first leg of the league, is an example of that as that match ended in a 1-1 draw, and it is expected to be a close contest this time too.

Mohammedan coach Emeka Euzigo believes Abahani have the upper hand, but at the same time he believes his side would give a spirited performance, much like they did in

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Russel's winning streak snapped

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Russel KC's four-match winning streak was snapped when they were held to a goalless draw by Arambagh KS in their Grameenphone Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The third draw in 13 matches saw Sheikh Russel drop off the pace in the title race as the gap with leaders Abahani is now nine points, with Abahani having played a match less.

Sheikh Russel are in third position with 21 points, six behind second-placed Muktijoddha Sangad while Arambagh went up to ninth position with 10 points from 13 matches.

Both coaches blamed the poor state of the dressing room for their poor performance and urged the authority concerned to take proper steps.

"How can a player perform on the pitch if he sweats as much in the dressing room where there is no ventilation system?" questioned Sheikh Russel KC coach Maruful Haq.

He however said that the opponents played good defensive football that did not allow his players much room to muster shots on the target.

Sheikh Russel mustered only two shots on target in the whole match. Both came from Nigerian hitman Alamu Bukola, whose low-drive in the 26th minute was saved by Arambagh goalkeeper Biplob Kumar Bishu while his 25-yard shot from outside the box in the stoppage time came off the woodwork.

Arambagh KS coach Zahidul Islam Milon also slammed the poor condition of the dressing room and compared it to a boiler room.

"Getting one point is a much better result than losing three," said Milon claiming that his charges went in to secure

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Arambagh defender Amadi Moses wins an aerial tussle during their Bangladesh Premier League match against Sheikh Russel at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Anand back with a bang

Chess

PTI, Chennai

Viswanathan Anand is back in the match. The world champion played a peach of a game on Monday to force challenger Boris Gelfand of Israel to submission and tie the series at 4-4, with four games to go in the World Chess Championship match in Moscow.

The result was probably not a shock for chess lovers, but the way Gelfand stumbled and lost in just 17 moves and less than two hours suggested his opening preparations that looked rock solid suddenly became vulnerable. It was refreshing to see Anand shed his safety-first approach for the first time in the match and go for the kill right from the start.

The queen-pawn opening was back on the board as Anand sidelined his fifth game experiment of playing king-pawn opening which gave him nothing much to play for. Moreover, he was already down in the match after his seventh game adventure and he had to strike back quickly if he were to deal a heavy blow to the challenger's confidence that seemed to increase with every game. Gelfand too flirted with the opening in

Game 8 as he consciously avoided the Gruenfeld and chose a Kings Indian in which he had sufficient experience in the 1990s.

However, as early as move 7, the Israeli seemed to drift away from standard practice when he posted his knight on the edge of the board.

The knight move in itself did not create any problems for black but slowly Anand got a position that he wanted. Active pieces, open space and a chance to show his tactical brilliance. Gelfand had to be cautious to avoid opening his kingside.

With a powerful pawn push on move 12, Anand made Gelfand think for a long time. The challenger had to bring his queen into action to create counter-threats but the Indian steered his king to a safe square before moving on with his kingside attack. On move 14, Gelfand got into a mess when he realized his queen was in danger of being trapped.

He gave a piece to avoid it and was lost immediately though he could have continued for some more time.

For Anand it was a memorable win especially since he had lost a piece on Sunday in the previous game in much the same way, though in a longer grind. Gelfand will have white in Game 9 on Wednesday after day's rest.