

# Star SPORT

DHAKA FRIDAY MAY 10, 2013, E-MAIL: sports@thedailystar.net

## Nando's observe Fergie Time

After all the trophies and the longevity and the fearsome reputation, one of the things Sir Alex Ferguson is best known for is Fergie Time. That extra bit of added time at the end of a match that always seemed to last just long enough for Man United to find a goal when they needed it most. Following Ferguson's announcement of retirement, Nando's chicken restaurants announced that nine of their Manchester locations would stay open an extra five minutes Wednesday night in his honour.

- INTERNET



Russian world No. 2 Maria Sharapova celebrates after beating German Sabine Lisicki in the Madrid Open third round match yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Canter for top two

AFP, Madrid

World No.1 Serena Williams cruised into the Madrid Open quarterfinals as she dismantled 13th seed Maria Kirilenko 6-3, 6-1 in just an hour and four minutes on Thursday.

The American, who is yet to be beaten in eight matches on clay this season, held a perfect 6-0 head-to-head record with the Russian before the match and never looked in danger of extending that streak to seven out of seven.

World No.2 Maria Sharapova also continued her stroll into the quarterfinals without even losing a set so far as she overcame Sabine Lisicki 6-2, 7-5.

The Russian broke the Lisicki serve four times to prevail in a disjointed opening set.

Serve was more dominant in the second set with both players exchanging just the one break early on before Sharapova secured a crucial second break at 5-5 and served it out to take her place in the last eight.

## MUSHFIQUR'S DECISION TO RESIGN

# An emotional call?

Cricket

SAKEB SUBHAN from Bulawayo

Mushfiqur Rahim's resignation from national captaincy has left everyone involved with the team and outside it guessing. It was evident from the press conference in which he made the announcement that he was very emotionally exhausted from the whole tour -- the ups and downs in fortunes of winning their first Test in Zimbabwe and then losing the ODI series after being 1-0 up, which seemed to be the straw that broke Mushfiqur's back.

But two things are certain or as certain as can be in these tumultuous times -- there appears to be no rift in the team, and there is a very encouraging solidarity among the players, coaching staff and officials as they have closed ranks out of respect for their young, departing captain.

No one in the team, from the coaching staff to the younger players, was willing to go on record when talking about the decision of Mushfiqur. Even their off-the-record utterances were guarded -- some were not willing to venture anything beyond a 'no comment, sorry' when asked about Mushfiqur. The general atmosphere was of surprise and sadness that one of their very own, their leader at least until the end of the tour, was undergoing emotional turmoil.

"I am saddened to hear that our captain has resigned," said a young member of the squad at the team hotel yesterday. When asked if he saw it coming after the loss in the second ODI, he said, "None of us saw it coming. I did not even know about it in the dressing room after the game."

That it was a surprise to all and sundry indicates that it was an emotional decision, taken in the heat of the moment after a disappointing three weeks in Zimbabwe. The spontaneity of the decision was evidenced by a member of the extended coaching staff learning about the huge development only after reach-

ing the team hotel.

The surprise in the dressing room was reflected in vice-captain Mahmudullah Riyad, who was conducting the press conference before Mushfiqur came in. Efforts were underway, among the few senior colleagues who were told of the decision at the end of the game, to dissuade him.

A senior member was asked if he could put his finger on why Mushfiqur arrived at the decision. "You know, we are a young team, and he is a young captain. I do not know exactly why he took the decision. Maybe the pressure got to him, it is not easy being the captain of an international team and that too at such a young age," he said. "The Zimbabwe series has always been hard for us. But this time we won our first Test here and if the toss had gone our way, things could have been different in the ODIs."

With everyone guessing, one can only go back to the things he said during that eventful press conference. The reasons he gave were that he felt that his batting and leadership deficiencies led to the loss in the ODI series, but his batting has not been well below par on the tour, having scored a 93 in the Tests and getting starts in the ODIs. However, he did say when answering a question about complacency that: "Yes, it seemed like that. Of course I cannot say that they [Zimbabwe] did not bowl well, but as you said there was something missing in the application and skill, for which we lost four or five wickets when we should not have."

One can only assume that perhaps he was a little fed up with the team underperforming and known to be an intense character -- that may have been enough.

While no one could give a plausible reason as to why he would step down, there was a unanimous plea that the team and its well-wishers should respect his decision -- a reflection of the esteem he is held in. Most members, from officials to

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## BCB to give long look at resignation

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon yesterday said the board will give a long look on the resignation issue of Mushfiqur Rahim.

"It will not be wise to talk too much on the issue at this moment as we still have two matches to play on the tour, but what happened is really unfortunate. We didn't expect it. We are not sure why this happened, but one thing is for sure that we need to give a long look on this issue," Papon told The Daily Star over telephone last night.

"I talked with Mushfiqur and what he said is: 'How do I operate if there is no teamwork?' He also said he can't lead the team. I didn't want to go into the details because what I felt was that we would discuss everything after the team returned," he added.

"In my opinion, there might be two possible reasons behind the decision -- it could be an emotional outburst after an unexpected series defeat or there might be instigation. Both are very serious because as a captain one can't take such an emotional decision without consulting with the authorities. On the other hand, we will take stern action if there is any instigation," said Papon, who was also upset with the Tigers' performance on this Zimbabwe tour.

# POSITIVE CHANGES in football

ANISUR RAHMAN

Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra became the new champions in the Bangladesh Premier Football League this year.

But more importantly the league was arguably the first in many years not mired in match-fixing allegations. This is perhaps the biggest positive change in the country's football that also witnessed a shift in power from two traditional rivals and popular teams Abahani and Mohammedan who failed to win a single silverware from three domestic competitions this time around.

Although some people tried to point fingers before crucial matches, but their apprehension was proved wrong. One of the reasons for this fair league was competition. Right from the outset, the battle for the title was confined to five teams (though it became a three-horse race midway through) while the remaining four were busy in the battle for survival.

So there was hardly any scope to resort to the age-old practice of syndicated match-fixing, a menace that crippled the country's football and slowly but steadily drove the crowd away from the premier venue where they once turned up in droves.

This year the league is also a recognition of coaches' importance over the weight of big name teams. Coaches have often been considered as a mere technical person than a mentor in our domestic football, but Sheikh Russel's young coach Maruful Haque proved without a doubt that a success story revolved around a coach by outwitting Sheikh Jamal's Nigerian Joseph Afusi and Abahani's Iranian Ardeshir Pourmatat in that technical area on the field and beyond.

Maruf became only the second treble-winning coach in the country's history after Mohammedan coach Abul Hossain, who achieved the feat in 2002.

The sixth edition of the professional football league had also been a platform for the rebirth of local strikers, who unlike the previous editions, found the back of the net regularly alongside the foreign strikers. Abahani's Shakhawat Hossain Rony was the third top scorer with seven goals.

Undoubtedly, the competitive tournaments, fair league and presence of a few quality foreign players helped the footballers move a step ahead and Sheikh Russel's Moroccan recruit Tareq El Janabi, who has played in different Asian leagues before coming here, certified the local booters.

"You have some talented footballers and I think their standard is almost equal to those of Malaysia, Indonesia and Bahrain where I played before," said the 28-year-old mid-fielder who added that the standard of football here was better than that of India, judging by his experience from watching matches of I-league on television.

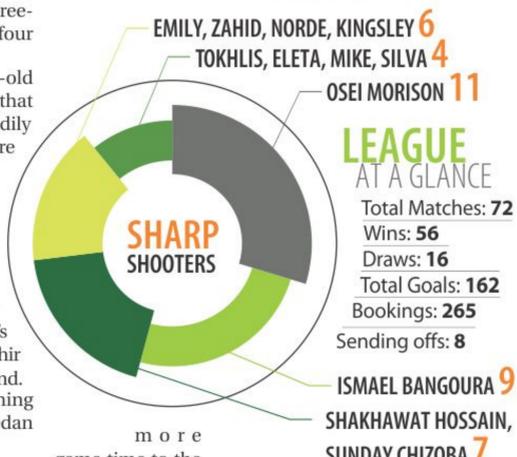
Tareq however suggested the coaches should give

Hattrick: Osei Morison

Biggest margin win: Sheikh Russel 6 -- 0 Arambagh KS

Team scored most: Sheikh Russel (30 goals)

Team conceded most: Arambagh (29 goals)



more game time to the youngsters, most of whom warm the benches round the season, as they should gather experience by playing with senior and foreign players.

However, some of that attraction was dampened by the unnecessary extension of the league. The football's governing body took as many as 177 days to complete only 72 league matches (12 matches a month on an average), which were often interrupted by unplanned international friendlies, AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers, political unrest and lastly the Bangladesh Games.

## Draw delights Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani gave up an early lead to eventually settle for a 1-1 draw against Taiwan Power Company in their second AFC President's Cup qualifiers yesterday.

It was their second drawn encounter by identical margins at the Dasharat Stadium in Kathmandu, but this result was more satisfying for the Sky Blues as it was against the former champions.

Rony, who had struck three goals for Bangladesh in AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers, gave Abahani the lead in the 5th minute firing home an Awudu Ibrahim cross.

Taiwan Power, a far superior club in the rankings, needed only nine minutes to restore parity with Hung Kai-Chun completing a solo run in dashing style.

After resumption, Ibrahim failed to capitalise on a Rony cross as the Ghanaian slipped while chasing the ball. The rest of time Abahani were busy holding their fort against a rampant Taiwan Power, who saw a beefy attempt from Lin Chang denied by the woodwork.

With two draws in successive matches, Abahani stand a bright chance to move into the finals, a stage they never reached in their previous four attempts, if they can beat Erchim FC of Mongolia in their last match on Saturday.

The Mongolian club crashed to a 2-0 defeat against Three Star who now lead the four-team table with four points.

"Now we have an easier match against Erchim FC and we are hopeful to make it to the final round," said Abahani

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## INT'L FRIENDLIES BFF names 29 with 3 expats in the squad

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday announced a 29-member preliminary squad for two FIFA international friendlies against India and Pakistan with the inclusion of three expatriate players and as many new faces.

The expatriates are Jamal Bhuyan of Denmark, Anando Rahman of Australia and Reasat Khaton of Germany while the three new faces are midfielders Omar Farque Babu and SA Yusuf Sifat of Brothers Union and Mohammedan defender Tapu Barman.

Fit-again Zahid Hasan Emily, Zahid Hossain, Ariful Islam, Nasirul Islam, Rezaul Karim and Maksudur Rahman

Mustak have been recalled

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