

SKY BLUES

blank Black & Whites

ATIQUE ANAM



Eight-time champions Abahani won the battle of pride when they defeated ten-time champions and arch-rivals Mohammedan SC 2-0 in their Group D match of the Walton Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The Sky-Blues profited from two defensive lapses from a shaky Mohammedan backline to prize out a goal in either half in a cagey affair, with little else to separate the teams in terms of their power in front of some 10,000 spectators under the floodlights.

The Black and Whites will now have the daunting task of facing Group A champions Sheikh Jamal in the first quarterfinal on Thursday while Abahani will play against Group A runners-up Feni Soccer Club in the second quarterfinal on Friday.

The pre-match talk was about the edge the Sky Blues held in terms of their foreign recruits, and it was proved on the field as Brazilian striker Luiz Rumolo de Castro gave them the lead in the 10th minute with a neat header on a perfectly-relayed cross from Towhidul Alam. Three of the Mohammedan defenders, including centre-backs Ariful Islam and Nahidul Islam kept watching as Castro picked the left corner of the net from an unmarked position. Mohammedan goalkeeper and national Number One Mamun Khan was rooted to his position as he saw the ball sailing into the net.

On the other hand, Mohammedan, who are considered



Mates join Wali Faisal (L) for a cradle celebration to commemorate his becoming a father yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

to have a strong forward line which includes the likes of national striker Zahid Hasan Emily, Nigerian recruit Unoneme Charles and national winger Zahid Hossain, were shut down quite expertly by the Abahani defence, except in the sixteenth minute when Zahid's square pass found Emily inside the box. But the hat-trick-scorer in their previous match against Rahmatganj could only manage a scuffed attempt at goal which was saved by the outstretched left foot of goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel. Three minutes later Charles raced onto a long ball from outside the box, but his shot from a difficult angle hit the side-netting. Emily had a half chance on the hour mark, as Sesan Idowu chested down a ball for him, only to see his volley sail over the bar.

Morrison had the best chance of the match in the 65th minute when he was threaded with a through ball past the Mohammedan defence, but the Ghanaian took too much time on the ball, allowing Nahidul to clear the danger.

While Mohammedan were trying to breach the opposition through the centre as Zahid was effectively marked down, Abahani found ample space down the wings to manoeuvre the ball into the box. And another of those inviting balls led to the second goal in the 75th minute, when former national midfielder Towhid released a cross for Morrison. Mohammedan's substitute centre-back Mintu Sheikh, who had replaced Ariful 20 minutes earlier, made a meal of clearing the ball as his shot blasted the post. The rebound fell kindly to Morrison, who had the easy job of poking it in from eight yards out.

The goal dealt a killer punch on Mohammedan's resolves as they failed to create any more chances to get back into the match, with their opponents sitting even deeper yet more assuredly.



Abahani's Brazilian star Luiz Rumolo de Castro (C) celebrates putting his team ahead against archrivals Mohammedan in their Federation Cup clash at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Dead heat going into final round

SPORTS REPORTER



The penultimate round of the Dhaka Premier League saw contrasting results for two title contenders -- Prime Doleshwar and Gazi Tank -- on Monday but still it will be left till the last round to determine the winner of the season's most coveted title. The two will meet in the final round -- originally scheduled for Wednesday -- in a virtual final at Fatullah. However, because of the blockade called by the opposition the scheduling of the final round remains uncertain, and will likely be held on Friday. Prime Doleshwar will however go into the final round on a winning note and seek to achieve their first-ever title after riding on English batsman Dawid Malan's hundred to post a 15-run victory over Kalabagan Cricket Academy at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

Meanwhile, another Englishman Samit Patel's all-round performance at BKSP saw Gazi Tank suffer a 54-run defeat against Mohammedan Sporting Club despite skipper Mahmudullah Riyad's hundred. The result pulled Gazi Tank -- who were in the lead going into the penultimate round -- back on level terms with Doleshwar, both entering the all-important final round on 20 points.

In the day's other match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Mushfiqur Rahim led from the front to ensure Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club's two-wicket victory against Prime Bank.

There was talk before the penultimate round that the league's fate might be decided yesterday if Gazi won their match and Doleshwar lost theirs but the opposite happened to keep the title race alive till the last round. After an early hiccup half-centuries from Hamilton Masakadza (69), Marshal Ayub (67) and Sharifullah (70) threatened Doleshwar but they survived the

scare as Kalabagan ultimately fell short of the winning target of 288, finishing their 50-over quota with 272.

Earlier, Malan's 123 off 120 balls -- featuring eight fours and six sixes -- and Mominul Haque's composed 45 helped Doleshwar pile up 287 for seven.

At BKSP, Riyad's 106 went in vain as there was a lack of support from the other end in Gazi Tank's chase of Mohammedan's total of 268. After Delwar Hossain's two-wicket haul, Samit Patel dashed Gazi's hope by taking three wickets.

Mohammedan's innings was built around Upul Tharanga's 62 and Patel's 76 but it was Mashrafe Bin Mortaza who virtually took the match away from Gazi by hitting a 15-ball 37 that saw six fours and a six.

At Mirpur, Zimbabwean Elton Chigumbura kept his cool during his unbeaten 28 to finish the game with three balls to spare after Mashrafe Bin Mortaza hit 82 as Sheikh Jamal scored 260 for eight in reply to Prime Bank's 256.

SCORES IN BRIEF

MOHAMMEDAN: 268-6 in 50 overs (Shamsur 36, Tharanga 62, Patel 76, Mashrafe 37, Arafat 2-37)

GAZI TANK: 214 all out in 42 overs (Imrul 36, Riyad 106, Delwar 2-31, Patel 3-52)

Result: Mohammedan won by 54 runs.

PRIME DOLESHWAR: 287-7 in 50 overs (Mominul 45, Malan 123, Sampath 32, Sabbir 32, Masakadza 4-56)

KALABAGAN CA: 272-8 in 50 overs (Masakadza 69, Marshal 67, Sharifullah 70, Sabbir 2-43)

Result: Prime Doleshwar won by 15 runs.

PRIME BANK: 256-6 in 50 overs (Bopara 61, Parvez 89 not out, Roy 2-39, Tanvir 2-14)

SHEIKH JAMAL: 260-8 in 49.3 overs (Jahurul 30, Mushfiqur 82, Tanvir 33, Nahidul 28, Chigumbura 28 not out, Ziaur 2-46, Bopara 2-26)

Result: Sheikh Jamal won by two wickets.

'Foiling Zahid, Emily was key'

ANISUR RAHMAN

Abahani's veteran national defender Wali Faisal was perhaps the happiest of the lot after his side outplayed arch-rivals Mohammedan 2-0 in their Federation Cup encounter last night, because he became a father earlier in the morning. The left-back, who could not see his new-born son during the day due to the match, played a key role in stifling the Mohammedan attackers down the flank. Zahid Hossain especially found it difficult to manoeuvre the ball when he switched flanks.

The left-back said it was a double delight for him as winning against the arch-rivals is special. "It is a double delight for me. This triumph will always remain in my memory due to the birth of my son," said Wali, who celebrated the first goal along with his teammates by mimicking a cradle.

"Last season I could not play for five months due to injury but I am happy after returning to the pitch and helping the team to win this crucial match," said Abahani's opening goal scorer, Brazilian striker Luiz Rumolo de Castro, at the post-match press conference.

Abahani coach Amalesh Sen admitted that marking Emily and Zahid effectively was key to their victory while capitalising on chances made the difference. "It was a team effort because not only the foreign players, but also the local players played well and we will now play the quarterfinal with extra motivation," said Amalesh. "We marked Emily and Zahid effectively to foil their attacks."

Mohammedan's assistant coach Jewel Rana, standing in for head coach Saiful Bari who is reportedly ill, had stated his worries about defence and the quality of his foreign players and was left ruing the defensive lapses once more.

"We could not avail the opportunities but they (Abahani) did, and those opportunities came from our defensive lapses. We were also far inferior in our foreign players. All these added to our defeat, but we look forward to the quarterfinal against Sheikh Jamal," said the former national captain.

Sk Jamal scrape past Feni

SPORTS REPORTER

Title aspirants Sheikh Jamal DC emerged Group A champions to move into the quarterfinals of the Walton Federation Cup with a less-than-convincing single-goal win over Feni Soccer Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Star-studded Sheikh Jamal rested three of their starters from the match against Uttar Baridhara Club but still left the field with all three points thanks to a 17-minute strike from Haitian striker Sony Norde, who had also bagged a brace in their opening match.

The big-budget side dominated proceedings from the outset yet failed to impress the spectators as they failed to capitalise on the scoring chances. Striker Emeka Darlington and midfielder Femi Orunmimi hit the cross-bar twice while substitute forward Shakhat Hossain Rony floated the ball over the bar when a simple dink would have been enough to beat the keeper.

Feni Soccer's Gambian coach Omar Cisse, who was once the head coach of Sheikh Jamal Football Academy, was surprised with his opponents' meek performance while Sheikh Jamal coach Joseph Afifi admitted that his team has a lot of work to do in finishing chances.

Badal fined for dissent

SPORTS REPORTER

Gazi Tank Cricketers' owner Lutfur Rahman Badal was fined Tk 5,000 by the match referee for reportedly showing dissent against the on-field umpire during the yesterday's Dhaka Premier League match against Mohammedan at the BKSP-2.

Badal, whose side lost the match by 54 runs, was irked after two of his side's foreign players -- Eoin Morgan and Ryan Ten Doeschate -- were given run-out at different points of the game.

"Yes, I was frustrated that those decisions went against us. I even have videos and photographs which show that those decisions were not right. It was not fair," Badal told The Daily Star.

The option to send a decision to the third umpire is not available in domestic cricket.

A 'taunting' campaign?

SPORTS REPORTER

If you have been watching the television or going through the papers recently, you would have come across advertisement campaigns for the upcoming ICC World Twenty20 2014, asking you to buy tickets for the event scheduled to begin in March.

While such public campaigns before an international event are no doubt a necessity, they however fail to depict the exact picture, which is that a large portion of the tickets -- which went on sale from November 17 -- were sold within the first two days.

According to the ticketing agency, tickets are available for the six matches in Sylhet and one match in Chittagong. The lack of demand for these matches is mainly because they feature Zimbabwe and the qualifiers.

The campaigns, which continue to remain in the public forum, have in a sense created confusion amongst the many ticket hopefuls. They have also compelled the banks -- responsible for dispatching the tickets -- to question the agency's moves.

It was also criticised by a BCB director. "They should detail out exactly which tickets are available for sale, since a majority of the tickets are already sold out. The advertisement in a way is taunting the supporters," said the director.

While the tickets were almost gone within the first two days, it was learnt that the ICC had booked advertising slots in various media houses for at least a month.

"I understand the problem, but we can't advertise separately for separate matches. So as long as the tickets in Sylhet and Chittagong are not sold, these campaigns will go on. We will, however, be adopting a different strategy for the practice matches soon," informed AttraBit Technologies & Solutions Limited's -- the ICC-appointed ticketing agency -- chief marketing officer Ehsan Sarwar Chowdhury.

According to the ticketing agency, almost 70 per cent of the tickets for the world cup were bought online.



A SHOCKING INTERRUPTION: A cricket match between AUJI & Bennett XI and Banoful at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong was brought to a halt in the 17th over of the first innings to allow BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon and director Akram Khan to take off in a helicopter for Dhaka. The duo had gone there to inaugurate this CJKS Corporate T20 tournament.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS