

Mushfiquer stumped by his keeping

NAIMUL KARIM



That Mushfiquir Rahim is the most hard-working player in the current Bangladesh line-up is pretty obvious from his day-to-day training schedule. He is generally the first one to show up at practice, spends the most time in the nets and is always on the forefront during an optional training day.

While there are no doubts about his dedication to the game, his performance in the first Test, which saw him drop at least four catches behind the stumps at crucial moments, led many to question if the captain-cum-wicketkeeper had felt the heat of handling multiple responsibilities.

A person who does not mince words, Mushfiquir was pretty direct regarding his performance behind the stumps.

"I don't remember when such a thing happened last. I think this is the first time. After I dropped the first catch (Kaushal Silva) and saw him go on to score runs and then a century, it really felt bad. It felt as though the team would lose because of me, "And I guess being amidst these thoughts led me to miss the other catches. It can happen in the game and unfortunately it happened to me, which is very wrong. I am the captain of the side and if I don't lead the team from the front then they will be morally down," said Mushfiquir at the post-match press conference yesterday.

As a player Mushfiquir has to carry thrice the burden in the team and while it's too early to talk about the inclusion of a separate keeper in the side, the more important thing for him would be to not let one aspect of his game come in the way of the other.

Minutes before lunch in Bangladesh's second innings Mushfiquir was bowled while going down the track to Dilruwan Perera and attempting to play an expansive drive through cover. It was unlike him and seemed to be a result of the frustration that had built throughout the Test.

Then again, having multiple responsibilities in the side can be a positive as well. A high-flying catch or a brilliant century can always help regain one's confidence. And at this point of time it seems as though that is exactly what he needs.

After the match, Mushfiquir stated that he would think of all the positive moments that the team had spent in the last two years in order to gain confidence ahead of the Test in Chittagong.

For the hosts's sake one would hope that his 'revival strategy' works; after all a gain in confidence for the captain would no doubt be a huge moral booster for the entire team, something they are desperately in search of.



Sk Russel's Moroccan striker Youness Roux (R) dribbles the ball past BJMC players in their Bangladesh Premier League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: COURTESY

BJMC hold Sheikh Russel

SPORTS REPORTER



Title holders Sheikh Russel K C got another jolt in the Bangladesh Premier League when they were held to a 1-1 draw by Team BJMC at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Substitute Mohammad Robin cancelled a Samson Iliasu's 49-minute lead in the 73rd minute to rescue Sheikh Russel from blues and the second successive draw left last season's treble-winner sticking at the third position with 11 points from seven outings, five behind leaders Abahani.

A one minute silence was

observed due to the passing of commentator Nur Ahmed before the match kicked off.

However, the first draw in six matches lifted BJMC to the fifth position with seven points by virtue of goal difference as Mohammedan and Brothers have also equal seven points from six matches.

"I have given up the hope of retaining the league title because it is not possible to recover ten points we had dropped in only seven matches. I think we will now have to fight for the third or fourth place," said Sheikh Russel's dejected coach Maruful Haque after the match.

Maruful blamed his strikers for dropping points regularly.

"If you saw our matches, we did not play like dropping points but we did so because the forwards failed to perform, they even failed to cash in on early chances in every match and we have to accept the reality," said Maruful, who also found lack of motivation among the club officials this season.

Sheikh Russel's Moroccan striker Youness Roux failed to beat opponent goalkeeper Arifuzzaman Himel in one-on-one situation twice before the holders conceded a lead four minutes into the second half.

Nigerian midfielder Samson snatched the ball from the feet of defender Rezaul Karim and moved on the right side to latch a powerful

shot past Sheikh Jamal's goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharjee, who however, made at least three good saves to keep his side in match.

Robin, who came in place of winger Shohel Rana, broke an off-side trap to level the margin with a low right-footer, a goal the former Mohammedan striker scored after 15 months and frustrated Team BJMC, who shrugged off their 1-0 defeat to Abahani to put up a good show against the holders.

"We should have secured full three points but the luck did not favour us," said Team BJMC coach Ali Ashgar Nasir. "We could have been flooded with goals had the opponents get the chances we had created."

S Bima book Super League berth

SPORTS REPORTER

Shadharan Bima ensured their Super League berth of the Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League with a 4-1 win over Dhaka Wanderers Club at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

The third win in five matches put Shadharan Bima on the third position with nine points, two and six points ahead of fourth-placed Ajax SC and fifth-placed Sonali Bank respectively.

Asfar struck twice while Mostak and Rocky scored one goal apiece for Shadharan Bima, who has one match left against Azad Sporting Club.

Schumi set to wake up

INTERNET

Michael Schumacher's doctors have started the process of bringing the former Formula One champion out of the coma he has been in since a skiing accident a month ago, his manager said Thursday.

The 45-year-old Schumacher suffered serious head injuries when he fell and hit the right side of his helmet on a rock in the French resort of Meribel on Dec. 29. The seven-time F1 champion has been in an induced coma in Grenoble University Hospital since then, although his condition stabilized following surgery after initially being described as critical.

One reason for reducing the sedation is to see if the swelling has gone down in the patient's brain and to assess what level of functions has been retained.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Manchester City's Stefan Jovetic (R) celebrates his first premier league goal with Jesus Navas against Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane, London yesterday.

5-star City crush Spurs

AFP, London



Free-scoring Manchester City swept to the Premier League summit with a 5-1 victory at Tottenham Hotspur on Wednesday, but Chelsea lost momentum after being held by West Ham United.

Arsenal's 2-2 draw at Southampton on Tuesday had given their two closest rivals a glimpse of top spot, but while City seized the opportunity, Chelsea were left in third place after a 0-0 draw at Stamford Bridge.

City had crushed Tottenham 6-0 in the reverse fixture in November and they wasted little time asserting themselves again amid pouring rain at White Hart Lane.

Having already struck the post, Sergio Aguero broke the deadlock in the 15th minute when he scuttled onto David Silva's pass and slipped a delicate shot past goalkeeper Hugo Lloris.

Michael Dawson thought he had equalised in the 36th minute when he volleyed home from Christian Eriksen's fierce free-kick, only to be adjudged offside.

City lost Aguero to an apparent ham-

RESULTS

Aston Villa 4 (Weimann 12, Bacuna 24, Delph 37, Bentekke 64-pen) **West Bromwich Albion 3** (Brent 4, Delph 9-og, Mulumbu 43)
Chelsea 0 **West Ham United 0**
Sunderland 1 (Johnson 17) **Stoke City 0**
Tottenham Hotspur 1 (Capoue 59) **Manchester City 5** (Aguero 15, Toure 51-pen, Dzeko 53, Jovetic 78, Kompany 89)

string injury on the stroke of half-time, but they extended their lead in the 51st minute when Yaya Toure tucked away a penalty after Danny Rose was sent off for sliding in on Edin Dzeko.

Dzeko made it 3-0 six minutes later, slamming a shot into the roof of the net after Silva's shot came back off the post, before Etienne Capoue reduced the arrears from a corner.

It gave the hosts a flicker of hope, but Stevan Jovetic, Aguero's replacement, made the game safe in the 78th minute with his first Premier League goal before captain Vincent Kompany added a fifth at the death.

Kenya lose ODI status

AFP, Nairobi



Kenyan cricket suffered a double blow on Thursday following the national team's three-wicket loss to Scotland in their World Cup qualifier in New Zealand by losing their one-day international status.

Kenya, once regarded as one of the strongest associate members of the International Cricket Council (ICC) needed to win the final Super Six game to avoid losing their ODI status after failing to secure a place in the 2015 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

"It is sad for Kenya cricket but there is nothing we can do about the situation. We have to wait for the team to come back on Sunday before deciding the way forward," a

top Cricket Kenya official told AFP.

Kenya were awarded the one-day ranking in 1997 following their impressive World Cup debut the previous year.

But a series of administrative malpractices, coupled with internal strife among the national team players have led to a sharp decline over the last decade.

Three older players including former team captain Steve Tikolo were called out of retirement to play in the New Zealand tournament and help Kenya to their sixth successive World Cup appearance.

Kenya is also set to lose out being part of the ICC High Performance Programme, launched in 2001 to assist in the funding of the development programmes within the leading ICC Associate member countries.

Atletico secure derby semi

AFP, Madrid



Holders Atletico Madrid set up a mouthwatering Copa del Rey semi-final with city rivals Real Madrid after beating Athletic Bilbao 2-1 on Wednesday to win 3-1 on aggregate.

Barcelona also assured their place in the last four with a 5-1 victory over Levante at the Camp Nou to seal a 9-2 rout on aggregate.

In Bilbao, Ariz Aduriz had powered the hosts into a deserved lead four minutes before half-time and Athletic were only denied a bigger advantage at the break by two outstanding saves from Thibaut Courtois.

RESULTS

Athletic Bilbao 1 (Aduriz 41)
Atletico Madrid 2 (Raul Garcia 55, Diego Costa 86)
Atletico Madrid win 3-1 on aggregate
Barcelona 5 (Adriano 28, Puyol 44, Sanchez 50, 52, Fabregas 69)
Levante 1 (Sergi Roberto 9-og)
Barcelona win 9-2 on aggregate

UAE, Scotland thru'

AFP, Wellington



Cricketing minnows the United Arab Emirates and Scotland secured berths at the 2015 World Cup on Thursday after taking the top two spots at a qualification tournament in New Zealand.

Both teams finished the round robin phase of the International Cricket Council (ICC) World Cup Qualifier on eight points after posting four wins and one loss, with the UAE's superior run rate giving them the edge over Scotland.

The results mean they will play in next year's World Cup alongside superpowers of the game such as India and Australia.

Scotland have featured in the World Cup twice before, in 1999 and 2007, while the UAE appeared in the

tournament's 1996 edition.

The Scots qualified after beating Kenya by three wickets in their final match with just three balls to spare, while the UAE downed Namibia by 36 runs.

Hong Kong entered the final day of the round robin with hopes of earning a debut World Cup appearance but results did not go their way, even though they posted a three-wicket win over Papua New Guinea.

The UAE and Scotland will contest the final of the qualification tournament in Lincoln on Saturday to determine which pool they will play in at the World Cup.

A total of 14 teams will contest the World Cup, to be hosted by Australia and New Zealand, comprising the ICC's 10 full member nations and four affiliate countries.

Ireland and Afghanistan secured two of the affiliate spots last year.

IFA SHIELD

Sk Jamal cleared to fly for India

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club were scheduled yesterday to fly for India putting an end to the uncertainty over their participation in the 118th IFA Shield tournament in Kolkata after Indian High Commission in Dhaka issued visas for its all foreign players, coach and trainer.

"All of our foreign players including coaching staffs have been given the visas today (Thursday) and we really thanked the Indian High Commission for their cooperation to grand visas within a short period," said Sheikh Jamal official Abdul Gaffar.

The Federation Cup champions will now play their first match against Kolkata Mohammedan SC on Sunday and then Sikkim United on Tuesday and the match against Muhan Bagan will take place on Thursday.

Sheikh Jamal DC were supposed to play their first match against Muhan Bagan yesterday but they could not travel to India due to visas crisis of its foreign players and they requested the tournament committee to defer their first match.

IHF chief expected today

SPORTS REPORTER

Leandro Negre, the president of the International Hockey Federation (IHF), is expected to arrive here today to inaugurate the National School Hockey Championship, starting from Saturday at ten different venues across the country.

Negre however will declare the 102-school championship open at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium with 560 school girls displaying the inaugural programme, said Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) general secretary Khaza Rahmatullah at a press conference yesterday.

The BHF has already handed over 16 composite hockey sticks and nine balls to each of participating schools. A total of 29 teams from 10 zones will qualify for the final round that will get underway from February 24 in Dhaka and the game's governing body will pick up 65 players from the championship for intensive training.

First Security Bank is the title sponsor of the championship.