

# SPORT

## Dhaka a few points away

SPORTS REPORTER

Only a miracle can stop Dhaka Division from regaining the National Cricket League title after six seasons when they take on defending champions Khulna Division in their last round match starting today at Cox's Bazar.

League leaders Dhaka go into the battle with clear 21 points ahead from their nearest rivals Rajshahi, who narrowed the gap with a massive 403-run win over Chittagong in the previous round.

A change to the playing conditions this year means that the champions will be decided at the end of the last round instead of having a final. Dhaka, who has 111 points in their account, will need only a few bonus points – regardless of result – to clinch the first-class title for the first time since the 2006-2007 season.

Second-placed Rajshahi will play against Dhaka Metro at Chittagong and they have an almost impossible task at hand if they are to deprive Dhaka as they have to gather 25 points from the last match and hope Dhaka score less than three points. Mushfiqur Rahim had hurt his finger during keeping in the previous round but the wicketkeeper-batsman is fit to lead Rajshahi in the last battle.

Chittagong however will miss opener Tamim Iqbal, who has been ruled out of action for three weeks due to a finger injury he suffered in the previous round, when they meet Sylhet at BKSP.

In another match, Rangpur play against Barisal at the Fatullah Outer Stadium.

The penultimate round was action-filled and Forhad Reza's double hundred, Mukter Ali's first-class record 16 sixes in an innings and Abdur Razzak's success with the leather hogged the headlines.



Sheikh Jamal defender Nasiruddin Chowdhury goes off on a celebratory run after scoring his second goal in their Bangladesh Premier League match against Chittagong Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. (INSET) During the day's second match between Brothers Union and Abahani, only a black flag populated the Western Gallery – a symbol of protest from Abahani fans who boycotted the match.

PHOTOS: STAR

## Siddikur moves up

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman moved up to joint 34th position after the end of the second round of the Maybank Malaysian Open yesterday. Siddikur started the day in joint 40th position, with one hole remaining in the first round. He bogeyed the hole and slipped to 59th position with a one-over-par (73). But the second round was much better for the two-time Asian Tour winner as he fired three birdies against one bogey in this round to climb up to take his aggregate score to one-under-par (143).

Meanwhile, former world number one Lee Westwood of England took his lead to four strokes after racing on to 13-under-par (131), followed jointly by Nicolas Colsemaerts of Belgium and Antonio Luscana of Philippines on nine-under-par (135). A total of 73 golfers made the weekend cut, which was set at one-over-par.

## Supporters boycott Abahani match

SPORTS REPORTER

The Abahani Supporters Forum staged a unique protest yesterday by putting up a black flag in front of the Western Gallery (Abahani gallery) and keeping the gallery vacant during the club's Bangladesh Premier League match against Brothers Union yesterday. It was learnt that the supporters were demonstrating against a statement from a club official that they would rather play without having their supporters in the stadium, following the supporters' angry outburst after the club's semifinal exit from the Independence Cup on April 9.

The supporters of the club were frustrated after having endured a trophyless season last year and they had been voicing their protest against the club management from time to time, which often took ugly shape. Last year the supporters had stormed into the ground and hurled bricks towards the players and officials after a defeat against Sheikh Jamal. This time, after their defeat against arch-rivals Mohammedan on April 9, the angry supporters reportedly confronted some of the players and officials and kept the team waiting inside the venue for one and a half hours.

However, some die-hard fans did get in and took their seats at the Eastern Gallery to watch their favourite team suffer another 1-0 defeat.

## Zia beats Mutairi

SPORTS REPORTER

Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman defeated Al Mutairi Hassan of Saudi Arabia in the first round of Asian Continental Chess Championships while WFM Nazrana Khan Eva conceded defeat to WGM Swaminathan Soumya of India in Sharjah, UAE on Thursday.

A total of 64 players including 32 Grandmasters and 11 International Masters from 21 countries are taking part in the Open section while 32 players including 9 Women Grandmasters, 4 International Masters and 10 International Women Masters from 16 countries are participating in the Women's section of the meet.

## Ferrer steals Nadal show

AFP, Monte Carlo



Eight-time champion Rafael Nadal slumped to a shock Monte Carlo Masters quarterfinal defeat to compatriot and close friend David Ferrer on Friday while Roger Federer scraped into the last four.

Ferrer claimed a famous 7-6 (7/1), 6-4 win to hand the top seed only his third loss in the principality just a day after Nadal had won his 300th career clay court match and 50th at the Monte Carlo Country Club.

Meanwhile Federer, bidding to win the title for the first time, squandered his first 15 break points before finally coming good on a 16th on his way to a 2-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-1 defeat of French ninth seed Jo-Wilfried Tsonga.

Ferrer came to the court on Friday with

a 5-21 deficit against Nadal who last failed to make the final in Monte Carlo in his debut year of 2003.

"When the opponent is doing things better than you, the normal thing is to lose. That's what happened today," said Nadal, who committed 44 unforced errors.

"I didn't play the right way. I didn't play with the right intensity with my forehand. I played too short. I give him the chance to have the control of the point almost all the time. He did much better than me, so I just congratulate him."

Ferrer will now face off on Saturday against Australian Open winner Stanislas Wawrinka who clinched a 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 over Canadian Milos Raonic.

Nadal's only other losses at the tournament occurred in the 2003 third round against Guillermo Coria and last year when he went down in straight sets to

Djokovic in the final. Prior to that final, he had won eight straight editions.

"I'm not happy today about what I did, not very happy about the way that I played the second set after losing the first," continued Nadal.

"I didn't play with the right intensity at the beginning of the second. I gave him a big opportunity at the beginning of the second."

Ferrer battled his nerves as he served for victory leading 5-2, but was broken. On his second chance, the 32-year-old got the job done after two hours, 11 minutes.

The win was the first on clay for Ferrer against Nadal in a decade.

"The last time I beat Rafael on clay was 10 years ago. But I'm happy because I am in the semi-final and because I am playing very good this week," said Ferrer, who was runner-up to Nadal at the French Open last year.



David Ferrer of Spain celebrates after beating his compatriot world number one Rafael Nadal in the Monte Carlo Masters quarterfinal in Monaco yesterday. (INSET) A downcast Nadal after only his third loss at the event.

PHOTOS: RUETER



## TT champions out of reckoning

SPORTS REPORTER

After all but ruling out defending national champion and number one men's table tennis player Manash Chowdhury from the Commonwealth Games squad, the Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) has now ruled out men's number two Mahbub Billah and women's number one Mounita Alam Rumi from the team for the World Cup, which will be held in Japan later this month, on 'disciplinary and fitness' grounds.

Mahbub, who is a former number one, is alleged to have broken discipline while Rumi is not match-fit, according

to federation officials. Mahbub claimed he did break the disciplinary code during the national championship in February, for which he also apologised and that his visa for the World Cup had also been procured by the federation last month.

"If they had a valid reason, why did they procure a visa for me?" said Mahbub while talking to reporters yesterday.

"I had back pain when my visa for Japan was procured. Now I feel fully fit but they have not even consulted me before excluding me from the team," claimed Rumi.

However, the federation officials claimed they have valid reasons to exclude these players. "The issue of discipline is very crucial and he has broken discipline on a number of occasions," said joint secretary of the federation, Saidul Haque Sadi.

Together with the possible exclusion of Manash – a practising dentist in Chittagong who was given an ultimatum to join the camp in Dhaka or face the axe – who has been from the Commonwealth Games team, the top players feel they are being wronged by the federation, who are not even sending a coach with the team to Japan.

## Nasir brace moves Jamal five clear

SPORTS REPORTER



Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club defender Nasiruddin Chowdhury showed how dangerous he can be as a forward by scoring two late goals to give his side a precious win from the jaws of defeat in their

Bangladesh Premier League match against strugglers Chittagong Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The striker-turned-central-defender was moved to the forward position in the 70th minute as the league leaders were trailing by one goal and were in danger of losing for the first time in the league. They conceded in the eighth minute when defender Didarul Haque's gaffe allowed Chittagong Abahani forward Sohel Mia an easy run in inside the box and slam the ball past a hapless Ziaur Rahman into the net. The port city side held on to the lead for more than an hour, and despite coming close to conceding on a few occasions – with Sheikh Jamal's Ali Amisu hitting the bar and Daniel Onyekachi forcing two excellent saves from Chittagong Abahani keeper Salim Ullah – they looked headed for a priceless victory. But a masterstroke from Sheikh Jamal coach turned the game on its head. Afusi took off Onyekachi and brought on defender Linkon Ahmed, while giving Nasir a free run at the forward position.

Three minutes after the switch, Nasir paid back the faith of his coach by expertly heading in a cross from Wedson Anselme to bring his side back into the match in the 73rd

minute. And Nasir completed the turnaround in the 90th minute with a thumping volley from inside the box on a Wedson cross.

"It's not the first time that Nasir delivered with goals. We put him up front in the Federation Cup and he gave us the win. He is a good player, a fighter, a soldier and he believes in playing till the end," said Sheikh Jamal coach Joseph Afusi after the match.

"My team manager Helal (Anwarul Karim) told me, 'remember, he (Nasir) is a striker, do you want to try him up front?' So I believe Helal is the man of the match today," said a satisfied Afusi.

Afusi had more reason to be pleased as the victory took his side five points clear at the top, as second-placed Abahani failed to reduce the gap by going down 1-0 against Brothers Union in the second match of the day.

Abahani, coming into the match after their semifinal exit from the Independence Cup, looked out of sorts and conceded the decisive lead in the 37th minute through a dreadful own goal as defender Nasirul Islam's back pass took a deflection and wrongfooted goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel to end up at the back of the net.

Abahani had the chance to restore parity in the 75th minute, but Portuguese forward Leonildo Soares squandered the opportunity by shooting over the crossbar on a one-on-one situation with Brothers goalie Mohammad Sujon.

The defeat meant Abahani stayed at 19 points from 10 matches and five behind Sheikh Jamal while Brothers moved up to sixth position with 13 points.

## Trott to take another break

AFP, London

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) on Friday confirmed that batsman Jonathan Trott is to take another break from all cricket with immediate effect.

Trott, who pulled out of England's tour of Australia and spent four months out of the game with what the ECB described as a "stress-related illness", experienced a repeat of the same symptoms after playing for his county Warwickshire against Sussex on Wednesday.

A statement released jointly by the ECB and Warwickshire said Trott "will now undergo further treatment to assist with his long-term rehabilitation."

Trott himself said: "It was with the best intentions and hope that I returned to cricket with Warwickshire this month.

"Much to my disappointment, since my first game, I have felt the same anxieties that occurred during my time in Australia."

## Day-night Tests 'just stupid': KP

CRICINFO, New Delhi



Kevin Pietersen has ridiculed the idea of day-night Test cricket, saying the game would be so different to proper Test cricket that we will need a whole new statistics database.

Day-night Test cricket has been the ICC's beloved project of late. It has been experimenting pink-ball cricket in the UAE, and has also been encouraging its member boards to keep trying it in their domestic first-class cricket. Pietersen, with 104 Test caps, is the first high-profile cricketer to oppose the idea in such clear terms.

"I have never played with the pink ball," Pietersen said responding to a question by BCCI treasurer Anirudh Chaudhary at an interactive session organised by Indian Express. "And if they start playing day-night Test cricket, then they have to start new statistics because it's totally different. You've got Brett Lee running in at quarter to ten at night with the second new ball. I mean it's just stupid."

According to conventional analysis, the durability of the pink ball has been the biggest problem area so far, but Pietersen went on to state how day-night cricket would change the whole equilibrium of Test cricket, durable ball or no durable ball. He also added that he believed the first session will be the only time the spinners will be effective.

"I don't know if it'll work, but I am not a fan of it at all," Pietersen said. "If they want to play it, then it can be a new form of cricket, but they have to use new statistics for it for sure. If you are going to play day-night Test cricket in Durban, I can't see a ball spinning when the sun goes down, and the light comes on. I can see the ball seaming."