

SPORT

'Dead wickets won't help'

SPORTS REPORTER

Former national pacer Mohammad Sharif, despite leading Dhaka to their fifth National Cricket League title, was not exactly brimming with enthusiasm yesterday. Considering the fact that he led a group of youngsters to Bangladesh's premier first-class championship yesterday -- the first for the side in seven years -- one would have expected the 30-year-old to heave a sigh of relief or be in a celebratory mood in the least.

He rather expressed his frustration on the 'dead' wickets that the league was played on. According to Sharif, Bangladesh will never be able to create a good pacer, if the league continues to be played on wickets like these.

"Yes it's good that we are champions. But for me, first-class cricket, the way we are playing, it won't improve. We don't have that environment to develop our cricket."

"We played almost all the four-day games on dead wickets, how much can the players improve if we don't get sporting wickets? I think apart from Rajshahi and Khulna, all the other wickets have nothing for the bowlers," rued Sharif.

"Yes the batsmen can go on to score 800 to 900 runs in a season, but what's the point? When we go abroad, even in Zimbabwe, we have to face deliveries that go past our chins and noses. Over here, we face deliveries that are below our knees, we can

never get fast bowlers this way," he added.

Dhaka went through a run-fest in the league this year. Against Rajshahi they posted 756 runs in their first innings, the highest in the history of the competition.

"I have spoken on this matter a number of times before, but there seems to be no impact. In a random game, we might find one odd-day where the wicket supports the pacers, but after that the complaints start pouring in and the wicket is changed the very next day," said Sharif.

Despite the criticism though, Sharif did praise his young side for putting up a good team effort.

"We weren't in a celebratory mood as much because we were struggling at 90-odd for 5. But midway through we learnt that Rajshahi were bowled out and that they did not get the bonus point. That's when the pressure got off."

"It's a young team, but I did not have any trouble leading the side. Everyone put in their best, starting from the coach and the rest of the staff," said Sharif.

He reserved special praise for young wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan, who has scored his runs at an average of 80, while batting at number seven.

"I think he is the best wicketkeeper in Bangladesh. He has a very good technique and has all the characteristics of a good teammate. He can hopefully get into the national team soon," said Sharif.



Mohammedan striker Zahid Hasan Emily (C) celebrates after scoring against Muktiyoddha Sangsad during their Nitol Tata Bangladesh Premier League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Cleared pair frustrated

SPORTS REPORTER

Distressed players Mosharraf Hossain and Mahbulul Alam publicly expressed their concern at not being able to participate in BCB organised tournaments, despite being cleared of all the 'corruption charges' by a BCB Tribunal last month.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday arranged by the Dhaka Gladiators, Mosharraf said that they had attached a copy of the short verdict of the trial and sent it to the BCB president, but received no reply.

"I fail to understand why we can't participate in the National Cricket League despite being cleared of all the charges. It's my major source of income and it's important for me. If the BCB does not want us to play anymore then they should make it clear."

Last week, BCB director Jalal Yunus said that the board was planning to contest the verdict and that the two players would not be able to participate as a result of that.

While the players did not receive any official explanation as to why they were being barred, BCB's acting CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury informed that they were awaiting a reply from their legal department on the issue.

"We are waiting for a legal opinion and we are expecting it shortly. The board can take a position on the players only after that," said Chowdhury.

On February 26, six of the nine accused by the ICC of being involved in fixing in the BPL were cleared by a three-member tribunal. Mosharraf, Mahbulul and Mohammad Rafique were the three Bangladeshis cleared.

Zia draws, Eva wins

SPORTS REPORTER

Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman drew against Chinese GM Yang Wen in the third round of the Asian Continental Chess Championships in Sharjah, UAE on Saturday. The draw meant Zia has 2.5 points from three games and shares the second position along with other three other players. In the women's section WFM Nazrana Khan Eva beat WGM Assaubayeva Bibissara of Kazakhstan to earn a single point from three games.

Title already Dhaka's

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka lifted their fifth National Cricket League title yesterday, even before their seventh-round game against Khulna at Cox's Bazar came to an end, as they gained an unassailable lead at the top of the table by achieving bonus points on the second day of the game.

For Dhaka to win the championship, they either needed to score more than 250 runs in their first innings or required second-placed Rajshahi to get bowled below 400 runs in the latter's first innings.

As it turned out yesterday, Dhaka recovered from a precarious 96 for 5 to post 252 to confirm the championship. In addition, Rajshahi were bundled out for 207 in their game against Dhaka Metro in Chittagong.

At 96 for 5, Dhaka were rattled early on by Abdur Razzak's slow-left armers. They were however, bailed out by young wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan, who scored a century while batting at number seven. Razzak followed his 13-wicket haul in the previous game with figures of 6 for 101 yesterday. Khulna in reply finished the

day on 94 for 3 in their second innings.

While Rajshahi did get a healthy 81-run lead over Dhaka Metro in the first innings, they lost out on the race to the title. Nevertheless, they seem to be in a good position to win this game as they reduced Metro to 253 for 5 in their second innings. Metro now lead by 172 runs.

A fine 149 from Dhiman Ghosh helped Rangpur finish on 346 for 5 at Fatullah yesterday and take a first innings lead worth 57 runs. At BKSP, half-centuries from Nazimuddin and Mominul Haque, kept Chittagong ahead against Sylhet. A five-wicket burst from Faisal Hossain helped the port city side bowl Sylhet out for 190. Chittagong finished the day on 152 for 3.

KHULNA 243 and 94 for 3 (Imrul 38; Shuvagata 2-8) and **DHAKA** 252 all out in 79.2 overs (Nurul 101; Razzak 6-101)
DHAKA METRO 126 and 253 for 5 (Saykat 94, Shadman 85; Sanjamul 2-47, Tajul 2-54) and **RAJSHAHI** 207 all out in 62.1 overs (Sabbir 64, Muktar 39; Abu 4-36)
BARISAL 289 and **RANGPUR** 346 for 5 (Dhiman 149, Naeem 60; Monir 3-91)
CHITTAGONG 213 and 152 for 3 (Nazimuddin 68, Mominul 53 not out; Ahmed 3-38) and **SYLHET** 190 all out in 75.3 overs (Rajin 59; Faisal 5-36)

MSC overcome Muktis

SPORTS REPORTER

Independence Cup champions Mohammedan SC kept their momentum in the league as they notched up a 1-0 win against Muktiyoddha Sangsad in their first match of the second leg of

Nitol Tata Bangladesh Premier League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

A ten-minute strike from Zahid Hasan Emily helped the Black and Whites leapfrog to third position from fifth with 17 points from 10 outings, seven behind leaders Sheikh Jamal DC and two behind second-placed Abahani.

Muktiyoddha Sangsad slipped one place to fifth with 15 points from 10 matches after suffering their second defeat against Mohammedan in the season following their identical margin defeat against the Black and Whites in the Independence Cup quarterfinal.

Mohammedan though had an early scare when Nkowcha Kingsley's shot went over the bar by a few inches in the third minute of the match.

But the Black and Whites went ahead with their first attack, with a touch of fortune, in the tenth minute when Muktiyoddha's Cameroonian defender Gerald Ledoux failed to clear a vicious cutback from Arup Kumar and the ball slipped out of the grip of goalkeeper Rasel Mahmud Liton. Emily was standing in front of goal and needed only a tap in to put Mohammedan ahead.

Muktiyoddha Sangsad stepped up the attack and came close to leveling the margin on 33 minutes, but Eleta Kingsley failed to connect to a Sunday Chizoba free-kick, much to the relief of Mohammedan goalkeeper Mamun Khan.

Mamun then made a brilliant save tipping over a header from Nkowcha while his opposite number Liton foiled an Emily header in the 73rd minute.

Mohammedan were playing very defensive football in the second half and it intensified after winger Zahid Hasan, along with Muktiyoddha captain Maruf Ahmed, were given the marching orders 11 minutes into the second half.

Muktiyoddha's attacking trio kept pressing till the end but failed to breach the Mohammedan defence, thanks to tireless effort from Black and Whites' tall defender Ulbom Henry.

"We needed three points and we are happy to collect them the points, even if we yhad to gain that by playing defensive football," said Mohammedan captain Emily, who believes if they can play in this fashion, they can even go on to lift the title.

"Despite playing better football, we had to suffer defeat due to the referee, who ignored a handling-the-ball incident in the Mohammedan box," said Muktiyoddha Sangsad coach Shafiqul Islam Manik. "We did not expect such negative football from a big team like Mohammedan."



Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland shows off the winner's trophy after beating compatriot Roger Federer in the Monte Carlo Masters final in Monaco yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Wawrinka masters Monaco

AP, Monaco



Stanislas Wawrinka won the Monte Carlo Masters for the first time after rallying to beat Roger Federer 4-6, 7-6 (5), 6-2 in a rare all-Swiss final on Sunday.

The Australian Open champion had lost his previous two Masters finals and looked like losing a third until Federer's level dropped suddenly late in the second set, and Wawrinka began troubling the 17-time Grand Slam champion with

his aggressive backhand.

The fourth-seeded Federer, who accepted a wild card invitation to play in the tournament, was also looking to win it for the first time after losing his three previous finals here to eight-time champion Rafael Nadal from 2006-08.

Wawrinka has beaten Federer only twice in 15 matches but both victories have come here. He also beat him in the third round in 2009.

"It's exceptional to be able to win my first Masters title here," Wawrinka said.

With the third-seeded Wawrinka serving for the match, Federer shouted

in frustration as he missed an easy forehand on second serve at 15-15. On the next point, Federer's backhand went wide and Wawrinka clinched victory with a crisp forehand winner that landed on the line.

The players, who are good friends, shared a warm hug at the net.

"I had a great week here," Federer said. "Congratulations to Stan."

It is the seventh title of the 29-year-old Wawrinka's career, and his third this year. He lost his previous Masters finals at Madrid last year and Rome in 2008.

Maruf laments 'shock' axing

SPORTS REPORTER



Successful coach Maruf Haque yesterday expressed his shock over his untimely sacking from the coach's job of Sheikh Russel KC, six months after leading the club to an unprecedented treble and at a time when he was preparing his side for the AFC President's Cup in Sri Lanka next month.

The axe fell on Maruf on Saturday after he took all responsibility for his side's exit from the Independence Cup quarterfinal where his side were beaten in tiebreaker by Feni Soccer Club earlier this month. The club officials had earlier served a show-cause notice to Maruf following the failure in shootout.

"I know there is no guarantee in the job of a coach but at the moment I was not prepared for such a decision from the club because I and the players were more focused on the upcoming tournament (AFC President's Cup) in next month," said Maruf at his BUET office yesterday.

Maruf is one of the most experienced and successful coaches in the domestic circuit. Under his guidance, Mohammedan lifted two Federation Cups, one Super Cup, two runners-up trophies in professional league while Sheikh Russel won the rare treble last season. However Maruf does not have any experience of guiding a side in any international matches.

"I had collected the footages of all three of Sheikh Russel opponents of the AFC President's Cup and set the players' up for the tournament. They had been doing well in practice which I think would have uplifted their performance in the domestic circuit," said the UEFA Part-1 license completed coach.

Maruf admitted that there was a gap between him and the club officials, but he said he endured everything for the sake of the team ahead of the President's Cup, where no Bangladeshi club have so far managed to qualify for the second round. Maruf even sent his practice schedules and chart of meal for players to the tournament organisers in Sri Lanka two days before he got axed.

Sheikh Russel have already conceded of the Federation Cup and the Independence Cup and currently in third position in league table with 15 points, nine behind leaders Sheikh Jamal DC.

"It is not the squad that won treble last season which had nine national players. To be honest, I did not have right players for the right positions. I did not have any match winner in the side like the previous season and the foreign recruits were not of the same quality," said Maruf.

Siddikur ends at 57th

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman finished the Maybank Malaysian Open in joint 57th position after aggregating three-over-par (291) over four rounds. The 29-year-old golfer, who started the fourth round day at 65th position, carded five birdies and four bogeys at the Kula Lumpur Golf and Country Club on Sunday for a one-under-par last round.

The poor performance had a bearing on Siddikur's Order of Merit standing as he slipped from third to seventh position.

The title was won by England's former world number one Lee Westwood, with a staggering 18-under-par (270), eight shots ahead of second-placed Bernd Wiesberger of Austria.

R'ganj beat Agrani Bank

SPORTS REPORTER

Rahmatganj Muslim Friends Society defeated Agrani Bank Sporting Club by 1-0 goal in the day's only match of the Premier Bank Bangladesh Championship League at the Bishreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. Mohammad Didarul scored the all-important goal for Rahmatganj in the 30th minute.