

# SPORTS



**Wahed Ahmed (R), who was given only his second start this season, turned into the Abahani hero as he scored two goals and ended Sheikh Jamal's unbeaten run Bangladesh Premier League.**

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## 'Give Mushy more time'

SPORTS REPORTER

"How will you judge a general's capabilities on the battlefield when you give him a gun without bullets?" Former Bangladesh captain Gazi Ashraf Hossain made the comment when asked about the criticism surrounding Mushfiqur Rahim's Test captaincy.

"You can only properly judge how good a captain is during fielding. Whether someone can put pressure on his opponents is a general criterion to judge whether someone is a good captain. The reality for the Bangladesh Test captain is that he has to fight with a gun that has no bullets," opined Ashraf.

"Do you think we have a quality bowling attack? Our bowling is ordinary and the funny thing is that we expect attacking mentality from a captain who has been given a team with eight batsmen. So, our problem lies with our thinking.

"Basically we are still a coach-dependant team, so first thing is we have to give our captain liberty. I would like to see Mushfiqur not making comments like 'it's a team decision'. Actually Mushfiqur is a helpless leader. And he doesn't have any magic wand by which he can change everything overnight," he went on, adding that the selectors should announce a 12-member team for a home series to avoid last moment controversy.

He said that there had been mistakes in Mushfiqur's captaincy but removing him is not a good solution. "Yes, he made mistakes but to change him is not a solution, rather the people concerned should talk to him about his flaws. He also needs to be open-minded to rectify his mistakes. It would be unwise to forget that he is our best batsman and most consistent performer, which is a primary criterion for a skipper," said Ashraf.

Another former captain Roquibul Hasan also echoed Ashraf's sentiments.

"At this moment we cannot think about any change to the Test captaincy. We have to continue with Mushy. Yes he might have made some mistakes and to some extent he lacks imagination as a captain, but he is still young and I believe he will make it up," hoped Roquibul.

"I don't know what's going on inside, but we need to make sure two things happen; the people concerned should talk to him regularly regarding his captaincy and he should be open-minded so that he accepts criticism and learns," he added.

Former cricketer-turned-commentator Athar Ali Khan believed that there was room for Mushfiqur to improve on his captaincy and he also was not in favour of bringing any changes. "Who is his contender? Nobody is. If you look at his success you will not at all be frustrated. However, Mushfiqur has to be careful and has to analyse his performance as a captain.

"I feel that there is no scope of bringing any changes in Test captaincy, rather we have to give our full effort to help Mushfiqur improve his performance as captain. And another thing is that we have to think how to mould a better leader for the near future," he said.

## Abahani back in contention

SPORTS REPORTER



Holders Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club tasted their first defeat of this season, suffering a 0-2 loss against Abahani in the Manyavar Bangladesh Premier League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Wahed Ahmed struck in either side of the break to inflict the defeat on the country's new powerhouse, who were undefeated for the previous 26 matches -- seven in

and Farashganj SC in their previous matches, but their frontline surprisingly shone in the crucial match against Sheikh Jamal.

From the outset, it was a different Abahani, passing crisply and putting huge pressure on Sheikh Jamal. Abahani were deprived of the lead in the seventh minute when winger Nasirul Islam rattled the post from a corner.

Wahed then squandered a chance with only goalkeeper Mazharul Islam Himel to beat, but the Sylhet lad shot straight at the goalkeeper to disappoint the Sky

up to chip for Wahed. The national marksman rounded off a defender inside the box and drove an angular shot past Himel in the 58th minute.

Sheikh Jamal's hopes of bouncing back were heavily dashed when Emeka Darlington picked up his second yellow in the 68th minute and Abahani dominated the game there on.

"I am only 70 to 80 per cent fit but the coach gave me an opportu-

nity after observing my performance in practice. I am happy to transfer my practice session's performance to the match," said Wahed, who has been given the coveted No. 10 jersey.

"Abahani deserved the victory but I am disappointed with the way our top quality players performed," said Sheikh Jamal coach Maruful Haque, who raised questions about the commitment of his players.

### ABAHANI 2 - 0 SHEIKH JAMAL

last season's professional football league, five each in Bhutan's King's Cup and the Federation Cup and nine in this league.

Despite the defeat, Sheikh Jamal finished the first leg of the eighth edition of the meet on top, with 23 points from 10 matches, while Abahani reignited their hopes of winning the title, climbing up to second with 17 points from nine matches.

Four-time champions Abahani have been struggling with a toothless attack that failed to find the target against Muktiyoddha Sangsad

made amends and struck his first goal of the season with a close-range header off Shahedul Alam's free kick in the 20th minute.

The goal should have been a wake-up call for Sheikh Jamal, but the Federation Cup and King's Cup champions were entranced in the face of Abahani's beautiful passing and pressing game, which saw a nice build-up before the second goal.

Midfielders Shahed and Emon Babu exchanged passes in their own half before the latter placed a perfect long ball to left-winger, Abdul Baten Komol, who stepped



**TIT-FOR-TAT? Sheikh Jamal's Emeka Darlington was walking off the pitch after his second yellow card amid abuses from the Abahani stand. Emeka was noticeably incensed and shouted back at the crowd animatedly. And after a fan threw a brickbat at him, the situation came to a head and the Nigerian, ill-advisedly, picked it up and hurled it back.**

## Mumbai keep in the hunt

AGENCIES, New Delhi

Kieron Pollard bowled a brilliant last over as Mumbai Indians kept their playoffs hopes alive with a five-run victory against Kolkata Knight Riders in their IPL match at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Thursday.

Chasing a stiff 172-run target, Kolkata managed 166 for 7 in their 20 overs as Pollard conceded just six runs in the last over when the visitors needed 12 runs to win.

Kolkata got off to a decent start with Robin Uthappa and captain Gautam Gambhir putting up a 45-run opening stand, but they lost Uthappa and Manish Pandey in a space of two deliveries to be reduced to 46 for 2.

It all came down to Kolkata needing 12 runs for victory off the last over and Mumbai captain Rohit Sharma handed the ball to Pollard, who had not bowled a single over in the match.

Pollard started with dismissing Yusuf Pathan off the first delivery and then Piyush Chawla didn't pick any of the slower deliveries as Kolkata slipped towards a gut-wrenching defeat and Mumbai stay in contention for the playoffs.

Earlier, Hardik Pandya blitzed his way to an unbeaten 61 as Mumbai recovered from a poor start to post a competitive 171 for 4.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**MUMBAI INDIANS:** 171 for 4 in 20 overs (Pandya 61 not out, Pollard 33 not out, Rohit 30, Pathiv 21; Shakib 2-22, Morkel 1-27)

**KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS:** 166 for 7 in 20 overs (Yusuf 52, Gambhir 38, Uthappa 25, Shakib 23; Pollard 1-6, Malinga 1-31) Result: Mumbai Indians won by 5 runs.

**Player-of-the-match:** Hardik Pandya.

## Confusion over Zim tour

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe cricket authorities on Thursday abandoned a planned tour to Pakistan citing poor security -- before retracting their decision within 20 minutes and saying discussions were still ongoing.

Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) released an official statement saying the tour would not go ahead following recent militant violence that has revived fears after a deadly attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in 2009.

But ZC spokesman Lovemore Banda then issued a rapid apology, saying the abandonment was not confirmed.

"The executive and the board are in a meeting right now and we are waiting for their decision," Banda told AFP by telephone, without explaining the earlier statement.

The tour would be the first by a Test-playing nation since militants attacked the Sri Lankan bus in Lahore, killing six Pakistani policemen and two civilians and injuring six Sri Lankan players.

Pakistan has been desperate to regain its

status as an international cricket venue, but security concerns rose further this week when gunmen attacked a passenger bus and killed at least 43 people in the southern city of Karachi.

Zimbabwe are due to arrive on May 19 and play two Twenty20 Internationals on May 22 and 24 and three one-day internationals on May 26, 29 and 31.

All five matches would be played in the eastern city of Lahore after Zimbabwe refused to play in Karachi.

Zimbabwe Cricket said in its first statement: "The decision not to tour at this time has been taken after considering the advice from the country's supreme sports regulatory authority, the Sports and Recreational Commission (SRC)."

It quoted Charles Nhemachena, the SRC director general, as saying: "We have consulted on the security situation in Pakistan... and have been advised that it would not be safe for the team to travel to Pakistan."

An advance party visited Pakistan last week and expressed confidence that the tour would go ahead.

Zimbabwe this week announced a 16-man squad.

## INDIA-PAKISTAN SERIES 2nd round of talks coming

AGENCIES, Chandigarh



Amid speculation over the fate of the proposed India-Pakistan series in the UAE, Indian cricket board secretary Anurag Thakur indicated that a second round of talks between the cricket boards of the two nations could take place to take the dissuasions forward.

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Shahryar Khan had visited India recently to rally hard for the resumption of Indo-Pak cricket ties.

Shahryar, during a joint press statement with Board of Control for Cricket in India president Jagmohan Dalmiya in Kolkata, proposed a series comprising three Tests, five ODIs and two T20s in December but BCCI is certainly not rushing into it.

"Possibility is that in the coming few days or coming weeks, second round of talks will take place," Thakur said in a press conference here.

Thakur, who is also a BJP MP from Hamirpur in Himachal Pradesh, said the talks between the two boards were still in "early stages".

"The series is yet to be decided, but already the issue cropped up in the parliament while for some TV channels, it became a matter of debate," he said.

## Plenty on ICC's plate

AGENCIES, Dubai

The two-day annual ICC Cricket Committee meeting will begin in Mumbai on Friday to discuss various issues including illegal bowling action and a review of the World Cup held in Australia and New Zealand.

Other issues to be discussed are the balance between bat and ball in all three formats, ICC Playing Conditions, the use of technology in umpiring and Code of Conduct, including player behaviour.

The committee is chaired by former India captain Anil Kumble and includes representatives of the game's various stakeholders.

## Kevin ruled out of IPL

AFP, London

Star batsman Kevin Pietersen's disappointing week continued on Wednesday as calf and Achilles injuries ruled him out of joining up with his side for the lucrative Indian Premier League.

The 34-year-old South Africa-born player, who on Tuesday saw his hopes of a recall to the England side dashed because of what director of cricket Andrew Strauss termed a 'massive trust issue', was due to take up his contract with Sunrisers Hyderabad and play his first match on Sunday.

However, Pietersen suffered the injuries playing for his county Surrey and is expected to be out for two weeks.

## IN A NUTSHELL

### KP finds a friend in Freddie

INTERNET

Kevin Pietersen has received support from former teammate Andrew Flintoff after the out-of-favour batsman's hopes of earning an England recall suffered a huge blow.

Flintoff said that Pietersen was not in his top 10 list of most difficult players he had played with, insisting that he was in the top three best players to be his teammates, the Mirror reported.

The former England all-rounder has been positive about bringing Andrew Strauss in the English set-up, but disagrees on his decision to exclude Pietersen from the national side.

### Blinded by a Miller six

INTERNET

South Africa and Kings XI Punjab batsman David Miller is undoubtedly one of the most brutal hitters of the cricket ball in the game today, and a joy to watch when in full flow. But a Kolkata police constable, who was on duty for the KKR-Kings XI Punjab game at the Eden Gardens on May 9, unfortunately suffered the brunt of Miller's force as a six struck by the left-hander hit him in his right eye. The 53-year-old constable, Alok Aich, is currently undergoing treatment at a South Kolkata hospital after losing vision in his right eye.



### BCCI ready to help Afg

INTERNET

Indian cricket board secretary Anurag Thakur Thursday said that they would help Afghanistan Cricket Board in every manner to help them match level of other countries at the international level.

Thakur said, "Afghanistan Cricket Board has requested the Board of Control for Cricket in India that they want to come and play here, use the infrastructure and also to have one venue as the Afghan venue.

"BCCI will be more than happy to accommodate the Afghan cricket team for any kind of help for the promotion of the game," he said.



Spain's Rafael Nadal serves to John Isner of USA during their Italian Open third round match in Rome yesterday.

## Rafa on course Andy, Serena pull out

REUTERS, Rome



Rafael Nadal produced an "almost perfect" display as he booked a place in the quarterfinals of the Italian Open with a 6-4, 6-4 victory over John Isner on Thursday.

The fourth seed, who has struggled to find his best form this season in the wake of the wrist injury and appendicitis issues that undermined him last year, was imperious against the big-serving American.

He did not face a single break point and won 90 percent of his first-service points.

The Spaniard, who fell to seventh in the rankings after Sunday's final defeat to Andy Murray in Madrid, looked to be back on the path to discovering his best claycourt form.

Andy Murray and Serena Williams pulled out ahead of their third-round matches.

Murray said he was tired, while Williams claimed she was suffering with an elbow injury.

Earlier Roger Federer defeated Uruguay's Pablo Cuevas for the second time this month as the Swiss legend began his campaign with a 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 win.

PHOTO: AFP