

SPORT

Title tussle set up for last day

Abahani favourites; Rugganj & Doleshwar in hot pursuit

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Will Abahani lift the Dhaka Premier League title for the 17th time? Or will the most competitive 50-over domestic competition of the country witness a new champion? With the last round of the Super League to take place today, the above questions will be buzzing in the country's cricketing circles.

As much as people enjoy witnessing the underdogs win, the fact remains that Abahani are the favourites to become champions today. They are more likely to win the title race ahead of Legends of Rugganj and Prime Doleshwar Sporting Club.

The Tamim Iqbal-led side will take on Prime Bank Cricket Club at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, while Rugganj will play Prime Doleshwar at the BKSP in Savar. At the moment, Abahani are on top of the table with 20 points in 14 games. Rugganj are second with 20 points from 15, while Prime Doleshwar are third with 18 points from 14.

If Abahani and Rugganj both win their games today, then Abahani will be declared champions. Even though the two teams will be tied on 20 points, Abahani will top the table on account of more matches won.

However, if both Abahani and Rugganj lose their respective matches, it will then be a three-way tie between Abahani, Rugganj and Prime Doleshwar. If that is the scenario, then the game between Abahani and Prime Doleshwar, which had to be indefinitely postponed due to the umpires leaving the field, will be crucial. In the case of a three-way tie, the winner of the game between Abahani and Prime Doleshwar will take the championship. A decision regarding that game is expected to be announced today.

A third possibility is if Abahani lose and Rugganj win. In that case as well, the postponed game will play a key role for Abahani. Abahani will need to beat Prime Doleshwar in order to win the championship.

Going by the current form of the teams, Abahani are expected to beat Prime Bank. With a number of their players in form, it will be difficult for Prime Bank, who have not really put up inspired performances in the recent past, to win the match today. With the likes of Shakib Al Hasan, Mosaddek Hossain, Liton Das and Dinesh Kartik going great guns, Abahani are favourites to win today.

The clash between Rugganj and Prime Doleshwar is harder to call. Doleshwar have a more balanced team with more match-winners but Rugganj have shown plenty of spirit in the tournament so far.

There will also be a third game between Mushfiqur Rahim's Mohammedan and Mominul Haque's Victoria Sporting. The result of the match though will be inconsequential, considering that both teams are already out of the championship race.



Abahani youngster Razib Das (L) is embraced by a teammate as Mohammedan's Imran Hasan Pintu looks on in frustration after the former scored during their Premier Division Hockey Super League match at the Maulana Bhasani Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Abahani stifle MSC's hopes

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani closed the gap with leaders Usha KC in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Hockey League by beating archrivals Mohammedan SC 4-2 in the Super Six encounter at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

The win took the joint champions of the last edition to within five points of Usha, who have 34 points from 12 outings. On the other hand, the defeat left Mohammedan, who had returned to the domestic circuit after two seasons, all but out of the title race with 26 points from 12 outings.

"I think the outcome of today's match will have no impact on the title race. We can only dream of retaining the league title if a few miracles happen," Abahani's advisory

coach Mahbub Harun opined after the match.

The game got off with the promise of an entertaining encounter, but Abahani turned it into a one-sided affair by availing most of the opportunities they got despite Mohammedan enjoying the lion's share of possession throughout the game.

The first meeting of the league between the two traditional powerhouses had experienced a lot of scuffles and tense moments, but it was a completely calm affair this time as there were no untoward incidents on the pitch.

Mohammedan snatched the first penalty corner in the fifth minute, but the combination of three Pakistanis -- Umer Bhutta, Tasvar Abbas and Mohammad Imran -- failed to convert the chance while Rasel Mahmud Jimmy exposed the Abahani backline to provide an excellent delivery to Bhutta, who failed to hit the board from

close range in the 10th minute.

Abahani, however, took the lead against the run of play when Shafqat Rasool, Moshir Rahmna Biplob and Kasif Ali combined, with the latter finding the back of the net with a flick in the 15th minute before Shafqat failed to beat Mohammedan goalkeeper Zahid Hossain from a difficult angle in the next minute.

Mohammedan came close to equalising the margin four minutes later, but Abbas saw his goal-bound push cleared by Kasif Ali before Abahani doubled the lead in the 22nd minute, with young Razib Das diving to connect a fierce hit from Rummam Sarker.

Mohammedan continued to enjoy more possession after restart, but Abahani looked dangerous on the break. Zahid produced a good save in the 42nd minute before Jimmy reduced the margin in the next minute.

But Abahani widened the margin yet again and took the game away from Mohammedan in the 48th minute as Rummam and Shafqat played a nice one-two between them before the latter hit the board with a fierce hit from inside the circle.

Mohammedan pulled another back to make it 3-2, with Pakistani recruit Mohammad Irfan converting a penalty stroke in the 58th minute before Razib struck his second in the 61st minute to wrap up the win.

"I don't see any chance of getting back in the title race as there is an eight-point gap with the league leaders," Mohammedan coach Jamal Haider said. "We had a lack of combination throughout the season; we even did not get all the Pakistani players together. That's why Mohammedan could not succeed in the Club Cup and the Premier League."

SL 286 for 9

AFP, Nottingham

Sri Lanka captain Angelo Mathews top-scored with 73 as his side were held to 286 for nine by England in the first one-day international in Nottingham on Tuesday.

But Sri Lanka's final total represented something of a recovery after they slumped to 197 for six.

England, however, would have been happy with a target of 287 on a Trent Bridge ground where last year they made 350 for six against New Zealand -- their highest winning total batting second in a one-day international.

Only Mathews and Seekkugge Prasanna, with a quickfire 59, made much headway for Sri Lanka in the first of this five-match series after England captain Eoin Morgan won the toss in this day/night clash.

Pace bowlers Chris Woakes and David Willey both took two for 56 in their maximum 10 overs.

Sri Lanka were 56 for three inside nine overs and their run-rate slowed, with leg-spinner Adil Rashid (none for 36 in 10 overs) proving tough to get away.

It took Mathews 34 balls to reverse-swept four off spinner Moeen Ali.

But a becalmed Dinesh Chandimal (37) holed out off Ali to Woakes at backward square.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SRI LANKA: 286 for 9 in 50 overs (Perera 24, Chandimal 37, Mathews 73, Prasanna 59, Shanaka 20, Maharoof 31 not out; Woakes 2-56, Willey 2-56, Plunkett 2-67)



Bangladesh Edible Oil Limited's general manager Inam Ahmed (R) shakes hands with Bangladesh Cycling Federation's general secretary Imtiaz Khan during a memorandum of understanding signing ceremony at a city hotel yesterday.

BEOL bringing Tour de Bangladesh

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Bangladesh Edible Oil Ltd (BEOL) yesterday signed a memorandum of understanding with Bangladesh Cycling Federation (BCF) to hold an annual individual time-trial cycling race styled after world-renowned Tour de France, for four years starting in the middle of November this year.

As per the initial agreement, the first edition of the race titled Fortune Tour de Bangladesh, will be held over a track of approximately 495 kilometres starting from Bogra and finishing in Chittagong with Tangail, Dhaka and Feni being the connecting points. Around 40 cyclists, selected from five service teams, districts and clubs will participate in the first edition of this event.

The BEOL high-ups and officials of BCF disclosed the details of the proposed race during the MoU signing at a city hotel yesterday evening. The BCF officials were also handed a cheque of Tk 39 lakh for

holding the first edition of the race.

Inam Ahmed, general manager of BEOL and Imtiaz Khan, general secretary of BCF signed the MoU on behalf of their respective organisations. Shoeb Md. Asaduzzaman head of sales and marketing of BEOL displayed a PowerPoint presentation detailing the plans for the event during the programme.

"This is a very challenging venture as it involves a lot of logistical issues including security and traffic management. But we are ready to take this challenge," Imtiaz Ahmed said during the programme, further adding that the only time a similar time-trial event took place in Bangladesh was during the 2010 South Asian Games.

Inam Ahmed informed that the MoU is for a four-year period and that they want to take this race to hilly tracks in the future because the aim of this initiative is to throw the spotlight on tourism as much as to expedite cycling as a sport in Bangladesh.

PCB to ask ICC for special fund

AGENCIES, Karachi



Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Shaharyar Khan on Monday said he would request the International Cricket Council (ICC) to set up a special fund for Pakistan to compensate for the heavy revenue losses it bears due to the absence of international cricket in the country.

With no international cricket team touring Pakistan since March 2009 when terrorists attacked the Sri Lankan team, Shaharyar said the PCB had suffered losses in millions of dollars of revenues.

"We want to use this special fund to develop and promote cricket in Pakistan," Shaharyar, who is scheduled to represent Pakistan at the annual ICC meetings from June 27 in Edinburgh, told Press Trust of India

prior to his departure for London.

"We will request the ICC and member countries to put aside a small percentage of its income from ICC events for this special fund for Pakistan cricket," he added.

Forced to organise its "home" series at neutral venues, mainly the UAE, the PCB said that the UAE was not proving very cost effective for them.

In order to save money, the PCB wanted to hold its "home" series against the West Indies later this year in Sri Lanka, but it did not work out as the Island nation gets heavy rains at most of their main venues during the scheduled series in September-October.

"When we play a series in the UAE the costs are high and generation of revenues not good enough for us. As a result, we are losing revenues annually and that eats into our funds set aside for development purposes and for our affiliated regional

associations," said Shaharyar.

Due to financial issues Pakistan was unable to arrange regular bilateral series for its U-19 and 'A' teams and this was affecting development of players, the PCB chief lamented.

Pakistan also doesn't have hosting rights for any ICC event until 2023 due to the security situation in the country.

The PCB chief, a former career diplomat, admitted that until the security situation improved in the country, it would not be in a position to convince any board to send its team or even host any ICC team or event.

"The security situation throughout the world is not stable but things are improving in Pakistan. But it is very difficult to say for certainty when we can host international teams at home. We don't want to take decisions in haste and regret it later," said Shaharyar.

Morgan not a fan of ODI league

REUTERS, London

England one-day international captain Eoin Morgan has played down the need for a new world league in the shorter format of the game, adding that the World Cup and Champions Trophy remain appealing enough.

"I am not sure it needs it [the world league]. Cricket is in a reasonable position at the moment," the 29-year-old said.

"The Champions Trophy next year will highlight that, it is a great tournament whereby something is on every game. The World Cup goes on a lot longer," he added.

India look to seal series

PTI, Harare



A rejuvenated India will have their nose ahead when they lock horns with Zimbabwe, left bruised and battered after a 10-wicket thrashing, in the series-deciding third and final Twenty20 International on Wednesday.

India entered the series on the back of a 3-0 whitewash of Zimbabwe in the preceding ODI series, but suffered a shocking two-run loss to the hosts in the opening T20 last Saturday.

The visitors got their act together in the second game on Monday and inflicted a crushing defeat on Zimbabwe at the Harare Sports Club.

India stayed alive with a win in the second game and would now look to seal the issue in their favour with another convincing victory.

This young Indian side can take heart from Tuesday's performances by Barinder Sran, Mandeep Singh, KL Rahul and also Jasprit Bumrah.