

# SPORT

## Keeping is up to Mushfiqur

SPORTS REPORTER

Chairman of the BCB's cricket operations Akram Khan has said that the team management will not think about relieving Test skipper Mushfiqur Rahim of his duty behind the stumps without the captain's opinion.

Following Bangladesh's last Test against India in Hyderabad, calls for a back-up wicketkeeper in the side grew louder after Mushfiqur missed a couple of easy opportunities during the game at a time when Bangladesh were desperately hunting for wickets.

"We have not spoken to Mushfiqur regarding the issue, but it's something we have all been thinking about," Akram told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

"His opinion is very important regarding this. The Bangladesh team won't leave for another two to four days and so we will sit with him and discuss the matter. Let's see what happens," he added.

While Mushfiqur was not so swift behind the stumps, in front of it with the bat he was Bangladesh's best in the last Test. "In the last Test, we played for five days. And we played well. But Mushfiqur was the one who spent the maximum amount of time in the middle. He kept for around 160 overs and then came to bat and scored a century. After that he went to keep again. What's important is to know what he wants. We trust him. His opinion will be important. I can tell you a 100 percent, that whatever will happen, will happen according to his opinion," said Akram.

"If he says that doing all three roles is hurting his concentration then we may think of another keeper. But, his opinion is very important. There is no point talking about this issue if we don't know his opinion," he added.

Liton Das is expected to be in the squad that will be touring Sri Lanka as a back-up wicketkeeper.



MUSHFIQUR RAHIM



Abahani and Pocheon Citizen FC players jostle for possession during their Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup match at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

## Abahani's hopes hanging

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

Abahani's hopes of a place in the semifinals of the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup hang in the balance after being held to a goalless draw by Pocheon Citizen FC at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

Having suffered a 0-1 defeat to TC Sports Club in their first match, Abahani desperately needed a win over Pocheon Citizen FC, but luck did not favour the Sky Blues despite them creating a few scoring chances against the third-tier club from South Korea.

Croatian coach Drago Mamic fielded five defenders, who brilliantly thwarted the forwards of Pocheon, a side who handed a 2-0 defeat to FC Alga of Kyrgyzstan in their opener. On the other hand Nigerian Emeka Darlington, Abahani's lone striker, and substitute Nabib Newaj Jibon failed to capitalise on a few occasions to break the deadlock.

From the beginning, Pocheon Citizen FC controlled the game with their crisp passing and pressed hard to put their noses in front but the Abahani backline, marshalled by

Ariful Islam, Yeasin Khan, Wali Faisal, Tapu Barman and Shakil Ahmed, proved difficult to break down. And although Pocheon came close to taking the lead twice in the first half, Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel managed to keep them at bay.

Abahani launched their first fruitful attack from the right flank with Jonathan David going deep to whip in a well-placed cross for Emeka, who saw his header hit the opposition goalkeeper Choi Ahn

<b>ABAHANI</b>	<b>0 - 0</b>	<b>POCHEON</b>
<b>TC SPORTS</b>	<b>2 - 1</b>	<b>FC ALGA</b>
Waheed 45', Ezekiel 70'		Nusubaliev 36'

Seong on the hand and bounce out during the first-half stoppage time.

Abahani pressed hard to break the deadlock in the second half and came close in the 61st minute when Jonathan beautifully crossed to Emeka, who in turn headed it towards Simon Ezeodika on the edge of the six-yard box. But Abahani were left frustrated again as the midfielder drove the shot miles off target.

Seven minutes later, Abahani survived a scare when Pocheon substitute Lee Seong Woo rattled the

crossbar before Shin Seopn Hyun headed wide an opportunity in the 75th minute.

Two minutes from time, Abahani found possibly the easiest chance of the day when Tapu Barman passed a Wali Faisal corner to Jonathan who then chipped it to substitute Jibon. Bafflingly though the Abahani striker, who merely needed to tap it in from inside the six-yard box, floated the shot over the crossbar with his first touch of the game after coming on to replace Emaka.

"It was the most important match for us to stay in the race after losing the first match. But I have to admit it was tough to play against strong Pocheon but I believe the boys deserve praise for the way they fought for a draw," Abahani coach Drago Mamic said after the match.

Meanwhile, TC Sports Club became the first team to move into the semifinals after a come-from-behind 2-1 win over FC Alga last night, leaving Pocheon Citizen FC and Dhaka Abahani to fight for the other semifinal spot from Group A.

TC Sports Club topped with six points while Pocheon and Abahani have four and one point respectively. FC Alga were eliminated with one match in hand.

## Tushar, Sharif shine

SPORTS REPORTER



The veterans were the highlights on the second day of the fourth round of the Bangladesh Cricket League yesterday. While Tushar Imran scored a career-high first-class score of 220 at the BKSP, Mohammad Sharif put in a brilliant all-round performance to give his side Central Zone an advantage.

Tushar's 220 helped Prime Bank South Zone post a mammoth 501 before. He was well supported by Shahriar Nafees's 74 and Mosaddek Hossain's 57. Tushar's marathon innings lasted more than seven hours and featured 22 fours and three sixes.

Tired after fielding for almost one-and-a-half days, BCB North Zone crumbled after the exchange. They lost four wickets by the end of Day Two and finished the day on 107 for four. Nahidul Islam was the key wicket-taker, finishing with figures of three for 40. North Zone had initially begun well, racing to 62 for no loss. However, once they lost Nazmul Hossain in the 19th over, they lost wickets in clusters.

Forhad Hossain managed to score a 50, but got out before the day ended.

At the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah, Abu Jayed bagged his fifth five-wicket haul in his last six first-class games. Central Zone though managed to recover from their overnight score of 232 for seven to post a powerful 328. That was thanks to a brilliant 70 from Mohammad Sharif, batting at number nine.

Sharif then kept up the momentum by taking four wickets in just 7.4 overs and almost dismantled East Zone singlehandedly. He finished with figures of four for 24 and was well supported by national pacer Kamrul Islam Rabbi, who finished the day with one for 31.

At the end of Day 2, East Zone finished on 114 for six and seemed to have lost their grip on the game.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

<b>SOUTH ZONE VS NORTH ZONE</b>
<b>PRIME BANK SOUTH ZONE:</b> 501 all out in 144.4 overs (Tushar 220, Nafees 74, Mosaddek 57, Sohravadi 4-105, Nasir 2-77, Sanjamul 2-173)
<b>BCB NORTH ZONE:</b> 107 for 4 (Forhad 56, Nazmul 24; Nahidul 3-40)
<b>CENTRAL ZONE VS EAST ZONE</b>
<b>CENTRAL ZONE:</b> 328 all out in 115.1 overs (Sharif 70, Nurul 65; Jayed 5-77, Afif 2-20, Saqlain 2-67)
<b>EAST ZONE:</b> 114 for 6 (Imtiaz 36, Mominul 24; Sharif 4-24)



Central Zone's Mohammad Sharif (C), who finished with 4 for 24 against East Zone at Fatullah yesterday. PHOTO: PRIME BANK

## Test squad to be named today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's Test team for the Sri Lanka series has been finalised and all that is left right now is an official declaration that will come in the form of a press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in the morning today.

The selectors and the chairman of cricket operations, Akram Khan, had a meeting yesterday afternoon and after that received the official approval required. However, the Bangladesh Cricket Board was not ready to announce the team yesterday.

Akram though spoke to reporters at Mirpur following the meeting yesterday and provided insights into the 15-member squad that will be leaving for Sri Lanka on February 27.

The statements of the selectors in the last few days have almost confirmed one thing: Mustafizur Rahman is all set to return to Test

cricket after a hiatus of more than a year. It is however not clear as to who he will be replacing from the squad for the Hyderabad Test.

At the moment, it seems Mustafizur may replace either Shubhashis Roy or Shafiqul Islam. The other pacers in the side are Kamrul Islam Rabbi and Taskin Ahmed, who are likely to stay on. Abu Jayed, who was the 16th member of the squad that travelled to Hyderabad, and just played the warm-up game, may travel with the team to Sri Lanka as well in a similar capacity.

The other question that remains is whether Imrul Kayes can make it back into the squad. He is being observed by selectors in the ongoing Bangladesh Cricket League fixture. The only question with regards to the left-handed opener is whether his fitness levels are fine. Whether he can field and run easily is a big aspect that the selectors are focusing on.

Imrul did seem fit during his last game and if he is chosen he will replace Mosaddek Hossain.

## Franchise owners agree on Lahore final

CRICINFO, Dubai

Owners of the five Pakistan Super League (PSL) franchises have agreed that their teams will travel to Lahore should they qualify for the final, which is scheduled to be played on March 5.

The decision came after a meeting on Monday in which the PSL management briefed the franchisees on security arrangements for the final, due to be played at the Gaddafi Stadium.

Though the PSL has maintained from before the start of this season that the final would be held in Lahore, that status has been shaken up by a series of bombings in Pakistan over the last week.

## Afridi ends international career

AFP, Sharjah

Legendary Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi on Sunday announced his retirement from international cricket, ending an illustrious and sometimes controversial 21-year career.

The 36-year-old star had already quit Tests in 2010 and ODI cricket after the 2015 World Cup but still skipped the Pakistan Twenty20 team at the 2016 World Cup in India.

He stepped down as captain after

the tournament although he retained slender hopes of continuing his career in the sport's shortest format as a player.

"I have said goodbye to international cricket," said Afridi after smashing a 28-ball 54 in a Pakistan Super League match for Peshawar Zalmi in Sharjah.

"I am playing for my fans and will continue to play this league for another two years but it's goodbye from international cricket."

Nicknamed 'Boom Boom', Afridi had been a fan favourite since he burst onto the scene in 1996, striking

a 37-ball one-day century against Sri Lanka in only his second match to set a world record that was unbeaten for 18 years.

Afridi finishes his international career having played just 27 Test matches which yielded 1,176 runs with a highest score of 156 and 48 wickets.

He played 398 one-day internationals with 8,064 runs, a highest score of 124 while taking 395 wickets with his legspin.

His Twenty20 international CV saw him play 98 matches with 1,405 runs and a career-leading 97 wickets.

## 'All about mental fitness'

SPORTS REPORTER



Tushar Imran converted his hundred into a double hundred at the BKSP yesterday. It was no surprise that the 33-year old batsman continued his run-fest in domestic first-class competition by scoring his second double hundred. But one cannot ignore the fact that he spent seven and a half hours at the crease on way to making 220 runs.

"It's very simple. I enjoy batting," was the straightforward comment from the right-hander, who in the course of his innings became the first Bangladeshi to cross the 9,000-run mark in first-class cricket.

"Believe me, it could have been much more enjoyable if I could spend more time in the middle because tiredness was not an issue for me," he continued.

How does he maintain his fitness after more than a decade and a half of high-level cricket?

"Generally, I play football in the afternoon and do some gym work. It's not like I spent a huge amount of time in the nets; rather I believe that nothing is more important than knocking at the central wicket. I have understood since playing first-class cricket in 2000 that mental toughness is important to stay out in the middle for a long time and you can only achieve it through playing first-class cricket. Mental fitness is very important."

Tushar's continued success is a testament to the high standard he maintained for a long time.

"I actually try to compete with national players. I always tell myself that I must do better than the national players. And nobody will blame me for scoring runs (laughs), so what's wrong in scoring runs and who knows, I might even get a chance to return to the national team. It may not happen, but there is nothing wrong if I continue to push for a place and even if one player thinks that Tushar is lurking to take his place, it would be nice for me," said Tushar, who played his last international game in December 2007.

Tushar, who played 5 Tests and 41 ODIs, advised young players to concentrate more on first-class cricket if they want to build a real Test career.

"It was a bit early when I got my chance in Test cricket. Actually, I had little idea about the approach of the longer-version cricket. Everyone is not Mushy [Mushfiqur Rahim], so I request young players to learn the craft of longer-version cricket by playing first-class cricket. If you are able to spend five hours in first-class cricket then you will be able to spend two hours in Test cricket -- it's very simple," he suggested.

The veteran campaigner lauded the improvement of the domestic standard. "I am playing first-class cricket for the last 17 years and I must say the standard has improved. We have been getting sporting wickets for the last few seasons, the competitiveness is high; a player is now not only happy with a hundred but wants to score bigger."



South Zone's Tushar Imran celebrates his double-hundred against North Zone on the second day of the BCL fourth round at BKSP yesterday. PHOTO: PRIME BANK