

SPORT

Debutant Zakir leads local revival

SPORTS REPORTER



Local cricketers answered questions surrounding their recent poor run of form in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) by delivering the kind of performance fans have hungered in Rajshahi Kings' seven-wicket win over Sylhet Sixers yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National stadium.

Out of the lot which included national players Mominul Haque and Mushfiqur Rahim, the one who shone the brightest was Rajshahi's Zakir Hasan, the youngest player in the team. The left-hander marked his first game of the season with a 26-ball 51 that featured four fours and three sixes alongside Mushfiqur, who scored 25 runs off 20 balls, to add an unbeaten 53-run partnership for the fourth wicket.

Zakir, who participated in the Under-19 World Cup, made an immediate impact. The wicket-keeper-batsman was lucky in the 12th over though as he slogged the next two deliveries for huge sixes after almost being dismissed on 16. Zakir was caught at midwicket but by the grace of a replay it was revealed that Sylhet bowler Nabil Samad had overstepped the line.

The 19-year-old, who is coincidentally from Sylhet, hit consecutive fours through the third man and midwicket region for the winning runs off left-arm spinner Tajul Islam as the Kings wrapped up the win with 15 balls to spare.

"I wasn't able to perform last year, so I spoke with my coaches and they told me to work on my strengths. I tried that and got results. Since I also play for the High Performance team, I try to reach the next level [of performance] and also work on my mentality," said player-of-the-match Zakir after the game.

This victory is Rajshahi's second of the

tournament while Sylhet, following their terrific form in the Sylhet leg where they won three out of four matches, have entered a slump in the Dhaka leg which is yet to see the side triumph. However, Rajshahi have played two fixtures fewer than the Sixers.

The Kings seemed confident from start to finish with openers Mominul and Rony Talukdar laying the 65-run foundation for an easy win.

Rony survived a scare early on as he was dropped by Danushka Gunathilaka at midwicket off the second ball of the innings but was later stumped off Nasir Hossain on 24 runs off 22 balls.

On the other hand Mominul continued his fine form, scoring a 36-ball 42 which included a brilliant bottom-handed straight six off Nasir in addition to five fours before he edged a quick delivery from Abul Hasan.

Earlier, after Rajshahi skipper Darren Sammy chose to field, Sylhet's icon player Sabbir Rahman struck a quickfire 26-ball 41 to help the side post a fighting total.

The right-hander, alongside Englishman Tim Bresnan (29 not out), put on 69 runs for the sixth wicket before the former was sent packing.

Sabbir hit seamer Forhad Reza for consecutive sixes through long on to tally 24 runs from the 18th over before smashing pacer Kesrick Williams for another two sixes but was eventually caught at square leg.

Meanwhile, Sylhet off-spinner Mehedi Hasan was the most economical as he gave away just 12 runs from his four overs.



Zakir Hasan's unbeaten 26-ball 51 powered Rajshahi Kings to a seven-wicket victory against Sylhet Sixers in a BPL fixture at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO:
FIROZ AHMED



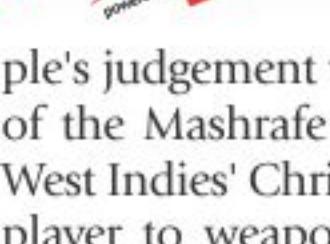
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'I aim to entertain'

SPORTS REPORTER



If one were to sit down and pen a T20 world eleven, it is a safe bet that the two names selected to open the innings in most people's judgement would be the current opening pair of the Mashrafe Bin Mortaza-led Rangpur Riders. West Indies' Chris Gayle is far and away the greatest player to weaponise a cricket bat in the shortest format and slightly behind him in terms of explosiveness and fear-inducing ability is former New Zealand skipper Brendon McCullum, his opening partner when Rangpur take on Comilla Victorians in today's second Bangladesh Premier League match.

The fantasy pairing that spectators will eagerly watch had opened the innings together only six times till now, during their stint with Indian Premier League side Kolkata Knight Riders in 2009. They had not wreaked the destruction that they are so obviously capable of then, with a highest partnership of 57.

"We know how destructive BM [Brendon McCullum] is; it is a privilege to open the batting with him again," the tall Jamaican said during Rangpur's training session at the BCB Academy ground in Mirpur yesterday. "We are both thinking the same. We have to work on our game plan. There's nothing to prove between me and McCullum. We just have to go out there, enjoy it and exploit the condition and play according to the situation. If a particular bowler needs to be taken down, we will work on it as much as possible."

Gayle boasts an unnerving 18 T20 hundreds, an average of 40.5 and a strike rate of 147.97. He also has a belief-defying 30-ball hundred -- the

fastest in T20 cricket -- for Royal Challengers Bangalore in 2013, an innings that bloomed into an unbeaten 175, the highest score in the format.

Gayle explained the philosophy behind his cricket, which as far as the style of play is concerned, could well be McCullum's credo too.

"Most of the time I go out to bat, my objective is to entertain the fans. They have spent their money, so want to be entertained," Gayle said. "Sometimes I get into trouble by trying to hit too many sixes. When it comes off, it is brilliant and everyone is happy. Normally I don't plan on the number of sixes in a competition. Hopefully I get off to a good start tomorrow [Saturday] and

maybe set the momentum for the tournament.

"Everyone in Bangladesh wants to be entertained by two great entertainers in myself and McCullum. This is why the pressure is going to be on us. But we expect these things. The crowd is going to be very noisy. It is going to be fantastic if we can get off to a good start, hitting a lot of boundaries and get the crowd excited. Maybe the other guys can build up from it and see what total we can set or get."

In a tournament that has not seen the best of cricket so far with one-sided matches and pitches not conducive to big hitting being the trend, a Gayle or McCullum special will do the trick. And if they both click, then it will be a special day indeed.



Rangpur Riders skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (R) shares a light moment with Chris Gayle (L) and other teammates during a training session at the BCB Academy ground yesterday, ahead of their BPL match against Comilla Victorians today.

PHOTO: STAR

SCOREBOARD

SYLHET SIXERS V RAJSHAHI

SYLHET SIXERS R/B 4/6s			
Tharanga c Mehedi	10/14	1/0	
Fletcher c Franklin b Sami	0/2	0/0	
Gunathilaka c Mominul			
b Franklin	40/37	4/2	
Nurul c Mehedi b Williams	10/11	1/0	
Nasir b Patel	9/11	1/0	
Sabbir c Zakir b Williams	41/26	1/4	
Bresnan not out	29/17	4/1	
Plunkett not out	6/2	1/0	
Extras: (w-1)		1	
Total: (For 6 wkts in 20 overs)	146		
Did not bat: Abul, Nabil, Tajul.			
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-18, 3-41, 4-69, 5-71, 6-140.			
Bowler O M R W			
Sami 4 0 36 1			
Mehedi 4 0 12 1			
Williams 4 0 32 2			
Farhad 3 0 43 0			
Franklin 3 0 17 1			
Patel 2 0 6 1			
RAJSHAHI KINGS R/B 4/6s			
Mominul c Nurul b Abul	42/36	5/1	
Rony st Nurul b Nasir	24/22	2/1	
Patel c Nurul b Nabil	1/2	0/0	
Zakir not out	51/26	4/3	
Mushfiqur not out	25/20	3/0	
Extras: (lb-1, nb-1, w-5)		7	
Total: (For 3 wkts in 17.3 overs)	150		
Did not bat: Franklin, Sammy (c), Mehedi, Farhad, Sami, Williams.			
Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-66, 3-97.			
Bowler O M R W			
Nasir 4 0 20 1			
Bresnan 3 0 24 0			
Plunkett 3 0 29 0			
Tajul 2.3 0 32 0			
Nabil 3 0 27 1			
Abul 2 0 17 1			
Result: Rajshahi Kings won by 7 wickets.			
Player-of-the-match: Zakir Hasan.			

MOMINUL COMPENSATES

Rajshahi Kings opener Mominul Haque will consider himself lucky as he was able to make up for the dropped catch of Sylhet Sixers' Sri Lankan left-hander Danushka Gunathilaka. Mominul was sloppy and looked casual when Gunathilaka, batting on 33, pulled pacer Forhad Reza in the 12th over straight to Mominul at deep midwicket, but the pocket dynamite was late in reacting and eventually dropped a dolly of a catch. But the drop catch did not prove too costly for Mominul or Rajshahi as he grabbed the next opportunity given by the same batsman one over later. After the addition of seven more runs, Gunathilaka flicked left-arm seamer James Franklin to the same region where he was dropped earlier and this time Mominul did not err in completing a simple catch. He also more than made up for the seven extra runs he cost his team by scoring 42 in Rajshahi's winning chase.

FRIDAY FULL HOUSE

After a blockbuster Sylhet leg where the locals turned up in huge numbers to watch the BPL matches for the first time in their city, there was not much fanfare to be seen since the tournament shifted to Dhaka. The past few days saw a rather modest attendance at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, but Mirpur reclaimed its colour and festive air as it was a full-house holiday crowd that turned up to watch the lucrative tournament yesterday. There was concern over the weather as rain was forecast, but the weather too decided to be being sporting in the end. Instead, the stands were packed and the crowd witnessed some blistering batting from local cricketers Sabbir Rahman, Mominul Haque and the young Zakir Hasan, who entertained with a deluge of sixes and fours in the first match between Rajshahi Kings and Sylhet Sixers.

SCOREBOARD

CHITTAGONG V KHLUNA

CHITTAGONG V KHLUNA R/B 4/6s			
Ronchi c Mahmudullah b Jayed	3/5	0/0	
B M Mahmudullah	32/34	3/0	
Anamul c Brathwaite	62/47	5/3	
Najibullah run out	24/16	1/2	
Raza c Ariful b Jayed	0/2	0/0	
Van Zyl not out	23/15	0/2	
Jordan not out	1/2	0/0	
Extras: (lb-4, nb-1, w-7)	15		
Total: (For 5 wkts in 20 overs)	160		
Did not bat: Banbir, Sunzamul, Al-Amin, Taskin			
Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-101, 3-107, 4-107, 5-157.			
Bowler O M R W			
Jayed 4 0 26 3			
Abbott 4 0 33 0			
Shafiq 4 0 41 0			
Brathwaite 2 0 20 0			
Mahmudullah 4 0 22 1			
Prasanna 2 0 14 0			
KHLUNA TITANS R/B 4/6s			
Klinger c Van Zyl b Sunzamul	1/5	0/0	
Rossouw c Al-Amin	49/26	5/3	
Dhiman b Al-Amin	4/7	0/0	
Mahmudullah not out	48/35	4/1	
Nazmul c b Tanbir	9/11	1/0	
Ariful c Jordan b Taskin	34/24	0/3	
Brathwaite not out	10/2	1/1	
Extras: (lb-2, w-7)	9		
Total: (For 5 wkts in 18.2 overs)	164		
Did not bat: Prasanna, Abbott, Shafiq, Jayed.			
Fall of wickets: 1-15, 2-54, 3-60, 4-79, 5-149.			
Bowler O M R W			
Bazza 3 0 20 1			
Sunzamul 4 0 33 1			
Taskin 3 0 38 0			
Jordan 3.2 0 28 0			
Al-Amin 2 0 14 1			
Tanbir 3 0 29 1			

Khulna in 2nd spot after tricky chase

SPORTS REPORTER



Skipper Mahmudullah Riyad and Ariful Haque put on a match-winning fifth-wicket stand of 70 runs to help guide Khulna Titans to a five-wicket win, their second over Chittagong Vikings and their third of this season's Bangladesh Premier League at the Sher-e-Bangla National stadium last night.

With three wins in six games Khulna are now in second position on the points table while Chittagong, having tumbled to their fourth defeat in six games, are in second-last spot in the seven-team table, above only Rangpur Riders, who have one win from three.

Khulna were just 12 runs short of the 161-run target when Ariful was dismissed for 34 off 24 balls, an innings which featured three sixes, two of which were struck in consecutive deliveries off leg-spinner Tanbir Hayder. But Mahmudullah saw his side home with an unbeaten 48 off 35 balls with four fours and a six. Carlos Brathwaite faced just two balls from Taskin Ahmed and smashed them for a four and a six before Mahmudullah hit the winning boundary off Chris Jordan with 10 balls left in the innings.

Player-of-the-match Rilee Rossouw started the chase in blistering fashion, hitting five fours and three sixes in 26 balls

before being bowled by off-spinner Al Amin one run short of his fifty. Having already lost opener Michael Klinger (1) and Dhiman Ghosh (4) before Rossouw's departure, Khulna were in trouble when they lost Nazmul Hossain (9) and were brought down to 79 for four inside 10 overs. But that only set the stage for the captain and the youngster to end as heroes