



**Skipper Mahmudullah
Riyad's 36-ball 59
propelled Khulna Titans to
a nine-run victory over
Rangpur Riders in their
BPL fixture at the Zahur
Ahmed Chowdhury
Stadium in Chittagong
yesterday.**

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Raza lords over Sylhet Sixers

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

They eventually limped to 171 for eight. Earlier, on a pitch that the dew had quickened from the sluggish surface seen during the day match, Zimbabwean Raza hit 95 off 45 balls with the help of nine fours and six sixes, and was Chittagong's last wicket to fall in the 20th over, being caught off Kamrul Islam Rabbi after having scored 41 of the team's 64 runs off the last five overs. It was delayed justice for Kamrul as he had a chance to dismiss Raza for 64 as early as the 10th over, but Sylhet skipper Nasir Hossain spilled a tough chance that would not have been called a chance if he had not gotten his hand to a pull at midwicket through a spectacular effort.

That seemed to be the signal for Raza to go berserk, which he did from the next over, hitting Nasir for a six and a four before repeating the dose to Ghulam Mudassar and Abul Hasan in the overs that followed.

Raza reached his fifty off his 30th delivery in the 15th over with a four off Taijul Islam. Chittagong were then 147 for four after 15 overs. Batting on 54 off 31, Raza then hammered 41 runs off his next 14 deliveries. While many of Raza's six sixes were slogs occasioned by the format, most of the fours were classy shots and he deserved a hundred; his dismissal in the last over was met with stunned silence from the partisan crowd, but that was swiftly followed by thunderous applause for the innings they had witnessed.

Chasing 212 to win, it seemed for a long time that Sylhet had the legs to topple the mammoth score as Andre Fletcher and Babar Azam struck up a high-octane 80-run partnership in just 9.2 overs after the opening stand between Fletcher and Gunathilaka realised 43 runs in 4.1 overs. However, Fletcher (71 off 46) and Azam (41 off 32) were dismissed in successive overs by Taskin Ahmed and Stiaan van Zyl respectively and when icon player Sabbir Rahman departed in the same over as Azam to leave the score on 129 for four after 15, the scoreboard pressure proved too much for the Sixers.

Uniread BERGER 245/17

ধূলো ময়লার দিন শেষ!



Riyad special takes Titans to top

SAKEB SUBHAN from Chittagong

The Chittagong leg of the Bangladesh Premier League started off yesterday with the formbook holding sway as an half-century from skipper Mahmudullah Riyad proved to be the key performance in Khulna Titans' nine-run defeat of fifth-placed Rangpur Riders, who despite a great rearguard partnership from Ravi Bopara and Nahidul Islam lost the opportunity to leapfrog Sylhet Sixers. Fittingly, the innings that propelled Mahmudullah to the top of the run charts also helped Khulna, who jumped over Dhaka Dynamites and Comilla Victorians to pole position in the seven-team ladder with their fifth win from eight matches.

Khulna put up 158 for eight after Rangpur skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza chose to field first, and the Bopara-Nahidul fifth-wicket stand took them from 45 for four to 145 in the last over, which started with fast bowler Junaid Khan defending 15 runs. Nahidul marked his first match of BPL 2017 by scoring a 43-ball 58 and Bopara hit a 44-ball 59, but an excellent over gave up only five as both set batsmen departed and Rangpur ended on 150 for six in the first match of the day at the Zahur Ahmed

Chowdhury Stadium.

Rangpur were on the back foot early when Brendon McCullum departed in the second over, caught in the deep off Afif Hossain. It was the 18-year-old Khulna native's stingy and incisive bowling that set the game up. Chris Gayle lost a battle with Abu Jayed in the third over as he edged behind after hitting two fours and a six, and Mohammad Mithun was run out by a direct hit from Carlos Brathwaite in the fifth. Then, Afif

scored at the top of the order by young left-hander Nazmul Hassan. The skipper came to the crease early with the score on 24 for two after three overs following Afif's dismissal, bowled by a searing Rubel Hossain yorker.

The right-handed Mahmudullah was undeterred by the dismissal of Nazmul, caught off Mashrafe, to bring the score to 49 for three in the seventh over. He unfurled his full and enviable range of strokes in a classy innings. There was the cheeky scoop to a ball on off stump, off Mashrafe in the 11th over; a pull off Thisara Perera over square leg for four; a bash over Rubel's head and the coup de grace: a shimmy down the track to Perera followed by a magnificently timed lofted cover drive that comfortably sailed over the extra cover boundary.

Nicholas Pooran gave him company in a fourth-wicket stand worth 43 and after the West Indian's dismissal Ariful Haque hung around as Khulna reached 130 when Mahmudullah fell to a combination catch at the midwicket boundary off the bowling of Rubel in the 17th over, with McCullum tossing the ball back to Nahidul just before the former ran over the boundary ropes. Ariful departed to Rubel in the same over, leaving Joffra Archer, Brathwaite and Junaid to take them past the 150 mark.

BPL'S HIGHEST RUN-GETTERS

Player	M	Inn	R	HS	Ave	SR	100s	50s
Mahmudullah	58	54	1336	62	29.04	115.37	0	7
Mushfiqur Rahim	53	49	1292	86	34.91	128.81	0	8
Imrul Kayes	37	36	1069	75	32.39	117.08	0	12
Shakib Al Hasan	55	54	1058	86*	25.19	133.41	0	3
Shakib Al Hasan	46	46	1051	67	24.44	114.61	0	4

bowed Fazle Mahmud in the eighth over to have figures of two for four from two overs, and it seemed that Rangpur were in for a heavy defeat, but the 100-run fifth-wicket stand ensured that the eager Chittagong crowd witnessed an exciting match.

Before all that, Mahmudullah's 36-ball 59 was the score of note in Khulna's innings. No one else from Khulna crossed 20, which was

scored at the top of the order by young left-hander Nazmul Hassan. The skipper came to the crease early with the score on 24 for two after three overs following Afif's dismissal, bowled by a searing Rubel Hossain yorker.

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ZACS decked out

AMIR HASAN SHAHRIAR, Chittagong



If there was any doubt about regional loyalties in the Bangladesh Premier League, the first day of the Chittagong leg debunked it as the port city fans turned up in full force to cheer their team, even though the home team had not done much to write home about in the BPL before yesterday.

The locals were vociferous in their support for Chittagong Vikings, currently at the bottom of the table, at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium (ZACS).

Mannan, a cricket enthusiast and a diehard Vikings and Luke Ronchi fan, expressed his support for the team. "Vikings will of course win today. We will make them win."

Their zeal proved impenetrable when the second match began. A gallery full of spectators turned their smartphones into fireflies as the batsmen hit the Sylhet Sixers pretty hard.

Another Vikings fan, Javed said that he would not come to the stadium for the rest of the tournament if his team did not beat the Sixers.

The crowd was comparatively timid during the day's first game between Rangpur Riders and Khulna Titans. Most fans seemed to

support Rangpur but at the end they stayed in their seats in hopes of seeing their home team win against the Sixers.

The performances of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's team and the stars in his side – such as the big-hitting Chris Gayle and Brendon McCullum – were attraction enough for thousands gather despite the huge queues outside.

When McCullum enchanted the gallery with his cutting-edge fielding, causing the fall of Mahmudullah Riyad, the audience broke out into a wild cheer.

But a little later, a disappointed man named Mohammad Kashem was seen leaving the gallery. The reason? Gayle was out.

By the end of the match, spectators agreed that it was the superb bowling of Junaid Khan that cost Rangpur the match, a sentiment echoed after the game by Rangpur's Nahidul Islam, who nearly won the match for his team.

It had all reached a crescendo in the last over, off which Rangpur needed 15. Soon however, the enthusiasm turned into woe as dusk descended, but the night ended in triumph for Chittagong, so one can expect a similarly festive atmosphere throughout the rest of the leg.

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WHAT THEY SAID



The environment is fantastic

This is my fifth or sixth time in Bangladesh. I think the environment is fantastic; it's noisy, which is exactly the way you want it to be. This place has got all the ingredients for any cricketer to enjoy playing cricket. I'd like to think so [about this being the start of a turnaround for Chittagong], but we'll take it one game at a time. Plus, the crowd behind us plays a huge role.

-- Player-of-the-match Sikandar Raza on the home support for Chittagong Vikings.



NCL batting helped in BPL

Batting in the National Cricket League helped me a lot as there is a scope to bat for long periods there. In the last Dhaka Premier League [for Legends of Rupganj in the last season] my batting was not good. But I am trying to improve day by day. There is no alternative but to win today [against Chittagong Vikings].

-- Rangpur batsman Nahidul Islam after hitting 58 in his first BPL 2017 match.



WHACK-OMETER

TOTAL 272 | TOTAL 554

Most 6s hit by a player: 14, Evin Lewis, Dhaka Dynamites

Most 4s hit by a player: 26, Andre Fletcher, Sylhet Sixers

MOMENTS

DON'T HIT RUBEL FOR FOUR

Khulna Titans' youngster Afif Hossain hit Rangpur Riders' Rubel Hossain for two fours in the third over. The ball after the second boundary was a bouncer that nearly took Afif's head off. The one-two punch was complete when Afif was bowled in the next ball by a yorker of pinpoint accuracy. In

the 17th over, Mahmudullah Riyad hit his Bangladesh teammate for a four straight down the ground. One ball later, Mahmudullah was walking back as he skied a slower ball to deep midwicket. Ariful Haque hit a sliced boundary through point off the next ball, and off the next he was caught plumb in front with a fast and full delivery. BPL batsmen should now think twice about hitting Rubel for four.

GAYLE FALLS FOR RYAD'S BLUFF

In the third over, Rangpur Riders' Jamaican six-machine Chris Gayle was in a hurry to bring the asking run rate to heel. The second ball from Abu

Jayed just managed to clear mid on for four. The third ball, a slower, caught the outside edge and ran away for four to third man. The next one was convincing, though, as it was deposited for over long off for a 106-metre six. Khulna skipper Mahmudullah had an extended discussion with his bowler. He then brought himself in from long on to mid and dropped midwicket back, leaving long off out. Jayed went around the wicket and for all money it seemed that the ball would be on the pads, and Gayle thought so too apparently. He was stuck to the crease as Jayed bowled it wide outside off, and Gayle could only get an outside edge through to the keeper.

SOUMYA ZONED OUT, NURUL TUNED IN

In the third over of the night game, Chittagong Vikings opener Soumya Sarkar threw his bat at a Nurul Hossain delivery outside off but could

only connect a bottom edge. The ball thudded into the pitch and bounced away to Sylhet wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan's left. Apparently clueless about where the ball had gone, Soumya walked out of his crease, but Nurul – arguably the best keeper in the country – was quick to grab the ball and whip off the balls, a pretty apt dismissal – a batsman who can sometimes lose focus outdone by a keeper who is always

on the ball.

Fall of wickets: 1-26, 2-123, 3-128, 4-129, 5-145, 6-149.

Bowler O M R W

Jayed 4 0 48 1

Arif 2 0 4 2

Junaid 4 0 20 1

Archer 4 0 33 0

Brathwaite 4 0 33 0

Tanvir 2 0 27 2

Perera 4 0 30 1

Gayle 16/9 2/1

McCullum 4/2 0/0

Mithun 3/10 0/0

Bopara 59/44 4/1

Nahidul 58/43 7/0

Kamrul 4/10 0/0

Perera not out 1/1 0/0

Extras (lb-2, nb-1, w-1) 4/0 0/0

Total: (For 6 wkt in 20 overs) 149

Did not bat: Mashrafe (c), Shohag, Rubel, Malina.

Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-20, 3-29, 4-45, 5-145, 6-149.

Bowler O M R W

Jayed 4 0 48 1

Arif 2 0 4 2

Junaid 4 0 20 1

Archer 4 0 33 0

Brathwaite 4 0 33 0