

SPORT

The Bangladesh team, led by shooter Abdulla Hel Baki, partake in the march-past of the opening ceremony of the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games at the Carrara Stadium in Australia yesterday. A heavy downpour lashed the 35,000-strong crowd at the beach-themed ceremony. The 21st edition of the games will last 11 days and will feature 71 nations and territories. Bangladesh is being represented in six disciplines.



Champions at BKSP or Mirpur?

SPORTS REPORTER



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is the name that has hogged the spotlight most for the last two months in the Dhaka Premier League because of the 34-year-old's stupendous bowling performances. It has all built up to today's finale and the charismatic cricketer will hope that his team will make sure that it will be a happy ending for him. Abahani need a win against Legends of Rugganj today at the BKSP to seal the title for the 19th time and render irrelevant all the permutations that may arise from a potential three-way tie.

Eyes will also turn today to the match in Mirpur between Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club and Khelaghar Samaj Kallyan Samity as against Abahani's 22 points, Sheikh Jamal and Rugganj are also in the running with 20 points each. In the case that rain plays foul today, there is a reserve day on Friday to ensure completion of the matches.

Abahani will clinch the title if they win or get one point (from a tie or abandoned match) but if they lose the game and Sheikh Jamal manages to beat Khelaghar in their last game, then Sheikh Jamal will become champions by virtue of having the most wins in head-to-head games between the three teams that will be tied on 22 points. They have a 1-1 head-to-head record against Abahani and have beaten Rugganj in both their battles.

For Rugganj, who have a 0-1 head-to-head with Abahani, to win the title Sheikh Jamal will have to lose to Khelaghar and Rugganj will

have to beat Abahani by a big enough margin to overtake their opponent's net run rate.

While many were surprised that a formidable Abahani have had to wait till the last possible match to grab the title that seemed theirs a while ago, it is refreshing to see the league race going down to the wire. Fans will hope that the final round will be characterised by fair play and that none of the controversies of the past two months will make an appearance.

"It's really fantastic as we will be champions if we can win the last game. If we confirmed it earlier then we could not have gotten such last-round excitement and nobody would have been as serious as they are now," said Abahani's young all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz.

"It's always charming and exciting to play against Abahani and it's more exciting when they are leading the table and we are following them. I would just love to see a good game tomorrow and I believe the team that can execute their plans well will win the match," said Rugganj coach Manjurul Islam.

Sheikh Jamal captain Nurul Hasan was also not interested in fussing over equations and just wanted to take today's game like just another match. "We are not thinking of anything other than focusing on our game. It's just another match. Since the start of the league our main target was to reach the Super League. Then we took it match by match and the last one is also another match for us," said Nurul Hasan.

The other match of the day will take place in Fatullah, but participants Gazi Group Cricketers and Prime Bank Cricket Club are already out of the race.

'I was praying before that six'

Mahmudullah Riyad has emerged as one of the calmest and most composed characters in the Bangladesh dressing room due to his ability to absorb pressure in crucial moments. The 32-year-old once again proved invaluable with a penultimate-ball six against Sri Lanka that powered the Tigers to the Nidahas Trophy final in Sri Lanka last month. The elegant right-hander spoke to *The Daily Star's* Mazhar Uddin in an exclusive interview, sharing his perspective on the memorable win and the tumultuous lead-up to that six, along with few other topics at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The followings are the excerpts of the conversation:

The Daily Star (TDS): Was that six in Colombo the most memorable shot of your career?

Mahmudullah Riyad (MR): Yes, I must say that six is one of the most memorable moments in my career so far. The Nidahas Trophy was very important for us as there were a few questions over our ability in the T20 format. So I think we have overcome that and took a step forward. Very few believed that we were going to reach the final before the start of the tournament. But I had said before that we need a win to change the scenario of our team and everyone had that commitment and were able to do that.

TDS: Describe the situation before you went to bat after the no-ball incident.

MR: If I talk about the nerves I can't explain that situation as there was huge chaos in that over and it had a positive impact on me when it came to seizing the momentum and taking my side through to the finish line. It was a special match, especially because there



were a few moments that I was a part of previously where we were unable to seize the moment but in that game we managed to overcome that and eventually we won; that was the most pleasing thing.

TDS: What were you actually thinking when 12 were needed off the last four balls from Isuru Udana and you hit a wide one for a four off the first of those?

MR: First -- that four over cover, which was almost a wide ball but thankfully the timing was good and it went for four. Off the next ball I took two runs. And before facing the fifth ball [of the over] I was literally praying to the Almighty so that I

could finish it off. At the same time I tried to remain calm. I always believe that calmness is very important in cricket and it has helped me in my game. So I was thinking 'just watch the ball and play according to the delivery'. I was focusing on looking at the ball till the last moment and in these situations, the batsman tends to tighten the grip and have a lot of negative thoughts. The most important thing was that we managed to win the game at the end and after that the celebration was also memorable.

TDS: Do you think the match-winning knock against Sri Lanka will somehow help you overcome the memory of the horrible one-run defeat against India in Bangalore [2016 World Twenty20]?

MR: I want to say one thing, even in that situation against Sri Lanka I thought of Bangalore and the Asia Cup [2012] final and what was important was that I was able to learn from those mistakes. I was lucky that we ended up on the winning side but

as long I will play this game I will look to learn from those incidents.

TDS: Do you think your place in the batting order is stable now?

MR: In a sense yes. It's steady as if you look at the ODIs I have batted at number seven-eight at the start of my career and after [Chandika] Hathurusingha joined I got my promotion to number four against Zimbabwe in 2014 while the team was expecting I play the role of a finisher in T20s. I want to have that versatility and whatever the team expects from me at any situation, I am able to do that. But obviously it's a big opportunity to bat in the top order and you have the platform to score big. Team requirements first...

I have learned a lot and I am more composed both professionally and personally; I am learning day by day. I think you can learn everyday from cricket if you want to and if you work on those small things you will improve. I have enjoyed the captaincy and I am proud that we managed to register a record chase against Sri Lanka in the Nidahas Trophy.



The teams in with a chance of clinching the Dhaka Premier League title trained intensely for the finale yesterday. (Clockwise from top) Abahani players, knowing they just need to win today to clinch the title, were in relaxed mood after practice; Sheikh Jamal need a win and an Abahani loss against Legends of Rugganj, whose star player Mushfiqur Rahim seems to be contemplating their long odds. PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED

C'WEALTH GAMES BD boxers ineligible?

SPORTS REPORTER

Two Bangladeshi boxers will not be able to take part in the Commonwealth Games, which got underway in Gold Coast, Australia yesterday, according to a satellite television report from Australia.

Boxers Mohammad Al Amin and Robin Mia were supposed to take the ring today in 64kg and 60kg categories, but satellite television Channel 24 reported that they are not eligible to participate.

The official website of the games did not feature the names of the two Bangladeshi boxers in the starting list.

"I don't know exactly what happened there, but I can guess from my previous experience that if the officials of the respective nation do not attend the managers' meeting, the athletes of that country lose their eligibility to take part," said MA Kuddus, outgoing general secretary of Bangladesh Amateur Boxing Federation. Kazi Abdul Mannan is accompanying the boxers as coach-cum-manager.

Soumya special can't save Agrani

SPORTS REPORTER



The very existence of the two teams in Dhaka cricket's top flight was hanging by a thread until the final delivery was bowled at the BKSP-4 in Savar yesterday. The equation at that moment was Brothers Union needing four runs off the last ball and Agrani Bank needing to stop a boundary for the common cause of avoiding the ignominy of being condemned to the lower tier.

Agrani's Indian recruit Rishi Dhawan, an all-rounder who played three ODIs for his country, bowled the last delivery at Nazmus Sadat. The right-hander played a pre-meditated ramp shot down to fine leg, where lanky pace bowler Al-Amin Hossain made a nervous attempt to stop the ball on the bounce. But the ball raced to the boundary, cruelly taking a feather touch of his outstretched arms, to save Brothers' blushes and sending Agrani back to where they belonged a season ago.

competition's history. They scored 335 for six in 50 overs against Agrani's 334 all out in 49.1 overs in what was the final and deciding relegation league playoff match.

The defeat meant the bankers along with Kalabagan Kriira Chakra, who earlier confirmed their demotion, will feature in the First Division league next year.

But the bankers certainly bowed out from the country's List A competition with their heads held high for the way they fought against an established side. They were also aggrieved at a couple of umpiring decisions in a high-scoring affair where national opener Soumya Sarkar hit a majestic 154.

After a forgetful time in the league between national commitments, the left-hander found his touch in what was his last act for the bankers. He started cautiously, scoring his first 50 off 67 balls, and completed his first century in three years off 107 balls. But his next 50 was something awe-inspiring; it took only 20 deliveries and contained four sixes, including three on the trot against leg-spinner Alok Kapali.

It was also the highest individual score in the league so far, pushing Abahani's young left-hander Nazmul Hossain Shanto's unbeaten 152 against Shinepukur to second place. Soumya struck nine fours and a



Soumya Sarkar rediscovered his sublime touch while scoring 154 for Agrani Bank against Brothers Union in their DPL relegation playoff match at BKSP yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

SCORES IN BRIEF

Agrani Bank CC: 334 all out in 49.1 overs (Nafees 24, Soumya 154, Salman 23, Dhiman 25, Dhawan 80 not out; Suhrawardi 3-48, Shakawat 3-43)
Brothers Union: 335 for 6 in 50 overs (Mizanur 62, Junaid 83, Myshukur 82, Das 73; Dhawan 3-71)
Result: Brothers Union won by 4 wickets.

SOUTH ASIAN CLUB TT C'ship from 7th

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh is all set to host the inaugural South Asian Club Table Tennis Championship with the champions of the premier leagues from six nations taking part in the four-day meet.

The championship featuring six clubs from India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan and Bangladesh will get underway on Saturday at the gymnasium of MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram. Advocate Golam Mustafa Memorial Trust is sponsoring the event.

"The executive committee of South Asian Table Tennis Federation had discussed introducing the championship two to three years ago. I'm really happy that the championship is finally seeing light," said Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation's (BTTF) general secretary Khandokar Hasan Monir at a press conference in Dhaka yesterday.

"It is a good opportunity for our players to compete against foreign players because they don't get enough opportunity to play international matches," said Monir.

Bengal Club of India, Thimphu Table Tennis Club of Bhutan, Hawaii Table Tennis Club of Nepal, Maldivian Table Tennis Club of Maldives, Southern Table Tennis Club of Sri Lanka and Pallolic Club of Bangladesh will play each other in round-robin matches, with the top point-getters ultimately becoming champions.

Karachi Gymkhana Table Tennis Club of Pakistan were also supposed to take part in the championship, but they withdrew as their players are representing Pakistan in the ongoing Commonwealth Games in Australia.

Manosh Chowdhury, Mahbub Billah, Hridoy Junior and Egyptian Sayeed Lashin are supposed to represent Bangladesh champions Pallolic Group.