



Indian recruit Arvinder Singh (L) celebrates Mohammedan's winning goal with teammates in the penultimate minute of their Premier Division fixture against Abahani at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO:  
FIROZ AHMED

# Embers of a once raging fire

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammedan Sporting Club pulled off a thrilling 2-1 win against bitter rivals Abahani in a Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League match at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium

yesterday.

It was a rare success for the once-famous Black and Whites against the Sky Blues against the backdrop of so many failures in hockey and other the increasingly domineering presence of football and cricket. While Abahani have maintained their supremacy in domestic sport, Mohammedan suffered a steep slide, failing to win a football league title since 2002, a cricket league glory since 2009 and a hockey league trophy since 2012.

More interestingly, Mohammedan's last wins against Abahani in Dhaka derbies -- the emotional component of which is now a thing of the past -- was a 1-0 football win in 2015, an eight-wicket victory in the Dhaka Premier Cricket League in 2016 and a 3-2 triumph in hockey in 2012.

And in that context, yesterday's victory in front of barely 500 diehard fans was a reversal of a trend that turned the once-riveting battle into a mere game. The match, a first between the two

teams in two years, however provided the entertainment it was once famous for -- loads of excitement, arguments, reviews of umpires' decisions on the pitch and a last-gasp winner.

It is not that Mohammedan have formed a strong team, but instead they rode on their four quality Indian recruits to overcome their bitter rivals.

With three minutes of regulation time left, Mohammedan squandered their seventh penalty corner, giving all indications that the game was heading for a 1-1 draw. But Mohammedan earned their eighth penalty corner in the penultimate minute. This time, defender Narendar Kumar sent the Mohammedan supporters into ecstasy, converting it with a powerful hit. However, the watching audience and even a few Mohammedan officials claimed after the game that Arvinder Singh, a penalty corner specialist, scored the winner.

Both teams came into the match on the back of eight straight wins but Mohammedan looked more forceful throughout as they dominated their archrivals and created more opportunities than Abahani, who curiously lacked confidence.

Defender Imran Hasan Pintoo gave Mohammedan the lead in the 24th minute with a fierce hit after the initial attempt from the penalty corner was well blocked. Abahani hit back in the second half with a clever strike from

Arshad Hossain after Bikash Pillai and Ahmed Tajuddin narrowly missed the target twice.

Although Mohammedan allowed a lot of space in the midfield in their previous matches, national team captain Rasel Mahmud Jimmy along with veteran Kamruzzaman Rana did well against Abahani and played key roles in dominating the area.

The ninth straight victory pushed the Black and Whites to the top of the 12-team table along with holders Dhaka Mariners Young's Club with 27 points each, three ahead of Abahani who are in second place after their first defeat in nine matches.

"We could not beat Abahani in the previous season [2016] but I can recall that we beat Abahani 3-2 in the Super League in 2012 on way to clinching the title," said Mohammedan SC manager Ariful Haque Prince after the exciting victory.

"Mohammedan played better than us and they deserved the victory," said Abahani coach Mahbub Harun. "Abahani could not play their natural game and our foreign players could not shine. The players were under pressure."

"We played as a team and dominated the match. The players gave 200 per cent effort to win the match. I think this victory will inspire us to do well in the Super League," said Mohammedan coach Moududur Rahman Shuvo.

## IPL form gives Jos 'second Test debut'

AFP, London

Jos Buttler had said getting a recall to England's Test squad feels as if he had been given "another debut".

Buttler played the last of his 18 Tests in December 2016, against India in Chennai.

But despite becoming a white-ball specialist in the intervening 18 months, he has been included in England's squad for the first Test against Pakistan at Lord's starting Thursday.

It is Buttler's form in the Twenty20 Indian Premier League, rather than English cricket's first-class County Championship that has propelled him back into the Test arena following a run of five successive fifties, including two unbeaten 90s, for Rajasthan Royals.

Now he is set to bat at number seven in the first of a two-Test series against Pakistan.

"It's a fantastic surprise and an incredible opportunity afforded to me," Buttler told reporters at Lord's on Monday.

"Any time you turn up here at Lord's it's special, and all of those emotions are arriving today. It feels like another debut really," he added.

"It wasn't particularly on my radar."

Buttler, 27, admitted he had contemplated that his Test career might be done and dusted.

"You always think maybe that race is run and will never happen again," the innovative ball-striker added.

## Time for us to step up: Jayed

SPORTS REPORTER



Abu Jayed was the second highest wicket-taker in the 2017 BPL. The 24-year-old pacer from Sylhet then entered

the international scene in the second T20i against Sri Lanka in February this year, where he conceded 45 runs for one wicket from four overs. He was retained for the Nidahas Trophy in Sri Lanka but did not play any matches, so his inclusion for the upcoming three-match T20I series against Afghanistan reflects the selector's long-term aim. Before that, former Pakistan fast bowler Aaqib Javed singled him out as a future prospect along with Abul Hasan, Abu Hider and Ebadat Hossain after the end of his week-long stint as the High Performance fast bowling consultant in August 2016.

Can the right-arm pacer grab a spot in the national team, namely filling the gap left by Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's departure from T20 cricket more than a year ago?

"It is time for us, the young pacers, to take responsibility as there are



Rookie pacer Abu Jayed (L) was eager for his young cohorts to step up and support a more experienced seamer like Rubel Hossain (2nd from L) as Bangladesh fine-tuned their preparations for the upcoming Afghanistan series in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

not many senior pacers in the team except for Rubel [Hossain] bhai and Mustafizur [Rahman], who has got some experience," Jayed told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

"The young pacers like me, [Abu Hider] Rony, Mustafizur -- we are all working on building our confidence. We are fully committed and confident," he headed.

He said that confidence is vital

when it comes to making an impact at the highest level. "International cricket is a tough place and we are preparing so that we can represent the country well in the coming days. We spoke to [Khaled Mahmud] Sujon bhai today and he said it totally depends on us how we approach international cricket -- it is easy if you take it easy and vice versa. If you are confident you can bowl well on any platform, be it international or domestic competition," he opined.

Jayed was yet to get the opportunity to work with legendary former West Indies pace bowler and interim head coach Courtney Walsh, instead so far working with Champaka Ramanayake -- the Sri Lankan who taught the young paceman that line is the most important thing in T20 cricket.

Jayed was hopeful that the pacers will do well in Dehradun and the good news, according to team manager Mahmud, was that there was likely to be good bounce on offer.

"I don't think we are going to get spin-friendly wickets as we were informed by our officials who visited the venue that there was grass on the wicket," informed Mahmud.

## Kirsten's first day of business

SPORTS REPORTER



All eyes were on the Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel in the capital, where former South African cricketer Gary Kirsten -- who arrived in Dhaka on Sunday night -- was to sit with Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials along with senior members of the national team yesterday.

Opener Tamim Iqbal first arrived at the hotel and had a meeting with Kirsten, which lasted around an hour and half, after which the dashing left-hander walked out without making any comment about the discussion.

In came Mushfiqur Rahim and the former Tigers captain also spoke to the former South African opener and he too was unwilling to reveal the contents of the meeting as he headed to the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was the last among the senior players to have a talk with the South African and said just this before leaving: "We are not permitted to comment about the meeting."

Kirsten has been appointed as a consultant by the BCB to advise on the coaches Bangladesh can target and to identify areas that will need particular focus through his assessment, which will continue over the next couple of days.

It was learned that Kirsten wanted to know the demands of the senior players and that he asked the players about the kind of head coach they wanted, their aspirations for the upcoming 2019 World Cup, the areas they needed to work on to become a better team and to play well overseas.

The 50-year-old also had a meeting with BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury and the selectors. He will also sit with BCB president Nazmul Hassan over the next two days. His departure date is not yet confirmed.

According to Chowdhury, the South African is undertaking an internal audit for the upcoming ICC tournaments, including the World Cup in 2019.

"Actually, Gary Kirsten is undertaking an internal audit on how to improve Bangladesh as a team and the areas Bangladesh need to work on keeping the upcoming ICC events like the World Cup and the T20 World Cup in mind.

"He is also working on appointing coaches and we have already shortlisted a few names for the head coach's role and Kirsten also has a few names. At the moment, he will give his suggestions after assessing which area we should work more on and then he will tell us which coach should be more effective for us," Chowdhury told reporters yesterday.

Chowdhury seemed to lay to rest speculation about exactly how long Kirsten's role would be by saying that the South African will only work for a short period.

"He is working as a consultant. Earlier we had plans to appoint him for a longer period, till the World Cup in 2019, which he also agreed to initially. But since he has a busy schedule and other engagements Kirsten informed that he will only stay with us till the coach appointing process," he said.

Kirsten, who coached India to the World Cup triumph in 2011, has expressed a wish to work with freedom and the BCB is providing him the logistical support.



Bangladesh senior cricketer Mushfiqur Rahim (L) talks to former South Africa player and short-term BCB consultant Gary Kirsten as part of his private talks with Bangladesh cricket's stakeholders at a Dhaka hotel yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## 'I'm coming for the trophy'

AFP, Paris



Fresh from attending the Royal wedding, Serena Williams will take aim at the upstarts who have been honeymooning at the majors in her absence when she makes her long-awaited Grand Slam return at Roland Garros.

Should she win a fourth Roland Garros, it will take her level with Margaret Court's all-time Grand Slam record of 24 majors.

But there are question marks over her fitness and readiness for the 2018 tournament which starts on Sunday.

Her last appearance at a Slam was at the 2017 Australian Open which she won while pregnant.

Having then missed the rest of the season as she gave birth to daughter Alexis Olympia in September, Williams's world ranking has slumped to 454 from its dizzy heights of undisputed number one.

"I'm not just coming back to come back. I'm coming back to win," she said defiantly in a HBO documentary 'Being Serena' which aired last week.

"Serena will play the French Open to win it," her long-time coach Patrick Mouratoglou, who oversaw her first training session on Court Philippe Chatrier at Roland Garros on Sunday, told the WTA Tour.

"Can she do it? Serena can achieve anything -- after being her coach for six years, I'm even more sure of that statement."

"She obviously comes back to win and the wait has been long, so she will probably start Roland Garros with a mix of stress and excitement because playing those events is the reason why she made such huge efforts to come back."



SERENA WILLIAMS

## Nadal regains No.1 spot

AFP, PARIS

Rafael Nadal regained the number one spot ahead of the French Open in the world rankings on Monday after winning his eighth Rome Masters title.

The victory saw Nadal overtake Roger Federer, who is not playing the claycourt season this year.

Former number one Novak Djokovic continued his fall, slipping four places to 22nd.

became the final team to seal a play-offs berth. Table-toppers Sunrisers Hyderabad and two-time title holders Kolkata Knight Riders are the other teams.

The first qualifier match will be played on Tuesday at the Wankhede Stadium between SRH and CSK, followed by the Eliminator between KKR and RR at Eden Gardens a day later. The second Qualifier will also be at Eden Gardens on May 25 and the final at the Wankhede Stadium on Sunday May 27.

Sunrisers' bowling attack has been the most captivating to watch, but of late they've dipped somewhat. To take them to the final, the trio of Rashid Khan, Shakib Al Hasan and Siddarth Kaul will have to once again combine to flummox CSK on Tuesday, given that Bhuvneshwar Kumar has been off-colour all season. Kane Williamson has been tremendous and if he pulls of a gem or two, SRH will remain the team to beat.