



Speedy Bangladesh forward Mahbubur Rahman Sufil proved quite a handful for the Palestinian defenders during their AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers at the Khalifa City Sports Stadium in Manama yesterday. Despite a courageous effort, Bangladesh lost the match 1-0. PHOTO: BFF

Valiant U-23s go down fighting

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's hopes of qualifying for the final round of the AFC U-23 Championship were extinguished following a 1-0 defeat against Palestine, but not before the young men in red and green gave their much superior opponents a massive run for their money in their second Group B qualifying fixture at the Khalifa City Sports Stadium in Manama yesterday.

The Bangladesh team had shown tremendous character in their 1-0 defeat against hosts Bahrain two days ago, but that was a backs-to-the-wall kind of performance where they created very few chances of their own.

However, yesterday, Jamie Day's charges survived the initial onslaught and then bossed the Palestinians throughout the second half. Had it not been for a special goal from a long-range effort, the result might have been very different.

The Bangladesh coach brought three changes to his starting eleven, with goalkeeper Pappu Hossain replacing the injured Anisur Rahman, who was the best player for Bangladesh under the bar in the first match. Rahmat Mia and

Mohammad Al-Amin were also drafted in, in place of Matin Mia and Mohammad Ibrahim.

The Bangladesh team, however, were under pressure as soon as the game started, with Pappu having to make a decent save from a free-kick within the first minute. The goalkeeper was again called into action eight minutes later as he half-stopped a powerful shot, with the effort from the rebound going wide.

The Bangladesh defence proved difficult to break down, but an extraordinary effort from Palestine forward Hani Abdallah in the 22nd minute -- a fierce shot from 30 yards that swerved in the air -- undid Pappu's resistance as the ball found its way into the left-hand corner of the net.

But the goal hardly dampened the spirits of the young Bangladesh players and they launched a few attacks, most notably in the stoppage time of the first half when Mahbubur Rahman Sufil was released with a through-ball on a quick counter attack. The speedy forward released a superb cross, but the Palestine goalie intervened before the ball could reach his fellow forward Biplob Ahmed.

The young men in red and green started the second half brightly and bossed their opponents -- ranked 100th against Bangladesh's lowly

192nd in FIFA rankings for senior teams. Riyadul Hasan tried an acrobatic header that went wide in the 64th minute before Sufil's pace on a quick counter attack almost gave Bangladesh the equaliser six minutes later.

The diminutive forward sped past his marker and beautifully released a low cross for substitute Matin Mia, who rounded the Palestine goalkeeper, only to see his effort on goal cleared by a backpedalling defender.

Pappu produced an excellent one-handed save in the 90th minute against Palestine captain Oday Ibrahim while the Bangladesh players fought till the final whistle for the equaliser that never came.

Jamie Day was proud of his team's performance and felt they deserved more from this game. "We work hard as a team, maybe we are lacking a bit in creativity. It was a pretty good performance," he said after the match.

"In the two games, we pushed two very good teams. In the second half today, we were the better team and we created the better chances. We needed to take those chances. I thought we deserved something out of this game. But the work rate and the way they played, I can't praise them high enough," the Bangladesh coach said.

Storied rivalry: from myth to mere battle

SPORTS REPORTER



The age-old rivalry that once defined Bangladesh's sporting culture will play out today with much of the old lustre dimmed as archrivals Mohammedan

Sporting Club take on Abahani Limited for the first time in this season's Dhaka Premier League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

Be it in football, cricket or hockey, this fixture has been raising adrenalin among fans in this part of the world in the four decades since independence.

However, the once-strong fan base of the two clubs has gradually decreased to the extent that it has become a mere battle that draws on a myth for significance.

The battle between the once-famed shirts of the 'Sky Blues' and the 'Black and Whites' draws much of its hype from the media but over the years, the intensity surrounding the match-up has dipped drastically.

"The intensity is now reflected on the field but not in the stands these days. Previously we used to see fans of both clubs divided into two parts in the stands. Nowadays the stands remain empty with very few spectators, but us players keep our focus on the game. That is

how the Abahani-Mohammedan game going these days," Abahani skipper Mosaddek Hossain told reporters ahead of the much awaited Dhaka derby yesterday.

Abahani, however, have established a clear superiority over the past few years in the rivalry, having won the majority of games against Mohammedan in recent times.

With four wins in five games, table-toppers Abahani are once again eyeing the much-awaited derby but Mohammedan have been playing some good cricket as they have won three out of their five games so far.

Abahani, however, lost their four-match winning streak in their previous game against Prime Bank, when they succumbed to a 16-run defeat.

The likes of Soumya Sarkar, Nazmul Hossain, Sabbir Rahman, Mohammad Mithun, Rubel Hossain and, of course, the inspirational Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will all look to make a comeback in the league. They 'Sky Blues' also have in their ranks Indian recruit Wasim Jaffer, who has been in terrific form in the leagues so far.

Mohammedan, on the other hand, are banking on a bunch of experienced campaigners with skipper Raquibul Hasan alongside Tushar Imran, Mohammad Ashraful and Sohag Gazi in the lineup.



With Bangladesh's eternal rivals -- Abahani and Mohammedan -- set to face off in today's DPL match in Mirpur, Abahani's Soumya Sarkar and Mohammedan's Liton Das were hard at work gearing up for the encounter yesterday. PHOTO: BCB



Bangladesh women's team all-rounder Rumana Ahmed attained one of the highest individual honours when she was named in the 2018 ICC T20 team, a collection of the year's top performers in one squad. In recognition of her achievement, Rumana was given a team cap which she now proudly sports. PHOTO: STAR

Siddikur 15th in Malaysia

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman finished tied 15th in the three-million-dollar Maybank Championship in Malaysia yesterday.

The 34-year-old exchanged three birdies against two bogeys in the final round at the Saujana Golf and Country Club to finish with a total score of eight-under-par (280).

The performance helped Siddikur pocket a paycheck of \$40,560 dollars and lifted him to 13th in the Asian Tour Order of Merit.

Scott Hend of Australia won the title after a dramatic final round with a score of 15-under-par (273), beating Spain's Nacho Elvira in tie-break.

Four quizzed over 'fixing'

SPORTS REPORTER



The Match-fixing Identification Committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday interviewed four of the six players for 'suspicious behaviour' during the Bangladesh Premier League fixture between Saif Sporting Club and Chittagong Abahani on February 23.

The committee, headed by ex-secretary Humayun Khalid, interviewed Chittagong Abahani captain Monaem Khan Raju, midfielders Abdul Malek and Awala Magalan and Saif Sporting Club's captain Jamal Bhuiyan to learn their accounts of the match.

The match, played at the Shaheed Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh, had ended in a goalless draw. The other two players summoned

before the committee -- Saif SC forward Jafar Iqbal and defender Yasin Arafat are currently in Bahrain with the national under-23 team. They will be interviewed after their return, Humayun Khalid informed.

"Our committee had analysed video footages of that match and hence we called up a few players for the interview. We talked about various aspects of the game and their experience in the interview. This process will continue," Khalid told The Daily Star last night.

While the committee maintains that they started the investigation of the basis of a TV news report and went through video footage of the match before summoning the players, one of those called up, Chittagong Abahani midfielder Abdul Malek, was not even in the squad for the match.

Khalid defended calling up Malek

by saying: "We can hear about his experience and other things from the interview. We might call up other people for the investigation."

Jamal said he answered everything the committee asked him. "They asked me why we couldn't win and why we couldn't score. I told them draws are part of the game and not scoring is also part of the game. How would we benefit from not winning? I'm not like that. I play to win."

Chittagong Abahani skipper Raju reiterated his position as having nothing to do with the alleged match-fixing.

"I cannot comment on what they asked or what we said as it is under investigation, but I can say we didn't do anything wrong. Why would we play for one point? In fact, if it was not for a decision from the referee, we would have won the game," Raju said after attending the interview.

Fab Finch pummels Pak

AFP, Sharjah



Aaron Finch struck back-to-back centuries to lead Australia to another thumping eight wicket victory over a hapless Pakistan in the second one-day international in Sharjah on Sunday.

The Australian skipper smashed 143-ball 153 not out for his 13th ODI hundred -- also his highest score in ODIs -- to anchor Australia's comfortable chase of a 285-run target in 47.5 overs which gave them a 2-0 lead in the five-match series.

Finch, who scored 116 in Australia's eight wicket win in the first game at the same venue on Friday, put on a solid 209-run opening wicket stand with Usman Khawaja who made 109-ball 88.

Finch struck six sixes and 11 boundaries in a dominating innings, improving on his previous highest one-day score of 148 against Scotland at Edinburgh in 2013.

The victory was more memorable as it was 100th ODI match between the two.

Pakistan had replaced fast bowler Mohammad Amir with Mohammad Hasnain for rookie 18-year-old's first one-day and that left them more deeply inexperienced, having already rested six

main players from the series.

Finch and Khawaja thrived against the novice attack, with Finch striking two sixs in the final overs while Khawaja's knock had eight boundaries.

Finch completed his hundred with a couple off Hasnain on his 97th ball, making successive hundreds for a second time in his career. He scored consecutive hundreds against England in Australia last year. Khawaja fell to Yasir Shah with 76 needed while Glenn Maxwell cracked two sixs in his 19 before being run out.

Pakistan owd their total of 280-7 -- after winning the toss -- to Mohammad Rizwan's maiden century.

Rizwan, only playing because regular keeper and skipper Sarfraz Ahmed has been rested for the series -- added 52 for the third wicket with Haris Sohail (34) and an invaluable 127 for the fifth wicket with stand-in captain Shoaib Malik.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: 284 FOR 7 (Rizwan 115, Sohail 34, Malik 60; Richardson 2-16, Coulter-Nile 2-52)

AUSTRALIA: 285 for 2 in 47.5 overs (Khawaja 88, Finch 155 not out; Shah 1-60) Result: Australia won by 8 wickets and lead the 5-match series 2-0. Player-of-the-match: AJ Finch



Kolkata's Andre Russell stuck an unbeaten 49 as the side eclipsed Hyderabad's 181-run total with six wickets to spare in an IPL match at Eden Gardens yesterday. (Inset) Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan enjoyed a special privilege on his birthday, ringing the ceremonial bell to signal the game's start. PHOTO: KKR TWITTER & COLLECTED

Russell steals Warner's thunder

PTI, Kolkata



Andre Russell smashed an explosive 49 to spoil David Warner's IPL comeback as Kolkata Knight Riders pulled off a dramatic six-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad on Sunday.

Needing 53 runs from last three overs, the powerful Jamaican changed the course of the match with his big-hitting.

He assaulted Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who bled 19 runs in the penultimate over as KKR sealed the 182-run chase with two balls to spare.

In the day's second match, the Delhi Capitals defeated Mumbai Indians by 37 runs after Rishabh Pant's unbeaten 78 off just 27 balls.

The wicketkeeper-batsman hit seven fours and as many sixes, which took Delhi to an imposing 213 for six.

SCORES IN BRIEF

HYDERABAD V KOLKATA

HYDERABAD: 181 for 3 (Warner 85, Bairstow 39; Russell 2-32)

KOLKATA: 183 for 4 in 19.4 overs (Rana 68, Russell 49 not out; Rashid 1-26)

Result: Kolkata won by 6 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Andre Russell.

DELHI V MUMBAI

DELHI: 213 for 6 (Ingram 47, Pant 78 not out; McClenaghan 3-40)

MUMBAI: 176 all out in 19.2 overs (Yuvraj 53, Pandya 32; Sharma 2-34, Rabada 2-23)

Result: Delhi won by 37 runs.

Player-of-the-match: R Pant.