



Imrul helps Chattogram extend lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Chattogram Challengers moved a step closer to confirming their play-off spot in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) with a convincing six-wicket victory against Dhaka Platoon at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

With this win, Chattogram have now secured 12 points, with six wins out of eight matches.

It was however a dull contest, especially compared to the recently concluded Chattogram phase where most matches were high-scoring encounters.

Dhaka struggled to get off to a good start on a pitch that seemed to be on the slower side. The overnight rain had added to the sluggish nature of the wicket as the ball stopped a bit, which was later acknowledged by losing team captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza during the post-match press conference.

The innings played by Chattogram's stand-in skipper Imrul Kayes, who had adjusted to the situation of the match, proved to be crucial. Imrul had earlier said that he always tries to play according to the demands of the team and the match situation, and he paced his innings brilliantly. His unbeaten 53-ball 54 was just what the team needed to chase down Dhaka's modest 124 for nine with eight balls to spare.

Imrul, who is now second in the top-scorers' list with 289 runs -- just 11 behind Dawid Malan -- could however consider himself lucky as Dhaka skipper Mashrafe called him back when he was run out. The incident took place in the fourth over when Imrul had wandered out of the crease after playing a defensive shot and Mominul Haque took off the bails. Even though the on-field umpire had ruled him out, Mashrafe -- after talking to Tamim Iqbal -- decided to withdraw the appeal and allow Imrul to bat on as the batsman was not aware that he had left the crease.

After that Imrul was smart, sneaking singles when necessary while punishing bad deliveries

with confidence. The best one from his highlights reel would be the massive six he smashed off pacer Hasan Mahmud in the 18th over. The ball that sailed over midwicket only stopped after striking the walls of the second tier in the gallery.

However, even while chasing the modest total, Chattogram were in a spot of bother initially. The table-toppers lost both of openers inside four overs after adding just 25 runs. Imrul, who saw his team through a difficult situation, said that the mantra behind his batting was not panicking in crunch situations.

"Even in Chattogram we were in a difficult situation while chasing a 124-run total. At that time I thought that if there is a set batsman and he can bat through the innings, it becomes easier to win these type of matches. But it becomes difficult

SCORES IN BRIEF

DHAKA PLATOON: 124 for 9 in 30 overs (Tamim 21, Mominul 32, Wahab 23, Mashrafe 17 not out; Muktar 2-18, Burl 2-1)

CHATTOGRAM CHALLENGERS: 125 for 4 in 18.4 overs (Imrul 54 not out, Walton 25; Wahab 2-18)

Result: Chattogram won by 6 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Imrul Kayes.

if we panic. So, when I walked out there, I did not think about the strike rate. My plan was to finish off the game," Imrul said during the post-match conference.

Earlier, Dhaka Platoon could not build partnerships of note as they kept losing wickets at regular intervals. A team high of a 34-ball 32 came from Mominul Haque in the middle while a 15-ball 23 from Wahab Riaz and another unbeaten 12-ball 17 from Mashrafe at the death helped Dhaka get past the 120-run mark. Chattogram pacer Muktar Ali shone with the ball, returning impressive figures of two for 18.



Chattogram Challengers' stand-in skipper Imrul Kayes hit his third fifty of the ongoing BBPL to help guide his team past Dhaka Platoon's modest 124 for nine at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

SHORT CORNER

'India is not a safe country'

Former Pakistan captain Javed Miandad launched a scathing attack on India and urged International Cricket Council (ICC) to stop teams from touring the country.

In the wake of nation-wide protests in India against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Miandad asked the international cricket body to suspend all ties with India and hand them similar punishment which was given out to Pakistan.

"People should take note of what is going on in India. I urge the ICC to boycott them," Miandad said in a video uploaded on PakPassion.com. "Not Pakistan but

India is not a safe country for any tourist or anybody (sic). As human beings, we sportspeople should also stand up and condemn them." --AGENCIES

PCB puts onus on players in Kaneria issue

The Pakistan Cricket Board on Friday sought to distance itself from Shoaib Akhtar's assertion that his former teammate Danish Kaneria faced discrimination at the hands of fellow players for being a Hindu, saying that the PCB cannot be answerable for the allegation.

Akhtar sparked a furore when he said that Kaneria was humiliated

by some players because he was a Hindu, was not given due credit and some even refused to eat food with him because of his faith.

Kaneria asserted that Akhtar's statement was true and he would soon reveal names of the players who mistreated him because of his religion. The former spinner is serving a life ban for spot-fixing since 2012.

"Look both Akhtar and Kaneria are retired players they are not contracted to us so they can do or say what they want. It is their opinion. And they are making allegations about behaviour of some players not about the entire Pakistan cricket set-up or board," a Board spokesperson said. --PT

SA seize advantage

AFP, Centurion

Vernon Philander led a relentless South African bowling performance before England fought back on the second day of the first Test at Centurion's SuperSport Park on Friday.

Philander took four for 16 in 14.2 overs as South Africa appeared to have taken control by bowling out England for 181, a first innings lead of 103.

But England struck hard at the start of the second innings. South Africa were 72 for four at the close, an overall lead of 175 on a pitch which has proved difficult for batsmen throughout.

Philander, 34, who has announced he will retire from international cricket at the end of the four-Test series, produced a master class of control to complement the strike power of fast bowlers Kagiso Rabada (three for 68) and Anrich Nortje (two for 47).

Wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock equalled the South African Test record by holding six catches, a feat which had been accomplished six times before - on four occasions by new head coach Mark Boucher.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 284 and second innings 72 for 4 (Elgar 22, Du Plessis 20; Archer 2-37)

ENGLAND: First innings 181 all out (Denly 50, Root 29, Stokes 35; Rabada 3-68, Philander 4-16, Nortje 2-47)



PHILANDER... 4 for 16



Khulna Tigers pacer Shahidul Islam (L) made Mushfiqur Rahim (C) a happy skipper with figures of four for 23 against Rangpur Rangers in their BBPL match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Shahidul's bowling ensured a 52-run win as Rangpur could only manage 130 for nine in response to Khulna's 182 for seven.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Expectations not just on me'

SPORTS REPORTER

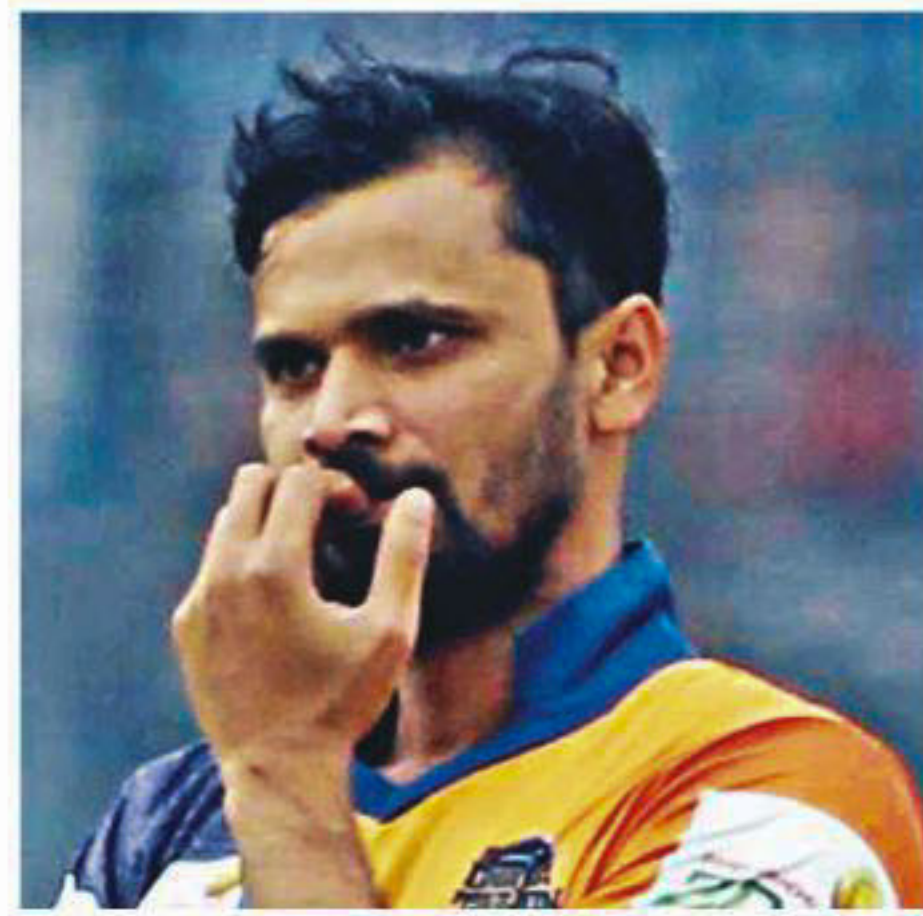


Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is still rated as the most successful captain in the history of the Bangladesh Premier League, despite the inspirational cricketer seemingly losing a chunk of his charisma since a dismal performance in the ICC World Cup earlier this year.

The 36-year-old, who took just one wicket in the flagship event, made a comeback to competitive cricket after nearly five months through the ongoing Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League.

But it has not been a smooth ride for Mashrafe. Even before the tournament started, the pacer's eventual inclusion in the Dhaka Platoon team was not short of drama. He was not drafted until the last moment despite being an A-plus category player and Dhaka eventually picked Mashrafe in the eighth round of the draft. It was learned that an integral member of the team had pushed the management to pick Mashrafe.

Following a six-wicket defeat against Chattogram Challengers yesterday, keeping Dhaka in third place in the points table with four wins in seven games, the four-time BPL-winning captain was asked



MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

whether he would be able to live up to the demands of his team owners this time too.

But unlike in the past when an optimistic Mashrafe would respond positively to such questions, it seemed a different person altogether as he replied: "The expectations are not just on me as it's the same for everyone else in the team. I almost remained unsold... so what's the point in expecting from me. If they had that expectation, I would have been sold in the first place. Actually, the owners could answer better. All the teams play with the

same amount of expectation. We will do whatever is required to remain in the hunt. We are in fourth [third] place in the points table and it's not that we are out of the race."

Perhaps Mashrafe's bowling performance against Chattogram yesterday was his best so far in the BBPL as he conceded just 14 runs from his four overs at an economy rate of 3.50, and also picked up a wicket, but the performance was in vain.

The third-highest wicket taker in the history of the BPL with 77 wickets has remained below par in the tournament so far as he picked up just four wickets in seven games at an economy rate of 8.09.

With this underwhelming record and the general impression that his bowling has lacked bite in the ongoing edition, it was only natural that Bangladesh's best pacer would be asked to assess his own performance thus far.

"I am actually not that bothered about my performance as I have returned to the field after a long time and I am trying my best. I am trying to adapt and sometimes it's going good and sometimes bad. I am going through ups and downs and I hope that as the tournament progresses... it's difficult to say anything in T20s like whether I will do well in this particular game or not. But I am trying to give my best," said Mashrafe.

Three captains in six games

SPORTS REPORTER

Languishing at the bottom of the table with four defeats in five games, a desperate Rangpur Rangers got their third captain in the sixth game of the ongoing Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) yesterday as former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson made his BPL debut as captain against Khulna Tigers.

It made no difference, however, as Rangpur lost their fifth game by a whopping 52 runs.

Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi led Rangpur in the first four games, all of which were lost. The team management replaced him with another foreign recruit in Tom Abell in the fifth game against Chattogram Challengers and eventually registered their first win of the season.

But despite the win under Abell, Rangpur opted for a new leader in their very next game in the form of Watson.

Rangpur missed out on Watson's considerable batting prowess yesterday as he was dismissed for just five. It will be interesting to see whether they continue with Watson until they lose three more matches or, if the past is a clue, they manage to win one.



Australia's Travis Head celebrates his century on the second day of the second Test against New Zealand in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Head leads Aus charge

AFP, Melbourne

Australia snatched two early wickets to leave New Zealand facing an uphill battle to stay in the second Test Friday as they chase the home team's 467, built on the back of a gritty 114 from Travis Head.

At the close on day two, the Black Caps were 44 for two with Tom Latham not out nine and Ross Taylor on two as a series defeat looms.

Captain Kane Williamson lasted only 14 balls, skying a James Pattinson delivery to wicketkeeper Tim Paine on nine while Tom Blundell, called up for the out-of-form Jeet Raval, was out to Pat Cummins for 15.

The visitors need to win to square the three-match series after crashing by 296 runs in the opening day-night clash in Perth.

Australia looked in complete control at tea on 431 for five, but they then collapsed to be all out for 467 within nine overs of the restart.

Skipper Paine departed for 79 seven balls after tea, with Mitchell Starc gone soon after for one. Australia started the day at 257 for four with Steve Smith on 77 and Head not out 25.

Head came into the match under pressure after a lean spell, but silenced his critics with only his second Test century, reaching three figures off 222 balls.

"It's very nice to contribute. It's pretty cool to score a Boxing Day hundred, nice to get my opportunity," said Head.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 467 all out (Warner 41, Labuschagne 63, Smith 85, Wade 38, Head 114, Paine 79; De Grandhomme 2-68, Wagner 4-83)
NEW ZEALAND: First innings 44 for 2.