



Mehedi Hasan Miraz's unbeaten 62-ball 87, laced with nine boundaries and three sixes, helped Khulna Tigers register a whopping eight-wicket victory against Sylhet Thunder at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Khulna chased down Sylhet's 157 for four with 13 balls to spare.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

All not well with Rangpur?

SPORTS REPORTER

With just one win in six matches so far in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL), the struggle on the field for Rangpur Rangers has affected the dressing room as well. Following sub-par performances, it was learned that team director Enayet Hossain Siraj's interventions in team management decisions have irked many within the Rangpur side.

During their game against Khulna Tigers on Friday, Rangpur had named wicketkeeper-batsman Zakir Hasan in the playing eleven. However, the opposition objected to Zakir's inclusion and Rangpur had to amend the playing eleven, including Shadman Islam in place of Zakir.

It was later revealed that Zakir was kept out of the Rangpur squad due to an injury sustained on the opening day of the BBPL, after which right-arm pacer Mukidul Islam was named as his replacement in the squad.

Zakir recovered from the injury after a week and the Rangpur team management decided to include the wicketkeeper-batsman in the squad.

This led to another problem for Rangpur as they exceeded the maximum number of local cricketers a team can sign. Zakir's re-inclusion swelled the number of local cricketers to 13, but according to the tournament's by-laws a team cannot have more than 12 local players.

According to sources close to developments, Rangpur had emailed the BCB technical committee about bringing back Zakir in place of another local batsman, Mohammad Al Amin Jnr, who was however not injured.

The technical committee did not approve Rangpur's request but despite that, Zakir was named in the playing eleven, a decision sources said was made by Siraj.

Discontent has also been brewing over Siraj's alleged interference in forming the playing eleven while ignoring suggestions of head coach Mark O'Donnell, team advisor Habibul Bashar, fellow team director Akram Khan and the captain.

Rangpur have so far fielded three captains in six games. Afghanistan all-rounder Mohammad Nabi was initially given the role to lead the team. But consecutive defeats in the first four games saw Nabi step down and English cricketer Tom Abell given the leadership for the fifth game.

But despite getting their maiden win in the tournament under Abell Rangpur once again changed their skipper when former Australian all-rounder Shane Watson, who joined the team the day before, was given the reins on Friday against Khulna Tigers.

"Is it my fault if I want to help the team? The players were taken for the betterment of the team. I do not find anything wrong if some needed changes are made to the team, recommended by the coaching staff. I have nothing to do if questions are being raised. I have been involved with cricket for a very long time," explained Siraj when quered about his alleged interference.

Prior to the BBPL, the BCB had appointed seven board directors as team directors of the respective teams. Former Bangladeshi captain Akram Khan was initially given the responsibility of Rangpur and had also formed the squad.

However, Siraj made a switch to Rangpur from Rajshahi Royals just a day before the start of the tournament under directions from the BCB. The board had made Siraj move to the new team as his business, Incepta Pharmaceuticals, had acquired sponsorship of Rangpur.

It was learned from sources close to developments that there had been tension between Siraj and Akram. With all the chaos and uncertainty off the field, it seems that Rangpur will be hard pressed to turn the tide of what has so far been a dismal season.

Eng keep hopes alive

AFP, Centurion



Rory Burns and Dom Sibley raised English hopes with a solid opening partnership after England were set a challenging 376 to win on the third day of the first Test against South Africa at SuperSport Park on Saturday.

England were 121 for one wicket at the close of play, needing another 255 runs to win.

The left-handed Burns and right-handed Sibley put on 92 for the first wicket before Sibley pushed back a run to left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj after making a patient 29.

Burns made 77 not out and saw out the day with first innings top-scorer Joe Denly, who was on 10.

It was an impressive innings by Burns, who made his runs off 117 balls and hit 11 fours. He was particularly strong on the leg side.

Burns was given out leg before wicket to Kagiso Rabada with his score on six in the first over but survived on review. On 20, he was dropped by Rassie van der Dussen at first slip off Vernon Philander.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 284 and second innings 272 all out (Elgar 22, Van der Dussen 51, Nortje 40, De Kock 34, Philander 46; Archer 5-102, Stokes 2-22).

ENGLAND: First innings 181 and second innings 121 for 1 (Burns 77 not out 77, Sibley 29; Maharaj 1-16).



ARCHER... 5 for 102

Pat puts Aus on the brink

AGENCIES, Melbourne



For the third time in as many innings in their three-match series against Australia, New Zealand's batting unit folded for a sub-200 total, as Australia ascended into a commanding position on the third day of their Boxing Day encounter at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Saturday.

Having closed out the second day's play on 44/2 in reply to Australia's first-innings 467, New Zealand crumbled in the face of another superb display of fast bowling from Pat Cummins, the world's top-ranked Test bowler.

Cummins' five-for underpinned the home team's dominance, as New Zealand were sent packing for 148, conceding a first-innings deficit of 319 runs. Tim Paine, however, refrained from reinserting the visitors. By stumps, Australia had moved to 137/4, with a 456-run lead in the kitty, and a victory firmly in sight.

Cummins was complemented brilliantly by James Pattinson, who had accounted for the all-important wicket of Kane Williamson on the second evening, before adding two more scalps on the third to finish with 3/34, while Mitchell Starc took the other two, winding up with 2/30.

"I was happy with how it all came

out today. I feel like I have been bowling well, especially the last couple of games," said Cummins after his 5-28 haul. "Today it felt like it all came together."

Paine could have enforced the follow-on, but opted to bat again and



Australia pacer Pat Cummins (R) celebrates after dismissing New Zealand's Tom Latham on the third day of the second Test in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Royals beat down Warriors

SPORTS REPORTER



Cumilla Warriors batsman Soumya Sarkar finally broke his jinx in the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League by scoring an unbeaten fifty, his first in over four years of the tournament, against Rajshahi Royals at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

However, it was all for naught as Cumilla fell just 15 runs short in chase of the 191-run target set by Rajshahi.

With five wins in six matches, Rajshahi are on the verge of confirming their playoffs spot while on the other hand Cumilla are struggling with just two wins in seven matches.

It was Soumya's second fifty in 58 BPL appearances. The last time the left-hander scored

up with South Africa's Stiaan van Zyl to help heal the initial blow, adding 46 runs for the third wicket.

Stiaan was eventually dismissed on 21 by a Shoaib Malik delivery but at the other end, Soumya looked composed. Soumya, who was then joined by Sabbir Rahman, was middling the ball quite well.

It was a big opportunity for the struggling Sabbir to impress seeing as he is yet to make an impact with the bat so far in the tournament. However, he disappointed once again and was dismissed on just 25 runs.

Although Soumya had reached his fifty off 36 balls by then, the required run rate proved too high to surmount as Cumilla needed 34 runs from the last over to win. Nevertheless, Soumya smashed Russell for two sixes and a four to take 19 runs in the final over but it was

too little too late.

Earlier, after being sent to bat, Rajshahi made a solid start with Liton Das and Afif Hossain adding 56 runs for the opening stand. Liton was dismissed after scoring 24, leaving the door open for Malik to join Afif and score some quick runs.

Afif might have looked to be in good touch early on but he eventually departed with 43 runs off 30 balls, which included six fours and a six, while Malik went on to smash his fifty off 35 balls.

Russell and Malik had come down hard on the Cumilla bowlers, adding 73 runs in the last five overs before the latter was finally run out with the last ball of the innings on a 38-ball 61, laced with five fours and three sixes. At the other end, Russell remained not out on 37 runs off 21 balls, featuring four sixes.



An all-round performance from Shoaib Malik (inset) had trumped Soumya Sarkar's unbeaten 48-ball 88 as Rajshahi Royals defeated Cumilla Warriors by 15 runs at the Sher-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

'Not enough evidence against Santokie'

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) anti-corruption unit have not found anything against Sylhet Thunder's West Indian pacer Krishmar Santokie, who was interrogated by the ACU for his suspicious wide and no-ball against Chattogram Challengers in the opening game of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League in Mirpur on November 11.

The 35-year-old left-arm seamer bowled a gigantic wide in his third delivery and two balls later bowled a huge no-ball in the second over of the innings which raised eyebrows in the cricket fraternity.

"Whenever there is any evident doubt, they (ACU) normally investigate the matter. The ACU may not have gotten any conclusive evidence in this issue and it is the reason why the matter did not come to us. Following media reports, they (ACU) have investigated the matter but in this case, they did not have enough evidence. I think that was the case in this matter too," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told the media

yesterday.

Earlier in the day BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus said that the anti-corruption unit have interrogated Santokie and that the report had been sent to the board.

"Santokie was interrogated for a long period by ACU members and they were looking deeply into his track record. It's not that the board is sitting idle without doing anything in this regard. They [ACU] had probably already provided their report to the board, although I am not sure about the decision that is placed in that report," Yunus said.

Sylhet are currently placed sixth in the seven-team table, having lost six of their seven games, including the one against Khulna Tigers last night.

Earlier, Sylhet team director Tanjil Chowdhury was quoted by some media outlets as saying that he had requested the BCB to investigate Santokie's wide and no-ball.

Tanjil was even quoted as saying that there was a lot of conflict between him and the team sponsors during the players draft and that he was not happy after the sponsors roped in Santokie, but later clarified in a social media post that there were no such issues.

SHORT CORNER

Indian lifter banned for doping

An Indian woman weightlifter, who won a silver medal at the Commonwealth Championships two years ago, has been given a four-year suspension for doping on Saturday, the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) said.

Seema's dope sample was collected this year during the 34th Women National Weightlifting Championship in Vishakhapatnam. "Presence of prohibited substances were found in her system during an ongoing Championship to enhance her performance which amounted to a clear cut case of cheating and outright violation of National Anti-Doping rules," the NADA said in a statement.

Seema won a silver medal in the 2017 Commonwealth Championships and finished sixth in the women's 75kg competition at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games in 2018.

-- PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

Root, Buttler join sick list

England captain Joe Root and wicketkeeper Jos Buttler joined England's lengthening sick list on the third day of the first Test against South Africa at SuperSport Park on Saturday. Buttler did not take the field at the start of play because he was feeling "unwell". Jonny Bairstow kept wicket and was due to keep the gloves at least until lunch.

Illness has swept through the touring party, with Jack Leach, Chris Woakes and Mark Wood remaining in quarantine at the team hotel on Saturday together with two members of the support staff.

South Africa meanwhile were left without opening batsman Aiden Markram, whose series has come to an end after suffering a fractured finger while fielding on Friday.

-- AFP