

SPORT 2019 IN REARVIEW



Mustafizur Rahman shone for Rangpur Rangers, bagging three wickets in yesterday's BBPL match against Sylhet Thunder.
PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Rangpur beat Sylhet in lacklustre match

SPORTS REPORTER

The first Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League fixture played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday, between Rangpur Rangers and Sylhet Thunder, was a low scoring encounter where dropped catches were the highlight.

Rangpur Rangers eventually won the match with seven wickets and 16 balls to spare but the low intensity was apparent on both sides, who are at the bottom of the points table.

This win, their second in seven matches, surely brought relief to Rangpur while Sylhet are virtually out of contention for the playoff phase with only one win in eight games.

In chase of the small 134-run target posted by Sylhet, Rangpur rode on the coattails of their South African batsman, Cameron Delpoit, who scored a blistering

50 to help the side register an easy win.

Rangpur did however being their chase badly, losing skipper Shane Watson for one through a brilliant Yorker from Ebadat Hossain. Rangpur did recover though with opener Mohammad Naim and Delpoit adding 99 runs for the second wicket.

The left-handed Delpoit played the role of aggressor, reaching his 50 off 24 balls before ultimately being dismissed on 63 runs off 28 balls, featuring five sixes and six fours.

Rangpur then lost another wicket cheaply when Lewis Gregory was sent back to the dressing room on just four. However, Naim remained not out on 38 runs off 50 balls, which included two fours and the same number of sixes, alongside Mohammad Nabi, who finished the job with an unbeaten 12-ball 18-run knock.

Earlier, Sylhet's struggles continued after being sent to bat as they kept losing wickets at regular intervals. Apart from a 47-ball 62 from Mohammad Mithun, none of Sylhet's other batsmen were able to make significant contributions as the side eventually posted 133 for nine from their allotted 20 overs.

Rangpur's left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman bagged three wickets while giving away just ten runs from his four overs. More importantly though, the seamer looked to be in fine rhythm after a below par start to the tournament.

The 24-year-old has made a fine return to form with eight wickets in the last three games, including the one against Sylhet yesterday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SYLHET THUNDER: 133 for 9 in 20 overs (Mithun 62, Rutherford 16; Mustafizur 3-10)

RANGPUR RANGERS: 134 for 3 in 17.2 overs (Naim 38 not out, Delpoit 63, Nabi 18 not out; Naveenul 2-13)

Result: Rangpur won by 7 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Mustafizur Rahman.

Liton, Asrorov knock out Abahani

Sean Lane's Mohammedan see off Ctg Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Goalkeeper Rasel Mahmud Liton produced two saves in the tiebreaker as minnows Rahmatganj knocked out three-time defending champions Abahani from the quarterfinals of the TVS Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The former national team goalkeeper showed excellent glove work all through the 90 minutes of regulation time which ended goalless, and after 30 minutes of extra time produced a 1-1 stalemate. Liton saved penalties from Sunday Chizoba and Kervens Belfort -- Abahani's two best players -- to lead his side to a stunning 4-3 victory.

It was the first time since 2017 that the Old Dhaka outfit made it to the last four of the season's curtain-raising tournament while the last time Abahani failed to make it to the semifinals was in 2015.

Abahani had a slew of chances to take the game by the scruff of its neck within the first 20 minutes, but incredible missed opportunities from Nabib Newaz Jibon and Sunday denied them from taking an early lead.

ABAHANI 1 (3) - 1 (4) RAHMATGANJ
(Belfort 94) (Enamul 119)

CTG ABAHANI 0 - 2 MOHAMMEDAN
(Shahed 25, Diabate 30)

Rahmatganj were very disciplined in defence, especially from set-pieces, yet Abahani had only themselves to blame for not making the most of their chances, with Jibon and substitute Jewel Rana wasting further opportunities.

The Sky Blues though, took the lead in the fourth minute of extra time when Belfort smashed home a volley on a long-ball from Mailson Veriato, but Rahmatganj found a way to take the game into tiebreakers, with substitute Enamul Islam Gazi taking advantage of Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam's poor judgement to head home the equaliser in the 119th minute.

The tie-breaker proved full of excitement as Liton saved two of five spot-kicks while Rahmatganj players converted all four they took, including a sublime panenka from Acpopob Asrorov, who had set up Enamul's equaliser moments earlier.

Abahani coach Mario Lemos was a frustrated man to say the least.

"My team did not play well today, everyone was poor. We created chances in the first half but we didn't play well overall," the Portuguese coach said. "They (Rahmatganj) fought and they ran. Maybe I should have made some changes."

Mohammedan stun Chattogram Abahani

Mohammedan booked their place in the semifinals of the Federation Cup for the first time since 2015 with a 2-0 win over Chattogram Abahani in the second quarterfinal later in the day.

Shahed Hossain opened the scoring for Mohammedan on 25 minutes with a placed shot on a miscued clearance from Ikbol Jon before Souleymane Diabate doubled the lead with a similar effort five minutes later.

It was game, set and match for the Black and Whites who showed tremendous spirit to keep the port city side, who had not conceded a single goal before this match, at bay.

Mohammedan coach Sean Lane attributed the camaraderie and teamwork between his players and the support of backroom staff to their success while Chattogram Abahani coach Maruful Haque blamed overconfidence of his players for the defeat.

Mohammedan and Rahmatganj will face off in the first semifinal on January 2.

AMLA TO JOIN KHULNA TODAY

Former South Africa batsman Hashim Amla will join Khulna Tigers today and is expected to feature in the ongoing BBPL from the upcoming Sylhet phase.

SCAN THE QR

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BCB served writ petition

SPORTS REPORTER

A Dhaka Third Division Cricket League club, Sabuj Bangla Krira Chakra, yesterday served a writ petition to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and ten other individuals, including the BCB president, CEO and Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis chairman.

In the petition, the club asked those concerned to declare the official tournament standings of the 2019-20 season and also to clarify the issue over the 'violation of tournament by-laws'.

Sabuj Bangla cricket committee secretary Riaz Ahmed Babu informed that those concerned are yet to declare the official standings and claimed this is due to a disorder created by the tournament committee.

The league, where 20 clubs took part, ended with Jatrabari Krira Chakra becoming

champions and Gulshan Cricket Club finishing as runners-up. According to the by-laws though, Dhaka Cricketers, instead of the Narayanganj Cricket Academy, would have played the eight-team Super League phase of the tournament.

"We have a very simple query, how come two rules are being followed to break a tie in points between two teams? If tournament by-laws are to be followed, then Narayanganj Cricket Academy would not have qualified for the Super League. How come they are following two rules to solve one similar incident?" Reaz told the media yesterday.

According to Reaz, the recipients of the legal notice have seven working days to respond. In case of a no-reply from the tournament authorities, the issue will automatically go to the court.

Meanwhile, CCDM coordinator Amin Khan informed that the organisation are yet to receive any letter regarding the issue.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

Had it not been for the South Asian Games towards the end of the year, it would have been really difficult to gauge the performance of myriad sports, which do not get the exposure and competitive platforms that cricket and football have. Thankfully, the 13th SA Games was held in Nepal from December 1 to 10, and it proved to be a proper platform to judge the feedback of the effort and investment in the 'other sports'. The Bangladesh Olympic Association ran five-month camps ahead of the Games in most of the 25 disciplines that Bangladesh contested in the regional multi-sport extravaganza but unfortunately, many of those disciplines failed to deliver on the promises of their federation officials. Had it not been for a clean sweep of gold medals in archery and slightly surprising successes in karate and wushu, the country would have had little to cheer about from the Games. The following is a look back on the performance of those sports over the last year in light of the SA Games, and also a look back at what was good, bad and ugly about sports in general.

THE GOOD



Bangladesh archery team's clean sweep of gold medals in the 13th South Asian Games was a result of proper planning and investment. PHOTO: COLLECTED

ARCHERY SHOWS THE WAY

The meteoric rise of archery as a forerunner among sporting disciplines in Bangladesh owes a lot to the planned investment and performance appraisal by the federation as well as the sponsors. The sport, which is only 12 years old in Bangladesh, helped the country win more than half of their SA Games gold haul, making a clean sweep of gold at the archery ground in Pokhara. With Ruman Sana spearheading the gold rush, Bangladesh found a few new stars, including 14-year-old Ety Khatun who, like Sana, won three gold medals. This performance was the culmination of a successful year for archery, which saw Sana win a gold medal in the Asia Cup following a bronze medal in the World Archery Championship, which also earned him direct qualification into next year's Olympics.

The success of the karatekas, who won three gold medals as well as three silver and 12 bronze medals, was a welcome relief for Bangladesh, a country not known for success in combat sports. Likewise, success from weightlifters, wrestlers, wushu and taekwondo athletes helped Bangladesh finish fifth out of seven South Asian countries.

A FRESH SPARK IN CHESS

Chess is one of the disciplines about which Bangladesh once had much to boast. The country, which gave the subcontinent its first Grand Master in Niaz Murshed, lost its way and started to lag behind India over

the last three decades, producing only four more GMs since Niaz. However, it seems as if the long wait for another GM -- it has been 12 years since Bangladesh's last -- will soon end as there are a few new faces in the block who are giving their senior compatriots a run for their money. Fahad Rahman, long considered the next big thing in domestic chess, filled the prerequisites to

become an International Master by beating seniors and earning a place in the Chess Olympiad this year.

Manon Reja Neer, a nine-year-old prodigy from Chattogram, created a buzz by becoming the youngest chess player to qualify for the national league. He went on to upset a few stalwarts in the national league before ending the year with a runners-up trophy in the prestigious Telegraph School Chess in Kolkata.



Nine-year-old Manon Reja Neer was one of the brightest sparks in chess. PHOTO: STAR FILE

THE BAD

WOODEN SPOON IN FIVE DISCIPLINES, DISAPPOINTMENT IN ATHLETICS AND SWIMMING

In the 13th SA Games, Bangladesh won a total of 142 medals from 23 disciplines, including 19 gold medals -- the country's best ever feat in the history of the Games. However, when one considers that the number of gold medals on offer this time was twice as many as the edition which had produced their previous best, there is little reason for the sports guardians of the country to bask in glory. There were a few high points, but those were far outnumbered by frustrating outcomes for Bangladesh during the 10-day meet. The country failed to win a single medal in as many as five disciplines -- basketball, volleyball, cycling, squash and tennis. Athletics and swimming -- two of the major disciplines in any multi-sport games

-- continued their regression while shooting, an erstwhile goldmine for Bangladesh, failed to deliver a gold medal for only the second time in the Games' history. Kabaddi, the country's national sport, had given cause for optimism after Bangladesh won the bronze medal in the inaugural Junior Kabaddi World Championship in Iran in November. However, that optimism soon turned into disappointment after both the men's and women's teams returned with bronze medals from the SA Games in December.

FOOTBALL'S FALSE DAWN

Football was another big disappointment in this regional meet. After 15 months of consistent performances under Jamie Day, there was optimism about the team regaining the regional title which Bangladesh won only twice. However, despite fielding a

team featuring most of the national squad players and despite the absence of India and Afghanistan, the booters returned home with a bronze medal.

STALEMATE IN HOCKEY

Hockey had a quiet year in 2019. There was a peaceful transition of power through a long-awaited election, which should have opened up avenues for competitions to be held on time, but there was no club cup or premier league held at all. The only hockey activity in the country was a Test series between Bangladesh U-21s against Oman U-21s at home and then the women's hockey team's maiden participation in Junior Women's AHF Cup in Singapore. The long-term absence of new general secretary Mominul Haque Shaeed, who did not return to Bangladesh following September's casino raids, left the sport in limbo.

THE UGLY

If the poor performance of athletes was not enough reason to worry for sports officials, there were enough off-field incidents that made sportspeople and sporting authorities hide their faces in shame.

CASINOGATE

The country's sporting fraternity was rocked in September by Casinogate, a drive carried out by law enforcement agencies at the Club Para in Motijheel. The drive unearthed illegal gambling machines at some of the pioneering sporting clubs of the country, including Mohammedan Sporting Club, Wanderers' Club, Victoria Sporting Club, Youngmen's Fakirerpool Club, Arambagh Krira Shangha and Muktijoddha Sangsad Krira Chakra. All of these clubs used to be pioneering institutions in our sports, and even if some of the clubs had lost ground to more modern clubs in terms of sporting achievements in recent decades, it was quite a shock to everyone to see that these clubs had turned into a nexus of nefarious activities. The fallout from this revelation has had a deep and lasting impact on the country's sports, football and hockey in particular, as these clubs are struggling to find a way out of this mess and relocate themselves into mainstream sporting culture once again.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Casinogate was not the only dark revelation in sports in the last one year, there were also reports of violence against women, both



Law enforcement agencies busted illegal gambling activities in several sports clubs of Dhaka in an unprecedented raid in September which unearthed the decadence of these sporting institutions and battered the dignity and integrity of sporting culture of the country. PHOTO: STAR FILE

of sexual and non-sexual nature, exposing the dangers of being a female sportsperson in the country still in the 21st century. A Japanese swimming coach left his job and the country after witnessing torture on a teenage swimmer under the auspices of other coaches and officials at the Bangladesh Swimming Federation while an expatriate teenage tennis player resorted to law enforcement agencies after being sexually harassed by a high official of Bangladesh Tennis Federation. Unfortunately, none of the perpetrators of either incident have been brought to book for their offences, even though the tennis official lost his position in the aftermath of

his misdeed.

In 2018, a case of sexual offence against a teenage weightlifter inside the National Sports Council had made nationwide headlines, prompting protests from all quarters and eventually forcing authorities into action against the offender. But these incidents showed that that was not just a one-off incident, rather a pattern of predators preying on vulnerable female athletes. So long as these incidents are not met with proper remedies and punitive measures, there could be repetitions of such heinous crimes too often.

Atique Anam