



Shakib Al Hasan made a solid albeit unspectacular return to cricket through the Bangabandhu T20 Cup, picking up one wicket and scoring 15 in the day's second game between Barishal and Khulna. However, he was upstaged, at least on the night, by 23-year-old Mahedi Hasan, who scored the tournament's first half-century in the opening game for Rajshahi before holding his nerve while bowling the final over against Dhaka to secure a two-run win.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Mahedi stars in opener

SPORTS REPORTER



A cracker of a start to the Bangabandhu T20 Cup saw Mahedi Hasan's incredible last over lead Minister Rajshahi to a scintillating two-run win over Beximco Dhaka in yesterday's first game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Following a crucial fifty that helped Rajshahi post a challenging 170, Mahedi remained equally instrumental with his off-spin in the last over when Dhaka required nine to win with an on-song Muktar Ali on strike.

Muktar struck three sixes off seamer Farhad Reza in a 19th over that cost 21 runs and brought the equation down from thirty off twelve balls to nine from six as the game went down to the wire.

But Mahedi held his nerve, opting to bowl a bit quicker in the blockhole and the strategy paid off. Mahedi managed to bowl three dot balls to Mukhtar, who had a proper batsman in the form of Sabbir Rahman at the other end on five.

However, Muktar managed to smash a boundary off the fourth ball, leaving Dhaka with five needed off the last two balls and there was yet another twist in the tale as Mahedi bowled a no-ball off his next delivery.

But Muktar failed to capitalise and, with five needed off the final delivery, he was unable to connect.

Earlier, despite losing three wickets inside seven overs, Dhaka looked on track with skipper Mushfiqur Rahim and Akbar Ali adding 71 for the fourth wicket. The Bangladesh Under-19 World Cup-winning skipper departed after scoring 34 off 29 balls as the pressure began to mount with

Dhaka needing another 44 runs off 26 balls.

The demands of the situation seemingly required skipper Mushfiqur to guide his side through, but the experienced cricketer once again could not resist the temptation to play his trademark scoop over the wicketkeeper's head. His valuable scalp was claimed by pacer Ebadot Hossain as the batsman was caught behind going for the innovative scoop after scoring 41 off 34 with three fours and a six.

Rajshahi made a decent start to the first innings, buoyed by opener Anisul Islam

"It is really difficult for a team to win with players scoring 30 or 40 runs. I think, if any one of us who got set, played a 60-plus innings then we could have won the game. But I am really happy as we got a good start to the tournament as everyone looks to be in good touch. So, I hope that the in-form players make sure that they score big in the next matches."

MUSHFIQUR RAHIM
CAPTAIN, BEXIMCO DHAKA

Emon and skipper Najmul Hossain before the latter departed for seventeen. Emon also departed after a promising 23-ball 35 and Rajshahi went on to lose three quick wickets. Muktar bagged two of those with his pace bowling, including Mohammad Ashraful on five after he was caught brilliantly at point by Naim Sheikh.

It was then the man of the match Mahedi and Nurul Hasan that added a quick 89-run sixth-wicket stand that lay the foundation for a challenging total. Nurul departed on 39 off 20 while Mahedi scored the only fifty of the game from 32 balls, a knock that included four sixes and three fours.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Fortune Barishal: 152 for 9 (Parvez 5; Shafiqul 2-27, Shahidul 4-17)
Gemcon Khulna: 155 for 6 (Jahurul 31, Ariful 48 not out, Shamim 26; Taskin 2-33, Shumon 2-21)
Result: Khulna won by four wickets.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Minister Rajshahi: 169 for 9 (Mahedi 50, Nurul 39, Emon 35; Muktar 3-22)
Beximco Dhaka: 167 for 5 (Mushfiqur 41, Akbar 34; Mahedi 1-22)
Result: Rajshahi won by two runs.

SPORTS REPORTER



Like the tournament opener earlier yesterday, the second match of the Bangabandhu T20 Cup was full of drama and suspense as Gemcon Khulna rode on the last over heroics of Ariful Haque to clinch a sensational four-wicket win over Fortune Barishal at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Chasing a 153-run target, Khulna were left needing 22 off the last over. But Ariful provided a grandstand finish by smiting off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz for four incredible sixes to register a memorable win.

Despite Khulna losing wickets at regular intervals, Ariful hung in till the end and the right-hander remained unbeaten on a match-

winning 34-ball 44.

Khulna's star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan made a return to cricket after serving a one-year ban, but it was their pacers that led the way, with seamer Shahidul Islam bagging four wickets and young quickie Hasan Mahmud and Shafiqul Islam picking up two each to restrict Barishal to 152 for nine after 20 overs.

Young Parvez Hossain top-scored with 51 off 42 balls, an innings that included four sixes and three fours but none of the other batsman were able to make a mark.

Yet, all eyes were understandably on Shakib and he was introduced into the attack in the seventh over. The left-armed gave away just three runs in the first over and, more importantly, bowled a beautiful line and length.

It did not take long for him to pick up his first wicket as he removed Afif Hossain with his

first ball of the second over with a rather loose half-tracker.

Shakib ultimately bowled three overs in the innings and conceded 18 runs but he seemed to be gradually getting into the groove.

The champion cricketer also showed a glimpse of his class with the bat as well when he came in to bat at number three after the early dismissal of Anamul Haque in the chase.

He remained cautious at the start and started to gain momentum and smashed pacer Sumon Khan for a classical cover drive reminiscent of the Shakib that we saw the ICC World Cup last year.

However, Shakib's promising innings came to an end sooner than expected and he departed for 18 off 15 as he was caught at deep square leg after attempting to pull a banged-in delivery from Sumon.

The pitfalls between beauty and duty

BISHWAJIT ROY

The tragic demise of a young cricketer because he could not quite crack it at the highest level brought to mind the forays of an all-time great -- former Australia skipper Steve Waugh's journey earlier this year through India with a camera to rediscover the joys of cricket, the love that keeps an entire population agog.

Waugh said with all the ill-feeling surrounding the infamous Sandpapergate scandal in Cape Town in 2018, when Australia and the wider cricketing world were shocked by the team's leadership decided to indulge in ball-tampering, he just wanted to do a "feel-good" project that he was "passionate about".

Among many others, Waugh came across a three-year-old Instagram batting sensation, a 100-year-old playing the game and was inspired by blind and differently abled players.

The joys that were captured by the lens of one of the greatest captains in the game's history were mostly of people playing the game at the informal, non-professional level.

But if we train the camera on the other end of the spectrum, will the images be the same?

The death of Sajibul Islam Sajib, a member of the 2018 Bangladesh Under-19 World Cup squad who died by suicide on November 15, reminds us of the dark side of the cutthroat demands of modern-day professional cricket.

Sajib was reportedly suffering mentally after not being considered for a competition. His tragic story may have grabbed headlines, but we do not know the number of young men who are battling depression and hopelessness after failing to make the highest level in a sport that they have loved from childhood.

The feel-good factor seen in Waugh's photos, where the simple love and enjoyment of the game is all that mattered, seems to start diminishing the higher up the professional ladder the player climbs. Appetite for success takes over from the thirst for joy when hopefuls enter a structure, where the line between failure and success is all too well-defined.

Every aspiring cricketer wants to be the best and soon wind up

carrying more weight than they can withstand. Much like other children are overburdened with schoolbags loaded with books, budding cricketers are bent double under the strain of bulging kit bags and long-nurtured dreams.

For many, it's also a way out and a way up.

The joy and love of the sport that started the likes of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim on the path to greatness soon vanish amid cricket's unavoidable lure. It is not just name and fame budding cricketers chase, but cricket -- especially over the last two decades in Bangladesh -- offers a way out of hardship as the sport has

Sajib's demise, Marcus Trescothick and Jonathan Trott's battles with depression, point to this divide between the joy that young boys and girls start out with and the pressures and hopelessness they feel at professional levels.

Waugh himself was a paragon of professionalism over an international career stretching nearly two decades, but even he was left seeking the soul of the game.

Is there anything wrong with a professional approach? Perhaps not, but the question is whether professionalism is the solution to everything and whether there is space inside this professionalism to take care of budding cricketers from



become synonymous with wealth.

Famous writer Eduardo Galeano once wrote: "The history of football is a sad voyage from beauty to duty. When the sport became an industry, the beauty that blossoms from the joy of play got torn out by its very roots."

In Bangladesh's context, with the crores to be made by top-level cricketers, Galeano's words apply if "football" is substituted by "cricket".

This dichotomy between beauty and duty is encapsulated by the country's best cricketer -- Shakib. His recent off-field incidents point to greater priority given to gaining more wealth, which made the headlines for all the wrong reasons.

a mental perspective, especially in Bangladesh.

We operate within a cricketing culture that has left little space for cricketers outside the glittering glow of national focus to feel secure.

If the powers that be can begin changing this state of affairs, developing a new more inclusive culture, then perhaps Sajib's tragedy would have resulted in something positive.

But what is more likely is that, as cricket returned yesterday with the Bangabandhu T20 Cup, off-field events ranging from the tragedy of Sajib to Shakib's indiscretions will be lost amid the glow of Mirpur's floodlights.



Booters' endeavour for fitness

Fit-again Jibon to fly to Doha today

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh national football team will look to get fitter ahead of the World Cup qualifier against Qatar as they take on Qatar Army, an amateur side, in one of two warm-up matches at the Al Azizyah Boutique ground in Doha today.

With head coach Jamie Day away from the team, the men in red and green have been training under assistant coach Stuart Watkiss over the last three days following a 72-hour quarantine at the team hotel. Yesterday they had nearly one-and-a-half hour's training with the ball and a 30-minute gym session in a quest to getting fitter for the December 4 match.

Bangladesh played two FIFA international friendlies against Nepal before flying for Doha on November 19, but they lacked fitness, cohesion and energy in those two matches, the first of which they won 2-0 before playing out a goalless draw in the second match.

"The main objective [of this practice match] is to get in shape and get some organisation of the team, going into the Qatar game. Obviously we are focusing on full fitness and emphasising on hard working game with organisation and structure of the team. There is no expectation on the result [from the warm-up match]; if we work hard and have good possession of the ball, we will win the game," goalkeeping coach Les Cleeveley said.

A Bangladesh Football Federation statement said that yesterday's practice session focused on activation, passing practice, short games, game training and set-plays and that all players and officials were motivated to perform their level best for today's match.

It has been learnt that Watkiss may field almost the same playing eleven that started against Nepal, with Mahbubur Rahman Sufil and Sohel Rana likely to come in place of Suman Reza and Nabib Newaj Jibon.

Jibon, however, has already recovered from a knee injury which he sustained during the second match against Nepal in Dhaka and he is scheduled to fly to Doha today. "I was in full bed rest in the last six days and took medicine which physio Andre Joan suggested me. Now there is no pain on my knee. Joan, having discussed the matter with Jamie Day, asked me to join with the team for training," said Jibon, who is hoping to play against Qatar with only nine days remaining for the game

All the pressure on Real

STAR SPORT DESK



Real Madrid and Inter Milan will meet for a crunch Champions League fixture at the San Siro tonight and both sides will be desperate for a win as they stand on the verge of an embarrassing exit.

Group B might reflect reality more accurately if the standings were reversed, but as things Real Madrid and Inter Milan occupy the last two spots in the group. Borussia Mochengladbach are on top with five points and Shakhtar Donetsk in second with four, equal with Real but ahead on goal difference. Inter, who are winless after three games, have two points and are languishing in fourth.

Zinedine Zidane's plight -- which was exemplified by a loss to a Shakhtar side missing 13 senior players due to Covid-19 -- has been exacerbated by the absence of six players, but Casemiro has recovered and is expected to play a role.

Inter, meanwhile, will be without Marcelo Brozovic, Aleksandar Kolarov and Daniele Padelli -- all afflicted by COVID-19 -- but will welcome back the dynamic Stefano Sensi. However, they will be under the same kind of pressure as Los Blancos simply because Inter have not progressed from the group stages of the Champions League since 2011-12. Their best result in Europe since was last season's run to the UEFA Europa League final, where they were beaten by Sevilla.

That ticket to Europa was provided by Antonio Conte's men finishing third in their group in the Champions League last season, behind Dortmund and Barcelona.

On the other hand, Real Madrid have never failed to reach the last 16. Real will be hoping that Eden Hazard can conjure some magic for them, while Inter's hopes will bank squarely on the performance of Romelu Lukaku, the fourth deadliest striker in 2020 with 29 goals. Elsewhere, a tough test awaits Liverpool against last season's semifinalists, Atalanta, as Jurgen Klopp finds himself without a large number of first-choice players but the positive news is the return of Mohamed Salah, who recovered from Covid-19 and can join a formidable attack with in-form Diogo Jota, Sadio Mane and Roberto Firmino.

The task should be simpler for reigning champions Bayern Munich, who will aim to continue re-writing the history books by extending their record of consecutive Champions League wins to 15 against RB Salzburg. The Bavarians have been perfect with three wins out of three.



Vinicius Jr has been the X-factor for Real Madrid numerous times and he will be hoping to make the most of any playing time that comes his way against Inter Milan. However, his starting spot has been clouded by the return to fitness of Eden Hazard.

PHOTO: TWITTER