


Mash magic sees Khulna in final

Firebrand Mushfiquir keeps Dhaka alive

SPORTS REPORTER

 Mashrafe Bin Mortaza rolled back the years, taking five wickets as a fired-up Gemcon Khulna gunned down high-flying Gazi Group Chattogram with a comprehensive 47-run victory in the first qualifier to reach the final of the Bangabandhu T20 Cup yesterday.

The former ODI skipper for the Tigers became only the second pacer for Bangladesh to pick up 150 wickets in this format after Mustafizur Rahman with his maiden five-wicket haul, helping Khulna bundle out their opposition for 163 runs.

It always looked like a tough ask for Chattogram chasing 211 runs as Mashrafe got into rhythm right away and got rid of the two big guns -- Soumya Sarkar for naught and Liton Das for 24 -- very early in the innings.

The veteran pacer, who was roped in by Khulna in the middle of the tournament following his eight-month hiatus from competitive cricket -- put the brakes on the chase by picking up those two wickets with great line and length and clever variation of pace. He went on to pick three more wickets and ended up with the figures of five for 35, announcing himself in this tournament in grand style.

Skipper Mohammad Mithun kept Chattogram's hopes alive but his departure for 53 put paid to those hopes. The port city side, however,



Gemcon Khulna players joined in the fun with Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who returned career-best T20 figures of 5 for 35 to dismantle Gazi Group Chattogram innings in the qualifier 1 of the Bangabandhu T20 Cup in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

will get one more shot at the final berth when they take on Beximco Dhaka in the second qualifier today. Earlier, Khulna's batting fired on all cylinders at the right time after being sent in to bat, courtesy of a blistering start from Jahurul Islam. The veteran right-hander, along with his partner Zakir Hasan, added 71 runs for the first wicket before the latter departed for 17.

Jahurul, however, went on and

reached his fifty off 33 balls while Imrul Kayes, who was making a comeback to the side, kept the tempo before his dismissal for 25.


Jahurul continued his aggressive approach while Shakib Al Hasan joined the party as the left-hander seemed to return to his groove.

Jahurul departed for a well-made 51-ball 80, an innings featuring four sixes and five fours. If Jahurul's innings laid the platform for a

big total, skipper Mahmudullah Riyad made sure that big became mammoth with a whirlwind nine-ball 30, which included three consecutive sixes against young pacer Shoriful Islam.

Shakib struck a couple of sixes and fours for his tournament-highest 28 before departing in the last over as Khulna added 77 runs off the last five overs to post 210 for seven in 20 overs.

SPORTS REPORTER

 On the same pitch which produced 441 runs in one of the group stage matches of the ongoing Bangabandhu T20 Cup, Beximco Dhaka yesterday managed to defend a sub-par total of 150 runs, beating Fortune Barishal by nine runs in eliminator.

Skipper Mushfiquir Rahim marshalled his troops with great authority, if at times with a bit too much of aggression, as the Dhaka bowlers kept the pressure till the end to restrict Barishal to 141 for nine in 20 overs. The victory helped Dhaka qualify for the second qualifier while eliminating Barishal from the tournament.

Coming to chase a modest target, Barishal batters looked shaky right from the start as they lost opener Saif Hasan for 12. Barishal kept on losing wickets at regular intervals and played away too many dot balls -- 51 to be precise during the course of the innings, which proved vital in the final reckoning.

Young Parvez Hossain one was of those who succumbed to the early pressure, with the left-hander perishing while trying to go for a big shot against off-spinner Robiul Islam. Parvez lost his castle and gave the first success to Robiul, who finished with brilliant figures of 15 for one in four overs.

Tamim, barely recovered from his physical discomfort, looked uncomfortable throughout his 28-ball 22. The opener eventually handed a straight-forward catch at deep square-leg against Muktar Ali, who bagged three wickets.

Afif Hossain led the charge for Barishal with a 35-ball 55, featuring four gorgeous sixes and three fours, but his dismissal off the bowling of Shafiqul Islam, who ended with three wickets, signalled the end of Barishal's chances.

Credit must go to the Dhaka bowlers, who gave away only three extras and were always kept on their toes by Mushfiquir. The

wicketkeeper-batsman, known to be a very emotional individual, did not shy away from expressing raw emotion every time a poor delivery was bowled or a sloppy fielding effort took place in the field.

The former Bangladesh captain was extremely animated on one occasion and gave a bit of a dressing-down to Nasum Ahmed after the two almost collided while going for the catch of Afif at short fine-leg in the final ball of the 17th over, bowled by Shafiqul Islam. The collision was just avoided and Mushfiquir held on to the catch, but the skipper made Nasum feel the heat, attempting to throw the ball at him before being calmed by his teammates.

Earlier, Barishal bowlers did well



to reduce Dhaka to 25 for three in the Powerplay, including the dismissal of previous-match centurion Naim Sheikh for five.

Mushfiquir steadied the ship with support from Yasir Ali, the two resurrecting the innings from the disastrous situation.

Mushfiquir was dismissed for a 30-ball 43 but Yasir went on to score his second fifty of the tournament before being dismissed for a 43-ball 54. Young Akbar Ali played a cameo of 21 runs off nine deliveries to help Dhaka post 150 for eight, which eventually proved to be a winning score.



CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ROUND OF 16

Messi battles Neymar as Liverpool face German guns

REUTERS

 Barcelona will face Paris St Germain and former striker Neymar while title holders Bayern Munich are up against Italy's Lazio in the last 16 of the Champions League after UEFA's draw was held on Monday.

The clash of Lionel Messi and Barca with last year's runners-up PSG is a repeat of their remarkable meeting at the same stage in 2017 when Barca overcame a 4-0 first leg loss to beat the French club 6-1 in Spain with Neymar scoring twice for the Catalans.

"We know them (PSG) well, they've got some exceptional players. Paris want to fight for the Champions League, last year they came very close to winning it and they want to go one better this time round, but we've got something to say about that," said Guillermo Amor, Barcelona's Director of Institutional Relations. Bayern will start as favourites in

ROUND OF 16
Borussia Moenchengladbach v Manchester City
Lazio v Bayern Munich
Atletico Madrid v Chelsea
RB Leipzig v Liverpool
Porto v Juventus
Barcelona v Paris St Germain
Sevilla v Borussia Dortmund
Atalanta v Real Madrid
***First legs to be played on February 16, 17, 23, 24.
Second legs to be played on March 9, 10, 16, 17.
***The draw for the quarter-finals, semi-finals and final will take place on March 19.

their tie but will be wary of Simone Inzaghi's Lazio team who have reached this stage for the first time in 20 years.

"Lazio are an uncomfortable opponent, you saw that in the group," said Bayern sports director Hasan Salihamidzic. "It is always uncomfortable against Italian teams."

Premier League champions Liverpool will play last year's semi-finalists RB Leipzig creating a match-up between Germany's most highly

rated young coach Julian Nagelsmann of Leipzig with Liverpool's Juergen Klopp, the country's number one coach. Liverpool are unbeaten in their last ten matches against German teams in all European competitions, a run going back to 2002.

13-times European champions Real Madrid face Serie A club Atalanta, who reached the quarter-finals in their first Champions League campaign last season. Real have won ten of their last eleven games with Italian clubs.

Atletico Madrid will face Chelsea in a game which could include the return of striker Diego Costa to Stamford Bridge. Manchester City will take on Borussia Moenchengladbach, who are in the last 16 for the first time in the Champions League era.

Italian champions Juventus will face Porto, a game where Cristiano Ronaldo will return to his homeland Portugal.

The two legged ties will be played from Feb. 16

Gerard Houllier dies at 73

REUTERS, PARIS

Former France manager Gerard Houllier, who rebuilt Liverpool from Premier League underachievers into a cup treble winning side in 2001, has died aged 73, his former club said on Monday.

RMC sport and sports daily L'Equipe said Houllier, who also coached Paris St Germain, Olympique Lyonnais and Aston Villa, died after having a heart operation in Paris.

After an insignificant playing career in France's lower leagues, Houllier began coaching in 1973, earning his first big job with Lens before taking over at Paris St Germain. He became France's assistant coach in 1988 and then manager in 1992 but had a short, unsuccessful spell in charge.

A diamond in the rough

ANISUR RAHMAN



After a seven-year hiatus, the third edition of women's football league just drew to a close on Sunday with the star-studded Bashundhara Kings becoming the new, undisputed champions, thanks to national forwards Sabina Khatun, Krishna Rani Sarkar and Tahura Khatun in their roster to make the key difference with other teams.

The prolific trio together scored 72 goals out of 249, struck in 42 league matches by over 60 players, without facing much challenge from the opponents but former national age-group right-back-turned forward Sadia Akter of Jamalpur Kacharipara Ekadosh came into the spotlight after slotting a stellar double hat-trick in a 7-1 win over FC Uttar Bango, a feat even Sabina, Krishna and Tahura could not achieve in the league though they had struck a few hat-tricks.

Having skipped the first-leg of the league due to SSC examination, Sadia began playing for Kacharipara Ekadosh in the second leg and helped her side finish third behind champions Bashundhara and Nasrin Sports Academy, also an outfit full with national players. The 16-year-old struck seven goals in six matches.

Sadia is not new to competitive football as she played for national U-14 and national U-16 team in Sri

Lanka and Tajikistan in 2013 and 2016 respectively after debuting through Bangamata Primary Gold Cup in 2012. She has also been in the camp of national U-19 team in 2019 but the BKSP student, who captained BKSP women's football team to win Subrata Cup in India twice in 2017 and 2018, surprisingly could not make the cut to the final squad.

Her adoptive mother -- Kamrunnahr Khan Mooni -- paved the way for Sadia to play for Kacharipara Ekadosh where

some seven players from Mooni's Monalisa Women's Sport Academy were given chances to play, and while Mooni herself played the role as the assistant manager of Jamalpur outfit.

"I haven't had her in my womb but I am her mother since 2017 and she stays with me," said Mooni. "Her father and mother live in Narsingdi and Sadia often meets with them."

"If I kept my mother identity aside, as an AFC C license coach, I will say that Sadia is a talented

player with quick decision making skills in midfield and that too while being two-footed, becomes a rare combination from our perspective," said Mooni, who is also a teacher of Uttaran Govt. Primary School of Tangail.

"I can play in different positions -- right wing, right back, midfield and striker but I think I can play better in striking position," Sadia told The Daily Star. "I believe I can get a call for the national U-19 camp on the back of my good performances in the league, although I am doubtful on getting a call following the apparent nepotism in the national camp."

"I struck a double hat-trick in my second match but I could not find the net as I was kept under strict marking in the remaining matches. Besides, there were no such midfielders who could provide me with opportunities to score," said Sadia.

"Sadia had been in our national age-group teams as the right back but she was dropped due to sub-standard performances. I was not there to witness her double hat-trick due to my sickness but I did watch her in the next four matches where she could not keep the momentum going," said national head-coach Golam Rabbani Choton while adding that some eight to nine players outside the national players caught his eye, and those are likely to be called in the national camp.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Kings sign 28 players

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings partially completed their players' registrations for the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League as they signed 28 players including four new foreigners and as many local players yesterday.

They are also on verge of signing England-born Bangladesh midfielder Mahadi Ahmed on the last day of registration today, depending on the availability of documents like the player's Bangladeshi passport and others.

After cutting ties with all their previous foreign players including influential Daniel Colindres, the Kings have now pinned their hopes on two Brazilians Jonathan Da Silveira Fernandes and Robson Azevedo Da Silva, one Argentine Rahul Oscar Becerra and an Iranian Khaled Shafiei.

They have also signed fit-again midfielders Masuk Mia Jonny and Atiqur Rahman Fahad, who played for Kings last season. They also roped in two junior players -- goalkeeper Mehedi Hasan and defender Tariq Miah -- from lower leagues.



Neymar sustained a left ankle injury following a heavy tackle from Thiago Mendes, who was then red carded, during PSG's 1-0 home defeat against Lyon. "No news about Ney(mar)," PSG coach Thomas Tuchel said after the game on Sunday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

'Focus on series against Pakistan'

REUTERS, WELLINGTON



New Zealand stand-in captain Tom Latham said on Monday their sole focus was the upcoming Test series against Pakistan despite their 2-0 sweep of West Indies putting them in contention for a place in next year's world test championship final.

The Black Caps boosted their hopes of reaching the ICC World Test Championship final after securing back-to-back innings victories against West Indies. New Zealand moved into third place in the table for the world Test championship when they completed an innings and 12 run victory over West Indies in the second Test. The top-two sides face each other in the final at Lord's next year. The two ahead of New Zealand, Australia and India, will start a four-match series in Adelaide on Thursday.

"When you look too far ahead you can sometimes get caught out," Latham, who stood in for the absent Kane Williamson at the Basin Reserve, told reporters.

"Our focus will shift to Pakistan and whatever happens post that we'll assess."