

Kings breeze into semis

SPORTS REPORTER



Defending champions Bashundhara Kings made it into the last four of the Walton Federation Cup for the third successive season by notching a 2-0 win over Sheikh Jamal in the third quarterfinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Argentine forward Rahul Oscar Becerra gave Kings a first-half lead before Brazilian forward Robson Da Silva struck the second to put the game to bed late into the second half against the three-time Federation Cup champions, who have not progressed past the semifinals in four editions since their last triumph in 2015.

National-player-studded Kings dominated Sheikh Jamal as many expected and had a few chances before Becerra got the lead in the 10th minute, scoring from a placed shot after Brazilian midfielder Jonathon Da Fernandes Reis delivered a nice cross into the box. Kings' fit-again midfielder Masuk Mia Jonny then tried his luck from distance before defender Mozzamel Hossain Nira rescued Sheikh Jamal with a goal-line clearance in the 34th minute.

Sheikh Jamal looked better in the last 10 minutes of the first half and created three chances but forwards Zahid Hossain and Omar Jobe failed to capitalise.

After resumption, Kings maintained their stranglehold and created three good chances, but Robson and Becerra squandered the opportunities despite being one-on-one with the goalkeeper. Robson only sealed the victory in the



Brazilian forward Robson Da Silva celebrates after his 90th-minute goal sealed a 2-0 win for defending champions Bashundhara Kings in a Federation Cup tie with Sheikh Jamal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

90th minute with a low free-kick after Sheikh Jamal goalkeeper Mamun Khan fouled Jonathon on the edge of the box.

Kings' Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon was happy to have qualified for the semifinals for the third successive time but felt his should have won the match by a greater margin. "My point of view is that the match was very tactical for both sides as Sheikh Jamal tried to make our backline tense instead of the build-up game but our backline has been very solid which is a big difference

compared to last season," said Bruzon. "We missed a lot of open chances and I feel every game should have been different in terms of the margin of victory but the most important thing is to win the match and go to the next stage. I think our team is looking solid and confident and ready to fight in every step to win the title."

Bruzon's counterpart Shafiqul Islam Manik was happy with his team's performance but unhappy with the performance of referee Bitu Raj Barua.

"Although we missed key players like Kesto Kumar, Rezaul Karim and Sulayman Sillah, the boys played like we played in last matches. We were beaten in two ways as the forwards could not avail the scoring opportunities before conceding and they could not reimburse the goal despite having good scoring chances. Otabek and Jobe should have struck goals today," Manik said, adding that the match could have been more entertaining had the standard of the referee been better.

Root and Co return to Sri Lanka



England captain Joe Root (R) arrives at the Rajapaksa International Airport in Mattala in Sri Lanka to play the two Tests that were abandoned in March last year due to the pandemic.

PHOTO: AFP

AFP, MATTALA

England's cricketers arrived in Sri Lanka Sunday to resume a Test tour cancelled in the early days of the Covid pandemic, in what officials hope will be a "massive boost" for match-starved cricket fans.

A British Airways charter flight carrying the players and support staff landed in Mattala, in the south of the Indian Ocean island, where they underwent antigen tests. Joe Root's men had the small airport to themselves as Sri Lanka has closed its airspace to scheduled commercial airlines. Only a handful of repatriation flights and charters are allowed into Sri Lanka since May under strict health controls. "We are very excited about the Galle Tests," Root told a small group of cameramen allowed into the terminal for their arrival.

Airport staff in white hazmat suits sprayed the hands and footwear of the visitors and their luggage before they were allowed into the terminal for coronavirus tests.

Managing Director of England Men's Cricket, Ashley Giles, said the team looked forward to playing at the seaside Galle stadium adjoining a colonial-era fort. "To play in Galle will be very special -- it is one of the iconic venues in world cricket," he said in a statement.

"The past 10 months have been uncertain for us all, but having

international cricket returning to Sri Lanka will be a massive boost for cricket fans all over the world. "Bat for charity-The team will not interact with locals, but sign cricket bats which will be auctioned to raise money for two charities supporting victims of sexual violence in Sri Lanka, the British High Commission said.

Sri Lanka Cricket said the team's hotel in the island's southern district of Hambantota will be off limits for locals as part of quarantine regulations.

During the quarantine period, the England squad will split into two teams in order to play a practice match, a SLC official said.

The team's aircraft was permitted to enter Sri Lanka despite a ban on all flights and passengers from the UK following the discovery of a new, infectious coronavirus strain.

The England cricket board confirmed their players and support staff had tested negative for the coronavirus prior to leaving.

England abandoned their two-match Test tour of Sri Lanka in March on the second day of a practice match as the pandemic spread.

They will now play their two Tests starting on January 14 at the Galle stadium without any spectators. Sri Lanka had just six reported cases when England pulled out in March, but the team returned to an island which now has over 44,000 infections and 211 deaths.

Brilliant Jamieson continues fine form

AGENCIES

There's a thrill unlike anything else in cricket when you watch a fast bowler on top of his game; a quick who looks like taking a wicket with every delivery.

Kyle Jamieson, from the Botanic Gardens End, was terrific, using his tall frame and high action to hit lengths that dared batsmen to press forward while also threatening to break fingers.

Jamieson took five for 69 as New Zealand overcame some stiff Pakistan resistance to dismiss the tourists for 297 at close of play on the opening day of the second and final Test at Christchurch on Sunday. He has 30 wickets in 11 innings so far and has taken a fiver in every Test series he has played so far.

Azhar Ali and in particular Mohammad Rizwan were not ready to play the victims and Rizwan looked to take the attack to Jamieson. Jamieson eventually won the battle, Rizwan edging through to BJ Watling for 61, continuing a series where he has passed 50 in all three knocks and has looked a class above most of those above him in the order. Jamieson couldn't account for Azhar (93), however.

Bowling with real venom and bounce, the 26-year-old sent back opener Abid Ali, Haris Sohail and Fawad Alam in three overs, the latter with an unplayable delivery that the batsman could only fend away from his helmet with his glove.

Jamieson's piece de resistance was to follow. Bowling to Fawad Alam, who had scored a brilliant back-to-the-wall century at Mt Maunganui, Jamieson used his 2.03m frame to extract wicked bounce from a good length.

It was all Fawad could do to throw his hands in front of his face and balloon the ball to BJ Watling. It was as close to unplayable as you can get.



NORTJE BLOWS SRI LANKA AWAY

South Africa's Anrich Nortje (2nd from R) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne during the first day of the second Test at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg yesterday. Nortje's six-wicket haul saw Sri Lanka bowled out for only 157 after the visitors chose to bat. South Africa ended the day with 148 for 1.

WINDIES' TOUR TO BANGLADESH

'No drastic changes to the squad'

SPORTS REPORTER



The selectors are set to announce a 24-member Bangladesh preliminary squad today for the home series against the West Indies. The visitors are scheduled to arrive on January 10 to take part in the three-match ODI and two-

match Test series.

The Tigers played their last international match back in March 2019 against Zimbabwe and since then their cricket has been limited to two domestic tournaments in late 2020.

According to chief selector Minhajul Abedin, they have already chalked out a 17-member Bangladesh squad for the ODIs and Tests.

"Although we have already chalked out 17 players for the upcoming ODI and Test series, we have decided to call 24 cricketers for the camp to take extra measures for coronavirus as some will also take part in the warm-up game against the West Indies," Minhajul told The Daily Star yesterday.

Minhajul said there would not be any drastic changes to the squad. West Indies are scheduled to play a warm-up match on January 18 before the ODI series begins from January 20.

"It will be a big challenge for the boys to return to International cricket after a long gap and it's not easy at all. We might want to have a



look at a few newcomers but the majority of the squad will consist of the regular players. Many are saying they [West Indies] are an inexperienced side but ultimately we will be playing international cricket and whoever we are up against we have to play our best," he said.

Members of the preliminary squad are scheduled to undergo Covid-19 testing on January 7 and depending on the results, the players will start to check in to the team hotel the same day.

Meanwhile, star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan returned to Bangladesh yesterday. The champion cricketer had gone to the United States before the final of the Bangabandhu T20 Cup last month for personal reasons.

Shakib will be making his comeback to international cricket in the series against the West Indies and the top-ranked cricketer admitted that it would not be easy for him.

"This comeback is totally different. I was disappointed that I could not go to Sri Lanka [for a tour that was eventually postponed]. Thanks to the West Indies for coming here and I am excited about it. I am happy that I am returning to international cricket. There is no pressure on me, but it won't be easy and I will try to recapture my old form. If we cannot do well against the West Indies, it will be disappointing," said Shakib upon his arrival to the country yesterday.



Romelu Lukaku congratulates Lautaro Martinez, who scored his first hat-trick for Inter Milan during his side's 6-2 thrashing of Crotona yesterday. The emphatic result was Inter's eighth straight win in Serie A and carried them above AC Milan into first place before their city rivals' trip to Benevento later on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Brisbane Test on as of now

PTI

The entire Indian cricket contingent, including the five players who are in precautionary isolation, will travel to Sydney for the third Test against Australia together in the same chartered flight on Monday.

The five players — vice-captain Rohit Sharma, opener Shubman Gill, stumper Rishabh Pant, pacer Navdeep Saini and batsman Prithvi Shaw — have not been barred from travelling with the team despite an ongoing investigation into an alleged bio-security protocol breach by them.

"If you carefully read the CA statement, they never said that it's a breach. They said that they are seeking to determine if it's a breach."

"So there is no restriction on these five players travelling with the team to Sydney. The entire team is flying tomorrow afternoon," a senior BCCI official told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

The Australian media on Sunday claimed that the fourth Test in Brisbane has been jeopardised as the tourists are reluctant to travel there in view of stricter quarantine rules.

But it is learnt that the fourth Test, starting at the Gabba from January 15, is on as of now.

PHOTO: AFP