

SPORT

Abahani end Kings' reign

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani ended Bashundhara Kings' reign in domestic football with a 3-0 victory against the defending champions in an entertaining final at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Kings had come into this final on the back of five consecutive titles including that of the last Independence Cup they won three years ago, but Abahani showed them that they are rebuilding towards something big with a dominating display in front of around 5000 supporters.

Following a goalless first half in which the Sky Blues completely dominated but failed to take their chances, Rakib Hossain gave the Dhanmondi outfit a deserved lead in the 54th minute before Dorielton Gomes doubled the hitherto-one-time champions' advantage with a spot-kick nine minutes later.

The Brazilian further extended Abahani's lead on 71 minutes as the Sky Blues claimed the prestigious title only for the second time in their history and the first time since 1990.

It was also Abahani's second final win against the new powerhouse of domestic football, the first one coming in a tempestuous Federation Cup final back in 2018 before Kings went on to scoop up all five domestic titles since.

Both sides had turned up with a change each, Abahani bringing



Player-of-the-final:
Dorielton Gomes (Abahani)

Top scorer:
Dorielton Gomes 4 goals (Abahani)

Player-of-the-tournament:
Raphael Augusto (Abahani)

Fair play trophy:
Saif SC

Very happy to win my first title with Abahani. It's been a long time, but finally it came. The reinforcements in pre-season added to our strength but I did not expect a 3-0 win against the champions.

MARIO LEMOS
ABAHANI COACH

We missed three key players due to injury which was the main reason for the defeat. Even if we had Sohel Rana, he could have made up for the absence of Jonathan Fernandes. Bashundhara

OSCAR BRUZON
KINGS COACH

I came to Abahani because Abahani are a champion team and I was convinced we would win. Abahani were a good team last year too, but had some injury issues. It was a good win and we want to win more.

RAKIB HOSSAIN
ABAHANI WINGER

in fit-again Dorielton for Nabib Newaz Jibon while Kings replaced injured playmaker Jonathan Fernandes with Mahbubur Rahman Sufil.

The Sky Blues, playing with four foreigners against Kings' three, had majority of possession and attacks, with Raphael Augusto and Dorielton missing two gilt-edged chances in the first half.

Raphael failed to beat Bashundhara keeper Anisur Rahman from a one-on-one

situation on 26 minutes after running onto a clever volley from Milad Sheikh.

Dorielton was guilty of not making the most of a free header on a cross from Raphael on 38 minutes after Kings, already hamstrung with a few injuries, saw centre-back Atiqur Rahman Fahad stretched off, to be replaced by Bishwanath Ghosh.

Daniel Colindres failed to take advantage of a free-kick from the edge of the box at the stroke of

half-time but those missed chances did not come back to haunt the Sky Blues as Rakib broke the deadlock nine minutes after restart, placing the ball past Anisur on an excellent through-ball from Raphael.

Colindres was then brought down inside the box by Rimon Hossain and Dorielton clinically dispatched the spot-kick in the 63rd minute as Abahani profited from their control in midfield.

The Rio de Janeiro native then wrapped up the victory in the 71st minute, smashing home from inside the box after Raphael's corner was headed towards him by Milad.

Dorielton, the top-scorer of the tournament, was happy to contribute to the team's cause.

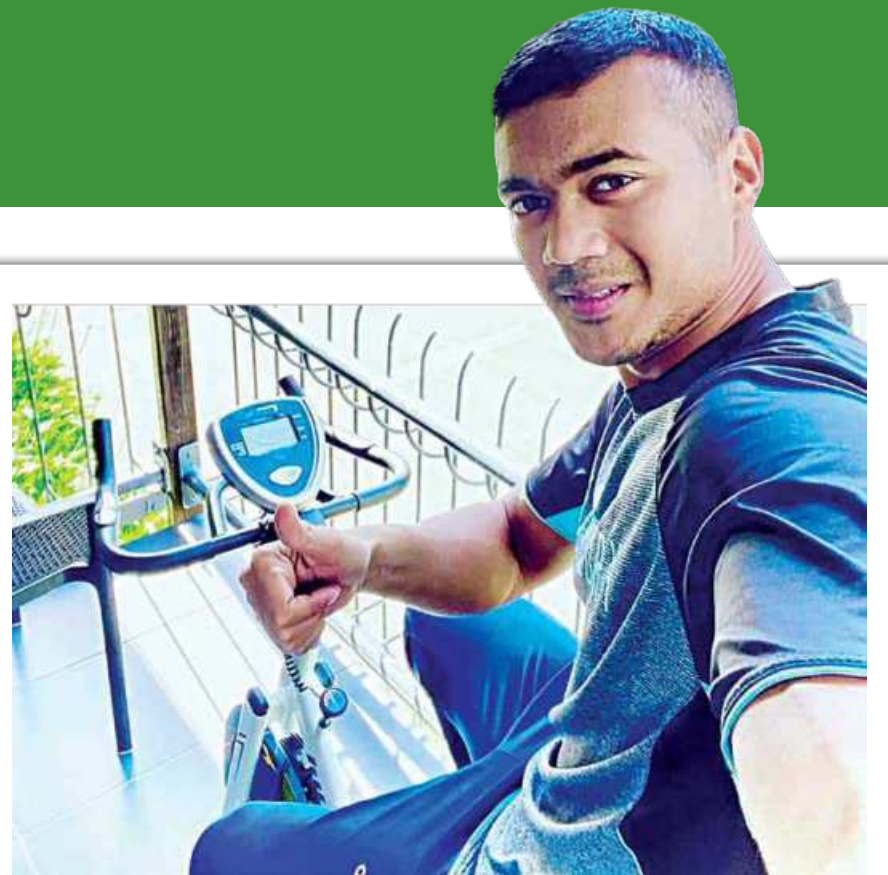
"I was always confident about winning this and I thank my teammates, not just the foreigners but also the local ones, for doing their job," Dorielton said after the match.

"We were playing for the title and I didn't mind whom we were playing against. I feel welcome by the club and I wanted to win with this club," the Brazilian added.

Abahani coach Mario Lemos, who hoisted his first trophy with Abahani in his third season in charge, said he didn't expect the margin of victory to be this big.

"Honestly I didn't expect a 3-0 win. The opposition are a great team and they made it hard for us in the first half. But we made some adjustments in the second and the chances were taken by the players.

"We had a few reinforcements in the pre-season and that helped our squad," the Portuguese coach said.



'Some players were wondering about coming back'

Tigers struggling with intense quarantine

SPORTS REPORTER



Although it was supposed to be a regular meeting of the Bangladesh Premier

League (BPL) governing council to chalk out the future of the upcoming franchise-based tournament, things took a dramatic turn at the home of cricket in Mirpur when BCB boss Nazmul Hassan decided to begin the meeting ahead schedule.

The Tigers' tour of New Zealand emerged as the meeting's biggest agenda, with rumours swirling that Bangladesh may return from New Zealand without taking part in the two-match Test series, scheduled to begin from January 1, due to the extended quarantine period taking a huge toll on cricketers.

The turbulence began after Bangladesh's spin-bowling coach Rangana Herath tested positive for Covid-19 in Christchurch. It then came to light that the New Zealand's first case of the Omicron variant was found on the same flight from Dubai to New Zealand that the Bangladesh team were travelling on, forcing the New Zealand Health Ministry to take strict measures. Other cricketers who had come in contact with the Covid-19 afflicted person were also separated and isolated upon landing on December 10.

In line with guidelines from the New Zealand Health Ministry, the visitors were asked to stay at the Managed Isolation Center for another three days of strict room quarantine despite originally being supposed to move to the team hotel and start outdoor practice from Friday.

The extended quarantine has disrupted Bangladesh's tour plans and results of Covid-19 testing on December 21 will determine whether the Tigers have to stay in quarantine for a few more days.

"Some players were wondering about coming back to the country because they are going through a very tough time. They have been in quarantine for many days and we all know life inside bio-bubbles is not easy," Hassan told media after the meeting yesterday.

However, the Bangladesh team that traveled to New Zealand earlier this year had followed a strict 14-day quarantine in their rooms before being able to roam freely about the country.

"Obviously we have been having a tough time since arriving in New Zealand. We had to stay mostly in our rooms. Initially, we thought that the room quarantine would be over after seven days, but it was extended by three days. We are allowed to go outside once a day to enjoy some fresh air but our food is served in our room. They also take our laundry from our room," a member of the Bangladesh team said, requesting anonymity.

Australian captain Pat Cummins was ruled out of the second Ashes Test after coming in close contact with a Covid-19 patient and, after Cricket Australia failed to persuade the health authorities to have him cleared for the game, Steve Smith replaced him as the captain.

It is also a fact that the sports world has started to adapt to the new normal, where life inside bio-bubble and maintaining social distancing has become essential to keeping the game moving forward in these times of uncertainty.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Sporting world battles surging Covid cases

AGENCIES

The coronavirus is once again disrupting global sport, forcing the cancellation of English Premier League matches and the scrapping of a one-day cricket series.

Aston Villa's Premier League game at home to Burnley on Saturday has been postponed due to more COVID-19 cases in the Villa squad, the league announced about two hours before kickoff.

Six of the 11 Premier League matches scheduled for this weekend are off. The clubs are due to meet on Monday to discuss the crisis, with differences emerging over whether to temporarily halt the season as a firebreaker for infections or to carry on.

Morocco coach Vahid Halilhodzic has expressed his fear that the already-delayed Africa Cup of Nations, due to kick off in Cameroon next month, could be called off due to the renewed threat of Covid-19 and the possibility that European clubs might not release players for the tournament.

Real Madrid have reported a number of positive tests, with Gareth Bale and Luka Modric among the players affected. Under Liga protocols, a club must have at least 13 players, at least five of them first-teamers and one a goalkeeper, available to play a match. The club also reported cases in its basketball team.

Covid has forced the cancellation of the one-day series between Pakistan and

the West Indies. Australia captain Pat Cummins was forced to sit out the second Ashes Test after being in close contact with somebody who tested positive for Covid-19. The Indian cricket team arrived in Johannesburg on Thursday and headed straight for their bio-secure base at the start of a curtailed South Africa tour. India will play three Tests and three one-day internationals despite a surge in coronavirus cases in South Africa, but four planned T20 internationals have been dropped from the original schedule.

European rugby chiefs have postponed seven matches in the Champions Cup and Challenge Cup competitions between UK and French sides due to strict coronavirus travel rules. Three matches had already been cancelled due to Covid outbreaks.

The National Football League on Friday postponed three weekend games amid a Covid-19 surge that has "seen a substantial increase in cases across the league."

The NBA has boosted its coronavirus measures after a surge in cases. The new measures will include more testing and mask wearing for players and staff, according to reports. Increased daily testing will begin December 26 and last two weeks. The National Hockey League said Friday it was postponing a game Saturday between the Boston Bruins and the Canadiens in Montreal because of Covid-19 concerns.



BCL second round from today

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The second round of the Bangladesh Cricket League will start from today with BCB North Zone facing off against BCB South Zone in Chattogram while Islami Bank East Zone take on Walton Central Zone at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

South Zone off-spinner Mahedi Hassan and left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed were instrumental in the previous round of the franchise-based first-class competition, bagging five-wicket hauls to bundle out East Zone for 260 in the first innings.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Zakir Hasan then struck a hundred while Anamul Haque scored 88 runs as South Zone took a huge first-innings lead before eventually sealing a comfortable eight-wicket win over East Zone.

Central Zone also started off with a comprehensive inning and seventy run win over North Zone in the first round. After bundling North Zone out for 219 in the first innings, Central Zone rode on a mammoth 327-run opening stand between centuries Mohammad Mithun and Mizanur Rahman.



PHOTO: STAR

Hosts hope for Pak upset despite Japan thrashing

SPORTS REPORTER



Following their valiant display in a 3-2 defeat against South Korea on Friday, the Bangladesh national hockey team reverted to type, suffering a 5-0 defeat against Japan in their third match of the Hero Asian Champions Trophy at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

The charges of Iman Gobinathan Krishnamurthy, who started the campaign with a 9-0 defeat against India, kept Japan at bay in the first quarter before breaking down against the wave of Japanese attacks.

The men in red and green conceded two field goals, two goals from penalty corners and one from

a penalty stroke. "Since we played a hard match yesterday, it might have caused fatigue on our players," Bangladesh captain Ashraf Islam said after the match.

The host nation, who lie bottom of the five-team table with zero points from three matches, still have a chance to make it to the semifinals if they manage to beat Pakistan in their last round robin match today.

Pakistan, who were held to a 3-3 draw by South Korea yesterday, have two points from three matches.

"Since both we and Pakistan are out of international hockey for a long time, I think we have a chance against Pakistan tomorrow. If we can play well and take our chances, we can come out with a positive result," Ashraf said. "We will watch

video footages of Pakistan's matches tonight and we will try to find out their weaknesses to take advantage of those in the match," the Bangladesh captain added.

The match between Pakistan and South Korea proved to be a topsy-turvy affair.

Pakistan fought back from a goal down in the first quarter to take a 2-1 lead early in the third quarter but Korea bounced back and scored two in the final quarter to take a lead.

However, Pakistan scored again with three minutes remaining to salvage a point from this fixture that left them in fourth position on the table. South Korea were in second position with six points from four matches. Japan occupied the third position with five points from three matches.