



Abahani winger Rakib Hossain jumps in the air to celebrate his goal against Rahmatganj in the Federation Cup final at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. (Inset) Abahani coach Mario Lemos climbs the fencing of the gallery to share his joy with the fans after the Sky Blues beat the Old Dhaka outfit 2-1 to claim their second title of the season.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Abahani make it two in two

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani broke Rahmatganj hearts to clinch the Bashundhara Group Federation Cup title with a 2-1 win in a competitive final at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

Costa Rican forward Daniel Colindres gave Abahani a first-half lead before winger Rakib Hossain sealed the game in the second half to confirm back-to-back trophies for Abahani, a feat that led to Abahani's acting director-in-charge Kazi Nabil Ahmed giving the team a Tk 75-lakh bonus. The result also extended giant-killers Rahmatganj's wait for a maiden top-flight trophy.

Despite the absence of the Brazilian duo of playmaker Raphael Augusto and forward Dorielton Gomes, Abahani were bolstered by the lively presence of 2018 World Cup participant Colindres, who led from the front in the attacking third as well as sometimes dropping deep and playing a significant role in midfield in front of some 5,000 spectators.

For his immense contributions, Colindres was not only adjudged the player of the final but also named

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Rakib Hossain



player of the tournament, while Dorielton and Philip Adjah finished as joint-top scorers.

Unfancied Rahmatganj capitalised on the Raphael Augusto's absence in Abahani's midfield and controlled the game from the start before coming close to taking the lead twice in the first 15 minutes. But Nigerian forward Sunday Chizoba and Ghanaian forward Philip Adjah squandered the chances.

Having survived those scares, Abahani grew in confidence and began to press for the lead. But Nabib Newaj Jibon floated over the crossbar from the top of the six-yard box with only the goalkeeper to beat on the half-hour mark before Rakib drove over in the 45th minute.

Colindres then broke the deadlock with a brilliant grounded shot from the top of the box in stoppage time.

Abahani maintained their tempo at the start of the second half and Colindres narrowly missed the target twice before Rakib Hossain found the back of the net with a low shot after Rahmatganj goalkeeper Rakibul Hasan Tushar's poor punch made its way to him in the 64th minute.

After taking a two-goal lead, Abahani retreated into something of a defensive shell, allowing Rahmatganj to press them and the Old Dhaka outfit reduced the margin with a 70th-minute strike from Philip but they could not find an equaliser.

"We did not have important players like Raphael and Dorielton so we were under pressure a bit. But we proved that local players can also do just as well by playing as a team," goalscorer Rakib Hossain said. "Winning a trophy is always a memorable moment, especially if it is a win in a pressure situation."

"The final is always a pressure match. We could not cash in on two early chances but Abahani capitalised on their chances to win the match. We are happy but not too happy because we want to keep our momentum intact in the league and produce a good result," Rahmatganj captain Mahmudul Hossain Kiran said.

'The length made all the difference'

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a historic win in the first Test against New Zealand in Mount Maunganui, the confident Bangladesh seamers saw the other side of the coin in Christchurch as they were made to toil by the hosts, who concluded the first day of the second Test on a dominant 349 for 1.

It was obvious that expectations would skyrocket after the pacers' brilliant showing in the first Test saw them bundle out the Kiwis twice on way to registering a maiden win over New Zealand on their soil. But the Bangladeshi pacers' lack of experience, borne of a lack of exposure, especially when it comes to adapting to different surfaces was visibly clear in Christchurch after skipper Mominul Haque won the toss and elected to field on a green top at the Hagley Oval.

The bowling line-up was unchanged from the first Test but there was a stark difference when it came to application whether it was the hero of the first Test, Ebadot Hossain, or Taskin Ahmed or Shoriful Islam. Shoriful got the only wicket as the Kiwis maintained a healthy run-rate of nearly four per over.

A lack of patience from the Bangladeshi seamers was also stood in contrast to what they had shown in the first Test as the pacers continued hunting for glory instead of making things difficult for the batters.

Skipper Tom Latham used the pace of the bowlers to score 21 of his 29 boundaries, being offered enough width to reach an unbeaten 186-run knock.

"I think it's the length that made all the difference and I think our pacers couldn't adjust to the length in Christchurch. Obviously, they were pumped up after seeing the green top but I think they lacked in maintaining a tight

channel. Even when you have favorable conditions and pitches for the seamers, it is important to utilise that properly," local pace bowling coach Mahbub Ali Zaki, who works at the grassroots levels of Bangladesh cricket, told The Daily Star. However, it will be too harsh to point fingers at the relatively inexperienced Bangladesh pace trio. Despite their brilliant showing in the first Test, Zaki believes the Kiwis would always look to come back strongly after the defeat.

"We all knew New Zealand would come at us hard after that defeat. From Bangladesh's point of view, it is important to keep going through the process. It is still early days for our bowlers in Test cricket and they also need to be thrown in difficult situations which they can learn from. I am sure the players will have a look at the wagon wheel of the first day and realise where things went wrong for them," he said.

The win in Mount Maunganui may have raised hopes of a better future for the Tigers in the longest format, but there is still a long way to go if Bangladesh are to become a consistent side. According to Taskin's mentor, that will require huge transformations at the grassroots level. "We need to accept that our boys have done tremendously well despite all the limitations and are already proving what they are capable of. But the fact is that we cannot sit back and wait for things to happen on a regular basis so we need to work accordingly."

"We need to have a pace bowling hub, where coaches will work on swing, bounce, pace and line and length throughout the year. Our bowlers need to know where to bowl on different surfaces and that hub will prepare them mentally and physically for the top-level instead of expecting them to deliver without those skills," Zaki said.



Bangladesh pacer Shoriful Islam celebrates the dismissal of New Zealand opener Will Young, the only wicket to fall during the opening day of the second Test in Christchurch on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

Shakib draws the limelight at start of BCL

SPORTS REPORTER

The one-day version of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) began yesterday and Shakib Al Hasan's involvement drew in visitors to Pitchvision's live feed of the match.

Shakib, who played the last home Test against Pakistan before opting out of the series in New Zealand for personal reasons, returned to cricketing action, hoping to get into the groove ahead of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and upcoming international assignments.

However, the premier all-rounder found the going hard with the bat, at least in part due to the nature of the wicket in Sylhet.

Batting first, Shakib's Central Zone started well with Mizanur Rahman (36) and Soumya Sarkar, who departed for 13 off 18. Spinner Nayeem Hasan bamboozled Abdul Majid with flight and got the latter out stumped to bring Shakib out to the crease.

Mizanur's departure next over saw a mini-collapse and Shakib looked tentative outside the off stump early, with Alauddin Babu beating the outside edge once before squaring Shakib up and producing a thick outside edge in the 17th over which went for four.

The little seam movement on offer saw Shakib keep on his tip toes.

The ball would keep low at times, with Shakib just about keeping Nayeem at bay. Mohammad Mithun looked good at the other end as the fourth-wicket partnership contributed 56 before departing for a run-a-ball 37.

Shakib, meanwhile, struggled against fuller-



length deliveries from pacers. Rejaur Rahman Raja got a few to angle back in, hitting Shakib on the pads on a few occasions. Bowlers managed to squeeze runs and skipper Mosaddek Hossain departed after a 38-ball 17.

Shakib too departed soon after, following 58-ball 35, holed out at deep mid-on off Tanvir Islam. Rubel and Raja's three-wicket hauls saw Central Zone bowled out for 177.

Rony Talukdar (38) and Imrul Kayes (25) kept East Zone well positioned in the game but once both were dismissed in quick succession, East Zone crumbled to 155 all out in 47.1 overs. Shakib, Soumya and pacer Hasan Murad got two wickets each.

In the other game, fifties from Parvez Hossain and Naeem Islam saw North Zone thump South Zone by eight wickets.

Fans watching the matches live on YouTube were left wondering why the BCB's feed for local matches was not of optimum quality. Meanwhile, Shakib, having won his first game on return, will likely look to adjust to the pitches on offer as he gears up for upcoming assignments.

Root praises England's character

AFP, SYDNEY

England skipper Joe Root praised his battered team's character to stave off Australia's victory push and hold on for a gritty draw in Sydney on Sunday as injured wicketkeeper Jos Buttler prepared to fly home.

Old stagers James Anderson and Stuart Broad batted out the final two tense overs to give the beleaguered tourists a fighting draw and deny dominant Australia a fourth straight Test win in the lopsided series.

"Relief is the overwhelming emotion and I'm quite proud too," Root said. We had a lot thrown at us in this game and guys have really stood up and showed a lot of character and pride."

"To come out and do that was really pleasing. It's a big step in the right direction."