

JIBON EXACTS REVENGE

Tarequl Islam Jibon (R) tries to get the better of Shahjalal Boli during the 113th edition of Jabbarer Boli Khela at Laldighir Par in Chattogram yesterday. Jibon prevailed after a gruelling 25-minute battle to reclaim the title of the traditional event, which was held after a two-year break due to the pandemic.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



Abahani regroup with a statement win over Muktis

SPORTS REPORTER

Although Abahani fell miserably short against ATK Mohun Bagan in the AFC Cup fixture last week, the Sky Blues bounced back to pull off an incredible second-half show in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) to win 4-3 against Muktiyoddha Sangsad KC at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj yesterday.

A brace from Rakib Hossain and one goal apiece from Costa Rican Daniel Colindres and Brazilian Raphael Augusto had Abahani turn victorious from two goals down, and thus the six-time champions managed to somewhat nullify their disappointment at Kolkata's Salt Lake Stadium to stay in the race with leaders Bashundhara Kings, who are four points ahead of them.

It had taken 50 long minutes for Abahani to finally make their presence felt, but by then Mario Lemos' charges had conceded twice as Japanese forward Tetsuki Misawa and his compatriot Soma Otani had the bottom dwellers in raptures.

Misawa converted a penalty in the 35th minute while Otani found his target from the edge of the box as Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel was caught napping and could only watch the ball roll past the all-important line.

The next 15 minutes saw a flurry of goals as all four of them went against Muktiyoddha, who had stunned Abahani 4-2 last season.

A brilliant combination between Colindres and Augusto in the 64th minute staged



Abahani's comeback as Colindres fired home with an angular shot. Two minutes later, Abahani launched an attack from the right flank and exchanged a few moves inside the box before Colindres saw his header come off the crossbar, after which Rakib nodded the rebounder home to equalise.

There was no stopping Abahani afterwards. Augusto handed the lead in the 75th minute as the Brazilian ran through the spine of Muktiyoddha and entered the box before latching home with a left-footer. Rakib went on to strike his second goal with a tap-in four minutes later and even though Misawa struck another from the spot, Muktiyoddha could not trouble Abahani any further.

The remaining matches of the day were fought between mid-table teams. At the Bashundhara Kings Arena, 10-man Mohammedan Sporting Club came from behind to hold a rejuvenated Sheikh Russel KC to a 1-1 draw. Elsewhere, Saif Sporting Club handed a massive 6-1 thrashing to Bangladesh Police while Chittagong Abahani were held to a goalless draw by Rahmatganj MFS after the port side, who occupy fourth place with 22 points, won three games on the trot.

Mohammedan and Saif, occupying fifth and sixth spot, are level on 18 points but Saif are ahead on goal difference. Police are trailing close at seventh position with 16 points while Sheikh Russell and Rahmatganj lie at eighth and ninth place with 11 and 10 points, respectively.

COLLEGE STUDENTS win school tournament?

EKUSH TAPADER

A school tournament won with college-going players. While such incidents are not unheard of in local tournaments, interestingly, this time, allegations were made that it happened in the National School Cricket Tournament, organised by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

Gopalganj's MC Academy beat Syed Hatim Ali High School by 135 runs in the final. However, Syed Hatim Ali High School alleged that the majority of the MC Academy players are college-going students.

Wicketkeeper Navil Absar graduated SSC with a GPA of 4.67 last year. Currently Absar is studying in MC Academy college's science discipline and a copy of his SSC mark sheet was obtained by The Daily Star.

According to BCB's rules and regulations, a side can include up to five players from another school but all the players must be school-going.

Munna Ahmed, one of the players in the playing eleven, uploaded a picture of him being awarded the player-of-the-match on his Facebook account. However, no player named Munna was found in the team sheet. Hatim Ali School alleged that a different name was used for the player to show that he was still a school student.



There are allegations that Shanto Dey, player-of-the-final, used his younger brother's name and that his actual name is Shuvo Dey. Shanto is a class 10 student and Shuvo used his younger brother's name to play the match.

One player named Shakib Ahmed also uploaded pictures on Facebook of him playing but his name was not found in the team sheet either. Allegations are that he played under the name 'Rifat'. There were two players named Rifat -- Rubayet Khan Rifat and Tahmid Ahmed Rifat -- in the playing eleven but it could not be ascertained whose name the player used during the match.

"We formed the team with school-

going students but the opposition team took players from college unit. They used fake names," Syed Hatim Ali High School's sports teacher Abdul mazed told The Daily Star.

"We have a player who was born after September 2005 and he is studying in class 10. But despite the player being eligible, we did not include him in the squad as he looks a bit older. It's unfortunate that the opposition did not follow the rules and we're hoping the officials will look into it," Mazid added.

Sylhet Cricket Committee secretary Toqrimul Haque Kabi told The Daily Star that he was aware of such allegations and that they will look into the matter if a written complaint is filed.

"During the group stages, they notified us verbally but we wanted a written complaint since the registration took place online through the BCB app. We weren't involved in the selection process. Every year we do the selection on the basis of who are eligible but this year we didn't get the opportunity to do the selection process. Once a written complaint is filed, we will send it to the BCB. We were able to curb such underhanded tactics before but this year the BCB are seeing to these things," Toqrimul said.

MC Academy teacher Sujit Kumar Talkukdar said that he was not aware of any such things happening.

"To my knowledge, there isn't a possibility of such things happening. They should have filed a written complaint before the game. I didn't attend the game but the sports teacher was involved. We don't believe in hiding identity to become first. If it has happened, this is a serious matter and we will look into it," Sujit said.

When contacted, BCB's age-level Cricket Committee chairman Obed Nizam informed that he will look into the matter. "The responsibility to organise the [district-level] matches was given to the local districts. I will look into the matter when I return to the country," he said.

Spanish challenge stands in way of City-Liverpool final

AFP, Manchester

Real Madrid and Villarreal stand in the way of Manchester City and Liverpool taking their battle for domestic honours to the biggest stage of all next month in the Champions League final.

A clash between City and Liverpool in Paris on May 28 would mean a third all-English final in four years.

The huge economic advantage enjoyed by the Premier League in TV rights deals is behind Madrid's continued motivation to seek the comfort of guaranteed income streams from a European Super League (ESL).

However, Villarreal's run to the last four is a reminder of why there is such opposition to a closed shop ESL.

Jurgen Klopp's men trail City by a point with five games to go in a thrilling Premier League title race. But they got the better of City to reach next month's FA Cup final and lifted the League Cup in February.

Klopp already has experience of losing out to Villarreal boss Unai Emery on the European stage as his Sevilla side beat Liverpool in the 2016 Europa League final.

That was just one of Emery's four Europa League titles, the last of which came when Villarreal beat Manchester United in last year's final just to qualify for the Champions League.

"They have probably the most successful cup competition manager in world football, so he knows what he is doing," said Klopp. "Unai Emery is the king of the cups. It is unbelievable

what he is doing."

Liverpool's status as favourites ahead of Wednesday's first leg at Anfield is understandable given the difference in resources between the clubs.

City are also expected to reach the final for a second consecutive year despite the vast gulf in European pedigree between the English champions and Madrid. But Pep Guardiola's men were convincing winners when the sides met in the last 16 two years ago.

"It's the third time we play the semi-final of the Champions League against a team who have a few Champions Leagues in the trophy cabinet," said Guardiola.

"It has to be a special night for us to enjoy it, give everything we have in our soul and after we'll see what happens."

Madrid produced a remarkable fightback from 2-0 down to beat Paris Saint-Germain in the last 16 and responded after falling 3-0 down to Chelsea at the Santiago Bernabeu to reach the semi-finals in dramatic fashion.

Carlo Ancelotti's men will have home advantage again in the second leg next week, but there are doubts as to whether Los Blancos can continue to be carried by the ageing legs of Karim Benzema and Luka Modric.

The excellence achieved in the era of Klopp and Guardiola in England's north-west has seen Liverpool and City persistently rewrite the record books. Over the next 10 days they have the chance to prove they are the two best sides in Europe by ending La Liga's challenge to English dominance of the Champions League.



Rayo Vallecano midfielder Alvaro Garcia Rivera (R) celebrates after scoring the decisive goal as Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen reacts during their La Liga fixture at Camp Nou on Sunday. The defeat left the Catalan giants in second position, 15 points behind league leaders Real Madrid, with five games in hand.

PHOTO: AFP