

Imrul leads MSC to season's first win

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club skipper Imrul Kayes led his side to their first win of the Dhaka Premier League as his 101-ball 86 helped set up a 22-run win over defending champions Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club at the BKSP Ground-4 yesterday.

Imrul hit 10 fours and two sixes while Mahmudullah Riyad scored a 51-ball 48 to help Mohammedan post 290 for seven after being put into bat first.

Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan misfired with the bat as he was dismissed for a nine-ball five by off-spinner Parvez Rasool, but the all-rounder kept things tight with the ball, going wicketless while giving away just 31 from his full quota.

The 37-year-old, however, couldn't enjoy his team's first win as he left for Dhaka in a helicopter before the conclusion of the match.

Sheikh Jamal got off to a solid start in reply as openers Saif Hassan and Shykat Ali put together an 83-run stand before the former fell to the left-arm wrist-spin of Jake Lintott after scoring a 67-ball 58.

Fazle Mahmud looked good for his 36 before he was run out by Shakib, and Towhid Hridoy and skipper Nurul Hasan failed to deliver as Sheikh Jamal lost half their side for 173 runs.



Rasool, who was his team's best bowler on the day, also provided the goods with the bat as he smashed a 56-ball 63 that featured three fours and two sixes.

But it wasn't enough as Sheikh Jamal were bundled out for 268.

Mohammedan's Abu Jayed Chowdhury and Lintott picked up three wickets each, with the latter taking home the player of the match award.

In the other match between Gazi Group Cricketers and Legends of Rugganj at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Narayanganj, Chirag Jani's all-round exploits helped Legends to their sixth win on the trot.

Gazi batter Ravi Teja scored a 111-ball 103 but Al Amin Hossain's fifer and Chirag's two scalps helped Legends bundle Gazi out for 277 before fifties from Sabbir Rahman (66), Chirag (68), and Irfan Shukkur ensured a successful chase for Legends.

At the BKSP Ground-3, a dominant display from Prime Bank Cricket Club saw them beat Rugganj Tigers Cricket Club by 124 runs.

Batting first, Yasir Ali's 96 and Nasir Hossain's 53 helped Prime Bank post 332 for eight.

Mominul Haque's 76 was the only highlight of Rugganj's chase as their innings came to a halt at 208 for nine, with Mukidul Islam failing to come out to bat due to an injury.



Shakib Al Hasan featured for Mohammedan Sporting Club for the first time in 12 years in the 50-over format yesterday as the domestic powerhouse registered their first win of the ongoing Dhaka Premier League by beating Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club by 22 runs at BKSP-4. Shakib, who misfired with the bat but conceded just 31 runs in his 10 overs, including a maiden, left for the capital for a commercial engagement by a helicopter before the match concluded.

PHOTO: STAR

BCB sends clear message

SPORTS REPORTER

There were murmurs around the country's cricket fraternity that Bangladesh's Test and T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan would skip the upcoming one-off Test against Ireland, starting in Mirpur from Tuesday, to make himself available from the beginning of the Indian Premier League, where he is set to represent Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR).

But all that speculation was put to rest after the selectors announced the squad for the Test yesterday, including Shakib, thereby backing up the words from Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon, who had maintained the stance that the all-rounder would not be allowed to skip the lone Test against Ireland. Liton Das, who was also drafted by KKR for the ongoing IPL, was also named in the squad.

The clear message from the board seems to be that national commitments come ahead of anything else and is a welcome reversal of instances in the past when the BCB chose to be lenient and allowed Shakib to skip national commitments to take part in the IPL.

In 2021, Shakib opted to sit out of a tour of Sri Lanka to play in the IPL after being granted permission by the BCB.

"He [Shakib] sent us a letter seeking permission to sit out the Sri Lanka tour because he wanted to play in the IPL. We gave him permission. If someone doesn't want to play, it doesn't make sense to force them," BCB's then cricket operations committee chairman Akram Khan told the media.

But the BCB's stance seems to change over the past couple of years, especially after Chandika Hathurusingha was reappointed head coach since the Sri



Lankan's main priority was to create a healthy dressing room atmosphere.

Many thought that the BCB would allow Shakib to join KKR right from the start of the tournament since the Tigers will be playing against a relatively weak opponent at home, but both Hathurusingha and the BCB stuck to their guns.

"There is no doubt that it will definitely help their skills if they play in the IPL since it's a high-class tournament. But their first priority is to play for the country. I think Mustafizur Rahman will also play in the [IPL], so a total of three players," Hathurusingha had told the media ahead of the T20I series against Ireland.

Another reason for not allowing Shakib to skip the national commitment could be the fact that the Tigers will be playing their first Test this year. Regardless of opposition, Bangladesh's performances in the longest format of the game have

remained a big area of concern.

However, Shakib clarified what his deal with the BCB was, saying yesterday: "When the BCCI wanted to know which time I would be available for, the BCB informed that we would not be get an NOC during any international commitments. And that is how we are getting the NOC. Mustafizur wouldn't get it either but, fortunately or unfortunately, he isn't in the Test side."

Despite a historic Test win against New Zealand at Mount Maunganui to begin 2022, Bangladesh were unable to win any of their next nine Tests that year.

The Tigers have recently adopted a fearless approach and the intention behind forming a full-strength squad for the Test against Ireland is to take that positive approach forward. As the captain of the Test side, Shakib's presence definitely matters when it comes to showing others the way.

Shadman's 'second debut'

SPORTS REPORTER

Having returned to the Bangladesh squad for the one-off Test against Ireland after getting sidelined for almost a year, opener Shadman Islam is geared up for a fresh start.

"It really felt great ... I can compare my feeling with the debut Test match. I'm excited as I returned to the Test side again after a long break. Now I want to make a new start," said Shadman, who was included in the 14-member squad announced yesterday.



Opener Tamim Iqbal made his return to the Test side as expected but the injury of Zakir Hasan – who made a debut hundred against India in the last home series in December last year – paved the way for 27-year-old Shadman, who missed the Tigers' last three series – against Sri Lanka, West Indies and India – after playing his last Test in South Africa in March-April last year.

"I knew the time would come for me. I worked really hard to get back my rhythm in the domestic competitions and now I'm ready to take the new challenge," said Shadman, who so far played 13 Tests with an average of 23.29 since making debut against the West Indies in 2018.

The other notable inclusion in the team is pacer Shoriful Islam while Nurul Hasan Sohan, Yasir Ali and Nasum Ahmed were axed from the squad that played against India.

SQUAD

Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Liton Das (vice-captain), Tamim Iqbal, Shadman Islam, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Tajjul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Khaled Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, and Shoriful Islam.

'Impact Player makes it tougher'

REUTERS

Gujarat Titans captain Hardik Pandya said the Indian Premier League's new "Impact Player" rule makes his job difficult because there are several options to choose from.

For the first time in IPL's history, teams this season will be allowed to make a tactical substitution with an Impact Player coming in to bat or bowl as needed.

Led by Pandya, Gujarat began their title defence with a five-wicket victory over four-times champions Chennai Super Kings in the season-opening match in Ahmedabad on Friday.

Chennai set Gujarat a target of 179 after Ruturaj Gaikwad scored a sensational 92, but his heroics went in vain as Shubman Gill's 63, combined with late cameos by Rashid Khan and Rahul Tewatia, helped the defending champions seal a win.

Chennai's Tushar Deshpande became the first Impact Player when he came in for Ambati Rayudu during their defence, while Gujarat's Sai Sudharsan replaced New Zealand's Kane Williamson and batted at no. 3 after he injured his knee while fielding.

"To be very honest, having this impact rule makes my job quite difficult because when you have too many options, you have to pick the right option, and I think because of this reason, someone will bowl less," Pandya said.

"I had to just pick and kind of back (my instinct), where I felt that going hard lengths was the plan for me, and it kind of worked, so yeah, some of the bowlers came late but they did the job for us."

Messi return would be 'ultimate last dance'

AGENCIES, Barcelona

Xavi believes Lionel Messi's potential Barcelona return in the summer would be similar to Michael Jordan's 'last dance' with the Chicago Bulls.

Messi, who starred for Barcelona from 2004 to 2021, has been linked with a move back to his former side as his Paris Saint-Germain contract expires in the summer.

Xavi has stated his "love" for his former Barcelona teammate while suggesting the Argentinian's return could prove to be of the same success as when Jordan returned to the Bulls two years after his first retirement from basketball.

In the 1997-98 season, Jordan led the Bulls to his second three-peat on his return, which entailed winning the NBA championship three years in a row.

Xavi, speaking ahead of Barcelona's La Liga match at Elche, said of Messi: "Don't misunderstand us, but of course I'm in love with Leo Messi. I've seen him grow up. He is exemplary. It's normal that there is excitement. The ultimate 'last dance', like

Michael Jordan. It's normal for people to be excited," he said.

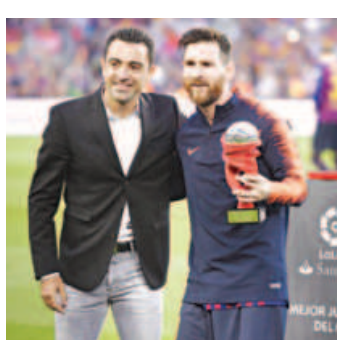
"It's important that the Cule are excited. The best thermometer is Camp Nou. There can be criticism, circumstances, but Camp Nou doesn't fail. People would be excited, happy in the street. It makes me proud."

Xavi added that he hoped to see Messi return, but conceded that it was out of his hands.

"I hope to be able to see Leo back at Barcelona in whatever form it takes. I would be the first to be happy to see him return. It's the club of his life, he's the best player in history, but now is not the time to talk.

"It doesn't depend on me, it depends on Messi, on his happiness, on whether he wants to return and has the will to do so. I have a relationship of friendship and trust and, if he decides to come back, I'll be delighted. I'll be the first to encourage him to come back.

"There is nothing for the moment. We are doing Leo and the club a disservice. It will depend on many factors. We are at the expense of fair-play, but above all of Leo's will," he said.



Kevin De Bruyne scored one and assisted another during Manchester City's 4-1 win over Liverpool in the Premier League at the Etihad Stadium on Saturday. Julian Alvarez, Ilkay Gundogan and Jack Grealish were also on target as the defending champions, unfazed by the absence of Erling Haaland, kept the title race alive.

PHOTO: REUTERS