

## ‘Busy’ Shakib hardly following IPL

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh’s premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan said Tuesday that he is hardly watching the matches of the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL) and joked about being in the Tigers’ squad for their upcoming Ireland series in the United Kingdom.

“I am not following IPL. that much...I am busy with the [Dhaka] Premier League (DPL),” Shakib, who is featuring for Mohammedan in the DPL, told the reporters during the opening of a coffee shop in the capital yesterday.

Shakib, who was roped in by Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), had earlier opted out of the tournament citing ‘family reasons’.

Asked whether he gave any advice to Liton, who already joined KKR, Shakib said: “No, I didn’t give him any advice. I didn’t even talk about IPL with him. What I want is for Liton to enjoy his game if he gets a chance.”

“Is it? No, I didn’t know,” Shakib joked when reminded he is in the team for Ireland series.



Even though Shakib Al Hasan is yet to turn up with a performance matching his outstanding standards, it seems his mere presence has lifted the spirits of his Mohammedan teammates. Mohammedan’s 10-run win over Brothers Union in Fatullah yesterday was their fourth victory on the trot, all since star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan joined the side following the Ireland series. [Bottom] Mahmudullah Riyad, who struck a fifty yesterday for Mohammedan, puts a wet towel on his head as scorching heat provides players with a different kind of challenge in the ongoing Dhaka Premier League.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# Mohammedan stars need to assemble after Shakib leaves

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan had begun their Dhaka Premier League (DPL) campaign with four defeats in five games, with one being abandoned, but after a thrilling win at Fatullah yesterday, the momentum seems to have finally gathered in their sail with yesterday’s win seeing them clinch four matches back-to-back.

Star players often do not have the desired effect, but all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan’s return to the dugout has turned the tide although he has not been the biggest contributor with either bat or ball.

Courtesy of yesterday’s 10-run win, Mohammedan are still in with a shout to play the Super League phase. But given the team they have, such a turnaround



should not have been necessary to be in contention.

Mohammedan had failed to make the Super League last season despite having star players such as Shakib, Taskin Ahmed, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mehedi Hasan Miraz in the squad. But national assignments denied Mohammedan from getting their service in crucial matches and Shakib later played for Legends of Rupganj in the Super League phase.

This season, they have again gone for stars in Shakib, Riyad, Miraz, Soumya Sarkar and Rony Talukdar but availability remains an issue.

Shakib’s contribution with the bat and ball turned out to be meaningful in the end in a low-scoring affair yesterday.

Mohammedan lost three wickets inside nine overs with Soumya Sarkar failing to shine once more before Miraz departed

cheaply as well.

Shakib, along with veteran Riyad, strung together a 53-run stand and despite Shakib’s departure for 37, Riyad’s 68-ball 58 and Jake Lintott’s 28 saw them reach 190 before being bowled out with more than four overs to spare.

After the exchange, Shakib bagged two while left-arm leg spinner Lintott bagged a fiver to thwart Brothers Union.

Mohammedan officials informed that they hoped Shakib would be available till the April 17, the date of the final round of the first league phase. But if him staying increases their chance of making the Super League, there is concern regarding what happens afterwards.

The DPL has been a major testing ground for players harbouring hopes of making it to the national team. Soumya and Riyad are two looking to make a return and

their performances will not only be vital for Mohammedan but their futures too.

However, Soumya has clearly not impressed selectors. “Not getting what is expected of Soumya. He is still in our thoughts. If he does well in domestic cricket, our pool of players will be bigger. There is no doubt about his ability but also a little disappointed,” selector Habibul Bashar told the media yesterday at Fatullah.

“Everyone is talking to him. He is being given the mental support he needs but sometimes, a cricketer has to save himself,” the selector said.

Soumya and Mahmudullah have scored a few runs this DPL, but the impact has not been felt. Bashar believed Soumya’s batting plan needed to improve. “He has to decide on his batting plan. There is nothing to tell him, he will have to get it himself,” Bashar said.

That plan will have to come through for others if the pool of players for the national team is to get bigger. Afif Hossain has been amongst the runs for Abahani, another looking to return after being dropped.

“Afif is doing what was asked of him. When someone is outside national team, the expectation is they will score runs in domestic cricket and return with confidence,” Bashar said.

Soumya too needs to take the cue and score big runs to change his fortune and Mohammedan will be hoping it comes when Shakib will not be there to inspire. But first, they still need to make the Super League. They are currently sixth in the table, with their last title coming in 2009-10 season.

## Augusto steers Abahani to semifinals

SPORTS REPORTER

A late header from Raphael Augusto powered defending champions Abahani to a 1-0 win over Sheikh Jamal in the second quarterfinal of the Federation Cup at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj yesterday.

Brazilian midfielder Augusto, who missed Abahani’s previous fixture due to a knee injury, managed to take the field and turned hero after heading home a corner kick from Daniel Colindres in the 82nd minute of an intense battle.

Although Sheikh Jamal have been struggling in the Bangladesh Premier league and came into the Fed Cup match on the back of a goalless draw against Rahmatganj, the three-time Fed Cup champions gave the Sky Blues a run for their money.

Both sides showed a fighting spirit, but neither could capitalise on opportunities in the first half, during which Sheikh Jamal had the upper hand. Raihan Hasan had threatened Abahani with his usual long throw-ins but Nodirbeck Mavlonov squandered the chance.

Abahani also had some chances but Colindres and Peter Nworah failed to cash in on opportunities, even one in front of an open net.

That pattern continued in the second half until Raphael Augusto finally broke the deadlock and sealed a victory with a header to meet Colindres’ corner kick.

## Brothers return to BPL after two seasons

SPORTS REPORTER

Traditional outfits Brothers Union returned to top-flight football after two seasons with a 1-0 win over Uttara Football Club in a Bangladesh Championship League (BCL) fixture in Kamalapur yesterday.

With two matches in hand, Brothers Union ensured a top-two spot and thus confirmed their Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) berth. Brothers’ 45 points from 18 matches now place them two and nine points ahead of BFF Elite Academy and Gopalganj Sporting Club, respectively. However, BFF Elite Academy will not be advancing to BPL.

After getting promoted to the first division in 1975, Brothers Union stayed at the top-flight for 45 years before being relegated from BPL to BCL in the 2020-21 season. Once hailed as the country’s third force in football, Brothers had skipped the last season by citing financial crisis before resuming action this season in the BCL.

“The journey was challenging and difficult because of a lack of training facilities and injury problems. However, I was hopeful to take Brothers to the premier division,” said head coach Zahidul Islam Milon yesterday.

“A different motivation worked inside me as I once played for Brothers Union for five to seven years to earn bread and butter, so it was an opportunity for me to give back something to Brothers Union.

“I’m really happy to take Brothers Union to the Bangladesh Premier League,” said Milon, who had guided Fortis FC to become the BCL champions last season, adding that his ultimate target is to see his charges finish on top of the league.

# Real hope for ‘another magical night at Bernabeu’

AGENCIES

For the third consecutive season, Real Madrid and Chelsea are facing off in the knockout stages of the UEFA Champions League. And defending champions Real Madrid will have a point to prove against The Blues in Wednesday’s quarterfinal first leg at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Despite Chelsea’s poor run of form in the Premier League, Real Madrid must be wary of the English club, who have faced Real in the knockout stages of the last two Champions League seasons and beaten them twice in four games.

It was Chelsea who landed the first blow at the semifinal stage in 2020-21, before Real responded in the quarterfinals last season. But Real lost the second leg of last season’s quarterfinal at home and progressed only on aggregate following two late goals from Rodrygo and Benzema. Another interesting thing from the two sides’ Champions League ties is that in the last two seasons, both times the side that progressed went on to win the UCL title.

Chelsea have only lost one of



their seven games against Real Madrid in European competition and seem to have taken great pleasure on their trips to Spain, having lost one of their last nine UEFA Champions League knockout-stage matches away to Spanish opposition (W3 D5).

And it seemed logical that Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti hoped for another magical night at the Bernabeu against Chelsea, who have dropped to 11th in the Premier League after a run of poor results, and have also been knocked out

of the FA Cup and League Cup, despite spending almost 300 million pounds (\$373 million) on new players in January. “We suffered a lot last year,” Ancelotti told reporters on Monday.

“We have to respect the team and the club, they have very good players and even if they are not in a good moment they have great motivation and will bring out the best. It’s a squad of a very high level.

“The team is excited and motivated to return to the Champions League and experience

another magical night at the Bernabeu. We have to take advantage of the fact that we play the first game at home.”

Chelsea’s current predicament also saw them sack coach Graham Potter at the start of April and hire their former coach Frank Lampard on an interim basis. The Champions League is the English club’s last chance for silverware this season.

“I feel sad (looking at Chelsea’s position in the table). I have a fantastic memory of this club, of the people that are still working there. I’m a supporter of Chelsea, because I spent two years there,” Ancelotti, who managed The Blues between 2009-2011 and also had Lampard as a player, added.

Ancelotti, however, ruled out a move back to Chelsea.

“Will I go back (as coach to Chelsea)? No, I hope Lampard will be able to do a fantastic job with them... Lampard has been a great player who I coached for two years.

“He knows these kind of games well and how to prepare his team. He has been here for a week, but he will do well in the time he is at Chelsea.”



Just over a week ago, AC Milan came into the Diego Armando Maradona Stadium and stunned Napoli 4-0. Milan are set to host Serie A leaders in the first leg of the Champions League quarterfinals today and will hope that Olivier Giroud turns up with yet another crucial performance for them this season.

PHOTO: AFP