

MOHAMMEDAN SPORTING CLUB



Established: 1936
Location: Motijheel
Nickname: The Black and Whites
President: Mohammed Abdul Mubeen
Current coach: Alfaz Ahmed
Current Captain: Souleymane Diabate

ABAHANI LIMITED



Established: 1972
Location: Dhanmondi
Nickname: The Sky Blue Brigade
President: Salman F Rahman
Current coach: Mario Lemos
Current Captain: Raphael Augusto

MAJOR DOMESTIC TITLES

Tournament/League	Mohammedan	Abahani
Dhaka League	19	11
BPL	0	6
National Championship	2	1
Federation Cup	10	12
Independence Cup	3	2
Super Cup	2	1



LEAGUE MEETINGS SINCE THE START OF PROFESSIONAL ERA (2007)

Played: 31
Abahani won: 15
Mohammedan won: 5
Draw: 11

MEETINGS IN FED CUP FINALS: 10

Mohammedan won: 3
Abahani won: 2
Draw: 4
No result: 1

MEETINGS IN INDEPENDENCE CUP FINALS: 2

Abahani won: 1
Mohammedan won: 0
Draw: 1

MEETINGS IN SUPER CUP FINALS: 2

Mohammedan won: 1
Abahani won: 0
Draw: 1

*The matches which were eventually decided on tiebreaker are considered as draws.

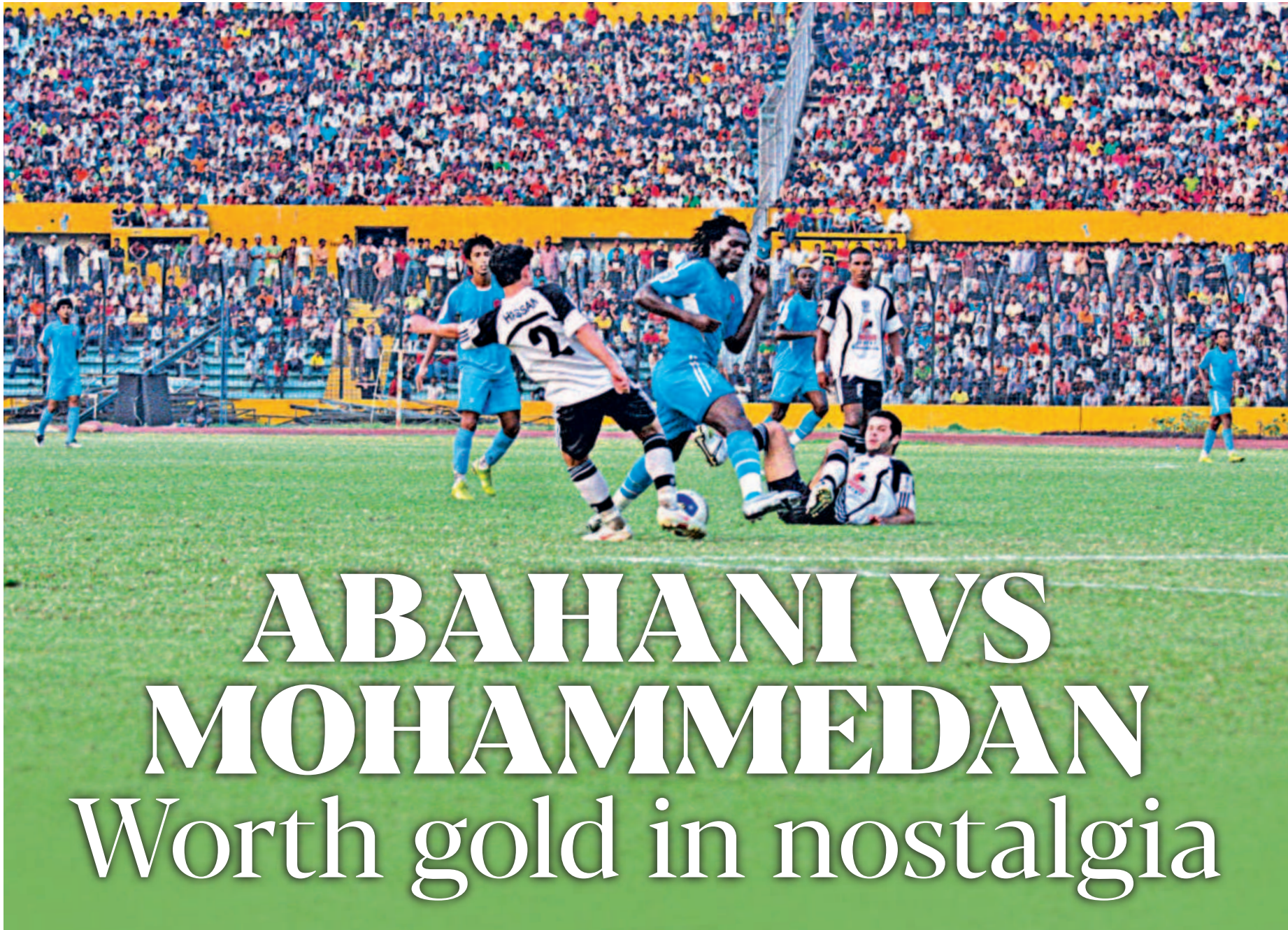


PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN/COLLECTED

ABAHANI VS MOHAMMEDAN

Worth gold in nostalgia

ATTIQUE ANAM

Almost every major football crazy city in the world has a historic club rivalry that it can brag about. Kolkata, London, Manchester, Milan, Madrid – you name it and there's at least one colourful and storied rivalry to whet the appetite of football fans.

Dhaka, our capital, had one such rivalry too which could rival those of the aforementioned cities for passion and excitement in its heyday. I say Dhaka *had* – as that rivalry, the one between Abahani and Mohammedan, no longer evokes the passion and excitement it once used to.

The Dhaka Derby, as it has come to be known in modern footballing parlance, is now a thing of nostalgia for those who witnessed the raging domestic football craze in the '80s and '90s of the last century. It is more alive in memories and memoirs of the football fans than on the pitch.

I can consider myself fortunate to at least have some fading memories of those wonderful times when the whole weeks or months would pass in anticipation of a Dhaka Derby. Not that the other league or cup matches were of less significance, however, the Dhaka Derby always had a special place in the hearts and minds of the football aficionados.

The Dhaka Derby started to catch the imagination of the nation long before televisions made their way into our living rooms. Radio was the go-to medium for the majority to turn to for the action. And the running commentary – with the baritone Abdul Hamid, the eccentric Khoda Baksh Mridha, the poetic Nikhil Ranjan Das and the meticulous Tawfiq Aziz Khan – relaying the riveting action from behind the microphone made the experience all the more memorable.

The memories of those days for me are a little vague, for I was too young when the Dhaka Derby was garnering unparalleled attention. Yet the recollections and reconstructions of those times tell me that we used to zoom over the radio long before the games started and kept on tuning until we received a decent signal. The games used to take place in the afternoons, and our afternoon sporting adventures were thus off the chart for those special days. It was perhaps a shared experience



between all children and youth in our neighbourhood, encapsulating the entire city for that matter.

Then came television and the Dhaka Derby became more tangible for those like me, who had never had the chance to go to the stadium since the atmosphere there was deemed too rowdy for the young ones. Names such as Salam, Aslam, Badal, Chunnu, Gaffar, Ilyas, Mohsin, Kanon, Munna, Sabbir and many others, whom

we had only heard of or had seen pictures of in newsprint, became living heroes, or arch enemies, depending which side of the Abahani-Mohammedan divide one stood.

Back then, Bangladesh Television beamed a range of wonderful football coverage, including Road to Wembley – an FA Cup highlight show and later a Serie A show, probably featuring the best match of the week (remember, Italian league was the best in the world those days) – but Dhaka football, and more precisely the Dhaka

domestic game started losing its appeal and the Dhaka Derby slowly started occupying less space in people's minds and in news coverage.

It's hard to ascertain exactly when domestic football lost its charm and what exactly reduced the Dhaka Derby to a mere news item, but the common perception is that there were quite a few debilitating factors at work around similar time. Wide access to live European football through satellite television, cricket's commercialisation in the subcontinent and Bangladesh's relative success in the game and, most importantly, the national football team's continued failure – all these factors might have played integral roles in the decline of popularity of the domestic game.

What remains today are memories of those days to reminisce and goad about while the galleries remain largely empty when these two giants take on each other.

Sometime in the mid '90s, probably after a league title won by Abahani, one of our next-door neighbours hung a Sky Blue flag on the concrete walls of his rooftop water tank and emblazoned the words 'Abahani Krira Chakra' in bright and yellow Bengali fonts.

The flag has disappeared a long time since. No-one flies those Black and White or Sky Blue flags anymore; their place is occupied instead by the Sky Blue White of Argentina or the Green and Yellow Brazil like a ritual every four years.

Ironically that writing on the rooftop water tank is still there. Somewhat faded and unattended to for a long time, yet it's there, overlooking the neighborhood, reminding everyone of the heyday of the game, like the way a decrepit aristocrat would cling on to his last treasure to goad of his rich family legacy.

A trip down Dhaka Derby lane

Sheikh Mohammad Aslam, Ashraf Uddin Ahmed Chunnu, Kaisar Hamid and Imtiaz Ahmed Nakib – four stalwarts of Abahani and Mohammedan during the golden era of the two Dhaka clubs' rivalry, recollect their memories of enthralling Dhaka Derbies in conversation with The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman as the two footballing giants are set to face off in the final of the Federation Cup for the first time in 14 years.

Sheikh Mohammad Aslam
Abahani striker (From 1984-1992 and 1994-1995)

After joining Abahani from BJMC in 1984, I had to endure abusive words from the fans for some off-target shots during a practice session ahead of the match against Mohammedan. I left the ground with a heavy heart. I also decided to leave the club but Harunur [Rashid] bhai calmed me down. The next day Kazi Salahuddin came under heavy criticism from the fans from the galleries after missing a few chances during the match and coach Ali Imam bhai took him off in the second half, piling the pressure on me to score. I received a through-pass from [Hasanuzzaman Khan] Bablu bhai, dribbled past two Mohammedan defenders and the goalkeeper to score the first goal of my Abahani career. This is an unforgettable memory for me because I still can feel the heat of that match and joy of that goal. Later I scored another goal.



Ashraf Uddin Chunnu
Abahani forward (1975-1988)

One incident in 1982 was exceptional. Mohammedan had already ensured the league title, but we were determined to break their unbeaten run when we met. However, the venue turned into a battleground after an Abahani equaliser was ruled out. The full-house crowd invaded the ground, forcing cops to fire tear shells. The players were confined inside the stadium till 12:00pm. Police later dropped the players at respective club tents. I returned to the national team camp at NSC dormitory but police took me, along with other Abahani players to the Rajarbagh Police Lines for taking statement. In the morning, we were sent to Ramna Police Station. The next day a court martial sent four of us – Kazi Salahuddin, Kazi Anwar, Golam Rabbani Helal and myself – to jail. That incident, I think, will remain a black day in the country's football.



Kaisar Hamid
Mohammedan defender (1985-1997)

I can recall countless memories regarding the Dhaka Derby match but the memories of my first two seasons in Mohammedan are most remarkable for me since I scored two goals against the Sky Blues in the Federation Cup final in my debut season of 1985. We beat Abahani twice in the league too but we failed to win the title after suffering a 2-1 defeat against Arambagh. I got injured in the previous match against Abahani and couldn't play against Arambagh. It was demoralising for me but the next season we became unbeaten champions beating Abahani, who had foreign players like Chima Okorie, goalkeeper Monoranjan Bhattacharjee, Prem Lal and Packer Ali. Abahani needed only a draw to win the title, but we beat them 2-0 to regain the title. This victory was a redemption for me and the club after the close miss the previous season.



Imtiaz Ahmed Nakib
Mohammedan striker (From 1989-1994 and 1999-2007)

The whole nation used to turn fever pitch for Mohammedan-Abahani matches and I was no exception to that feeling. It was amazing to see spectators at the club tent from the morning on the match days and then a full-house crowd at the stadium. Among all the memories, the sweetest one was in a match in 2000 when I scored a hattrick against Abahani. Interestingly, I have never played for Abahani and I have scored hattricks against each of Abahani outfits – Dhaka Abahani, Chittagong Abahani, Khulna Abahani, Rajshahi Abahani, Sylhet Abahani and Faridpur Abahani. I still feel proud when Abahani fans tell me I was the cause of many of their defeats. I also enjoyed when the Abahani fans taunted me, and even when they used to call me jamai [sister-in-law], even though I still don't know why they used to call me jamai.

