

## Abahani fall to Mariners again

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club returned to the title race of Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League after beating title aspirants Abahani 2-1 in their Super Six encounter at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

It was Mariners' second win against the Sky Blues inside four days as the defending champions had beaten the Dhamondi outfit by the same margin four days ago. Overall, it was the third consecutive victory for Mariners against Abahani, with their 3-0 win in the final of the Club Cup the first of the season.

With the crucial victory, Mariners (28) have gone level on points with Abahani and Usha KC, who beat Ajax SC 2-1 in the other match yesterday.

Mohammedan lead the table with 32 points from 13



matches. Mohammedan, Mariners and Abahani have three matches each left, which will be held after the Eid-ul-Fitr vacation.

Mariners went ahead with Shohanur Rahman Sabuj converting a penalty corner in the 20th minute after forward Abed Uddin forcefully earned a penalty corner while Fazle Hossain Rabby doubled the margin from a penalty stroke in the 26th minute.

Indian recruit Sheshe Gowad reduced the margin from a penalty corner in the 33rd minute but the rest of the efforts were not good enough for Abahani in their bid to exact revenge and minimising the gap with leaders Mohammedan.

Smarting from a 5-3 defeat at the hands of Mariners on Saturday, Usha managed to return to winning ways by notching up a come-from-behind 2-1 win over Ajax, with Indian recruit Ishrat Ikidar netting both goals after Jasman Nunda gave Ajax a 12th-minute lead.



Triple world champion Max Verstappen (L) his Red Bull partner Sergio Perez celebrate with the team staff following their dominant show in the Japanese Grand Prix in Suzuka on Sunday. Verstappen finished 12.535sec ahead of Perez, who came home in second in front of Ferrari's third-placed Carlos Sainz in dry, sunny conditions. Verstappen has taken an early stranglehold on the world championship on 77 points, with Perez on 64 and Sainz's Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc on 59.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Liton needs to devote more time to cricket: Mahmud

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh and Abahani star batter Liton Das's wavering focus on the cricket field has been in the limelight for a while and former national team director Khaled Mahmud Sujon believes that Liton needs to get back to the basics and devote more time to the game to regain his lost groove.

Liton has been looking a shadow of his old self with the bat for some time and even lost his place from the Bangladesh squad in the third ODI against Sri Lanka last month.

The wicketkeeper-batter, however, featured in both Tests against the same opponents and in a series where almost all Bangladesh batters failed to deliver, Liton's dismissals stuck out like a sore thumb.

Mahmud, who has been Liton's coach since the Under-13 level, had a few advices for the

struggling right hander.

"He [Liton] needs to get back to his basics. Now he is a senior and a bit more reserved, he needs to break free from that. He needs to mix more with others and give time to cricket," Mahmud told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

"He has a family now but this [cricket] is his bread and butter. He needs to devote more time to cricket," added the Abahani head coach.

Liton has played just one match for Abahani so far in the ongoing Dhaka Premier League (DPL) on March 17, after getting dropped from the ODI squad, where he made five against Shinepukur.

Most national team players joined their respective DPL sides after the end of the Sri Lanka Tests. Liton, however, had asked for a break from Abahani and skipped the game against

Legends of Rupganj on April 6.

Mahmud said that he had no second thoughts about granting Liton the rest considering the strength of his squad which consists batters like Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, Towhid Hridoy, Mohammad Naim along with Afif Hossain, Mosaddek Hossain and Jaker Ali Anik.

"Our team is very strong and I don't remember the last time a Dhaka Premier league team was this strong."

"I wouldn't have given him [Liton] the break if we didn't have that flexibility. The flexibility given by our batting order makes me feel that, okay, he should come back fresh from a break. He may not be playing the upcoming matches but we are hoping to get him from the Super League," Mahmud said.

The bigger question now would be whether Liton would make it into the lineup when he

is available with Mahmud suggesting that no one's place in the side is guaranteed.

"Performance will speak for itself. Previously it was easy walking into the team but that isn't the case in Abahani now. I was talking to Shanto yesterday and jokingly told him that Abahani is stronger than the national team."

"It's not easy to drop those who are practicing daily and performing for the team. But still, Liton is the country's best batter and the door is open for him. We will see if the team requires his presence since he has been playing for Abahani for quite a few years and performing."



## DPL awaits Super League boost after Eid break

SPORTS REPORTER

The Dhaka Premier League (DPL) entered a week-long break for the Eid holidays after the conclusion of the ninth round matches yesterday and with just two rounds to go in the league phase, a lack of competitiveness has been the overarching trait of this year's DPL so far.

Despite majority of national team players missing most matches in DPL due to the home series against Sri Lanka, the disparity between the teams has remained great.

Nine rounds into the league, two clubs - Partex Sporting Club and Rupganj Tigers - have just one win each while two other clubs - City Club and Gazi Tyres Cricket Academy - have managed two wins each.

After the first four rounds, four of the teams were on zero points without any wins, indicating the one-sidedness of the ongoing tournament.

While the likes of Partex, City Club or Rupganj Tigers have struggled to earn any points, table-toppers Abahani have won all nine of their games and can even afford to give a break to star batter Liton Das, who is struggling for form, without any hesitation.

Yesterday, bottom-placed Rupganj Tigers finally opened their

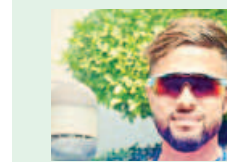
### MOST RUNS

**Parvez Hossain Emon:** 493 at a strike rate of 93.54  
**Mahidul Islam Ankon:** 453 at a strike rate of 71.9  
**Tamim Iqbal:** 403 at a strike rate of 78.86



### MOST WICKETS

**Ruyel Miah:** 21 at an economy rate of 4.47  
**Abu Hider:** 20 at an economy rate of 4.35  
**Maruf Mridha:** 19 at an economy rate of 5.13



account with a 31-run win over Brothers Union in a rain-curtailed game at BKSP Ground 3.

At BKSP Ground 4, Partex Sporting Club, who are 11th in the standings, slumped to a two-wicket loss to City Club in a tight game. City Club are now ninth in the table, one place above Gazi Tyres.

Brothers Union are eighth in the standings with just three wins while Legends of Rupganj, who suffered an eight-wicket loss to Abahani on April 6, have five wins, same as seventh place Gazi Group Cricketers.

Shinepukur Cricket Club, meanwhile, climbed to fourth position in the standings after beating Gazi Group by 80 runs in

a 43-over-a-side game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur, their second win on the trot.

National team players - Rishad Hossain and Nahid Rana - produced the goods for Shinepukur, claiming four wickets each to bundle out Gazi Group for just 161.

The DPL will resume on April 15 and the league phase would end on April 19. The top six teams in the league stage will move onto the Super League stage - which is likely to begin on April 22.

After a mostly dull league phase, hopes are that the country's premier domestic 50-over competition will come into life in the Super League phase.

### SHORT CORNER

#### Leverkusen one win from Bundesliga title



Bayer Leverkusen are just three points from a first Bundesliga title after a 1-0 win at Union Berlin on Saturday, with Bayern Munich letting a two-goal lead slip in a 3-2 loss at Heidenheim. Florian Wirtz converted a penalty deep into first-half stoppage time as Leverkusen were made to work hard in the German capital against 10-man Union, extending their unbeaten run this season to 41 games. Xabi Alonso's side need just three points from their remaining six matches to clinch the club's first league title. Bayern, on a streak of 11 straight Bundesliga titles, could relinquish their crown next week in between the first and second legs of their Champions League quarterfinal against Arsenal.



#### Sub Messi scores but Miami held by Colorado

Lionel Messi scored after coming off the bench but his Inter Miami were held to a 2-2 draw by the Colorado Rapids in Major League Soccer on Saturday. The Argentine had been out of action for almost a month with a hamstring injury, missing the last four games. Having come on after the interval, the Argentine World Cup-winner made an instant impact as he brought Miami level.

Djokovic wants last dance with Nadal at Roland Garros

Rafa Nadal's withdrawal from the Monte Carlo Masters has cast doubt over the 22-times Grand Slam champion's participation at the French Open, but Novak Djokovic said he is still hoping for a final chapter in their storied rivalry. "As a tennis fan I want him to play at least one more tournament before he retires..." world number one Djokovic told Eurosport in an interview published on Saturday.

#### Junaid trolls Kohli over slow century

Virat Kohli registered his eighth Indian Premier League century in Royal Challengers Bengaluru's match against Rajasthan Royals on Saturday. However, Kohli also made himself part of an unwanted record of hitting the joint slowest ton (67 balls) alongside Manish Pandey in IPL history. Following the knock, former Pakistan pacer Junaid Khan took to Twitter to criticise the star Indian batter with a sarcastic post. He wrote, "Congratulations Virat Kohli on the slowest 100 in the history of IPL."

#### Zaka Ashraf criticises PCB over Afridi outster

Former Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief said Shaheen Shah Afridi's removal from T20I captaincy was a hasty decision. "Shaheen should have been given some more time, at least one year, so that his performance [as skipper] could be analysed before taking any decision in this connection," Zaka said during an Iftar party in Lahore on Saturday, according to media reports in Pakistan.

\*\*Read full stories on The Daily Star's website.

## Valverde's 'incomparable' triumph

AFP, Barcelona

Ernesto Valverde has won league titles in Spain and Greece and the Copa del Rey with Barcelona as both player and coach, but the Athletic Bilbao manager said Saturday's Spanish cup final triumph over Mallorca was "incomparable".

Athletic edged underdogs Mallorca 4-2 on penalties after a tense 1-1 draw left two sides that could not be separated following 120 minutes of high-intensity football.

It was the Basque club's 24th Copa trophy - only Barcelona have more - but their first major silverware for 40 agonising years.



Athletic Bilbao players celebrate after putting an end to a 40-year wait to win the Copa del Rey by beating Real Mallorca 4-2 on penalties at La Cartuja stadium in Seville on Saturday following a 1-1 draw after extra time. The Basque side lifted the trophy for the 24th time, behind only 31-time winners Barcelona.

PHOTO: REUTERS

During that time they have reached the final six times but lost on every occasion until Saturday at a packed La Cartuja stadium in Seville.

Fans travelled in droves from the north of Spain to the sunny south to watch their team lift the club's first major trophy since 1984.

None of the current squad were born then but, with the club's unique stance of only using Basque origin players, the vast majority grew up

dreaming of emulating that success.

The domestic double winning team boarded an iconic boat known as the 'Gabarra' to celebrate, and the current squad will follow suit next week.

"It's incredible, it's incomparable to any other (triumph)," a delighted Valverde told reporters in the early hours of Sunday morning.

"You just have to see how the stadium was, the fans who came."

Valverde, under appreciated at Barcelona where he won two league titles in his first two seasons and was sacked with the team top of the table during his third, has forged a dynamic, exciting side after being appointed in 2022.

Athletic, propelled on the flanks by brothers Inaki and Nico Williams, play "rock 'n' roll", football according to midfielder Ander Herrera, the former Manchester United player.

