

Abahani defy intense heat to extend DPL supremacy

SPORTS REPORTER

Amid soaring temperatures throughout the day, Abahani clinched a nervy win against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi to seal back-to-back Dhaka Premier League titles yesterday.

While Abahani clinched the title at BKSP Ground-4, Mohammedan Sporting Club held their nerves in an eight-run win over Shinepukur Cricket Club at Ground-3, significantly improving their chances of finishing as runners-up.

Earlier in the morning, reporters reaching BKSP were surprised by Shakib Al Hasan's presence in the Sheikh Jamal dug-out. Shakib, who arrived from USA on Monday, had gone to his home district of Magura before coming to BKSP early in the morning for the game against Abahani.

Shakib struck 49 before Ziaur Rahman's scorching 58-ball 85 helped Sheikh Jamal to 267 for nine. Shakib later took a wicket too but Afif Hossain's 83, Anamul Haque's 67 and Mosaddek Hossain's all-important 53 helped the Sky Blues to a four-wicket win.

The conditions were gruelling for cricketers with many taking time between overs to recover from cramps. When Shakib was asked about the intense weather after the game, he only said, "Pretty hot."



Shinepukur had Mohammedan on the ropes for a while during another intense game. Skipper Akbar Ali's 61 got Shinepukur to touching distance before Musfik Hasan's double strike saw Mohammedan win.

As dusk started settling in, Abahani's joy found meaning after battling through intense temperatures.

"We play like a team and that is the reason we are champions," Abahani's match winner Mosaddek told reporters, after guiding the team to become unbeaten champions, with two games in hand.



Following a three-day camp, Bangladesh had their first training session as the players geared up for their upcoming five-match T20I home series against Zimbabwe -- being played as part of the preparation for the T20 World Cup in June -- at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. Mohammad Saifuddin, who was included for the Zimbabwe series after an 18-month gap, remains likely to also get a nod for the mega T20 event. PHOTO: BCB

Sky Blues make Fed Cup semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Title aspirants Abahani crossed Fortis FC hurdle to move into the semifinals of the Federation Cup with an emphatic 3-1 win in the fourth and final quarterfinal at the Bashundhara Kings Arena on Tuesday.

Last season's runners-up Abahani, who struggled against Fortis this season with a defeat and a draw in the Bangladesh Premier League, cruised to an easy victory, thanks to sparkling performance from all four of their foreign recruits.

Brazilian forward Washington Brandao scored one and set up two for Stewart Cornelius and Jonathan Fernando while Iranian defender Milad Sheikh Soleimani put up a bold performance.

The charges of Diego Cruciani got off to a brilliant start with Washington coming close to breaking the deadlock in the second minute.

The Brazilian, however, set up Cornelius for the opener seven minutes later, teeing it up for the Grenadian, who drove to right far corner of the goal. Washington was denied by the post in the 28th minute before doubling the lead in the stoppage time of the first half.

Fortis showed signs of comeback after the break but the Abahani defence held firm. Jonathan made it 3-0 in the 79th minute to ensure the Sky Blues' first win of the season over Fortis, who pulled one back in the stoppage time. Abahani will take on Bashundhara Kings in the semifinals while defending champions Mohammedan will play against Bangladesh Police.

'Team bonding' gives 9.8cr-powered Abahani edge

Amid the ongoing heatwave, while the rest of the coaches looked tense as the Dhaka Premier League fixtures at BKSP hung in balance yesterday, Abahani coach **Khaled Mahmud Sujon** looked at ease, his calmness embodied by Mosaddek Hossain's knock that helped clinched the title. Despite the team's financial muscle, there is more to it than meets the eye in Abahani's 23rd title, says coach Mahmud as he spoke to **Abdullah Al Mehdi** of The Daily Star.

DS: *How was the whole tournament from all teams' perspective?*
KM: For Abahani, it was fantastic. If you think of the tournament, it was not bad. I don't know if it would be right to say this, but, four or five teams appeared not to be up to Premier League standards. The rest of the seven teams found it easy. Previously, eight or nine teams used to fight for a Super League spot.

DS: *Do the rest of the clubs feel they should take the remaining players after Abahani form their team, or are they intimidated by Abahani's financial strength, among other aspects?*

KM: It's the second thing [feeling intimidated]. The first is definitely wrong. I want a player, so what problem is there? [Tawhid] Hridoy played for Sheikh Jamal [Dhanmondi Club] last year and I let him go. Someone wants a player, then they have to bargain, right? If I am paying five taka, you can propose eight taka. No one is denying them that.

Players are free to go anywhere but they always think twice before leaving this environment in Abahani. It's not only money but the atmosphere that players enjoy a lot.

DS: *What sort of club atmosphere creates value for your players?*

KM: One reason is payments, which I feel is very important in DPL. If you ask any



player in the team, you will see that none of them have to ask for their payments to Abahani. They know that they will get their payments in a timely manner.

Even if a player leaves Abahani, no one ever leaves without full payment. I have heard incidents at many clubs where a player says 'sir, I still have pending payment with that club, so how can I come?' Some clubs withhold payment, but this culture doesn't exist in Abahani. I can say Abahani are a cricket team and a family.

DS: *Abahani have been forming team with youngsters, leaving the big four of DPL?*

KM: They [big four] are very expensive. The guys here have been playing with me for a while. They are a very happy family. They do a lot of swearing and *addas* and I

always like to watch that.

If Riyad plays for my team -- obviously I like him a lot and I want him to play for my side -- then the language that they would use in the dressing room would be different. I don't even go into the dressing room sometimes, afraid of what they might say. Youngsters may not be comfortable with the seniors.

DS: *Apart from financial muscle, what's important to win a championship?*

KM: It's team bonding. They play for each other, and they play for their friends. They go out to eat together and roam around together. I don't have to do much, and they are the ones planning on how the team would win and I help them.

DS: *How can the other clubs reduce the gap with Abahani?*

KM: Abahani had the same problem. I have told them [club management] that I will take less renowned players to build a team on budget, but I have to ensure full payment of players. This develops trust towards Abahani.

Most players are expensive, and our budget is [Tk] 9.8 crore, which is more than a BPL [Bangladesh Premier League] team's where local and foreign players' payment do not add up to such an amount.

This Abahani is different from their previous versions, and this Abahani builds a team very professionally.

India, England, SA announce T20 WC squads

STAR SPORTS DESK

India, England and South Africa -- three of the top teams in T20 cricket -- announced 15-member squads for the upcoming T20 World Cup, which will be held in the United States and the West Indies in June-July. Wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant returned to the India squad 16 months after enduring a horror car crash. Pacesman Jofra Archer, meanwhile, was recalled to England's squad for the defence of their T20 World Cup crown after a year out of action. South Africa's squad, meanwhile, includes two uncapped players -- wicketkeeper batter Ryan Rickelton and fast bowler Ott Niel Baartman.

INDIA

Rohit Sharma (captain), Hardik Pandya, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj.

ENGLAND

Jos Buttler (captain), Phil Salt, Will Jacks, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Duckett, Harry Brook, Liam Livingstone, Moeen Ali, Sam Curran, Chris Jordan, Tom Hartley, Adil Rashid, Jofra Archer, Mark Wood, Reece Topley.

SOUTH AFRICA

Aiden Markram (captain), Ott Niel Baartman, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs.



India's Smriti Mandhana and Dayalan Hemalatha walk back to the pavilion following a rain interruption during their second T20I against hosts Bangladesh at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. Even though inclement weather had disrupted proceedings a few times, India managed to win the game by 19 runs via DLS -- thanks to Hemalatha's unbeaten 24-ball 41 that saw the visitors amass 47 for one in 5.2 overs in reply to Bangladesh's 119 all out in 20 overs. India took a 2-0 lead in the five-match series. PHOTO: BCB

All eyes on Mbappe in Dortmund-PSG clash

AGENCIES

The focus in the Champions League semifinal tie between PSG and Borussia Dortmund at the Signal Iduna Park tomorrow is firmly set on French star Kylian Mbappe.

PSG were crowned Ligue 1 champions for a record-extending 12th time on Sunday with three games to spare but it is no secret that ultimate glory in the Champions League is what the hierarchy have yearned for and tried to build projects to climb that

particular summit.

In that quest, PSG talisman Mbappe has led from the front in the league as well as in Europe as he leads the goal-scoring charts in both with 26 and eight goals respectively.

However, a tricky visit to Germany stands in the way of Parisians who are looking to make their way into their first final since 2020 in the Champions League.

PSG already met the German club in the group stage, winning at home and drawing away, with Luis Enrique's side squeaking through



- Dortmund are unbeaten in their last 10 home games in the Champions League (6W 4D). This is their longest streak in that regard in the competition.
- Kylian Mbappe is behind only Harry Kane in recording the most goals involvement in all competitions amongst players in the top five leagues. The French forward has netted 43 goals and 10 assists, while Kane has 42 goals and 12 assists to his name.
- Mbappe has found the net eight times in the Champions League so far this season, his joint-best tally alongside the 2020-21 season. He is also two goals away from reaching 50 goals in the competition and has scored a brace in each of his last two away games in Europe.
- PSG are winless in their past three visits to the Signal Iduna Park (1L 2D) in the Champions League, including a 1-1 draw in this season's group stage.

a tough group despite defeats by Newcastle United and AC Milan.

Meanwhile, Dortmund's deep run in Europe has not been a reflection of their woes in the league. They sit fifth on the table but will stand to be the beneficiaries if Germany claim a fifth spot in the next season's Champions League.

Edin Terzic's side are set to welcome back key defender Mats Hummels from injury and will also have midfielder Marcel Sabitzer fit for the match, while Emre Can and Ian Maatsen will be available having served their suspensions.