

BCB hopes to unveil more talent via NCL T20

SPORTS REPORTER

Rangpur Division decimated the challenge from a strong Dhaka Metro to clinch the inaugural NCL T20, winning the final by five wickets in Sylhet yesterday.

Pacers Mukidul Islam Mugdho and Alauddin Babu sent a few stumps flying, picking up three wickets apiece. Robiul Haque and Mohammad Rizwan also bagged one wicket each, alongside spinner Arif Ahmed, to bowl Dhaka Metro out for just 62 in 16.3 overs.

In response, Rangpur were reeling on 18 for four, but Ariful Haque and Tanbir Hayder steadied the chase before Mohammad Enamul hit the winning runs during a 9-ball 14 at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

"I think the full team deserves the trophy; not only me. The kind of support our players provided in the tournament despite a few of them not having played enough matches ensured a positive vibe in the dressing room, and that's why we won the title," Rangpur skipper Akbar Ali reflected.

For the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), a low-scoring final or the low-scoring affairs in the qualifiers and eliminator rounds took some lustre away from the intended purpose the tournament would serve. But overall, the tournament served its crucial purpose, according to the chief coordinator of BCB programmes, Minhajul Abedin Nannu.

"Can't give it hundred out of hundred, maybe 90 in 100. The wicket for the final match was not up to standard since it was



PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

CHAMPIONS: Rangpur (Prize Money: Tk 20 lakh)
Runners-up: Dhaka Metro (Prize Money: Tk 10 lakh)
Top Scorer: Naim Sheikh (316 runs)
Top Wicket-taker: Alauddin Babu (19 wickets)
Most dismissals: Akbar Ali (12)
Most Sixes: Jishan Alam (22)
Highest Score: Anamul Haque Bijoy (101 not out)
Centuries: 2 (Jishan Alam, Anamul Haque Bijoy)
Best bowling figure: Alauddin Babu (4-9)
Player of the final: Mukidul Islam Mugdho (3-12)
Player of the tournament: Abu Hider Rony (123 runs, 13 wickets)

very challenging. Four games took place every day on two grounds. Still, I think the behaviour [of the wicket] was okay; just the final was low-scoring," Minhajul said yesterday.

"Overall, the tournament has brought many players into the focus of the selection panel. We hope to consistently organise the tournament in the future and hope that the deficiency that we have in the T20 format will be fulfilled," he added.

Bangladesh had been looking to create the player base for Twenty20 cricket in particular, a format that they have lagged behind in international cricket. The works with the High Performance (HP) unit had been carried forward to the NCL T20 -- a

tournament that would also lend support to local players in terms of preparations for the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League.

Jishan Alam of Sylhet, who hit a ton, played some eye-catching knocks. There were other knocks of importance, such as Akbar's or his counterpart in the final, Mohammad Naim's. Another U-19 star from Jishan's batch, Ariful Islam, also came to focus for his T20 prowess.

Abu Haider Rony showed he was no mug with the bat, while also churning out displays with the ball. Spinners such as Rakibul or Aliss Islam showed their mettle in the shortest format.

"Our HP has gone through a lot of players in the last four years and they are

being noted now. If we keep playing more matches, more players will be found."

Minhajul said that they will try to ensure participation from national team players in the coming editions. Players such as Mushfiqur Rahim, Towhid Hridoy, Najmul Hossain Shanto, and Mustafizur Rahman featured sporadically during this edition.

Minhajul hoped the tournament would be organised more effectively in the future.

"We want to play in this tournament in at least three venues. It would help the players rest and [improve] their mentality too. We couldn't manage [more venues] since the tournament was organised within a small window," he concluded.



FEDERATION CUP Goals galore as Jibon hits hat-trick

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan SC and Rahmatganj MFS enjoyed goalfest in the Federation Cup Yesterday, smashing their respective opponents for six goals each in their Group B fixtures.

Rahmatganj, who had beaten Mohammedan 1-0 in their opening group fixture, handed a 6-0 drubbing to Young men's Fakirerpul Club, courtesy of a hat-trick from on-form striker Nabib Newaz Jibon, at the Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh.

The former national team forward has already scored four goals in the Bangladesh Premier League with the Old Dhaka outfit after having gone goalless in the league with Abahani last season.

After Maraz Hossain Opi opened the scoring in the 12th minute, Jibon scored in the stoppage time of the first half and then twice in the second half to complete his hat-trick. Samuel Boateng and Fahim Nur Toha scored the other two goals for Rahmatganj.

Mohammedan, meanwhile, saw six different players score a goal each in their 6-0 thrashing of Chittagong Abahani at the Bashundhara Kings Arena.

Muzaffarov and Souleymane Diabate gave the Black and Whites a 2-0 lead early in the match before Arif Hossain, Razu Ahmed, Sourav Dewan and Juwel Mia scored one apiece for the premier league leaders.

SHORT CORNER

Rajshahi rope in 'axe man' Ijaz as head coach

Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) franchise Durbar Rajshahi have appointed former Pakistan batter Ijaz Ahmed as head coach for the fast-approaching season, beginning December 30. Ijaz was a key member of Pakistan's 1992 World Cup-winning team, and was part of the squad that finished runners-up in the 1999 edition.

Argentine Fernandez finally thriving at Chelsea

Chelsea midfielder Enzo Fernandez struggled to live up to his hefty price tag following his arrival at the club in January last year but the Argentine says his recent upturn in form is down to developing a good understanding with coach Enzo Maresca.

Stokes to miss three months with torn hamstring

England Test captain Ben Stokes faces at least three months out after tearing his left hamstring during the tour of New Zealand, team management announced on Monday. The 33-year-old all-rounder had already been ruled out of next year's Champions Trophy one-day international tournament in Pakistan and the preceding white-ball tour of India.

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BOXING DAY TEST

Rohit wants to only focus on Melbourne

SPORTS DESK

After a stupendous start to their tour Down Under, winning the opening Test in Perth by 295 runs, India lost the advantage soon after in Adelaide against Australia.

India crashed to a 10-wicket defeat in Adelaide before battling to a draw in the rain-hit third match in Brisbane.

"At 1-1, I think it's a fair reflection," India captain Rohit Sharma told the reporters ahead of the Boxing Day Test.

"Both teams have played solid cricket and these two Tests are going to be so important for both teams. We want to break it down to Melbourne and focus on what we can achieve here, get things right and play well."

Rohit was coy Tuesday on how his team will line up for the Boxing Day Test against Australia, with the option of a second spinner on the table.

Temperatures are forecast to reach 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) on Thursday, and the Melbourne Cricket Ground curator said during the week he expected the pitch to offer plenty for the fast bowlers.

But Rohit left the door open to a second spinner.

With off-spinning allrounder Ravichandran Ashwin announcing his immediate retirement from international cricket after the third Test in Brisbane, Ravindra Jadeja is expected to keep his place. Washington Sundar is the other spin option.

India skipper backed

Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman

Gill, and Rishabh Pant to do well, ahead of the Melbourne Test as well as has backed Virat Kohli to overcome his problems with deliveries outside the off-stump in Australia, saying on Tuesday that players of his calibre always find a way to succeed.

"They know what is expected of them," he said.



***Sam Konstas will open the batting for Australia in the fourth Test against India, coach Andrew McDonald said Tuesday, while voicing confidence leading batsman Travis Head will be fit to play. Konstas was called up after selectors dumped Nathan McSweeney after just three Tests, with the 19-year-old tasked with fending off Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah alongside an under-performing Usman Khawaja. Konstas will become Australia's youngest Test debutant since current skipper Pat Cummins took the field against South Africa at Johannesburg in 2011.

* **India and Australia have played 14 Tests at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG), with Australia winning seven, India four, and three ending in draws.

***Of the nine Boxing Day Tests played at the MCG, Australia has won five, India two, and two have been drawn.

***India's unbeaten streak at the venue dates back to 2011, with wins in their last two Tests (2018 and 2020) and a draw in 2014.

Champions Trophy fixtures announced

Bangladesh open campaign against India

SPORTS DESK

Bangladesh will start their Champions Trophy 2025 campaign against India in Dubai on February 20.

The fixtures and groupings of the ninth edition of the tournament have been announced by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday, with the tournament set to begin on February 19 in Karachi with the final on March 09.

The eight-team tournament will feature 15 matches, and will be played across Pakistan and in Dubai.

In Pakistan, Rawalpindi, Lahore, and Karachi will be the three venues to host tournament play. Each Pakistan venue will feature three group games apiece, with Lahore hosting the second semi-final.

Lahore will also host the final on March 09, unless India qualify, in which case it will be played in Dubai. Both the semi-finals and the final will have reserve days.

The three group matches involving India, as well as the first semifinal (March 4), will be played in Dubai. The second semifinal will be held in Lahore on March 5.

Pakistan take on New Zealand in the Group A tournament opener in Karachi on February 19. The Dubai leg begins the following day with India taking on Bangladesh.

Group B begins on February 21, with Afghanistan squaring up against the Proteas in Karachi.



BANGLADESH FIXTURES

February 20: Bangladesh v India, Dubai
February 24: Bangladesh v New Zealand, Rawalpindi
February 27: Pakistan v Bangladesh, Rawalpindi
*All matches will be day-night encounters and start from 3.00pm (Bangladesh Time)

GROUPS

A: Pakistan, India, New Zealand and Bangladesh.
B: South Africa, Australia, Afghanistan and England

A big weekend then kicks off with rivals England and Australia set to clash in Lahore on Saturday (February 22), with the much-anticipated Pakistan-India clash set for the day later.

The eight sides in the Champions Trophy competing for the famous white winners' jackets are the teams that finished in the top eight positions on the points table of the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023.



The Bangladesh Police players celebrate with team flag following their 26-16 points victory over Bangladesh Ansar & VDP in the women's final of Victory Day Kabaddi Competition at the Shaheed M Mansur Ali Handball Stadium yesterday. (Inset) In the men's final, Bangladesh Navy edged Bangladesh Air Force by 38-36 points.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED