

Diabate hunts down Kings again

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan's inspirational skipper Souleymane Diabate scored a brace as the Black and Whites took another step towards claiming a first-ever Bangladesh Premier League title with a 2-1 win against 10-man Bashundhara Kings at the Kings Arena on Saturday.

The Malian striker exploited two unforgivable mistakes from the opposition players to give the league leaders their second win in the league over the five-time champions, in the process all but ending the hosts' hopes of a successful title-defence.

Diabate had also scored in the reverse fixture of the league where Mohammedan had run out 1-0 winners in Cumilla while he had also scored the only goal for Mohammedan in their 3-1 defeat against the same opposition in the season-opening Challenge Cup fixture.

The 34-year-old gave Mohammedan the lead in the 18th minute with a placing finish from outside the box after a terrible mix-up between defender Deciel dos Santos and goalkeeper Mehedi Hasan Srabon had handed him the opportunity to strike his eighth goal of the campaign.

Kings, who were playing with only two foreigners in the starting XI against Mohammedan's four, hit back seven minutes later, with Rakib Hossain grabbing



Mohammedan players celebrate their crucial win against Bashundhara Kings with the Palestinian flag, showing their solidarity with the war-ravaged people of Gaza.

PHOTO: BFF

a poachers' goal, poking home a rebound after Mehedi Hasan Mithu managed to block a shot from Mohammad Sohel Rana from outside the box.

The hosts were reduced to 10 men three minutes after restart when right-back Rimon Hossain saw a second yellow card after needlessly pulling down Emmanuel Sunday near the byline, long way away from the box.

Kings brought on three changes soon, including introducing Argentine striker Juan Lescano for the first time alongside Evans Etti, and the latter was partially culpable for the second Mohammedan goal.

The Ghanaian forward lost the ball in midfield in the 85th minute before Sunday's long ball found Diabate close to the box. The Malian rounding off Srabon and Deciel and picked the back of the net with precision to send the visitors on way to another tremendous victory, which took them to 30 points from 11 matches – 10 ahead of Kings.

Abahani, meanwhile, remained in pursuit of Mohammedan with a commanding 4-1 win against Wanderers at the Shaheed Barkat Stadium in Gazipur.

Raphael Augusto opened the scoring after the break and then wrapped up the victory with a brace, with Sumon Reza and Mohammad Ridoy netting the other two goals for the Sky Blues, who now have 26 points from 11 matches.

Sakib Bepari scored the consolation goal from the spot for Wanderers.

Elsewhere, Fortis FC moved into the fifth position with a 2-0 win over Brothers Union at the Bir Shreshtho Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj.

Nineteen-year-old defender Aky Marma scored his first goal in the league while Pa Omar Babou confirmed of all three points for Fortis. Brothers Union, meanwhile, slipped to seventh position with 15 points.



Pacer Ebadot Hossain continues his good form, finishing with career-best List-A figures of 4 for 36, after opener Anisul Islam's [Below] career-best 114-run knock helped Mohammedan secure a 39-run victory over archrivals Abahani in their Dhaka Premier League (DPL) match at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Extra pressure, added effort key to win: Hridoy

SPORTS REPORTER

Towhid Hridoy believes the intensity and emotional weight of "a few matches in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL)" push players to give more than they often do in international cricket, after Mohammedan triumphed by 39 runs over their arch-rivals Abahani in a high-stakes DPL fixture on Saturday.

Mohammedan, led by Hridoy, clinched the contest at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium to finish the league phase second in the standings, behind league leaders Abahani.

There was added joy for Mohammedan as it was their first List-A victory over Abahani since 2016, after a streak of 11 winless matches.

"Pressure is always there, both in international cricket as well as in domestic cricket. There are a few matches in the Dhaka Premier League in which I feel more pressure than I usually do in international cricket," Hridoy told reporters in Mirpur yesterday.

"Since there is tradition here, it becomes a game of egos, and prestige is at stake. You can feel the Abahani-Mohammedan rivalry in the DPL. I think there are many players who have put in more effort here today than they have put in international matches. I've enjoyed it."

After asked to bat, Mohammedan



gained from a one-man show as opener Aminul Islam Emon scored a 118-ball 114, hitting 18 fours and two sixes. The right-hander stitched a 123-run stand with Mahidul Islam Ankon (48 off 55 balls).

However, there was little to get excited about from the rest of the Mohammedan batters, with the next highest score being Mushfiqur Rahim's 26-ball 20. After Ankon's dismissal, they were 156 for two in the 26th over, eyeing a 300-plus total, but were eventually bundled out for 264 in 48.2 overs.

Abahani's Nahid Rana was the pick of the bowlers with figures of three for 49, while Mrittunjoy Chowdhury, Rakibul Hasan, and Mahfuzur Rabby picked up two apiece.

"It was a big match. It's always a cause for excitement whenever

Abahani and Mohammedan face off. It gets very competitive too. We focused on ourselves and what we wanted to do," said Hridoy, who played for defending champions Abahani last year.

"Credit has to be given to Emon [Aminul Islam] for the way he started off; he batted very well. We were always in a dominating position because of the way he batted. It wasn't easy and, apart from one or two batters overall, no one could play with ease on this wicket, which was a bit tricky – normally what we get in Mirpur. We were always confident that 250 on this wicket was enough."

In response, Abahani got off to a shaky start as they lost three wickets inside the first 11 overs with 59 runs on the board. A 67-run stand between skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mominul Haque (19 off 18 balls) followed, but Abahani were pegged back when they lost half their side in the 28th over, with 133 runs needed off 132 balls.

Shanto played through the innings with a 113-ball 80 and had help from Mosaddek Hossain (24 off 21 balls) and Mrittunjoy Chowdhury (24 off 33 balls), but the pressure got the better of the Abahani batters as they eventually folded out for 225 in 47.2 overs.

Ebadot Hossain starred with four wickets for 36 runs for Mohammedan, while Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Mohammad Saifuddin picked up two each.

Real aim recovery at Alaves

AGENCIES

Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti, reeling from a 3-0 mauling at Arsenal in the Champions League quarter-final first leg, must rally his players for Sunday's LaLiga fixture away at 17th-placed Alaves.

After last weekend's home defeat by Valencia, Ancelotti's side are four points behind leaders Barcelona after 30 games.

Broadcast blackout in Zimbabwe series?

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is struggling to sell the media rights for the upcoming home two-Test series against Zimbabwe as so far, no broadcaster nor marketing agents have shown interest.

On March 19, the BCB officially invited Expression of Interest (EOI) along with financial offers for the series, which will begin on April 20. The deadline for EOI submission ended on April 7, but the BCB received zero offers.

"As far as I know, no one has shown any interest as they believe the two-match series won't be feasible," a BCB source told The Daily Star yesterday on the condition of anonymity.

In the recent past, the Tigers' home series have aired on T Sports and GTV through Millennium Media Consortium, whose contract with the BCB ended with the home series against South Africa in October last year.

Total Sports Marketing (TSM) CEO Md Moinul Haque Chowdhury, whose company owns the ICC cricket rights in Bangladesh until 2025, said due to a crisis in the advertisement market they didn't even consider applying for the media rights of the Zimbabwe series.

"The condition of the market is so poor that no client is interested to advertise... I informed him [Faruque] about the current situation. As I don't own a TV channel, I would need to find a TV channel after acquiring the rights. So, it's not feasible for me either," Moinul told The Daily Star yesterday.

It is learnt that if the BCB fails to sell the media rights, it may air the series on state-owned BTV and BTV World.

When contacted, BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury didn't deny the predicament the board is in with the Zimbabwe series but said, "The matter is still not settled. We are hopeful."

The BCB's struggles are not limited to just the Zimbabwe series. On March 11, BCB had invited EOIs from consulting firms to help the board with the tendering process for the worldwide media rights of the men's team's home series till June 2027, but garnered no interest.

"The BCB is trying to appoint an international consultancy firm to get a valuation of their media rights, conduct the EOI and tender process... But no one showed any interest," said the BCB source. "The BPL broadcasting rights and TV product contracts are also over. Now we have home production service agreement and ground rights, both until 2027. But now we don't have global media rights for home series," he concluded.

WOMEN'S WC QUALIFIER In-form Bangladesh face winless Ireland

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's team will look to continue form as they take on Ireland in their second match of the ongoing ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier in Lahore today (3:00 pm, Bangladesh time).

The Tigresses made a dominant start to the tournament, riding on captain Nigar Sultana Joty's hundred to thrash Thailand by 178 runs and register their biggest win in this format, giving them a huge advantage in net run rate.

Meanwhile, Ireland have lost both their games to Pakistan and West Indies so far in the tournament, despite having showcased fighting spirit in both contests.

A win for Bangladesh at the Gaddafi Stadium will place them level on points with leaders Pakistan in the six-team competition – which will determine the two teams advancing to September-October's main event in India – given the West Indies, who started their campaign with a defeat to Scotland, are likely to climb the points table.

Joty and company yesterday had an extensive practice session in hot and humid conditions in Lahore, and according to team officials, all players are in good health.

Bangladesh have so far faced Ireland in nine WODIs, winning six matches and losing one, while two ended without result.



Kevin De Bruyne inspired a brilliant Manchester City comeback, scoring once and providing two assists in a commanding 5-2 victory over Crystal Palace on Saturday. The win ended Palace's eight-game unbeaten run across all competitions and lifted City to fourth in the Premier League, two points clear of Chelsea and Newcastle United, who both have games in hand.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CORPORATE BOOKING

Fantasy Kingdom and Water Kingdom will be reserved on 13th April (Sunday), 2025 for Corporate Booking.

From 14th April (Monday), 2025 Fantasy Kingdom and Water Kingdom will remain open for all.

Contact: 01969-910100

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