

Nasum heroics set up Mohammedan-Abahani 'final'

SPORTS REPORTER

On the backdrop of all the chaos of the previous day over Towhid Hridoy's suspension, Mohammedan Sporting Club yesterday got across the line against Gazi Group Cricketers in a last-ball thriller with Nasum Ahmed emerging as the unlikely hero with the bat to set up a virtual final between Mohammedan-Abahani Limited to decide who will lift the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) title this season.

Coming to bat at number eight, Nasum hit an unbeaten 13-ball 21 to help Mohammedan clinch a thrilling four-wicket win at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur.

Mohammedan, who are in second position with 24 points, now stand with a chance of winning their first DPL title since 2009-10, as they will face table-toppers Abahani, who have 26 points, in a title-deciding match in the last round of the Super League at the same venue on Tuesday.

If Mohammedan win, they would



PHOTO: STAR

equal Abahani in points and edge them on head-to-head to lift the title. Meanwhile, if the match gets washed out, Abahani will lift the trophy.

Abahani, meanwhile, beat Legends of Rupganj by seven wickets at the BKSP-4 on the same day.

Chasing 237, Mohammedan were

reduced to 204 6 inside 47 overs when Nasum entered the fray. Mohammedan captain Hridoy, after all the fuss surrounding his suspension, made 37 off 54 balls.

Mohammedan needed 23 runs in the last two overs, of which Nasum and Mohammad Saifuddin shaved off 11 in

the penultimate over from Abdul Gaffar, leaving 12 to get in the last over.

Saifuddin, the bowling all-rounder, played a dot first up against Sheikh Parvez Jibon and then took a single to turn over the strike to Nasum.

The tail-ender then hit a four, which was followed by dot and then a six to level the scores. Nasum then took the remaining run in the last ball to complete a memorable win.

Saifuddin, who claimed 3-42 with the ball, remained not out on 30 off 55 balls.

"When Saifuddin didn't take a single [in the first ball of last over], I was upset. Then I got the strike and hit a four and a six," Nasum told the broadcasters after the match.

"I was looking above all the time and praying to Allah to make me the hero. I was trying my best and all I required was His help. And it happened in the end," he added. Meanwhile, in the day's other match, Agrani Bank Cricket Club registered a massive 137-run win over Gulshan Cricket Club at BKSP-3.

BCB's new era, same old rot

Under Faruque Ahmed, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) continues to face the same issues as the previous regime -- team struggles, match-fixing allegations, and administrative chaos. The Towhid Hridoy suspension saga and player protests highlight the board's lack of professionalism and discipline. With elections nearing, unless Faruque brings genuine reform, his tenure risks being seen as a missed opportunity.

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Hridoy faces fresh ban

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammedan Sporting Club captain Towhid Hridoy's suspension saga took a new turn yesterday after he was handed one demerit point for showing dissent after being given out during their Dhaka Premier League (DPL) match against Gazi Group Cricketers in Mirpur. The fresh demerit

point took his total to eight, which means he will be suspended for four matches, which includes Mohammedan's upcoming title-deciding clash against Abahani Limited on Tuesday and will also miss three matches next season.

"If you see it in slow-motion, you can see how seamlessly it went. If you are caught out and then say you are not out, what is there to do? This is at the very least a Level 1 breach which imposes one demerit point," Iftekhar Rahman Mithu, chairman of BCB umpires' committee, told The Daily Star.

"If this adds on, then he has eight demerit points. Eight demerit points means a four-match suspension. He will not be able to play the next four matches, including Mohammedan's next match against Abahani."

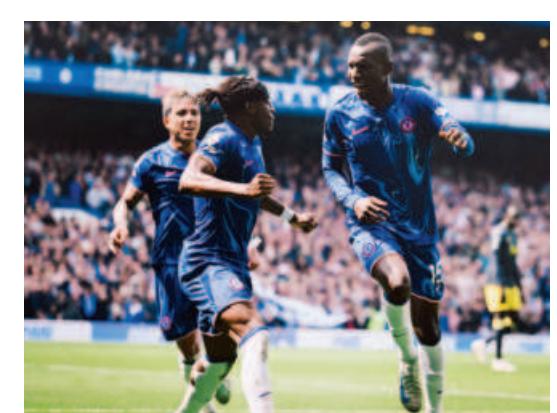


PHOTO: POLYGRAN

you don't get to play competitive matches, how can you compete at his level?" the former captain said The Daily Star, requesting not to be named.

"I don't want to blame the players. We need to have the league first, without that how will players get match temperament? When we used to play, we had so much of hockey that we didn't have time to rest. We played in all over Europe. Now our players' only target is to graduate from BKSP and then get into a services team," the former player lamented.

The ad-hoc committee in hockey was formed five months ago following last August's political changeover, but the new committee has yet to start either the club cup or the premier league. All it has done so far is arrange a Victory Day competition for the senior men and a Women's Development Cup apart from sending men's and women's youth teams to Junior Asia Cup events. But there has been no serious competitive hockey for the senior players for the last one year. BHF GS Riazul, though, could not offer much optimism in regards to starting the league or the club cup.

"Our biggest challenge now is organising the league. We have asked the clubs so far indirectly to play in the league. Now we will tell them directly. Unfortunately none of the clubs have come forward and told us to arrange the league," Riazul claimed.

Chelsea climbed back into contention for next season's Champions League with a 1-0 home win over Everton in the Premier League yesterday thanks to a fine first-half strike by Nicolas Jackson. The result lifted Chelsea to fourth in the table with 60 points, one behind Man City, as the battle for the top five nears its climax, with just four points separating third and seventh-placed teams.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

Jaker urges batting rethink after Sylhet setback

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's old batting frailties resurfaced in Sylhet, where they slumped to a three-wicket defeat against Zimbabwe inside four days last week.

Bundled out for 191 and 255 in their two innings, Bangladesh extended their miserable run at home, where improved pitches have done little to mask their lack of application. The hosts have now lost their last six home Tests.

Amid the gloom, wicketkeeper-batter Jaker Ali has been a rare bright spot. Batting lower down the order, the 27-year-old has been Bangladesh's most reliable presence, hitting four fifties in as many Tests.

Despite often running out of partners, Jaker has already played crucial innings, including a fighting 91 against West Indies in St Kitts that helped end Bangladesh's 15 year Test drought in the Caribbean.

Jaker, who scored 28 and 58 in Sylhet, believes the team's struggles stem from a lack of collective effort with the bat.

"The first match didn't go in our favour... After the first match, there was a good discussion. In our



PHOTO: STAR

maximum matches, we struggle due to our batting. So batting will be our primary focus," Jaker told reporters in Chattogram yesterday as the side began preparing for the second and final Test, starting Monday.

"Whoever we play against, I think we need to maintain our process. Especially about the batting in which we didn't do well. We talked about the shot selection, and how we can improve that. Not every day will bowlers win you matches. We want all batters to showcase their best performance and win the match for the team," he added, stressing the importance of batting smartly with the tail.

"I have to bat according to the situation... I try to score as many runs as I can along with the tail-enders," he said.

However, it is worth noting that in his second innings in Sylhet, Jaker appeared to shirk responsibility while batting with the tail. During his partnership with No.9 batter Hasan Mahmud -- a 35-run stand where Jaker faced only 33 of 91 balls -- premature strike rotation early in overs had exposed Hasan to the bowlers.

Asked why Bangladesh often falter against lower-ranked sides, Jaker did not sugarcoat his response.

"We make mistakes and that's why we lose. It's as simple as that," he said, backing Mushfiqur Rahim to bounce back soon.

Mushfiqur's form remains a worry for Bangladesh. The veteran has failed to score a fifty in his last 13 Test innings and managed just eight runs across both innings in Sylhet, with his dismissals sparking concern.

"Mushfiq bhai always works really hard and he is still doing well. He hasn't stopped trying, looking for ways to score runs. Hopefully, he will get back to form very soon," Jaker said.

Meanwhile, Zimbabwe got down to business under scorching conditions in Chattogram. Opener Ben Curran said they are ready for a backlash.

"We are expecting Bangladesh to come really hard at us. We are not expecting this to be an easy game. We have to work hard for every moment. We can hopefully put in a similar performance to last game," Curran said.

'A big blow to our hockey'

SPORTS REPORTER

Terming Bangladesh's failure to qualify for the Asia Cup for the first time as a 'big blow' to the country's hockey, general secretary of Bangladesh Hockey Federation's (BHF) ad-hoc committee, Lt Col (retd) Riazul Hasan, has cited lack of finances as a cause for the team's disastrous performance in the ongoing AHF Cup.

Four-time defending champions Bangladesh lost to Oman 5-4 in the semifinals of Asia's second-tier competition on Friday, in the process missing out on a place in the upcoming eight-team Asia Cup -- the first time Bangladesh will not be a part of the tournament in its 43-year history.

Mamunur Rashid's charges went to Jakarta with almost two month's training but did not get to play any practice matches. In fact the last time Bangladesh had played a competitive match was in the Asian Games in September-October of 2023.

Oman, on the other hand, have just played a tournament at home and practice matches in Pakistan in the build-up to the tournament.

The BHF general secretary said they need to move ahead with long-term plans and with support from all quarters, including the government and sponsors.

"We didn't have fund to arrange practice matches. We even had to borrow money for participating in this tournament," Riazul told The Daily Star.

"The other teams have improved a lot," the BHF GS said. "If we have to keep pace with them, our tactical and technical game sense will need to be increased a lot. And for that we need three year or five year plans and resources to implement those plans."

A former captain of the national team said he felt the players didn't play with freedom and spirit, which, according to him, Oman did.

"I felt Oman players were very spirited, and they played with a lot of spirit and enjoyed the game. On the other hand, our players looked like they lacked confidence. If

you don't get to play competitive matches, how can you compete at his level?" the former captain said The Daily Star, requesting not to be named.

"I don't want to blame the players. We need to have the league first, without that how will players get match temperament? When we used to play, we had so much of hockey that we didn't have time to rest. We played in all over Europe. Now our players' only target is to graduate from BKSP and then get into a services team," the former player lamented.

The ad-hoc committee in hockey was formed five months ago following last August's political changeover, but the new committee has yet to start either the club cup or the premier league. All it has done so far is arrange a Victory Day competition for the senior men and a Women's Development Cup apart from sending men's and women's youth teams to Junior Asia Cup events.

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Mohammedan, Abahani play out a dull draw

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani missed out on a great opportunity to cut Mohammedan's four-point lead in the Bangladesh Premier League after being held to a goalless draw by their archrivals in their 12th round match in Cumilla on Saturday.

The Sky Blues played with a numerical advantage for more than half of the match after Mohammedan full back Mahbub Alam had ruthlessly brought down Abahani forward Sumon Reza in the 42nd minute of this otherwise dull encounter.

Abahani, however, failed to make that numerical advantage count, courtesy of some wayward finishing and a few excellent saves from Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujon Hossain.

The draw means Mohammedan stay four clear of Abahani with 31 points from 12 matches with only six games remaining.

Sumon had the first chance to break the deadlock in the ninth minute of the game when he had a free header in front of goal, but his effort went across the face of goal.

Mohammedan tried a few long-range attempts in the first half, but nothing worth testing Abahani keeper Mitul Marma as the game, which

saw a number of disruptions due to crowd trouble, meandered into the second half.

The best chance of the match came to Abahani in the 66th minute when Mohammedan centre-back Mehdi Hasan Mithu was dispossessed right in front of the box by Abahani captain Raphael Augusto. Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujon saw the danger early and hared out of the box to clear the ball, only as far as Mohammad Ibrahim, who however blasted the ball over the target.

Sujon then made a string of fine saves as Abahani stepped up the attack in search of a winning goal while Muzzaffar, at the other end, failed to hit the target despite having the Abahani goalkeeper out of his position.

Meanwhile, five-time defending champions Bashundhara Kings failed to take advantage of this result as they, too, were held to a goalless draw by Rahmatganj in Munshiganj. The outcome means Kings remained in third position with 21 points, followed by Rahmatganj on 19.

There were goals, though, in the other match of the day between Brothers Union and Chittagong Abahani, which the former won 2-0 at the Mymensingh venue. Mohammedan tried a few long-range attempts in the first half, but nothing worth testing Abahani keeper Mitul Marma as the game, which

Liverpool prepare for Premier League title party

Liverpool have one hand on the Premier League trophy as they seek the solitary point they need against struggling Tottenham on Sunday that would guarantee a record-equaling 20th English title. Already leading by 12 points, a draw at an expectant Anfield would take Arne Slot's men 13 points clear of Arsenal with just four games remaining, meaning their tally cannot be matched by the Gunners.

*Slot is set to become the first Dutchman to win the Premier League. He will be just the fifth boss to win the competition in his debut season, after Jose Mourinho (2004-05), Carlo Ancelotti (2009-10), Manuel Pellegrini (2013-14) and Antonio Conte (2016-17). *Mohamed Salah has scored 15 goals against Spurs in all competitions, only netting more against Manchester United (16) in his European club career. Eleven of those 15 goals have come in the Premier League, with Alan Shearer (14) netting more against Spurs in the competition.

*Liverpool are unbeaten in their last 15 home games against Spurs in all competitions (W11 D4), winning the last three while scoring four goals each time.

*Spurs have won just two of their last 24 Premier League games against Liverpool (D6 L16), with both victories coming at home.

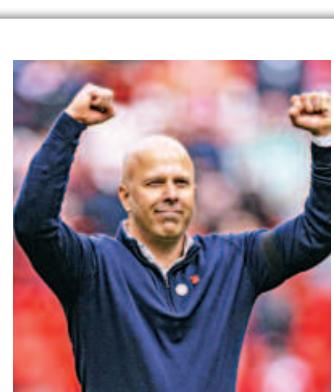


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