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SPORT

Okafor hits hattrick against former club

SPORTS REPORTER

Onyekechi Okafor scored the first hattrick of the Bangladesh Football League season against his former club as City Club held Fortis FC to a thrilling 3-3 draw in the second round at the Bashundhara Kings Arena on Saturday.

The former Nigeria international, who joined newcomers City Club from Fortis this season, put his new side 2-0 ahead by the 19th minute before Mohammad Ibrahim pulled one back for Fortis on the half-hour mark.

Pa Omar Babou equalised for the hosts after the break, but Okafor completed his hattrick in the 54th minute to restore City Club's lead. Japanese recruit Noriki Akada, however, levelled the score in the 69th minute to ensure the spoils were shared.

Meanwhile, former champions Abahani registered their first victory with a 5-1 thrashing of Dhaka Wanderers Club at the Chandpur District Stadium.

Nigerian forward Anthony Okachi scored twice, while compatriot Michael Babatunde, Pakistani forward Moin Ahmed and local striker Al Amin added one each for the Sky Blues. New recruit Jahid Hossain scored Wanderers' consolation.

The other match of the day ended in a 2-2 draw between Arambagh and Rahmatganj at the Gopalganj Stadium. Senegalese forward Sene Ibrahima scored both goals for Rahmatganj, while Rayies Suraj and Mohammad Rocky found the net for Arambagh.

City Club, Abahani and Fortis have four points each from two matches, while Bangladesh Police lead the table with six points.





Alessandro Bastoni celebrates with teammates after scoring Italy's equaliser in the 68th minute to help secure a 1-1 draw with hosts France in their Nations League clash at the Stade de France yesterday. France had taken the lead through Michael Olise's spectacular curling freekick, but were reduced to 10 men late on after Dayot Upamecano was shown a straight red. The draw ended Zinedine Zidane's winning start as France manager after two victories. [Inset] Edin Dzeko takes a selfie with Bosnia-Herzegovina teammates after his 152nd and final appearance for his country. The 40-year-old received a standing ovation and a guard of honour when he was substituted in the 63rd minute as Bosnia drew 1-1 with Sweden. PHOTO: **AFP**

New-look NCL begins with seven new faces

SPORTS REPORTER

In the absence of national cricketers, seven players made their first-class debuts for their respective sides as the new-look National Cricket League 2026-27 got underway at four venues across the country yesterday.

Pacer Anik Debbarma and off-spinner Nayeem Ahmed debuted for hosts Sylhet against Mymensingh, who handed debuts to all-rounder Azijul Hakim Rony and wicketkeeper-batter Md Fahim.

In Mirpur, leg-spinner Shadhin Islam made his debut for Rangpur against Dhaka, while wicketkeeper-batter Abdullah Shifat and top-order batter Zawad Abrar debuted for Barishal against hosts Khulna.

The opening day, however, produced no century or five-wicket haul, with batters largely dominating proceedings.

In Khulna, Kalam Siddiki and skipper Mohammad Mithun missed out on centuries after scoring 92 and 89 respectively as Khulna reached 328 for five against Barishal after being sent in to bat. Afif Hossain (44 not out) and Nurul Hasan Sohan (47) also contributed, while Barishal pacer Ruyel Miah took three wickets.

In Sylhet, Mymensingh reached 273 for seven, with Mahfijul Islam unbeaten on 70 off 135 balls and Abdul Mazid and Abu Hider Rony scoring 46 each. Debutant Nayeem took three wickets, while Nabil Samad, who is set to retire after the season, claimed two.

In Chattogram, Rajshahi made 290 for six at stumps, with openers Sabbir Hosan (71) and Habibur Rahman Sohan (75) scoring half-centuries. Hasan Murad and Enamul Hoque Ashiq took two wickets each for Chattogram.

Bowlers fared better in Mirpur, where Dhaka reduced Rangpur to 229 for six. Openers Mim Mosaddeak (63) and Anik Sarker Shatu (50) shared a 114-run stand before Anamul Haque broke the partnership, after which Dhaka struck at regular intervals.

Earlier in the day, all eight team skippers wore blazers during the toss for the first time in a first-class match in Bangladesh as the 28th edition of the NCL got underway.

Empty-handed, under fire after historic failure

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh had never left an Asian Games cricket tournament without a medal. Until Aichi-Nagoya 2026.

A full-strength side arrived in Japan chasing gold but will return empty-handed after losing both matches that mattered, to Pakistan in the semifinal and then, most painfully, by 63 runs to a second-string Sri Lanka in the bronze-medal playoff.

The result ended Bangladesh's run of Asian Games cricket medals dating back to 2010 and exposed a side that failed when the stakes were highest. The bronze offered a route out after the semifinal defeat. Instead, Bangladesh produced another shambolic batting display.

The historic failure set the tone for an uncomfortable post-match press conference, where captain Litton Das faced questions over his own performance, the team's approach and whether Bangladesh's cricketers had taken the Games too lightly.

Litton was asked whether the team, despite receiving considerably more facilities and support than athletes from many other sports of his country, had shown enough responsibility. He was also confronted with questions about players being seen outside the team environment close to match days, with the suggestion that Bangladesh may not have treated the Games with the same seriousness as a bilateral series or major tournament.

Litton pushed back.

He argued that the squad had not been provided with adequate practice facilities and that there had also been problems with the food available to the players.

"When you play cricket, many things are required. You need practice. Was there any practice facility here? No," he said.

"If we had the option of practising, perhaps you would have seen us on the field practising all the time. But there was no option. That's it."

When a journalist pointed out that Pakistan and Sri Lanka had faced the same conditions but produced far better performances, Litton acknowledged the obvious: Bangladesh had simply not played good cricket.

Asked whether that failure would see him resign, he replied: "No, I do not want to resign. There are ups and downs in cricket. One day things will go well, another day they will go badly. There is no reason to resign over this."

The questioning continued, with a journalist arguing that expectations were higher because of the privileges and resources afforded to Bangladesh's cricketers.

Litton eventually snapped back: "What should I do then? Tell me."

When told that he should resign and admit that he had failed, the captain responded sarcastically: "Should I resign? Fine, I have resigned from the Asian Games."

The confrontation was uncomfortable, but so was the cricket that had prompted it.

On Saturday, Sri Lanka posted 165 for nine, with Tharindu Ratnayake smashing 65 off 32 balls after Bangladesh's promising start with the ball unravelled. The chase was worse: four wickets fell for 18 runs inside 3.5 overs, including ducks for Saif Hassan, Tanzid Tamim and Litton, before Bangladesh were bowled out for 102 in 17.3 overs.

Litton's own contribution across the two matches was two runs and a golden duck.

There were logistical problems at the Games, and Litton made sure they were heard. But they could not disguise the central failure: Bangladesh had the players, experience and opportunity to win a medal, yet failed when it mattered.

The contrast with India could hardly be starker. India have now won back-to-back Asian Games cricket gold medals, doing so in their first two appearances. This time, they completed a double, with both their men's and women's teams taking gold.

Bangladesh, meanwhile, saw a proud regional legacy reduced to rubble.

While the captain deflected, coach Mohammad Salahuddin had no such hesitation in assessing the outcome.

"To be honest, we are deeply ashamed. As a coach, I feel that we have failed, and we have not been able to deliver what was expected of us. It is very disappointing, and I want to apologise to the entire nation," he said.

WHAT TO WATCH



SONY SPORTS 1, 2, 5
Asian Games
Events and concluding ceremony
Live from 6:00 am
UEFA Nations League
Live from 12:45 am (Monday)
Greece vs Germany
Netherlands vs Serbia
Portugal vs Norway

T SPORTS
World Championship of Legends
SA vs WI
India Vs England
Live from 9:30 pm





Pedro (right) celebrates scoring Brazil's second goal with Estevao Willian during their 4-0 victory over hosts India in a FIFA international friendly at Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata yesterday. The scoreline, however, only tells part of the story, as a spirited India refused to sit back against the five-time world champions. [Inset] Vinicius Junior could not find the net, but Estevao scored one while Samuel Lino netted a brace to seal the victory. However, the Blue Tigers can take heart from managing nine shots, including three on target, and six corners. PHOTO: **AFP**

IN BRIEF

Hockey team finish seventh

STAR SPORTS DESK

Bangladesh finished seventh in the men's hockey competition at the Asian Games after beating Thailand 3-0 in the seventh-place playoff at the Gifu Prefectural Green Stadium in Japan today.

Roman Sarker put Bangladesh ahead in just the third minute, giving Peter Gerhard's side an early boost as they dominated the opening quarter.

Bangladesh continued to press and doubled their advantage in the 27th minute when Amirul Islam converted a penalty corner.

Thailand struggled to create clear chances as Bangladesh maintained control of the contest. Ashraful Islam then put the result beyond doubt by converting a penalty stroke in the 53rd minute.

Thailand failed to find a response as Bangladesh comfortably protected their three-goal lead until the final whistle.