

BPL 2023: Strikers march into final in first for Sylhet franchise, For Masrafee it's 5th time.

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Online Desk: Sylhet Strikers finally moved to the final of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) in second attempt as their bowlers held their nerve in an adrenaline-pumping moment to help the side record a 19-run victory against Rangpur Riders in the second Qualifier today at Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium. They will take on three-time champions Comilla Victorians in the final for the coveted trophy for the first time. Comilla indeed beat them in the first Qualifier to seal the final straightway.

Sylhet looked to lose the baton in the second attempt too despite piling up 182-7 as Rangpur rode on a brilliant knock of Rony Talukdar to close in on victory. But Sylhet led by an inspiring captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, simply refused to give up. Needing 33 runs in the last three overs with seven wickets at hands, Rangpur were clear favourite but Sylhet bowlers remained calm under pressure to snatch a victory from the jaws of defeat, restricting Rangpur to 163-8. Rony's 52 ball-66, that included seven fours and two sixes were the top score from the either side even though brilliant knock went in vain. He kept the side in the hunt despite the early departure of famed batter Sam Billings (1), who was trapped leg-before by Tanzim Hasan Sakib, a young pacer who played a key role in Sylhet's eventual victory with 2-19.

Rubel Hossain had Shamim Patwari caught by George Linde for 14 to give Sylhet an early edge. Rangpur then titled the momentum towards them, thanks to Nicholas Pooran, whose six-hitting spree was hard to fathom for Sylhet. He struck four sixes and one four for his 14 ball-30 before being out, via an unbelievable catch of Luke Wood. It looked Rangpur would loss the momentum from that point.

Captain Nurul Hasan Sohan came up and counterattacked alongside Rony as they took the side on the verge of the victory with 33 runs needing from last three overs. At this point, game was stopped for some minutes as Sylhet's Mushfiqur Rahim who was not on the ground for most part of the match, entered here. It looked the stoppage distracted Rangpur's pair's concentration with Sohan mistiming a Sakib delivery to give a simple catch to Thisara Perera at long-on, ending the 82-run partnership for the fourth wicket stand with Rony. Sohan made 33 off 24.

Three balls later Rony who survived on 29 by Zakir Hasan, was trapped run out as Sylhet got the momentum which they didn't loss. Sakib conceded just two runs in that over and then Luke Wood came to take the wicket of Mahedi Hasan and Dwaine Bravo to finish as most successful bowler with 3-34. Dasun Shanaka hit two fours off Rubel Hossain in the last over but that was too late.

For Sylhet who were asked to bat first, Najmul Hossain Shanto was the top-scorer with 30 ball-40, an innings studded with five fours and one six. He and Towhid Hridoy gave the side a solid start, adding 65 runs in 8.5 overs with Hridoy making run-a-ball-25. But the duo was dismissed in quick succession, ruining the pace with which they were progressing. Mashrafe Bin Mortaza moved him up in the batting order and played a 16 ball-28 cameo as No.3 batter. But a flurry of wicket saw them slowing down in the middle overs before Thisara Perera and Linde hammering some crucial boundaries in the death overs that took the side to a safe zone. Both of the batters hit quick-fire 21 runs each. Hasan Mahmud and Shanaka grabbed two wickets apiece.