

ZZ marked out!

SPORTS REPORTER

It might have been easier to get past the whole Italian defence for a footballer of his stature. But the barrier of insistent photojournalists proved immovable for Zinedine Zidane, whose progress was blocked by repeated flashes of the hunting still and video cameras when he entered the BFF Bhaban yesterday.

The great midfielder not only failed to find a way through a 'wall' of cameras but also found himself tightly marked and could not properly kick the ball when he went to the children awaiting in the lawn inside the BFF Bhaban premises.

Over enthusiasm brought a premature end to the brief programme and the legendary French footballer was hastened for a press meet.

It got worse when Zidane made his public appearance at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. Having entered through the northern gate at 4.45pm amid noisy welcome cheers, he was driven into the ground on a horse-ridden carriage surrounded by BFF officials but he could not alight from the vehicle as camera shutters were kept on pressing.

It took a long time for the spectators from the stands to see that the champion footballer was wearing a dark trouser beneath a black figure-hugging t-shirt.

He was not only hidden by the photojournalists but scores of relatives of BFF officials, organisers, footballers and influential administrators barred the public's view. Everyone tried to get near him and as a result, the hero of France felt agitated to come down from the haven of the VIP box and take part in the exhibition match.

In the first place, the security was slack as even a nobody managed to invade the pitch and its surroundings and during the match, people were standing right beside the touchline.

Even the VIP stand, which was

reserved only for BFF officials, was crowded with unknown faces -- young kids and women.

Zidane finally got into action and whenever he touched the ball, he was making the fans stand on their toes. They had been waiting eagerly for a long time to see this happen but on a dew-wet strip, Zidane's sneakers could not grip the grass and he slipped often.

He tried to do what he used to do with a football but the youngsters, the under-16 booters of Abahani and Mohammedan, looked more eager to impress the master rather than passing him the ball to put on display for what people had come -- Zidane's manoeuvres.

The exuberance of youth could be forgiven but the people's sentiment was that the coaches should have told their boys to let the big man play. Because people had come to see Zinedine Zidane.

Zidane, who was gifted with the jersey of Brothers Union -- the local league champions who could not play -- before the game, played ten minutes for Abahani and 18 minutes for Mohammedan and looked great in all three colours -- orange, sky-blues and the black and whites -- with number 10 printed under his name.

He even wore the orange shorts of Brothers but people who came to watch one of the greatest names of the game, went home with the disappointments: Had he played a little longer or had he scored a goal or showed us the wonders he performed with the ball during his Real Madrid days with the 'galactico'!

Zidane, who scored a goal in the morning during a trip to Gazipur, came close to a second when his header on a corner was cleared from the line by a Mohammedan defender. He raised his hand often to draw attention of a teammate

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French football legend Zinedine Zidane, donning the Mohammedan colours, dribbles past a Abahani under-16 youngster during the exhibition match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Acme's maiden title

Crowds decorate CCL final

SPORTS REPORTER



Legendary footballer Zinedine Zidane was in the city but still the GrameenPhone Corporate Cricket League final turned out to be a grandiose affair as Acme Laboratories dethroned Beximco with a nerve-wrecking three-run victory at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The atmosphere was electric during the final of this season's curtain-raiser as the only 'living' cricket ground in Dhaka was filled to the brim, a sight unseen in recent domestic cricket.

Dashing Sri Lanka opener Sanath Jayasuriya, who was the last moment coup of champions Acme, added more spice in the final but the charismatic Lankan was far away from the fans' expectations as he scored only 14 runs, dropped a vital catch as well as giving away 37 runs in seven overs without any success, continuing his Dhaka jinx after his single failure back in 1997 for Mohammedan.

But still Acme rode on captain Habibul Bashar's magnificent 91-ball 68 and man-of-the-match Aftab

Ahmed's blistering 68-ball 56 to clinch the maiden title as they shot Beximco out for 232 runs in 49.2 overs, defending the 235 runs they scored in 49.5 overs to become another first-time winners after Bashundhara, GrameenPhone, ArafApparels and Beximco.

Another Sri Lankan, Kumar Sangakkara, however, showed his mettle for the second successive match but the left-hander's clinical 81-ball 76 as well as some brilliant glove-work and a quickfire 36-ball 33 by Mashrafe Bin Mortuza was not good enough to ensure their side's second consecutive trophy.

The match turned into a real tantalising affair when Beximco were left to score nine runs from the final two overs with Abdur Razzak and Mohammad Sharif batting, but the latter (11) skied the last ball of the penultimate over off pace bowler Alamgir Kabir only to be caught by keeper Dhiman Ghosh, leaving five runs to score off the last over.

Nazmul Hossain managed one run from Mohammad Rafique's first ball and Razzak, who was involved in a squabble with Jayasuriya, went for a big one in the second delivery but his shot was only good enough to reach the safe hands of Aftab at the long-off fence to kill Beximco's

hope off with four balls to spare.

Earlier, Acme had a fragile start after Bashar decided to bat first as Acme's ace Jayasuriya disappointed the local crowd as he returned to the pavilion with the scoreboard reading 33 for one in eight overs.

Aftab then joined Hannan Sarker to live up to the crowd as they added 45 runs for the second-wicket before Hannan was trapped leg before for a steady 56-ball 32.

But it was skipper Bashar who steadied the ship, associating in a 71-run third-wicket stand with dashing Tigers batsman Aftab who sketched six boundaries and cracked a six over wicket mid-off off paceman Nazmul, who was the most successful bowler with five for 51, before being caught at deep midwicket by Mohammad Ashraf in the very next ball.

Acme was more than just a few runs short in their total as they lost their last five wickets for 40 runs in the final stage.

In reply, the Beximco top-order once again failed to fire as Al Shahrir (18), Alok Kapali (10) and Ashraf (19) walked to the dressing room within a brief period and at one stage, were reduced to 109 for six in 29.5 overs.

Sangakkara and Mashrafe

revived the sinking ship but the 73-run seventh wicket stand was broken when the Sri Lanka vice-captain, who smashed 69 runs in the semifinal, mistimed a flick off paceman Hasibul Hossain, only to be caught at extra-cover by Jayasuriya.

Razzak and Mashrafe then took their team to a near victory but Mashrafe was run out by a very good throw Aftab throw from midwicket.

Alamgir Kabir, Monjurul Islam, Hasibul and Rafique picked up two wickets each for the winners.

Both captains Bashar and Akram Khan were not ready to highlight on the match result, rather they were overjoyed with the atmosphere of the match.

"I can't remember when we played a domestic match with such a superb crowd behind us. It was a great match played in a great atmosphere. Honestly speaking, I was completely surprised because you know a great footballer is here. I think the crowd was the real winner in the match," said an excited Bashar, who clinched a title as a captain for the first time in his domestic career.

"It brought back the old days. It seemed it was (at a match) 10 years

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PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh and Acme Laboratories captain Habibul Bashar works the ball on the off-side as Beximco's Sri Lankan star wicketkeeper Kumar Sangakkara looks on during the GrameenPhone Corporate Cricket League final at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

'I want to help the children of Bangladesh'

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

A soft-spoken Zinedine Zidane smiled his way through the brief press conference held in his honour at the BFF Bhaban at the heart of the city yesterday and left a message saying that he would be proud to do something to help the children of Bangladesh.

"I shall be proud to do something to help the children of Bangladesh and aid in the overall development of football in the country," said the French legend in his opening speech which came after Nobel Laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus, the man responsible for bringing Zidane here, said that "Bangladesh are fortunate to have a footballer of Zidane's stature grace us with his presence."

Yunus further went on to say that he hoped Zidane's visit would, "change the face of Bangladesh football" in the years to come.

In a packed conference room overflowing with reporters and photojournalists, Zidane was the star attraction in a panel that also included BFF president SA Sultan, vice-President Serajul Islam Bachchu and general secretary Anwarul Haq Helal.

"I want to thank Franck Riboud of Danone and Prof. Yunus for inviting me here," said a demure Zidane.

"I am very proud to be here and I am pleasantly surprised to see the enthusiasm of football in this region," said the French legend speaking through an interpreter.

And the maestro offered hope to aspiring young Bangladeshi footballers saying that regardless of their background if they worked hard and got the correct direction they could surely make the grade as professional footballers abroad.

"I believe that anything is possible if one has a fixed goal and believes in hard work."

Answering a query from a reporter about the key differences between Asian and European football Zidane said, "Asia is probably lagging behind since football is primarily an European sport and came late to this part of the world."

He was hopeful that it would catch-up very soon though.

Also keeping in tune with his roots, Zidane said that Muslim countries doing well in football made him happy and therefore he was hopeful that Bangladesh would one day reach a standard level.

VP Serajul Islam Bachchu opened the session by saying that this was a great day for Bangladesh football and the BFF. He thanked everyone including Danone and Professor Yunus for making this day

possible.

After the initial formalities Zidane was asked a variety of questions and answered queries, which ranged from speaking about his future goals to expressing his dismay at not being able to watch Indian football on TV!

Zidane confirmed that he had no plans to take up coaching at this moment saying that, "I think that at this moment I can put my skills to better use in some other sectors rather than football."

Asked how bitterly he felt about

his runners-up finish in this summer's World Cup, Zidane was philosophical.

"A players' career is full of ups and downs. Sometimes the good things come along and other times its all bad. It's part and parcel of a footballer's life. There have been many incidents in my life and its part of who I am."

And faced with the age-old question of who amongst Pele and Maradona was better, Zidane was diplomatic.

"I only watched Pele on TV and

videos after his career had finished but I grew up watching Maradona. Both are great players in their own time and both shall live on as legends."

Zidane also dispelled any comparisons between him and Platini saying that although Platini was a great player of the 80's there was very little resemblance between themselves.

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PHOTO: AFP

French football superstar Zinedine Zidane is all smiles during a press conference at the BFF Bhaban yesterday.