

Cricket’s summer in a bubble a lesson for everyone

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Despite England’s five-year unbeaten record in home series coming to an end when Australia’s Mitchell Starc swept Adil Rashid for a boundary at Old Trafford in the third ODI on Wednesday, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) would still have been proud of what they achieved this summer -- cricket’s first summer in a bio-secure bubble.

The summer was indeed a very successful one as it saw of 18 fixtures -- six Tests, six ODIs and six T20Is split into four series -- completed in just a span of three months with no major collateral damage. It goes without saying that what the ECB has pulled off is not only exemplary but also an inspiration for the rest of the world.

It is all the more remarkable because just six months ago, when the world was in the initial throes of the Covid-19 pandemic, it was probably beyond anyone’s imagination that cricket, or any other sport, could return in a manner that would only draw plaudits.

From laying the blueprint for all the series, creating the bio-secure bubble, ensuring the highest safety measures for not only the home side but also for the visiting contingents -- West Indies, Ireland, Pakistan and Australia -- to scheduling repeated coronavirus tests, ECB left no stone unturned even without a frame of reference upon which to rely.

But now, thanks to the ECB, a model has been set which the other boards should seek to replicate. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has already taken steps in this regard as they sought advice from the ECB on creating a bio-secure environment for their series against Zimbabwe starting from next month.

However, the challenge may be steeper for countries in the subcontinent where the coronavirus situation is more threatening, population density higher and cricketing infrastructure not as developed. The Bangladesh Cricket

Board (BCB) -- which has already refused to tour Sri Lanka under what BCB President Nazmul Hassan termed “historically unique” protocols set by Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) -- will have to cope with greater challenges than ECB when arranging series.

ECB made players, coaches, administrators, backroom staff and even rights-holders commit to staying, eating, sleeping, playing

And it was not as if even ECB’s largely successful measures had gone without a hitch, and there too are lessons for BCB, other cricket boards and players. England pacer Jofra Archer and Pakistan all-rounder Mohammad Hafeez both breached bio-secure protocols -- Archer made an unauthorised trip to his home in Hove after the first Test at Southampton’s Ageas Bowl and Hafeez posed for a

England’s Ollie Pope made an unbeaten 91 on the first day of the third Test against West Indies but only after struggling in the previous two games as he found it challenging to cope with the strict measures. And Archer, who has spent 87 days in the bubble -- most by any player during the summer -- is now considering pulling out of the Big Bash League saying that the mental challenge has had an effect



Australia's Glenn Maxwell attended a post-match briefing maintaining social distance after a match-winning hundred on Wednesday. Twin tons from Alex Carey and Maxwell inspired Australia to a three-wicket victory over England as the touring side clinched the ODI series 2-1.

PHOTO: REUTERS

and training on-site at suitably appointed stadiums. For ECB, one of the richest boards in a developed country, it was easier as they already had two venues -- Ageas Bowl and Old Trafford -- with hotels built into the stadium’s infrastructure.

That is not the case here. What the cash-rich BCB can try and emulate is the extra mile that ECB went in creating isolated zones, testing and quarantine facilities, one-way systems and abundant supplies of PPE and sanitisers.

photograph with an elderly fan at the golf course adjacent to the same venue on the eve of the second Test against England -- jeopardising the respective series. While Archer was levied an undisclosed fine and an official written warning, PCB took a rather lenient view of Hafeez’s offence. But both players were immediately isolated till their next negative coronavirus tests.

Players have also said time inside the bubble was challenging and had an effect on their performance.

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What this teaches us is that the success of arranging a series would now depend on the collaborative efforts of the boards, players and all its stakeholders. While the boards would need to chalk out a detailed and safe blueprint for a tour and put mental health issues of payers and management staff high on the list of priorities, the players and staff also need to comply and adhere to protocols for their own safety and benefit.



New domestic season to start in December

SPORTS REPORTER



The Professional Football League Committee (PFLC) of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday decided to start the 2020-21 from the first week of December through the season’s curtain-raising Federation Cup after settling agreement issues between clubs and the players.

Participating clubs had offered footballers only 20 per cent of their new contracts, which would be the same as their contracts of the 2019-20 season. Booters’ demand of paying 50 per cent of the new contract and also demanded the clearance of all of their wages of last season’s Bangladesh Premier League, which was cancelled in mid-March after only six rounds of matches due to the coronavirus outbreak.

“The next season will get underway in the first week of December as all clubs have agreed to the proposal. Now we have to take approval from the executive committee and we will try to sit in an executive meeting within this month,” said PFLC chairman and BFF senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy after the meeting at the BFF House yesterday.

“We have received written opinions from most clubs about where they stand regarding players’ payment, the start of the season and foreign players’ quota. As per discussions with clubs and players, we have decided that the players will get 25 per cent

If there are any gaps between the clubs and the players regarding the clearance of dues and payments of the new contract, the federation will look after the matter

Abdus Salam Murshedy, BFF Vice-president

of their new contracts, which will be the same as the previous season,” Murshedy said.

“The economy hasn’t bounced back after the pandemic. The clubs, which are being run on donations, are in financial trouble. I have also sat with the players twice and talked to them over the phone. The players want to play because they will disappear if football is not started immediately.”

Clubs had before told the PFLC that they would clear all of last season’s dues but have changed their minds and cleared only 45 per cent during the signing of the new contract.

“If there are any gaps between the clubs and the players regarding the clearance of dues and payments of the new contract, the federation will look after the matter,” said Murshedy, who could not say when the window would open.

It was also decided at the meeting that each club could sign four foreign players instead of five and field all of them in a single match while venues were trimmed to three or four instead of previous seven.

‘He would never compromise on his ideals’

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

There are those whose love knows no bounds and their devotion and fidelity to their passion attracts a deep reservoir of respect, gratitude and ultimately sporting conduct. ASM Faruque, the former cricketer and BCB director, who breathed his last yesterday following cardiac arrest, belonged to that latter group of rare personality. He remains another unsung hero of this country, which has come up in leaps and bounds through the grit and sacrifice of many.

“I will always remember him in that way -- a gentleman. I didn’t see him play but later, due to my work as a journalist, I got to know him as an organiser,” Utpal Shuvro, one of the most respected sports journalists in the country, said while talking about Faruque.

“The thing is, there is a thin line between being a cricket player and being a ‘cricketer’. Many times, we see something and exclaim ‘it’s not cricket-like’ and although it might sound silly in this age of IPL, the expression also suggests that cricket is also a philosophy of a way of being -- he embodied all those things. That’s what we understand as being a ‘cricketer’. The way he talked and conducted himself and how he was fully in love with the game always amazed me. Bangladesh’s cricket was all he revelled in and he did a lot for cricket. We have many unsung heroes, and he was one of them.

“When he was Bangladesh’s manager in 1982, one of his friends from England had asked what he could do for Faruque bhai. He asked nothing for himself but requested that arrangements be made so two players from Bangladesh have the opportunity to play in England’s local cricket each year. That was what he was like,” Utpal Shuvro concluded.



Faruque had himself arranged for the U-19 national team’s tour to England in 1989. The tour included eight players who went on to feature for the Bangladesh Test side. Three of them -- Naimur Rahman Durrjoy, Khaled Mahmud and Habibul Bashar -- went on to become national team captains.

“He was our first manager and it was the first tour in all our lives,” Bashar recalled. “I don’t think any of us even stepped out of the country before that. It was certainly my first. He was like a father figure to us.”

“We used to fear him during that tour but behind that was the immense respect we had for him. He was the right guide for us and what we learned on that tour will always stay with us. He would never compromise on his ideals. He was never shy of setting us straight. His discipline and passion were exemplary. In recent times, we used to talk a lot. We were making plans to each

personally write about our tour from ‘89. Even the last time we talked, he told me to stay safe,” the former captain said.

“You can gauge from the reaction of people who have met him or had a friendly exchange with him. Only a natural sportsperson can do that because not everyone can mix with people that way. He had a huge career and his sense of belonging can be understood from his devotion to Shantinagar Club and Mohammedan,” renowned cricket writer and coach Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury said.

“Team mates or opponents, everyone used to enjoy his company.”

Faruque may have left but the bonds that he forged and the passion he communicated and indeed spread, will live on.



BUNDESLIGA 2020-21

Can Haaland break Lewy’s iron grip on Torjaegerkanone?

AGENCIES



The battle that every fan wants to see in Germany’s this top division season, which gets underway with champions Bayern Munich hosting Schalke 04 on Friday night in the first match, is the one between Robert Lewandowski and Erling Haaland for the Bundesliga Golden Boot, better known as the ‘Torjaegerkanone’.

Lewandowski, who has won the award for the last three seasons, is favorite to keep the accolade. But if you fancy a different winner, Haaland is next up following a stunning debut campaign for Borussia Dortmund. The 20-year-old may have arrived in January, but it took him no time at all to adapt to German football whatsoever.

Haaland, who has been making waves all over the world after literally bursting onto the scene head-on and scoring goals at a frightening rate, scored 13 times in 15 games last time around after joining from Salzburg and will have his eyes on ending Lewandowski’s grip on the Torjaegerkanone. The Poland captain has now won five Bundesliga top-scorer awards -

ALL THAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Bayern are in the pursuit of a ninth consecutive Bundesliga title, a feat no club has managed so far in the league’s history.

If Bayern do win the league, David Alaba and Thomas Müller could each add a 10th Bundesliga winners’ medal that would make them the Bundesliga’s most successful players ever.

In the 2013-14 season, Bayern won 10 games in a row away from home, and they repeated that feat last season. A win at Hoffenheim on Matchday 2 would see them set a new Bundesliga record.

Bayern ended the 2019-20 campaign with 13 consecutive victories, and if they can win their first seven matches of 2020-21, they would beat their own 19-match record for most successive wins set in 2013-14.

Dortmund are only six points short of 2,500 Bundesliga points, a mark only Bayern have passed thus far.

Lewandowski (236) is 14 goals away from his 250th in the Bundesliga, while Marco Reus (127) is 23 away from 150 Bundesliga goals.

Fans will be banned from the first matchday on Friday, Munich’s mayor said on Thursday. Authorities had planned to allow 7,500 fans, albeit under strict hygiene measures but Munich reported 151 new coronavirus infections on Thursday, resulting in a seven-day incidence of close to 48 per 100,000 people. German states agreed that if the number rises to more than 35 per 100,000 inhabitants in seven days and the infection cannot be localised, fans will be banned again.

including each of the last three - and set a record for the most goals by a non-German in a single season with his 34 strikes last season. Could Haaland and Lewandowski spur each other past Gerd Müller’s 40-goal single-season record?

Lewandowski exceeded even his own lofty standards last season, banging in 55 goals in 47 games (in all competitions). He crowned the season with his first personal

Champions League triumph and if the Ballon d’Or had been voted on, he would, without doubt, have been the outstanding candidate.

But in his shadow lies Dortmund’s devastating new frontman, Haaland. The Norwegian teenager got off to a flying start in black and yellow and, with a full preseason behind him, one wouldn’t be totally mad to back him for the Bundesliga’s

“Torjaegerkanone” — the brilliantly named goalscorer’s cannon.

It is a very rare sight when a young player enjoys such a meteoric rise over a sustained period of time. He grows older, he is expected to bulk up and become an even more daunting presence than he already is.

A player of such an attribute is always going to be a target man with excellent aerial ability and hold up play which would give more chance to his creative teammates to be involved in the attacking phases of the play.

For someone of his frame, Haaland is deceptively quick off his block and loves to be on the move constantly. With teams that prefer to play direct attacking football, he would thrive due to these attributes.

The Norwegian is naturally good at reading game situations and always thinking two steps ahead of the players on the field. He tends to be looking for pockets of space all the time which as a consequence, stretches the opposition defense and ultimately creates more space for other attacking players to get in good positions.

The world is his canvas, and it is clear that Haaland has quite a lot of colours on his palette.