

Cricket finally back where it belongs

SPORTS REPORTER

A common sight in normal times but a rarity in the new normal – anticipation was in the air as a small group of people gathered outside Gate-2 of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Competitive cricket was returning to the country after seven months.

For someone who reports regularly on Bangladesh, walking through Gate-1 of the stadium to cover the first match of the three-team 50-over BCB President's Cup yesterday was like a sort of homecoming.

Masks and sanitisers were ensured but there was still a sense of apprehension in the press box, which was dispelled as excited journalists tried to maintain social distance.

Bangladesh Cricket Board's [BCB's] efforts to get the game back on the field reached the execution stage yesterday as Najmul XI took on Mahmudullah XI in the opening game.

There was a sense of satisfaction among the BCB officials, including President Nazmul Hassan, who were present to witness the game. A minute of silence was observed in memory of the cricket personalities who have passed away in recent months and the victims of Covid-19 and the country witnessed its first top-tier cricket action for the first time since March. Although general entry was restricted for spectators, the BCB did telecast the tournament through its



Cricket returned to Bangladesh with the President's Cup in Mirpur yesterday. The first game saw Mahmudullah Riyad's 51 lift his team to 196 against the Najmul XI.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

official Facebook and YouTube pages.

BCB had suspended cricket in March due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the country resumed normal activities since early August and cricketers started individual training. Considering the situation, BCB had first come up with plans to resume through the national team's tour of Sri Lanka for a three-match Test series.



The cricketers were initially allowed to attend individual practice sessions in small groups and then as a full unit inside a bio-secure bubble weeks before their travel to the island nation. The plan however fell through as BCB rejected the health safety conditions that was set by hosts Sri Lanka Cricket and the country's Covid-19 task force. But it did not deter the board from their

intention to get players playing competitive cricket. The board immediately came up with a back-up plan, starting with a couple of practice matches with the red ball and then the 50-over tournament which eventually turned into the BCB President's Cup.

A lot will depend on the success of the President's Cup for the BCB, who are also planning to arrange a five-team corporate T20 league in November.

As far as the action on the field, the cricket yesterday was below-par, considering the anticipation with which all were waiting for cricket to resume.

Najmul XI won the toss and asked Mahmudullah XI to bat as there was a short delay due to rain at the start. But things were all set after the break where Mahmudullah XI faced the music from pacers Taskin Ahmed and Al-Amin Hossain initially in overcast conditions and were struggling on 21 for three at one stage.

Naim Sheikh, Liton Das and Mominul Haque were the early casualties before skipper Mahmudullah and Imrul Kayes steadied the ship for the batting side.

The pair went on to repair the early damage but could not capitalise as Imrul departed for 41 while skipper Mahmudullah also perished after reaching his fifty.

Mahmudullah XI were eventually bundled out for 196 with pacers Taskin, Al-Amin and Mukidul Islam bagging two wickets each.

It will be harsh to point fingers at the cricketers who failed yesterday. Instead, it was indeed a welcome sight to see competitive cricket finally back in the country – everything else was, for yesterday at least, secondary.

District football in BFF boss's portfolio

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin announced himself as the chairman of the District Football League Committee yesterday, a week after he had said that holding the district leagues was not his responsibly following his re-election.

The new executive committee of the game's local governing body sat for its first meeting, with 18 out of 20 members present. The meeting formed 19 out of 21 sub-committees.

There were hardly any changes in the sub-committees as senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy, vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed, members Mafuza Akter Kiron, Harunur Rashid and Bijon Barua were retained as chairmen of their previous committees. Newly-elected vice-presidents Imrul Hasan and Ataur Rahman Bhuiyan were named as chairman of Dhaka Metropolitan league committee and development committee respectively.

Salahuddin, however, kept to himself the district football league committee, which was overseen by Chattogram Abahani director Tarafder Ruhul Amin in the preliminary stage of the last tenure.

"I'm taking responsibility of district football as leagues are not held there but this time I will look into the matter so that I won't need to depend on anyone to fill the gaps [between the BFF and district], said Salahuddin.

"I will make sure every district will have its league and I will financially support them. I will show that the district football committee can be stronger than any other committee. We will also monitor district leagues strongly. If districts fail to hold leagues despite taking initiatives, the administration will take over the responsibility to hold the league," said Salahuddin, who in his first tenure from 2008 to 2012 provided only a token money to District Football Associations (DFAs) for decoration of their offices.

During his second tenure from 2012-2016, the BFF, with assistance of former Sheikh Jamal DC president Manzur Kader, held district league twice. BFF, supported by government fund, helped DFAs to hold leagues twice between 2016 and 2020.

The BFF president also reiterated his promise of holding national football league, Sheikh Kamal U-19 and Sheikh Russel U-12 championships with participation of district teams.

The BFF boss also gave strong directive to clubs to be prepared for participating in the Bangladesh Premier League as per schedule.

"We will hold the league in line with official announcement. If any club doesn't want to play, the league will be held with the rest of the teams. We have had a lot of compromise and friendship, there is no friendship now because it is only time for football now," said Salahuddin.

A star is born

AGENCIES

When you make history, you feel the love. Nineteen-year-old Iga Swiatek became the first player from Poland to win a Grand Slam title in the Open Era at the French Open on Saturday, capping off a history-making fortnight without the loss of a set by beating American Sofia Kenin—and after the match, the tennis world came together to congratulate the teenager on her triumph.

Swiatek's father, Tomasz, was an Olympic rower who competed in the quadruple sculls event at the 1988 Games in Seoul. Her initial foray in sport came



champions Mats Wilander and Chris Evert also congratulated new tennis star but the most vocal online support came from three-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka, both during and after Swiatek's historic championship.

Though the reigning US Open winner Osaka missed this year's French Open herself due to injury, she was fully invested over the fortnight in the results of her friend, with whom she's struck up an earnest friendship over the past year.

Poland's first Grand Slam finalist in women's singles, former World No.2 Agnieszka Radwanska, was among the first to offer her compatriot congratulations.

Swiatek also received a special shoutout from the men's World No.1 Novak Djokovic.

Classic heavy metal and rock is her preferred genre and she walks out for matches listening to the likes of AC/DC and Guns N' Roses and she is a keen student and she combined her tennis career with finishing high school, where her favourite subject was maths. She described this season as her gap year before she decided whether or not to go to university. The decision has surely now been made.

This is Swiatek's second time lifting a grand slam trophy. Her first came at Wimbledon in 2018 when she proved herself to be head and shoulders above her peers by sweeping to the junior title, convincing herself in the process that she could play on grass.

Very few juniors are able to translate their success at the senior level so quickly, even fewer players can reach and play their first Major final with such ease.

But that's where Swiatek stands apart.

in swimming, but Swiatek told earlier this year: "I was scared of water so tennis was much better for me."

Now she announced herself as tennis' newest teenager superstar.

Poland's President Andrzej Duda, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, were among those offering congratulations to the youngest woman to win the French Open since Monica Seles in 1992.

Bayern Munich forward Robert Lewandowski, former French Open

BOSSING IT EVEN FROM HOSPITAL

Chris Gayle is yet to play a match for Kings XI Punjab in IPL this season. The 'Universe Boss' has not been keeping well in UAE and informed his fans through social media that he has landed in the hospital. But like always, Gayle was in a cheerful mood, saying, he will "never go down without a fight." Gayle posted: "I Am The #UniverseBoss - That will never change!! You can learn from me... but its not everything I do you should follow!! Don't forget my style and flair too!! #LivingDiLife #Always".

PHOTO: TWITTER



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