

Rubel leads pacers' party

SPORTS REPORTER

Perhaps the most positive aspect of the ongoing three-team BCB President's Cup is the pace bowlers stepping up and making a huge impact for their sides.

The wicket-takers' chart of the fifty-over tournament is dominated by pacers, with the likes of Rubel Hossain, Al Amin Hossain, Ebadot Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Mohammad Saifuddin and young Shoriful Islam regularly outperforming the spinners.

As important as the wickets they have taken has been their consistency in line and length and their efforts to extract some life from the Mirpur wicket, which has been sporting throughout the tournament.

The experienced Rubel certainly stands tall among the lot as he is at the top of the wickets list, having picked up 10 wickets in four games at an economy rate of well below four runs per over, including his



Rubel Hossain, like most of the pacers of the national team and the ones on the fringes, continued to be destructive with the new ball during the BCB President's Cup in Mirpur.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

tried to get something from the pitch at good pace and a perfect line and length, which has made him a lethal force in this tournament.

The 30-year-old pacer has been instrumental with the new ball and managed to get early breakthroughs for Mahmudullah XI consistently and yesterday was no exception.

Rubel, right from the start, tempted the batters by maintaining a tight channel on the fourth and fifth stump line and got the reward immediately. He started off by picking young Tanzid Hasan Tamim with a banged-in three-quarter length delivery which rose sharply and took the left-hander's edge through to the slip fielder.

Credit should also be given to another pacer, Abu Hider, who was bowling from the other end

as the left-arm seamer kept the pressure on from one end, which helped Rubel pick up wickets as the batsman chased the right-arm seamers' away going deliveries.

His next victim was Anamul Haque Bijoy, who was caught in two minds over whether to play the shot or not and offered up a simple catch to cover off a Rubel delivery well outside the off stump.

The pacer was brimming with confidence and also used variations like the slower ball and at times tried to bowl in the blockhole, keeping the batsmen guessing all the time.

Mohammad Mithun also paid the price as he became Rubel's third wicket, courtesy of an outside edge to the keeper as Tamim XI were struggling on 17 for four inside

nine overs.

Much like with the new ball Rubel was also instrumental with the old cherry as well and coming into his second spell the pacer managed to give the all-important breakthrough for his side by picking up the wicket of Maidul Islam Ankon for 57.

Courtesy of Rubel's magnificent figures of four for 34 from his 10 overs, including three maidens, Tamim XI could only post 221 for eight in 50 overs.

As the Tigers head coach Russel Domingo said before the tournament, he is focusing on creating a group of seven to eight pacers who could play in all three formats both home and away, the BCB President's Cup will undoubtedly encourage the South African.

Booters welcome Nepal friendlies

SPORTS REPORTER



The national footballers are eagerly waiting to return to the ground through friendlies against Nepal -- slated for November 13 and 17 in Dhaka -- despite questions remaining about their preparedness to take the challenge following a long coronavirus-induced break.

Footballers had been training at home as per instructions from head coach Jamie Day till early August after the country's sports activities were suspended since mid-March and deferment of all international engagements due to the pandemic. The booters even started outdoor training at Gazipur from early August for the World Cup Qualifying fixtures in October and November but FIFA/AFC on August 12 again deferred the matches to the next year, leaving the national players, except the booters of Bashundhara Kings, sitting idle for the last one month.

In such circumstances, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has invited Nepal to play two international friendlies on the November FIFA Window.

Though the players have not yet been officially informed about the friendlies by the BFF or coach Day, the players are well aware of the friendlies due to media reports. And the booters seemed to be excited to return to action despite the lack of preparation.

"We have not been informed about the friendlies yet but Jamie always asks us to be ready because the training camp may get started anytime. Since the lockdown, Jamie has been in touch with all of the national players and recommended us to follow the training schedules," said midfielder Sohel Rana.

"We have been training individually but there is a huge difference between individual training and team training. It's a fact that we have to gain [match] fitness

as much as possible within a three-week period to play these matches because we don't have alternatives." The Abahani midfielder is however ecstatic with a hope that they will return to the action in November after a long eight-month gap.

"Arranging such international matches is needed because all of us are out of action for a long period. Our football will return to the ground through these two international friendlies and the footballers will not only get a taste of football after a long gap but also the spectators and other stakeholders will also get the taste of football," said Sohel.



More than half of the national players including Sohel are perhaps out of training since mid-August. However, a dozen national players have been in the club training for Bashundhara Kings till October 15. The club management also asked the players to join the camp on October 30 before resuming training from November 1.

"The players of Bashundhara Kings won't face much problem to regain their fitness because they have been in training for the last one-and-a-half months but the players outside Bashundhara may face difficulties to get fit within a short period of time," said right-back Bishwanath Ghosh.

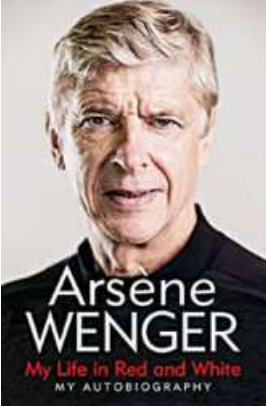
"We really want to return to the ground immediately and we are obviously happy with such an initiative that will also give us a platform to get prepared for December's domestic competition," said Ghosh.

'I feel like being in kindergarten with Jose'

REUTERS

Arsene Wenger has brushed off Jose Mourinho's reaction to being left out of the Frenchman's autobiography despite their fiery touchline clashes over the years, saying that dealing with the Portuguese made him feel like he was in kindergarten again.

Wenger's autobiography, "My Life in Red and White", looks at his 22 years at Arsenal but failed to mention his duels with Mourinho, whose Chelsea side dethroned the Frenchman's 'Invincibles' in 2004-05. Mourinho had said the reason he was not mentioned in the book was, "Because he never beat me." "It doesn't bother me. It's permanent



provocation." Wenger told Canal Plus. "I feel like I'm in kindergarten with him. But that's part of his personality."

Mourinho's rivalry with Wenger reached boiling point in 2014 when they physically clashed on the touchline in a Premier League game at Stamford Bridge.

It took Wenger 14 attempts to finally beat Mourinho, who once called him a "specialist in failure", and he managed only two wins in 19 meetings.

"We beat him twice. We won, and there were also a lot of draws," Wenger added. "It's not 'you' who wins, you only participate in the victory. It's 'us' who win. The manager is there to get the most out of a team."



THREE SUPER OVERS IN A DAY!

Sunday night was a historic one for IPL, witnessing three Super Overs on a single day. Debutant Lockie Ferguson's destructive bowling saw Kolkata Knight Riders edge Sunrisers Hyderabad in a Super Over in the first match before Chris Gayle's towering six all but sealed Kings XI Punjab's win over Mumbai Indians in the second Super Over of that particular match.

PHOTO: IPL

Virus shakes up big leagues

REUTERS, BERLIN

Fans assuming that Bayern Munich would already be cruising towards their ninth consecutive Bundesliga crown or that English champions Liverpool would have started to shake off their rivals early in the season could not be wider of the mark.

The Covid-19 pandemic has mixed up the traditional balance of power across Europe's major soccer leagues, with heavyweights Liverpool, Real Madrid and Juventus trailing behind the likes of Everton, Real Sociedad and Sassuolo.

A disrupted 2019/2020 season due to the global spread of the virus meant any regular pre-season preparation went out of the window, with leagues stretching into June and July to finish.

The Champions League did not end until a month later, forcing teams such as Bayern, PSG and Manchester City to make do without virtually any training before the new campaign.

AGENCIES



The Champions League group stage kicks off on Tuesday with Bayern Munich beginning their defence of the trophy won in Lisbon in August. Here are some of the storylines to watch over the next few weeks.

Pirlo up against his old master

In 1995, Mircea Lucescu gave midfielder Andrea Pirlo his Serie A debut at 16. Some 25 years on, Lucescu will be on the opposite bench when Pirlo makes his UEFA Champions League coaching debut with Juventus. The 75-year-old Dynamo Kyiv boss remembers the young Pirlo as: "Incredible, mature; mature like he is now." Can the 41-year-old outfox his old mentor in Ukraine, even with star striker Ronaldo absent?

All eyes on Camavinga

Like Pirlo, midfielder Eduardo Camavinga was 16 when he made his top-flight bow, and the Rennes man subsequently became France's youngest senior international debutant since 1914 when he featured in the UEFA Nations League in September at 17. He should catch the eye in Rennes's group stage debut against Krasnodar, as his old Rennes youth coach Landry Chauvin put it: "He has this simplicity that brings the ball to life."

Will Messi close the gap?

With Ronaldo isolating, Lionel Messi

has a chance to narrow the 15-goal gulf between the two megastars at the top of the all-time UEFA Champions League rankings. Ferencvaros visit Camp Nou, but Messi will not remember his only past meeting with a Hungarian side fondly. At 18, he made his Argentina debut in an August 2005 friendly against the Magyars. He was sent off within two minutes of coming on.

Can Immobile show Dortmund his worth?



Defending champions Bayern Munich will be looking to race off the blocks when they host Atletico Madrid on Wednesday.

PHOTO: BAYERN MUNICH

Outscoring Robert Lewandowski to win last season's ESM Golden Shoe with 36 league goals will have brought a certain satisfaction for Lazio's Ciro Immobile. The forward replaced Lewandowski when the Pole left Dortmund for Bayern in 2014, but underperformed in his only season in Germany: ten goals in 34 games in all competitions. As Lazio welcome Dortmund, the 30-year-old has a chance to get some closure.

PSG v United: The revenge mission

On 6 March this year, Marcus Rashford posted an Instagram to mark one year since his late penalty in Paris completed a stunning round of 16 comeback, the Reds Devils overturning a 2-0 home defeat to progress with a 3-1 success at Parc des Princes. "What a night," wrote Rashford. Neymar, who watched both legs from the sidelines, will be anxious to help PSG get their own back.

Lewandowski v Suarez

With 15 goals over the course of Bayern's stunning campaign -- 11 games, 11 wins -- Robert Lewandowski was the star of last season's UEFA Champions League, and a clear winner in the UEFA Men's Player of the Year vote. He will seek to maintain that striking form in this season's group stage, but an opener against miserly Atletico means he could be upstaged by Los Colchoneros' new arrival Luis Suarez.

Like the first time for Ramos

Matchday 1 could easily feel like Groundhog Day for Sergio Ramos; Real Madrid's game against Shakhtar marks the start of the defender's 17th successive UEFA Champions League campaign. However, no one sums up the spirit of the competition quite like the 34-year-old. As he put it: "You have to reset every year and start from scratch; to live each triumph, every trophy win, as if it were a completely new thing."

Liverpool v Ajax: Battle of the giants
Perhaps the most remarkable thing

about this matchday 1 fixture is that it is only Ajax and Liverpool's third European encounter. Their first two tussles came in the 1966/67 European Cup second round; Johan Cruyff scored three across two legs as Ajax won 5-1 in Amsterdam then drew 2-2 at Anfield. Having netted in four of his side's last seven European away games, might Salah be the star this time around?

An Olympian struggle for Valbuena

"Marseille and me, we're linked for life," tweeted Mathieu Valbuena after his current club, Olympiacos, drew OM in the group stage. The midfielder spent eight seasons at Marseille before leaving for Dinamo Moskva in 2015, so fans were not exactly delighted when he returned to France to join Marseille's rivals Lyon two years later. Expect that relationship to remain complicated as the 36-year-old lines up on Wednesday.

Underdogs aim to prove themselves great Danes

Four teams make group stage debuts on matchday 1: Basaksehir, Krasnodar and Rennes kick off on Tuesday, while Midtjylland meet Atalanta in their opener on Wednesday. Denmark's champions have had the longest journey; they made it through two qualifying rounds before beating Slavia Praha in the play-offs, coach Brian Priske saying: "Getting to the group stage is the ultimate."

2020-21 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE	Edition: 66	Teams: 32	Midtjylland and Rennes will make their debut appearances. *This will be the first time three Russian clubs will play in the group stage.
	Defending champions: Bayern Munich	Final: 29 May, 2021	
	Schedule: 20 Oct 2020 – 29 May 2021	Venue: Ataturk Olympic Stadium, Istanbul	
		*Istanbul Basaksehir, Krasnodar,	