



The players and officials from the Gemcon Khulna dug-out run in to celebrate with the ones on the field following their nail-biting five-run win over Gazi Group Chattogram in the final of the Bngabandhu T20 Cup at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# Riyad's Khulna triumph

MAZHAR UDDIN

The adage that says that you cannot buy experience was proved once again as Gemcon Khulna skipper Mahmudullah Riyad rose to the occasion on the biggest stage on offer and led from the front to lift his maiden domestic T20 trophy yesterday.

It was a cracker of a Bangabandhu T20 Cup final. Gazi Group Chattogram's Shykat Ali kept hopes alive till the end during their chase of 156, but the form team of the tournament fell short by just five runs.

Defending 15 runs in the last over, pacer Shohidul Islam held his nerve and dismissed the dangerous Shykat on 53 with a brilliant yorker to start the celebrations for Khulna. It was Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's fifth T20 title and his inclusion in the middle of the tournament seems to have worked as a lucky charm for Khulna.

Mahmudullah, however, did not leave it up to luck as Khulna's title owed much to his crucial, unbeaten 70, which he followed with outstanding captaincy when defending the middling 155-run total.

Considering Chattogram's form throughout the tournament, it was expected to be an easy chase but Mahmudullah and his team made sure there was no let-up in pressure.

Chattogram's success throughout



We peaked at the right time. The boys showed their character and I can't ask for more. I could not bat the way I wanted to in the first few games but I kept on and Alhamdullillah finally contributed for the team.

MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD



Boys played really well the whole tournament but [unfortunately] the final did not go our way. Our top order was in very good touch [in the tournament]. Maybe it would have been easier if we had some partnerships going in the beginning.

MOHAMMAD MITHUN

the tournament had much to do with their in-form opening pair of Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar, but they failed in the all-important final as Suvagata Hom dismissed the latter for 12.

Skipper Mohammad Mithun also departed cheaply, trapped-leg before by Al-Amin Hossain for seven. Mahmudullah then rotated his bowlers smartly and managed to deny boundaries to Liton and the frustrated right-hander was eventually run out for 23.

Earlier, Khulna's ploy to go after the bowlers and use the Powerplay

backfired after Jahurul Islam, who struck a blistering 80 in the first qualifier between the teams, was out off the first ball of the innings going for a big shot against off-spinner Nahidul Islam.

Khulna then lost another experienced hand in Imrul Kayes to the same bowler.

On 42 for two after the Powerplay overs, Khulna were searching for momentum but kept losing wickets -- Zakir Hasan and Ariful Haque, who was sent up the order to number four, departed in their twenties.

But then skipper Mahmudullah took over, fighting the lone battle of not just holding the innings together but also looking for those boundaries to post a fighting total. He made sure he made up for the absence of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who left for the US after the first qualifier to be with his critically ill father-in-law.

The 34-year-old mixed aggression and calm to great effect and reached his first fifty of the tournament off 39 balls, but the job was not yet done.

The Bangladesh T20I skipper then launched himself on the Chattogram bowlers and, courtesy of his short-arm jabs, Khulna added 37 in the last three overs. Mahmudullah smashed Soumya Sarkar for 17 runs in the final over of the innings.

He remained unbeaten on 70 off

**Gemcon Khulna:** 155 for 7 (Mahmudullah 70 not out, Zakir 25; Nahidul 2-19, Shoriful 2-33)

**Gazi Group Chattogram:** 150 for 6 (Shykat 53, Liton 23; Shohidul 2-33, Al-Amin 1-19)

**Result:** Gemcon Khulna won by 5 runs

**Player-of-the-final:** Mahmudullah

**Player-of-the-tournament:** Mustafizur Rahman

48 balls, which included eight fours and two sixes, as Khulna posted 155 for seven in 20 overs.

## An all-round success

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangabandhu T20 Cup posed a lot of challenges for not only organisers but also young, upcoming cricketers along with the seniors of the national side. The consistency of batsmen and bowlers came to the forefront over such a long tournament and it also served notice of the importance of such tournaments to gauge the performance of the crop of players closest to the national team's sphere while also bringing such players into view who can challenge perspectives going forward.

Most importantly, the tournament's performances will provide impetus for the national side's think tank to get things moving in terms of finding their footing in a format where Bangladesh have generally struggled, and form a specialised side for T20s.

The three tons of the tournament from Parvez Hossain Emon, Nazmul Hossain and Mohammad Naim, all scored at tremendous strike-rate, showed the direction that the national outfit can take to improve their T20 credibility.

That Nazmul's ton, when his side Minister Group Rajshahi posted the highest total of the board, was assailed by an aggressive 42-ball ton from Emon showed the merits of such a tournament with only domestic players on view.

Established stars also made their mark as national team stalwart Tamim Iqbal ended as the second highest-run getter in the tournament. Although his fluency was often questioned, that he finished amongst the top scorers once again showed his consistency as one of the top batsmen in the country.

Liton Das also made the tournament count, impressing Gazi Group Chattogram's fans with his array of strokes and the composure and consistency that so many craved from him. His opening partner Soumya Sarkar also found his rhythm and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza got in on the act after

joining Gemcon Khulna and scalping a career-best five-wicket haul in T20s.

There were some let-downs as well as Mahmudullah Riyad and Mushfiqur Rahim did not always get going while all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who staged a return to competitive cricket through the tournament after serving out a one-year ban, could not quite get his bat to shine the way he would have liked but still featured economic bowling as potent as ever in the format.

Meanwhile, Beximco Dhaka batsman Yasir Ali's haul of 294 runs proved his potential in difficult situations with the bat.

However, the tournament was however not just about batsmen. Mustafizur Rahman staked his claim as one of the best performers, with line, length and above all his intelligence once again brought to the fore. His energy while running in to bowl and getting his rhythm going showed signs of him being able to overcome the injury issues that had plagued him before the Covid-19 pandemic stalled cricket.

His bowling partner Shoriful Islam proved his potential with 16 wickets, generating pace, bounce and swing with the new ball. With the old ball, he got his yorkers going and proved a capable deputy. Spinner Nahidul Islam also impressed as he opened the bowling for finalists Chattogram and grabbed early breakthroughs to set the stage for the likes of Mustafizur and Shoriful.

Experienced campaigner Rubel Hossain of Dhaka showed venom with the ball and the youngsters like Dhaka's Shafiqul Islam and Khulna's Shahidul Islam impressed with their performances in pressure situations. Kamrul Islam Rabbi's hattrick in a tough game also brought much-desired competition.

The performances of local players meant that the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president was certainly in favor of such tournaments taking place. "We are considering how to keep this tournament in the calendar," BCB president Nazmul Hassan said.



TOP FIVE RUN-GETTERS								
Player	Mat	Runs	HS	Ave	SR	100	50	
Liton Das	10	393	78*	49.12	119.45	0	3	
Tamim Iqbal	9	324	77*	40.5	115.30	0	2	
Najmul Hossain	8	301	109	37.62	156.77	1	2	
Yasir Ali	9	294	67	36.75	124.57	0	2	
Soumya Sarkar	11	292	63	29.2	125.86	0	1	

TOP FIVE WICKET-TAKERS								
Player	Mat	Overs	Runs	Wkts	Best	Ave	Econ	
Mustafizur Rahman	10	38.5	243	22	4/5	11.40	6.25	
Muktar Ali	10	31.0	285	17	4/37	16.76	9.19	
Kamrul Islam Rabbi	9	33.0	286	16	4/21	17.87	8.66	
Shoriful Islam	10	38.0	304	16	3/27	19.00	8.00	
Shohidul Islam	8	26.5	205	15	4/17	13.66	7.63	

## Kiwis draw first blood

AFP, Auckland

QThe Black Caps ended on 156 for five with seven balls to spare after losing Qthe toss and being set a target of 154.

Tim Seifert top-scored for the hosts with 57, while debutant paceman Jacob Duffy took four for 33.

Pakistan never recovered from a slow start, despite a fighting 42 from stand-in captain Shadab Khan.

Haris Rauf was the tourists' best bowler, taking three for 29.

Pakistan had a rocky preparation for the match when 10 of their touring party tested positive for Covid-19 during quarantine after arriving in New Zealand.

Players also received a rebuke from local health authorities for flouting social distancing rules, and were unable to train until they were allowed out of their hotel on December 8.

In contrast, New Zealand were coming off a 2-0 series win over the West Indies and playing in home conditions.

The second and third T20s will be played in Hamilton and Napier on Sunday and Tuesday, with the first of two Tests starting in Mount Maunganui on December 26.



## Ashwin four-for gives India lead

AFP, Adelaide



Tim Paine ran out of batting partners.

Paine was left stranded on 73 not out when the Australian innings ended at 191 to trail India's 244 by 53 runs. Ashwin had figures of four for 55 while Umesh Yadav took three for 40.

At stumps, India in their second innings were one down for nine with Mayank Agarwal on five and nightwatchman Jasprit Bumrah yet to score. Prithvi Shaw was bowled by Pat Cummins for four.

Fifteen wickets fell on the day which started when Cummins and Mitchell Starc took just 25 deliveries to knock off the final four India batsmen.

Australia in turn struggled to make headway as Bumrah, Ashwin and Yadav worked their way through the batting order. Even with India spilling five chances, they never allowed Australia to settle apart from a determined Paine who plugged on to his eighth half century, aided in part by being dropped on 26.

It was Paine's only misstep and he brought up his 50 off 68 deliveries.

## One who put Messi, Ronaldo in shade

AFP, Berlin



impossible -- relegating superstars Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi to supporting roles at a football awards show.

On Thursday, Bayern Munich's Polish striker claimed FIFA's 'The Best' prize for the year's top footballer, a season crowned by a European Champions League medal.

"He deserved it more than anyone else. He played the season of his life," said Bayern Munich chairman Karl-Heinz Rummenigge after Lewandowski's 55 goals in 2019/20 were a key factor in Bayern winning the treble.

The Poland forward has already scored 18 goals in 17 games this season, hitting the net twice against Wolfsburg on Wednesday to pass the milestone of 250 Bundesliga goals.

The fact Lewandowski has had to wait until he is 32 to be crowned at FIFA's 'The Best' awards is down to the way he proved himself in the knock-out stages of the Champions League last season.

Despite having been the Bundesliga's top-scorer for five of the last seven seasons, Lewandowski was getting a reputation for struggling to find the net in key Champions League games. Up until February, he had

failed to score in his previous seven matches in the knock-out stages.

His four goals for ex-club Dortmund in the 2013 semifinal, first-leg, against Real Madrid seemed a faded memory.

All that changed in February's last 16 win over Chelsea, when Lewandowski scored at Stamford Bridge, then set up Serge Gnabry's two



goals in a 3-0 away win.

When the return leg was played nearly six month later, Lewandowski had a hand in all four goals -- scoring twice and creating two more -- in the 4-1 win at the Allianz Arena.

Lewandowski followed that up by scoring in the historic 8-2 quarter-final rout of Messi's Barcelona and netted again in the 3-0 semifinal win over Lyon.

He finished as the Champions League's top-scorer with 15 goals,

two short of Ronaldo's record for a single season and was dubbed 'LewanGOALski' by Bayern teammate Thomas Mueller.

His three goals in this season's group stages puts him level with Real Madrid legend Raul on 71 Champions League goals, short of Messi's 118 and Ronaldo, who has scored 134 times.

In October, Lewandowski was

## Russia welcomes CAS decision

AFP, Moscow

Russia's Olympic Committee on Thursday expressed its satisfaction with the Court of Arbitration for Sport's decision to not ban the country's athletes from participating in the Olympics.

Sport's highest court on Thursday barred Russia from the international stage for two years including the rearranged Tokyo Olympics and Beijing Winter Games, but halved a four-year ban for systemic doping imposed by WADA.

The country will also miss out on the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. Speaking to reporters on Thursday, the Russian Olympic Committee's president Stanislav Pozdnyakov expressed satisfaction that CAS had not "collectively" banned Russia's athletes, who will still be able to participate under a neutral flag if they prove no connection to doping.

However Pozdnyakov blasted as "unacceptable" CAS's decision to ban Russia's high-ranking officials, including the country's president Vladimir Putin, from attending the Games.