

SPORT



Every person in the Comilla Victorians' camp invaded the pitch and made a beeline straight towards Alok Kapali (R), whose 28-ball 39, featuring four boundaries off the last two overs, sealed a dramatic last-ball win against the Barisal Bulls in the Bangladesh Premier League final at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

V FOR VICTORIANS

Mash doesn't rate himself!

SPORTS REPORTER

He was dismissed as a has-been by the national selectors earlier this year. That his good run in the domestic circuit failed to attract any attention did not help him. However, Alok Kapali, a batsman who was once the star for Bangladesh, turned the tables, took a leap into the past, and scored a mind-boggling knock to lead the Comilla Victorians to the Bangladesh Premier League title in Mirpur yesterday. The packed Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium could not have asked for a more thrilling finale. Chasing 157, Comilla initially seemed on track for a comfortable chase after Imrul Kayes had given them a superb start with his half-century. However, once the left-hander was dismissed, they lost wickets at regular intervals and suddenly the equation tightened as

they required 35 runs from the last four overs with Kapali and Darren Stevens at the crease. Things got worse for Comilla as they were pegged back and two good overs later the equation came to 23 off two overs. Stevens and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza were dismissed off the first two balls of the 19th over and the Comilla loyalists in the stands seemed to have lost hope. After all they required 23 from 12 at that point. That's when Kapali decided to take a leap out of his old manual and sweep two fours off the last two balls of the 19th over. The task was still difficult, with Comilla requiring 13 off six deliveries. Shuvagata Hom was run-out in the first ball of the 20th, and after a single, Kapali needed to score eleven of the last four balls against Mohammad Sami. As the third ball approached, he took a step back and pulled one to deep mid-wicket for a four. Off the next ball, he produced something even better -- a classic Kapali drive as one would have said in the

years -- bringing his front foot forward and driving one over point for another four. With three runs required off the last two balls, Kapali timed another beautiful drive through cover, which got him two. Needing just one off the last ball, a nervous Sami bowled one down the leg-side which Kapali briskly touched and ran for what would have been the most important single in a long time in his career. The Comilla dressing room erupted, as did the crowd and the Victorians were crowned champions. While Kapali finished the innings the result would not have been possible without a defiant 53 off 37 from Kayes. Henceforth, one will definitely think twice before referring to Imrul as a Test specialist because the polished knock that he played in the all-important final would have made any T20 campaigner proud. His form was such that had he not suffered from cramps in the middle of the

innings, there was every possibility that he would have stayed till the end of the chase. All he did was wait for the ball and sweetly pierce the gaps in the field. That the left-hander was in good nick was obvious from the four fours that he smacked in the first two overs of the chase. While Comilla lost both Liton Das and Ahmed Shehzad by the tenth over, Imrul remained undeterred. In fact the highlight of his knock came in the eleventh over when he brilliantly hit Seekuge Prasanna for two sixes straight down the ground. The second one brought up his half-century. Earlier, Barisal Bulls rode on an 81-run stand for the fourth wicket between skipper Mahmudullah Riyad and Shahriar Nafees to cross the 150-run mark. Mahmudullah scored a 36-ball 48 while Shahriar remained unbeaten on 44. It was a sad ending for Mahmudullah, particularly because he had put an extremely inspiring performance on the field all-round.

SPORTS REPORTER

Three wins in three editions of the Bangladesh Premier League, a phenomenal win-rate with the Bangladesh national team and yet when you ask Mashrafe Bin Mortaza to rate himself as a captain he gives you the number zero. Why? Because he apparently doesn't think it's a big deal. But then again, the modest Comilla skipper eventually went on to admit that the nearly flawless year did make him happy. "I am very lucky to be in the winning team of all three editions of BPL. It has been a very good year for the entire Bangladesh national team and I. Yes, I have done well. But I need to continue the good work. "I just want this trend to continue, I don't want anything more than that," said Mashrafe at the post-match press conference. It was an intense finale yesterday, with Comilla needing 23 runs off the last two overs. That went down to requiring one run in the last ball; a task which Alok Kapali eventually accomplished. Mashrafe though couldn't watch the scenario. "I was inside the dressing room lying down on my physio's bed, which is a place that I have really become accustomed to. For some reason I told myself that if I stepped out of the dressing room we would lose." When Mashrafe got the news of the winning runs, he ran towards Kapali and gave him a bear hug. The skipper later revealed that his celebration was extra special because it was his long-time colleague Kapali who had won the game for them.

So close yet so far Kapali's blast from the past

SPORTS REPORTER

He scored a brilliant 48, took two crucial wickets and held on to an extremely difficult catch at a crucial stage of the match; despite all that, Mahmudullah Riyad ended up on the losing side. The expression of the Barisal Bulls skipper during the post-match press conference perhaps best described how he felt. There was a hint of disbelief in his eyes as he scratched his head. "I didn't want Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza] bhai to get his hat-trick," he said with a wry smile, alluding to Mashrafe's third BPL triumph. Incidentally Mahmudullah was third-time unlucky against Mashrafe in this year's BPL. "But unfortunately, things didn't go according to plan. It's disappointing when you come so close to the trophy and end up not getting it. But there's nothing to do. Congratulations to the Comilla Victorians," said Mahmudullah. Bulls coach Graham Ford was a bit more talkative and described his team as fighters. "I am extremely proud of the way the boys have shown character. We were behind in so many games and yet we fought back. Even today, we showed fight. It's just disappointing that the players couldn't finish well," said Ford. "I think we batted pretty well, played a good game of cricket and so easily could have been on the winning side. But that's what hurts everybody. You play well and then you miss out by a fraction. It was a competitive score, but maybe we could have gotten a few more," he added. Ford had some special praise reserved for Riyad's captaincy. "Without any doubt, he has been absolutely crucial. His leadership has been brilliant, tactically he has been superb and also his man-management has been fantastic. I don't need to say much. You have seen how fantastic he has been," said Ford. Opposition skipper Mashrafe echoed Ford's sentiments later on and admitted that he was a bit 'surprised' with the way Mahmudullah led the side. "I was surprised looking at Mahmudullah because the way he took decisions during so many crucial moments in the competition, the way he changed his bowlers, I think he did everything that was required of him. "This is a great sign because he is an experienced player now and he needs to excel in this area to do better in the future," concluded Mashrafe.

SPORTS REPORTER

After scoring two double centuries and a century in the Bangladesh Cricket League and the National Cricket League earlier this year, Alok Kapali had suddenly garnered some attention from the media. When the national selectors were asked as to whether they still had the former Bangladesh international in their plans, the reply was that Kapali wasn't even in their 'Plan B'. Whether or not Kapali gets a chance in the national team in near future, there's no doubt that he will savour last night's game-changing knock for the rest of his life. Speaking to reporters after the match, Kapali placed this knock right up there with some of his best international innings. "I think the last time I was so enthusiastic after the match was when I scored a century against India in the Asia Cup. Four wickets had fallen and we needed to do well. That was great. Kapali said. "And I think this is the first time ever since that knock [in 2008] that I have felt like this." The more interesting part about the entire scenario is that Kapali wasn't even signed during the players' draft. It was only after Mashrafe Bin Mortaza felt the need of an experienced batsman in the side that he requested the Comilla Victorians to sign him up. "I did quite well in first-class cricket



From being dismissed as a has-been, Alok Kapali put Comilla Victorians on his back and led them to victory in the BPL final yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

this year. I scored a double century as well. So after those knocks, I had hope that I would be bought by some team, although I didn't get a chance. "When I got signed up, I had that urge in me to do well. I wasn't getting too many chances because we were winning matches so easily. But today [Tuesday] I got that chance and I am really happy that I did well," said Kapali. Despite playing a heroic knock, Kapali refused to term this innings as a 'comeback'.

"It's not a comeback. You know there are several great players in the national team right now. I am not thinking about that. All I want to do right now is play well for the next one or two years. "It may be any league. It could be the Dhaka League, the Sylhet League, whatever, I just want to do well," said Kapali. Comilla had needed 22 runs off the last eight balls. According to Kapali, all he wanted to do was play the full quota of 20 overs.

WHACK-OMETER
TOTAL 6s HIT 249 | TOTAL 4s HIT 751
 Most 6s by players: 12, Chris Gayle, Barisal Bulls
 Most 4s by a player: 35, Kumar Sangakkara, Dhaka Dynamites

PREMIER cEMENT
SCOREBOARDS
BULLS V VICTORIANS

BARISAL BULLS					COMILLA VICTORIANS				
Bowler	O	M	R	W	Bowler	O	M	R	W
Maruf lbw b Zaidi	11/13	0/1			Kapali not out	39/28	5/0		
Prasanna b Stevens	33/19	2/2			Zaidi run out	16/14	1/1		
Sabbir b Mashrafe	9/19	0/0			Stevens c Prasanna b Cooper	8/8	1/0		
Nafees not out	44/31	2/3			Mashrafe c Mahmudullah				
Mahmudullah b Kulasekara	48/36	6/1			Cooper			0/1	0/0
Cooper not out	7/2	0/1			Shuvagata run out			1/1	0/0
Extras (lb-2, w-2)	4				Kulasekara not out			0/1	0/0
Total: (For 4 wks in 20 overs)	156				Extras (b-5, lb-2)	7			
Fall of wickets: 1-19, 2-54, 3-68, 4-149.					Total: (For 7 wks in 20 overs)	157			
					Fall of wickets: 1-23, 2-77, 3-92, 4-116, 5-134, 6-134, 7-145.				

Result: Comilla Victorians won by 3 wickets.
Player-of-the-match: Alok Kapali.
Player-of-the-series: Ashar Zaidi.