

# WINNING THE BIG LEAGUES

*Idea. Leadership. Inspiration.*

*The words above are, no doubt, heard of and spoken about a lot in current times. Nowadays we are seeing a generation of Bangladeshis marking their excellence in fields of science, education, entrepreneurship, arts – both in and outside our borders. To be born with qualities as such is a blessing, to hone them is no easy task. As William Shakespeare said, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." One such great team is Team Bangladesh – the funny Ayman Sadiq, the articulate Sajeed Alam and the ever-so-humble Ishmam Chowdhury – who conquered London and hoisted the flag of Bangladesh on April 13, 2016, by winning one of the grandest prizes in the world of business competitions, the Unilever Future Leaders' League (FLL).*

**KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD**

SHOUT met up with Team Bangladesh fresh off the win. We were also joined by the coaching team of Shadman Sadikin, Product Group Manager – Hair Care; Mahdia Chowdhury, Management Trainee – GTM; and Ipshita Fahmin, Leadership Development Manager at Unilever Bangladesh.

**SHOUT: How did you prepare Team Bangladesh?**

**SHADMAN:** To be very honest, there wasn't much that I had to do from my part. I was assigned to help these boys by immersing them into the brand. The team itself prepared all the presentation materials. As coaches, the task was to show them the footprint of the brand on a global scale, which they picked up with ease.

**MAHDIA:** Team Bangladesh consists of the brightest youngsters I have come across. They just needed to be encouraged about their own ideas and we, the mentors, worked as a "bouncing off idea board" for them. As mentors it was our duty to inspire and get the best out of them.

**SHOUT: One might say coaches are one-half participants. What challenges did you face in preparing the team for such a major international event?**

**SHADMAN:** The magnitude of competition at FLL is at its peak, always. And over here [in Bangladesh], we had a time constraint – only 3 weeks – to prepare before the team flew for London. Each member has their own jobs and appointments, yet they managed to prioritise and find time to prepare. We had to design a crowdsourcing platform, test run it and then come up with an idea in this short time, with in-depth knowledge of the brand itself. But I should mention that their teamwork instilled a lot of confidence in us and we had high hopes from the start.

**SHOUT: How was the team's morale in London?**

**AYMAN:** It would be unfair to say that we were at our best, morale-wise, while in London. We honestly wanted to have fun, explore the wonderful city, take free tours and connect with people through experiences. The competition was always at the back of our heads, but we were running on a thin line between excitement and pressure. Thankfully we managed to balance our priorities, as we always do, and got in the game. We even managed to catch *Batman v Superman* on the big screen.

**SHOUT: You've met so many participants from around the world. How did they**



**receive you?**

**SAJEED:** There were 29 teams divided into 6 groups, and each group had a supervisor. It was in the winning moment that we realised how well we all had bonded over a course of only four days. People got emotional, danced with us, cheered us on – and we felt on top of the world. We made some amazing friends through this event.

**SHOUT: What would you say about the people you met at Unilever in London?**

**ISHMAM:** We met some great personalities there, notably the Unilever CEO, Paul Polman and Chief HR Officer, Leena Nair. I can speak for us three here when we say that our group's supervisor, Elise Marks, who was designated as the Chief Energy Officer made all the difference. She was the fourth member of Team Bangladesh, and we thank her for all that she's done for us.

**SHOUT: Which other team did you find really impressive that gave you a tough competition?**

**SAJEED:** Team Russia [2nd runner-up]. They

had a great product and were stellar in their presentation. Everything about their execution was spot-on. It was during their pitch that really got us thinking about our own. **SHOUT: Describe the moment that you would say was the 'moment of inspiration' during the course of the entire competition.**

**AYMAN:** It was the applause following our final presentation that we would say was one moment when we thought, "Hey, you know what, we can win this." We stepped onto the stage with Uptown Funk playing loud; I think Sajeed began with a joke that got people laughing. We aced the Q&A section, even managed to earn a wink from one of the judges, all of whom gave us a standing ovation. It was everything at that period of time – it was unbelievable.

**SHOUT: As a coach, how do you see the consistent performance of Bangladesh at FLL?**

**IPSHITA:** Here's a fact: Bangladesh is the only country from South Asia to have qualified for the finals each year, so that says a lot about

the talent we acquire. We were finalists the first time, became 1st runner-up last year and champions this year. It's an incredible feeling that validates the quality and level of our local competition.

**SHOUT: It's safe to say that you are now an inspiration to many students around the country. How do you want to use this influence?**

**SAJEED:** There's a quote by Maya Angelou – "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget how you made them feel." We three love to talk, to bring up new ideas. And winning FLL brings a greater responsibility upon us, that we must help those who want to represent Bangladesh on the global stage. Yes, we will continue to have fun in all that we do, but this win has challenged us to do even better in the coming days.

**SHOUT: How do you see Unilever BizMaestros and FLL making an impact on our corporate culture and in grooming young business professionals?**

**IPSHITA:** The format of Unilever BizMaestros is miles ahead than other regional competitions around the world, and that is an advantage. Allowing more universities in the final rounds gives the teams exposure which creates a level of confidence for them to excel and prove themselves. Moreover, we constantly learn from these young people. That is how we tap into generations, by predicting the future of these talents, so that they can grow into potential professionals.

**SHOUT: It's the year 2026. Where are you now?**

**ISHMAM:** It's very difficult to answer this as we ourselves don't know where we will be then. Sajeed and I are already in corporate jobs; Ayman has his own venture. That being said, I'll comment that we millennials are a misunderstood generation being blamed for spending too much time on our smartphones but we are proud to have stepped up to change that notion and do something about it.

**SAJEED:** To that I'd like to add that this generation of ours is a promising one and we're going places. We won a global competition like FLL but were more enthralled at the fact that we got the opportunity to represent our nation, as Team Bangladesh. So why can't there be more of us?

*Kazi Akib Bin Asad is a Sub-editor at Shout who likes to travel and collect puns from all over the world. Follow him and his adventures on [instagram.com/akibasad](https://www.instagram.com/akibasad)*



**AYMAN SADIQ**

*Favourite quote: "Most people die at 25, but don't get buried till 75." - Benjamin Franklin*



**SAJEED ALAM**

*Favourite quote: "May you always do what you are afraid to do." - Ralph Waldo Emerson*



**ISHMAM AHMED CHOWDHURY**

*Favourite quote: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." - Ralph Waldo Emerson*