

SPORT

The dark arts of domestic cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

92 runs scored off four balls; it is not a cricket fantasy but was in fact a true story of Bangladesh cricket. Sujon Mahmud was the bowler who bowled 13 wides and three no-balls to make sure Axiom Cricketers overtook the score of 88 runs in four balls and win the match by 10 wickets against Lalmatia Club without any difficulties under the scorching heat.

What however happened at the City Club ground during yesterday's Dhaka Second Division Cricket League match was not something that can be explained by cricket's most popular saying: anything can happen in cricket. Rather, these weird statistics was born out of Lalmatia's frustration when they, like many other clubs, felt helpless in the face of continuous controversial umpiring -- an alarming practice that has been a source of silent decay at the grassroots level of Bangladesh cricket.

It was not a horror story but there were some fingers that have been haunting domestic cricket as apparently their owners stand behind the stumps only to serve the purpose of certain groups, alleged many clubs officials on the condition of anonymity.

When contacted a Lalmatia Club official reacted: "Brother, when we had nothing to do against such controversial umpiring, we did this peculiar thing. We simply did it out of frustration. I just request everybody to go through the scorecards of the league and they will know what is actually happening."

"Can you imagine, during the match an LBW decision was changed to a caught-behind decision in the official scorecard. There are some common faces like [umpires] Shamsur Rahman and Azizul Bari Babu who conducted some particular clubs' matches and either gave LBW decisions or caught-behind decisions even if the ball passed miles away from the batsman," informed another club official.

Shamsur and Babu were the umpires in yesterday's peculiar affair and they also officiated last Sunday's match between Axiom Cricketers and Matuail Cricket Academy, who were bundled out for 34 runs in seven overs in chase of 234 runs, allegedly through controversial umpiring.

"From the very beginning there was an agenda with eight teams because of eight votes [top eight second-division teams become eligible to vote in next BCB election as councilors] and now they have a mission to make Axiom and Dhaka Cricket Academy champions and runners-up so that they can qualify to the first division league. And you will get the answer if you look at the names running the clubs," another aggrieved club official said.

It seems that there is no end to partial and controversial umpiring in the domestic circuit as there were also allegations against certain clubs in the First Division Cricket League and before that there was news in the media that a third division cricket league match was allotted to the waterlogged ground of Fatullah Outer Stadium. In the lower tier there has been chaos for a long time as for the last two seasons there was no third division qualifying round matches as nobody showed an interest to pay the entry fee of Tk 5 lakh except Axiom and Dhaka Cricket Academy. In the next two years a meteoric rise has seen these two clubs on the cusp of first-division qualification.

There is also no exception in the highest flight as Abahani's Premier Cricket League triumph last season was marred by reported controversial umpiring.

"It looks like we are living in Hirak Rajar Deshe," quipped an official.

There was however an end of the misery in Satyajit Ray's Hirak Rajar Deshe but will there be an end to this misery afflicting Bangladesh cricket's domestic scene?

Everybody will however be looking to the Dhaka Premier Cricket League, which begins today, to see whether the alleged corruption continues or some good sense prevails in the greater interest of the game.

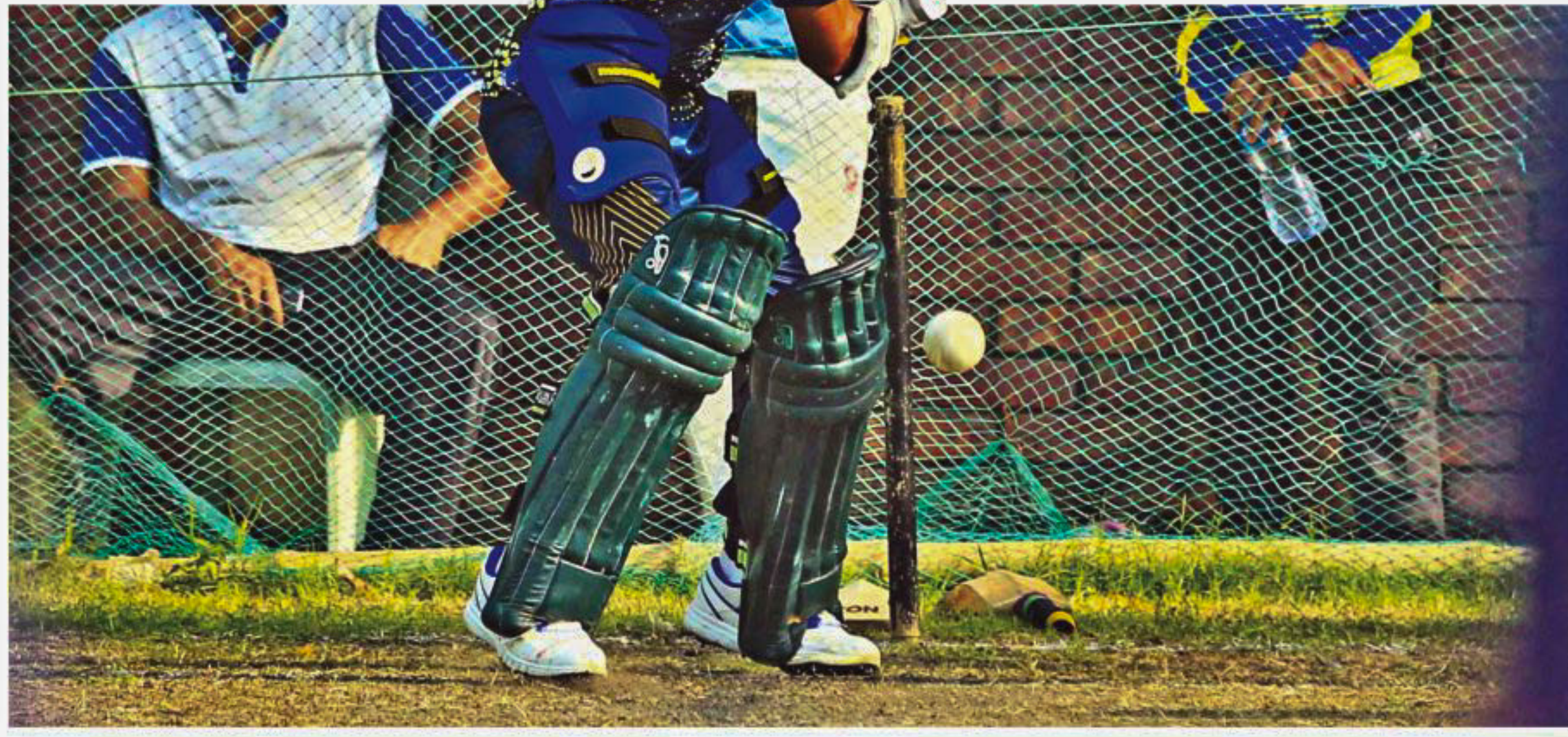


PHOTO: STAR

Gazi Group Cricketers' Mominul Haque is about to play the cut during practice at the Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club yesterday, ahead of their first Dhaka Premier League match against Mohammedan SC tomorrow.

Mushfiqur to lead Rugganj

Mash to take backseat against Brothers today

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Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has gone through a lot over the last few days since announcing his retirement from T20s. The board did not really accept his decision with open arms, with the Bangladesh Cricket Board president claiming that Mashrafe had resigned from captaincy but not the format.

Therefore, it doesn't come as a surprise that Mashrafe has decided against captaining the Legends of Rugganj in the Dhaka Premier League. According to Rugganj officials, Mushfiqur Rahim will be leading Rugganj against Brothers Union at the BKSP today.

According to the team, Mashrafe wanted to relax a bit ahead of the Champions Trophy and as a result handed over the responsibility to Mushfiqur.

The national players will get to play just four matches in the Premier League, which is set to begin today, after which

they will leave for England to get ready for the Champions Trophy.

Mashrafe and Mushfiqur's team will be the favourites when they take on Brothers Union today as they have players in their team who have been performing well lately. The likes of Ejaj Ahmed, Naeem Islam, Pinak Ghosh, Yasir Ali and Mahmudul Islam will provide good support to Rugganj.

On the other hand, Brothers will depend upon their veterans -- Alok Kapali, Dhiman Ghosh and Robiul Islam. However, they will, have to work extremely hard to come out victorious against Rugganj.

Prime Doleshwar will take on Partex Sporting Club in the other game at the BKSP. Doleshwar have a far more experienced team than Partex, who will be playing the Premier League for the first time. While Doleshwar do not have any national players in their team, they have got a promising set up. Abdul Majed, Arafat Sunny, Marshall Ayub, Shahriar Nafees and Saeed Sarkar are expected to play the core role for the team.

Partex will be led by Tarek Ahmed

Ruben and will count on the experience of Irfan Sukkur, Shahnoor Rahman and Jonny Talukdar.

The third match of the day will take place between Mahmudullah Riyad's Abahani and Khelaghar Samaj Kallyan Samiti at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah. Reigning champions Abahani have a strong setup this time, although they haven't signed up Tamim Iqbal and they won't have the services of Shakib Al Hasan.

Aside from Riyad, they have signed Taskin Ahmed, Mosaddek Hossain, Nazmul Hossain, Liton Das and Shuvagata Hom. However, they might face problems once the national players leave. For the moment, they have youngsters such as Mohammad Saifuddin, Afif Hossain and Saif Hasan to support the seniors.

For Riyad, this will be a chance to prove himself yet again. He did not have a good time on the recently-concluded tour of Sri Lanka and will be looking to redeem himself.

Khelaghar will hope their veteran batsman Nafis Iqbal can find some form today.

IPL will be easier this time: Fizz

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Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman, who was awarded the Emerging Player of the Year in last season's Indian Premier League, told reporters yesterday that he hopes to put in an even better performance in the current season.

The pacer left for Hyderabad yesterday evening and will be joining the Sunrisers Hyderabad in their quest to defend their championship title this season.

"I will try to perform better than last time. I need everyone's prayers so that I can do well," he told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, prior to his departure yesterday.

"The last time I went there, everything was new to me. This time, I know the players, the grounds and even the dressing room. It will be a lot easier to play the IPL this time. If I get to play, I will try to give my best."

Hyderabad have made a good start to the championship, winning their first two games.



Mehedi in for Hogg for Trinbago

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Bangladesh spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz managed to break into the world of T20 leagues when he replaced Brad Hogg in the Trinbago Knight Riders' squad for the Caribbean Premier League this year. The league is expected to begin in August.

Mehedi made his debut as a Test bowler for Bangladesh in October last year, after leading the Bangladesh Under-19 team for two years. His persistence and accuracy helped him find a spot in the ODI team and T20 team in Bangladesh's last series against Sri Lanka.

Mehedi is not a very experienced T20 player. He has played just one T20I and 16 domestic T20s so far. However, he has impressed the world with his aggressive off-spinners.

After getting the news yesterday, Mehedi said: "I am very happy to get a chance to play in the Caribbean Premier League. Playing here will help me further improve my game. I hope I can prove myself here."

Kohli set to return

CRICBUZZ

Having lost two of their three games thus far in IPL 2017, Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) received a massive boost ahead of their next fixture, against Mumbai Indians on April 14, with regular skipper Virat Kohli likely to make his comeback after a brief injury lay-off.

Kohli, who was sidelined due to a shoulder injury, is all set to return to the field when RCB host the Rohit Sharma-led side at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in the day game of Friday's double header.

"Can't wait to get back onto the field now. Almost there. 14th April," Kohli wrote on his Instagram account. The Indian captain had earlier stated that he would only take the field when he is "120 percent fit".

Afusi looking to rebuild a young Sheikh Jamal

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Since their re-introduction into top-flight football in 2010, Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club have always been known as a big-spending club, buying out the best of the local talents and assembling

them with high-quality foreign recruits. That the Dhanmondi giants won three professional league titles apart from a number of other domestic and one international silverware in the following six seasons has been largely due to that philosophy of spending big on players and coaching staff.

However, after enduring a barren season in 2016-2017 -- when the club lost most of its national team players as well as premier foreign marksman Wedson Anselme -- the club seems to be moving in a completely new direction now.

Last year the club only managed to finish in third place in the league, 20 points behind eventual champions Abahani, while exiting the Federation Cup at the quarterfinals stage and bidding bye to the Independence Cup at the semifinals stage. They also saw their AFC Cup

campaign end in the group stages, having finished bottom of their group.

This time though, after being taken over by the Bashundhara Group, the club is looking to rebuild itself, banking on a young squad along with some new foreign recruits. And they are determined to get back on track, if not to challenge for the title, to at least build the side as a strong unit for the future.

And they have brought back their former coach Joseph Afusi, one who knows the club culture inside out, to do the rebuilding job.

The squad, a relatively young and energetic one, has been put through their paces at the club's headquarters in Dhanmondi for the last month. The Nigerian coach is banking on his young brigade to make a mark on the local scene again. With the pre-season transfers still underway and the start of the season still some way off, Afusi thinks he can get this untested bunch to a desired level to challenge the big names in domestic circuit.

"We don't have superstars; we don't have national team players. But the players we have are good players. What I will have to do is to guide them, show them what to do and hopefully if they do what I tell them, we can achieve some-

thing good," Afusi said yesterday while working with the players.

The club has already poached some promising players from mid-table clubs like Muktiyoddha KC, Rahmatganj MFS, Arambagh KS, Uttar Baridhara, Team BJMC, etc. They also have brought in a few foreign players including a striker from Nigeria, an attacking midfielder from Argentina and a winger from Gambia -- all of whom, the coach believes, have a bright future in Bangladesh football.

"I have players like Afsar, Sohel, Manik, Mamun who are real quality. They just need to have the self-belief, and we are working on instilling that self-confidence in them. These players will have to challenge the branded players. They have to understand that there is no difference between big and small player," Afusi hoped.

After losing Wedson to a foreign league and seeing Emeka Darlington switch to Abahani, Sheikh Jamal DC is looking to build the side around national team's centre-back Yeasin Khan, and midfielder Landing Darboe, given the Gambian stays with his old club.

"We have collected unheralded players from some mid table teams because our target was to give the young and promising players a platform to shine. You will see stars emerge from these players," hoped the club's manager Anwarul Karim Helal.

BCCI to meet Hassan today

PTI, New Delhi



The Board of Control for Cricket in India's (BCCI's) court-appointed Committee of Administrators (COA) will meet Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan on Wednesday to discuss proposed constitutional reforms in the International Cricket Council (ICC).

It has been learnt that COA wanted all three office-bearers -- acting president CK Khanna, joint secretary Amitabh Chaudhary and treasurer Aniruddh Chaudhry -- to attend the meeting, but none of them have confirmed their participation.

Bangladesh is one of the Test playing nations which is against constitutional reforms in the ICC, including a proposal to review full membership status after a certain period of time. They are also opposed to the proposed two-tier Test format and have India as their strongly ally.

"We didn't oppose the financial reforms but there were parts of the constitutional changes that we had opposed. I was also a part of that committee. When these came up in the last meeting, there were things that didn't go with us," Hassan had said on March 15 during Bangladesh's tour of Sri Lanka.

"In the next meeting [in April], these will come up item-wise, and we will vote on them item-wise too. A lot of those present had told me to refuse the whole thing but I said that if Bangladesh is getting more money, why should I refuse that? I have to look at BCB's interest."



Walton was declared the title sponsors of the Dhaka Premier League in Mirpur yesterday. Walton officials Uday Hakim (L) and Milton Ahmed (R) and BCB director Saiful Alam Chowdhury briefed journalists during the declaration.

PHOTO: STAR

Samson powers Delhi to win

AGENCIES, Pune



Delhi Daredevils put their IPL campaign on track with a resounding 97-run win over the hapless Rising Pune Supergiant on Tuesday, powered mainly by Sanju Samson's maiden IPL century and some disciplined bowling.

The Daredevils posted a massive 205 for 4 in their 20 overs with Samson playing the protagonist with a 63-ball knock of 102. Chris Morris played a breathtaking cameo of 38 runs off just 9 deliveries to give finishing touches to the innings.

Pune needed a solid start but they were never in the chase as they kept losing wickets at regular intervals.

Zaheer Khan led from the front with the ball as he sent back the dangerous Ajinkya Rahane (10) in the third over of the match. The wily left-arm paceman then removed

the other Pune opener, Mayank Agarwal (20) in his second over as the hosts slumped to 38/2.

Chris Morris ended Rahul Tripathi's stay in the middle in the next over while Shahbaz Nadeem picked the important wicket of Faf du Plessis (8) as Pune's hopes of chasing the big total were dented very early.

Zaheer Khan picked up another wicket to make it a three-wicket haul for himself, as Pune were bowled out for a paltry 108 in 16.1 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

DELHI: 205 for 4 in 20 overs (Billings 24, Samson 102, Pant 31, Morris 38 not out; Chahar 1-35, Tahir 1-24)

PUNE: 108 all out in 16.1 overs (Agarwal 20, Bhatia 16, Chahar 14; Cummins 2-24, Zaheer 3-20, Mishra 3-11)

Result: Delhi Daredevils won by 97 runs. Player-of-the-match: Sanju Samson.