

# SPORT



## JOSE GETTING HIS GROOVE BACK?

SAMAMA RAHMAN

When Manchester United scored the go-ahead goal in the 89th minute of their Champions League tie against Juventus, Jose Mourinho lifted his hands up to his ears and implored the stunned Juventus to speak up in response to 86 minutes of vitriol.

Over the past weeks the Portuguese has taken on a defiant tone unprecedented even by his standards. But rather than projecting negativity onto his own board or players as he has recently done, he has harnessed the voices and fed it into himself, harkening back to his glory days at Inter, Porto, Chelsea and to some extent Real Madrid.

"They insulted me for 90 minutes. I came here to do my job, nothing more," Mourinho said after the game. "I didn't offend anyone at the end; I just made a gesture that I wanted to hear them louder. I probably shouldn't have done it, with a cool head I wouldn't have."

It was understandable why he failed to keep a cool head. Other than the fact that he has been under unyielding bombardment from the press and contending with numerous fans on his back, the result was also the first time Manchester United scored two late goals (after 85 minutes) to win a match

leave Real Madrid -- only led to scapegoats, such as Luke Shaw, stepping up their games. Now it seems his new mantra of instilling a winning mentality has struck a chord as evidenced by their third come-from-behind win in five matches, all of which featured a winning goal after the 88th minute -- the hallmark of vintage Manchester United teams.

Mourinho has also been much softer in practice -- recently exchanging death

stares with Paul Pogba for high fives and hugs -- winning over players as he did at previous clubs. He is slowly shifting the focus to his brilliant game-

management, which saw United hound Juventus with a high press for bursts and disorient them. He has also made an effort to repair burnt bridges, giving out-of-favour Anthony Martial chances to shine, which he has grabbed with both hands.

His vital substitutions, such as the introduction of Marouane Fellaini and Juan Mata last night, have also highlighted his tactical nous -- something forgotten amid all the drama at Old Trafford.

His defence may not be perfect -- they have leaked 18 goals in 11 league games. Even Victor Lindelof -- who has been tremendous since the reverse leg against Juventus -- took his eyes off Ronaldo for only a few seconds and



Even as the national Test team suffer heavy defeats at the centre of the public glare, away from the spotlight the engine room of Bangladesh's cricket keeps churning with cricketers playing for a living, for their passion and the dream of one day taking centrestage. The 20th National Cricket League ended yesterday with Rajshahi romping to their sixth triumph. Their story is a perfect example of cricketers taking responsibility for their own fates and uniting for a common cause. We delve into their season and also a few other highlights over the past month and a half.



Rajshahi players celebrate with the trophy after winning a record-equalling sixth National Cricket League title in front of their home crowd at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: WALTON

## United from the ground up

MAZHAR UDDIN



Rajshahi Division were already within touching distance of a record-equalling sixth title after the third day of the sixth and final round of the 20th National Cricket League (NCL). Junaid Siddique's unbeaten hundred helped them score the remaining 102 runs yesterday to clinch the win in the Tier-1 match Barishal Division and with it a slice of history. Aply, it all took place where it all started for Rajshahi -- their own Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium.

It was their second win in six games as Rajshahi finished the tournament as unbeaten champions. It is their first NCL title since the 2011-12 season and it is all the more special because it was won after playing in the second tier in just the previous season. Jahurul Islam's side are now equal with Khulna Division, who won the last three editions, as the most decorated longer-version sides in Bangladesh.

The title may have come within touching distance only a day earlier, but the seeds were planted more than a month before the league even started.

Known as the hub of producing top-class players, the dedication and willingness to work

### RAJSHAHI'S SIX

Season	Champions	Runners-up
2005-06	Rajshahi Division	Chattogram Division
2008-09	Rajshahi Division	Barishal Division
2009-10	Rajshahi Division	Chattogram Division
2010-11	Rajshahi Division	Dhaka Division
2011-12	Rajshahi Division	Khulna Division
2018-19	Rajshahi Division	Rangpur Division

hard and the unity among the players of Rajshahi has always set them apart from the other divisions.

That is what proved to be the difference this time too as the Rajshahi players got together and raised funds to practise a month and a half before the tournament even started. Normally, official practice begins two to three weeks before the first round.

"Actually, for the past three years all the players of Rajshahi Division have started training together a month and a half or two months before the start of the season," Rajshahi's captain Jahurul describe the reason behind the success to The Daily Star yesterday. "Wherever the players are, we try to get together and practise and we follow a tight schedule with trainers and coaches,

which I think is even harder than the national team training schedule.

"The players also raise monthly funds to pay for the training facilities. Top players contribute more while there are some who are unable to contribute, so we try to work as a family and that has helped us to be more united."

That unity was the integral component during a season of collective performances from a team with a mixture of youth and experience. "For example, Forhad Reza has been playing a very crucial role for us for a long time and you may not notice him but at the end of the season he stands out as one of the top wicket-takers and run-getters.

"Junaid, Mizanur Rahman, Sunzamul Islam, Taijul Islam and myself, we all tried to lead from the front through our collective performances along with the youngsters. We look for young prospects in the nets and call them to practise with us. For instance, we have a young pacer called Shafiqul Islam who used to bowl in our nets and eventually he played for Rajshahi. Mohor Sheikh is the other bright prospect who picked up eleven wickets in two games. It is a very healthy process which is helping Rajshahi to become a better side."



since their unforgettable triumph in the 1999 Champions League final against Bayern Munich.

It was also a landmark win for a side that had not beaten a big European team away from home since Sir Alex Ferguson's departure in 2013. In the time that followed they had defeated only Young Boys, Benfica, CSKA Moscow, Club Brugge and Bayer Leverkusen away from Old Trafford.

Add to that the fact that Juventus -- who have been Italian champions six years running -- had lost only eight of their 189 games prior to last night's match at the Allianz Stadium, and Mourinho's over-exuberance can only seem par for the course.

However, of more interest than the win itself is how such a result even came to occur.

Even the most hardcore Manchester United fan was hoping for a draw at best ahead of Sunday's clash against Manchester City but as the players said in their post-game interviews and on social media, it was the effect of a dressing room that has seen its atmosphere change dramatically.

Jose's initial plan of implementing his famous 'siege mentality' failed; Manchester United are a club used to hostility from every other fanbase in England. His authoritarian attitude -- which had famously seen Iker Casillas

was punished in the worst fashion as the Portuguese created a half-space, outpaced the Swede onto one of Leonardo Bonucci's trademark balls over the top and laced a venomous volley past a disbelieving David de Gea.

And despite a plethora of attacking talents, United's play in the final third still looks listless, with little movement. Alexis Sanchez added a spark there, but it was futile in the face of the best defence of Europe. It was only Mata's moment of magic from a free-kick and a goalmouth melee which led to Alex Sandro bundling into his own net that rescued United. But that second goal especially highlighted how much Manchester United have begun to believe in themselves and their ability to win.

The English press may have entertained the now 55-year-old's request to be labelled 'The Special One' when he first arrived in the Premier League more than a decade ago, but his recent pleas for respect -- backed by the three-finger salute which he uses to signify his three Premier League triumphs -- have been mocked thoroughly.

However, with a good performance against Manchester City and a few more glittering European nights, Mourinho may just end up re-earning the respect he so desperately craves.



HIGHEST SCORE: Rony Talukdar (Dhaka Div) 228 not out vs Chattogram 1st round in Fatullah, Oct 3.



In an edition filled with drawn games, three of Dhaka Division's six matches ended in a result. None however was more crucial than their fifth-round win over Dhaka Metro, which pushed them to the top spot in Tier-2 and secured promotion.



BEST INNINGS FIGURES: Nayeem Hasan (Chattogram) 8 for 106 vs Dhaka Div 4th round in Cox's Bazar, Oct 22.

PHOTO: WALTON

## Belfort strike seals thriller

SPORTS REPORTER



A stoppage time strike from Haitian marksman Kervens Filis Belfort helped holders Abahani advance to the Walton Federation Cup semifinals with a come-from-behind 3-2 win over Arambagh KS at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Belfort flicked a diving header off defender Tapu Barman home three minutes into the second half stoppage time after substitute Nabib Newaj Jibon released a low free-kick from the left flank, sealing the victory.

The match was an entertaining one though with Arambagh taking the lead against the run of play in the eighth minute when Shahrar Bappy drove an angular shot into the far post from outside the box after Nigerian Paul Emile chested down a Chinedu Mathew chip to cut it back for Bappy. Abahani then equalised on the half-hour mark through Nigerian Sunday Chizoba.



Sohel Rana (L) and Sunday Chizoba scored one goal each for Abahani against Arambagh KS at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Three minutes later, Arambagh restored their lead as Uzbek Iqbaljon Normatovich converted from the spot after Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel brought down Bappy. Eleven minutes later, midfielder Sohel Rana hammered in a stunning shot from 25 yards out to bring Abahani back into the game.

The match was however marred by the Arambagh KS supporting staffers' attack on assistant referee Harun-Ur-Rashid after the final whistle. Arambagh claimed the goal by Belfort was off-side.

## Dhaka ascend, Barishal fall

Rajin Saleh calls time on career

SPORTS REPORTER



After the six-wicket defeat against Rajshahi in the last round, Barishal Division were demoted to Tier-2 in the National Cricket League while Dhaka Division were promoted to Tier-1 after they managed to draw against Sylhet Division yesterday.

Defending champion Khulna were being demoted to game if they were beaten, but manager Rajin Saleh, who finished the season as runners-up, well behind Sylhet skipper and former Bangladesh captain Rajin Saleh announced his retirement from first-class cricket having scored 87 as Sylhet ended the final day on 303 for six.

In the other Tier-2 game Shamsur Rahman struck his 15th hundred on the final day as the Dhaka Metropolitan-Chattogram Division game also ended in a draw.



HATTRICK SEASON: In the fifth-round match against Rangpur, Rajshahi pacer Delwar Hossain (L) took out three batsmen in three balls. In the final round, Rajshahi left-arm spinner Monir Hossain (C) emulated that feat on Tuesday and Enamul Haque Jr of Sylhet did the same the following day.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

<b>KHULNA V RANGPUR</b> KHULNA: First innings 261 and second innings 282 (Soumya 83, Moinul 55; Robul 2-10, Tanbir 3-40) RANGPUR: First innings 249 for 8 dec and second innings 184 for 6 (Rakin 74, Shuvo 25; Mahedi 3-17) Result: Match drawn.	second innings 346 <b>RAJSHAHI:</b> First innings 160 and second innings 284 for 4 (Junaid 120 not out, Jahurul 64; Tanvir 2-61) Result: Rajshahi won by 6 wickets.	<b>CHATTOGRAM:</b> First innings 345 and second innings 142 for 4 (Irfan 44, Tasamul 26 not out; Asif 2-29) Result: Match drawn.
<b>BARISHAL V RAJSHAHI</b> BARISHAL: First innings 97 and	<b>DHAKA METRO V CHATTOGRAM</b> DHAKA METRO: First innings 328 and second innings 261 for 6 (Shamsur 121; Shakhawat 2-75)	<b>SYLHET V DHAKA DIVISION</b> SYLHET: First innings 238 and second innings 303 for 6 (Rajin 87, Jaker 77 not out, Shahanur 70 not out; Shahadat 2-43) <b>DHAKA DIV:</b> First innings 346 Result: Match drawn.