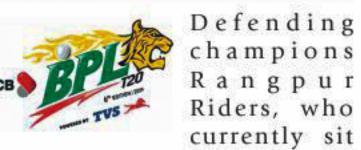




Comilla Victorians opener Tamim Iqbal (L) has been out of touch with the willow in this season's BPL and so, the left-handed batsman was seen discussing tactics with captain Imrul Kayes ahead of today's encounter with Khulna Titans. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Can Mr.360 turn it around for Riders?

SPORTS REPORTER



champions Rangpur Riders, who currently sit

third from bottom on the Bangladesh Premier League table, already had an illustrious list of players with both local and international talents at their disposal. However, after one of the most feared batsman on the planet -- AB de Villiers-- joined their ranks yesterday, the franchise has surely increased in lustre.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's Rangpur are certainly not in a position they would have liked to be at so early in the season. Managing only two wins from six matches, one of which was the side's narrow eight-run victory against bottom-placed Khulna Titans while the other was their best showing in the tournament -- a nine-wicket win over Comilla Victorians, who were bundled out for a meagre 63 runs.

While only Rilee Rossouw has

been consistent with the bat for impact. Rangpur, topping the highest rungetters list with 288 runs from six

games, which saw three fifties and a 44 not out against Rajshahi Kings in a lost cause, another big name in Chris Gayle, hailed as the 'Universe Boss' of the shortest format of the

game is yet to make any notable



The inclusion of South African whirlwind AB de Villiers will surely bolster Rangpur Riders' already formidable batting line-up for tomorrow's BPL encounter with Sylhet Sixers.

However, Rangpur coach Tom Moody mentioned during a press conference yesterday that they would not be carried away with the fact that de Villiers -- known as Mr. 360 for his ability to hit all around the park -- joined the side.

"I think AB de Villiers in any side



is going to add a lot of value. But we'd be foolish to think that he's going to be the magic that's going to make a difference. We know that yes, he is going to add value, but there are talented players that need to also continue to do the hard work. It's a collective effort; there's no individual that can make massive changes. But we welcome him into our side because we know we are bringing in a world-class player."

Moody also reiterated his faith on the destructive West Indian Gayle.

"I'm sure Chris [Gayle] is frustrated. Chris has a T20 cricket record that no one's close to. And he is also a very proud man and we know that a player of his quality is going to shine at any given moment. Once Chris comes to the party with the bat, I feel for the side that's going to be in his way."

Although Rangpur have a lot of talented individuals, it's just as their manager said, they will need a collective effort to change their fortunes when they meet Sylhet Sixers tomorrow.

A tournament in decline?

SAKEB SUBHAN from Sylhet



For most organisations and events, five times is usually enough to get the process right. The

Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is currently in its sixth edition and it was not unreasonable to hope that the BPL governing council (GC) would finally be able to stage a season not blighted by controversy after five editions that were compromised by one gaffe or another.

That hope has by now, less than halfway into the tournament, been proven to be a foolish one. Far from running a tournament free from mismanagement, this edition has already had a sufficient number of instances to label the whole brand a mismanaged one, let alone just one season. The latest is not the BPL GC's mismanagement but Sylhet Sixers'. The lack of transparency in the development of skipper David Warner leaving the tournament to have surgery for an elbow injury has been laughable to say the least. At least one reporter inquired about the injury on Wednesday night after Sylhet had beaten Rangpur Riders, but the Sylhet manager seemed clueless.

Yesterday morning however, Cricket Australia's website had announced that Warner would be returning from the BPL, after which Sylhet's media manager said that there was an injury, and that there was no decision on it yet. As the day wore on, it first emerged -- according to the franchise -that Warner would play out the ongoing Sylhet leg of the BPL. Meanwhile, Surrey CCC had announced that Jason Roy would join Sylhet Sixers -- presumably as Warner's replacement -- but that too was not announced by the franchise. The cherry on top was the Sixers calling a press conference to address the issue at 5:30pm at their Sylhet hotel, but at 5:24 the media manager informed a Whatsapp media group that the press conference was postponed 'due to the unavailability of Sixers management' and

that they would 'post further updates regarding DW'. The last information on Thursday was that it Warner's departure was not yet confirmed.

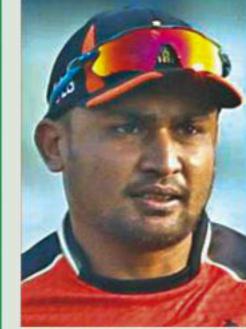
The update did come, but it was 20 minutes past midnight in the aforementioned Whatsapp group - meaning that a majority of fans would not be updated of the latest as, for many media outlets, it would not be possible to update the news at that hour.

The BPL GC may say that none of this is their responsibility, but they have set the example of opacity and excuse-making that those below them follow. This season alone, they started the tournament with the Decision Review System (DRS) but without the technology that detects if bat made contact with the ball. Ultra Edge came in a week into the tournament, when the excuse for the delay was that its operator had not gotten the visa, although on the second day of the tournament it was revealed that the franchises were informed of Ultra Edge's unavailability.

The Sylhet leg's first day was played without the DRS, and the excuse was it was stuck in Dhaka because of customs-related issues. The pitches have been of poor quality, producing boring matches that calls the tournament's overall quality into question. The broadcast has been the joke of the tournament so far, with erroneous graphics at times misspelling players' names, showing their ages as past the century mark, inflating averages and most grievously, showing wrong stats for balls left and runs required. The response to that was BPL GC membersecretary IH Mallick saying that the level of BPL's production is matched only by the IPL final and semifinal and the ICC World Cup.

So Sylhet's unprofessionalism is not a bug, but a feature of the BPL that is championed by its GC. A professionally run tournament was a foolish expectation perhaps because far from being chastened by past gaffes, the GC has been emboldened by the fact that despite those they are staging a sixth tournament.





We were desperate to win the last game. I was not able to fulfill the responsibility given to me in the last game but we badly needed a winning combination in Sylhet. The team is in good shape after the win against Rajshahi. Our morale was down after losing the first four games but now it's better. [Lasith] Malinga is the captain of the Sri Lanka T20 side and he has huge experience and we will get four solid overs from him which is very important.

KHULNA TITANS ALL-ROUNDER

tangible achievements to mention

here except the holding of the

league ten times. Professionalism is

far off, both among the clubs and in

the BFF. The clubs are allowed to

progress in a relaxed way and they

are enjoying it. The clubs don't have

their own grounds or structure; they

ARIFUL HAQUE

India look for perfect finish

3rd & final ODI against Aus today

AGENCIES, Melbourne



Buoyant and self-assured in equal measure, India would be eyeing a maiden bilateral ODI series triumph on Australian soil after the path-breaking Test conquest when they take on the home team in the tour finale on Friday.

The three-match series is level at 1-1. The Men in Blue have never won a bilateral ODI contest

on Australian soil.

While India will take winning momentum into this third ODI, their only worry at the moment is the fifth bowling



India opener Shikhar Dhawan speaks during a press conference ahead of the third ODI against Australia in Melbourne today. PHOTO: COLLECTED

So far in the series, senior pacers Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Mohammed Shami have been impressive, while the two leftarm spinners Kuldeep Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja have provided control and breakthroughs in the middle overs.

"Bhuvi (Kumar) is very experienced as well as (Mohammed) Shami," Indian opening batsman Shikhar Dhawan told reporters on Thursday. "That's why in the first 10 overs we have been dominating."

Australia, on the other hand, have made two changes in their playing XI. Leg-spinner Adam Zampa and fast bowler Billy Stanlake have been brought in for Nathan Lyon and Jason Behrendorff respectively.

Australia haven't won a series in about two years and the final ODI against India gives them a real shot at course correction in the lead-up to the World Cup.

A semblance of professionalism returns

ANISUR RAHMAN



The Bangladesh Premier League is all set to enter its 11th edition today when holders Abahani

meet NoFel SC, but the country's top-flight professional football league continues to struggle to mould itself into a model based on professionalism despite starting its journey over a decade ago.

Acting on demands from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) introduced the professional football league in 2007 with the clear aim of improving the standard of the country's football as well as bringing professionalism among the clubs. But the objectives have not been met in the past decade despite the league being held 10 times from 2007 to 2018.

The standard of football has not improved in terms of either results of the national team or results of clubs at international tournaments. Simultaneously, footballers' wages have increased dramatically due to the dearth of quality players across the country.

The game's local governing



The BFF should strictly impose the AFC Club licensing criteria on the participating clubs of the Bangladesh Premier League to take the professional football league to

a higher standard.

SHAFIQUL ISLAM MANIK

FORMER NATIONAL & CLUB COACH

body has attempted to fix the issues by introducing new rules every season for the past 11 years, even prolonging the season to 10 months of a year, but has failed to resolve any of the problems. They have even failed to set a specific timeframe for the league for each to demands from clubs by increasseason, something the All India



The Bangladesh Premier League must be held on a home-and-away basis within a specific time frame and participating clubs must change their amateur attitude and go outside the capital.

GOLAM SARWAR TIPU FORMER NATIONAL & CLUB COACH

Football Federation has done with the I-League. Eventually, the league was also confined to Dhaka instead of being held on a homeand-away basis across multiple

The BFF has even bowed down ing the foreign players' quota time

Season

2008-09

2009-10

2010-11

2011-12

2012-13

2013-14

2014-15

2015-16

2016-17

2007

Matches

110

110

156

131

110

72

135

110

132

132

BPL SEASON-TO-SEASON

Draws

29

25

33

25

45

37



It is a so-called professional football league but there is nothing fixed in the league. I believe football is still being played because of having the clubs.

> **AMER KHAN BROTHERS UNION MANAGER**

and again, although there have

been strong demands for the reduction of that quota in order to give space to local players. Speaking about what the coun-

try's football has received from the professional league over the last 10 editions, veteran coach Shafiqul Islam Manik said: "There are no

Loss

81

85

110

98

82

56

95

85

87

95

Goals

273

280

391

335

295

162

382

332

342

302

are playing the professional league in a single venue. "The clubs have got a good idea what professionalism is over the past 10 years and the BFF should allow only those clubs who can meet the AFC Club licensing criteria to participate in a home-and-away based professional league," said Manik, who was involved with various top clubs until last season.

"It is a professional football league in name only because there have been no structural changes to the league. There has not even been a change in terms of standards due to the lack of quality local players," former national coach Golam Sarwar Tipu said. "The BFF must ensure the district leagues [are staged] regularly to make a strong pipeline and provide players for the professional football league."

"Are we professional? No. You never see a football season last 10 months, but it does in Bangladesh. Why can't we fix dates for the league? Why can't we avail homeand-away benefit? Because the BFF always looks after the interest of big teams, thus putting smaller clubs in trouble," said Amer Khan, the longserving manager of Brothers Union.

However, the good news is that the league has returned to a homeand-away format, with six venues hosting the 13 teams. It is also expected that the league will be more competitive as clubs will have to deal with more partisan crowds during away matches.

TOP SCORERS IN LAST 10 LEAGUES				
Season	Names	Country	Club	Goals
2007	Elijah Obagbemiro Jr	Nigeria	Brothers Union	16
2008-09	Bukola Olaleken	Nigeria	Mohammedan SC	18
2009-10	Enamul Haque	Bangladesh	Abahani	21
2010-11	James Moga	Sudan	Muktijoddha SKC	19
2011-12	Ismail Bangoura	Guinea	Team BJMC	17
2012-13	Osei Morison	Ghana	Mohammedan SC	12
2013-14	Wedson Anselme	Haiti	Sheikh Jamal DC	26
2014-15	Emeka Darlington	Nigeria	Sheikh Jamal DC	19
2015-16	Sunday Chizoba	Nigeria	Abahani	19
2016-17	Solomon King, Raphael Onwrebe	Gambia, Nigeria	Sheikh Jamal DC	15