

What to WATCH

GTV & MAASRANGA

BBPL
Chattogram v Dhaka
Live from 2:00pm
Khulna v Rangpur

Live from 7:00pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
English Premier League
Wolves v Man City
Live from 1:45am (Saturday)

SONY SIX

Australia v New Zealand
Second Test, Day Two
Live from 5:30am
South Africa v England

First Test, Day 2

Live from 2:00pm

DAY'S EVENT

Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Dhaka
Chattogram v Dhaka

Time: 2:00pm
Khulna v Rangpur
Time: 7:00pm

Federation Cup

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka
Ctg Abahani v Bashundhara

Time: 3:30pm

Sheikh Jamal v Saif SC
Time: 6:15pm

Grassroots slipping through the cracks

BISHWAJIT ROY



Who cares about the Third Division Cricket League these days, when fans, officials and media are mostly engrossed in international cricket? But this season's domestic lower-tier competition has still gotten plenty of attention. But, alas, the spotlight has been shone for all the wrong reasons.

There were allegations aplenty -- biased umpiring, favouritism, muscle-flexing from powerful quarters during matches and even buying and selling of points. Regarding these issues, different media outlets ran a number of stories and many incidents became viral on social media, which even led to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) banning players, coaches, officials, a team boy and other staff involved on match days from



THE POINTS AND ARGUMENTS FROM VICTIMS AND ACCUSERS:

--There were strong reasons for the few incumbent BCB officials to be involved as they want to ensure councillorship from the club quota.

--Fingers raised towards two powerful BCB directors -- IH Mallick and Khaled Mahmud -- as it was believed that they set the mechanism in motion from top and their few hand-picked umpires executed their plans at the ground.

--Fingers raised towards umpires -- Tariqul Islam Masum, Masud

Rana, Saidur Rahman, Touhidur Rahman, Ashraf Tipu, Jahiur Islam Jewel, Shahinur Rahman Shamim -- whose very presence on the morning of a match gave victims and accusers an idea of how the match was going to pan out (match 'kopano', or sizing up the match, is a very popular term in this regard).

--Those selected umpires got the maximum number of matches -- according to the victims and accusers these umpires conducted

93 out of 124 matches in the just-concluded Third Division League and did not hesitate to raise the finger for leg-before decisions even when the ball hit the arm.

--There is an umpire like Jahiur Islam Jewel, who played the dual role of umpiring and coaching and was also a Purbachol Sporting Club representative at CCDM.

--Vested quarters are now on the brink of grabbing full control of lower-tier cricket, to the point

that even protesting voices may disappear from next season. There are three categories -- clubs that are directly supervised and financed by that vested quarter; clubs that get their blessing in other ways and the few that negotiate with them for survival; and only a few who are not part of them.

--Only a neutral inquiry committee can find who the people are destroying grassroots cricket from behind the scenes and how.

using mobile phones and electronic gadgets in lower-tier cricket tournaments.

The league, where 20 clubs took part, ended with Jatrabari Krira Chakra becoming champions and Gulshan Cricket Club finishing as runners-up. That, however, may not be the end of it as a legal battle may commence following the alleged violation of the league's bylaws.

If the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) followed their own bylaws, then Dhaka Cricketers, instead of the Narayanganj Cricket Academy, would have played the eight-team Super League of the tournament.

Narayanganj Cricket Academy and Dhaka Cricketers had equal points and the bylaws clearly state that 'in the event of teams finishing on equal points, the higher standing in the competition (First Phase, Super & Relegation League) will be determined as follows: the team with the most number of wins; if still equal, the team with the most number of wins over the other team(s) who are equal on points and have the

same number of wins (head to head); if still equal, the team with the highest net run rate'. Dhaka Cricketers were supposed to play the Super League as they had more wins (4) than Narayanganj (3), who surprisingly got the Super League ticket on head-to-head consideration, which should have only come into play if the number of wins were equal.

The explanation from the CCDM and BCB was that it was a mistake and the matter was 'under investigation'. But those who were victims of the 'mistake' believed that it was intentional to favour 'their' team.

Their team' and 'our team'; here lies the problem. Their team' was also jokingly called the 'Shorkari team'.

To try to shed light on the allegedly corrupt workings and the fissures that have seemingly spread like a cancer in the past few years, The Daily Star spoke with a number of stakeholders. The majority of the respondents preferred to remain anonymous for fear of possible undesired consequences.

THE POINTS AND ARGUMENT FROM THE ACCUSED:

--Board officials patronising different clubs is nothing new in Bangladesh cricket.

--Wholesale allegations against biased umpiring are baseless.

--A certain quarter always tries to destroy the image of Bangladesh cricket when they fail to perform.

--Things have improved a lot

since the introduction of cameras at matches that enable the CCDM to verify allegations and take necessary measures.

--CCDM cannot do anything about allotment of match officials, which is a matter for the Bangladesh Cricket Umpires and Scorer Association (BCUSA).

This has been the scenario for the past few years, leaving grassroots cricket silently crying out for help. Allegations of widespread corruption in the lower-tier circuits of Bangladesh cricket has been a recurring theme over the past few years. It would be hard to say when this will end.

"I have never seen such naked interference earlier. The main objective is to stay at the board and nothing else. And you know there is councillorship. It seems they are chalking out a plot to stay in power forever. As umpires are employees of the board, they obey its orders. What we heard is that Mallick is controlling everything. They are actually destroying cricket. The situation is such that if you exit the race once you can in no way return in cricket under current circumstances. We need to save cricket. You will not get dedicated organisers in future and enthusiastic people in certain areas will not come forward to form teams. That will not help our cricket, neither will it be helpful in creating a healthy sporting atmosphere. Overall, the scenario is very bleak. They flex their muscles in many ways, even creating panic at the ground by threatening many with dire consequences if anybody tries to protest."

MOHAMMAD SARWAR
General Secretary of Kathalbagan Green Crescent

"In cricket one or two decisions can go against you, but four-five? What happened was not cricket. Why should us players feel pressure in the presence of any particular umpire? I can only share my own experience -- a batsman was caught behind after edging an outside-off delivery. ... in that scenario, how can the leg umpire make the decision? Or when a bouncer hits a batsman on his arm, how can he be adjudged leg-before? Whenever we confront them about these hilarious decisions all they say is that they have their family to run and if they don't comply with their bosses' instruction they will not get matches. Sometimes it's also seen that in the middle of a game the umpires rush to the edge of the ground instead of their designated dressing room to get further instructions from club officials. I don't know how long this will continue."

A player speaking on condition of anonymity.

"This matter (violation of bylaws) is under investigation."

NIZAMUDDIN CHOWDHURY, BCB CEO

"We have 50 to 60 active umpires in Dhaka City and there are 100 irregular umpires who conduct matches on and off. We have different categories as 12 to 15 conduct first-class matches and 10 to 15 at this level (third division). We mix old umpires and newcomers on a trial basis. This time seven to eight umpires from outside Dhaka have conducted 20 to 22 matches, so the allegation is baseless. When you don't like someone, you can find everything wrong with them. Those who are complaining have their own agenda. It is also true that I cannot mind everyone on the field, so we have to be more alert in the future and everybody should come forward to get out from this situation."

SHOYLAB HOSSAIN TUTUL
General Secretary of BCUSA since 1987.

"There are 14 directors from clubs and they are patronising almost 60 clubs; why do they point their fingers at me? If it is the issue of councillorship, then I need only one. If there is a question about allotment of umpires or the standard of umpiring, then there is a department (BCUSA) to look into the issue. I think some are trying to portray a wrong impression of our cricket."

IH MALLICK, BCB Director

"I am less bothered with third division cricket and I didn't go there. ... I am not interested to know what is happening there. There are five to seven teams from Beximco and if they ask for players, I provide them. All allegations are baseless. This is our long-standing tradition that those who are in the board take care of different clubs and patronise them. I think CCDM can take a measure to clear the air with video footage. ... about umpiring, it could have happened three-four years ago but it's not possible now."

KHALED MAHMUD, BCB Director

"This was unfortunate (violation of bylaws), but it's a mistake. We already formed a committee to find the reasons behind the mistake and whether it was intentional. We are yet to receive the report. The league has already finished and what has happened, has happened, but what we can do is make sure that we take proper measure so that this kind of mistakes are not repeated. I don't think there is any valid ground to make wholesale allegations of corruption in lower-tier cricket and our president [BCB President Nazmul Hassan] has already assured everybody that he will take stern action against such incidents."

KAZI INAM AHMED
BCB Director and CCDM Chairman



Tottenham's Dele Ali (R) celebrates with teammates after scoring the decisive goal in an English Premier League encounter with Brighton in London yesterday. Earlier, Harry Kane (L) scored as well to help his side secure a 2-1 win. PHOTO: REUTERS

5-team women's football league from Jan 31

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation has decided to host the long-demanded women's football league from January 31 involving five clubs.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the women's football committee at the BFF house yesterday, with the committee head Mahfuza Akter Kiron in chair.

The league will be held after six years, with the second and last edition of the league held way back in 2013. However, defending champions Abahani will not be a part of the league along with Mohammedan SC. Only five teams -- Sheikh Jamal DC, Sheikh Russel KC, Bashundhara Kings and newcomers

Uttaranga FC and Begum Anwara Sporting Club have registered for the league, which will be held at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in double-leg format.

"Five clubs will take part and this league will help the players get match experience as well as money," said Kiron.

The FIFA member also expressed her disappointment about not getting enough teams on board.

"We tried a lot, but clubs do not show much interest in taking part," Kiron said. "However, we are hopeful we will get more teams when we host the next league in September, 2020."

The registration window for the league will run from January 11 to 26.

Abahani through, Police too

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani cruised into the quarterfinals of the TVS Federation Cup with a 5-1 win over Arambagh KS at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Sunday Chizoba gave the defending champions a ninth-minute lead before four goals from four local players in the second half ensured a big win for the holders, who topped Group A with six points from two matches.

Arambagh were eliminated with two defeats in two matches while Bangladesh Police, who have three points from two matches, went through as runners-up of the group.

The Sky Blues, who had beaten Police 4-0 in their opening game, gave starting eleven berths to four players for the first time and later made three substitutions, all of whom were playing their first game of the competition. Yet the Dhanmondi giants had little trouble dispatching crisis-hit Arambagh, with the reserve-bench players making a strong case by contributing to the victory.

Jewel Rana, one of those players, set up Sunday for a smashing finish for the opening goal in the ninth minute. Abahani failed to increase their lead in the first half, but a couple of tactical switches helped open the floodgates after the break.

Nabib Newaz Jibon doubled Abahani's lead seven minutes after restart with a simple tap-in before veteran centre-back Nasiruddin Chowdhury made it 3-0 with a header five minutes later.

Abahani exploited the width



Abahani forward Sunday Chizoba (L) celebrates after scoring in a 5-1 win over strugglers Arambagh in a Federation Cup encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

of the pitch in the second half by involving the wingers more in their attacks and continued to reap the rewards, with former captain Mamunul Islam, who was one of the four players getting a rare first-eleven outing, picking the far corner of the net with a powerful left-footed shot in the 73rd minute.

Substitute Faisal Ahmed Shitol made it 5-0 with a glancing header six minutes later before Murad Chowdhury scored a consolation

goal for Arambagh with a volley from inside the box in the 85th minute.

Abahani coach Mario Lemos was satisfied with the team's performance including those who do not get a chance in the starting eleven.

"(Bangladesh) Police was a different team than Arambagh, who are struggling. But a win is always satisfying. We scored five goals and could have scored more," the Portuguese said in his post-match

reaction.

When asked about the performance of the reserve-bench players, Lemos said he would have difficulty choosing his eleven in the next match.

"The reserve bench was good. Now was the chance to look for options that we have this year. The quarterfinals will be much tougher but it's also going to be difficult to choose the starting eleven after this performance," said Lemos.