



Nepal players sweat it out by carrying the goal as part of their training at the Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club ground yesterday. The Gorkhalis, as they are called by their fans, would look to shoulder the responsibility of defying the hosts when they take on Bangladesh in two FIFA friendlies in Dhaka on Friday and Tuesday next.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

IPL 2020: A unique edition amid Covid-19

AGENCIES

The 13th edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) is being played without crowds or the usual glamour due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, the cricket fever has skyrocketed among the fans ever since the showpiece event marked the resumption of cricket for India. Let's have a look at some of the key moments and events of the tournament:

NO CROWD, YET MOST VIEWED

The opening match of the IPL between Mumbai Indians and Chennai Super Kings broke viewership records as 20 crore people tuned in to watch the match.

BCCI president Sourav Ganguly later expressed, "You will get

everything here! I can bet you that the IPL has been a smashing success this year, in terms of the ratings, the number of people who have watched the game."

TEWATIA'S BRUTAL ASSAULT ON COTTRELL

While chasing 224 against Kings XI Punjab, with 51 needed off the last three overs, Rahul Tewatia unleashed a brutal assault on left-arm pacer Sheldon Cottrell, hitting him for five sixes in an over in Sharjah, and went on to win the match for Rajasthan Royals.

CSK GOT KNOCKED OUT PRIOR TO THE PLAYOFFS

Chennai has appeared in the tournament for 11 seasons, including the current one. But MS Dhoni's own form and the overall low morale of the team proved to be too much for them as they failed to reach the playoffs for the first time ever.

FIRST-EVER HISTORIC DOUBLE SUPER OVER

In T20 times, cricket can be a crazy sport, and the clash between Mumbai and KXIP needed two super overs after scoring the same numbers twice, sending the cricket world into a frenzy.

The second super over saw Mumbai making 11 runs because of Kieron Pollard. While chasing it, Chris Gayle hit the first ball for a six, and then Mayank Agarwal hit two fours to ensure KXIP's win.

GAYLE, FIRST TO HIT 1000+ T20 SIXES

'Universe Boss' Gayle became the first batsman in history to smash 1,000 T20 sixes after passing the milestone during his knock of 99 from 63 balls against Rajasthan in this edition of IPL.

SHREYAS-LED DELHI'S ROAD TO FINAL

Shreyas Iyer got the responsibility to lead an IPL team for the first

time in his career, and the young rising star of India led Delhi Capitals into their first-ever final.

POORAN'S ASTONISHING FIELDING EFFORT

KXIP cricketer Nicholas Pooran produced one of the best fielding efforts against Rajasthan when Sanju Samson pulled Murugan Ashwin's short of a length delivery. It was destined to clear the ropes, and it surely did, only for an outstretched Pooran to catch the ball mid-air and throw it back into the field in the blink of an eye.

PARAG'S BIHU DANCE

It is always good to see the youngsters take center stage in the world's toughest T20 league. After guiding Rajasthan past Hyderabad, Riyan Parag celebrated his winning shot by exhibiting some moves from the traditional Bihu Dance, the indigenous folk dance from the Indian state of Assam.

Blazing a trail of success

NABID YEASIN



"I hope many more girls in our country will focus more on playing cricket and work on their fitness in order to achieve something for their country after seeing my performance or Jahana's [Alam] performance," Salma Khatun said after helping Trailblazers win the Women's T20 Challenge for the first time.

Salma had to go through a challenging six-day quarantine period at a hotel in the United Arab Emirates before she got the chance to introduce herself to the rest of her Trailblazers teammates, with whom she participated in the three-team T20 tournament.

But by the time the tournament ended, Salma ensured that she would need no further introduction, at least not to players from around the globe playing in the franchise T20 tournament -- popularly known as the Women's IPL.

In her debut campaign, she played an important part in helping Trailblazers to the title. Adapting to tough situations was never an issue for a girl whose family had endured poverty for most of their lives. And Salma yet again proved her mettle at a crucial juncture of the final as she returned miserly figures of three for 18 in her four overs after coming on to bowl at the latter stages during their 16-run victory over Supernovas on Monday.

Salma belongs to the very first batch of women cricketers of the country and so her cricketing journey is laying the foundation for future batches of cricketers in the country. And in that regard, Salma has rarely failed to inspire. It was under her leadership that

Bangladesh won the Asia Cup in 2018 -- the first major cricketing trophy for a country where male cricketers usually get the lion's share of the spotlight.

According to Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, who was manager of the BCB women's cricket wing development for a long time, Salma is just as good as any male spinner the country has.

"Salma has the ability to turn the ball away from the batters and can also bowl the arm ball very effectively. She is as good as any spinner we have in the Bangladesh [male] side," opined Nazmul.

Salma was however not the only Bangladeshi player who featured in the tournament. Pacer Jahana Alam completed her second stint with Velocity. Even though Velocity could not make it to the final, falling short on net run-rate, Jahana did not fail to make a name for herself. The right-arter scalded two crucial wickets during their win against Supernovas in the opening game.

In the early 2000s, it took some inspiring performances from the likes of Mohammad Rafique, Mohammad Ashraful and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza to help instill the confidence in the next generation that they too can do well on the international stage. Similarly, the likes of Salma and Jahana could be the ones to lay the groundwork and pave the path for the upcoming batch of women cricketers, who could reach new heights at the highest level.

They just need to work harder in order to turn what Salma already believes into reality, "I believe we have more girls capable of playing in the IPL. Since it's only three teams, they could not get in but if there are more teams I am sure two to three more players from Bangladesh would get called up."



Mominul tests positive

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Test captain Mominul Haque became the latest cricketer to be infected by the coronavirus. The left-hander had himself tested on Monday due to slight symptoms and the report yesterday came positive.

"I was feeling slightly feverish a couple of days back. So I got tested yesterday and the result came out positive," said Mominul yesterday.

"My wife has also tested positive. We are in home quarantine," the Test skipper said, adding that he has mild fever.

Mominul became the second national cricketer to test positive this week after T20 captain Mahmudullah Riyad tested positive earlier in the week which forced him out of the PSL playoffs.

Meanwhile, the second and final day of the mandatory fitness test of the cricketers outside the national, high performance, and under-19 side, completed yesterday.

Nasir Hossain and Sohag Gazi failed the fitness test for the second consecutive day.

BCB awaiting CWI feedback

SPORTS REPORTER



Indies cricket board regarding the Windies' scheduled to tour to Bangladesh in January next year for three Tests, three ODIs and two T20is.

The BCB has already sent a bio-bubble plan to Cricket West Indies (CWI) and the health authorities of the government and is awaiting a feedback before making the final decision.

"As per our communication with the West Indies cricket board, we have already sent a bio-bubble plan to them and the authorities of our government. Once we get the feedback from the West Indies board, we can make the final decision," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told media yesterday.

Chowdhury also said that the BCB is willing to complete the tour in a short time. "What we understand from the West Indies board is that we need to keep the tour short and our main target will be to fulfil what we have on our FTP (Future Tours Programme). We are working accordingly



but we are yet to reach a final decision," he said.

The BCB is all set to host the Bangabandhu T20 Cup by the end of this month, and although the schedule of the five-team domestic tournament is yet to be finalised, according to Chowdhury the board is willing to finish the tournament by the time they host West Indies.

Following a seven-month halt due to the coronavirus pandemic, cricket in the country returned through the 50-over BCB President's Cup. However, it was in March this year that Bangladesh had an international series, with the Tigers hosting Zimbabwe.

Hosting an international series after the pandemic might be challenging in regards to maintaining safety protocols, but BCB is gradually gaining experience by hosting domestic competitions.



Barcelona and Argentina superstar Lionel Messi returned to national team duty yesterday ahead of World Cup qualifiers against Paraguay, in Buenos Aires on November 13 and Peru, in Lima on November 17.

PHOTO: TWITTER

This season might be a bit different

REUTERS, LONDON



sufficient period for the big guns to start gathering near the top of the table and for the surprise early pace-setters to be on their inevitable slide.

Now and again a club from outside the accepted top-six will defy gravity for longer and once in a blue moon miracles happen, as Leicester City proved by winning the title in 2015-16 as 5000-1 outsiders.

A glance at the standings after the weekend's games raises the prospect that this season might be a bit different.

Southampton, beaten 9-0 by Leicester a year ago, began the weekend perched on top for the first time in 32 years after winning on Friday, Tottenham Hotspur beat West Bromwich Albion to take over for a few hours on Sunday before Leicester moved to the summit with 18 points from eight games by beating Wolverhampton Wanderers.

With Aston Villa's 3-0 drubbing of Arsenal hoisting them to sixth, three points behind Leicester with a game in hand, Everton in seventh, Crystal Palace in eighth and Wolves in ninth, it resembles a table from the 70s or 80s, long before the evolution of a Premier League big four and then big six.

Manchester City are 10th, albeit from only seven games, while Arsenal and Manchester United languish in the bottom half.

BBC pundit and former England striker Alan Shearer says he still expects champions Liverpool and Manchester City to battle each other for the title again and the bookmakers agree.

But the quality so far displayed

by Leicester, Southampton, Villa and early on Everton suggests a shake-up in the top half is not beyond the realm of possibility.

According to statistics provided by Nielsen's Gracenote, Leicester's start is the best by a team from outside the big six since Leeds United also took 18 points from eight games 19 years ago, eventually finishing fifth.

What is more, Leicester are three points better off after eight games than they were in 2015 and are enjoying their best start to a top-

The last time that happened was in 2006 when Bolton Wanderers and Portsmouth eventually finished in seventh and ninth places respectively.

Should Villa get a point in their next game against Brighton, it would mean three teams outside the big six have taken 16 or more points from their opening eight games -- something that has happened in only two Premier League seasons since 1995.

While the appearance of the table is refreshing, it is far too early to start talking about the prospects of



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flight campaign since 1930.

While Leicester's form is perhaps less surprising, given they were impressive last season before a late fade, Southampton's is more so considering their squad is more or less the same as last season's when they struggled.

They have 16 points, meaning it is the first time in 14 years that two teams from outside the big six have averaged at least two points per match in their first eight games.

another Leicester-like fairytale.

Of the 21 teams from outside the big six to have taken 16 or more points from their first eight games, only five finished in the top four, with Newcastle United blowing a golden chance to win the title in 1995-96, finishing second to Manchester United.

And a cautionary take is that of Hull City who took 17 points from their first eight games but two from their last eight, surviving on the last day of the 2008-09 season.