



Bangladesh captain Mahmudullah Riyad and his Australian counterpart Matthew Wade show each other thumbs-up in the spirit of mutual respect and sportsmanship while man-of-the-match and man-of-the-series Shakib Al Hasan celebrates the victory with Mustafizur Rahman yesterday. [Bottom] Supporters had to get to the top of a building adjacent to the stadium to enjoy the last game as the health protocol for the Covid-19 restricted the spectators from entering the stadium.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'We'll be challenging whoever comes to play in Bangladesh'

SPORTS REPORTER



In spite of the fact that Bangladesh managed to post their best opening stand so far, of 42 runs, in the five-match T20I series against Australia,

the Tigers just could not capitalise on their start to land a big total in the fifth and final game at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Even then, Bangladesh's half-decent target of 122 for eight proved a little too much for the men from Down Under, as their middle-order miserably collapsed from 48 for three to becoming all out for 62 in 13.4 overs. And with this shambolic batting display, the Aussies registered their lowest-ever total in the shortest format of the game. Their previous lowest-ever score, of 79 in 14.3 overs, was in Southampton against England in 2005.

Shakib Al Hasan, the usual suspect when it comes to becoming the decider of a match, wrecked havoc by picking up four wickets, giving away just nine runs. He was adjudged to be the both player of the match and the series.

"I think we played some really good cricket through two series, in Zimbabwe and here. Obviously the wicket was tough, but we held our nerve well. All in all a team effort," said the champion all-rounder after the match.

"If you look at the last match, we scored 104-105 and the game still went to the last over. So we knew if we score 120-130 we'll always be in the game. We started well with the bat today, that gave us momentum. I think the bowlers did a fantastic job throughout this series.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Bangladesh: 122 for 8 in 20 overs (Mahedi 13, Naim 23, Shakib 11, Soumya 16, Mahmudullah 19, extras 18; Ellis 2-16, Christian 2-17)
Australia: 62 all out in 13.4 overs (Wade 22, Mcdermott 17, extra 1; Nasum 2-8, Saifuddin 3-12, Shakib 4-9, Mahmudullah 1-9)
Result: Bangladesh won by 60 runs.
Player-of-the-match & player-of-the-series: Shakib Al Hasan.

We're trying to improve all our areas," Shakib added further.

A jubilant skipper Mahmudullah Riyad emphasised on the team effort.

"The boys showed a lot of character and hunger to win a series against a team like

Australia. We executed our plans really well. Obviously it was hard for the batters, but we did well to keep getting 120-130. All the bowlers worked really well together.

"We always felt that in our backyard we are a very good team. We can't let anything go past. We'll be challenging whoever comes to play in Bangladesh and we'd like to win every series. Though the ranking doesn't show it, I have always felt we have very good potential to be a very good team in T20Is," said Mahmudullah.

Earlier in the first innings, the hosts from being in a situation capable of posting somewhere near 140, were 91 for 4 in 16 overs. By losing wickets at regular intervals, Bangladesh eventually managed to add 31 runs and lost four wickets in the last six overs.

And yesterday's win for Bangladesh had meant, that in terms of Australia's win-percentage record against their oppositions in T20Is, the Tigers are levelled with England on 56 percent, ahead of South Africa (62%) and New Zealand (68%).

Australian captain Matthew Wade insisted that this was a learning curve for their side and gave hosts the credit.

"It's hard to say there will be more positives. Certainly a great learning opportunity for our group. I've played for a few years now, certainly the toughest conditions to play T20 cricket in. Great learning for youngsters. Wasn't our series unfortunately. There's no excuses of not playing enough cricket. We had enough cricket in the West Indies to come and play good cricket, we just didn't. Credit to Bangladesh, they did well."



Barca fans 'devastated', PSG fans 'waiting for a legend'

REUTERS, BARCELONA

Barcelona fans gathered outside Lionel Messi's house on Monday and spoke of their sadness at the club's greatest player leaving after 21 years, while Paris St Germain fans eagerly awaited his arrival in the French capital.

One Barca member filed complaints with a French court and with the European Commission to try to block any move by PSG to sign Messi, according to documents seen by Reuters on Monday.

The 34-year-old on Sunday bid farewell to the club he has spent his entire career at and confirmed that he was talking with the Paris club over a possible move.

There were no signs of movement around Messi's house in the hills of the wealthy Barcelona district of Castelldefels on Monday, however, where fans waited to catch a glimpse of the player.

"I feel devastated," said Cristian Garcia, wearing a Barca shirt with Messi's name and number 10 on the back.

"To see a player that I have always followed, who is an example for me, to see him leave now brings me a lot of pain."

Messi said he had agreed a 50% pay cut in order to stay at Barca and sign a new contract but was unable to finalise the deal due to the Spanish league's financial control rules and the club's debts, which total more than 1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion).

La Liga said last Wednesday it had secured a private equity injection of 2.7 billion euros from firm CVC, with the funds to be shared among the clubs in return for 10% of the league's revenue.

It had been believed this would allow Barcelona to get the Messi deal done, but after Real Madrid rejected the proposal and said they would take legal action against La Liga, Barca also came out against it.

"I don't think the club has done enough to make him stay, I think it was in the club's hands to make him stay, beyond the money," said Barca and Argentina fan Gonzalo Moreno.

Messi said on Sunday that PSG was "a possibility" but that he had not yet signed any deal.

In the Barcelona member's legal complaints, shared by the fan's lawyer, the member claims that French football authorities have failed to enforce their own financial fair play (FFP) rules in order to help PSG become a force in European football.

Barcelona, like their main La Liga rivals Real Madrid, are fully owned by their subscription-paying members known as "socios".

The FFP rules notably forbid top European soccer clubs to pay their playing squads an excessive share of their total revenues, according to the complaints, which also state that the transfer of Messi to PSG would breach the code. PSG and the French football league did not immediately respond to emailed requests for comment.



French newspaper L'Equipe reported on Sunday that Messi would travel to Paris on Sunday or Monday for a medical and to finalise a deal with the Qatar Sports Investment-owned club.

Spanish newspaper Marca reported that PSG had formally sent their offer to Messi on Sunday morning.

"We're waiting for a legend, the legend that is Leo Messi," said PSG fan Mehmet Sen, who had been waiting at the gates to Paris' Le Bourget airport since 2 a.m. for a glimpse of the star.



Fans hang a jersey bearing the name and number of Barcelona's outgoing superstar Lionel Messi during the 56th Joan Gamper Trophy friendly football match between Barcelona and Juventus at the Johan Cruyff Stadium on Sunday. [Top] Fans wait in line to welcome Messi in Paris.

PHOTO: AFP

SAFF Championship moves to Male

SPORTS REPORTER



The 13th edition of the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship has moved from Bangladesh to Maldives and will be held in Male from October 1 to 13, an emergency executive meeting of the regional football body decided yesterday.

Bangladesh was originally scheduled to host the biennial event in September last year but the first wave of the pandemic prompted a one-year deferral before the second wave forced Bangladesh Football Federation to relinquish the hosting rights altogether.

The All Nepal Football Association and the Football Association of Maldives expressed their desire to host the event, but the meeting, which was organised virtually and attended by general secretaries and presidents of six nations as well as delegate of Asian Football Confederation, unanimously supported Maldives' bid to host the regional championship.

Anwarul Huq, general secretary of the SAFF, briefed media following the meeting. "The decision for Maldives hosting was unanimously approved in the meeting. The decision was taken in light of the comparatively better Covid situation as well as higher vaccination rate in Maldives compared to Nepal," Huq said.

The Maldives capital will, meanwhile, host the AFC Cup South Zone matches later this month involving clubs from India, Bangladesh and the host nation. While the decision as of now is to stage the SAFF Championship with five teams in round-robin format, the SAFF has given Bhutan three days to decide on whether to participate and make it a six-team affair.

"The championship will be held in round robin format if five countries participate. In that case, the final will be held between the top two teams of the points table. However, if Bhutan plays, it will be in group format with two groups of three teams each with semifinals and final," Huq said.

Bhutan had earlier informed they would not be able to participate if the championship was held this year due to travel restrictions in and out of the country owing to the pandemic. Pakistan, the seventh country of the region, are ineligible to participate because of a FIFA suspension.

Invincible Kings clinch BPL title

SPORTS REPORTER



Defending champions Bashundhara Kings retained the title of Bangladesh Premier League after handing a 2-0 defeat to three-time champions Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Brazilian duo Robson Da Silva and Jonathan Fernandes struck one goal apiece to deliver season's second trophy to Kings who have taken an uncatchable lead in the 13-team table with 55 points from 20 matches.

Sheikh Jamal, on the other hand, slipped into the third position with 39 points from 19 matches after Abahani Dhaka beat Arambagh KS 6-1 in the day's second match, riding on a hat-trick from Jewel Rana, to reach the second position with 40 points from 20 outings.

Having been boosted with season's first trophy of the Federation Cup, Kings recruited two Brazilians, one Argentinian and one Iraqi who all had a superb run from the beginning of the league, notching up seven straight victories. Whereas, inconsistent performances from Abahani and Sheikh Jamal, meant that the title race by midway had turned into a one-horse race with Kings leading by at least eight points from their two nearest rivals.

The gap kept increasing during the league's second leg as Kings kept their momentum conserved with Abahani and Sheikh Jamal often dropping points. This paved the way for Kings to clinch the title

in record time, with four matches still left to play.

"There were plenty of things during the season's beginning. Our management surprised us by providing the best facilities, best players, confidence and support throughout the season. The credit goes to the players. I think we completed an excellent season filled with ups and downs due to discontinuities but we worked knowing that this season was going to be important. I think we played the perfect BPL and still have a big tournament ahead [AFC Cup in Maldives]. I'm delighted to win back-to-back titles," said Oscar Bruzon, Kings

Spanish coach, after the match.

Kings definitely did not want to delay the party this time unlike their debut season in 2018-19, in which they had prepared to celebrate the title triumph with a win over Sheikh Russel KC in their 21st match, with two games in hand; however, they ended up suffering a 0-1 defeat. Yesterday, Kings held their nerves to bring the outcome in their favour despite an initial surge from Sheikh Jamal who had to play the match without their head coach Shafiqul Islam Manik, after the club management terminated Manik three hours prior to the match.

Sheikh Jamal seemed to be lacking



Bashundhara Kings players toss their Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon as they celebrate retaining the Bangladesh Premier League title with four matches in hand after beating Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club 2-0 yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club terminated their head coach Shafiqul Islam Manik hours before their crucial tie against Bashundhara Kings. "I have been verbally asked not to accompany the team. They will let me know in written form tomorrow (Tuesday)," said Manik.

ideas without their coach along with the absence of hard-working Uzbek midfielder Jonov Otabek, who usually initiates most of the attacks by pairing with Solomon King for their formidable Gambian striking duo Pa Omar Jobe and Sulayman Sillah. Having survived Sheikh Jamal's initial burst of pressure, Kings established their authority on the match, thanks to a 21-minute strike from Robson, who drove home from 25 yards to raise his goal tally to 19.

Afterwards Jamal attempted to expose the Kings' backline but Sillah was denied by the woodwork in the 43rd minute before the tall striker drove wide three minutes later.

After resumption, both sides fought on level terms before Jonathan doubled the lead with a powerful drive outside the box in the 62nd minute while in the 83rd minute, substitute Emon Hossain had rattled the crossbar.