

## No captaincy, please!

BISHWAJIT ROY

Who would not love to captain his side? It is something that a lot of players dream of. We often hear players say, “It’s a dream come true to captain the side.”

But we can’t expect any such usual practice when it comes to the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

The ongoing BPL probably made headlines mostly for captaincy changes, especially for teams to replace skippers just before the start of a match. And more interestingly, most players have refused to take the role. Let’s begin with the controversy surrounding Mehedi Hasan Miraz during the Chattogram leg of the competition.

The Miraz drama, which was initiated after the player was stripped of captaincy just hours before their game against Sylhet Sunrisers, eventually ended after reaching an understanding with the franchise, but the player made it clear that he would not captain the side if asked again.

Once again sudden captaincy changes took centre stage in the Sylhet leg of the tournament. After Sylhet Sunrisers surprised with a captaincy change on Monday, Chattogram Challengers yesterday had Afif Hossain replace Naeem Islam, who had in fact replaced Miraz as captain earlier.

When Chattogram had Miraz stripped off captaincy, they did not cite any issue regarding the player’s performance. However, in Naeem’s case, the team mentioned that the player had to be dropped due to his poor performance.

On Monday, after Sylhet replaced Mosaddek Hossain with Ravi Bopara as their captain, Sylhet team manager Kazi Al Mashuk Bari disclosed that players like Anamul Haque and Mohammad Mithun refused to take the responsibility.

It is, however, not sure if Chattogram had asked anyone else to replace Naeem before approaching Afif. But one thing is certain that the captaincy circus has reached such a stage that no one can be sure as to who will be coming in to flip the coin in BPL anymore.



Opener Munim Shahriar played a blazing knock of 51 off 28 deliveries as table-toppers Fortune Barishal posted 199 for four before restricting Sylhet Sunrisers to 187 for 6, ensuring the elimination of the latter from the race for the last four in the BPL at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. (Bottom) Earlier, Mrittunjoy Chowdhury’s excellent last over handed Chattogram Challengers a much-needed three-run win over Minister Group Dhaka.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Mrittunjoy: Chattogram’s beacon in the dark

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Sylhet

There was joy and jubilation on one side, a clutter of youthful energy converging and coming through. At the other side of things, wearing a dreary look was the experienced Tamim Iqbal, stranded at the non-striker’s in the last delivery after what should have been a match-winning knock of 73. Tamim would have hoped that Mohammad Naim would do something special, only his partner could not find what was required. The one who got it right was 20-year-old Mrittunjoy Chowdhury, holding his nerve against the odds in a crucial death over against experienced batters.

Young guns Afif, Nasum Ahmed, Shoriful Islam converging towards Mrittunjoy signified a young side answering for themselves amidst the circus. Most of those names have done their bit in this ongoing BPL but things have remained clumsy for the franchise.

“We’re a young side. Our sense of joy in a win or disappointments in defeats is a bit more than others. We were very cheerful at the beginning [of BPL]. It was a matter of proving ourselves as youngsters. There was a lot of planning for today’s game and when it won, it was difficult to contain that joy,” Mrittunjoy told The Daily Star in an interview yesterday.

Tamim was set for glory, his side needing just nine runs in that last over. “Nine runs is too little to defend,” the pacer remarked.

There was a quiet confidence about him and he knew how to shift his plans. From picking up Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Qais



Ahmed’s wicket with slowers in previous spell, he went to his yorkers with five deliveries remaining.

“I planned according to the batters and then tried to execute. Panic doesn’t do you good. I would have tried slowers if Tamim bhai was new to the crease, but at that moment I felt he might get under it and yorkers were the better option. The change in pace was confusing them,” he said, landing one of his yorkers under Tamim.

“I went very wide of the crease, I wanted to land it right [a tad outside off stump] where his bat would come down from natural stance.

“I like the challenge of death over bowling. I feel less pressure than normal and competing with batters gives me confidence. I feel I have an idea of how batters think. When I have bad days, I feel I have enough experience of bad days

struggling two years with injury.”

The lad has 10 wickets in five games now, including a hat-trick in one and a three-wicket over in another. A beacon for Chattogram in the dark.

“I wanted to do well this BPL for my family, my coaches, my support structure.” Biggest facet of this win is that it keeps Chattogram’s hopes alive.

Meanwhile, in the night game that followed, Sylhet Sunrisers’ hopes of progressing to the next round faded completely despite a 49-ball 90 from Colin Ingram as they fell short by 12 runs against Fortune Barishal, who amassed 199 while batting first, the second-highest total of this BPL edition, riding on quick-fire knocks from opener Munim Shahriar (51 off 28), Shakib Al Hasan (38 off 19) and Dwayne Bravo (34 off 13) while Chris Gayle (51 off 45) anchored the innings from the top.

## Peng Shuai makes Games appearance

REUTERS, Beijing

Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai was on hand on Tuesday to watch China’s Eileen Gu as she won gold in the Big Air competition in Beijing to put the host nation at the top of the medals table.

Peng, who could be seen in the stands wearing a black knit hat with the Olympic rings on them and a black coat with the Chinese flag, acknowledged a greeting from a journalist but declined to answer questions as she left the venue.

Peng’s well-being became a matter of global concern when she appeared to allege on social media in November that a former Chinese vice premier, Zhang Gaoli, had sexually assaulted her in the past.

After that post, which was quickly removed, she disappeared from public view for nearly three weeks.

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach visited with members of the group including Peng during the competition.

“I just met her, she was here sitting in the stadium,” Bach told Reuters.

“She was among the athletes, and I had the opportunity to meet with a number of athletes from Switzerland and from Germany and the U.S.,” he said.

## Zouma apologises for abusing cat

AFP, London

West Ham and France defender Kurt Zouma has apologised after a disturbing video surfaced of him kicking and slapping a cat, with the Premier League club publicly condemning the footage.

Zouma is seen in the clip dropping, kicking and slapping the animal, while laughter can be heard in the background.

The 27-year-old then chases the cat, before throwing a pair of shoes at it and slapping its head. West Ham condemned Zouma’s actions in a strongly worded statement following publication of the clip online.

“West Ham United unreservedly condemns the actions of our player, Kurt Zouma, in the video that has circulated,” the club said in a statement.

“We have spoken to Kurt and will be dealing with the matter internally, but we would like to make it clear that we in no way condone cruelty towards animals.”

The France international, who joined West Ham from Chelsea in August 2021, has also released a statement expressing his regret. “I want to apologise for my actions,” he said. “There are no excuses for my behaviour, which I sincerely regret.

“I also want to say how deeply sorry I am to anyone who was upset by the video. I would like to assure everyone that our two cats are perfectly fine and healthy.”

## Sheikh Jamal go top

### Last-gasp equaliser spares Abahani’s blushes

SPORTS REPORTER

Title aspirants Abahani salvaged a point in the Bangladesh Premier League as the Sky Blues came from a goal down to play out a 1-1 draw against Bangladesh Police FC at the Birshreshtha Shaheed FL Lt. Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Jamal DC, another contender, sailed through their second game with an emphatic 3-0 win over Mukijoddha Sangsad KC at the Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium in Tongi to claim top spot in the 12-team table with six points from two games. Solomon King gave Sheikh Jamal a 20th-minute lead before Chinedu Mathew struck twice in 37th and 55th minutes respectively.

Away at Munshiganj, Independence Cup and Federation Cup champions Abahani appeared a shell of their double-winning selves, squandering a plethora of chances, including a penalty, before sharing honours with a resilient Bangladesh Police.

Bangladesh Police again gave a superior side a run for their money and found themselves on the verge of upsetting six-times champions Abahani, but could not keep out a stoppage-time equaliser eerily

reminiscent to the stoppage-time goal they conceded in a 1-0 loss to Saif SC in their opening game.

On the back of a narrow 1-0 win over Muktijoddha Sangsad in their previous match, Abahani looked a bit of nervous, misplacing passes and squandering some easy scoring chances. Bangladesh Police goalkeeper Mohammad Nehal made some brilliant saves while Abahani’s Brazilian forward Dorielton Gomes wasted two easy chances, including a penalty.

Abahani also saw a strike from Jewel Rana ruled out due to offside in the 73rd minute before their luck seemingly ran out and they conceded four minutes later from a counter.

Tutul Hossain Badsha’s poor attempt to clear Isanur Rahman’s cross saw the ball fall to Brazilian forward Denilson Rodrigues, who made no mistake angling the ball to the far post.

Bangladesh Police’s attempt to kill time thereafter was far from subtle, prompting referee Symoon Hasan to add on eight minutes of stoppage time but Abahani needed only three to find the equaliser. Colindres whipped in a nice cross from the left for Dorielton, who glanced a header past Nehal and spare Abahani the blues.



Chelsea striker Romelu Lukaku and teammates train at the Mohammed Bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday. The European champions will take on Saudi Arabian side Al Hilal in the semifinal of the Club World Cup at this venue tonight.

PHOTO: REUTERS