

I can't say that things will be the same when I return to the court .. but there is an additional reason to play better than ever.

Novak Djokovic said yesterday on the eve of his return to tennis.



Comilla Victorians spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman celebrates the dismissal of Fortune Barishal batter Faf du Plessis during the final of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Barishal bounce back after Narine carnage

SPORTS REPORTER

After an early flurry of runs, Fortune Barishal bowlers managed to curb Comilla Victorians batters' strokeplay to restrict them to 151 for nine in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) final in Mirpur yesterday.

Sunil Narine, on the back of a blazing 57-run knock against Chattogram Challengers in Qualifier 2 on Wednesday, was on song again yesterday as he found boundaries easily.

Despite opener Liton Das perishing to Barishal skipper Shakib Al Hasan in the third over, runs came freely from Narine's bat, who picked up his fifty off just 21 deliveries. His power-hitting had Comilla skipper Shakib worried but in the final over of the Powerplay, Narine (57 off 23) succumbed to Mehedi Hasan Rana.

With a long batting lineup, Comilla were expected to make hay. However, a good effort from Barishal saw Mahmudul Hasan Joy run out before Mujeeb Ur Rahman removed Faf du Plessis and Ariful Haque. As the runs dried up, Moeen Ali's fighting 38-run knock helped Comilla reach a decent total.

Another journey of drama and controversy

SPORTS REPORTER

Like its past seven editions, the eighth iteration of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League was full of drama, controversy and action.

It all started with low and slow surfaces at Mirpur, which maintained its reputation for producing low-scoring affairs. Interestingly, the night games in the first leg of the tournament in Mirpur produced fighting totals but day games produced low-scoring encounters. Among them, the lowest total came when Sylhet Sunrisers folded for just 96 runs against Comilla Victorians, who eventually chased down the target for the loss of eight wickets.

However, excitement began to soar in the Chattogram leg, which saw the first 200-plus total posted by hosts Chattogram Challengers against Sylhet. In the same game, fans were treated to the eighth edition's first hat-trick from young left-arm seamer Mrityunjay Chowdhury.

The first hundred of the tournament was also registered in Chattogram by Sylhet opener Lendl Simmons. However, Minister Dhaka opener and Bangladesh's ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal overpowered Sylhet with his own century to lead his side to a nine-wicket win.

This edition of the BPL was also

significant in terms of performances from local cricketers.

Mrittunjay remained among the top wicket-takers, picking up 15 wickets from eight games while Fortune Barishal opener Munim Shahriar showed great promise with his big-hitting ability and his fearless attitude caught the eyes of the selectors.

Mustafizur Rahman also remained instrumental for Comilla and was on top of the wicket-takers list, but it was star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan who stole the show with all-round performances for Barishal.

Shakib created history by picking up five consecutive man of the match awards following impressive performances with bat and ball while also leading Barishal from the front as they cruised to the final.

Barishal ended the group stage on top of the points table while Comilla finished at second to confirm qualifier spots. Chattogram and Khulna secured playoff berths in their final group stage games.

Despite a star-studded side that had the likes of Mahmudullah Riyad, Tamim and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Dhaka ended the tournament in disappointing manner, unable to make it to the playoffs.

As for controversy, the Mehedi Hasan Miraz saga was prominent. After captaining Chattogram for the first four

games, he was replaced by Naem Islam just hours before the start of the fifth game.

Miraz then decided to leave the franchise and even left the team hotel and was set to return to Dhaka, creating a huge uproar. However, following negotiations between the franchise, BCB and Miraz, the drama came to a conclusion.

Meanwhile, Sylhet were also surrounded by controversy regarding their change in captains and strange decisions from the team management. Sylhet's team selection and performances kept raising questions throughout the tournament and they ended up winning just one game in the end.

Shakib, not one to shy after controversy, also drummed some up after not showing up at the photo session ahead of the final, which was supposed to feature the captains of the finalists. As it turned out, Shakib was involved at a different photoshoot, related to an advertisement, raising many eyebrows as it was also a possible breach of the bio-secure bubble protocols.

However, BCB physician Monjur Chowdhury informed that Shakib came back to the hotel and maintained protocols properly, also returning a negative test and then participating in the final.

Domingo due today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national team head coach Russell Domingo is set to arrive in the country today ahead of the start of Bangladesh's preparation camp in Chattogram for the upcoming ODI series against Afghanistan.

Following the ODI series, slated to be played between February 23 to 28 in Chattogram, the teams will head to Dhaka for the T20I series on March 3.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) sources informed that Domingo's flight will land in Dhaka today while spin coach Ranagana Herath has already arrived. It was learned that newly-appointed batting coach Jamie Siddons is still in quarantine after returning a positive Covid-19 test but will undergo another test today along with the rest of the Bangladesh team.

"Siddons had returned another positive test after his initial test had returned positive. He will take the test tomorrow [Saturday] along with the rest of the team," BCB chief physician Debashish Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

The whole Afghanistan squad and support personnel had returned a negative test following a second Rapid Antigen test on Wednesday, ACB informed in a press release on Thursday.

Afghanistan had to initially cancel their practice session on Tuesday following positive Covid-19 reports in their ranks. Afghanistan are due in Chattogram today following a week-long camp in Sylhet.



Australia crush Sri Lanka in fourth T20I

REUTERS

Australia eased to a six-wicket victory against Sri Lanka in the fourth Twenty20 international in Melbourne on Friday, barely needing to shift out of first gear as they heaped misery on the tourists who have yet to register a win in the five-game series.

Chasing 140, the home side suffered some early jitters before the middle order steadied the ship, cruising to 143-4 with 11 balls to spare courtesy of a 20-ball 40 by Josh Inglis.

Bowling with clever variations of pace, Lahiru Kumara (2-22) took the wickets of unconvincing opener Ashton Agar (26 off 31 balls) and captain Aaron Finch (two), who increased his run of scores without a half-century to 12.

Inglis, who struck the only two sixes of the innings, partnered Glenn Maxwell (48 not out) at the crease with the side at 49-3 in the ninth over and the duo put on a carefree 71 runs together to put the result beyond doubt.

"It looked like (Inglis) was batting on a different wicket," said Maxwell.

"He was really calm out in the middle for just his fourth game of international cricket."

Earlier, fast bowlers Kane Richardson (2-44) and Jhye Richardson (2-20) combined for a flurry of late wickets to restrict Sri Lanka to 139-8 when a more competitive score could have been achieved - summing up Sri Lanka's batting woes in Australia.



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