

CAPTAINS' QUOTES

We will try to defend our title. No matter how strong you are on paper, you need to play well on the field or else it will be futile.

Comilla captain Imrul Kayes.

I haven't become a champion yet but I played two finals. It will be great to become champions.

Mehedi Hasan Miraz, standing in for Fortune Barishal skipper Shakib Al Hasan.

Our strength is team spirit and our team is balanced. So we are hopeful.

Shuvagata Hom, captain of Chattogram Challengers.

Our team is young and energetic and we have a lot of all-rounders. We will be able to do well if we give a hundred per cent.

Nurul Hasan Sohan, captain of Rangpur Riders

Not nervous, actually excited. It's something new in life and that too on a stage like the BPL. Would like to do something good.

Yasir Ali, captain of Khulna Tigers.

This is an opportunity. If I can do well, it will be better for my career so focus will be on that and also team performance.

Nasir Hossain, Dhaka Dominators captain.

The combination between coaching staff and cricketers are good. Difficult to say what will happen on the field. We will take it match by match.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, captain of Sylhet Strikers.



All seven franchise captains, except Fortune Barishal's Shakib Al Hasan, were present during the trophy unveiling of the ninth Bangladesh Premier League, scheduled to begin today with the game between Chattogram Challengers and Sylhet Strikers at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. All-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz had to fill in for absentee Shakib. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Lack of impetus cloaked in a shroud of confidentiality

Burning questions unanswered as BPL begins today

SPORTS REPORTER

The build-up to the ninth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) has been about a lack of effort from organisers to make the country's premier T20 competition truly competitive and big-scale, with Shakib Al Hasan the latest to chime in and draw attention to a lack of forethought on Wednesday.

Thus, the discussion even a day ahead of the tournament was about a lack of impetus on behalf of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) during an inquisitive press conference.

"We don't have the scope to talk about anything outside cricket," a representative of one of the sponsors said when questioned whether Shakib's comments were a shock to the system.

The BCB was also unable to reveal the financial details of their deal with the title sponsors Ispahani, with CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury stating it was an aspect bound by a confidentiality clause.

Making revenue, developing infrastructure and player development were the BCB's reasons for staging the tournament, but all those came under question as well.

"Regarding infrastructure development, we haven't been able to fulfil our targets

yet, especially with regards to certain obligations of the franchises. We accept that opportunities haven't been there for franchises to develop infrastructure and facilities because we have not been able to go towards long-term planning," the BCB CEO said.

Since its inception, no franchise has participated in every event. Teams are built to make ends meet, often at the last minute, because the underlying research is missing. The ever-changing franchises do not create the platform to groom stars and the lack of brand value with constant switching means crowds are not drawn.

But is the BCB serious about making a concerted effort to hold the tournament more efficiently?

Revenue sharing has come up as an issue ahead of this BPL, but that issue was best left avoided from the BCB's perspective. A lack of planning was evident too from the BCB's inability to adopt DRS (Decision Review System), which puts the seriousness of the tournament in further doubt alongside the unavailability of big-name stars.

"We gave all-out effort when the matter was brought to our knowledge," the BCB CEO suggested, insinuating it was too late to secure DRS by the time they had begun to take action.

"We can't explain the limitations (in organising) publicly but it's not just the cricket board," he said, adding that the pandemic had offered further challenges.

Sylhet Strikers skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza said he agreed with most of what Shakib said.

"As he said, he believes that there is market value. In a country of eighteen to twenty crore, where cricket is hugely popular, what's needed is goodwill. What's good is that franchises have been announced for three editions. You can plan six months earlier next year. Support the teams and try to learn what they need. An auction three months before the tournament and then practice sessions right before the tournament won't lead to changes," Mashrafe told reporters yesterday.

A BCB higher-up yesterday told The Daily Star that the tournament, considering the budget and everything else, was designed with 'sustainability' in mind.

There was an eagerness to not plan something which might fall through. But in the fast-changing landscape of global T20 leagues, that thought-process has only led to a missed opportunity when it comes to creating value.

Liton scales new heights

SPORTS REPORTER



Liton Das made history once again as the wicketkeeper-batter moved a place up in the Test batting ranking, to 11th, as International Cricket Council revealed its latest ranking update on Thursday.

Liton had already made headlines a week ago when he leapfrogged India's Virat Kohli and moved up to 12th in the Test batting ranking – matching the best-ever position by a Bangladeshi in the format.

Liton, who has not played any Test since the Tigers' two-match Test series against India last year in December at home, moved another spot up, courtesy of Usman Khawaja's dip from 11th to 12th in the ranking. Liton has a rating of 702.

The 28-year-old batter wrapped up a memorable 2022 with a notable performance against India – when he scored a team-high 73 in the second innings of the second Test that the Tigers lost narrowly by three wickets.

The first time Liton moved to 12th in the batting ranking was back in March last year, but the right-hander could not hold on to it for long. Before Liton, ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal attained the best-ever ranking in Tests when the southpaw moved to 14th.



In another dominant day for the hosts, an imperious Usman Khawaja (195 not out) and Steve Smith hit hundreds during Australia's run plunder against South Africa on the second day of the third Test on Thursday in Sydney. The red-hot Khawaja surpassed his previous highest score of 174 while Smith more than played his part, passing Bradman's 29 Test tons. Only Ricky Ponting (41) and Steve Waugh (32) have scored more Test centuries for Australia than Smith, who is second only to the immortal Bradman (99.94) with a current Test average of 60.89 in his 92nd Test match. "I don't think about that stuff a great deal but I did look up at the scoreboard just after I got 100... and there are some pretty big names there, so that's pretty cool," Smith said. PHOTO: AFP

Athletics finally turns to grassroots

SPORTS REPORTER

With the nation's once glorious athletics scene in dire straits in terms of success on the international stage due to a lack of quality athletes, the Bangladesh Athletics Federation (BAF) finally took the initiative to unearth new talents from the grassroots level by organising the first-ever Inter-School and Madrasa Athletics Championships.

Until now, the BAF has remained committed to organising three events – the National Athletics Championships, Summer Athletics Championships and age-group athletics championships – every year, neglecting schools which were once breeding grounds for athletes.

The introduction of the Sheikh Kamal Inter-School and Madrasa Athletics Championships, which will get underway from January 14 at union-level schools and madrasas, is expected to revive the culture of sport at the school level.

"Generally, educational boards hold inter-school and madrasa sports competitions. But many upazilas and districts even came to know about this competition," BAF general secretary Abdur Rahman Montu said. "Wins and

losses are not important, involvement of all schools in sport is far more important. So, we want to focus on school sports to revive the country's athletics."

Schools at union level will initially take part in the championships at the upazila level before the district, division and final phases take place gradually between January 14 and February 13.

"We are expecting around 50 lakh students to take part in 17 events," Montu said, adding that students from class six to eight would be competing in four events – 100m sprint, 200m sprint, high jump and long jump (girls and boys) while students from class nine to ten would participate in 13 events – 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, 400x100m relay, high jump, long and triple jump, hammer throw, javelin throw, shotput and discus throw (boys and girls).

The BAF needs a big budget to complete the competition and BAF's new president Tofazzal Hossain Miah, also the principal secretary to the prime minister, has played a vital role in arranging the funding as well as involving the local administration at district level.

Montu said they planned to provide scholarships and advanced training to athletes selected from the championships.



Superstar Cristiano Ronaldo has already assumed the role of a leader at Al Nassr after penning a deal worth 200 million euros. However, the 37-year-old forward faces a wait to debut for his new club because the Saudi outfit have exceeded their quota for foreign players with Ronaldo being their ninth foreign player -- one more than the eight allowed by Saudi football authorities. Thursday's Saudi Pro League game between Al Nassr and Al-Ta'ee was shifted to Friday due to heavy rain causing electrical problems at the stadium in Riyadh, and it remains to be seen how long Ronaldo will have to wait to begin his new journey. PHOTO: TWITTER