

## Mohammedan to defend Super Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Fallen giants Mohammedan will have a chance to defend their Super Cup title when the big-budget domestic football tournament returns in May after a decade-long gap.

Mohammedan have failed to win a Bangladesh Premier League title since the introduction of professional league in 2007. However, the Motijheel-based outfit won two out of the three editions of the Super Cup held in the intervening time.

The Black and Whites won the inaugural Super Cup in 2009 before regaining the title from archrivals Abahani in 2013, the last-time the crore-taka tournament was held.

Following a decade-long gap due to a lack of interest from sponsors, the tournament is set to be staged again this April. Despite not being directly eligible for automatic qualification, which is reserved for the league's top four, Abahani made it due to Saif Sporting Club's departure from the top-flight football.



Mehedi Hasan Miraz pulls one out of the park, leaving his Fortune Barishal teammate Anamul Haque Bijoy in awe during training at the Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday. Miraz, who missed Barishal's last three matches due to a side strain, has been gearing up for a return to the Bangladesh Premier League.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## ‘My use of wrist all comes from squash’

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Ryan Burl has come leaps and bounds since his early days, with his rise perfectly coinciding with the new-found ambition coming through in Zimbabwe cricket. The 28-year-old spoke about growing up with cricket and other sports and his view on the current generation of Zimbabwe players during an interview with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi. The excerpts are below:

**On Zimbabwe's current generation:** When you start thinking of the legends, you think of the late 90s and early 2000s. You think of Andy Flowers, Heath Streak or Henry Olonga and Tatenda Taibu. But that was back then, I firmly believe we have our own legends now like Sikander Raza, Brendon Taylor, Sean Williams and great prospects like [Blessing] Muzarabani. So, I believe some years from now, people will call us the legends of Zimbabwe cricket.

**On the atmosphere of Zimbabwe from a cricketer's point of view:** It's amazing. Not everyone knows you but you are the talk of the town and everyone's talking about cricket. Everyone wants to go to the games and the stadiums are packed and we owe a lot to the crowds.

**On that viral tweet about gluing the shoes back:** It was the kind of thing which you don't expect to see go viral. I couldn't be any more grateful to Puma for stepping up and helping us out. They helped not just me but some of my teammates too and it's an eye-opener in terms of sponsors rallying behind us. Obviously we



are not top five in the world but that's no excuse for the sponsors. At that time, [the tweet] was about giving insight into what us cricketers face in the background. I like tampering and fixing things and I am a bit of DIY guy at home, although not as good as my brother and dad. Cricket can be a bit of an expensive sport and we go through a lot of wear and tear.

**On playing hockey and squash and how it helped in cricket:** I think those kinds of sports contributed to the player I am today. You see my use of wrist and it all comes from squash. You see me sweeping and reverse-sweeping and that's basically hockey all over – getting low down. To this day I play all the sports but I came to cricket because it's a team game.

**On Zim coach David Houghton's work:** We kind of all sat down and talked about the brand of cricket we wanted to play. We wanted to cheer up the fans and play positive cricket to bring in the fans. It doesn't work all the time but works

sometimes. It happens that you go for 180 but manage just a 100. But being defensive and getting 140 means you still lose the game. So that's what we discussed as a group.

**On his experience with Mashrafe:** He's a legend of Bangladesh and has an extremely calming presence. He's one of those guys who gives you full belief and backs you hundred per cent. I was originally put down to bat at five or six but there would be an instance when he says: 'No I want you to go at four and want you to express yourself, be confident and enjoy yourself.' He makes integration easier.

**On becoming a leggie:** You have less space in the garden and sometimes you bowl spin. I used to open the bowling with Sam Curran in Zimbabwe but then one day I told the coach I'm done with seam. Watching Warnie, Stuart McGill and Kumble and you start to bowl the flipper or the slider. It's a proper art form.

**On whether leggies are diminishing:** It's a weird one since I haven't seen a leggie in Bangladesh. But you look at the T20 rankings, at one stage there were six of seven leggies up there like Adil Rashid, Rashid Khan, Ish Sodhi. It might seem like a dying art and it's high-risk and high-reward thing but you might also get wickets. I discussed grips with others such as Rashid and bringing unpredictability to the field set-up. It's like a community of leggies and we speak to each other. Batters are always trying to figure us out so we're trying to stay ahead.

## ‘We can't relax’

AGENCIES

Barcelona stretched their La Liga lead over Real Madrid to a substantial eight points with a comfortable 3-0 win over Sevilla on Sunday.

The Catalans, aiming to win their first Spanish title since 2019, took full advantage of Real Madrid's defeat to Real Mallorca earlier in the day to extend their lead at the top of the table.

However, coach Xavi Hernandez said Barca would not allow any "euphoria" to creep in.

"I don't know if we're the most reliable team in the league. We are in a good moment, but this changes. We can't relax," said Xavi.

Xavi also asked his players to keep working with 'humility', insisting that their work is far from over.

"This is a long race and we have to keep working with humility. We are building something very good, but nothing has been won. Only the Super Cup. We are hungry," Xavi added.

However, goals from Jordi Alba, Gavi, and Raphinha secured all three points for the hosts and that left Xavi a very satisfied manager.

But Xavi still considered Real Madrid as favourites in La Liga and urged his players to shut the door on a potential Madrid comeback.

"They are still the favourites because they are the reigning La Liga and Champions League champions," said Xavi.

"I know that Real Madrid will keep competing until the end. There have been historic comebacks, we can't let that happen."



## Vinicius Jr victim again of racist abuse

AGENCIES

Mallorca fans were filmed racially abusing Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Vinicius Jr. in their Son Moix stadium during their 1-0 upset win against the LaLiga holders on Sunday.

Supporters could be heard calling the 22-year-old Brazilian player a monkey in a video published by streaming company DAZN on social media.

Mallorca did not immediately respond to a request for comment. But in a radio interview club manager Javier Aguirre denied that his players had targeted Vinicius, who suffered 10 fouls, the most endured by any player in LaLiga this season.

Vinicius has been subjected to racial abuse by fans on at least three occasions – at Camp Nou against Barcelona in November 2021, at Atletico in September 2022 and at Valladolid in late December 2022.

Spanish police are also investigating a possible hate crime against the Brazilian.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti defended Vinicius after the Brazilian broke the record for the highest number of fouls received by a Real Madrid player in almost a decade.

"Everything that happens and has happened is not Vinicius' fault. He wants to play soccer and there is an environment of rivals who provoke him and foul him," Ancelotti said.

Nacho Fernandez, who scored an own goal during the game, also commented on the treatment of Vinicius, labelling it as "nonsense."

"I think an atmosphere is being created with the issue of Vinicius that does not favour anyone, neither Vinicius nor anyone else. The public is getting involved with the boy. We have to leave controversy and nonsense aside," Nacho said.

## City accused of over 100 irregularities

AGENCIES, London

The Premier League has accused Manchester City of breaking its financial rules on more than 100 occasions between the 2009-10 and 2017-18 seasons following a four-year investigation, referring the reigning champions to an independent commission.

The six-times Premier League champions have been accused of failing to give "a true and fair view of the club's financial position", of failing to "include full details" of player and manager remuneration, of failing to comply with rules regarding financial fair play and failing to co-operate in a Premier League investigation that has concluded after more than four years.

If proven, these would be the greatest offences committed by a club in the history of the competition.

The independent commission could recommend that City be expelled from competition by resigning them to relegation. A lesser infraction may simply lead to a fine or points being docked.

This is not the first time that the team have found itself in hot water for such issues. In February 2020, City were banned from the Champions League by UEFA after being found to have broken financial rules and misled the European governing body, only for the ban to be overturned on appeal by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

On the central finding that City's Abu Dhabi ownership had disguised its own funding as independent sponsorship by the state's commercial companies, Cas found: "Most of the alleged breaches were either not established or time-barred."

'Time-barred' was the crucial phrase. It basically means that UEFA have a five-year window to penalise clubs for Financial Fair Play infringements. However, the Premier League does not have include any such clause regarding time.

However, under Premier League rules, clubs cannot appeal to the CAS or FA. If they are found guilty, they will have to go for the drawn-out process of arbitration with another independent panel.

Last season, City won their sixth Premier League title since they were purchased by the Abu Dhabi United Group in 2008. They also won the Premier League title in the 2011-12, 2013-14, 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2020-21 seasons. Since the takeover, Manchester City have spent over two billion euros on new players.

In January 2023, City topped the Deloitte money league – a list of the world's richest clubs by revenue – for second year in a row ahead of Real Madrid. After the allegations came out, Jamie Carragher tweeted sarcastically: "This can't be right. Man City bring in more commercial revenue than Real Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich, Man Utd and Liverpool."

Tagenarine Chanderpaul, the son of former West Indies skipper Shivnarine Chanderpaul, starred in a West Indies record of 336 for the first wicket with Kraigg Brathwaite yesterday before the visitors declared at 447-6 on the third day of their first Test against Zimbabwe. Tagenarine scored an unbeaten 207, surpassing his father's best-ever Test score of 203 not out against South Africa in 2005. His innings saw them become only the second father-son duo after Pakistan's Hanif Mohammad and Shoaib Mohammad to have scored Test double centuries.

PHOTO: TWITTER

