

Imranur waiting for good news

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Athletics Federation (BAF) is seeking further assistance for England-based sprinter Imranur Rahman to help him flourish after the 29-year-old sprinter created history by becoming the first Bangladeshi to win a gold medal in the 60m sprint at the Asian Indoor Athletics Championship in Kazakhstan last Saturday.

The 29-year-old, who arrived in Dhaka on Tuesday night, spent the hours yesterday meeting officials and media before a training session at the Army Stadium in Banani in afternoon. Imranur is also expected to receive a grand reception within a couple of days.

Imranur is a part-time athlete who has been working two jobs to bear the expenses of his family and training but the schedule means there is



little room for him to fully dedicate himself to training, although he has been working under a professional coach in England.

"We believe the way he has been training in England will stay intact because we are hoping for some good news in the coming days. We expect some sponsors to come forward and provide him with financial help because Imranur has the capacity to deliver more at the international level," said BAF general secretary Abdur Rokib Montu, who added that Imranur's success would have a positive impact on budding athletes that are currently participating in the School and Madrasa Athletics Championships as well as the Bangladesh Youth Games.

The BAF had previously sought help from the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA), who provide financial aid to athletes with potential to shine in international competitions.

"As he is representing Bangladesh Army, the Army is looking after him by paying him a monthly honorarium, bearing air tickets for international tournaments and providing pocket money. In addition, the Bangladesh Olympic Association has also been with him in different ways from the beginning since he came to Bangladesh," said BOA secretary general Syed Shahed Reza.

"After the competition of ongoing Youth Games, we will sit to discuss what he [Imranur] needs and what the BOA can provide for him, especially after his recent success. We will definitely do for him in the coming days," said Reza.



Comilla Victorians skipper Imrul Kayes and Sylhet Strikers' Mushfiqur Rahim, who showed up on behalf of Sylhet captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and appeared to have recovered from a fever which triggered controversy in the second Qualifier on Tuesday, pose with the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) 2023 trophy during an official photoshoot at Uttara's Diabari metro station yesterday ahead of the franchise-based T20 tournament's title decider between the two sides, scheduled to take place at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today.

PHOTO: BCB

Sylhet, Comilla primed for 'battle of nerves'

SPORTS REPORTER

After over a month-long battle among seven teams, two of the best and most deserving sides rose to the top, with Sylhet Strikers set to take on Comilla Victorians in the final of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

Imrul Kayes's Comilla will be eyeing a fourth title while Sylhet, led by inspirational skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, will be eager to clinch their maiden BPL trophy.

The teams had made contrasting starts to the BPL, with Comilla losing their first three games on trot before becoming the first team to qualify for the final on the back of a 10-match unbeaten streak. Meanwhile, Sylhet had a dream start, winning their first five games on trot, and were among the first teams to qualify past the initial phase.

In terms of strength, Sylhet rely heavily on their local performers. The likes of Najmul Hossain Shanto and Towhid Hridoy are among the top run-getters in the BPL while the experience of Mushfiqur Rahim and skipper Mashrafe's leadership quality will also prove crucial in the all-important final.

On the other hand, Comilla have transformed into a dangerous unit that blends locals with some big overseas names that can single-handedly change the course of a game like Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, Moeen Ali and Johnson Charles.

According to Kayes, the final will be a battle of nerves and he placed an emphasis on staying ahead of any mind games.

"I think tomorrow (Thursday) is totally



Comilla have transformed into a dangerous unit that blends locals with some big overseas names that can single-handedly change the course of a game like Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, Moeen Ali and Johnson Charles.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

going to be about mind games. In such a high-voltage game, whoever holds their nerve and stays calm will do better because there's no guarantee that you will win even if you score 200 hundred runs. I remember during the final of the previous edition, we were behind till the 18th over but we went on to win in the last two overs. It's a different ball game. You have to be calm on the field," Kayes told reporters on the eve of the final.

Interestingly, neither Comilla nor Mashrafe -- who has led various franchises -- have ever been on the losing side in the final, meaning something has to give.

After losing to Sylhet in the first group game, Comilla managed to win the next

two encounters against them, including a comfortable four-wicket win in the first Qualifier.

However, Shanto -- who has been instrumental for Sylhet and is among the leading run scorers in the BPL with 452 runs in 14 games -- said that they were not thinking about their opponents and were instead focusing on executing their plans.

"I think two of the most deserving teams have reached the final by playing some brilliant cricket. I think it's unimportant who we are playing against since our aim will be to execute our plans. They (Comilla) are definitely a good side but whoever plays better cricket on the day will win. We are not worried about big names," said Shanto.

PSG left looking to Mbappe

AFP, Paris

Paris Saint-Germain were deservedly beaten by Bayern Munich in the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie on Tuesday, but Kylian Mbappe's cameo on his return from injury gives them reason to believe they can still prevent another premature exit from Europe's elite club competition.

Mbappe did not look like a player who had been brought back much earlier than expected following a thigh injury as his electrifying pace caused panic in the Bayern defence when he came on for the final half-hour.

The France superstar could not inspire a comeback as Bayern left the Parc des Princes with a 1-0 win, but only a brave Yann Sommer save and then a marginal offside call denied him an equaliser.

"We only lost 1-0, there are no more away goals, and if we play our attacking game, cause them problems and score once, we'll be level," Mbappe said as he looked ahead to the return leg in Germany on March 8.

"We are not beaten, not at all. We still have every chance."

However, what Tuesday's game confirmed was the extent to which PSG are dependent on Mbappe,



despite the presence of Lionel Messi and Neymar in their attack as well.

Messi and Neymar struggled to have any real influence on the game in the first 57 minutes before Mbappe came off the bench, by which time Kingsley Coman had put the away side ahead.

"When he came on Mbappe completely lifted the atmosphere in the stadium and that also gave the other players a lift," admitted Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann.

"It is clear that Kylian Mbappe can change any game."

Ten Hag wishes Barca tie was final

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag believes his side's last 32 Europa League clash against Barcelona would have been worthy of the final itself.

United have enjoyed a resurgence under their Dutch boss, who took charge ahead of this season.

They now travel to Spain for Thursday's first-leg tie against La Liga leaders Barcelona in third place in the Premier League, five points behind table-toppers Arsenal but having played two games more than the Gunners.

Both Barcelona and United have rich European histories, with eight European Cup and Champions League titles between them, in addition to other continental trophies.

"I think Barcelona and (us) as well (would) have preferred to play (this match) in the final," Ten Hag told UEFA in comments published Wednesday.

"We are looking forward (to it), it (takes) a lot of energy searching for that finish, and it will be a great game. "Hopefully, everyone is fit for Barcelona and for us. So we see a game (that will be played) at the highest level."

'There is something to learn no matter the result'

The Women's T20 World Cup has been going on in full-swing in South Africa since February 10 and although the group stages are yet to be completed, Bangladesh have already faced Sri Lanka and Australia and come out disappointed from both matches. Keeping wickets in hand appeared to be a major challenge for the Tigresses, as did setting a solid platform by attaining enough runs through the Powerplays. On a brighter note, some of the newer players in the team who joined just after a promising campaign in the inaugural U-19 T20 World Cup have been showing immense promise. Speaking to The Daily Star's Naziba Basher, Bangladesh captain Nigar Sultana Joty shared her insights into the T20 World Cup and spoke about the different strategies the team could adopt to churn out wins. The excerpts of that interview are below:

The Daily Star (DS): What is the atmosphere like in South Africa?

Nigar Sultana Joty (NSJ): It is always exciting. Each World Cup and each country it is held in has a different atmosphere. It is our job to adjust and that is what we are trying to do.

DS: What are you hoping to get out of this World Cup?

NSJ: More than anything, we are hoping to take back some good experiences. We also have so many young, talented players and we want to show them through this World Cup that there is something to take back and learn from each of them, no matter the result.

DS: What are your hopes from the new players?

Joty: I have to talk about our new pacer Marufa Akter. She has been bowling sensationally and has been giving her absolute best in every game. As a matter of fact, all the young players have been doing the same. However,

there is a lot more for them to learn.

DS: The first two matches did not go our way. What did you take away from those defeats?

NSJ: We actually have some great players. But we are falling short when it comes to runs per over. I believe we are falling short especially in the Powerplay. While other teams manage to score at least 7-8 runs per over during the Powerplay, we are falling behind. We need to improve in that regard.

DS: What is your preparation like as a team?

NSJ: Like I said, everyone has been giving their best. There are some areas that we need to work on collectively and I believe if we can conquer those areas, we can move ahead.

DS: Which teams are your targeting?

NJS: Every team we are up against. Whether it's Sri Lanka, Australia or New Zealand. Every team we are playing against, we are targeting.

DS: Are there any specific players you and your girls watch out for?

NSJ: Well, seeing as our batters are getting dismissed early, I think we need to watch out for attacking bowlers more than anything else.

DS: You have had a couple of international tournaments during the run up to the WC. What did you learn from those in terms of WC preparations?

NSJ: We really need to pick up on our batting and the line-up needs to get

much stronger. However, we need to accept the fact that all of us have to try harder to play in different conditions. I think that is where we fall behind the most. We can't put up with different conditions. We need to work on that.

DS: We know it is quite difficult for those used to playing in South Asian conditions to excel in countries with different conditions in terms of pitch and weather. How much do you think you can use the South African conditions to your advantage?

NSJ: Like I said, it is different for each country. After many tournaments and matches, some of us were able to acclimatise to different types of weather, pitches and more. But with new players in the team, it becomes a little tougher. They will need to learn how to adjust as well.

DS: What is your ultimate goal from this T20 World Cup?

NSJ: We just want to be able to bring something back to the country, for the country.



New Zealand captain Tim Southee and his England counterpart Ben Stokes pose with the trophy in Mount Maunganui yesterday ahead of the first match of the two-Test series beginning today.

PHOTO: ECB