

BPL's pull still there as fans turn up

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Premier League had difficulty in pulling in crowds in many of the previous editions, especially in Dhaka phases of the tournament. Matches in Sylhet and Chattogram usually have great turnouts and festive atmosphere.

This time, the run-up to the tournament was timid but surprisingly a big crowd showed up for the opening day's games at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium on Friday. The eastern side of the gallery was packed, but the pricier seats on the western side were left vacant.

Many waited outside to purchase tickets from the black market in hope of being able to watch some action at some point during the day.

The attendance on the first day, despite it being a holiday, was a welcome sight for fans too. One such fan opined that district or regional rivalries still pull in crowds.

"I came for cricket. I am from Dhaka and I came to see Dhaka play. My friend here is from Barishal and he is a [Fortune] Barishal supporter since he supports the team from where he originally is," Kamrul Hasan, who studies in the engineering and technology department of the Dhaka University, said.

"But it was difficult to manage tickets since the tickets that are left are pretty expensive," he added.

Raihan Chowdhury, a banker from Dhaka, brought his whole family to enjoy the cricket on the holiday.

"Actually, BPL doesn't pull me that much but since it's a Friday and my kids are interested about cricket, we chose to come here," Raihan said.

"I think BPL [excitement] will improve as in my office I am noticing quite a bit of interest in the BPL. Since I work at a bank, I myself don't get much opportunity to watch cricket, but since BPL is a short format, it's better for me. My son plays cricket the whole day and it's because of him that I'm here," the fan added.

It remains to be seen whether the BPL can continue to pull in crowds who are still willing to come to the ground despite the low-key stature of the tournament this year.

Whatmore's understanding could be key for Barishal

Fortune Barishal have a lot of national team stars including Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad. The seniors in the side have a familiar face in Dav Whatmore as head coach, the man who was one of the key characters behind Bangladesh's rise in world cricket.

Mehedi Hasan Miraz talked to the media after Barishal's training yesterday, saying: "He has been communicating with everyone and boosting the players. Understanding is very important and our senior cricketers played under him before. Coach's communication is very important."



Durdanto Dhaka pacer Shoriful Islam marked the start of the 10th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League with a maiden T20 hatricket which helped his side to a five-wicket win over defending champions Comilla Victorians in the tournament's opener yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in front of enthusiastic fans who flocked in numbers to the stadium on a Friday afternoon. The left-arm pacer, who remained wicketless in his first three overs, picked up three in three in the final over to restrict Comilla to 143 for six.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Shoriful 'never thought of a hatricket'

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From 6,6 to W,W,W – the way things unfolded in the final over of the first innings between Durdanto Dhaka and defending champions Comilla Victorians yesterday was as surprising to the protagonist, Shoriful Islam, as it was to the fans who had flocked in on a holiday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium to witness the 10th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League kick off.

Having been struck for consecutive sixes in the second and third deliveries by Khushdil Shah, Shoriful went on to register his maiden hatricket in T20s as Dhaka restricted Comilla to a modest total of 143 for six in 20 overs.

"To be honest, I did not think of a hatricket. After being struck for two sixes, I was trying to make a comeback and maybe pick one or two wickets and bowl dot deliveries but I never thought of a hatricket," Shoriful, player of the match for his figures of three for 27, told the media after helping his side begin the latest edition of the country's only franchise-based T20 tournament with a convincing five-wicket win.

It was the seventh hatricket in the history of BPL and the third by a Bangladeshi.

With the aim to stop Comilla from finishing proceedings on a high, Shoriful, in fact, was asked by experienced pacer

BPL Hatricks

- Mohammad Sami (Pakistan) for Durdanto Rajshahi vs Dhaka Gladiators in 2012
- Al-Amin Hossain (Bangladesh) for Barisal Bulls vs Sylhet Super Stars in 2015
- Aliss Islam (Bangladesh) for Dhaka Dynamites vs Rangpur Riders in 2019
- Wahab Riaz (Pakistan) for Comilla Victorians vs Khulna Titans in 2019
- Andre Russell (West Indies) for Dhaka Dynamites vs Chattogram Vikings in 2019
- Mrittunjoy Chowdhury (Bangladesh) for Chattogram Challengers vs Sylhet Sunrisers in 2022
- Shoriful Islam (Bangladesh) for Durdanto Dhaka vs Comilla Victorians in 2024

Taskin Ahmed and Dhaka skipper Mossadek Hossain to bowl slowers in order to minimise the damage.

"After I was hit for two sixes, Taskin bhai, and Mosaddek bhai told me to bring in some change of pace as there was some

extra bounce on the surface," Shoriful said.

Shoriful, however, did far more than just contain runs – he removed Khushdil, Roston Chase, and Moidul Islam Ankon to register a magnificent feat, swinging the momentum back towards Dhaka in the process.

The occasion was more special for the youngster as Shoriful's family members were among the ones applauding from the stands.

"It's a very good feeling and it's more special as my family members also came to the ground to watch the game for the first time, and I was able to register a hatricket on the same day. So, it feels even better," said Shoriful.

Shoriful has been the standout performer for Bangladesh in 2023. The left-arm seamer was the top wicket-taker for Bangladesh in ODIs last year, also making it among the highest wicket-takers' list globally in the format.

He was also among the top three wicket-takers for the Tigers in Tests and T20Is in 2023, and Shoriful is hopeful of continuing his fine run in the coming days.

"Alhamdulillah, last year went well for me and I kept that in mind while training -- that I want to start the new year similarly. The first match went well and I would like to continue that in the coming days," he added.

SHORT CORNER

Robinho hits half-century

Robson Robinho reached the 50-goal mark in the Bangladesh Premier League as Bashundhara Kings made it four wins out of four with an emphatic 3-0 win over Sheikh Jamal DC at Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj yesterday.

Captain Robinho scored the third goal for his side after his Dorielton Gomes struck a brace as the defending champions took their tally to 12 points from four matches in the 10-team table.

NZ go 4-0 up against Pakistan

Daryl Mitchell and Glenn Phillips combined to steer New Zealand to a seven-wicket win over Pakistan in the fourth Twenty20 international in Christchurch on Friday and place them on the verge of a series clean sweep.

The Black Caps pair scored unbeaten half-centuries in a 139-run stand as the home side reached 159-3 in the 19th over in response to Pakistan's 158-5.

Ruthless Aus pummel depleted Windies

Josh Hazlewood finished with a nine-wicket match haul as world champions Australia crushed a depleted West Indies by 10 wickets inside seven sessions of the opening Test in the two-match series at the Adelaide Oval on Friday.

Usman Khawaja was forced to retire hurt after being struck in the head by West Indies debutant quick Shamar Joseph with one run required for victory and Marnus Labuschagne got the home side over the line off the second ball he faced.

Klopp shocked by Salah injury on Egypt duty

Jürgen Klopp said he was shocked to discover Liverpool star Mohamed Salah had suffered a hamstring injury while playing for Egypt at the Africa Cup of Nations. The 31-year-old was forced off during Egypt's 2-2 draw with Ghana on Thursday.

Iraq stun Japan to reach Asian Cup last 16

Ayemen Hussein scored two first-half headers as Iraq stunned Asian Cup favourites Japan 2-1 on Friday to reach the knockout rounds. It was Japan's first Asian Cup group-stage defeat in 26 matches and set them on a potential collision course with South Korea in the last 16 in Qatar, assuming they still progress.

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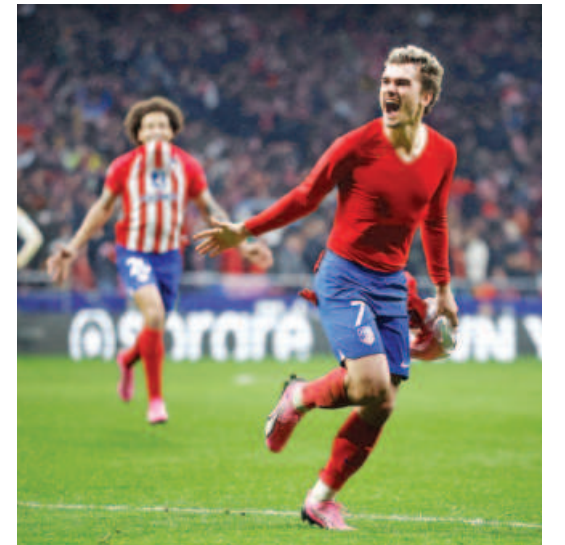


PHOTO: REUTERS

Following a mesmerising solo run, cutting in from the right flank, Antoine Griezmann finished with aplomb to put Atletico Madrid ahead in the extra time after it ended 2-2 at full-time in their Copa del Rey last 16 tie against defending champions Real Madrid on Thursday. Another extra-time strike from Rodrigo Riquelme helped Atletico edge Los Blancos 4-2 on the night and book a place in the quarter-final. The outcome also snapped Real Madrid's 21-match unbeaten streak, seeing Carlo Ancelotti's side suffer their second defeat of the season in all competitions.

ICC U-19 WORLD CUP

Young Tigers against familiar foes first up

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are set to begin their ICC Under-19 World Cup campaign today against familiar foes India in a match that is bringing back sweet memories from four years ago.

The Young Tigers will face India in a Group A match at the Manguang Oval in Bloemfontein, set to begin at 2:00pm Bangladesh time.

Almost four years back, in Potchefstroom, a city 324 kilometres away from Bloemfontein, the Akbar Ali-led Bangladesh team defeated India in a nail-biting final to lift their maiden world title at the U-19 level.

Although Bangladesh's title defence in the 2022 edition in the West Indies went poorly, as they finished eighth out of 16 teams while India went on to win their fifth title, the return to South Africa and the recent good performances are giving the Young Tigers the confidence to start the fresh campaign with a victory.

"We are focused on our next match against India, we want to go match by match in the World Cup," Bangladesh skipper Mahfuzur

Rahman Rabby said yesterday in a video message.

The Rabby-led team arrived in South Africa with a lot of momentum, having won the ACC U-19 Asia Cup title in Dubai last month – Bangladesh's maiden triumph in the competition.

Before crushing the United Arab Emirates by 195 runs in the final to



be crowned undefeated champions, they had defeated India by four wickets in the semifinal.

Bangladesh lost some of the momentum with a 112-run defeat to Sri Lanka in their first warm-up game on January 14 before coming up with a five-wicket victory over their Australian counterparts in

their second and final warm-up game on Wednesday.

Even though Bangladesh's record against India in Youth ODIs isn't anything to write home about, with just five wins in 26 matches, the two teams have been involved in fiery encounters in recent years, where tempers have flared and some unfortunate incidents have occurred.

However, Bangladesh captain Rabby downplayed the tensions between the teams and said they will approach it like any other game.

"We will play it like a normal game. We have had good preparation for the tournament. We have had great input from our coach," Rabby was quoted by the ICC after the captain's photo session on Tuesday.

The tournament, which was originally supposed to be held in Sri Lanka but got shifted to South Africa after the island nation received a ban from the ICC, began yesterday with Ireland defeating the USA by seven wickets and South Africa beating the West Indies by 31 runs.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic signs autographs for fans following his 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 victory against Argentina's Tomas Etcheverry in the third round of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Friday. The 10-time champion, who was dragged into dogfights in the first two rounds, gave a masterclass in clean and clinical tennis for two sets as he picked apart the 24-year-old Argentine in his 100th match at Melbourne Park.

PHOTO: AFP