

History-makers Kings playing a different ball-game

ATIQUÉ ANAM

After referee Symoon Hasan Sunny blew the final whistle following Bashundhara Kings' 2-1 win against Mohammedan in Mymensingh yesterday, ensuring the Kings' historic fifth consecutive title of the Bangladesh Premier League, two-goal hero Dorielton Gomes sunk to his knees before laying on the ground, thanking the heavens for what they had just achieved.

It was an unprecedented achievement in Bangladesh's top-tier football, beating the feat of Dhaka Wanderers who had won four consecutive league titles in the 1950s, but there was not much overt expression of joy, neither from Dorielton nor from his teammates. It almost felt like business as usual for the modern-day powerhouse of Bangladesh football for they have turned the Bangladesh Premier League into an almost one-horse race since making debut in the 2018-19 season.

Later the players and club officials celebrated the victory at the Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium wearing blue jerseys, with the word 'Champions' emblazoned in bold letters on the front of the shirts, reflecting the conviction and the determination of the team to win the title at the home ground of their nearest rivals Mohammedan, the only team that had beaten Kings the whole season.

"We could come here today to fight for just a draw and knowing that one more point next week would be enough, but we were clear that we were here to win," Oscar Bruzon, the chief architect of all five of Kings' league



PHOTO: STAR

titles, relayed this sentiment while talking to reporters after the victory.

This winning mentality and professionalism are what perhaps set Kings apart from the rest of the clubs in Bangladesh's top-flight football.

Kings, arguably the most financially solvent club of the country, set a few benchmarks in the country's football even outside of the football field. Since the beginning when Kings plied in the Bangladesh Championship for one season, the club tried to follow the path of elite clubs in the world, setting up their own dormitories and gym facilities for the players.

Gradually the club set up their own practice ground and their own stadium – a novelty in

Bangladesh's sports fraternity – to further stamp their mark on domestic football.

There are other clubs though that may rival Kings on financial front, namely, Abahani, Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel, but those clubs have fallen by the wayside in recent years despite splurging a good amount on player recruitment.

Sanat Babla, a veteran sports journalist of the country currently leading the sports team in Shokalskhondha.com, has followed the club's activities and performances from very close. He feels

"Credit must be given to the club for managing the players so well, taking care of their health as well as their finances. I haven't

heard of any payment issues about Kings, something which is not uncommon in our football. They also take the best care of their players in terms of medical issues and fitness, opting to not field a player even in a crucial match if there is slight issue with his fitness," the journalist told The Daily Star.

Bashundhara Kings' president Imrul Hasan feels discipline is the key factor that keeps the team united and forges the path to continued success.

"A lot of clubs can have good teams. But we are always very strict in maintaining discipline, which keeps the players physically and mentally fit and committed for the club," Hasan told The Daily Star last night. "In the first one or two seasons, we did not have that great a team since we were new in this field and did not have the proper insight into

transfer market. We did not have an outright target of winning the title, yet ended up as winners because of the discipline and the commitment of the management."

The club had already set a unique example last year when it suspended three key players for various terms over a serious breach of discipline and monetarily fining two others.

Five-time champions of the BPL is very important for the club. Guys, lets now go and fight for the Federation Cup.

CAPTAIN ROBSON ROBINHO

While similar digressions by players had previously been swept under the carpet by other clubs, Kings took a no-compromise policy, even at the risk of jeopardising the club's prospects in domestic and international competitions.

While Kings may seem unparalleled when it comes to domestic football, they tend to fall short on the international stage, having been eliminated from the group stages of the AFC Cup four times in a row.

That is one area the club might have to shift focus on with better planning next season while their immediate focus shifts to the Federation Cup, where they are two wins away from regaining the title and becoming only the second club to clinch a domestic treble.

After winning five consecutive trophies, I'm absolutely satisfied with this enjoyable season. Having lost only one game in domestic competitions is a big achievement. Winning five titles in a row is something that is not in the hands of everybody. So all praise to our players.

COACH OSCAR BRUZON

End of an era as Anderson retires in July

REUTERS, LONDON

England star James Anderson believes the "time is right" to end his Test career after revealing on Saturday that the first Test against the West Indies at Lord's on July 10 will be his final appearance in the five-day format which will bring an end to a 21-year career in which he became the most successful ever fast bowler.



Having made his Test debut against Zimbabwe at Lord's in 2003, Anderson, who has played 187 Tests, is set to finish his career with 188 caps, second to only Sachin Tendulkar who has played 200, the most by any player.

The 41-year-old sits third, with 700 wickets, in the list of most scalps in Tests after Muttiah Muralitharan (800) and Shane Warne (708). He has 32 five-wicket hauls to his name in the format - the second-most by a pacer after Sir Richard Hadlee (36) - and has taken 10 wickets in a match on three occasions.

Anderson has taken 1114 wickets in first-class cricket having claimed his 1,000th while playing for Lancashire at Old Trafford in 2021.

He won the Ashes in 2009 and came into his own in the 2010-11 series in Australia where he took a series-leading 24 wickets as England won their first Ashes in Australia for 24 years.

'Type of cricket' biggest concern for Tigers

NABID YEASIN

There was a lot of scepticism regarding Bangladesh's home T20I series against Zimbabwe, especially with it being viewed as an opportunity for the Tigers to gauge their mettle before leaving for the USA and the West Indies for the ICC T20 World Cup in June.

Questions were raised as to what good can come of playing a five-match T20I series against a side that could not make it to the mega event, losing to Uganda and Namibia in the qualifiers in November last year.

The scepticism and queries over the team's preparation were not at all surprising, considering how poorly the Tigers have fared in the last two T20 World Cups - only winning over low-ranked Netherlands and Zimbabwe in 2022 while suffering a humiliating loss to Scotland the year before in the previous edition.

But once the series started, there remained no point in mulling over what opposition the team was lining up against - especially for the players. Then, it became a matter of how well the given opportunity could be utilised to tune up in the best possible way for the T20 World Cup as it boils down to what type of cricket the team is trying to play and with what approach.

"More important than winning or the opponent we are winning against is what type of cricket we are playing and how much we can improve from here on," Soumya Sarkar, who scored a 34-ball 41 despite some initial jitters in Bangladesh's slender win in the fourth T20I in Mirpur yesterday, said after the game.

Soumya, however, also mentioned that it is important to develop a "winning habit" going into a World Cup - a notion that backfired for Bangladesh in the 2021 ICC T20 World Cup where home series wins over Australia and New Zealand before the tournament did little for the team in the actual event.

Soumya's initial comment about the "type of cricket" sounded logical and appropriate but when analysing the four T20Is played so far this series, there are nothing but worrying signs to take

away for the Tigers.

The eight-wicket win in the first match conceals how Clive Madande and Wellington Masakadza staged a record eighth-wicket stand for Zimbabwe, and the second-best in T20Is overall, to undo the brilliant initial effort from Bangladesh bowlers that had reduced the visitors to 41 for seven, threatening of setting the record for the lowest-ever collection by the Zimbabweans.

The second T20I was about how the bowlers sort of repeated the script from the first game - taking wickets initially but letting Zimbabwe's lower-order batters flourish and put up a mediocre score - and the top-order batters coming up with dialed down performances as the Tigers' middle-order had to come in rescue to complete a regulation 139-run chase.

Meanwhile, things got alarmingly close in the last two T20Is, with Bangladesh prevailing by nine runs in the third match and by just five runs in the fourth one on Friday.

In the last match, Bangladesh's heavily unsteady batting line-up was exposed. In a rare instance, the fresh opening pair of Soumya, replacing out-of-form Liton Das, and Tanzid Tamim managed to put up a 101-run opening stand at a brisk pace. But instead of capitalising on the start and converting it to a daunting total, Bangladesh lost their last nine wickets for just 42 runs and were bundled out for 143.

This only proves that at times when even scores north of 270 are a probability - considering how things are unfolding in the ongoing Indian Premier League - Bangladesh batters' threshold remains what was the norm about a decade ago in the shortest format.

While Soumya's remarks on focusing on "type of cricket" might have sounded good, the cricket put on display by the Tigers would only add to the worries ahead of the T20 mega event. And even a 5-0 sweep of a low-ranked Zimbabwe, which could be materialised in the final T20I on Sunday, will not be enough to diminish it in any way.



Josko Gvardiol struck twice and one goal each from Phil Foden and Julian Alvarez saw Manchester City rout Fulham 4-0 at Craven Cottage yesterday, propelling the Citizens to the top of the league. The win opened up a two-point lead for the reigning champions over Arsenal who sit second with 83 points. The Gunners will play away at Manchester United today as the title race comes down to the wire.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Mbappe to leave PSG at end of season

AFP, Paris



Kylian Mbappe confirmed on Friday that he will leave French champions Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season, with Real Madrid widely expected to be his next destination.

The announcement brings an end to a prolific association with his hometown team, which began when he signed from Monaco in 2017 in a deal worth 180 million euros (\$194 million).

"I wanted to announce to you all that it's my last year at Paris Saint-Germain. I will not extend and the adventure will come to an end in a few weeks," Mbappe, 25, said in a video posted on social media.

"I will play my last game at the Parc des Princes on Sunday."

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