

Kings show why they are champions

ANISUR RAHMAN from Mymensingh

Bashundhara Kings and their loyal band of travelling fans were ecstatic at the Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh yesterday as the club added the Federation Cup to the Independence Cup and the Bangladesh Premier League following a come-from-behind 2-1 win over Mohammedan Sporting Club.

In doing so, Kings completed the holy trinity as only the second club in the professional era in Bangladesh to win all three titles after Sheikh Russel did it in the 2012-13 season.

Kings will remember this final not only for confirming the treble but also their supporters, who made the environment electrifying throughout the final.

"I think it was an electrifying final; it was not a one-sided affair and the spectators enjoyed the game thoroughly," midfielder Sohail Rana said in instant reaction after the thrilling final, which was decided in extra time.

"We have built a mentality of becoming champions because the officials and players believe we deserve all trophies every season," the veteran

I can't express how I am feeling as my first strike in top-flight football helped Kings become champions.

Jahid Hossain
 Kings' winning goal scorer

midfielder added.

Echoing the same sentiment, captain Robson Robinho said, "The way they (Mohammedan) started the match, we knew it was going to be tough but when we go to the pitch, we always try to win. That is the mentality of Bashundhara Kings and we do it in every match. Sometimes good clubs give you tough time but you have to come back and we did it."

Goalkeeper Mehdi Hasan Srabon kept Kings in the match with a string of excellent saves in regulation and extra time. The second choice keeper thought he paid back the coach's faith.

"I am happy to have taken the challenge I was given today. I think I have paid back the faith the coach put on me

in the final," said Srabon, who felt the final was the toughest game he played this season.

Defender Tapu Barman felt that the two tournaments this season were tougher than the league and that Mohammedan were the tougher opponents than Abahani.

"The league was easy for us as we clinched it with three matches left but the Federation Cup and the Independence Cup were difficult. However, teamwork was important, especially with the way we came back in the matches. We also went down in the Independence Cup final but came back and it happened in the Federation Cup too," said Tapu.

Mohammedan coach Alfaz Ahmed, meanwhile, blamed his side's defending and inability to take the challenge for the defeat.

"I think there was a problem in defending and the players could not take the pressure of the big match," Alfaz said. "We could have killed the match in regulation time or taken the tie to tiebreaker. I think you need a bit of luck to become champions. But I'm happy that the players gave their best."



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

**Mohammedan 1-2
 Bashundhara Kings**
 (Sunday 63')
 (Miguel 86', Jahid 104')

Player of the final: Miguel Figueira
Player of the tournament: Robson Robinho

Goalkeeper of the tournament: Mehdi Hasan Srabon
Top-scorer: Washington Brandao



Mistakes made and little 'repair' time left

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh began their series against USA on a disastrous note on Tuesday, succumbing to a five-wicket loss in the first of three T20Is in Houston. While the result was unexpected, it did not feel earth-shattering due to Bangladesh's recent performances in the build up to the fast-approaching T20 World Cup, slated to begin on June 1.

What skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto said later only felt like giving more life to a living, breathing problem of their poor performances in the format, for failure to address shortcomings properly also signifies not being aware of the underlying reasons related to approach, skill and tactical maneuvers.

The Tigers' scorecard after the Powerplay read only 37 for two despite 34 coming off the first four. Decision to exclude Tanzid Tamim, who found runs in the Zimbabwe series, also lacked logic of the convincing kind.

Shanto's remarks on wickets in the recent Zimbabwe series compounding to batters' struggles did not go down well, with former captain and Bangladesh Cricket Board's HP unit chairman Naimur Rahman yesterday saying that

The national team is a place to perform. If you give excuses about the wicket, it's not acceptable.

Naimur Rahman Durjoy
 BCB Director

wickets were made according to the team's demands.

Even after the Powerplay, the out-of-form batters' struggle with form showed with both Shakib Al Hasan and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto unable to push the tempo.

At the end of 12 overs, Bangladesh were scoring at below six runs per over and had lost four wickets. Only Towhid Hridoy and Mahmudullah Riyad's knock enabled Bangladesh post a challenging score.

"I don't think there is anything to worry because all the batters are working with their skill," Shanto had said after the game, but the last few games the middle-order had saved the Tigers' blushes.

While batting was the major calamity, the decisions made when trying to defend a small total of 153 backfired. Bangladesh bowled out Mahedi Hasan in the 13th over and

when Corey Anderson and Harmeet Singh, both left-handers started going on the counterattack, Shanto could not bowl either Shakib or Rishad Hossain due to unfavourable matchup.

Then the two left-arm seamers found it difficult against the same left-handers of USA, Mahmudullah Riyad was asked to bowl the last over with too little left to defend. Crucially during the last four overs, Shanto failed to take into account the direction of the wind as the batters capitalised by hitting big sixes with the wind.

Shanto's explanation after the match was uninspiring. "It (wind) is very important. I think when we came here for practice we all knew the wind would be having a big impact in the match. We all saw that but we tried to execute that plan," he said.

Chairman of the selection panel, Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu, yesterday acknowledged that there were shortcomings on display in the match against the USA. "We have to quickly repair the mistakes occurring in some situations and we don't have much time ahead of the World Cup," he highlighted the woes as Tigers look for a short turnaround.

SHORT CORNER

Saikat to become first Bangladeshi to officiate in a WC opener

Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat will become the first Bangladeshi umpire to officiate at an ICC Men's T20 World Cup when he stands in the tournament opener between the USA and Canada. Saikat, 47, took charge of five matches at last year's ICC Men's Cricket World Cup and has also been on the panel at two ICC Women's Cricket World Cups and the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2018.



Pochettino leaves Chelsea

Mauricio Pochettino has left Chelsea after just one season in charge by mutual consent, the English club announced on Tuesday. The Blues finished sixth in the Premier League thanks to a fine run towards the end of the season but missed out on Champions League qualification and a trophy.

Copa America teams to be allowed concussion subs

Teams at next month's Copa America will have the option of an additional substitution in the event of a concussion or suspected head trauma, South American football's governing body CONMEBOL said on Tuesday.

Fizz's LPL franchise disbanded

The foreign owner of a T20 cricket team in Sri Lanka's Lanka Premier League (LPL) was arrested Wednesday on suspicion of corruption. Tamim Rahman, a British national of Bangladesh origin and owner of Dambulla Thunder, who confirmed signing Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman last Sunday for the upcoming LPL season, was stopped at the country's main airport before he boarded a flight to Dubai, police said.

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Swiatek ready to join select club

REUTERS

Iga Swiatek will be looking to join a select band of players who have lifted the Suzanne Lenglen Cup four times when she begins the defence of her French Open title next week.

Since tennis turned professional in 1968, Chris Evert, Steffi Graf, and Justine Henin have been the only women to have claimed at least four titles at Roland Garros, and on current form, few would bet against Swiatek adding her name to that illustrious list come June 8.

After securing back-to-back titles in WTA 1000 events in Madrid and Rome, the world number one will come out swinging in Paris on the back of a 12-match winning streak as she chases a fourth triumph in five years at the claycourt major.

Also on the line will be pulling off a rare 'Triple Crown' - with the 22-year-old bidding to become the first player since Serena Williams in 2013 to win the Madrid-Rome-Paris titles in the same season.

"She lives to play on clay... She's playing really well, so it's going to be tough to beat her," twice Rome champion Elina Svitolina told the



WTA.

American great Martina Navratilova summed up why Swiatek is such a formidable force on red dirt.

"She's been Chris Evert-like. That topspin drives you nuts and I think she moves as good as anybody. Clay, she's got that down to perfection, the sliding and the movement and recovery," the 18-time Grand Slam champion was quoted as saying by the WTA.

"Just wears you out from the baseline, playing aggressive. She's got the consistency and the major wins. That's why she's been No.1 for so long. Paris is the perfect venue for her game."

Swiatek certainly left world number two Aryna Sabalenka wondering what more she needs to do to get the better of her Polish rival.

Swiatek saved three championships points to defeat Sabalenka in the Madrid final two weeks ago and then came out on top again in a showdown between world's top two at the Italian Open final, swatting aside the Belarusian 6-2, 6-3 to win the 21st title of her career.

Unsurprisingly, mentally she feels more confident heading into Roland Garros this year than she did 12 months ago when a thigh injury forced her to quit the 2023 Italian Open during her quarterfinal against Elena Rybakina.

"I feel like I'm in a different place. I'm still focusing on the same things but I remember last year I was more nervous and more stressed. I felt more pressure. This time I'm kind of using the way I feel to just enjoy everything more," Swiatek said.

"I just want to stay in my rhythm, stay in my zone, be focused."



PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

French superstar Kylian Mbappe, who ended the Ligue 1 season as the top scorer with 27 goals from 29 matches, poses with the trophy on Wednesday. The Real Madrid-bound forward became the top-scorer of Ligue 1 for a sixth successive time in his seven-year stay at PSG, missing out on the summit only in his first season in Paris (in 2017-18) when he was bettered by his teammate Edinson Cavani (with 28 strikes).