

Rangpur defeat highlights plight of franchise T20 cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

In less than 24 hours, West Indies all-rounder Andre Russell played two matches for two different teams in two different leagues, underperformed and lost both games and saw his team get eliminated from both leagues.

Russell was plying his trade for Abu Dhabi Knight Riders in Dubai's ILT20 till Sunday night before he hopped on a flight and joined the Rangpur Riders in Dhaka mere hours before their crucial eliminator match against Khulna Tigers in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) yesterday.

Rangpur had also drafted in Australia's Tim David and England's James Vince, who were playing for Gulf Warriorz in the ILT20, alongside Russell for the knockout fixture.

But these last-minute inclusions did not work out for Rangpur as Russell, who was out for a first-ball duck the previous night in Dubai, could make just four off nine balls in Dhaka while David (eight) and Vince (one) also did not fare any better.

The three new recruits could not cope with the spin challenge served up by Khulna through captain Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Nasum Ahmed and Pakistan's Mohammad Nawaz and Rangpur lost the match by nine wickets.

At first glance, it seems that failure to acclimatise with the condition was the primary reason behind the trio's poor scores. However, Rangpur's assistant coach Mohammad Ashraful did not concur.



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PHOTO: STAR

"They arrived in business class so there shouldn't be a problem with that and the weather too is not very different from Dubai. But they [only Russell] had played last night, that might

have been an issue. But they are professional cricketers. I don't think it [acclimatisation] was a big issue," Ashraful said.

Teams flying in marquee overseas players for the knockout

stage is nothing new in BPL. In fact, Rangpur's opponents Khulna did the same thing as they also brought in the West Indian duo of Jason Holder and Shimron Hetmyer, also

from the ILT20, right before the eliminator.

All of Rangpur and Khulna's newest recruits arrived after their respective sides got ousted in the ILT20. Players hopping from one league to another like this has become the norm in the current landscape of franchise cricket. The mushrooming of franchise leagues is offering opportunities to players to represent different teams in different leagues in a matter of days and in Russell's case, it was less than a day.

Because of this, franchises, especially in BPL, have to always be on the look out for replacements, plan ahead of time about who they can bring in at what point. Meanwhile, fans struggle to form a connection with the players who are here one day and gone the next.

According to Ashraful, losing a settled overseas star like Pakistan's Khushdil Shah, who left the side for national duty, and not finding his ideal replacement cost them against Khulna. The former Bangladesh captain also suggested that drafting in players only for the playoffs is not ideal.

"In England, you need to play three league-stage matches to be permitted to play knockout matches. We don't have any such rule in the BPL. Players can arrive on the day of the match and play. It is not ideal... When you don't spend two-three days with the team, it's difficult to even recognise your teammates."

Rajshahi start settling dues after owner interrogated

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Premier League (BPL)'s newest franchise Durbar Rajshahi has started to clear the remaining payments of their local players, as promised by their owner, Md Shafiq Rahman, following his interrogation by law enforcement agencies.

According to a Rajshahi official, 14 of their local players received 25 percent of their payment in cash yesterday, bringing their total payments for this edition of the BPL to 50 percent. They had previously received 25 percent during the Chattogram phase of the tournament.

However, the official also confirmed to The Daily Star that Rajshahi's support staff did not receive any payment yesterday and were told they would be paid 50 percent of their promised amount on February 7 and 10 through a banking channel.

When a few Rajshahi players were contacted to verify the payments, they confirmed the matter.

Earlier in the day, the Ministry of Youth and Sports issued a press release stating that Rajshahi owner Shafiq was taken into custody and interrogated by law enforcement agencies in the early hours of Monday.

According to the release, the Rajshahi owner had previously discussed the issue with sports adviser Asif Mahmud, during which he assured that 50 percent of the payments would be completed by February 2.

However, after failing to honour his commitment and with rumours circulating that Shafiq might flee, the government intervened, leading to his interrogation.

"He [Shafiq] accepted his fault and promised to clear all dues [by February 10]... Otherwise, necessary legal actions will be taken against him," stated the press release.

On the field, Rajshahi narrowly missed out on a playoff place, finishing fifth in the points table after the league phase.

Mamun named national hockey coach

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday appointed Mamun Ur Rashid as head coach of national team for April's AHF Cup in Indonesia.

A former national player, Mamun previously coached the team in the 2015 World Hockey League's second round in Singapore, and has also worked with the U-21 and U-23 teams.

Mamun aims to guide Bangladesh to another AHF Cup title, a tournament they have traditionally won.

Meanwhile, Moshirul Rahman Biplob has been named assistant coach, and Alamgir Islam will serve as trainer. The preparation camp begins after a fitness test on February 20, with over 50 players participating.

Arsenal still in title mix after thumping City



AGENCIES

Arsenal blew Manchester City away with a 5-1 thrashing at home on Sunday to send a statement to Liverpool that the Premier League title race is still far from over.

The win over the reigning champions, courtesy of goals from Martin Ødegaard, Thomas Partey, Kai Havertz, Myles Lewis Skelly and Ethan Nwaneri, cut down their deficit with league-leaders Liverpool to six points. Arsenal are now 14 games unbeaten in the league and have 50 points from 24 games, while Manchester City, whose six-game unbeaten run ended, are a distant fourth with 41.

It was a day to savour for Arsenal against the side that has denied them the title in each of the past two seasons as it was lit up by goals from academy graduates Lewis Skelly and Nwaneri.

The teenagers became the youngest players to score in the Premier League against the reigning champions since Wayne Rooney announced his arrival for Everton against Arsenal in 2003.

Lewis Skelly would have been banned had his controversial red card against Wolves last weekend not been rescinded.

The left-back made the most of that reprieve with a barnstorming performance that was capped by his first goal for the club. He rounded it off with a coksure celebration as he mimicked City striker Erling Haaland's trademark meditation pose.

Nwaneri completed the rout with his seventh goal of the season and is thriving in the extra minutes offered by Bukayo Saka's injury layoff.

"It is a great day for us, especially with the necessity that we had to win

After going 15 Premier League games against City without a win, Arsenal are now unbeaten in their last four against the Citizens (W2, D2).

City have suffered their heaviest defeat in a Premier League away game since losing 4-0 to Everton in January 2017, while Arsenal have recorded their biggest-ever win in the competition against the reigning champions.

City have conceded 4+ goals in a game for the fourth time this season, which is now the most times in a single campaign in Pep Guardiola's managerial career. The Citizens have conceded 53 goals in 36 games in all competitions so far this season, only one fewer than in 59 matches last season (54).

Pep Guardiola's side have committed eight errors leading to goals in the Premier League this season, their outright most in a campaign under the Spaniard.

the game. The manner that we have done it I am really pleased," Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta said after the match.

"Overall, we scored some beautiful goals and the team showed a high competitive level."

WOMEN BOOTERS' BOYCOTT

BKSP director stresses 'discipline'

SPORTS REPORTER

Amid an ongoing player-coach dispute, Bangladesh Krira Shikha Protishtan (BKSP) director Brigadier General Md Munirul Islam visited Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday to meet members of the national women's team.

His visit came as 18 footballers continued their protest against head coach Peter Butler, demanding the Englishman's removal. Of the 30 players in camp, eight are current BKSP students – three of whom are boycotting training.

"I have been seeing in the media that members of the national women's team are raising some issues. We have many players in this squad, including former BKSP students, so I felt the need to come here and understand their concerns as their BKSP guardian," Islam said after meeting players at the BFF dormitory.

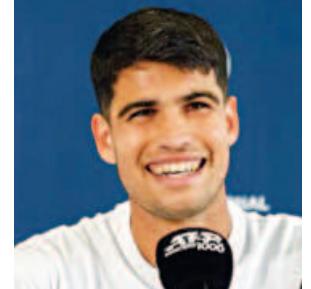
"I just expressed my feelings, not recommendations, because the BFF will take care of the matter. The players have their own perspectives, but they also want to perform well in the UAE matches [in February-March]. I learned from them and guided them because discipline is the foremost requirement in any sport," he added.

Meanwhile, a seven-member BFF Special Committee continued its efforts to achieve a resolution in the matter yesterday, interviewing the remaining 11 of the 18 boycotting footballers.

A Special Committee member, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star, "Those [boycotting] players have another worry – losing their central contracts with the BFF; which although had ended in October [last year]."

"Jannik [Sinner] is the best right now. He has lost only four or five matches in the past year, so it's crazy. I know people say who's better out of us. They say Jannik is better or some say me. It's all discussion. But for me, I think for a tennis player, we have to face Jannik and he's winning everything."

CARLOS ALCARAZ



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