

MSC celebrate title in style

SPORTS REPORTER

With the players and officials wearing special jerseys with the word 'champions' emblazoned alongside the years that the Black and Whites won the top-tier league titles in its 89 year journey, the crowd-pulling Mohammedan Sporting Club celebrated with their first Bangladesh



Premier League trophy following a 3-3 draw in a thrilling penultimate match in Cumilla yesterday.

The fading light of the sun at the Shaheed Dharendraanath Dutta Stadium turned the faces of the players and officials glow brighter as the Black and Whites ended a 23-year wait for the top-tier title, winning their first ever league title in the professional era.

The celebration of the Motijheel-based outfit assumed more colour when the foreign players from Mali, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Burkina Faso hung their respective national flags around their shoulders while Mohammedan ultras, a fan group of the club, made the moment more vibrant with smoke flares in the gallery, letting the players soak in the adoration of the fans.

Prior to the start of the match, Brothers Union players gave a 'guard of honour' to the Mohammedan players as well as their goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana, who called time on his 11-year top-tier career with the match against the club where he had started his top-tier journey.

Former national goalkeeper Rana played the first half before coming out and was greeted with garlands and crests by officials of Brothers, Mohammedan, Abahani, BFF, Cumilla DFA and many others.

However, the environment was totally different on the pitch as Brothers gave a tough time to their old rivals with a seventh-minute lead, with Mouhamed Becaye Diarra heading home a Jamal Bhuiyan chip from close range.

Mohammedan reorganised and hit back in the 25th minute with a powerful header from defender Mehedi Hasan and then captain Soleymane Diabate nodded a Muzaffar Muzaffarjon corner home in 38th minute. It was Diabate, who made it 3-1 in the 69th minute with a volley from inside the box. However, Mfon Udoh and Jewel Rana netted in the 71st and 88th minutes to force Mohammedan to settle for a 3-3 draw.

In the day's other match, Young Men's Fakirerpool Club confined Dhaka Wanderers to relegation with a 2-1 win, in the process themselves avoiding the drop.



PHOTO: BFF

Mohammedan players and officials celebrate their first Bangladesh Premier League title with the trophy following a 3-3 draw in their penultimate fixture against Brothers Union at the Shaheed Dharendraanath Dutta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday. (Inset) Brothers goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana is being given a guard of honour by his teammates prior to his last professional match.

'Players need to believe they are the main players'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's bitter defeat to the UAE, an associate nation, has opened up a Pandora's box on what will befall the national team and which cricketers can carry the baton in the near future. As much as results are expected, a team in transition cannot always deliver. However, an improvement curve needs to be seen, otherwise Bangladesh cricket risks falling into a loop of demoralising failures.

With many seniors already out of the national setup, realisation has come through that the current crop will have to take the responsibility of taking the team forward. Parvez Hossain Emon's century in the first match was perhaps the only impactful performance in the recent UAE series.

What can Bangladesh cricket do to help build the future from here? Hannan Sarkar, the Abahani head coach who has worked with Emon this DPL, feels that talent is there in players such as Emon.

"Emon always had that power-hitting ability, even when he was in U-15s. You have to develop your power-hitting ability with time and in the last three years, he played well in the DPL and knows the process of how to score his runs and that's why his confidence grew. For a player to become consistent, first they have to understand the process of how to score. Many players know how to score runs but only against weak opponents. Since Emon has been scoring runs in domestic cricket, now he has to look to develop against international teams and quality bowlers," Hannan told The Daily Star.

International cricket has changed over the last two decades. When the likes of Shakib Al Hasan or Tamim Iqbal were



coming through, expectations were different. But more is expected now as Bangladesh as a team and players who are coming through. That means patience is important in building a side, and most crucially, keeping the players motivated.

"You have to make the players trust the fact that they are the main players and give them that confidence. You can't allow them to play with fear and uncertainty. This crop is only now feeling that they are the main players. You see that they are the future, so ultimately U-19 days are past them and with time they will have to get into the flow of taking that responsibility. International cricket isn't easy and they need time as well," the former Bangladesh opener explained.

The batch which featured Tamim, Mushfiquir Rahim or Shakib Al Hasan had mentors and coaches that had built

them up in a batch together. For Hannan, the team management has to take the responsibility so that players keep growing.

"Those that are with the team such as (Mohammad) Salahuddin bhai, knows about their [players'] mentality and psychology. It's a positive thing and Salahuddin bhai is more experienced now. Players are expected to do more now and his feedback would be very important," Hannan feels.

For players like Emon, confidence can go a long way to becoming a settled player in the eleven. The Pakistan series would be tough but there will also be an opportunity to learn what areas to improve upon. "He has good confidence and he is on the right track. Of course he can fail but the way he is playing, especially since I have seen him play for Abahani, I feel he will continue," the former national selector hoped.

Angelo Mathews to quit Tests

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's former skipper Angelo Mathews said on Friday he will retire from Test cricket after playing in the first match against Bangladesh next month but will continue white-ball cricket.

The 37-year-old veteran will leave the longest format of the game after a Test career of 16 years, which began with a match against Pakistan in July 2009 at the Galle stadium.

His final Test appearance, his 119th, will also be at the same venue from June 17.

However, he will not play in the second Test against Bangladesh.

"I stand grateful to the game and thankful to the thousands of Sri Lanka cricket fans who have been there for me throughout my career during my highest of highs and lowest of lows," he said in a statement.

"Now seems like the best time to make way for a younger player to take the mantle to shine for our nation."

There was no immediate comment from Sri Lanka Cricket.

A former captain in all three formats of the game, Mathews has been a mainstay in Sri Lanka's middle order.

He has scored 8,167 runs in the 118 Tests he has played so far. He has also taken 33 wickets, giving away 1,798 runs.



SHORT CORNER

Neymar returns from injury in Santos defeat

Neymar returned to action on Thursday after more than a month on the sidelines due to a thigh injury but the Brazilian was unable to prevent Santos from exiting the Copa do Brasil after they lost 5-4 in a penalty shootout against CRB.

UEFA apologises for Europa League medal fiasco

UEFA has apologised for running out of winners medals during the Europa League final trophy ceremony on Wednesday after more Tottenham Hotspur players than expected lined up to receive their individual prizes.

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Novak Djokovic is presented with a birthday cake after winning his quarter final match against Italy's Matteo Arnaldi on Thursday. The Serbian marking his 38th birthday in style to reach the Geneva Open semifinals and continue his pursuit of a 100th career title.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM

Ancelotti wishes Alonso luck at Real Madrid

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti wished the man set to replace him, Xabi Alonso, "all the luck in the world" on Friday, before taking charge of his final game at the club.

Bayer Leverkusen coach Alonso is set to take over ahead of the Club World Cup although Madrid have not yet named him officially as their next coach.

Ancelotti spoke before Saturday's match at the Santiago Bernabeu against Real Sociedad in La Liga, his last game before taking the reins of the Brazil national team.

"I don't want to give advice because everyone has their own idea about football," Ancelotti told a news conference.

"Xabi is the first (to come after me), I wish him all the luck in the world, because he is a coach who has the characteristics to coach this club, this team -- enjoy it."

Former Real Madrid midfielder Alonso, 43, won the Bundesliga with Bayer Leverkusen in 2024 after a stunning unbeaten season, along with the German Cup.



Ancelotti said he expected his final match at the helm to be an emotional day.

The 65-year-old said he expected his final match at the helm to be an emotional day.

"I have it in my genetics that I get emotional very quickly, because my grandfather did that, and my father too, so it will be a very emotional day tomorrow,"

continued Ancelotti.

"I have no problem if I end up crying, no problem at all, I will not hide it in that sense. It will be a beautiful day."

Saturday will also be midfielder Luka Modric's last game at the Santiago

Bernabeu, with the Croatian to play in the Club World Cup in the United States before leaving Madrid.

"I'm sharing it with Luka," said Ancelotti.

"He has been a spectacular help in this era at Real Madrid, he is fantastic, a legend, and saying goodbye along with him seems nice to me."

The coach also posted an open letter on social media to say goodbye, saying his bond with Real Madrid was "eternal".



BKSP swimmer Monir Khan Tonmoy pumps his fists as he celebrates a record timing in the 100m freestyle event in the 37th National Age-group Swimming and Diving Competition at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur yesterday. Tonmoy finished his dash at 55.21 seconds, shaving off 0.13 seconds from the previous record set by Mohammad Ismail of Gopalganj Swimming Club in 2021.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED