

## BPL teams to get ticket sales revenue

SPORTS REPORTER

The governing council of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) yesterday announced that franchisees who have complied with player payment obligations last season will receive a portion of ticket sales revenue.

The decision was made during a BPL governing council meeting yesterday, which centered on the issue of outstanding payments owed to both local and international players who were part of the players' draft last season.

"The Governing Council has agreed in principle to allocate a portion of ticket sales revenue to franchisees... This is the first time that the BCB will distribute revenue from ticket sales to BPL franchisees," BCB said in a press release yesterday.

"The disbursement, scheduled ahead of Eid-ul-Adha, will be conditional upon the verification of payment acknowledgments from the respective players," it added.

The BCB has allocated Tk 55 lakh each for the four teams that qualified for the playoffs while the remaining three teams would get Tk 45 lakh each.

However, the final disbursement will be based on the percentage of outstanding player payments each team has cleared relative to their eligible share.

The governing council also warned legal actions against franchisees if they "default on payment obligations despite repeated official notices".

As per BCB guidelines, the franchisees had to clear all their dues by March 8. But it is learnt that most of the franchisees are yet to complete the payments of their players, coaching staff as well as the support staff.



Rishad Hossain, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Shakib Al Hasan – the three Bangladeshi players enjoy a cheerful moment following Lahore Qalandars' thrilling six-wicket win against Quetta Gladiators in the final of the PSL on Sunday. Although Shakib is no more part of the Bangladesh team, the other two Qalandars members have already joined the Tigers' camp in Lahore for the upcoming three-match T20I series against Pakistan, beginning on May 28.

PHOTO: LAHORE QALANDARS

## ‘Want to keep as many clean sheets as possible for Bangladesh’

With 15 clean sheets in 21 games in the Federation Cup and the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), Abahani goalkeeper Mitul Marma has been the standout performer this season. Mitul, who has conceded only eight goals throughout the season, will be joining the national team's preparations ahead of their Singapore match next month after their final league game today. In an interview with *The Daily Star's* Anisur Rahman, the 21-year-old keeper talked about his performance, improvement, the domestic league, and the national football team. Below are excerpts from the conversation:

**The Daily Star (DS):** What has been the recipe behind your success this season?

**Mitul Marma (MM):** The improvement in my performance is also linked to the national football team, where our aim is to keep clean sheets. To achieve that, I must perform well at the club level. When I joined Abahani, I was determined to concede as few goals as possible because Abahani, unfortunately, couldn't form the squad they initially intended. So, we local players pledged to start the season like a champion team by giving our best.

**DS:** How does it feel to have kept so many clean sheets?

**MM:** I am not the one to be given sole credit for this, as it was a collective effort. From defenders to attackers, everyone defended well throughout the season, so I was under less pressure.

**DS:** What has been the difference between this season's Mitul Marma and last season's?

**MM:** The difference is my mentality, which developed thanks to the national team's

head coach [Javier Cabrera] and goalkeeping coach [Nayan]. I discussed my strengths and weaknesses with them and worked on improving during the national camp. Abahani's goalkeeping coach also helped me a lot.

**DS:** How competitive has the league been this time in the absence of two big teams – Sheikh Jamal DC and Sheikh Russel KC?

**MM:** Despite the absence of Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel, I think the league was competitive. It became a three-way race among Abahani, Mohammedan, and Kings – unlike previous seasons when only one team dominated. The race for runners up is still open going into the final round.

**DS:** Do you have any regrets for not winning the Federation Cup and the BPL despite coming close?

**MM:** After working hard all season, of course, we regret not winning a trophy. But I think becoming runners-up isn't a small achievement either. We



will carry the regret of not winning the Federation Cup for a long time. We lost the Cup due to a disruption in the momentum during the final.

**DS:** From being the third-choice national team goalkeeper to

being the number one – how did you make it happen?

**MM:** I believe hard work is the foundation of all achievements, and I never stopped working. I also learned from senior goalkeepers. I think the turning point was the Asian Games in 2023. After our match against China, the coach [Cabrera] told me, "You are now ready for the national team, and you will play for the senior team." Since then, I've tried to give my best. But I don't consider myself the number one goalkeeper – I just focus on doing my best in every match.

**DS:** Is it possible to translate your domestic performance to the upcoming Asian Cup qualifying matches, considering Bangladesh conceded over 20 goals in the FIFA World Cup qualifiers?

**MM:** We already kept a clean sheet against India in our first match. My target is to keep as many clean sheets as possible for the national team and help us win. However, there is a big difference between domestic and

international matches.

**DS:** What's on your mind ahead of the Singapore match on June 10?

**MM:** First, we are all preparing ourselves by playing in domestic competitions. Hamza Choudhury has already played one match, and Shamit Shome is expected to join us for the Singapore game. So, we will be stronger than we were against India. The inclusion of midfielders like Hamza and Shamit will give us an edge in creating more scoring chances. However, the match will be tough because Singapore also have two or three quality players like Hamza bhai. But we want to capitalise on our home advantage. I think we have a good chance to win.

**DS:** How do you feel seeing the excitement around Bangladesh's match against Singapore?

**MM:** I feel really proud that the people of Bangladesh are showing such interest in football, which wasn't common before. That support inspires us to do something great for the nation.

## Inter jerseys fly off shelves in Marseille

REUTERS, Paris

In Marseille, the only French city with a European Cup to its name, an unexpected fashion trend has emerged – Inter Milan jerseys are flying off the shelves as Olympique de Marseille supporters back the Italian side against their bitter rivals Paris St Germain in Saturday's Champions League final.

Inter shirts have been selling fast in the port city, which celebrated OM's Champions League triumph in 1993.

"It's crazy, everyone wants the Inter jersey. All year long, there's no demand, nobody wants this jersey. And now, it's like the whole city of Marseille has turned Interista. We're really going to pray for Inter to win," Ismael, a vendor at a major sports shop in Marseille, told French TV channel BFM.

The son of former OM president Bernard Tapie, who led the club to the 1993 title, said he would support Inter as well.

"A true OM supporter can't be happy if PSG wins the Champions League. For France, it would be good for PSG to win it. But me, I'm supporting Inter Milan. Ask any real OM fan – we're all fully behind Inter," Laurent Tapie was quoted as saying by French media.

In 2020, OM fans celebrated at the Old Port when PSG lost to Bayern Munich in the Champions League final.

## Isco 'proud to be back for Spain'

AFP, Madrid

Spain coach Luis de la Fuente called up Isco on Monday for the Nations League final four, six years after the midfielder's last appearance for La Roja.

The 33-year-old has enjoyed a superb season with Real Betis, helping them reach the Conference League final where they face Chelsea on Wednesday.

Euro 2024 winners Spain face France in the semifinal in Stuttgart on June 5 before a potential final against Germany or Portugal.

"It was the opportune moment for Isco to come and give something to us," De la Fuente told reporters. "He will be adding a lot – if not, he would not have been in the list."

Out of favour for several seasons at Real Madrid, former Malaga playmaker Isco moved to Sevilla and then Betis in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

At the Benito Villamarin stadium he has rebuilt his career and become a vital cog in Manuel Pellegrini's attractive attacking set-up.

"I'm happy to return after so many years, it's a nice objective to be able to play again with my national team," Isco told Real Betis's in-house media.

"I'm proud to get back there, that means that things have been going well."

Real Madrid's new defensive signing from Bournemouth, Dean Huijsen, who impressed in the quarterfinal win over the Netherlands, returns to the squad, while Barcelona midfielders Gavi and Fermin Lopez also make the cut.

Teenage winger Lamine Yamal and playmaker Pedri are the key figures, along with Athletic Bilbao attacker Nico Williams.



## ‘Beginning of a new era’

REUTERS, Madrid

Xabi Alonso said he was convinced he can achieve great things at Real Madrid after he was unveiled as manager of the LaLiga club on Monday.

Alonso was appointed manager on Sunday, returning to the Santiago Bernabeu where he spent six seasons as a player and won several trophies.

The 43-year-old had been in charge of Bayer Leverkusen, who he guided to a double last season as they won the German Cup and lifted their first Bundesliga title without losing a game.

"Without a doubt, this is a very special day for me. A day that I will have marked in my calendar for life. I am very happy to be here, in what I feel is my home," said Alonso, who will begin his tenure on June 1 ahead of the Club World Cup.

"The bond with Madrid has never ceased to exist and, since I entered Valdebebas (training centre) an hour and a half ago, that feeling has been reborn. I have the feeling that this is the beginning of a new era..."

"We have a great team, we have fantastic players and a very good potential. That gives me reason to come here with a lot of energy and enthusiasm. We have the conviction that we can achieve important things, worthy of Real Madrid and these European Cups."

Alonso takes charge of a Real side who had a sub-par season by their own lofty standards, finishing

second in LaLiga behind Barcelona, who also beat them in the Spanish Super Cup and Copa del Rey finals.

They were knocked out of the Champions League as holders in the quarter-finals by Arsenal.

Alonso has signed a three-year contract until June 2028 and replaces Carlo Ancelotti, who took charge of his last game on Saturday.

In his address at the presentation, the Spaniard paid tribute to his predecessor and former coach.

"Before I start talking about the new era, I don't want to forget to talk about the era that has just ended," Alonso said.

"Carlo was my coach, a great person and a huge influence. Without his mastery, I probably wouldn't be here. I take over and carry on his legacy with great honour and pride.

"I hope to live up to expectations and be able to take the club to all the places we all believe we can."

Alonso joined Real in 2009 from Liverpool and made 236 appearances, winning a LaLiga title, two Copa del Rey trophies and the club's long-awaited 10th European crown.

He began his coaching career at Real's youth academy where he managed the Under-14 team during the 2018-19 season, winning the league and the Champions tournament.

He took charge of Real Sociedad's reserve team before making the step up to take the Leverkusen job.



Barcelona players celebrate a successful season with a 3-0 win at Athletic Bilbao on Sunday in their final match, with Robert Lewandowski netting twice to pass his 100 goal milestone for the club. The veteran Polish forward reached 27 league goals for the season, finishing four behind Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe.

PHOTO: INSTAGRAM