



SPIRIT ON THE TOUCHLINE

Enrique, Xana, and the healing power of sport

KHALID HOSSAIN

Sometimes, sport does more than crown winners. In a world spinning faster, louder, and often colder, it often offers healing as an unlikely source; a reminder of something quieter: humanity. Of loss. Of love. Of remembering the right things, and, perhaps most of all, of carrying on.

On Saturday night in Munich, Paris Saint-Germain finally climbed Europe's greatest peak. A first Champions League title. A thumping 5-0 win over Inter Milan; glory long overdue for the big spenders.

But as the fireworks burst and silver rained down, the night belonged not just to the players or the club, but to someone who wasn't even on the pitch.

Xana.

Six years ago, Luis Enrique's nine-year-old daughter died from osteosarcoma, a rare and cruel bone cancer. And when the final whistle blew, Enrique, who had just coached PSG to a historic treble, turned not to the cameras, but to the sky.

And to her.

"My daughter has been with me since she left," he said. "She left physically, but she is always with me spiritually."

In the stands, PSG fans held up a massive tifo; an image of Enrique and Xana, together, planting a flag. It was a recreation of their moment after his 2015 Champions League win, leading to a treble, with Barcelona. Back then, she was beside him.

This time, she still was, just not where we could see.

"It was very emotional with the banner from the fans for my family," Enrique said. "But I always think about my daughter."

Grief changes you. Sometimes it hardens. Other times, it humbles. For

Enrique, it became a quiet strength. As the 55-year-old's young team delivered what Lionel Messi, Neymar, and Kylian Mbappe could not, their coach never lost focus. Dressed all in black, he roamed the touchline; agile, composed, almost serene.

Maybe that is what makes Enrique's story so powerful. In a time where violence often drowns out kindness, and grief is something to hide, he has done neither. He has shown us what it means to carry someone with you, gently.

Reflecting on Xana's death, he once said in a documentary: "Can I consider myself lucky or unfortunate? I consider myself lucky, very lucky."



Mohammedan's bitter-sweet coronation as AFC ticket missed



SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club (MSC), one of the country's most popular teams, celebrated their maiden Bangladesh Premier League title in vibrant fashion at the Shaheed Captain M Mansur Ali Stadium in Dhaka yesterday.

However, their joy was tinged with disappointment over missing out on a spot in the AFC Challenge League -- a continental competition they last appeared in back in 2006.

Since winning the now defunct Dhaka Premier League in 2002, the Black and Whites have struggled in top-tier football. But this season, they reclaimed their former glory with a long awaited league triumph.

Under usual circumstances, the BPL champions would qualify for the newly introduced AFC Challenge League, provided they meet AFC club licensing requirements. MSC, however, failed to secure the licence due to not meeting all the criteria.

As a result, either runners up Abahani or third placed Bashundhara

Kings -- both of whom applied for the licence -- are expected to take the AFC slot. Bangladesh Football Federation is likely to announce the licensed clubs within a few days.

Asked about missing out on the AFC opportunity after 19 years, MSC director and football committee chairman Ghulam Mohammad Alamgir said:

"In the last 15 years, Mohammedan SC could not stay at the top for different reasons, but now we don't have anything to look back on. Still, we believe we can try it [AFC club licensing], and we have to accept it if we can't do it now."

"MSC... always played for the championship, but they had lacked one for the last 22 years. There was a cry from players, officials and fans for not winning the league title, but this time we came out of it. It was possible because of the cordial efforts from the committee members, specifically due to the president [General (retd) Mohammad Abdul Mubeen] and me," he added.

A former MSC player, speaking

anonymously, said the club may struggle to retain their title-winning squad next season, as the current board is hesitant to begin preparations ahead of the club's upcoming elections. He also noted that while meeting licensing criteria is manageable, securing sufficient funding to compete in the AFC Challenge League is the real challenge.

Midfielder Alamgir Kabir Rana echoed the sentiment, saying, "Such an opportunity will not come every season for Mohammedan SC and they should have availed the opportunity to regain their image beyond the country."

While the missed AFC chance was a letdown, it didn't dampen the celebratory spirit. The stadium became a gathering place for MSC's former footballers, cricketers, organisers, fans, and journalists.

Captain Souleymane Diabate entered the venue with the champion's trophy, donning a golden T-shirt marked with the title-winning year.

Writ petition challenges Faruque's removal as BCB president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Faruque Ahmed on Sunday filed a writ petition with the High Court challenging the legality of his removal from the post by National Sports Council (NSC).

The petition also challenged the legality of NSC's decision to appoint former national captain Aminul Islam Bulbul as the new BCB president, Faruque's counsel Barrister Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal told The Daily Star.

The hearing of the petition is likely to be held today, he informed further. Barrister Kazal, however, declined to disclose further details of the writ petition.

Bulbul was elected BCB president on Friday, a day after the NSC revoked Faruque's directorship following a vote of no confidence from the majority of the board's directors and a review of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) fact-finding committee's report.

With this, Bulbul became the 17th president of the BCB.



HARIS SHINES AS PAK CLEAN SWEEP TIGERS

PHOTO: PCB

Mohammad Haris embraces skipper Salman Agha after helping Pakistan chase down a 197-run target with 16 balls remaining as the hosts clinched a seven-wicket win in the final T20I of the three-match series against Bangladesh in Lahore on Sunday. Haris' maiden T20I hundred (107* off 46) saw Pakistan clean sweep the Tigers, who had put in their best-ever showing with the bat against Pakistan in T20Is when they amassed 196/6 after opener Parvez Hossain Emon scored a 34-ball 66 and his opening partner, Tanzid Tamim, made 42 off 32 deliveries.

Election, reforms not in BCB boss's list of priorities

SPORTS REPORTER

When Aminul Islam Bulbul joined the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) under unprecedented circumstances, replacing Faruque Ahmed as the president, it was expected that his major task would be reforms in the BCB constitution and bringing about elections in October.

During his introductory press conference on Friday, his statements did not reveal anything fundamentally different from what other presidents, such as Faruque, had said during their introductions.

On Saturday, however, he held an official board meeting, setting the list of priorities. Election, changes in the constitution, or reforms needed in the board's structure were not among those.

He had said during his first day as president that he was looking to play a quick T20 innings as the BCB boss, but also contradicted himself by saying that he did not come here for just three months.

"We [Bulbul and Youth and Sports Advisor Asif Mahmud] discussed the decisions we've made about our action plans. There was no discussion regarding the elections," Bulbul said at an informal event of the Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association yesterday, after he had met the sports advisor at the National Sports Council (NSC).

"It hasn't even been 48 hours yet. We need to gather more information before speaking on that."

Instead, his focus has been on pilot projects to help spread cricket. But a short 'T20 innings,' as he described it, has to be more than just projects – it must address how to hold a fair election, when to hold the election, and how to ensure integrity and fairness in the board's functioning.

"Yesterday [Saturday], during the board meeting, we created a list of what we want to do. Everyone has been given specific responsibilities, and they have been asked to come back with their plans by June 30," he said, identifying that he wants to notch a "triple century", consisting of 100 percent trust, 100 percent programs, and 100 percent reach while implementing the vision.

The programmes he talked about and planned are related to high performance and decentralisation. Constitutional changes may be needed to make regional cricket a reality, but there are more fundamental issues in the board's structure yet to be addressed.

When decentralisation has not been enacted in Bangladesh's history to date, it seems Bulbul is delving into forces that require more time than just three months.

স্থান পরিবর্তন

ব্রাক ব্যাংক মতিবিল শাখা
এখন নতুন ঠিকানায় আরও বড় পরিসরে

পুরাতন ঠিকানা

খান ম্যানশন, হোল্ডিং # ৮০ (সাবেক-১০৭)
শহীদ বীর উত্তম আশফাকুশ সামাদ সড়ক
ওয়ার্ড # ০৯, মতিবিল, ঢাকা।

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রূপালী রেড ক্লিনিক টাওয়ার
হোল্ডিং # ৮৬-৮৮ (প্লট নম্বর)
শহীদ বীর উত্তম আশফাকুশ সামাদ সড়ক
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