

Sylhet, Comilla primed for ‘battle of nerves’

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Online Desk: After over a month-long battle among seven teams, two of the best and most deserving sides rose to the top, with Sylhet Strikers set to take on Comilla Victorians in the final of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today. Imrul Kayes’s Comilla will be eyeing a fourth title while Sylhet, led by inspirational skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, will be eager to clinch their maiden BPL trophy.

The teams had made contrasting starts to the BPL, with Comilla losing their first three games on trot before becoming the first team to qualify for the final on the back of a 10-match unbeaten streak. Meanwhile, Sylhet had a dream start, winning their first five games on trot, and were among the first teams to qualify past the initial phase. In terms of strength, Sylhet rely heavily on their local performers. The likes of Najmul Hossain Shanto and Towhid Hridoy are among the top run-getters in the BPL while the experience of Mushfiqur Rahim and skipper Mashrafe’s leadership quality will also prove crucial in the all-important final.

On the other hand, Comilla have transformed into a dangerous unit that blends locals with some big overseas names that can single-handedly change the course of a game like Andre Russell, Sunil Narine, Moeen Ali and Johnson Charles. According to Kayes, the final will be a battle of nerves and he placed an emphasis on staying ahead of any mind games. “I think tomorrow (Thursday) is totally going to be about mind games. In such a high-voltage game, whoever holds their nerve and stays calm will do better because there’s no guarantee that you will win even if you score 200 hundred runs. I remember during the final of the previous edition, we were behind till the 18th over but we went on to win in the last two overs. It’s a different ball game. You have to be calm on the field,” Kayes told reporters on the eve of the final.

Interestingly, neither Comilla nor Mashrafe — who has led various franchises — have ever been on the losing side in the final, meaning something has to give. After losing to Sylhet in the first group game, Comilla managed to win the next two encounters against them, including a comfortable four-wicket win in the first Qualifier.

However, Shanto — who has been instrumental for Sylhet and is among the leading run-scorers in the BPL with 452 runs in 14 games — said that they were not thinking about their opponents and were instead focusing on executing their plans. “I think two of the most deserving teams have reached the final by playing some brilliant cricket. I think it’s unimportant who we are playing against since our aim will be to execute our plans. They (Comilla) are definitely a good side but whoever plays better cricket on the day will win. We are not worried about big names,” said Shanto.