

Aga Khan Gold Cup-1979

a listless tournament

by A. K. Faizul Huq

I was just wondering whether it would be worth while reviewing the languid Gold Cup Tournament which concluded only last week at the Dacca Stadium. To be very frank there was something special missing from the beginning of the tournament which kept the stands near empty and gossip-corners inactive. Although public memory is proverbially short, it was amazing to hear everyone talk of the last Aga Khan Gold Cup Tournament rather than the one which was being played in front of their eyes. There was no dearth of drum beating by the committee, some said this was the biggest tournament with maximum number of teams, others attached great importance to the participation of Burma and China; but unfortunately hopes and promises soon fizzled out.

Of the local teams the first to commit suicide was BJIC, the local league champions. As to how they went down so easily and left the arena so coolly is yet to be understood and comprehended. Brothers Union and Wanderers just came like passengers and went away the same way. It was certainly Mohammedan Sporting Club and Abahani K. C. which figured prominently and made some news.

Mohammedans withdrew midway because they felt injustice was being meted out to them by the tournament committee who kept on changing the groupings according to the dictates of a special team (whose name needs no mention in this humble write-up). So far good. But gentleman, can the complainant be his own judge? At least I have not known any such thing so far. Why did the Mohammedans withdraw? That was not only foolish, I should say, that was most unsporting. If the tournament committee was at fault they could have registered their protest in some other way—may be through press statement or directly in writing to the BFF and the Gold Cup

Tournament Committee. But why should you decide your own fate? This helped the anti-Mohammedan propaganda machine to grease-up and move in a rocket like speed. The fans also felt depressed and dejected. I only wish they would not repeat this in future. What difference would it have made if the Chinese would have won by a big margin? After all you are playing a game and not quarrelling. Abahani K. C., thanks to so many factors including their competence, went up to the semi-final and displayed unity through their spirited performances. They hardly left any opportunity slip away including the one that they got on a rain-soaked field against the Afghans. I was surprised as to how could the Afghans agree that evening. It was a great risk and a misjudged gamble. They had to lose (5-1). But after reaching the peak, Abahani just couldn't hold on and obviously succumbed to the tremendous Indonesian pressure.

Of the foreign teams, the Thais, Burmese, Indonesian and the Chinese impressed a lot. Bad luck for the Thais, they should have done better. The fear from Singapore was good but not to the extent of reaching the final. To me the Afghans impressed a lot and having had the opportunity of visiting Kabul once in the past I was just trying to figure out and recollect if I had at all seen a single soul play football in Kabul. Of course I am talking of 1976 and 10 years is really a long time. But I can tell you one thing. The Saudis and the Afghans will one day be the giants of Asian Football and the time is not very far off.

The Iranians this year put up a bad show and so did the South Korean team. In fact I was told that a good team from South Korea was playing in the Thai capital exactly at the same time when Aga Khan Gold Cup Tournament was in progress at the Dacca Stadium. In any case my readers will possibly agree with me when I bluntly say that

we never expected such a poor team from Seoul at least. This is more true because every time a team has come from South Korea, it has displayed the best possible soccer. Lets hope for the best next time.

The Iranians, as one gentleman from the Iranian Embassy claimed, had come to Dacca after beating the Sepid-Rud Club of Iran (3-2) which is so well known to our football fans here. And the fact remains that the match between Sepid-Rud and the Indian Football Federation (IFF) XI—played last time is still fresh in our memory and will continue to remain so for long time to come as one of the best, played so far on the Dacca ground.

Kudos to Sri Lanka (which accepts all of our invitations so generously each year) and Nepal for coming and making the tournament colourful. We hope they will continue to come in future. As was expected the Chinese edged out a good Burmese team and the Indonesians beat Abahani K. C. to meet in the final. But alas! the final was hardly what we expected. The Chinese were goal shy and the Indonesians were just nervous, or should I say, mentally prepared for a tie breaker after leading 1-0 for sometime. During the closing minutes of the game it was clear that both the teams wanted a draw and a decision in an abnormal way. Their prayers were granted by the Almighty and the result is well known. Poor Chinese having played like Tigers they failed to force a decision and ladyluck should share some of the blame.

In any case the Indonesians also deserved the honour which was undoubtedly hard-earned if we go through the entire tournament. And no wonder they emerged unbeaten champs. Referring was below standard on many occasions.

Well that was about the game. And now a few words about the great team of organisers who managed to disorganise everything. First there was no justification of such enhanced rate of

tickets as the fertilizer and petrol prices have not directly hit the BFF or the Aga Khan Gold Cup Committee. Secondly they earned a bad name by frequently changing the grouping. It reveals fickle-mindedness and the ghost of nepotism and favouritism that is currently haunting the entire Football Federation; not to talk of the Aga Khan Gold Cup Committee. Thirdly security measures were inadequate and I have an impression that some people get fun in watching people getting beaten up or being wounded. But gentleman, a time will come when you will fail to conduct even a single match in the future if remedial measures are not taken now. Foreign teams will stop coming and local teams will follow suit. Will you start playing amongst yourselves then? Not a bad idea after all. Fourthly for God's sake do not chalk out such a lengthy fixture. Is it ordained by the Almighty that we should have two dozens local teams and the tournament should continue for months together? I just can't understand the logic behind this irrational step, which has been pointed out in the past also. A word about the V. I. P. enclosure (or shall I say the so-called VIP enclosure). How could those youngmen in their teens get hundreds and thousands of VIP cards (or entry as you may say) when the genuine gentlemen failed to get them even after offering money for the passes which were meant for them? Is it BFF or a private limited company? And which fool has arranged the seating arrangements? How do you place two chairs in one row when there is no step in between? Is it to harass the invitees or any thing else.

And the least said about the Presidential enclosure the better. Not only Tom, Dick and Harry but also Selimuddin and Kalimuddin all made their entry inside. Thanks to the big bosses who patronised such things openly. We really wish Bangladesh, so many VVIPs in future and in reality.