

Mithun's soccer foray becomes cricket body poll issue

Bollywood actor Mithun Chakraborty's foray into local soccer has become an election issue in the Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB), with the dissidents owing allegiance to Jagmohan Dalmiya demanding action against an affiliate unit close to the ruling group for getting associated with the Indian Cricket League (ICL).

A day after Chakraborty's ICL team Royal Bengal Tigers signed a five-year sponsorship agreement with Kolkata's first division soccer club Howrah Union, the Dalmiya loyalists Thursday accused CAB of 'double standards' as it had banned senior Bengal cricketers for inking deals with the Zee-promoted ICL.

'They have shut the doors of even the Eden dressing room on players like Deep Dasgupta and Avishek Jhunjhunwala. These players are not allowed to play for Bengal. How can they look the other way when the Howrah Union has entered into a tie-up with a team that is a participant in the ICL?' asked Dalmiya-camp member and former Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) joint secretary Goutam Dasgupta.

He said the matter would be raised with 'full force' in the July 29 CAB annual general meeting, where Dalmiya would take on incumbent Prasun Mukherjee for the president's post.

'It's a good election plank for us. There is a BCCI directive that an affiliate unit can't have any truck with an association or individual related in any way with the ICL,' Dasgupta told IANS.

The ruling group and the Dalmiya-led opposition are locked in an intense battle for control of the CAB and have put up rival candidates for every post.

BCCI-promoted Indian Premier League (IPL) and ZEE's ICL are rivals.

BCCI came down hard on the ICL last year, even going to the extent of stopping pension and other facilities to international stars like E.A.S. Prasanna, Sandip Patil and others who have pitched their lot with the rival league.

What has irked the dissidents more is the fact that Howrah Union general secretary Indranath Dey is a CAB vice president, who is seeking re-election with support from the ruling faction.

However, Mukherjee brushed aside the allegation. 'This is a non-issue. CAB is concerned with cricket. Why should we bother about soccer?'

Dey said he had not violated any BCCI norm. 'Our arrangement is with a separate company floated by Chakraborty, Royal Bengal Sports'.

But the release given at Chakraborty's media meet Wednesday night clearly spelt out ICL's involvement. 'Mithun scripts ICL booster for West Bengal sports,' said the heading.

Besides it also had quotes from Himangshu Mody, business head, ICL.

The release quoted Mithun as saying 'The announcement (of the tie up with Howrah Union) cements

my association with ICL....'

As part of the deal, the Royal Bengal Sports would provide support to Howrah Union for infrastructure building, player recruitment and also training facilities.

Chakraborty is also scheduled to visit Portugal and Mexico to recruit foreign players.

The association would begin in the next 2008-09 season.

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