



Jolly Rovers regain TNCA first division crown

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CHENNAI: Jolly Rovers won the TNCA first division league by virtue of a 117-run first innings lead in their drawn final at the IIT-Chemplast ground here on Friday afternoon. The Kaushik Gandhi-led side won the title for the 20th time. After having declared their first innings on 434-3, Jolly Rovers dismissed Alwarpet for 317. B Aparajith starred with the ball as his part-time off-spin fetched him figures of 4 for 56.

Having started the day on their overnight total of 123-3, Alwarpet slipped to 184 for 6 before a rearguard action from R Kavin Kavin (73, 163b, 9x4) and Jaganath Sinivas (54, 94b, 6x4, 1x6) kept them afloat. '

The duo added 93 runs for the seventh-wicket partnership which delayed the inevitable. Despite the two negotiating the bowlers well on a slow track, Jolly Rovers' skipper Kaushik Gandhi conceded that the side didn't press the panic button.

"It was quite a dangerous partnership. But we knew that we had to get one wicket and we'll be back in the game. On a slow track, scoring over four runs an over (the run rate required at that time for Alwarpet to overhaul Rovers' first innings score) was always going to be difficult, especially after losing six wickets," he said.

Once Kavin was cleaned up by Aparajith, the doors opened for Jolly Rovers. Aparajith hit the final nail on the coffin as he got the final wicket in the form of Sandeep Warriar (6) — caught by keeper Smit Patel.

Aparajith, who has been pivotal with the willow for Jolly Rovers this season, said the team's title triumph was a tribute to its never-say-die attitude. "We didn't have the best of starts to the season as we failed to get a first innings lead in the first three matches. However, we began to turn things around as the season unfolded and beat top sides enroute to our title," Aparajith said.

The last two seasons have been a rollercoaster ride for Rovers. The 2016-17 champions were relegated to the second tier (Plate Group) in the first division last year. However, TNCA chose to do away with Elite and Plate stages in the first division league this year. Kaushik said his side answered the critics in style. "This is a fitting response. This is where we belong," he added.

Bharath Reddy, cricket-in-charge of the Sanmar Group, felt the quality of cricket played by Rovers is what helped them regain the title. "Despite not having a great season last year, we have shown great character to come back in style. It has been a total team effort," he said.

Brief scores: Jolly Rovers 434-3 decl. Alwarpet 317 in 98.3 overs (R Kavin 73, RS Jaganath Sinivas 54; B Aparajith 4-56, DT Chandrasekar 2-79). Jolly Rovers won on first innings lead