

The Times of India

Title : Two Much! City rolls out red carpet for ATK players

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Location :

Kolkata

Article Date : 12/20/2016

Fans Relive 2014 Moment As Team Trounce Kerala Again

Quest Mall tested Ishan Gupta's loyalty on Monday. He had checked into the Park Circus shopping mall around 3pm to catch a glimpse of the felicitation of Atletico de Kolkata (ATK) for its triumph in the ISL final. The champions were late by over an hour and the police had made stringent arrangements to keep the fans at a safe distance from the players. Every inch was taken up but Gupta did not relent. He nibbled into a small pocket and created space on the first floor.

"I have come from Naktala just to see my city's football team. I am proud of the victory and want to be a part of the celebrations," said Gupta.

Gupta was not alone. The upper floors of the mall overlooking the atrium where a small platform had been erected for the team's reception looked like stands as thousands of fans, many of whom had been waiting for more than three hours, just about managed to prevent themselves from falling off. The moment they were waiting for arrived a little after 5pm.

Mobile phones went into overdrive as soon as ATK players entered the mall led by coach Jose Molina. They were received by team co-owners Sanjiv Goenka and Harsh Neotia.

Several players took to the microphone for brief and often amusing chants or messages to the crowd including several displays of inter-club unity. While an emotional Iain Hume could only manage to say "We did it", local lad Jewel Sheikh made the fans work. He chanted "jeetlo ke" thrice to which the mall reverberated to "ATK".

When the team made its way out of the mall at a little before 6pm, there was again a big crowd near the exit calling out their favourite players' names. The city clearly could not have enough of their heroes.

The celebrations had kicked off at the airport itself and even before the team arrived. The fans started descending at the airport as early as 2.30pm. By 3.50pm, minutes before the ATK contingent landed, the entire stretch in front of the arrival section had turned into a sea of red and white.

"Since the final was not played in Kolkata, we are trying to make up for all the excitement and frenzy," said Piyali Dasgupta, a fan of ATK who came from Hazra with her friends.

The crowd was in for some disappointment as the biggest "draw" - Sourav Ganguly - did not step out with the team. Questions like "Dada kothai?" and "Maharaj asche ki?" were on everybody's lips.



Pics: Subhojyoti Kanjilal & Amar Kar



Hundreds of ATK fans followed the players from the airport (left) to Quest Mall on Monday