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Bangladesh face Brunei today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will take on Brunei Darussalam today in their opening Pool A match of the 3rd Men's AHF Cup Hockey tournament in Singapore.

The four top teams out of nine from the June 14-22 meet will qualify for the Asia Cup hockey.

Bangladesh face Chinese Taipei tomorrow while hosts Singapore and group contenders Uzbekistan on June 17 and 18 respectively.

The national hockey team, which finally left Dhaka yesterday morning after flight delays and landed in Singapore in the afternoon, will be led by Maksud Alam Habul.

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation announced Usha Kira Chakra striker Habul as captain and Abahani forward Russel Mahmud Jimmy his deputy at the eleventh hour.

SQUAD
Maksud Alam Habul (captain), Russel Mahmud Jimmy (vice-captain), Mahbub Ullah Shakil, Mehrob Hossain Kiran, Mamunur Rahman Chayan, Issa Mia, Asaduzzaman Chandan, Moshirur Rahman Biplab, Ferdous Goldar.

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Pakistan's Umar Gul (R), Shahid Afridi (C) and Sohail Tanvir sprint yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium during training on the eve of the Kitply Cup final against India.

High India, low Pakistan

BISHWAJIT ROY

While it was all quiet on the Indian front, the Pakistani camp was rather shaken by an embarrassing defeat and its aftermath before revival of the old foes' rivalry on the eve of today's Kitply Cup final at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

But first of all, if anybody thought that the atmosphere is electric ahead of the battle of two traditional rivals, then he must have made a mistake because even the two captains did not bother to say a few words prior to the final of the tri-series and the organisers were also reluctant to bring them in front of media.

Everything looks in favour of Mahendra Singh Dhoni's men as they hardly have any reason to worry after demolishing Pakistan and hosts Bangladesh in the one-sided league encounters. One could only expect another ruthless show from the inform Indians if complacency does not become an issue.

The focus, however, was on Pakistan for all the wrong reasons and the tense appearance of Pakistan's Australian coach Jeff Lawson at the press conference yesterday reflected of what might have been going on inside the team.

The off-the-field situation was so bad that Lawson even faced a

question from a Pakistani journalist whether Shoaib Malik needed a break as captain.

The curiosity about the Pakistan team was whether the furious response of their board president after a 140-run embarrassment in the league match could ultimately ignite Shoaib Malik's men to make it a big final.

But Malik's side have hardly earned the reputation of the past Pakistani teams often tagged as 'unpredictable'.

Nowadays everyone has become capricious about the label, which especially worked against India in the past as the new generation Indian cricketers have been showing different kind of attitude since ice melted in cricketing ties between the two next-door rivals.

TEAMS

INDIA (from): MS Dhoni (captain), Yuvraj Singh, Virendra Sehwag, Gautam Gambhir, Rohit Sharma, Irfan Pathan, Robin Uthappa, Suresh Raina, Manpreet Gony, Yusuf Pathan, Ishant Sharma, Pravin Kumar, RP Singh, Piyush Chawla and Pragyan Ojha.

PAKISTAN (from): Shoaib Malik (captain), Salman Butt, Nasir Jamshed, Younis Khan, Mohammad Yousuf, Misbahul Haq, Shahid Afridi, Kamran Akmal, Sohail Khan, Umar Gul, Sohail Tanvir, Rao Iftikhar, Wahab Riaz, Fawwad Alam, Bazid Khan and Naumanullah.

Umpires: Nadir Shah and Asoka de Silva.

five years back.

But still, many believe that even this Pakistan side can show character in the final despite the morale-slumped defeat in the league stage.

Lawson, however, was not definitely one of them.

"It is not do-or-die battle rather it's a final of a tournament which we want to win. If we lose it would be another day and we go back home and concentrate on the next game. Sometimes people get over-taken by consequence. What happens if you lose one match... it doesn't matter because you will get another morning," was the response of the former Australian fast bowler.

But with Nasim Ashraf, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) president, set to attend today's battle, Malik and his co would surely feel the heat if they go down badly again.

"There was no strong reaction by the Pakistan Cricket Board. I know the PCB chairman and he is entitled to his opinion," Lawson reacted over the board president's e-mail after a huge defeat.

India coach Gary Kirsten, however, was looking forward to face a big challenge against their opponents in the final.

"It's a great clash. Pakistan definitely will come up with more than the first game. We expect a big clash because Pakistan will give their best. But we want to execute our plan and if we play good cricket

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Robin recalls that final

MOHAMMAD ISAM

It did not take Robin Singh too long to remember the last India-Pakistan final in Dhaka.

Ten years ago, on a cold January morning, the bitter foes were involved in a fantastic match that broke a few barriers in one-day cricket. Witnessed by a packed to the rafters Bangabandhu National Stadium and millions at home, India reached a massive victory target of 315 runs and it was a world record for chasing the largest total to win an ODI at that time. The game in itself created an example for future one-day matches when teams batting second did not think twice when up against a big score.

But on that fine day, it would be hard to find any cricket-lover in Bangladesh who did not watch that game. Everyone pretty much remembers where he or she was when that final half-hour took shape into some of the nerve-wrecking and memorable moments in one-day cricket.

The game also played its part in renewing ties between the two cross-border rivals and it was only a matter of time before they became regular opponents rather than battling occasionally in neutral venues. These days, excessive India-Pakistan clashes have diluted the enthusiasm somewhat and there was a lack of interest around the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

But Robin, India's successful fielding coach who is accompanying the side in Dhaka, exactly remembered a different occasion at the Big Bowl when his 82 played a pivotal role in India's victory.

"It had never happened before

(in one-day cricket)," recalled Robin as he hurriedly packed away his kits after a short fielding session.

"There was a big crowd that day with lot of enthusiasm and it was the sort of game that was unheard of in those days. Nobody chased like we did that day," said the former all-rounder who played 136 ODIs and just the sole Test match.

India had easily defeated

Pakistan in the first final of that triangular tournament also involving hosts Bangladesh. Pakistan gave one back, banking on a four-wicket haul from Mohammad Hussain and so, all eyes were on the Big Bowl for the third final.

Pakistan took control of that game from the foggy morning until the sun came out briefly in the

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India fielding coach Robin Singh (R) imparts some batting tips to left-handed batsman Suresh Raina yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium during training on the eve of the Kitply Cup final against Pakistan.

'Pakistan team divided within'

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan cricket coach Geoff Lawson may have rubbished reports that team was not united but if sources are to be believed all is not well in the Pakistani team and even some players are questioning credentials of Lawson as an international coach.

After the team received a drubbing from archrivals India in the tri-nation Kitply Cup league match, Lawson had said, "It is incorrect to say that there is no harmony in the team." However, the sources in the team say some players are not happy with Lawson and captain Shoaib Malik.

"If you were here in Dhaka you would clearly see there is a split in the team with seniors like Younis Khan, Mohammad Yousuf, Shahid Afridi forming their own group and keeping a distance from the captain and coach," one source in the team told PTI.

"Some of the players are not getting along with Lawson after his

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Buffon keeps Italy alive

AEP, Zurich



A slender thread after a 1-1 draw with Romania here on Friday.

Adrian Mutu gave his side the lead ten minutes into the second half but Romania's star striker failed to beat Buffon with an 80th-minute spot-kick that would almost certainly have sealed a famous victory.

Christian Panucci equalised within a minute but the Italians never seriously threatened to go on from there to claim the victory they needed to haul themselves off the bottom of Group C.

After a goalless draw against France, the Romanians will go into their final game against the Dutch knowing a win over a side they beat during qualifying will be enough to put them into the last eight.

Italy made five changes from Monday's 3-0 defeat by Holland and it appeared to have heeded Donadoni's call for a display of focused anger in reaction to that humiliating defeat with a high-tempo start. The early pressure almost yielded a goal after ten minutes, when recalled captain Alessandro del Piero nodded Simone Perrotta's chip wide.

The Italians' defensive lapses that contributed to the defeat by the Dutch continued when Mutu forced Buffon to make the first of three crucial saves.

Centre-back Gabriel Tomas's low drive from fully 40 yards was bound for the bottom corner before Buffon reached it at full stretch and the Italians had a huge let-off in the 20th minute, Cristian Chivu's freekick deflecting off Panucci onto the inside of the post.

Romania lost holding midfielder Mirel Radoi, who was stretched off after a clash of heads with teammate Razvan Rat.

Toni's power in the air appeared to be Italy's most likely source of a goal and, after Perrotta failed to finish off one of his knockdowns, the

Bayern Munich striker forced Bogdan Lobont into two good saves in quick succession.

The lanky forward thought he had finally got the better of the Romanian goalkeeper in first-half stoppage time but his finish from Gianluigi Zambrotta's cross was chalked off for a debatable offside decision against del Piero.

Ten minutes after the restart, there appeared little danger as Romanian rightback Cosmin Contra hammered a freekick from his own half but Zambrotta's header back to Buffon was undercooked and Mutu darted in to smash the ball past Buffon.

The equaliser came in less than a minute, Giorgio Chiellini heading Daniele de Rossi's corner back across goal to allow Panucci to bundle the ball over the line.

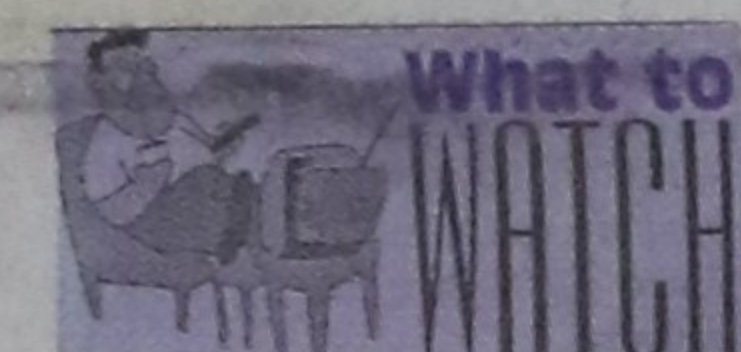
Romanians should have claimed victory after Panucci was judged to have brought down Mutu as they tussled for a cross at the near post.

But Mutu's strike was straight and Buffon got a hand to it before a fortunate ricochet off his boot carried the ball over the bar.



Did U Know?

Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympic Games, was a fencer.



BTV, NEO Cricket & GEO

Kitply Cup Final
India v Pakistan
Live from 3:00pm

ESPN

Euro 2008

Sweden v Spain

Live from 10:00pm

Greece v Russia

Live from 12:45am (Sunday)

TEN Sports

West Indies v Australia

Third Test, Day 3

Live from 8:00pm



Michael Ballack

(German football captain)
"I carry out this role in a calm manner - Zinedine Zidane did the same thing. He was the leader of his team simply by dint of his class and his manner of playing."

While comparing his role with the former French maestro.

NAT'L SHOOTING

Tripti claims

second gold

SPORTS REPORTER

BKSP shooter Tripti Dutta denied Sabrina Sultana her third gold medal in the 22nd National Shooting Championships yesterday.

Tripti, who won the 10m air rifle (junior) gold on Thursday, edged her more illustrious opponent Sabrina for the women's 50m rifle three-position gold at the BKSP shooting range on the fourth day of the meet which concludes today.

Tripti scored 549 points, just

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Baichung eyes a 4th

India-Maldives final today

SPORTS REPORTER

A spirited and inform Maldives stand in reigning champions India's way to claim their fourth SAFF Championship title as the two teams meet in the final of the fifth edition of the regional football competition today.

The India-Maldives final, a repeat of the inaugural SAFF Championship final in Kathmandu back in 1997, will kick off at the Sugathadasa Stadium in Colombo at 8 pm Bangladesh time.

India, guided by English coach Bob Houghton, however, will have history on their side. They have won all three finals -- in 1997, 1999 and 2005 -- and the only time they missed out was in 2003 in Dhaka when they were ousted 2-1 by

eventual champions and hosts Bangladesh in the semifinals.

Slovakian coach Jozef Jankech's Maldives, who twice made the final pairing earlier, were destroyed 5-1 by India in Kathmandu and went down in tiebreakers in Dhaka.

The only plus point for Maldives, yet to win an international against India, would be the lively brand of football they have showed throughout the eight-nation meet including a 1-0 win over fellow co-hosts Sri Lanka in Colombo.

Although the Indians had rested six key players during their 1-0 win in the group stage against Maldives in Male, the match was dominated by the hosts.

India also showed exhausted legs when they were stretched by tournament's surprise pack Bhutan in the semifinals and needed a stoppage-time goal after 120 minutes to win 2-1.

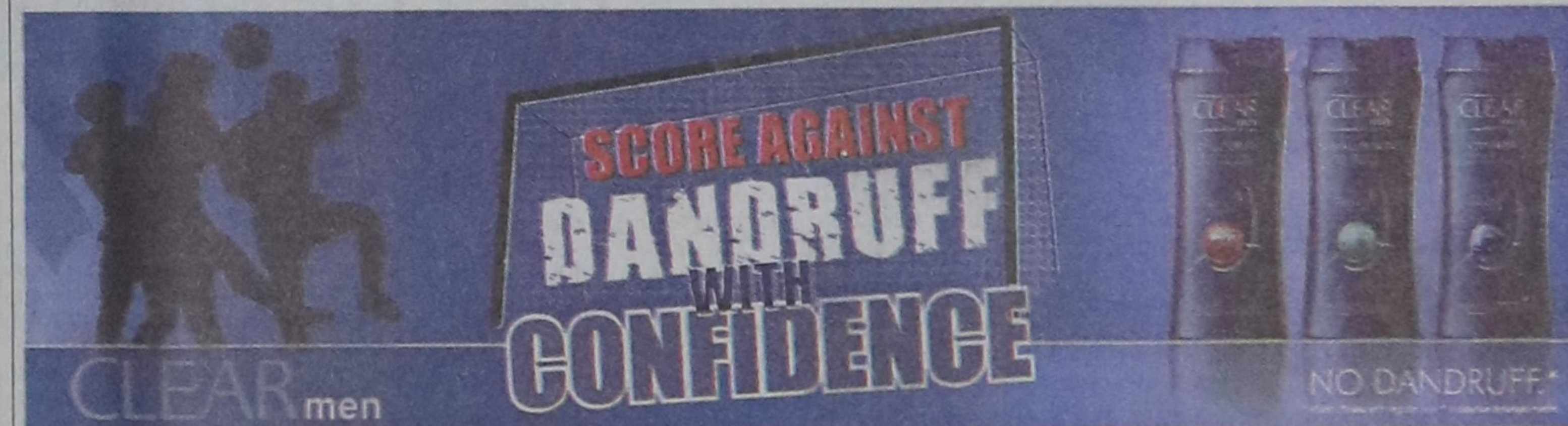
The final, in the end, would be for the fortunate -- who would be

able to grab the chances early -- and the experienced.

While the exciting Maldives midfielder Ashfaq Ali holds the key for his team, Indian skipper Baichung Bhutia could make all the difference although the veteran of four tournaments has showed signs of ageing in what seems to be his last SAFF Championship.

The star striker, who has all three winners' medal and missed the 2003 version due to injury, would definitely be eager to sign off with another feather in his illustrious cap.

Only three players -- Bangladesh defender Hassan Al Mamun and goalkeepers Biplab Bhattacharya and Aminul Haque -- have appeared in all SAFF Championships so far although the defender has played in all five. Aminul served the bench in 1997 while Biplab was second choice in 1999 and 2003. Both the veteran goalkeepers shared the duty in 2005 and this year.



Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon stops Romanian forward Adrian Mutu's (not in picture) penalty shot during their Euro 2008 Group C football match at the Letzigrund Stadium in Zurich on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP