



Indian forward Joaquin Santan (L) and Afghanistan's Israfeel Kohistani are in hot pursuit to win the ball during their opening SAFF Championship match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. India won the match 1-0.

Hosts can confirm semifinals today

Pakistan in a must-win situation

SPORTS REPORTER

Fresh from a moral boosting 4-1 win over Bhutan, Bangladesh will be looking to confirming their semifinals berth in the SAFF Championship with a win against Pakistan in a crucial Group B encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Putting behind the month-long chaos regarding the termination of Brazilian coach Edson Silva Dido, Shahidur Rahman Shantoo's charge put on a spectacular show on Friday and are looking forward to going all the way through another good show against Pakistan, who are in a must-win situation to keep their chances alive after going down to Sri Lanka in the tournament opener, also on Friday.

"We needed such a start which enhanced our morale and we are positive against Pakistan and not thinking much about them. If we can carry our first day's form, then beating Pakistan is very much possible," said Bangladesh captain Aminul Haq, who also believed that the victorious month of December had been playing as an additional motivation behind performing better against Pakistan.

The Bangladesh goalkeeper is also convinced that the players are fully motivated to put in more efforts against Pakistan because a win against them will take them into the semifinals.

Aminul has been solid under the bar in the last four meetings against Pakistan since the 1999 Goa SAFF Championship

and never saw his side go down against Pakistan and it has been inspiring him more than anything else.

However, Bangladesh coach Shantoo is very cautious about Pakistan and doesn't want to lose any points on way to booking the last four spot.

"Every match is important for us and we don't want to lose any point but it doesn't mean that we won't play for full three points. We will keep in line with the merit of the game because Pakistan will go for the kill in the must-win game," said Shantoo.

Boosted by the presence of five UK-based players, Pakistan were actually unlucky to go down 1-0 against a nine-man Sri Lanka despite having played fast-paced game to penetrate the Lankan backline and the Bangladesh coach is also a bit worried over Pakistan's speed and was planning how to restrict their midfielders who Shantoo thinks are better compared to his own defenders.

"Having watched them against Sri Lanka, it seemed to me that they played a bit fast game and their play was built up in the midfield though they have problems in the backline as well as the striking zone," said Shantoo.

However, the former Bangladesh goalkeeper is more focussed on rectifying the mistakes his boys made against Bhutan.

"The boys, especially the defenders, made some fumbles in the first match and the forwards partly failed to execute some plans and I think the boys will come in a better way tomorrow [Sunday] and they will get better as the tournament progresses," said Shantoo.

Asked whether former Bangladesh coach George Kottan would be a factor with enough knowledge on Bangladesh, Shantoo said, "Obviously not. Each coach has separate strategy, view and game plan. Besides, it depends on how a coach uses his boys and it definitely won't match another's."

Shantoo hinted that he might make a couple of changes in the starting eleven that won against Bhutan and the changes might come in the backline.

Shantoo's counterpart, Kottan was also optimistic about winning against the hosts to stay alive.

"If we want to qualify for the last four, there is no alternative but to winning both matches against Bangladesh and Bhutan," said Kottan, who, however, believed Bangladesh would be tough opponents.

"Like us, Bangladesh will also want to confirm their semifinals spot and definitely they are a good side. I watched them play yesterday [Friday] and although they conceded a stupid penalty goal, striking four goals was definitely their credit."

"We have our top scorer of the domestic league in our side, but he could not find the target [against Sri Lanka] and it is a cause for concern for us. If the midfielders can have a good day, then I think tomorrow [Sunday] will be ours," hoped Kottan.

Bangladesh have won five times and drew once in their 11 previous meetings against Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's scheduled practice session at the BUET ground started half-an-hour later due to lack of proper permission from the authorities.

Telegraph chess

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's Abdullah Al Saif earned 4.5 points after the end of the fifth round and shared second position along with ten other players in the 21st Telegraph School Chess Championship in Kolkata.

Ikramul Haq Siam, Umme Taslima Protiva Talukder and Tanzina Akter Tani have 3.5 points each while Tahmina Akter Tani has 2.5 points. Fifth round games were held on

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Div I chess

SPORTS REPORTER

The First Division Chess League starts tomorrow from 3:00 pm at the Bangladesh Chess Federation hall-room. Sixteen teams will participate in the tournament. The participating teams are Destiny 2000 Limited, Bangladesh Biman,

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Bangabandhu SAFF Championship

Sri Lanka v Bhutan (4:00pm)

Bangladesh v Pakistan (7:00pm)

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Nepal hold Maldives

SPORTS REPORTER

 A spirited Nepal held Maldives to a 1-all draw in Group A opener of the Bangabandhu SAFF Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

After dead-lock in the first half, Ahmed Thoriq gave favourites Maldives a 60th minute lead only to see parity restored by Ju Manu Rai eight minutes later.

Both on paper and statistically, Maldives were clear favourites against Nepal, who went 4-1 down to the islanders in their last meeting in April, but the latter produced a brave show to impose authority in the first half after both sides had started the game on 4-4-2 formation.

Maldives, coached by Hungarian Urbanyi Istvan Bela, never seemed to penetrate the Nepalese backline despite having star players in the starting eleven like Ashfaq Ali, who was under constant mark by the opposition defenders.

Nepal gradually gained in confidence and enjoyed superior ball possession and mustered the first shot on target 12 minutes into the game when Bijay Gurung forced Maldives goalkeeper Mohamed Imran to a diving save with his powerful footer from outside the box.

However, Maldives reorganised to launch a couple of attacks before the breather, but shaky shots from Fazeel Ibrahim and Gasim Shamweel failed to pose any problem for Nepal goalkeeper Bikash Mallah.

After resumption, Nepal enjoyed the lion's share of possession and came close to taking the lead six minutes into the second half with Chetan Chimire striking the side-net twice from the right.

However, against the run of play, Maldives took the lead 15 minutes into the second half when Ashfaq Ahmed whipped a well-judged lob from the right for Thoriq, who received the ball on the edge of the eight-yard box to tap

home coolly after making a Nepal defender and goalkeeper fool with exchanging his foot.

Nepal, though, bit back six minutes later as Yougesh Shrestha, who had replaced Bijay Gurung just one minute earlier, released a minus to Ju Manu Rai, who stabbed the ball home with a glancing header to equal the margin.

Nepal found the back of the net again eight minutes from time through Ju Manu Rai, but this time the goal was ruled off-side.

Maldives were lucky enough not to concede a last-gasp goal as goalkeeper Mohamed Imran brilliantly tipped over a dipping shot by Anil Gurung from 30 yards.

Both coaches at the post-match briefing expressed their dissatisfaction over poor refereeing.

However, Nepal coach Krishna Thapa was happy with his boys' performance to snatch a point from Maldives, but blamed the referee for overruling their second goal.

"There is a bit of pressure when you play the first match and some of the players disappointed me despite having the ability of doing better. Besides Ashfaq Ali was marked well by Nepal defenders and other players should have taken the role of Ashfaq, but they did not," said Maldives coach Bela, who appeared partially happy for getting one point.

TEAMS

MALDIVES: Mohamed Imran, Ashfan Ahmed, Umar Mohamed, Ibrahim Sobah Mohamed, Jameel Mohamed, Gasim Shamweel, Naseer Mukhtar (Rasheed Ahmed), Arif Mohamed, Fazeel Ibrahim (Hussain Mohamed), Ashfaq Ali and Ahmed Thoriq (Abdul Ghani Akhram).

NEPAL: Bikash Mallah, Ju Manu Rai, Chetan Ghimire, Sandip Rai, Raju Tamang, Anjan KC, Bijay Gurung (Yugesh Shrestha), Biraj Mahajan, Rohit Chand, Sagar Thapa and Anil Gurung.

Yellow cards: Anil Gurung (Nepal).

Referee: Abdul Hannan Miron (Bangladesh).

Victoria in Super League CCS almost there

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Sharif's splendid all-round show ousted star-studded Gazi Tank from the race as Victoria Sporting Club booked a super league place in the Ispahani Tea Premier Division Cricket League with an 11-run victory at BKSP yesterday.

Batting at number eight Sharif a 63-ball 71 that contained seven fours and a six as Victoria posted 222 for 9 and then the pace bowler claimed four wickets for 35 runs in his ten-over spell to restrict Gazi for 211-8 in their share of 50 runs.

With their sixth win, Victoria joined Mohammedan, Abahani, Biman and Kalabagan to compete in the super league phase while Cricket Coaching School (CCS) brightened their chances after beating Old DOHS by three wickets in the tenth round game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. CCS improved their tally to ten points and despite the defeat DOHS and BKSP, which defeated Partex by three runs in the other tenth round game at Fatullah, still have a slim chance to qualify as they both have eight points with one match in hand.

Back to the BKSP game, Victoria top order had a terrible performance except opener Arman Hossain who made 78 off 85 balls with 12 fours and a six. Victoria in the end managed a respectable total thanks to late order efforts from Arifat Salahuddin (24 off 50 balls) and Sharif.

Nazmul Hossain, Forhad Reza and Alok Kapali picked up two wickets each off Gazi Tank.

In reply, most of the Gazi batsmen got starts but they ultimately paid the price for being too cautious. Nayeem Islam for that matter who recently earned a reputation as a big hitter, slowed down the scoring rate as he made 30 off

63 balls without managing a boundary. Kapali top scored 49 off 73 balls that featured four boundaries and a six.

Taposh Ghosh was the star at Mirpur as the number four batsman anchored the innings with his unbeaten 125-ball 86 that included eleven fours and a six as CCS posted 186-7 in reply to DOHS's 185-8.

Pakistani Shahbaz Butt was the other notable batsman with 45 off 71 deliveries that featured eight boundaries.

Nasiruddin Faruque was the most successful bowler with 4 for 13.

At Fatullah, Zakaria Masud captured four wickets conceding 27 runs in 6.5 overs after captain Tanvir Haider's 113-ball 74 as BKSP snatched a three-run victory over lowly Partex.

Pakistani Rashed Hanif made 59 before falling victim to a run-out. Tareq Ahmed (31) and Rezaul Karim (38) made some contribution in the late order, even though Partex were bundled out for 179 runs in 47.5 overs in reply to BKSP's 182.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Victoria v Gazi Tank

Venue: BKSP

Victoria: 222-9 in 50 overs (Arman 78, Salahuddin 24, Sharif 71, extras 12; Nazmul 2-38, Forhad 2-40, Kapali 2-28).

Gazi: 211-8 in 50 overs (Nazimuddin 12, Mizanur 27, Nafees 37, Kapali 49, Nayeem 30, Forhad 32, Razzak 13 not out, extras 8; Sharif 4-35, Saju 2-34).

Result: Victoria won by 11 runs.

CCS v OLD DOHS

Venue: SBNCS

DOHS: 185-8 in 50 overs (Rumman 25, Anwar 32, Rabbi 20, Taibur 36 not out, extras 16; Rasel 2-53, Nizamuddin 2-22).

CCS: 186-7 in 47.1 overs (Butt 45, Taposh 86 not out, Nazimuddin 18, extras 10; Rubel 2-38, Saju 2-34).

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Sangakkara delays India's victory

Cricket

AFP, Mumbai

Sri Lanka's captain Kumar Sangakkara scored an unbeaten century to delay India's victory bid in the third and final Test here on Saturday.

The tourists, trailing by 333 on the first innings, survived a middle-order collapse in the post-lunch session to move to 274-6 in their second knock by stumps on the fourth day.

Left-handed Sangakkara returned undefeated on 133, his highest score in the series, with Sri Lanka still needing 59 more to avoid a second successive innings defeat with four wickets in hand.

India, who won the Kanpur Test by an innings and 144 runs, will leapfrog leaders South Africa and number two Sri Lanka to become the top-ranked Test side if they win the series 2-0.

Sri Lanka lost four wickets for 25 runs in the post-lunch session to slip to 144-5, before Sangakkara led a revival to take the match into the fifth day.

The skipper put on 64 for the sixth wicket with wicket-keeper Prasanna Jayawardene (32) and 66 for the unbroken seventh with Nuwan

Kulasekara, who was unbeaten on nine.

Sri Lanka, starting the day at 11-0, lost key batsman Tillakaratne Dilshan (16) to an umpire's mistake for the second time in the match when he was given out leg-before to Harbhajan Singh before lunch.

Australian umpire Daryl Harper raised his finger as Dilshan paddled up to a ball that spun sharply from the middle-stump and hit the batsman's front leg.

Television replays showed the ball missing leg-stump by at least six inches.

In the first innings, Dilshan's century knock was cut short by English umpire Nigel Llong, who ruled the batsman caught at forward short-leg even though the ball bounced off the pad.

The umpires' referral system, which allows a batting or bowling team to appeal for a review of an on-field decision, is not being used in the series.

Tharanga Paranavita and Sangakkara put on 90 for the second wicket but India hit back with quick wickets after lunch.

Seamer Shanthakumaran Sreesanth broke the stand by trapping Paranavita leg-before for 54 -- an easy decision for Llong to make as the batsman played back and was hit in line of the middle stump.

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VIP TREATMENT? Bangladesh central defender Wali Faisal (R) and Maman Miah watch some students (not in picture) of BUET unwittingly making merry with a soccer ball while two other members of the national team take an unscheduled nap at the BUET ground yesterday. Unfortunately Bangladesh football team had to wait for half-an-hour before starting their training session due to non-availability of permission to use the ground ahead of their important SAFF Championship match against Pakistan today.