

Hosts have no answers India, Maldives in final

SPORTS REPORTER

It was all set up for a Bangladesh victory. Team spirit was supposedly at its highest, the stands were packed with thousands who had braved the winter chill to turn up at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, the opponents were India and the spirit of 2003 had been invoked.

But it all turned flat very soon for Bangladesh as a woeful display of football saw them crash out of the SAFF Championship with a lone-goal defeat to a youthful India side.

The hosts looked lost from the beginning and never managed to grab the game by the scruff of the neck, failing to muster a decent shot on target. The Indians in contrast, were sharp and quick and by the end the difference between the sides was clear for all to see.

Except it seems, Bangladesh interim coach Shahidur Rahman Shantoo. The former national goalkeeper's press conference was even more abject than his team's performance as he failed to provide satisfactory responses to even the most basic of queries.

Asked why Bangladesh did not show any urgency to bounce back, Shantoo had no explanation.

"Before the match, everything was going in the right direction and the boys were hundred percent fit, but I still can't understand why they did not show much urgency to come back into the game."

He went on to suggest that India created a single chance all game which they took advantage of, clearly missing the numerous fantastic saves that his captain and goalkeeper Aminul Haque pulled off to

keep the score respectable.

Aminul was one of the few players who could hold his head high after a night in which the Bangladesh side clearly looked over-the-hill. Perhaps the pressure had got to them, but Shantoo was not even sure if this was the case.

Asked whether the boys took too much pressure playing before a jam-packed home crowd, Shantoo said, "I have no idea."

The beleaguered coach did get his bearings back for a short while managing to shift the blame on the players for looking tired and not executing the game plan.

"The boys did not play well. They looked tired the entire game and I will ask them why after returning to the hotel."

Shantoo was perhaps shaken by the fact that he had to be taken into the press conference in policy custody after a section of fans demonstrated their displeasure by throwing bottles onto the pitch.

It was a poor reaction from the faithful, not understandable, but expected as their heroes hardly gave them their money's worth. The goal itself was not a surprise as the Indian's had been threatening from set-pieces all evening.

Robert Lalithamuana's wicked left-foot deliveries had the veteran Bangladesh defence guessing all night, but the goal came when he teed up his captain Sushil Kumar Singh for a grounder that cut underneath a poorly constructed wall and beyond the despairing dive of Aminul.

"We had prepared for free-kicks, but it seemed that the wall was not in proper place and India availed the opportunity to go ahead," said Shantoo.

And despite being outplayed in all departments Shantoo stopped short of labelling the young side better than Bangladesh.

"I won't go in that direction. What I can say is that we could not play according to our game plan."

Shantoo's counterpart Sukhvinder Singh said that they deserved to win the game and they did not allow the hosts to take charge from the beginning.

"I told you yesterday (Thursday) that many things play a role when playing against the hosts, who remain under pressure from the home crowd. We played our best and won the game."

"May be they (Bangladesh) did not play well, but we did not allow them to play from the beginning and got the result."

India will now take on Maldives in the final on Sunday, for a chance to win the tournament and provide a firm launching pad for their stars of tomorrow.

TEAMS

Bangladesh: Aminul Haque, Nasirul Islam, Ariful Islam, Rajani Kanta Barman, Wali Faisal, Atiqur Rahman Mishu (Arman Aziz), Mamunul Islam (Mithun Chowdhury), Zahed Parvez Chowdhury, Mehdi Hasan Uzzal (Shahedul Alam), Enamul Haque, Zahid Hasan Emily.

India: Arindam Bhattacharja, Ronaldo Rodrigue, Baldeep Singh, Sushil Kumar Singh, Joaquim Abranches, Je Je Lalpekthula, Jibon Singh, Dharmaraj Ramanan, Robert Lalithamuana, Denzil Franco, Jewel Raja Sheikh.

Yellow Cards: Ariful Islam (Bangladesh), Robert Lalithamuana (India).

Referee: Adil Ali (Maldives)



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

An Indian player is over the moon after his captain Sushil Kumar Singh scored from a grounder against Bangladesh at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Fans frustrated

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A large number of spectators turned out at the Bangabandhu National Stadium last night, expecting a repeat of their 2003 performance, when they beat rivals India in the semifinal to advance to the final where they lifted the SAFF Championship trophy for the only time beating Maldives in penalties.

People of all ages appeared in festive mood and took their seats long before the game had kicked off and greeted the Bangladesh team with huge cheer as they took the field.

But their enthusiasm and spirit gave in, bit by bit, as the Bangladesh players ran chased shadows throughout the game. The hapless performance finally got the better of the crowd and they started to throw plastic bottles on the ground towards the end of the game and finally returned home with their heads low having seen their beloved boys in red-and-green bow down to India so lamely.

Abdur Rahman, a spectator who came from Badda said he was frustrated with the show of the local boys, "Bangladesh never looked as they would win the match. This was a poor performance and I am very disappointed."

A sport journalist at the press put his frustration more

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PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

A combo image shows (L) Bangladesh coach Shahidur Rahman Shantoo hanging his head after succumbing to a 1-0 loss against India in the semifinals of the SAFF Championship yesterday. (R) Goalkeeper and captain Aminul who was one of the few to emerge with any credit trudges off the pitch after losing a game that his side had been hyped to win.

Much ado about nothing

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Emergency executive committee meetings, a 'decisive' democratic decision making process, an animated press conference and a re-integration. Bangladesh football has been busy, behind the scenes, in the last month. But nothing has changed as far as the national football side are concerned as Shahidur Rahman Shantoo's boys slumped to a pitiful 1-0 loss to an Indian national side only in name.

The U23s from our neighbouring country provided the national booters with a lesson in combination football, possession play and intelligent ball retention to send the hosts out despite the packed house at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

As far as 1-0 victories go, this is as emphatic as it gets. Bangladesh were abject for almost the entire game failing to create even one noteworthy chance. Playing in a formation that is now only consigned to the museum did nothing to help matters. The fact that the youngsters from India gave them the run-around can only add insult to injury for our 'proud' veterans, who huffed and puffed but could not blow the house down.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is left with egg on their faces and will struggle

to pick up the pieces. In hindsight, the decision to sack Edson Silva Dido over his youthful team selection now looks completely farcical. And now the question that will be asked is: what good did sacking Dido do?

The answer is evident for all who care about the game. Losing with a youthful side has innumerable advantages. Losing with a side chock full of players past their prime has none. It's only embarrassing.

The dreams of a place in the final went up in smoke last night, but the signs had been there from the beginning. Barring a good showing against a shockingly poor Bhutan, Bangladesh had been struggling for the entire tournament. They were lucky to draw Pakistan 0-0 and a stirring win against Sri Lanka was diluted by the fact that the islanders rested a number of first team players.

But the real losers will be the fans who turned up in droves yesterday. It is a testament to the giant strides that the game has made in the last year that the irate home fans stayed on deep into injury time in the blind hope of an equaliser. Their explosion of frustration was misdirected, but it shows how much they care for the game.

For their sake hopefully, the BFF will finally close the chapter on the glorified veterans and give the young brigade a chance to prove themselves.

And if this loss doesn't convince them, nothing will.

Maldives steamroll SL

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Reigning champions Maldives moved into the Bangabandhu SAFF Championship final after inflicting a humiliating 5-1 defeat on Sri Lanka in the first semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Fazael Ibrahim struck twice while Ahmed Thoriq, Ashfaq Ali and substitute Ali Assad netted one each for Maldives. EB Channa pulled one back in the match which was expected to be a mouth-watering clash between the two regional rivals.

Sri Lanka suffered the same fate in the semifinal of the last edition as they bowed out losing 1-0 to Maldives.

It was virtually a one-sided affair after Sri Lanka had started the match with great pace, going close twice in the opening 15 minutes before Maldives woke up from their slumber with crisp passing and sharp movement as midfielders Arif Mohamed and Gasim Shamweel worked hard behind strike duo Ahmed Thorie and Ashfaq Ali, the nucleus of Maldives' play.

Despite having fielded five fresh players, who were rested in the final group match against Bangladesh, Sri Lanka looked like suffering from a lack of confidence, losing the balance to control the ball on the hard-soil. Thus all their initial efforts went begging though at the pre-match briefing, Sri Lankan captain Chaturu had said that their fresh legs would be the key to the success in the semifinal.

Maldives Hungarian coach Urbanyi Istvan brought no change to the starting eleven that handed a 2-0 defeat to India and his charges grew in confidence to assert their authority after a brief show from Sri Lanka. Maldives came close to taking lead thrice inside three minutes and one of the three attempts saw a header from Arif Mohamed come back off the crossbar in the 17th minute.

Maldives took five minutes to open the account as Ashfaq exchanged a short corner kick

with Naseer Mukhtar from the right before releasing a measured lob for the unmarked Thoriq, who just headed the ball past goalkeeper Sathishkumar to give Maldives a 22-minute lead.

Thoriq then hit the sidenetting on the half-hour mark before Sri Lanka came close to equalling the margin in the next minute, but Channa hurriedly floated a Gunarath cross wide when composure was needed to find the back of Maldives net.

After the resumption, Sri Lanka looked desperate to level the margin and found the equaliser with Channa levelling the margin in the 62nd minute following two efforts from Channa and Asmeer.

But, Sri Lanka could not hold the equaliser long as Maldives hit back two minutes later. Fazeel put Maldives ahead again and Sri Lanka will not forget the match for the howler made by their goalkeeper Sathishkumar, who let

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PHOTO: STAR

Maldives playmaker Ashfaq Ali (C) diverts the ball beyond the despairing dive of the Sri Lanka goalkeeper (R) and just beyond the post in their SAFF Championship semifinal match against Sri Lanka at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Ashfaq did manage to get on the scoresheet as Maldives routed Sri Lanka 5-1 to sail into the final on Sunday.

Five more tournaments mooted

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The South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) yesterday proposed to introduce five more competitions alongside the existing SAFF Championship for the year of 2010-11.

The competitions proposed are a Club Cup championship, Boys' U-16 and U-18, Girls' U-17 and the national women's competition and those competitions will be held in alternative years following the SAFF Championship.

The proposal was taken at

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Lancer Cup Golf held

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Col. (ret'd) Nurus Sama clinched the men's title while SS Son Kim won the ladies' crown in the Lancer Cup Golf Tournament at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.

Brigadier General (ret'd) Daniel Islam won the senior title, Major General (ret'd) Mahmudul Hasan won the super senior title while Master Anaf Bin Sharfuddin became the junior champion.

Navy Chief Vice Admiral Zahir Uddin Ahmed attended the prize giving ceremony as chief guest to distribute prizes among the winners.

Rangs Group chairman Abdur Rouf Chowdhury and high civil and Army officials were present in the prize giving ceremony.

NZ dominate Day 1

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Don't be fooled by the score. It was a flat track in Napier but Iain O'Brien was on a mission to make his last Test memorable and Pakistan's top order, as ever, was in a self-destructive mood. Imran Farhat lifted Pakistan from the depths of 59 for 5 and resuscitated his career with a fighting century but New Zealand will be more than pleased with their efforts, especially after a dogged batting display from the openers, on the first day of the final

Test.

Until Farhat produced his hundred it was all O'Brien. At one point his figures read: 4.2-4-3-3. He was hostile throughout his spell, consistently bowling over 140 kph, and was always accurate but, even so, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that even he would have been slightly surprised by the results.

On a flat pitch, Pakistan's top order contrived to implode yet again by playing poor cricket. Only one batsman, Misbah-ul-Haq, was taken out by a difficult delivery; the rest were simply not

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Erratum

Yesterday's front-page story of The Daily Star Sport, titled "Kalabagan down Biman" carried an erroneous headline and first paragraph. The heading should actually have read "Biman down Kalabagan" since it was Biman who coasted past Kalabagan by seven wickets in their Super League Premier Division Cricket League match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

We apologize for the oversight and for any inconvenience cost.

Sports Editor



PHOTO: COURTESY

Winners of the Lancer Cup Golf Tournament pose with chief guest Navy Chief Vice Admiral Zahir Uddin Ahmed at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.