

Hosts lose big in first big test

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh women's national team had never played against an opponent outside the SAFF region before. They came up against a 29th ranked team in the world in the form of Thailand in their first match of the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. And it proved to be a testing one for the hosts as they lost the match 9-0.

The Thais, who are the favourites from this Group B to qualify for the final round, toyed with the hosts and turned it into an array of attacks, right from the word go till the very end. Bangladesh were busy defending their goal in numbers, but the superiority of the Thais was telling as they found openings in a sea of defenders every now and then.

The first ten minutes went goalless. In fact the hosts managed to hold out the Thais for the first fifteen minutes through some desperate defending. But when in the 16th minute midfielder Nam Thongsombut tapped in from in front of the goal, there was no stopping the Thai onslaught. At the other end, the Thai goalkeeper was ambling around in front of the D-box for most of the match, as Bangladesh strikers Sabina Khatun and Aumra Ching Marma hardly managed to break into the opposition half.

After the opener, the Thais found the Bangladesh net three more times in the first half and five times in the second with forward Nisa Romyen pocketing highest four goals.

Bangladesh goalkeeper Sabina Akter made a couple of decent saves and the goal bar came to the rescue a couple of times, or else the margin of defeat could have been much bigger.

The match was played before few thousand spectators, most of whom were local. But a band of about sixty colourful Thai supporters outcheered the local contingent like their team did on the field.



Bangladesh women's team goalkeeper Sabina Akter (L) was arguably the busiest player during the AFC Asian Cup Qualifying mismatch against Thailand at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, where the home side tasted a bitter 9-0 defeat in what was their first big international exposure yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Niaz wins, Sharmin loses again

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GM Niaz Murshed returned to winning ways in the Asian Continental Chess Championship after beating Chinese Mu Ke in the fourth round in Manila, Philippines yesterday.

Niaz has 2.5 points from four matches while his compatriot Sharmin Sultana lost against WFM Karenza Dita of Indonesia. This was Shirin's fourth in four defeats.

KIIT INT'L CHESS Abdullah Al-Saif made a remarkable start in the 5th Kiit International Chess Festival drawing against Russian Grandmaster Igor Yugopov in first round of elite category before losing against WGM Padmini Rout in the second round held in Bhubaneswar, Odissa yesterday.

However, Saif's senior teammate GM Enamul Hossain Razib won both games to share the lead along with 13 other players. GM Ziaur Rahman, IM Abu Sufian Shakil and FM Debaraj Chatterjee were jointly in second position with 1.5 points each.

Premier League from July 1

To be played under new payment scheme

SPORTS REPORTER



The uncertainty over the start of Dhaka Premier Cricket League was finally over as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has decided that the competition will start from July 1.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon made the announcement after a long meeting with the participating clubs' representatives at Mirpur yesterday. "The player recruitment programme (previously known as the players' transfer) will take place on June 20 and the league commences on July 1. This was a unanimous decision as every club wants to play the league," said Papon in a press conference.

The new pay structure will be introduced even though the top cricketers took a stance against it and this year's might be the longest-ever league considering the prevalent weather and possible political disruptions. This year BCB's focus will be on completing games through reserve days rather than sharing points when matches are interrupted. All matches will be held outside Dhaka.

The BCB will probably have to pay large amounts to each club as part of the process of convincing them to participate.

Earlier, leading cricketers led by Mushfiquir Rahim reportedly raised their voices against the new payment system and

according to sources have even decided to boycott the league if the board decides in favour of the new scheme.

"I agree that the grading could have an effect on two to three cricketers who may earn less than they did last season but the majority of the players will benefit and I hope those players will accept the loss for cricket's sake," explained Papon, adding that they will finalise the details of the new system over the next two-three days.

When asked about the threat of a players' boycott, Papon said with a smile: "If they don't want to play then we are yet to decide what we will do and I can't say anything in advance. But I am hoping that every one will play."

He further said that this is not like a franchised league and believes that there will be no problem with the payment, which is what the players, having had a bitter experience with the BPL, are apprehensive of.

"This is more of a rotational system. Through a lottery the first person can select a player, and then after the 11 other clubs have had their pick, he will get his next chance. So this will create a balance. 24 cricketers will be in the top grade, so every team can have two players in the highest grade," he explained.

The BCB has made a 181-player list and will distribute them in different categories -- most likely five. Tk 30 lakh may be the amount for the top category, and Tk 5 lakh for the lowest category.

Forum backs Rahmatullah

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The polarisation in upcoming hockey election has taken a new dimension after the District Sports Organisers' Forum threw its weight behind Abahani councillor and probable general secretary contestant Khaza Rahmatullah yesterday.

The Forum, boasting 27 councillors out of a total of 71, in a meeting at the National Sports Council yesterday pledged their all out support for the Abahani councillor. Forum has played a pivotal role in deciding the outcome of elections in many federations and their support will no doubt boost Rahmatullah's bid against a strong panel supported by Mohammedan and Mariner Young's Club.

It may be mentioned that Rahmatullah has been serving as the general secretary of Bangladesh Hockey Federation's current ad-hoc committee for the past two years. While, Shafiullah Al Munir, who is expected to be his rival for the general secretary post, burst onto the scene from virtually nowhere to become the chairman of Mohammedan's hockey committee a year ago.

The schedule for the election has not been announced yet but the councillors' list will be sent to the NSC today.

Malditas maul Iran

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Philippines made a mockery of the FIFA rankings as the 83rd ranked side brushed aside 53rd ranked Iran 6-0 in the opening match of Group B Qualifiers of the AFC Women's Asian Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Philippines, boasting eight US-based players in their starting eleven, struck three goals inside the first four minutes to take a stranglehold of the game against an Iranian side that seemed inferior in stamina, skill and technique.

The Malditas, playing an ultra-attacking 3-6-1 system, created havoc in the Iranian backline right from the word go and snatched the lead in the first minute, thanks to a strong header by Heather Cooke from a corner.

Megan Marie Jurado doubled the lead with an angular shot in the third minute before Jesse Anne Shugg scored with a curving shot in the next minute. The Filipinos added two more goals in the first half.

With around one thousand partisan crowd supporting the Iranian side, Iran tried to fight back in the second half but could not register a single goal, instead they conceded a late goal in the injury time.

Iran's Portuguese coach Helena Costa blamed lack of concentration and humidity for the defeat but promised to bounce back in the next matches.

Philippines coach Ernest Nierras said he was confident about winning the game with his unusual 3-6-1 system.

"We knew what we had to do and we did it with system. Many may raise eyebrows seeing our 3-6-1 system, but that is what we play back home and it is not done as a gimmick," said Nierras.

Papon wants investigation

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Mushfiquir Rahim, in his first meeting with Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president since his controversial resignation, re-iterated his stance and stated that he had taken the decision 'emotionally'.

Speaking to reporters at the BCB headquarters yesterday, president Nazmul Hassan Papon said, "I spoke to him on Monday. He told me that he was emotional and he could not deal with the loss."

"However, I told him that a committee will be formed to investigate whether there were any other issues in the next board meeting," said Papon.

The board's decision to form a committee despite Mushfiquir's statement indicates that the BCB wants to make a thorough analysis of the problems before taking the next step. Ad-hoc committee member Sajjadul Alam Bobby, who had travelled to Zimbabwe along with the team has therefore been asked to submit a report on the issue.

Nasir doesn't need surgery

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Bangladesh batsman Nasir Hossain will not have to undergo an operation on his shoulder, informed Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) sports physician, Debasish Chowdhury. There was a possibility that Nasir, who travelled to Johannesburg in South Africa following Bangladesh's tour of Zimbabwe, would have to undergo surgery for an 'unstable shoulder'.

The surgeon however advised Nasir to go through a shoulder rehabilitation programme rather than a surgery. "The surgeon over there told us that the problem has not reached a stage where an operation may be required," said Debasish. "He has no problem moving his arm clockwise. It's only the side-ways throws that hurt. So he'll work on a rehabilitation programme that will strengthen his shoulder muscles," he added.

Meanwhile, pacer Nazmul Hossain, who twisted his left knee in Sri Lanka, is scheduled to leave for Australia on June 4. He has an appointment with orthopaedic surgeon Dr. David Young in Melbourne the next day.

The pen that haunts

SAKEB SUBHAN

It is unheard of that the presence of a media person at the ground can have an effect on the performance of a cricketer. Yet that is what a Bangladesh batsman said transpired at a recent game. "I was batting well, and had just hit a boundary when I saw a certain face near the boundary. Something happened then, and believe me I was out next ball."

Whether the presence of a scribe was really the reason behind the dismissal is anyone's guess, but the anecdote speaks volumes about the central role that the media holds in the national cricketer's mind.

Some cricketers were asked for their view of the media during Bangladesh's tour of Zimbabwe, and as expected they shied away from making comments. When told that their views would be anonymously expressed, a player's eyes lit up and he said, "I hope you don't mind, but in one word I will say they are the enemy."

A more junior member, emboldened by his senior's candid response, nodded in agreement. "Because I am new to the team, I am



actually scared of the media. I have seen in the past that the words of some players have been twisted and presented in another manner. I don't want that to happen to me," said the youngster who is known for being tight-lipped at press conferences.

The batsman wanted to get a point across. "Write about how we perform, that is your business. But I

sincerely request that the sanctity of the dressing room be protected."

A bowler joined the duo and gave his take on the issue. "When we play well you raise us to the skies, but if we perform badly you vengefully thump us back to the ground. Personally, I do not read match reports or what you guys have to write about our performance. If someone is doing a special feature

on me, I read that."

This last statement of detachment, however, does not go with the overall impression that the team as a whole are wary of the press -- an impression strengthened by the assertion of a member of the coaching staff that players are apprehensive about the media backlash after a big loss, such as in the first Test in Zimbabwe. A senior member once told reporters off the record that while the team say that they do not read the printed word, in reality all of them are concerned about what is being written about them.

Recently a high-placed member of the board speculated that Mushfiquir Rahim resigned because he wanted to sidestep the media backlash. Whether true or not there is little doubt that the media loom large in players' minds. Although young, the players must realise that handling the media is an art everyone in the public eye has to master. Also, it can be hoped that with more maturity they will cease to take media reactions to heart. There certainly is room for improvement on both sides of the fence.

CSK in final again

PTI, New Delhi



Chennai Super Kings breezed into the final of the Pepsi IPL for the fourth straight time with a thumping 48-run win over Mumbai Indians in the first qualifier here on Tuesday.

Riding on pyrotechnics of Mike Hussey (86) and Suresh Raina (82), CSK posted a massive 192 for one and then did well to bowl out Mumbai Indians for 144 in 18.4 overs.

Mumbai Indians' last nine wickets fell for 57 runs.

Mumbai will however get another chance to qualify for the final when they meet winner of the second qualifier between Sunrisers Hyderabad and Rajasthan Royals.

For the record, CSK have made it to the fifth final in six editions of the cash-rich league. The only time they failed to make it to the title round was the second edition held in South Africa where they lost in the semifinals.

En route their win, Hussey (732 runs) and Dwayne Bravo (28 wickets) also retained the 'Orange' and 'Purple' Cap respectively.

Dwayne Smith's big-hitting prowess is well documented and while chasing a target of 193, one needed to be aggressive from the word 'go'. He hit a blazing 28-ball 68 but

after his fall, Mumbai lost wickets in heap.

Smith took full advantage of the field restriction as he played the lofted shot to good effect. Whether it was rookie Mohit Sharma or South African Chris Morris, Smith deposited all of them in the stands as MI started scoring at a rate of more than 10 per over.

Aditya Tare's dismissal couldn't deter Smith as rival skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni saw his bowlers being clobbered. Smith reached 50 off 21 balls and then Ravichandran Ashwin was brought into the attack.

Smith hit him for a straight six into the sight-screen and followed it with a boundary. Such was Smith's dominance that in a partnership of 75 runs with Dinesh Karthik, the latter contributed only nine.

The mayhem couldn't have continued forever and Dhoni introduced one of his 'Go-To' Man Ravindra Jadeja (3/31) which turned out to be the masterstroke.

SCORES IN BRIEF

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS: 192 for 1 in 20 overs (M Hussey 86 not out, Vijay 23, Raina 82 not out; Pollard 1-28)

MUMBAI INDIANS: 144 all out in 18.4 overs (Smith 68, Karthik 11, Pollard 24, Rayudu 15; Sharma 2-32, Jadeja 3-31, Bravo 3-9)

Result: Chennai Super Kings won by 48 runs. **Player-of-the-match:** Mike Hussey.