

SPORT

Misfortune hits Sohel again

SAFF fever has yet to peak

ATIQUÉ ANAM From Kathmandu

Bangladesh national football team's second-choice goalkeeper Shahidul Islam Sohel's relationship with the SAFF Championship is one he will want to forget. In his first assignment, the Delhi SAFF Championship in 2011, the young goalkeeper made a terrible blunder against Nepal, letting in a 40-yard free-kick dip over him and into the net. That goal sealed a 1-0 defeat for Bangladesh and a group-phase exit with only one point. Much maligned for that mistake, Sohel eventually dropped down in the pecking order.

Two years on, a more-matured Sohel was hoping to redeem himself in Kathmandu, given he got the chance to stand under the bar. But luck had other ideas about him. The tall keeper sustained a groin injury during training on Tuesday, which at the time did not look too ominous, but later was found that he would be sidelined for at least three weeks.

As his teammates were training at the Buddha Bikas Mandal ground amid the afternoon rain, Sohel's eyes glistened. "I am going home tomorrow," were the only words Sohel could muster. Sohel's ill-luck opened the door for goalkeeper Ziaur Rahman to be part of the SAFF squad for the very first time. The former Abahani goalie was flown in the Nepalese capital yesterday.

Bangladesh's problems about injuries do not end here. The most important player of the squad, midfielder Mamunul Islam, is still not fit enough to participate in any heavy training and so is midfielder Sohel Rana. Both received knee injuries during the last two practice matches that Bangladesh team played at home. Fitness coach Yamali Mohammed hoped that the two players would start serious training soon, but also said they might not be fit enough to play before the start of the tournament, which is only two days away.

"Mamunul will not be match-fit before the start of the tournament, that is for sure, but I'm hoping to get him involved in serious training soon," said Yamali after yesterday's practice session.

Coach Lodewijk de Kruijter reiterated his observation about this team's chances in the tournament, asking everyone to have realistic hopes, as according to him, India and Nepal were favourites to go through from the group that Bangladesh are in.

"Things don't improve in a day. You will have to give them time," said the Dutch. "People will have to be realistic about their expectations as Nepal are favourites due to home advantage and India are ahead as they invest much more in the game. Having extraordinary expectations will only put the players under pressure."

That weight of expectation comes from back in Bangladesh where people are dreaming of big things, especially after a complete package of Dutch coaching staff was drafted in two months back, with the promise of revolutionising Bangladesh's football. Out here though, the players are training quite unnoticed, as the buzz of the tournament is yet to hit the otherwise-football crazy nation. At least that looked like the case from the lack of promotional activities on the streets and football venues around the city.

Kabaddi final today

SPORTS REPORTER

The final of the Walton International Invitational Women's Kabaddi tournament will be contested between the West Bengal Women's Kabaddi team and the Andhra Pradesh Women's Kabaddi team at the Kabaddi Stadium today.

West Bengal confirmed their final berth with maximum seven points from four matches while Andhra Pradesh confirmed their final place by finishing one point ahead of third-placed Bangladesh.

The day's first match will be a place-decider pitting Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation, who earned five points from four outings, against Assam Women's Kabaddi Team.

Meanwhile, the Nepal Women's Kabaddi Team finished last in the five-team tournament.

Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation president and inspector general of police, Hasan Mahmud Khandoker, will be present on the occasion to distribute prizes among the winners.

Lee wants fear factor

AFP, Sydney

Veteran fast bowler Brett Lee said Wednesday Australia must inject the fear factor into their attack and called for Mitchell Johnson to be recalled for the home Ashes series.

The former Test quick, who frequently delivered balls in the 150 kph (93 mph) range, wants to see Johnson back in the frame to add some genuine pace, along with Pat Cummins.



CAPTAINS EXCHANGE: Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim (standing) shares a light moment with women's team captain Salma Khatun at the National Cricket Academy in Mirpur during the teams' respective training sessions yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh's blues on

SPORTS REPORTER



Stadium at Ipoh in Malaysia certainly provided it in abundance.

On Wednesday a de-motivated Bangladesh men's hockey team rounded off their Pool B campaign in the AHF 9th Asia Cup with a humiliating 9-1 defeat at the hands of holders India.

Bangladesh players did their best to motivate themselves for an improved performance against their imposing neighbours after two big defeats -- a 9-0 thrashing by South Korea followed by a stunning 4-2 loss against Oman. But despite singing the whole length of the national anthem (which is not even the standard practice) amidst incessant rain, they were no match for the might of the Indians who feasted on penalty corners for a 5-1 lead at the break and then pumped in

another four in a rather relaxed second session.

Bangladesh, ranked 31 in the world, were helpless against the 11th ranked India who never looked back after Rupinder Singh gave them a third-minute lead converting the first penalty corner of the match.

Rupinder and Ramchandra, the two penalty corner experts in the Indian ranks, shared seven goals between them with Rupinder adding his fourth from the lone penalty stroke. Thimmaiah and Mondeep Singh also put their names on the score-sheet.

For Bangladesh Mamunur Rahman Chayan struck the only goal, a spectacular top-of-the-roof hit from the lone penalty corner, only after India took an unassailable 5-0 lead.

Bangladesh, who lost to India 5-1 in what was a brilliant World Hockey League (Rd-2) campaign in Delhi earlier this year, were a pale shadow of their vibrant selves under new Pakistani coach Naveed Alam.

It was not just that they could hardly complete

three or four passes in the entire game, they were actually kept busy chasing the shadows of the speedy Indians.

After the break, Bangladesh looked a bit better with ball possession, which helped them to create two chances but Pushkor Khisha Mimo squandered one in front of the Indian goalpost before Mainul Islam Kaushiq saw his fierce dragger go just wide of the goalpost.

India, who emerged top from this group, set up a semifinal clash against Malaysia while Pool A champions Pakistan will play South Korea in the other semis with both matches billed for Friday.

Bangladesh, who finished bottom of the four-team Pool B, will now play against Pool A third-finishing Japan in the first of two place-deciding matches on Friday before playing the last match on Saturday. The opponents will be decided on the outcomes of Friday's matches.

And the trend suggests that Bangladesh, in all probability, is destined to finish top from the bottom of the eight-team meet.

Shakib wants to be there at the start

SPORTS REPORTER

Injured Bangladesh cricketer Shakib Al Hasan expressed his desire to play the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League from the very first match.

The ace all-rounder, who was diagnosed with a hair-line fracture on his left thumb, met with the officials of the Kalabagan Kriya Chakra yesterday where he expressed hope about his chances of playing from the first game.

"We invited all our players today who are staying in Dhaka and we talked with Shakib about the team because he will lead the team this season. Shakib told us that he will try his best to lead the team from the first match of the league," informed Reaz Ahmed, secretary of the cricket committee of Kalabagan KC.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board's physician Debasish Chowdhury however said: "Theoretically he will need three more weeks to return to the field. We don't want to take any risk by allowing him play matches before September 18. Let's see what happen in the next couple of days."

The much-talked about league is scheduled to start from September 3 but the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis have already said that it is likely to begin on September 10.

TT boys fly to Qatar today

SPORTS REPORTER

A three-member Bangladesh table tennis team leave here today for Qatar to take part in the Asian Junior Table Tennis Championship, beginning in Doha from Friday.

Javed Ahmed and Imran Hossain will be playing in the cadet section of the championship as they have earned their tickets after winning the bronze medal in the team event of the South Asian Junior Table Tennis Championship in Delhi.

Some 165 players from 20 countries will be competing in the two sections -- cadet and general -- of the championship.

Li, Radwanska cruise

AFP, New York



Agnieszka Radwanska and Li Na reached the US Open third round on Wednesday, while rain delayed the start of matches for past champions

Venus Williams and Juan Martin del Potro.

Those included Radwanska, promoted to third seed after the injury-forced withdrawal of Maria Sharapova, defeated Spanish world number 103 Maria-Teresa Torro-Flor, 6-0, 7-5 while Li, the Chinese fifth seed, beat 100th-ranked Swede Sofia Arvidsson 6-2, 6-2.

Radwanska, who has never got beyond the fourth round in New York, was on course for a quick-fire win over Torro-Flor, her second successive Spanish opponent, when she raced through the first set in just 21 minutes, losing just seven points.

But Torro-Flor, dressed in matching colours of blue and pink, made the Pole work for her win in the second set with three breaks of serve.

Radwanska, however weathered the unexpected storm, going through to a third-round clash against Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, capitalising on her rival's

38 unforced errors and 10 double faults.

Li, playing in her 30th Grand Slam and a New York quarter-finalist in 2009, clinched her third career win over policeman's daughter Arvidsson, who has now not progressed beyond the second round in seven attempts. Also on Wednesday Marcos Baghdatis progressed to the second round after beating Japan's Go Soeda 6-4, 6-3, 6-1.

On Tuesday, top-ranked Novak Djokovic and 17-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer advanced with ease at the US Open but 2011 winner Samantha Stosur was ousted by US teen qualifier Victoria Duval.

Six-time Grand Slam champion Djokovic who captured his fourth Australian Open crown in January, launched his quest for a fourth consecutive US Open final by beating Lithuanian 112th-ranked Ricardas Berankis 6-1, 6-2, 6-2.

Federer made a solid start to his bid for a sixth US Open title by defeating Slovenia's Grega Zemlja 6-3, 6-2, 7-5 in a match delayed a day by rain.

Duval pulled the day's shocker with a 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 victory over Australian 11th seed Stosur in a tense struggle that lasted for two hours and 39 minutes.

England sorry about 'call of nature' reply

AFP, London



England's cricketers have issued an apology for any offence caused during their celebrations of their Ashes series win over Australia at the Oval on Sunday.

The statement, released on the England and Wales Cricket Board's website, followed allegations that England players urinated on the pitch hours after the series had ended on Sunday night in a 3-0 win for the home side.

"The England cricket team would like to state that during our celebrations after winning the Ashes at no time was there any intention to disrespect Surrey CCC, the Oval or anyone else involved in the game we love," the statement on www.ecb.co.uk read.

"As a team we pride ourselves on respecting all things cricket including the opposition and the grounds we play at. We got carried away amongst the euphoria of winning such a prestigious series and accept that some of our behaviour was inappropriate.

"If that has caused any offence to anyone we apologise for that and want to reassure people that it was a simple error of judgement more than anything else."

The allegations arose following eyewitness accounts from Australian journalists, who were still in the ground while England celebrated their win.

Reports have since indicated the ECB has launched an investigation into the matter after being contacted by Surrey chief executive Richard Gould.



World number one Novak Djokovic of Serbia pumps his fist in celebration after beating Lithuania's Ricardas Berankis at the US Open in Flushing Meadows on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP