

Journey starts in Dasarath

Bangladesh face Nepal today

ATIQUE ANAM from Kathmandu

Bangladesh will start their SAFF Championship campaign today from where they had left off in New Delhi two years back. A brilliant free-kick from Nepal striker Sagar Thapa, made doubly-difficult by goalkeeper Shahidul Alam, had cut short Bangladesh's campaign on that occasion.

Two years on they meet again at the Dasarath Rangasala Stadium in Kathmandu today at 6:45 pm BST, kicking off the 10th edition of this regional football extravaganza. Bangladesh Television (BTV) will telecast the match live.

But in the meantime, fortunes have shifted and so have the tag of the favourites.

Bangladesh, who were considered as the outright favourites against the Himalayan opponents till 2011, are considered the underdogs this time. Ravaged by Injuries and playing against the host nation, Bangladesh start the match and the tournament as 'outsiders'.

But this a do-or-die match for both Bangladesh and Nepal, as they have been pitted in the 'group of death' alongside six-time champions India and Pakistan. A defeat for either team will dent their title hopes as they will have to deal next with India, who are considered as unbeatable in the region.

Bangladesh's biggest concern, on the eve of the opening match, is injuries.

Skipper Mamunul Islam, who is also the main playmaker of the side, is a serious doubt for this match. Another important player, midfielder Sohel Rana is also doubtful, leaving coach Lodewijk de Kruif short of options in vital positions. Midfield was

supposed to be Bangladesh's strength, but now it is the cause of their biggest concern.

The coach reasonably played down the team's chances at the official press conference yesterday.

"We want to win, but we are not favourites in this tournament. Countries like India, Afghanistan, maybe Nepal as the home team, are the favourites. I think we are outsiders along with some other teams," said De Kruif.

De Kruif's counterpart, Polish-American coach Jack Stefanowski, was confident enough in his proclamation of being one of the favourites in the tournament.

"This is a fantastic opportunity to play a tournament at home with the fans and the country behind you. So at the start it can give our team an advantage and give them a go," said Stefanowski.

However, one thing that will give Bangladesh heart is the record book.

Apart from their defeat two years ago, Bangladesh have won all the three other encounters against Nepal in the SAFF Championship. Bangladesh hold a healthy lead of 11-5 in overall matches they have played. The most recent meeting between the two sides also ended as a 2-0 win for Bangladesh at this very ground.

But the biggest inspiration for Bangladesh could be the venue itself, as Dasarath was the place where Bangladesh had their first taste of a title in the SAFF region in the 1999 Kathmandu SAF Games. An extra-time goal by super-sub Shahajuddin Tipu against the home side had won Bangladesh the title that day. The generation of Tipu have long left football, but the football lovers of the country will be praying that the new generation can start another revolution from the venue of one of their most famous victories.



PHOTO: STAR

Captains of the SAFF Championship pose in front of the historic Hanuman Dhoka temple at Durbar Square in Nepal during the trophy unveiling yesterday. Seven of the eight captains from the participating nations were in attendance.

NRB Jamal to make history

ATIQUE ANAM from Kathmandu



Kathmandu, Nepal

Bangladesh midfielder Jamal Bhuiyan will be creating a small piece of history if he takes the field today against Nepal. The Denmark-based defensive midfielder, whose position in the Bangladesh team's starting eleven is all but certain, will be the first non-resident Bangladeshi to wear the Red and Green jersey.

If it happens today against Nepal, it will be a special occasion not only for the team, but also for Jamal personally as the former FC Copenhagen youth team player had been waiting for two long years for his chance.

"I had been waiting for this moment for two long years," said the 23-year old midfielder yesterday. Jamal came to Bangladesh in 2011 to join the World Cup pre-qualifiers camp with the dream of representing the country of his birth. But he had to return dejected as he failed to impress the then coach Nikola Ilievski, having failed to cope with the conditions and work load.

But that rejection only strengthened Jamal's resolve. He responded immediately when current coach Lodewijk de Kruif



announced that he would scout for talented Bangladeshi players who ply their trade in leagues around the world. And this time there was no heart-break for Jamal as he impressed the coach with his determination and hard work.

"I was doubly determined to make it this time as I did not lose heart after failing two years ago. I worked so hard to come to this day that I will try to uphold the dignity of the Red and Green jersey."

And going by the resolution of the man, Jamal will hopefully not let his countrymen down.

Bangladesh taste defeat again

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's last hopes of securing sixth place in the AHF 9th Asia evaporated after a chastening 3-0 defeat to Japan in the place-deciding match at Azlan Shah Stadium in Ipoh, Malaysia yesterday.

The defeat against Japan was Bangladesh's fourth in a row in a tournament they had entered with high hopes of finishing fifth or sixth. The demotivated Bangladeshis put up a relatively better show against the 16th ranked Japan, but the eastern nation led the first half 2-0 before wrapping up victory through a penalty corner one minute from time.

Bangladesh had a brilliant performance in the World Hockey League (Rd-2) under a local coach and country's hockey lovers expected another good show in the Asia Cup under the guidance of Pakistani coach Naveed Alam.

But players like Mamunur Rahman Chayan, Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Pushkor Khisha Mimo, Qumruzzaman Rana, Imran Hasan Pintu, Moshir Rahman Pintoo, who were the key performers of Bangladesh's World Hockey League, were mere shadows in these four matches.

Naveed however said that Bangladesh need to play big matches regularly so that they can change some of the bad habits of the players. Naveed also believed that it was not possible to bring perfection with only 45 days of training.

Bangladesh will play against Chinese Taipei in the seventh-eighth place-deciding match today.

CPL 2013 Shakib named in team of tournament

SPORTS REPORTER

Ace allrounder Shakib Al Hasan has been named in the Caribbean Premier League team of the tournament. Shakib, who played for the Barbados Tridents, was the second highest wicket taker of the tournament with 11 scalps. His record figures of 6 for 6 against Trinidad and Tobago Red Steels was the highlight of his performance. However, Shakib batted mostly at number eight and hardly impressed.

Dashing opener Tamim Iqbal who had played for St Lucia Zouks however missed the cut. The team also included Muttiah Muralitharan and Shoaib Malik. Opener Chris Gayle was named the captain.

The selection panel of the squad included ex players, umpires, commentators and journalists. Former South African allrounder Mike Procter, umpire Billy Bowden and commentator Mike Haysman were among the few.

The CPL took place between 30 July and 24 August and involved six franchises from across the region.

Dizzying Finch crushes Eng

AFF, Southampton



Aaron Finch's record-breaking innings saw Australia to a first competitive international win in 200 days as they beat England by 39 runs in the first Twenty20 international at Southampton on Thursday.

Player-of-the-match Finch's stunning 156, the highest individual score in all Twenty20 internationals, was the cornerstone of Australia's 248 for six, itself the second-highest team score at this level.

England, who wrapped up a 3-0 Ashes series win with a draw at The Oval on Sunday, unsurprisingly lost early wickets when faced with such a colossal chase and finished on 209 for six.

Victory saw Australia go 1-0 up in a two-match series that concludes in Durham on Saturday.

Australia hadn't won a major international match since a 17-run victory over the West Indies at Melbourne on February 10 saw them complete a 5-0 one-day international series clean sweep.

Finch's runs came from just 63 balls and the 26-year-old Victorian opener, playing just his seventh match at this level, comfortably surpassed the previous Twenty20 world record of 123 set by New Zealand's Brendon McCullum against Bangladesh at Pallekele in September last year.

Remarkably, Finch got off the mark, reached his 50, hundred and 150 with sixes.

Indeed his 14 sixes were also a world record for the most in any individual T20 international innings, with Finch also striking 11 fours.

Finch's century was only the 10th in



PHOTO: AFP

Australia opener Aaron Finch celebrates his record-breaking 156 from 63 balls during the Twenty20 International match against England at the Ageas Bowl in Southampton on Thursday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: 248 for 6 in 20 overs (Finch 156, Marsh 28, Watson 37; Dernbach 3-34)
ENGLAND: 209 for 6 in 20 overs (Lumb 22, Root 90 not out, Bopara 45, Buttler 27; Johnson 2-41, Hazlewood 2-43)
Result: Australia won by 39 runs
Player-of-the-match: Aaron Finch.

all T20 internationals, the first by an Australian and the first by any batsman at this level in England.

Sachin, Rahul named in CLT20 squads

CRICINFO, New Delhi

Sachin Tendulkar, who has retired from the IPL, and Rahul Dravid, who has indicated the upcoming Champions League would be his last tournament, have been named in the Mumbai Indians and Rajasthan Royals squads for the Twenty20 event. A Faisalabad Wolves squad has also been announced, in an indication of the Pakistan side's probable participation in the qualifying stage of the league, after political tensions between India and Pakistan had cast doubts over whether they would be allowed to come over.

Kumar Sangakkara is the only player who hasn't preferred his IPL franchise for the tournament among the 12 wanted by two sides, and has decided to play for his home side Kandurata Maroons. Explaining the process for deciding which teams these players would represent, Dean Kino, a CLT20 governing council member and director of legal and business affairs, said: "Players who were named by more than one team were asked to select which team they were going to play for."

Rafa, Roger closer to face off

AFF, New York



Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer moved closer to a first-ever US Open meeting with second-round triumphs on Thursday while women's top seeds Serena Williams and Victoria Azaranka also advanced.

Spanish second seed Nadal, a 12-time Grand Slam winner who has nine titles since ending a seven-month injury layoff in February, beat Brazilian qualifier Rogerio Dutra Silva, 6-2, 6-1, 6-0 in 92 minutes at Arthur Ashe Stadium.

Swiss 17-time Grand Slam champion Federer, who at the seventh seed is in his lowest spot at the US Open since 2002, fired 37 winners in beating Argentina's 48th-ranked Carlos Berlocq, 6-3, 6-2, 6-1 after 95 minutes. Federer, who swept the New York hardcourt crowns from 2004-2008, and Nadal, whose 2010 US Open title completed a career Grand Slam, could meet for the first time at the US Open in the quarter-finals.

On the women's side, defending champion Williams downed 77th-ranked Galina Voskoboeva 6-3, 6-0, and Belarus second seed Azarenka beat Canada's Aleksandra Wozniak 6-3, 6-1.

But Italian fourth seed Sara Errani made a tearful exit, the 2012 US Open semi-finalist and French Open runner-up falling to friend and compatriot Flavia Pennetta 6-3, 6-1.

Federer, 32, next faces Frenchman Adrian Mannarino, who defeated US 26th seed Sam Querrey, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (5/7), 6-4. Federer won both of their prior meetings, in the 2011 second round at Paris and Wimbledon.

Spanish fourth seed David Ferrer and French eighth seed Richard Gasquet kept rolling toward their own potential quarter-final by beating countrymen, Ferrer dispatching Roberto Bautista Agut 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 6-2 and Gasquet dumping Stephane Robert 6-3, 7-5, 7-5.