

SPORT



The Bangladesh football contingent at the SAFF Championship watch yesterday's match between India and Pakistan at the Dasarath Stadium in Kathmandu. India won 1-0.

PHOTO: BSJA

Booters hardly slept

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu

The manager at the hotel stared curiously at the press accreditation card and asked "Where are you from?" A mischievous smile flashed across his face, as he learned that this reporter was from Bangladesh. Then he started showing how much proud he is of The Gorkhalis.

The pride was reflected in the front pages of all the national dailies here. The Kathmandu Post, one of the most circulated English newspapers in Nepal, printed a five-column box story on top with a blow-up picture of Anil Gurung celebrating his goal and teammates riding on his back. The Himalayan Times published a six column

picture of the team's victory lap.

The victory for the hosts was sweet as they did not expect to win so convincingly against Bangladesh, a side they lost to at home 2-0 back in March. The architect of the victory, Gurung, was surprised to see the lack of resistance from Bangladesh.

"Actually I'm a bit surprised to win so easily as they beat us at home only a few months back. I cried after scoring the goal as it was in the first match and in front of the home crowd," said a cheerful and relieved Gurung, who came to Dasarath Stadium yesterday, along with his teammates, to watch the India-Pakistan match.

The mood was quite the opposite in the Bangladesh camp. The players who were bubbling with enthusiasm just before Saturday's

match, looked away from the photographers, as they alighted from the bus. It was a long and painful night for some of them, they said.

"It was a bad night for us. I could hardly sleep," said injured skipper Mamunul Islam, who could only watch from the bench as his teammates suffered during the match.

Dr. Rafiqul Kabir, a former footballer and football enthusiast who came to Kathmandu to watch Bangladesh's matches, said disappointed would be the lightest word that could be used to express his feelings.

"I heard that this coach was teaching the Dutch style of football, but what the players did on the field was utterly disappointing. It was anything but Dutch, it looked like football of the pastures."

More bad news than good

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu

The injury list continues to lengthen as Bangladesh try to recover from their morale-shattering defeat against Nepal and seek inspiration ahead of their crucial encounter against favourites India on Tuesday.

Striker Sakhawat Hossain Rony, who came in as a substitute in Saturday's match, was the latest inclusion to the injury list as he aggravated a groin injury during the match and is likely to be ruled out of the tournament. Goalkeeper Mamun Khan also received a shin-bone injury while trying to make a save towards the end of the match, though it was learnt that his damage was not that serious. Skipper Mamunul Islam is still in rehabilitation process and likely to miss the crucial match too. But the good news is midfielder Sohel Rana is fit enough to play.

The team had a training session yesterday morning where coach Lodewijk de Kruijff pointed out the mistakes to his players and tried to motivate them for the big match.

"For us it is important that we learn from our mistakes. What I told the players is that we had a hammer on our head yesterday. We did not perform well in organisation, especially in defensive organisation," said the Dutchman before the practice session.

Having lost against Nepal in the tournament opener, Bangladesh face six-time champions India, knowing that a defeat

against the favourites would end their hopes of progressing through the group stages. In the face of adversity, the coach tried to put on a brave face.

"India is the most important game in our life at the moment. We have to look back a bit, and learn from our mistakes against Nepal and focus on India. In football everything is possible. If you don't believe it, you better stay at home," said the 43-year-old coach.

But he believes that not having Mamunul fit for the match is a big blow to the team.

"In the position that Mamunul plays, he is the best player of the country. It's hard to replace him. For that position, we need a real number 10, who is Mamunul," felt the Dutchman.

Mamunul also understands the gravity of a positive result in the next match. "After the poor display against Nepal, we were all frustrated but today [Sunday] morning the coach had a briefing with us and we also realised the importance of the match against India," said the injured captain.

Manunul is seeking inspiration from the 1999 Kathmandu SAF Games. Bangladesh were staring down the barrel, having lost against Maldives 2-0 in the opening match before going on to beat Nepal in the final to win the trophy.

"We are not finished yet. We were in a similar situation in 1999, but we won that tournament. That is what I am telling my teammates," said an optimistic Mamunul.

Management as poor as always!

SPORTS REPORTER from Kathmandu

Despite the great strides that the Nepalese national football team made in the last decade, the facilities provided to the visiting teams and journalists have remained as poor as ever.

The Bangladesh team had to remain inside their bus for almost half an hour before entering the Police Headquarters Ground to practise yesterday. They arrived in time for an 11:30 start, but were stopped inside the gate, because a training session for the police themselves was going on in the ground. The tournament committee was not made aware of it, and on the other hand the police authority claimed they were not informed about the training schedule. So it needed some forceful convincing from the Bangladesh team manager before they were let in.

The mismanagement does not end here. The Bangladesh players were not provided with any sort of drinks during the half-time break of the match against Nepal, the team manager complained. There wasn't even water in the toilets.

Up in the press box, the condition is dingy. The wi-fi connection went off intermittently. There are a few tables, serving to journalists on a come-first-occupy-first basis. For the rest, it is their own laps that they have to resort to for reporting.

Rumours 'baseless'

SPORTS REPORTER

At midnight on Saturday, rumours of ex-Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Saber Hossain Chowdhury deciding to withdraw from the BCB elections this year did the rounds in sections of the cricketing fraternity and the media.

The cricket board's elections are due to take place this month and have been the most talked-about topic lately. The rumour led many to believe that this would clear the way for Nazmul Hassan Papon to retain his presidential post unopposed.

However, speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Saber dismissed the rumours as baseless.

"That is not true. I am still contesting for the presidential post and am waiting for the process to begin," said Chowdhury.

"What I still can't understand is why the BCB's ad-hoc committee has not directed the clubs, districts and the rest to send in the names of their councillors. As per the Supreme Court's verdict the elections should take place as soon as possible, yet the most basic steps remain incomplete," he added.

Saqlain likely in Oct

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Pakistani spinner Saqlain Mushtaq is expected to join the Bangladesh national team before the New Zealand series in October to continue his role as spin consultant.

Saqlain had earlier signed a 100-day contract with the Bangladesh Cricket Board, according to which he could join the team management at different times of the year. He was last with the Tigers during their April-May tour of Zimbabwe.

In an exchange with an English Daily Saqlain stated his due arrival. "I look forward to joining the Bangladesh camp by the end of September. If not, October 1 is a must," Saqlain told the Dhaka Tribune.

The 36-year-old will conduct a three-week spin-bowling clinic for a group of current and emerging West Indies spinners from September 3, after which he is expected to join Bangladesh.

Gazi yearns for red cherry

SPORTS REPORTER

A three-day practice match is not generally the most high-priority fixture for the country's top cricketers. What makes tomorrow's fixture between Bangladesh Green and Bangladesh Red crucial is that the national players have not been involved in the longer version cricket since the Test series against Zimbabwe in April.

And with the Dhaka Premier League scheduled to begin next week, tomorrow's practice match seems to be the only opportunity for players to get into Test mode before the New Zealand series in October.

Preparations for the crucial series have hardly been ideal so far. Many of the national cricketers have recently returned to the country after an A team tour of England where all matches were of the limited-overs variety. That has meant that a large portion of the players who will front up against the Kiwis will not have played with the red ball for quite some time. Off-spinner Shohag Gazi, who will form a crucial component of the spin attack, is yearning to bowl with the red ball.

"The three-day practice match is definitely a big deal for me. Honestly speaking I have not played with the red ball since

Zimbabwe," said Gazi. "I think the last few months we focused a lot on our fitness and now the more game time we get before the New Zealand series the better it will be."

The Tigers overwhelmed the Kiwis 4-0 in the ODI series during their last visit in 2010 and the hosts' spin department played a crucial role. Gazi, who said he did not watch any of those games, had yet to emerge on the national scene. In the upcoming series though, he is likely to play alongside Abdur Razzak and Shakib Al Hasan in a spin-heavy attack.

"I played an important role in the last home series against the West Indies and I just hope I can continue that. My main goal will be to read the batsmen as fast as possible," said Gazi.

Despite a disappointing tour of England with the Bangladesh A team where the spinner picked up five wickets in seven matches, he was hopeful of a change of fortunes at 'home'.

"It was my first tour to England and the conditions were new to me. The standard over there was such that there was no room for even the slightest of errors. But I learnt a lot and it was really good for me, because now I know what to do the next time I go there," said Gazi.

"The New Zealand series is at home, so it will be different."

Korea lift Asia Cup

PTI, Ipoh

India made a spirited fightback in the second half but failed to earn a direct berth in next year's hockey World Cup as they lost the high-scoring summit clash 3-4 to defending champions South Korea here Sunday.

The Indians, who are virtually assured of a place in the game's showpiece event to be held at The Hague, Netherlands, needed to win the eight-nation tournament to secure a direct entry in the World Cup.

Korea's fourth title win means Malaysia are certain to return to the World Cup after a gap of 12 years.

The Indians will now have to wait till the conclusion of the Oceania Cup in November, which either Australia and New Zealand is expected to win, for the official confirmation of their participation from the FIH.

Rafa, Roger could collide

AFP, New York

Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer cruised into the fourth round of the US Open on Saturday, taking a crucial step toward a possible first-ever Grand Slam matchup on the Flushing Meadows hardcourts.

And the last-16 roadblocks to their potential quarterfinal showdown at Arthur Ashe Stadium are a combined 1-19 in their respective personal matchups against the superstar duo.

Spanish second seed Nadal, a 12-time Grand Slam champion, stretched his career-best hardcourt win streak to 18 matches by beating 38th-ranked Croatian Ivan Dodig, 6-4, 6-3, 6-3.

Federer, seeking his 18th Grand Slam title and sixth US Open crown, fired eight aces and 34 winners in defeating 63rd-ranked French left-hander Adrian Panatta, 6-3, 6-0, 6-2.

On the women's side, two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka advanced in three sets and Daniela Hantuchova saved four match points to reach the last 16, but Grand Slam winners Petra Kvitova and Svetlana Kuznetsova and former world number one Caroline Wozniacki were beaten.

Azarenka, who lost to Serena Williams in last year's final, outlasted French 26th seed Alize Cornet 6-7 (2/7), 6-3, 6-2.

Next up for Azarenka will be Serbian 13th seed Ana Ivanovic, the 2008 French Open champion who edged Christina McHale 4-6, 7-5, 6-4.

Italian 21-year-old qualifier Camila Giorgi, ranked 136th in the world, stunned Danish sixth seed Wozniacki 4-6, 6-4, 6-3.

SPORTS REPORTER



Hardly anyone was convinced when Pakistani coach Naveed Alam stated in the pre-tour briefing that Bangladesh had the ability to beat any opponent at the AHF 9th Asia Cup. But even then, no one was expecting the national team to put on this dismal showing in Malaysia, following on from their great showing at the World Hockey League (Rd-2) five months ago.

There is a gulf of difference between Bangladesh and Asia's top sides like India, South Korea, Pakistan and Malaysia as evidenced by a 9-1 loss to India and a 9-0 return against South Korea. But rather than the scoreline, it was the meek surrender that left hockey lovers reeling, especially since it was in stark contrast to their sterling showing against giants like Ireland and India in the World Hockey League.

Even aside from the humiliating double losses, Bangladesh, were also humiliated 4-2 at the hands of debutant Oman before conceding a 3-0 defeat to Japan, a team they had originally targeted to upset. An easy 11-3 win over minnows Chinese Taipei to avoid the wooden spoon to finish

seventh among eight teams, was scant consolation.

Hence, the tactics and players' selection of Pakistani coach Naveed Alam came into question. Former players and coaches pointed out that there was no combination among three departments that left no penetration into the opponent territory as the ineffective midfield could hardly build up the game.

The performance of the players also came into question. Many questioned whether players had deliberately performed below par to put the existing executive committee in trouble as they have been demanding the inter-club players' transfers for last two months. The movement also saw four of their fellows and one club official suspended by the federation, who also filed a case against them.

The game's governing body also can't avert their responsibility as they failed to provide a good number of practice matches ahead of the tournament to adjust to the blue turf and the yellow ball.

Citing the financial crisis, the federation also refused to entertain IHF's high-profile Belgian coach Michal Kennan before the tournament. The training of Kennan had put a good impact on the team's performance in the World Hockey League (Rd-2).

The team will return today.



Rafael Nadal of Spain celebrates his victory over Ivan Dodig of Croatia at the US Open in Flushing Meadows on Saturday.

PHOTO: AFP

Sachin to play 200th Test at home

PTI, Kolkata

Sachin Tendulkar is all set to play his 200th Test match on home soil with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) trying to squeeze in a series against the West Indies ahead of the year-end tour of South Africa.

The decision to invite West Indies for two Tests and five one-dayers was taken at the working committee meeting in Kolkata on Sunday.

"We have sent a proposal to the West Indies Cricket Board in this regard. We are hopeful of working out the modalities for the series," a top BCCI official said.

The series against West Indies will provide Tendulkar a chance to complete the historic milestone of playing 200 Tests in front of home fans.