

# SPORT

## HEARTBREAK at Halchowk

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu

A 93rd minute free-kick from Indian skipper Sunil Chhetri robbed Bangladesh of a much-deserved victory against India in their crucial Group A match of the 10th SAFF Championship at the Halchowk Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday. The free kick, which resulted after a feeble challenge from substitute midfielder Mamunul Islam on Chhetri at the edge of the box, was curled over the wall, and into the near corner of the net, beating goalkeeper Mamun Khan who was guarding the far post. The goal cancelled the 83rd minute strike from Bangladesh defender Atiqur Rahman Meshu and severely dented Bangladesh's chances of progression from the group stages.

After two matches, Bangladesh remain at the bottom of the table with a single point, along with Pakistan who however have a better goal difference after drawing 1-1 against hosts Nepal in the second match yesterday. India and Nepal have four points each.

To progress Bangladesh will need to beat Pakistan by a big margin in their last match on Thursday and hope that the match between Nepal and India on the same day produces a big-margin win for either team.

Yesterday's was a match of two halves. The first half belonged to India, who profited from some nervous defending and missed passes from Bangladesh to launch a number of attacks. The Bangladesh backline, made up of Nasiruddin Chowdhury, Atiqur Rahman Meshu, Wali Faisal and Ashraf Mahmud Linkon, was under severe pressure from the

Indian midfield and was split open quite a few times. But thanks to some wayward finishing from Chhetri, Je Je Lalpekhlua and winger Francisco Fernandes in particular, Bangladesh went for the breather unscathed.

Bangladesh gradually gained confidence and took control in the midfield, with Omar Faruk Babu playing a key role in the build-up. The two wings -- Taklish Ahmed on the left and Mobarak Hossain, who started in the right wing in place of Zahid Hossain, were penetrative with their skill and speed. Zahid Hasan Emily was the lone forward dropping into a deeper position to complement the two wingers.

Most of the attacks that Bangladesh created came from Mobarak as he dribbled past the defenders quite a few times but could not find either Emily or Taklish at the end of the ball. The coach took a gamble and sent on Mamunul in the 80th minute, and it immediately paid off. Mamunul's first touch was a corner which was headed off by a defender for another corner. The resulting corner was curled towards the middle of the box by Mamunul which was headed back to the path of Meshu, who blasted the ball at the back of the net to give Bangladesh the lead.

Having taken the lead Bangladesh tried to keep possession, but endured a few nervy moments towards the end, as India desperately looked for an equaliser. But India seemed destined to their first defeat against Bangladesh in ten years, until the last thirty seconds when the slightest of challenges from Mamunul inspired the Sri Lankan referee to blow the whistle for a free-kick. Chhetri made sure that he made the most of that lucky break.



PHOTOS: BSJA  
Atiqur Rahman Meshu (above) celebrates his 82nd minute goal against India. But the delight turned into extreme agony for Bangladesh booters including striker Zahid Hasan Emily (inset) as they failed to cling on to the slender lead in a crucial SAFF Championship match that ended in a 1-1 draw courtesy a last-kick-of-the-match equaliser from Sunil Chhetri.



Back-from-injury Mashrafe Bin Mortaza bowled with some pace and precision on the opening day of the three-day match for BCB Red against BCB Green at the Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Mash content on return

SPORTS REPORTER

It's still not certain as to whether Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will make a return to limited-overs cricket during the upcoming New Zealand series. And recent interviews of the player suggest that it's definitely going to take him a much longer time before he can get back to Tests.

However, on Tuesday morning the Narail Express took his first few steps towards yet another international comeback when he bowled 10 overs on the first day of the three-day practice match between the national probables in Khulna for the Black Caps series.

While he did not get a wicket, he did however rejoice the fact that he was playing his first match since he went down with a heel injury during the Bangladesh Premier League earlier this year.

"I bowled ten overs in two spells and there was not any major problem. I felt a lot better than expected," Mashrafe told The Daily Star. "And there are still a few issues

which remain. In order to get into full rhythm I will need some more time."

The pacesman bowled three no-balls and dreaded the fact. He stated that it was an aspect that could only be fixed with more game-time.

"I need to play as many matches as possible to return to form. And as per the plan tomorrow [Wednesday] I will be bowling a maximum of five overs," he said.

National selector Minhazul Abedin echoed Mashrafe's sentiments and said that the bowler had shown good signs on the first day.

"The way he bowled today [on Tuesday], especially after all those injuries that he went through, it was very positive to see. There are a few things that he needs to work on though, such as his stamina. The Dhaka Premier League will do him good," said Minhaz.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Green, captained by Mushfiqur Rahim, finished the day on 156 for 4. Mushfiqur top-scored with an unbeaten 69. All the four wickets for Bangladesh Red were taken by spinner Abdur Razzak. He finished with figures of 4 for 36.

## 'Referee was on their side'

SPORTS REPORTER from Kathmandu



Assistant coach Rene Koster kicked the water bottle in anger as Sunil Chhetri's free kick found the back of the net. Head coach Lodewijk de Kruif could only hurl abuses at the Sri Lankan referee from behind the dugout after being sent off for his protestations a few minutes ago. Away at the presentation ceremony, goal scorer Atiqur Rahman Meshu cried profusely, holding the player-of-the-match award. At the dugout, Meshu's teammates stared blankly at each other. The senior ones tried to console

their younger teammates as the players tried to get a grip on the anger and frustration of being 'robbed' of a victory they thought was there for the taking.

"Crishantha Perrera, the Sri Lankan referee and fourth official Adham Muhammad Tumah of Jordan destroyed our game," was the first thing a furious de Kruif said at the post-match press conference.

All throughout the match, India committed a number of dreadful challenges that could have earned them bookings, but were mostly overlooked. Sunil Chhetri was on a yellow card when he fouled Bangladesh skipper Nasiruddin Chowdhury but wasn't shown a card

into contact with the Indian player inside the box. But it was not a foul at all and we have been dealt a harsh blow," said Mamunul, who took two injections to his knee to be match-fit.

"Was it a foul by Mamunul? I don't think so," de Kruif claimed. "He (Mamunul) told me in the dressing room it was not a foul. The guy hit him instead of hitting him. But the referee was on their side, everyone could see that."

Mamunul, who came off the bench in the 81st minute of the match to make an instant impact by sourcing the goal before being involved in the tackle which gave away the free-kick, claimed the same.

"If it was a foul, it should have been a penalty kick because I came

into contact with the Indian player inside the box. But it was not a foul at all and we have been dealt a harsh blow," said Mamunul, who took two injections to his knee to be match-fit. India coach Wim Koevermans declined to comment on the refereeing but said his side should have won the match in the first half. "I don't comment on refereeing. But I think it was a foul and we should have killed the match in the first half," said the Dutchman at the post-match press conference.

De Kruif said will try to motivate his inconsolable players from the 'double hammer blow' in time for the match against Pakistan on Thursday, a must-win for Bangladesh.

## Unique breakfast gift

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu



Maldives coach Istavan Urbanyi startled everyone during the team's breakfast in the morning when he stooped before star striker Ali Ashfaq and crawled towards him before taking off the striker's shoes. And then the Hungarian coach himself replaced them with a new pair of boots. The bemused teammates of Ashfaq clapped and cheered to show their admiration for their captain and the gesture by the coach.

The day before, Ashfaq had set a unique record, scoring six goals in the Red Snappers' 10-0 bashing of Sri Lanka -- both are new regional records. That feat also made him the highest scorer in the SAFF Championship history, taking

him two past Indian IM Vijayan, who held the record thus far with 12 goals. The celebration on the field was unique too as the ginger-haired striker performed a double somersault after completing his double hat-trick.

Ashfaq said he was ecstatic with having scored six goals, but he had even better goal-scoring record in club football.

"I have scored 12 goals in a match in the Maldives Premier League. But as much yesterday's goals gave me pleasure, these were not my best goals. My best goal is the one that I scored for Radiant FC against Indonesian club Persibo Bojonegoro in the AFC Cup earlier this year. I scored that goal dribbling past three defenders," said the striker while talking to reporters after the breakfast surprise yesterday.

The striker has been a prolific scorer

both at club and national levels. Debuting at a tender age of 18, Ashfaq became the captain at 23 and scored in four of the five SAFF Championships so far. He has scored 32 goals in 38 appearances for his country, a national record, and more than 300 goals in his country. He is so popular among the Maldivian football lovers that they like to call him 'Dhagandey' or 'Man of Steel'.

The 27-year-old striker had urged on his countrymen to support them as the 12th man so that they can become champions for the second time. "We came here to win the tournament and be with us as the 12th player. InshaAllah we will win the tournament this time."

Going by the display Ashfaq put up on Monday, it will be no surprise if Maldives become the champions again, demolishing all their opponents.

## Cox's Stadium to miss deadline

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan Papon has said that the stadium at Cox's Bazar, which has been named as Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium and Sports Complex, will require around 15 more days than the ICC's September 30 deadline.

Speaking to reporters during the foundation stone laying ceremony of the venue yesterday, he said, "We have to present the ground to the ICC by September 30. Having seen the progress of the stadium I feel that it should take around 15 more days than the actual deadline to complete all the work."

"We might therefore send a letter to the ICC asking for an extension," he added.

Earlier in the day Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina symbolically laid the foundation stone of the stadium from Ukha.

The arena is expected to host the ICC Women's Twenty20 World Cup next year. The sports complex at the venue is an aspect that the BCB plans to work on after the world cup. As of now, the board aims to meet the ICC's requirements that would ensure the venue to host the grand event.

The stadium aims to be a nature-friendly sporting facility and has been dubbed as a 'green stadium'.

## Federer fails once more

AFP, New York



Roger Federer crashed out of the US Open in the fourth round on Monday while Rafael Nadal captured his 19th hardcourt win in a row to reach the quarterfinals without having allowed a service break.

Federer suffered a stunning upset at the hands of Spanish 19th seed Tommy Robredo, whose 7-6 (7/3), 6-3, 6-4 shocker was his first victory in 11 matches against the 17-time Grand Slam champion and five-time US Open winner.

Federer's failure, which came on the heels of a shock second-round Wimbledon exit, thwarted a potential quarterfinal match with 12-time Grand Slam winner Nadal in what would have been their first meeting on the New York hardcourts.

Instead, it will be Robredo in his first US Open quarterfinal against second-seeded countryman Nadal, who dispatched Germany's 22nd-seeded Philipp Kohlschreiber 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 6-3, 6-1.

Spanish fourth seed David Ferrer reached his eighth consecutive Grand Slam quarterfinal, beating Serbian 18th seed Janko Tipsarevic 7-6 (7/2), 3-6, 7-5, 7-6 (7/3).

Ferrer will face French eighth seed Richard Gasquet, who outlasted 10th seed Milos Raonic 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 7-6 (11/9), 7-5.

In the women's section life-long friends Roberta Vinci and Flavia Pennetta as well as Daniela Hantuchova reached the quarterfinals Monday to ensure five women over the age of 30 will be in the last eight.

