

SPORT

NOW or never

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu

A morally shattered Bangladesh side will look to their performance against India for inspiration ahead of their last group match against Pakistan today. The Bangladesh side, which looked nervous and out of shape in their 2-0 bashing at the hands of Nepal, gave a much better account of themselves against India, and were only denied by a 93rd minute equaliser from the Indian captain Sunil Chhetri. That match, despite the heart-rending scenes at the end, has given Bangladesh hope that they can beat Pakistan to keep their qualification hopes alive.

The match starts at 3:45pm Bangladesh time at the Halchowk Stadium in Kathmandu.

Taklish Ahmed, who was one of the brightest lights in the match against India, said that the Pakistan match is a do-or-die situation which they will have to win, no matter what.

"This is our last chance. We know we will have to win and we will give it our best shot," said Taklish, who was running a fever yesterday.

Bangladesh coach Lodewijk de Kruif is also confident that his side can win, despite feeling that Pakistan will be a stronger challenge than India.

"Yes, they are a bigger challenge," de Kruif said. "I think everybody underrated Pakistan. They have a good team, with matured players, very dangerous. So I think it should be a tougher match than against India."

Pakistan have undoubtedly earned the admiration of the teams with two good performance in the two games, but were unlucky as they conceded an own goal in their 1-0 defeat against India and an injury time goal in their 1-1 draw against Nepal. The physical presence and the height of the Pakistan players could be a concern for the Bangladesh side who have conceded all three of their goals from set-pieces. The skill of their foreign-based booters -- especially wingers Hasan Bashir and Mohammad Adil and midfielder Saddam Hussain -- can cause headaches in the Bangladesh defence, which looked nervous for the better part of the last two matches.

De Kruif can take heart from the fact that his key midfielder Mamunul Islam is nearing 100 per cent recovery, even if he is not a certain starter. The starting line-up may remain the same except for Nasiruddin Chowdhury, who might have to sit out having three stitches on his forehead after being elbowed by Indian defender Nimal Chhetri in the last match.

One thing that will give de Kruif confidence though is that Bangladesh have not lost against Pakistan in the last 18 years. The two sides have met seven times in the last eight years and Bangladesh have won three of those, the other five ending in draws. Bangladesh also hold a 2-1 lead in their five SAFF Championship meetings to date.

Bangladesh (probable): Mamun Khan (GK); Wali Faisal, Ariful Islam/Nasir Chowdhury, Atiqur Rahman Meshu, Ashraf Mahmud Linkon; Jamal Bhuiyan, Sohel Rana, Omar Faruk babu; Taklish Ahmed, Mobarak Hossain, Zahid Hossain Emily.



Bangladesh footballers gather at the lobby of Everest Hotel in Kathmandu before leaving for their practice session yesterday. Bangladesh take on Pakistan in a crucial SAFF Championship match today. PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh need a win and...

HEAD TO HEAD

Country	Played	Won	Draw	Lost
Bangladesh	15	6	4	5
Pakistan	15	5	4	6

POINTS TABLE (GROUP-A)

Team	P	W	D	L	Pts	G	G/D
Nepal	2	1	1	0	4	3/1	+2
India	2	1	1	0	4	2/1	+1
Pakistan	2	0	1	1	1	1/2	-1

SPORTS REPORTER from Kathmandu

Bangladesh coach Lodewijk de Kruif has said that Bangladesh need a bit of luck, which they have not had in the 10th SAFF Championship so far, to qualify for the semifinals.

Bangladesh have only one point from two matches, and need to beat Pakistan in their last group match today and hope that the result in the match (which will take place at the same time in another venue) between India and Nepal go in their favour.

"We need a little bit of luck. The luck was with India as there are a lot of other people who are supporting them outside the pitch. We need that luck tomorrow," said de Kruif to reporters at the team hotel yesterday.

The equation that takes Bangladesh to the semifinals is a tricky one. First of

all, Bangladesh need to beat Pakistan by a healthy margin (e.g 2-0) and hope that the other match produces an outright result. If Nepal beat India 1-0, Bangladesh will need to beat Pakistan by 2-0 and that will ensure their qualification. However, if India beat Nepal by one goal, then Bangladesh will have to beat Pakistan by at least 3 goals. But if India and Nepal play out a draw, then both will go through and Bangladesh will be eliminated from the championship, regardless of the result and the scoreline against Pakistan.

The Bangladesh coach fears that the last eventuality could be the very result that might become reality, going by the nature of the tournament.

"Is it fair play, is it match fixing? I don't need to say, everybody knows, the world is looking, the media is looking," said de Kruif while talking about his apprehension about tomorrow's match.

De Kruif's opposite number in tomor-

row's match, Pakistan coach Shaazad Anwar also believes that Pakistan have been harshly dealt with by the referees and that it will not be a surprise if India play out a draw against Nepal today.

"It happens in international football, and we cannot do anything about it," said Anwar.

However, India coach Wim Koevrmans claimed that his side play will play for nothing but a win.

"We will play to win. We came here to retain the title and that remains our target. It doesn't matter whether we play well or bad, what matters is that we become champions," said the Dutchman.

For the Bangladesh coach, the championship is quite a distant dream at the moment. All his thoughts are occupied with a win in tomorrow's match.

"Let's stick to the facts, which are that we have to win tomorrow to stay in the tournament. Then we depend on the result of the other match," said De Kruif.

A Danish rivalry

SPORTS REPORTER from Kathmandu

When Bangladesh take on Pakistan in their last SAFF Championship group match today, two former club mates and close friends will be pitted against each other. Jamal Bhuiyan, the Denmark-based Bangladesh midfielder will be vying against his erstwhile club mate Hassan Bashir of Pakistan for the right to earn a place in the last four of the competition.

Despite coming from different backgrounds, the two booters have had similar career paths. Jamal Bhuiyan left his country of birth at the tender age of five for Denmark, where he took football as his profession and met Bashir, who was born and bred there. The two played at the Kloppenborg club in the Danish second division three years ago before parting ways.

"We played in the same club in Denmark three years ago. He is a good player with good skill and strength," said the Pakistan forward about his former teammate and current opponent.

Both had responded to the call of national duty but were denied on the first occasion.

"I was born and bred in Denmark, but



JAMAL BHUIYAN



HASSAN BASHIR

I've always wanted to represent Pakistan at the national level," said Bashir at the team hotel yesterday.

"I was called for the 2011 SAFF Championship squad but my documents were not in order, so I could not play for the national side"

Jamal's first attempt to get into the Bangladesh team was also in 2011, but then he failed to impress the coach.

Jamal too thinks Bashir is an excellent player, but thinks the friendship will be put aside when the two of them meet on the pitch today.

"I know him well as we have played together and I know he is a good player. But there will be no quarters given tomorrow as we will be in opposing dug-outs," said Jamal.

Day 2 Marshal-ed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna



Bangladesh Red's Marshal Ayub hogged the spotlight on the second day of the three-day practice match against Bangladesh Green by hitting an unbeaten hundred at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium yesterday.

The right-hander's unbeaten 147 has given the national team management something to think about ahead of the home series against New Zealand in October as the team need an in-form batsman in the middle-order.

Marshal struck 21 fours and two sixes during his 197-ball stay as Bangladesh Red posted 282 for five in 66 overs before stumps were drawn for the day.

Speaking to The Daily Star over telephone, Marshall seemed pleased with his effort. "My performance in the tour of England was not that great, so I was determined to perform well in this match. I hope I can get a double-hundred tomorrow (Thursday)," said Marshall. When asked if this performance would further his case for inclusion in the national side for the New Zealand series he said: "Every match from now on is an opportunity."

Earlier left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak finished with figures of 7-73 to wrap up Bangladesh Green for 268 runs.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza bowled five more overs on the day and took one wicket. Bangladesh's premier right-arm pacer, playing his first match after injury, bowled better on the second day and generated some good pace.

Prep time 'not enough'

SPORTS REPORTER



National women's cricket team coach Oshadee Weerasinghe has said that he expects Bangladesh's upcoming tour of South Africa to be even more challenging than the team's last tour of India.

The Sri Lankan, who returned to the country on Tuesday and has been given the reins of the national cricket team till the end of the series, also stated that the time he had received to prepare the team for the tour was 'not enough'.

"The girls have been camping for the last three weeks and before that they played league cricket. But I only arrived yesterday (Tuesday) and we will be leaving on the 9th. I know the players from before so it won't be hard for me to select a team, but the preparation time is not enough," said Weerasinghe.

The foreign conditions in South Africa is Weerasinghe's biggest worry. "South Africa is not a place that we have visited before and the conditions there are new to us. There are many things that we have to consider," he said.

South Africa did visit Bangladesh last

year and won both the T20I and ODI series by two games to one. The coach however expects a much tougher challenge this time.

"We won two matches against them in both the formats last time and I thought we were almost the same in terms of our abilities back then. However, when we go there, I think they will be a better team because they have had opportunities to play against better teams since that series," he said. "I am counting on my experienced top order and senior bowlers to perform. We need a good start in the T20Is and carrying the momentum," he added.

While the coach does hope to look at the brighter picture, the last-minute planning by the board seems to have backfired. After yesterday's practice match, there were at least five players who faced fitness issues.

A similar scenario is seen in the team management. Weerasinghe left the country after his contract ended earlier in July this year. As a result of the last-minute appointment, Weerasinghe now faces the unenviable task of preparing the team for a maiden tour of South Africa in just four days.

Bangladesh will play three T20Is and three ODIs from September 12 to 24.

SIDDIKUR TO PLAY European Masters starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddiqui Rahman will be playing on the opening day of the Omega European Masters in Switzerland today. It is the fourth time that the ace Bangladeshi golfer is participating in the 2.2-million-Euro competition.

Apart from Siddiqui, top Asian golfers who are in the Order of Merit like Kiradech Aphibarnrat, Gaganjeet Bhullar, Liang Wen-chang and Thongchai Jaidee are also taking part in the tournament.



World number one American Serena Williams plays a forehand return against Spain's Carla Suarez Navarro at US Open in Flushing Meadows on Tuesday. PHOTO: AFP

Playing like number ones

REUTERS, New York



World number ones Serena Williams and Novak Djokovic ruled supreme on Tuesday, sending ominous warnings to their rivals with dazzling, runaway victories over Spanish opponents at the US Open.

Djokovic said he played some of his best tennis on the Arthur Ashe Stadium court in trouncing Marcel Granollers 6-3, 6-0, 6-0, and Williams could not have done better, handing Carla Suarez Navarro a 6-0, 6-0 beating at the National Tennis Center.

Dominant performances are not out of the ordinary for those rankings leaders but fifth-seeded Li Na provided something special by breaking another

barrier for Chinese tennis.

The 31-year-old Li became China's first semifinalist ever at the US Open by beating Russian Ekaterina Makarova 6-4, 6-7(5), 6-2 on Tuesday at a windy Flushing Meadows.

Li pumped both fists in joy after 24th seed Makarova sailed a backhand long to end the two-hour, 20-minute match at Arthur Ashe Stadium as the crowd showered her with cheers.

"For me, this is the first time to come to the semi-finals, so I'm very proud of myself," said Li, who looked about to claim victory in two sets after winning the first three points of the tiebreaker but was extended to a third set.

Other winners were also tested as defending men's champion Andy Murray of Britain worked hard to get past 65th-ranked Denis Istomin of

Uzbekistan, 6-7(5), 6-1, 6-4, 6-4.

The lone upset by rankings was registered by ninth-seeded Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland, who ousted fifth seed Tomas Berdych of the Czech Republic 3-6, 6-1, 7-6(6), 6-2

Wawrinka, who has now won five of his last six matches against Berdych, advanced to a quarters clash against Murray.

Li will not have too long to revel in her achievement as the win set up a semifinal date with defending champion Williams.

Djokovic moved into the quarters against Russia's Mikhail Youzhny, who ended the magical run of 2001 US Open winner Lleyton Hewitt by escaping a 1-4 hole in the fourth set and a 2-5 strugglehold in the fifth for a 6-3, 6-6, 6-7(3), 6-4, 7-5 win.