

SPORT

DREAM
over for booters

ATIQUJE ANAM from Kathmandu

Bangladesh were eliminated from the group stages of the 10th SAFF Championship after losing 1-2 to Pakistan in their last match at the Halchowk Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday. A back-header from Zahid Hossain Emily, who was wearing the captain's armband, gave Bangladesh the lead in the 29th minute, which was cancelled six minutes later by Pakistan captain Samar Ishaq's header. An injury time goal from substitute midfielder Kaleemullah stole the victory for Pakistan.

Bangladesh finished bottom of the group with a single point, having drawn just a game while losing the other two, the same as they did two years ago in New Delhi. Pakistan, despite the win, failed to make it through, falling behind in the head-to-head count thanks to their loss to India.

Nepal, who defeated defending champions India in the other match yesterday, qualified as group champions with seven points while India booked the other berth with four points.

Bangladesh started the match at a frantic pace and should have taken the lead in the first minute when left-winger Zahid Hossain dribbled past two defenders to tee the ball up, but the veteran forward's feeble attempt from inside the six yard box went straight to the Pakistan goalkeeper.

Pakistan, having survived the scare, took a counter-attacking approach and launched counter attacks through the wings, earning three consecutive corners, which Bangladesh managed to keep out. Bangladesh saw more of the ball in the midfield, with Omar Faruq Babu, Sohel Rana and especially Jamal Bhuiyan showing excellent ball control and passing, providing ball to the wings, where Zahid and Mobarak Hossain Bhuiyan failed to complement the good work.

Pakistan found a glorious opportunity to take the lead in the 26th minute when Adnan Farooq was provided with an excellent cross from the right wing, but his volley missed the target by a few yards. Three minutes later, and against the run of Pakistani attacks, Bangladesh took the lead as Emily back-headed a long throw-in from Raihan Hasan into the Pakistani net.

But Pakistan's consistent attack through the wings, where Adnan and Adil Ahmed were creating havoc, paid off six minutes later as they earned a corner, which skipper Samar Ishaq headed in from six yards out.

Pakistan should have taken the lead in the 43rd minute when Hassan Bashir was left unmarked on an inviting cross from the right, but he hit it way off target.

Bangladesh, coming into the second half with Taklish Ahmed replacing an ineffective Zahid on the left wing, had more bite in their attack. In the 52nd minute, Emily unleashed a brilliant strike from inside the box aiming for the far post, but the Pakistan goalie was equal to the task. Striker Wahed Ahmed was sent on to replace midfielder Sohel Rana as Emily dropped back to a deeper position. The tall striker got the best chance of the match to give Bangladesh the lead again in the 69th minute when he managed to leap above the Pakistan defenders on a Mobarak free-kick, but his header was awfully off-target.

Bangladesh desperately looked for a winner and surged men forward but started making mistakes in the midfield and gifted possession to Pakistan, who unlocked the Bangladesh defence and tested Mamun Khan with a couple of powerful attempts. The Bangladesh defence were playing a very high line and were caught off-guard in the 92nd minute as Kaleemullah took advantage of a complete lack of communication in defence to nod the ball home from a goalmouth melee. The goal came in the second minute of stoppage time, killing the game off and handing an early ticket home for the Bangladeshis.



DEJA VU: Humbled Bangladesh booters walk off the pitch at the Halchowk Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday after conceding a 1-2 defeat against Pakistan that capped yet another forgettable SAFF Championship campaign for them.

PHOTO: BANGLADESHERKHELA.COM

Refereeing, luck
not to blame

ATIQUJE ANAM from Kathmandu

There was no scope for lambasting the refereeing or blaming it on luck for Bangladesh coach Lodewijk de Kruij for yesterday's defeat against Pakistan. Rather the Dutchman blamed poor defensive organisation of his side and a lack of effort from a couple of his players for the downfall.

The 43-year-old coach, who was all smiles before the kick-off as he posed for camera holding the Bangladesh flag, cut a stern figure at the post-match press conference.

"I have to admit few players were not in the game today. Most of them were in it, 70 or 80 per cent, but a few were absolutely terrible," said de Kruij without naming any names, but his reply about winger Zahid Hossain's performance said it all.

"A few were not ready or good enough or didn't have the qualities, especially in the mental way. We will get rid of them and find others in the country. I gave Zahid another chance and you all saw what he did."

The coach, who got two months to prepare the team for the SAFF Championship, admitted in a passive way that his defenders had not learnt much.

"I think the first one was also a silly one. The second one was a silly one too. In Bangladesh, we have a big problem with defensive organisation and also the mentality and discipline that come with organisation. When you are a defender, I will advise

you to buy a few DVDs on how they defend in Italy. All the people behind there are butchers. They have a lot to learn and we have to teach them," said de Kruij.

He, however, thinks that there have been some good performances from some of the youngsters like Sohel Rana, Raihan Hasan and Taklish Ahmed and he wants to reorganise the squad with players like them.

"Back in Bangladesh, the U-16 and U-19 tournaments are coming up. That is the focus. I think you have to have a very good education plan and programmes like football schools which is not there in Bangladesh. It's a process and it needs time," said de Kruij, looking forward to his two-year regime.

Midfielder Mamunul Islam, who came off the bench in the second half but failed to make any impact, admitted to letting themselves and their countrymen down.

"On behalf of my teammates, as the captain, I apologise to the 16 crore people of the country for letting them down. We could not play well in the tournament and could not repay the faith of the people," said a dejected Mamunul.

Pakistan coach Shazad Anwar felt his side had the mental toughness and the focus to eke out a win at the death.

"We had the mental toughness to win it in the end. The players fully concentrated on their job till the last moment. We changed our tactics and our formation, putting one forward to put pressure and that worked," said Anwar.

'Meeting a must for
election's integrity'

SPORTS REPORTER



Former Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Saber Hossain Chowdhury expressed his desire yesterday to meet incumbent board president Nazmul Hassan Papon on September 7 in a face-to-face discussion on some issues surrounding the BCB elections.

"He (Papon) publicly made a commitment and now it is very important to set a time for the open discussion. The latest information I received was that he wanted to meet but he is not setting a proper date. I hope he sets a date and keeps his promise of meeting at any place and at anytime as early as possible," said Saber at his Paribag residence yesterday.

"I'm ready to meet on September 7. Even if he chooses another day, I am ready," he added.

Saber believes that without an open meeting the allegations of tampering with the constitution and attempting to buy councillors for a 'controlled election' will only gain strength.

"Their aim is to hold a controlled election and I will continue to say this until some questions are answered," said Saber.

28 for second phase

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) picked up 28 youth players for the second phase of training, which will get underway from tomorrow at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.

The players have been asked to report to Pakistani coach Naveed Alam.

In another move, the school committee decided to start the school hockey championship from the first week of February next year and before the start of the championship Naveed will conduct a coaching course featuring at least 30 coaches who will later work with the participating schools.

PREMIER CRICKET LEAGUE
Pak players'
participation
uncertain

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) may consider getting in touch with their Pakistan counterparts to sweep away the uncertainty over the participation of the country's players in the upcoming Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League.

As per a CricInfo report, it (the Pakistan Cricket Board) is seeking a formal communication from the BCB before considering releasing its players. The PCB said that the players were being approached directly with no written agreement from the "Bangladeshi organisers and board".

Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) chairman and BCB ad-hoc committee member Jalal Yunus however found no reason to make a written communication regarding the issue.

A BCB official on condition of anonymity however said that things could change if the clubs requested the board to send an official letter to PCB for issuing their players NOC (no-objection certificate) to participate in the league.

Pakistani players have dominated the foreign quotas for many years but the clubs were yet to confirm any Pakistani player for this season as the BCB has not received any NOCs from the PCB. The same thing happened before start of the Bangladesh Premier League earlier this year after relation between the two boards declined following Bangladesh's refusal to tour Pakistan.

Siddikur
stutters

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh ace golfer Siddikur Rahman began his Omega European Masters campaign on the wrong foot with a one-over-par 72 in the first round in Switzerland yesterday.

Siddikur, who failed to make the cut in the last edition, needs a much improved performance in the second round to avoid a similar fate as 61 golfers finished the first day with at least one-under-par.

He played three birdies against four bogeys; three of them came in the 10th, 11th and 12th holes before the ace golfer finished the 18th and final hole with a birdie to score 72.

20 named
for SA prep
camp

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 20-member Bangladesh women's squad for the preparation camp for the tour of South Africa.

The squad has been reduced from a 29-member list and the final squad is expected to be announced next week.

The team will reach South Africa on September 9 to play three T20Is and as many ODIs.

SQUAD

Salma Khatun, Rumana Ahmed, Lata Mondol, Ayasha Rahman, Jahanara Alam, Fargana Hoque Pinky, Khadiza Tul Kubra, Panna Ghosh, Nuzhat Tasnia, Sultana Yesmin Boishakhi, Lily Rani Biswas, Ritu Moni, Fahima Khatun, Shahnaz Parvin, Shathira Jakir Jesy, Shohaly Akhtar, Tazia Akter, Saira Sharmin, Sharmin Akter Supta and Tithi Rani Sarkar.

Eng-Aus 1st
ODI today

REUTERS, London

England are out to avoid a repeat of previous post-Ashes slumps when they play Australia in a best of five one-day international series starting on Friday at Headingley, captain Eoin Morgan said.

The hosts have won six of their last nine home one-day series and crushed the Australians 4-0 last year but they lost the last two post-Ashes series, in 2009 and 2010-11.

England comfortably beat Ireland in a warm-up match on Tuesday with Morgan scoring an unbeaten century against the country of his birth.

"We've talked about it in previous series before and this series is no different, we need to turn up, produce our skills, at crucial times we need to stand up and be counted," he told reporters on Thursday.

"I think everybody is aware of the responsibility that's on their shoulders and what is expected."

England rested Alastair Cook, James Anderson, Ian Bell, Stuart Broad and Graeme Swann following the 3-0 Ashes win, but batsman Kevin Pietersen has been selected despite recent knee problems.



PHOTO: AFP

World number two Spaniard Rafael Nadal makes a forehand return against compatriot Tommy Robredo at the US Open in Flushing Meadows on Wednesday.

Skipper happy with intensity

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna



Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim expressed his satisfaction with the way the three-day practice match was played between Bangladesh Red Team and Bangladesh Green Team at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna.

Both captain and coach Shane Jurgensen praised the efforts of Abdur Razzak -- who took nine wickets -- and Marshal Ayub, who struck 156 runs in the match which ended in a stalemate yesterday, the third and final day, with Soumya Sarker hitting a hundred (115 runs).

Mushfiqur also saw the return of pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza as a positive sign for his team ahead of the home

series against New Zealand, who will arrive in Dhaka on October 2 to play two Tests, three ODIs and a T20 International.

"We played the match divided into two groups but encouragingly we played the match with great intensity. There was no shortage of competitiveness in the match, which was really fantastic," said Mushfiqur after the end of the match yesterday, adding that they had achieved eighty per cent of their target for the match.

"We know how good Razzak Bhai is in the one-day format but he also showed his character in this longer-version game, which is a really encouraging sign for us as we need a bowler in the longer-version game who can contain the batsmen from one end. Marshal Ayub also played brilliantly. The return of Mashrafe Bhai was encouraging. But we still have lot of work to do," he added.

Victoria the odd one out

REUTERS, New York



Victoria Azarenka struck a blow for the younger generation by beating Daniela Hantuchova of Slovakia 6-2, 6-3 to join a trio of 31-year-olds in the semifinals of the US Open on Wednesday.

The 24-year-old Belarusian, the second seed and runner-up last year, will play unseeded Italian Flavia Pennetta, while defending champion Serena Williams meets Li Na of China in Friday's semifinals.

Pennetta reached her first Grand Slam semifinal by beating longtime friend and Fed Cup teammate Roberta Vinci, the 10th-seeded 30-year-old, 6-4, 6-1.

On the men's side second seed Rafael Nadal continued his remarkable 2013 form,

improving his hardcourt record to 20-0 with a 6-0, 6-2, 6-2 hammering of fellow Spaniard Tommy Robredo.

Next up for Nadal is France's Richard Gasquet, who will be playing in the semifinal stage of a Slam for the first time since Wimbledon in 2007.

Eighth-seeded Gasquet booked his long awaited return to the last four of a men's Slam with a 6-3, 6-1, 4-6, 2-6, 6-3 upset of fourth seed David Ferrer of Spain.

It was the second successive five-setter for the 27-year-old Gasquet, who clinched the concluding set of a marathon fourth-round match against big-serving Canadian Milos Raonic 7-5.

Gasquet had lost eight of nine previous matches against Ferrer. The hill could be even steeper against Nadal, who has won all 10 of their professional encounters.