

SPORT

Time to mend bridges

SPORTS REPORTER

It seems that a formal letter might break the ice. But the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is apparently not ready to come forward to mend the strained relationship with their Pakistan counterparts.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had sought a formal written communication from the BCB before considering the release of its players for the upcoming Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League.

The relationship between the two boards was a very friendly and cordial one until Bangladesh cancelled the proposed tour to Pakistan in December 2012. There were genuine reasons for not touring Pakistan as security was a real and ever-present concern.

The PCB, who was desperate to reintroduce international cricket to their country, had however reacted aggressively to the cancellation, saying that they will reconsider bilateral ties with Bangladesh as they were not ready to sacrifice their interests for those who did not honour promises.

Fingers were pointed at the then BCB president AHM Mustafa Kamal, who reportedly made a promise to his Pakistan counterparts to tour mainly, it was alleged by the PCB, to gain backing for the ICC vice-president's post.

The immediate fallout from the episode was that the PCB denied their players the no-objection certificate (NOC) necessary for them to take part in the second edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

The last-minute decision had under-

standably angered the BCB as the Pakistani players were an essential part of the tournament and its appeal. The BCB, under the leadership of new president Nazmul Hassan Papon, however had the courage to go ahead with the BPL even with the non-participation of Pakistani cricketers.

These events transpired as a chain reaction of factors not within cricket's reach, and now there is no benefit for the BCB to be stubborn or hold grudges, especially if it hinders the progress of the country's cricket. Bangladesh must look at the broader picture when they think about their relationship with Pakistan.

The assistance Pakistan have provided in the development of cricket is twofold. Firstly, their players have long been a part of domestic tournaments in Bangladesh, which has given local cricketers the opportunity to grow by playing alongside more experienced and international-standard cricketers. As importantly, the PCB have always been a voice of support for Bangladesh when it comes to international cricketing matters and have been generous both in responding to tour invitations and, unlike India, inviting Bangladesh for series.

Nowadays Bangladesh's chances of playing against top-ranked sides have become limited, so it would be unwise to lose a regular source of such opportunities. When a chance has come the BCB's way to revive a once-strong relationship, they must capitalise on it.

And it can open the window. But for that the BCB needs to employ some much-needed diplomatic nous and overlook past grudges.



Younis Khan (C), who hit a double hundred, and Saeed Ajmal (R), who finished with a match haul of 11 wickets, have every reason to smile after leading Pakistan to an emphatic 221-run victory over Zimbabwe on the fifth and final day of the first Test in Harare yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Tamim to lead Brothers

SPORTS REPORTER

Opener Tamim Iqbal will be leading Brothers Union Limited in this year's Dhaka Premier League. All-rounder Sohrawardi Shuvo has been named his deputy.

The club, which also includes former national players Alok Kapali and Nafees Iqbal, had its first official meeting with all the players yesterday.

Speaking to reporters Tamim said that he was hopeful of making a good start to the league on September 10 when Brothers take on Prime Bank Cricket Club in their first match at Rajshahi.

"The players will give a 100 per cent on the field, there's no doubt about that. But luck is also a factor. There are times when a club loses a match despite having star players. Whatever the case, we will give it our best shot on the field," said Tamim.

The left-hander, who played for Victoria last year, stated that he had begun his career with Brothers and that he was happy to be playing for them again.

"What many people may not know is that I started by playing for Chittagong's Brothers Union. So I have had no problems adjusting to the club," said Tamim.

"When I came to know that Brothers had bought me, I talked to Nasir uncle (AJM Nasir, Brothers official). He even gave me the freedom to select the foreign players for the clubs," he added.

On that note Tamim stated that he had contacted India's Yuvraj Singh to play for Brothers this year. Yuvraj however, despite reportedly having shown interest, will not be featuring in the league due to difficulties in obtaining a no-objection certificate from the Indian cricket board.

The Bangladeshi opener, who had openly criticised the newly-styled player transfer system in which the clubs had to depend on a lottery-based, rotational system to acquire players, reiterated his stance.

"I hope that the old transfer system is reinstated from next season. It's good for us because the players can choose whichever club they want," said Tamim.

Hosts' time to go one better

SPORTS REPORTER from Kathmandu

Hosts Nepal will look for their maiden final berth in the SAFF Championship when they take on Afghanistan in the first semifinal at the Dasarath Stadium in Kathmandu today.

This will be a rematch of the last edition's semifinal where the Afghans won through a 101st minute goal from the then captain Belal Arezou. This time though, Nepal are being considered the favourites as they are playing in front of their home crowd and have been in sparkling form. The Gorkhalis topped Group A with seven points, having beaten Bangladesh and India and drawing against Pakistan, Afghanistan, the beaten finalists of last edition, too have bagged seven points, with wins against minnows Bhutan and Sri Lanka, but had to settle for the second position in Group B due to an inferior goal difference to Maldives, who held them to a 0-0 draw.

The match will start at 6:45pm Bangladesh time.

Pakistan zap Zimbabwe

AFP, Harare

Pakistan took nine wickets in an extended morning session to beat Zimbabwe by 221 runs on the fifth day of the first Test at the Harare Sports Club on Saturday.

Zimbabwe, set an unlikely 342 to win, were bowled out for 120.

Left-arm fast bowler Junaid Khan made the initial breakthrough, taking two wickets in his first eight balls of the day after Zimbabwe resumed at 13 for one.

Then spinners Abdur Rehman and Saeed Ajmal took over, finishing with four wickets apiece.

Left-arm Rehman, who followed up Junaid's opening burst by taking the next three wickets, took four for 36, while Ajmal wrapped up the tail to take four for 23.

Off-spinner Ajmal finished with match figures of 11 for 118, the fourth time he had taken 10 or more wickets in a match.

Zimbabwe were in trouble from the sixth ball of the day when captain Hamilton Masakadza gloved a short delivery from Junaid to gully.

Overnight batsman Vusi Sibanda was out lbw in Junaid's next over to reduce the home side to 19 for three.

Sikandar Raza and Malcolm Waller, who shared a century partnership in the first innings, provided some resistance with a fourth wicket stand of 30 before Waller swept left-arm spinner Rehman to backward square leg where the tall Rahat Ali stretched skywards to hold a catch.

Raza was dropped by wicketkeeper Adnan Akmal off Rahat when he was on 17 but made only seven more runs before he was caught at short leg off Rehman.

SCOREBOARD				
Pakistan: First innings 249; Zimbabwe: First innings 327;				
Pakistan: Second innings 419-9 dec				
Zimbabwe: Second innings (overnight 13-1)				
Mawoyo lbw b Ajmal	2			
Sibanda lbw b Junaid	6			
Masakadza c Azhar b Junaid	1			
Raza c Azhar b Rehman	24			
Waller c Rahat b Rehman	17			
Chigumbura c Hafeez b Rehman	28			
Mutumbami not out	16			
Utseya b Ajmal	0			
S Masakadza lbw b Ajmal	0			
Panyangara lbw b Rehman	6			
Chatara lbw b Ajmal	13			
Extras: (b-1, lb-5, nb-1)	7			
Total: (All out in 46.4 overs)	120			
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-14, 3-19, 4-49, 5-58, 6-89, 7-90, 8-90, 9-101				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Junaid Khan	10	3	20	2
Rahat Ali	7	1	35	0
Saeed Ajmal	16.4	5	23	4
Abdur Rehman	13	5	36	4
Result: Pakistan won by 221 runs.				
Player-of-the-match: Younis Khan				



Tamim Iqbal (L) receives a Brothers Union shirt from its cricket committee chairman AJM Nasir during a presentation ceremony at the club's Gopibagh tent yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Nepal stride where Bangladesh stumble

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu

For the second consecutive time, Nepal have made it to the semifinals of the SAFF Championship. Today they play against Afghanistan, and have a great chance of advancing, considering the performance they have put in so far in the tournament. For a country which struggled to get past the group stages on seven occasions in the ten editions of the tournament so far, this is notable progress.

For Bangladesh though, who once used to make the last four on a regular basis, things have gone in the opposite direction. The 2003 champions and two-time runners-up have finished seventh out of eight teams in the latest two editions.

What is making the difference? There may be a number of reasons for this progress, but at its heart is the proper use of limited resources where Nepal is making the strides and Bangladesh are falling behind.

Bangladesh have not yet been able to set up a football academy thanks to the red-tape that is prevalent in the culture, despite getting FIFA assistance more than a year ago. Nepal, on the other hand, started the good work 16 years ago. Now they have five of those academies, four of which have been financed by the FIFA and run by the All Nepal Football Association (ANFA). Six of the current national team players, including striking duo Anil Gurung and Bharat Khawas, are products of these academies.

"The academies are one of the most conducive factors to football's development in Nepal," said Prajwal Oli, a senior sports correspondent of Republica, the third-most circulated English daily in Nepal. "Some of the best players of the national team have come from the academies."

The club structure in Nepal too is strikingly different from that of Bangladesh. Here,

most of the clubs, apart from the three force teams which are under the government's patronage, are owned by the ANFA officials, most of whom come from a football background. They're not businessmen themselves but they ensure sponsorship from corporate houses. In Bangladesh, most of the clubs are owned by either businessmen or ones with political clout, whose main aim is to win the title by any means and thereby increase their clout and prestige which often gives rise to collusion and match-fixing.

"Our football suffered from match-fixing too. But it has been curbed, if not eradicated, quite some time ago," said Oli.

The national team players, salaried by the ANFA, do not get a very big amount but enough at least to ensure that players do not have to worry about a regular stream of income.

"Bharat Khawas is a second lieutenant now and he will be promoted to captain soon. So he gets paid from the army and also gets 13 months' salary (12 months plus one month bonus) from the ANFA, which makes his living much easier," Oli related.

The ANFA is all about Ganesh Thapa, the celebrated former footballer and long-serving president, who is moving towards his sixth tenure. The AFC vice-president has his critics for his autocratic way of politicking football, but he has his admirers too for the good work he has done for Nepalese football.

"He (Ganesh Thapa) is a controversial figure alright, but a charismatic one as well. He is responsible for lifting Nepalese football by luring the sponsors, minimising the factions and lifting the payment structure of the players," says Oli.

The AFC vice-president has used his clout to woo FIFA for the academies and the SAFF and AFC to organise international tournaments in Nepal on a regular basis, which has helped sustain the popularity of the game. That is perhaps the main driving force behind the game's development.



WHERE ONCE WE RULED: A barely recognisable six-time Grand Slam winner Boris Becker (L) talks to three-time Slam champion Virginia Wade as they look upon the scene of past glories during the US Open semifinal between Serena Williams and Li Na in New York on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

It's Venus v Victoria again

REUTERS, New York



Defending champion Serena Williams slugged her way to a US Open title rematch against Victoria Azarenka as the top two seeds scored straight-sets knockouts in their semifinals on Friday.

World number one Williams thrashed a rattled Li Na 6-0 6-3, overcoming some staunch resistance at the end, while Azarenka returned to the Flushing Meadows final with a 6-4 6-2 win over unseeded Italian Flavia Pennetta.

"Just to be able to defend a title for once would be really awesome," said French Open winner Williams, who will get her chance on Sunday after failing to go back-to-back following her 1999, 2002 and 2008 titles in New York.

Although overpowered in the opening set, Li battled valiantly in the second, saving six match points to

hold serve before the top seed finally closed the deal on a seventh with an unreturned serve.

"It was a good match. It was tough at the end," Williams said. "I got a little nervous but I was able to close it out."

Former French Open champion Li, China's first semifinalist at the US Open, admitted that she experienced a bout of nerves when she hit the Arthur Ashe Stadium court.

Williams and Azarenka's final will be the first back-to-back title clash at the US Open since Serena and her older sister Venus battled for the crown in 2002.

Belarusian Azarenka trails 12-3 head-to-head against Williams, but has won two of their last three matches, hardcourt finals in Doha and Cincinnati.

"When you play against Serena, you have to play your best," said Azarenka. "She makes me play my best."

Williams is bidding for a fifth US Open title and her 17th in grand slams.

At 31, she would become the oldest women's winner at Flushing Meadows since tennis turned professional in 1968, supplanting Australia's Margaret Court who won in 1973.

Australian Open champion Azarenka booked her return to the championship match by finally finding a way to hold serve in a contest littered with 13 service breaks.

In the end, Azarenka's power was too much for the battling Pennetta, who returned from a serious wrist injury to reach her first grand slam semifinal.

There were five service breaks in a row before Azarenka held to win the first set after her unseeded 31-year-old opponent saved five set points.

The second set followed a similar pattern, with three broken serves before Azarenka turned up the power.

After holding serve to lead 3-1, Azarenka broke Pennetta yet again and squealed with delight after closing out the 94-minute match with a well-placed forehand.

Kubra returns

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board announced a 15-member women's squad for the tour of South Africa this month. The side has seen four changes from the outfit that toured India earlier this year.

Spinner Khadija Tul Kubra, who had missed the India tour in order to sit for her exams has returned. Shathira Jakir, who had a good run in the women's club cup returned to the national side after a long hiatus.

The squad is scheduled to leave Dhaka on Monday morning to play three ODIs and three T20Is against South Africa.

SQUAD
Salma Khatun (Captain), Fargana Hoque, Lata Mondol, Ayasha Rahman, Jahannara Alam, Rumana Ahmed, Khadiza Tul Kubra, Panna Ghosh, Nuzhat Tasnim, Sultana Yesmin, Lily Rani Biswas, Ritu Moni, Fahima Khatun, Saila Sharmin, Shathira Jakir Jesy.

BKUP aim to set sport right

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Krira Unnoyon Parishad (BKUP) will work towards the development of the country's sports and the eradication of all corruption and anomalies from sport, said speakers at the introductory meeting of the newly-formed BKUP at a city hotel yesterday.