

ASIAD HOCKEY  
Bangladesh  
in Pool A  
SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been placed in Pool A along with hosts South Korea, last edition's runners-up Malaysia, Japan and Singapore in the 17th Asian Games hockey competition in the 10-team draw ceremony on Wednesday.

The Pool B consists of hosts Pakistan, India, China, Oman and Sri Lanka.

Last time Bangladesh finished eighth ahead of Singapore and Hong Kong after losing to Oman 5-6 in the place-deciding match.

However, this time Bangladesh are aiming to improve their position.

"Our target is to do better than the last time that is to finish fifth or sixth," said Bangladesh's Pakistani coach Naveed Alam.

"The teams that we have in our pool, except Singapore, are above us in world rankings. If we beat Singapore and manage to beat either Japan or Malaysia, it is possible to achieve our target."

"With the preparation that we have had over the last two and a half months, I'm hopeful that we can do something good," said Naveed.

All not bleak after  
Grenada heartbreak

BISHWAJIT ROY



Those who sat bleary-eyed in front of their television sets till the early hours of Thursday were rewarded with heartbreak as once again victory eluded the Tigers even though they were very close to breaking the jinx of a winless 2014.

It is only natural that fans will despair over a defeat seemingly snatched from the jaws of victory, especially as there have been many such reversals so far this year.

But unlike those occasions, the Tigers should not be castigated for Wednesday's three-wicket loss in Grenada. However, familiar grumbles about Mushfiqur Rahim's intransigent captaincy will be fueled, especially his obstinate obsession with saving his best bowlers' overs for the death even when the game may not reach that far. That was the case during the first ODI and has been for a while now.

The result could have been different with a different team combination. One may ask whether the visiting think-tank was able to read the conditions properly and whether three spinners would have been the right choice on a slow, turning wicket. And Mominul Haque is a better option than Shamsur Rahman not only in the middle order, but also as a useful part-time bowler.

But it would be churlish to take anything away from the masterly hands played by Kieron Pollard and Denesh Ramdin.

*Mushfiqur Rahim's men went to the Caribbean to regain their confidence and while they showed nothing extraordinary in their first match they have done a decent job, most pleasingly keeping up their disciplines for a majority of the match.*

Struggling at 34 for five, Ramdin did what he does best in this situation and Pollard was simply stupendous as the right-hander was at his hard-hitting best and held his nerve to guide his team out of danger.

But praise for opponents will not suffice for Bangladesh. Before attempting a postmortem of the defeat we must give some credit, even in defeat, to the Bangladesh team for their effort in the match.

With the backdrop of one defeat after another this year, Mushfiqur Rahim's men went to the Caribbean to regain their confidence and while they showed nothing extraordinary in their first match they have done a decent job, most pleasingly keeping up their disciplines for a majority

of the match.

They lacked fireworks in their batting to finish a few runs short is a competitive total but there was no empty bravado in their batting; in complete contrast to their approach earlier in the year.

The bowling missed the variety and bite at crucial moments but no one would say it was undisciplined. It was frustrating not to win the match after destroying the top order so early but the bowlers deserve applause for bringing the team back into contention defending a sub-par total of 217 runs.

One question was however in everybody's mind: Why was left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak left out when conditions looked likely to suit the slow bowlers, the team's strongest suit?

While no explanation has been forthcoming, the new coach Chandika Hathurusingha's methods so far hints that he may have started preparations for next year's World Cup in Australia-New Zealand in earnest. The pacier, bouncier pitches in that region will demand fielding three pacers. The Sri Lankan had earlier preferred to provide seaming-friendly pitches during last home series against India and may now be trying to give enough opportunities to his pace department.

While there is nothing wrong with that he will have to balance that view with the need to maintain morale by turning around the Tigers' 2014 nosedive.

Here the new coach will need to re-think his strategy and must take the advice of the people around him because his team desperately needs the winning-tonic to get back their confidence.

Spin or pace?  
Tigers' series at stake  
in today's 2nd ODI

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Will Bangladesh go with a three-man pace attack or add another spinner to the playing 11? That is the pertinent question ahead of the second of three ODIs against West Indies, starting at 7pm Bangladesh Standard Time at the National Cricket Stadium, St George's, Grenada.

Many felt the absence of a specialist slow bowler when Kieron Pollard and Denesh Ramdin staged a rescue act to give the hosts a three-wicket victory in the first game at the same venue. Leaving veteran left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak out of the first ODI seemed to be a poor decision considering the conditions, but selector and team manager Habibul Bashar said over phone yesterday evening that they were yet to settle upon a final 11.

"We have training sessions in the afternoon and after reviewing the conditions the team management will take the final decision about the 11. The match will take place at the same venue but on a different pitch," informed former national skipper Bashar.

Bashar however said that the team was in good shape despite the defeat and they got back their confidence by playing some decent cricket in the first game.

"The boys are disappointed as they were so close to winning the match but you have to give credit to Pollard and Ramdin for their brilliant effort to snatch the match away from us. The team is confident of putting in a better performance in the second game and we are hopeful," added Bashar.

Whether a pacer will be dropped or not depends solely on head coach Chandika Hathurusingha. And Mominul Haque is also unlikely to replace Shamsur Rahman in the second match, though many think that the former is a much better choice.

After the match, the Tigers will travel to St Kitts where they will play the third and final ODI on August 25, the only T20I on August 27 and a three-day practice match starting from August 30.

Proteas sweep  
series clean

REUTERS, Bulawayo

Opener Quinton de Kock smashed 84 as a weakened South Africa crushed Zimbabwe by seven wickets to complete a whitewash in their three-match ODI series at Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo on Thursday.

After putting their hosts in to bat, South Africa skittled Zimbabwe for 165 inside 40 overs before chasing down their target to end at 171 for three with 136 balls to spare.

The Proteas, who had already rested fast bowling trio Dale Steyn, Morne Morkel and Vernon Philander for this series, left out their top two batsmen as well for the final match as Hashim Amla and AB de Villiers sat out.

That meant debuts for opener Rilee Rossouw and seamer Mthokozisi Shezi, and a return to the side for fast bowler Marchant de Lange.

The latter was the pick of the bowlers with a return of three for 31 as his extreme pace had the Zimbabwe batsmen hopping around the crease.

Only Zimbabwe captain Elton Chigumbura offered any sort of resistance to the Proteas with 90 as he put on 46 for the 10th wicket with Tinashe Panyangara, before he was bowled by a slower ball from De Lange to deny him his century.

*Aamer Blind  
Love's hero*

AFP, Karachi

Pakistani fast bowler Mohammad Aamer is set to make his big-screen debut, he told AFP Thursday, as he struggles to make ends meet while serving a ban for spot-fixing.

Left-arm quick Aamer was rated one of the best young talents in world cricket until his fall from grace in the notorious Lord's Test against England in 2010.

Aamer, then 19, was hit with a five-year ban from cricket after he was caught in a tabloid newspaper sting along with captain Salman Butt and pace partner Mohammad Asif agreeing to bowl no balls to order.

"I have been offered the hero's role in a Pakistan film and I have decided to take this opportunity but once my ban is lifted my first priority will be cricket," Aamer told AFP.

The 22-year-old said he took the role in "Blind Love", offered by Pakistani director Faisal Bukhari, because he was hard up.

This time around Bangladesh's assistant

Booters against  
familiar foes

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Bangladesh face a familiar challenge in the 17th Asian Games football competition after they were drawn in Group B along with S A F F C h a m p i o n s Afghanistan yesterday.

In the four-team group Uzbekistan and Hong Kong are the other two opponents against whom the Bangladesh U-23 team will meet in the second successive Asian Games after the last edition in China in 2010.

Bangladesh's first game will be against Hong Kong, who won the last meeting 4-1, on September 15. Their next game is on September 18 against Uzbekistan, who won 3-0 in China four years ago. Bangladesh's last group league game against Afghanistan is on September 22.

Bangladesh have so far played 19 matches in the Asiad and won only two -- against Nepal in 1986 and Malaysia in 1982 -- but have never crossed the group stage hurdle.

This time around Bangladesh's assistant

Dutch coach Rene Koster, who will be in charge in the absence of his compatriot and coach Lodewijk de Kruif, sees a slim chance for his side to progress into the 16-team knock-out stage.

"If you want to know about Bangladesh's chance, then I will say every team has a chance to go to the second round. But the reality is that Bangladesh have 30 per cent chance to advance to the next level from a group where our opponents are very strong," Koster told reporters yesterday.

Koster said the boys are in good spirit. However, his immediate focus is to work on Uzbekistan and Hong Kong whom he knows little compared to Afghanistan.

Captain Mamunul Islam said he would love to return home with at least three points.

"The opponents are always strong in the Asian Games. But we will love to beat Afghanistan and be trying to push Hong Kong hard," said Maumul.

The 17th edition of the continental sporting extravaganza will start on September 19 in the South Korean city of Incheon. However, the football competition will commence from September 14.

Broad's  
knee op  
Sept 4

AFP, London

England pace bowler Stuart Broad will undergo knee surgery on September 4 as he targets full fitness in time for the 2015 World Cup.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) had already confirmed that the 28-year-old needed to go under the knife to cure a long-standing tendonitis problem.

"The ECB medical team confirmed that England pace bowler Stuart Broad is to have surgery on his right knee on Thursday 4 September," said an ECB statement.

"A rehabilitation and recovery programme will be determined following the operation."

Broad helped England to a 3-1 Test series win over India despite having suffered a broken nose in the innings and 54-run fourth Test victory.

Kabaddi has  
little hopes

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Bangladesh's hopes of winning medals in kabaddi event in the upcoming 17th Asian Games have been put on a rough road as both men's and women's teams have been placed in strong groups in the draw ceremony held in Incheon, South Korea yesterday.

Bangladesh men's team were pitted in Group A along with India, Pakistan and Thailand while the women's team were also placed in Group A along with India and hosts South Korea.

Before winning gold and silver medals in men's and women's cricket in the previous edition in 2010, Bangladesh earned three silver and two bronze medals in kabaddi by the men's team, who however failed to produce any medal in the Guangzhou Games while two bronze medals came from women's kabaddi and boxing respectively.

The hopes of the men's team winning a medal have almost evaporated yesterday, well before the start of the competition itself, after they were placed along with the likes of India and Pakistan. Bangladesh have never beaten India in the Games while they failed to overcome Pakistan since 2002. Bangladesh were also eliminated from the semi-finals of the 2010 SAFF Games in Dhaka after losing to Pakistan.

In women's kabaddi, holders India are tipped to retain their gold while it will be tough for the Bangladeshis to beat hosts South Korea to qualify for the last four though Bangladesh won bronze in the last edition after beating South Korea in the group stage match before being beaten by India in the semi-finals.

Wozniacki falls  
from New Haven

AFP, New Haven



Camila Giorgi sprang an upset to defeat four-time champion Caroline Wozniacki 6-4, 6-2 on Wednesday and reach the quarterfinals of the WTA

Connecticut Open, a final warm-up for the US Open.

The Italian saw off the former world number one in 78 minutes to book a last-eight date with Spain's Garbine Muguruza, who eliminated Chinese qualifier Peng Shuai 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 in another second-round match.

The unseeded Giorgi also ousted Wozniacki in last year's US Open, but lost their only other meeting this year at Eastbourne.

Wozniacki, whose best Grand Slam showing was a 2009 US Open runner-up effort, won the title at New Haven from 2008 to 2011, but saw her record at the Yale University event dip to 24-3.

The 24-year-old Dane's only prior losses since Wimbledon came in three-set battles with world number one Serena Williams in Montreal and Cincinnati.

"I knew I was going to get limited break chances and when I did get them, I didn't convert," Wozniacki said. "I knew I had to be aggressive out there and try to push her

back, but I didn't manage to do that. She played well and I didn't."

The defeat does allow Wozniacki a few extra days to prepare for the year's final Grand Slam, which starts on Monday.

"I would have loved to have been here longer, but it wasn't to be this year," Wozniacki said. "Now I just need to take the positives out of it. I get a few extra days to rest up and practice for the US Open."

Wimbledon finalist Eugenie Bouchard also failed to make it to the quarterfinals.

Australian veteran Samantha Stosur briskly ousted the third-seeded Canadian 6-2, 6-2.

Stosur next faces Belgian Kirsten Flipkens, who beat Germany's Andrea Petkovic 4-6, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (8/6).

Thursday's other two quarterfinals were already set. Slovakian Magdalena Rybarikova, who ousted top-seeded Simona Halep, will take on American Alison Riske, and second-seeded Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova will face fellow Czech Barbora Zahlavova Strycova.

Rybarikova sent top-seeded Simona Halep crashing out in one of two second round upsets on Tuesday at the final US Open tune-up.

Halep, the reigning champ, had her serve broken six times and Rybarikova saved 10 of 14 break opportunities en route to a 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 victory.



South Africa opener Quinton de Kock follows the path of the ball after hoisting it over long-on during the third and final one-day international against Zimbabwe at the Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP