

Ratna leads shooting debacle

SPORTS REPORTER from Incheon

The seven-month long intensive training for the Bangladesh shooters under a South Korean coach has seemingly yielded no rewards as the female shooters produced frustrating performance in the 10m Air Rifle event of the Asian Games at the Ongnyeon International Shooting Range yesterday. Though not pronounced, there was some hope centring the top female shooter of Bangladesh, Sharmin Akter Ratna, due to her success in the South Asian Games and Commonwealth Shooting Championship and especially after she made it to the eight-shooter final round of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games earlier this year.

But Ratna was most disappointing in her pet event of 10m Air Rifle where she finished 37th out of 53 shooters and third among three Bangladeshi shooters with a score of 407 points, 6.8 points less than her Commonwealth Games mark.

Ratna got off to a good start as she stayed among top five initially but failed to continue that in the middle to score less than 10 and seemingly gave up her hope. Afterwards, she produced some fantastic scores in the last ten shots, one of which was maximum 10.9, but that was not enough to compensate for the damage in the middle.

Islamabad SA Games gold medalist Sharmin Akter finished 31st with a score of 409.2 points while Sadia Sultna became 34th with a score of 408.8 points.

Now all hopes of Bangladesh lie with male shooters, who will take part in the 10 Air Rifle event today at the same venue.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN
Bangladesh's Yeamin Munna (L) and Mamunul Islam (3rd from L) try to tackle a Hong Kong attacker during their Asian Games group match at the Hwaseong Stadium in Incheon on Monday.

'We should have won'

ANISUR RAHMAN from Incheon



Syrian referee H a s o u d Tufayelieh's long whistle at the end of 90 minutes at the Hwaseong Main Stadium brought most of the Bangladesh players down on the greenish pitch. Along with the match, the shrill sound brought an end to their dream playing the round of 16 in the Asian Games for the first time, despite having put up a fighting performance against Hong Kong.

Captain Mamunul Islam, defender Rayhan Hasan and goalkeeper Rasel Mahmud Liton burst into tears while the players at the sideline looked far more dejected.

"The way we started, we thought we would come out with a victory. But we lost a match which we should

have won. Keep the history away... I am really feeling bad for not winning this match," said Zahid Hossain.

Zahid was inspired by coach Lodewijk de Kruijf, who told him that Bangladesh would play a very good game if he performed well.

A tearful Rayhan could barely speak. "We played better as we created a lot of chances but we could not win the game at the end. Players like Jamal[Bhuiyan] and Hemanta [Vincent Bishwas] could not score from close range; shots they don't miss during practice," lamented Rayhan.

Despite the defeat Rayhan was of the opinion that their fighting performance would encourage the national team to put up good performances in the future.

A seemingly disappointed Bangladesh coach, believed that Bangladesh were heading in the right direction despite the defeat.

"I am really sorry for my boys. When you play like this, you deserve a reward but the boys did not get it," said De Kruijf adding that he was disappointed to lose despite dominating the game throughout the 90 minutes.

"After analysing the game I had to say to the assistant coach that the difference should have been 70/30. We tried to attack whenever we could, but when you attack you are likely to be vulnerable and they scored from two corner kicks," explained the 44-year Dutchman.

"Of course, I feel the absence of someone who can score goals easily. When you play like this, you need a reward. If we win games like this, we will keep moving ahead. We feel the absence of a real killer. The problem is that there is only one senior player, Zahid Hossain Emily who regularly plays, and he was injured and could not come," said De Kruijf.

Abahani, Brothers held

SPORTS REPORTER

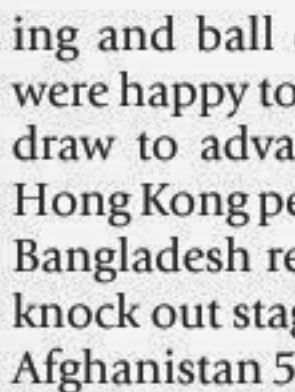
Abahani and Brothers Union dropped points after drawing their respective matches of the Airtel Under-18 Football Tournament at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Brothers Union were held to a 1-1 draw by Uttar Baridhara. After a barren first half, Dipta scored for Brothers Union in the 66th minute while Harun restored parity in the 76th minute.

In the second match, Abahani played out a goalless draw against Feni Soccer Club.

Shattered dreams

ANISUR RAHMAN from Incheon



Bangladesh's dream of qualifying for the second round of the Asian Games were shattered as they suffered a 2-1 defeat against Hong Kong in their last group match at the Hwaseong Stadium in Incheon yesterday. The charges of Lodewijk de Kruijf dominated proceedings from the beginning with crisp passing and ball control against a higher-ranked Hong Kong, who were happy to sit back and hit on the counter as they needed just a draw to advance into the knockout stage. That strategy suited Hong Kong perfectly as they scored twice in the second half before Bangladesh reduced the arrears. The win took Hong Kong to the knock out stage along with champions Uzbekistan who thrashed Afghanistan 5-0 in the other match of Group B.

On the other hand, Bangladesh, despite playing admirably well, were left to rue the missed chances by the forwards and a missed opportunity to seal the second-round qualification.

With Zahid Hossain drafted in for a start at the right and Tapu Barman playing as the wing-back, Bangladesh created some brilliant moves down the flank from the beginning, which unsettled the Hong Kong defence. But forward Wahed Ahmed and attacking midfielder Jamal Bhuiya were in such dreadful form in front of goal that those opportunities were completely wasted.

The first attack came in the seventh minute when captain Mamunul Islam tried his luck from 25 yards out, but his powerful left-footed shot went inches wide of the target before Wahed failed to connect to a dangerous cross from Tapu in the 17th minute.

Hong Kong almost found the target on a quick counter attack as Lam Hok Hei's header went perilously close to the goal-line, where midfielder Sohel Rana rushed in to scramble clear the danger. Bangladesh went all out for the lead in the second half and had at one stage pegged all the Hong Kong players back in their own half. A glorious opportunity came knocking for Jamal in the 47th minute but the Denmark-based midfielder failed to tap in a deflected cross from Tapu.

Hong Kong grew in stature and forged a quick counter attack from the left wing in the 51st minute where Lam Hok Hei's effort was parried off away for a corner by Bangladesh goalkeeper Rasel Mahmud Liton. The resulting corner was headed in by Hong Kong's Nigerian-neutralised striker Christian Kwesi Annan, who was left unmarked in the danger zone.

Trailing by a goal, Bangladesh pressed hard for the equaliser, but Jamal and Hemanta Vincent Bishwas incredibly failed to find the target from point blank range.

Liton did his best to foil another effort from Annan while Wahed, at the other end, failed to connect to a cross from Zahid in the 67th minute.

The missed chances made Bangladesh pay dearly as Hong Kong doubled their lead from another counter attack in the 73rd minute. The initial effort was parried away for a corner by Liton, who however could not stop the resulting header from Hok Hei Lam.

Aminur Rahman Sajib came off the bench to replace the misfiring Wahed and reduced the arrears four minutes later with a tap-in after a 35-yard stunner by Zahid was parried to his path by Hong Kong goalkeeper Hung Fai Yapp.

With Bangladesh pressing for the equaliser, Hong Kong produced two counter attacks but Liton stood firm under the bar, only to keep the margin of defeat to a minimum.



PHOTO: AFP
China's world record-breaking shooters (L-R) Zhang Binbin, Yi Siling and Wu Liuxi show off their gold medals on the podium after their feat in the Asian Games in Incheon on Monday.

China shoots to world record after drama

AFP, Incheon



China's women set a world record in the Asian Games' 10m air rifle team event Monday after one of their shooters was disqualified but then reinstated following a heated appeal.

Yi Siling, Wu Liuxi and Zhang Binbin combined to score 1,253.8 points -- just 0.1 points ahead of the previous mark of 1,253.7, also set by China, at the Asian Shooting Championships in Tehran last year.

But China nearly missed out on both the gold medal and the world record when Zhang was disqualified for shooting with a heavier rifle during the qualification round.

She was eventually allowed to compete after judges upheld her team's vehement appeal, a lengthy process which delayed the individual final for 30 minutes.

A relieved Zhang then went on to win a bronze medal in the individual event, where Iranian teenager Najmeh Khedmati won gold ahead of her friend and teammate

Narjes Emamgholinejad.

"I was very sad when I was told I was disqualified, but my teammates and coaches backed me and said they would appeal," she told reporters. "I just needed to control my emotions going into the final."

Organisers declined to reveal reasons for the U-turn by the jury, but one shooting official said the disqualification may have been due to a technical error.

"I am just guessing, but it is possible the weight of the rifle had been wrongly calculated," the official, who did not want to be named, told AFP.

The reinstatement meant disappointment for Singapore, who were in the bronze medal position before the Chinese appeal was upheld but had to settle for fourth.

And the Iranian team, who had been declared winners prior to the appeal, had to settle for the silver with a score of 1,245.9. South Korea took the bronze with 1,241.6.

But Iran hit back with a one-two in the individual event as Khedmati, 18, beat a strong field including reigning world and Olympic champion Yi Siling, who finished fifth.

Bindra quitting pro career today

AFP, Incheon

India's lone individual Olympic gold medalist Abhinav Bindra plans to leave full-time shooting after competing in his favourite 10m air rifle event in the Asian Games on Tuesday.

"Tomorrow will mark the end of my professional shooting life!" Bindra, 31, tweeted on Monday, adding "I will however still shoot, compete as a hobby shooter training twice a week."

Bindra earned the honour of being "one in a billion" when he won the 10m air rifle title at the Beijing Games in 2008 to become India's first -- and so far only -- individual Olympic champion.

India has won eight other Olympic golds, but all of them in field hockey till 1980.

Despite giving up serious shooting, Bindra still hopes to qualify for the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

"And yes I will still try to be at Rio and my bio is now most appropriate! Great times and am sure there will be a few more!" he added.

Bindra, who won the gold medal at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow this year, failed to make the final at the World Championships in Spain this month.

Highest game 'hardest test'

AFP, Kilimanjaro



South African cricket legend Makhaya Ntini learned to play barefoot before being talent spotted and handed a pair of boots, and he knows about bowling on a bumpy pitch.

Now he says he faces his "hardest test:" playing the world's highest game of cricket near the summit of Kilimanjaro, Africa's tallest mountain at 5,895 metres (19,341 feet).

Once a herder in a rural area of the Eastern Cape, Ntini was the first black African to represent South Africa at cricket, making his debut in 1997.

"It is going to be like going back to the old days, playing a game in the dust in the rural areas, when you didn't care where you played because you were just crazy for the game," Ntini said, who played 101 Test matches and took 390 Test wickets.

"That will be the greatest of things," he said, speaking on the mountain, already high above the cloud level.

The 37-year-old fast bowler is part of an expedition of 30 players -- mainly amateurs and enthusiasts, but also some professional players, including English spin bowler Ashley Giles -- scaling the giant peak for the eccentric charity match.

Those facing the formidable bowler may be alarmed to hear that balls reportedly go far faster at higher

altitude. But Ntini laughs, saying his otherwise dangerous delivery may this time be a little slower.

"It won't be my usual bowling. We'll be playing in so many clothes with the cold, and then there are the heavy boots," Ntini told AFP, during the eight-day expedition up the flanks of Kilimanjaro.

"I'll be taking six paces and that'll be it, in the thin air. I wish I was 20 years old again, it is the hardest test!" he added.

Teams, who set off trekking early Saturday, aim to reach the peak at dawn on Friday.

They then aim to play a full Twenty20 in the crater of the dormant volcano, laying down a plastic track -- hauled up by Tanzanian porters -- for the wicket, and playing in freezing air, surrounded by vast blocks of ice.

Qualified umpires will ensure the game is played properly and eligible for the record.

- Inspiration for black players - While no technical climbing skills will be needed, playing a game at two-thirds the height of Everest will have considerable risks.

"It is a huge challenge, because each and every one of us will react differently to the altitude, we'll have to be careful," Ntini said.

"I want it to be an inspiration to others, to help other black players develop," said Ntini, who also played for India's Chennai Super Kings and England's Warwickshire.

Nafees hits 50 on rain-hit day

SPORTS REPORTER

Former national opener Shahriar Nafees scored a half-century on the first day of the second four-day match between Zimbabwe A and Bangladesh A at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah yesterday.

The continuous rainfall throughout the day meant that meant that only 21.2 overs of play was possible on day one. After being put into bat, the hosts finished on 88 for no loss. Nafees scored nine boundaries in his 58 while Sadman Islam scored 18 runs off 62 balls.

With the weather forecast predicting more rainfall in the coming days, the match is not expected to produce a result. However, with the hosts batting first it will be a good opportunity for the batsmen to hit form.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Bangladesh A: 88 for no loss in 21.2 overs (Nafees 58 not out, Sadman 18 not out)

Media Cup football starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Kool-BSJA Media Cup Six-a-Side Football Tournament, organised by Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA), will begin today at the BFF artificial turf in Motijheel.

Twenty-five teams from print and electronic media, split into eight groups, will take part on league basis matches. Later, the eight group champions will play in the quarterfinals.

Former captain of national team Aminul Haque and head of the marketing of the meet's sponsor Square Group Malik Mohammad Sayed were present at the day's ceremonial draw and jersey unveiling ceremony at the BOA auditorium yesterday.

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