

Maruf's ban reduced

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation yesterday reduced the suspension of celebrated coach Maruful Haque from one year to six months and waived the monetary fine of Tk 30,000 in response to an appeal he lodged on September 11. The decision was taken at a meeting of the appeal committee headed by Abdul Muyid Chowdhury.

The former Sheikh Russel coach was handed the suspension and monetary fine on August 23 for demanding the resignation of the entire professional league committee for allegedly favouring another club through rescheduling of matches in February this year. Despite his subsequent apology through a reply to a show-cause notice, the disciplinary committee came up with the hefty punishment, more than five months after the incident.

As Maruf was in UK attending a training course when the suspension was imposed, he made a delayed appeal, after his return on September 11.

Media Cup underway

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It was a starry start for The Daily Star in the Kool-BSJA Media Cup six-a-side football tournament that began at the BFF artificial turf field in Motijheel yesterday.

They recorded a 'facile' 1-0 win over Dainik Sangram with Abul Kalam Azad, a star cricketer and table tennis player, scoring the all important goal.

In the day's other matches, reigning champions RTV defeated New Age 2-0, Channel 24 were 2-0 winners over Dainik Bortoman, Dhaka Tribune routed Dainik Naya Diganta 4-0 and MyTV beat Gazi TV 1-0 while three matches ended in scoreless draws.

Afridi, Akmal penalised for poor fitness

CRICINFO, Lahore

Shahid Afridi, Umar Akmal, Abdur Rehman and Raza Hasan are the four big names among the Pakistan players found to be below their optimum level of fitness by the Pakistan Cricket Board. They will each have 25 per cent of their monthly retainer docked for four months, starting with August's fee. At the end of the four-month period, they can have their fitness reassessed.

The PCB had attached greater importance to fitness in its new contracts handed out to the players. The board had said this month that it was mulling handing out fines to players who failed to keep the fitness levels prescribed to them by the National Cricket Academy during a month-long camp in Lahore in May-June.

An assessment of 28 players' fitness was carried out between September 6 and 8, but three players had failed to report for that evaluation due to personal reasons. Among them was Afridi, but he has since had the assessment. Wahab Riaz and Nasir Jamshed are yet to do so and, in their cases, it will have to wait until they are back from Lahore Lions' Champions League T20 campaign in India.

Five players, meanwhile, were given bonuses for maintaining peak fitness. Shan Masood and Umar Amin will get a bonus of 17.5 percent every month for the first four-month period, while Misbahul Haq, Ahmed Shehzad and Bilawal Bhatti will get 10 per cent.



Bangladesh players celebrate their victory over Singapore in the Asian Games at the Seonhak Hockey Stadium in Incheon yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

A face-saving win

SPORTS REPORTER from Incheon



After two massive defeats against Japan and Malaysia, Bangladesh

hockey team got their first win of the Asian Games yesterday when they eked out a 2-1 win over Singapore in their Pool A encounter at the Seonhak Hockey Stadium in Incheon yesterday.

Pushkor Khisha Mimo and Khorshedur Rahman struck one goal apiece in the second quarter for 30th-ranked Bangladesh before Yi Ru Tan reduced the margin for Singapore in the fourth and final quarter.

The win over the 36th ranked side made sure Bangladesh will compete for the 7th/8th-place deciding match even though they still have a group phase match against hosts South Korea remaining.

Bangladesh got off to a shaky start as they took time to find their feet on the blue turf, but managed to keep Singapore at bay through the first quarter. Enjoying the lion's share of support, with a hundred students from a nearby girls' school chanting 'Bangladesh, Bangladesh, Mimo, Mimo', the players in Red and Green grew in confidence and built up a

few attacks which resulted in the two quick goals the second quarter.

The first goal came in the 22nd minute when Moinul Islam Koushik built up the attack from the left and threaded the ball to Krishna Kumar who set up unmarked Mimo for an easy strike from close range.

Three minutes later, Bangladesh earned a penalty stroke when Koushik was roughly challenged as he was about to pull the trigger from point-blank range. Khorshed converted the stroke to put clear daylight between the sides.

Bangladesh dominated the show thereafter and created a lot of chances including penalty corners but failed to extend their lead. The missed chances gave Bangladesh some nervous moments as Singapore, who had lost to Bangladesh twice by 2-0 margin this year, reduced the arrears in start of the fourth quarter.

"We had hoped to win the match by 5 or 6 goals and we created the chances too, but we will take the 2-1 win anyway," said Mimo, adding that support from stands inspired them to play well.

Mimo also said that they were not hoping for a win or a draw against South Korea in their next match rather they would be happy if they could keep the margin of defeat to within 5-2 or 6-2.

Baki breaks hearts too

ANISUR RAHMAN from Incheon



Shooter Abdullah Hel Baki failed

to carry his Commonwealth Games form into the Asian Games as the silver medalist of the Glasgow Games could only manage a 15th finish in the 10m air rifle event at the Ongnyeon International Shooting Range in Incheon yesterday. Eyeing medals in the Commonwealth and the Asian Games, the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) arranged a seven-month intensive training programme for the shooters under a Korean coach and Baki proved his worth by clinching the silver in Glasgow, but the shooter from Gazipur could not maintain his performance in the Incheon Games as he scored 619.6, point four (.4) less than his Commonwealth Games scores.

"I had a thought that if I could score 625 or 624 out of 654, I could move into the final round and I hit 626 to 627 in practice. You see the last qualifier has scored 622.3. But at this point, I am so very disappointed with my score as I should have qualified for the finals," rued Baki adding that he also did not expect such score.

At the range yesterday, Baki looked nervous and was inconsistent throughout the 60-shot qualification

round. He might have been under pressure as he carried all the expectation after the elimination of women shooters in the 10m air rifle and 10m air pistol events.

Baki's teammates Jesimuzzaman and Mahmudul Hasan put up worse scores of 613.8 and 606.5 respectively to finish 32nd and 45th among 53 participants in the event. Even with the collective points of the three shooters, Bangladesh finished 10th in the 10m air rifle team event among 15 nations.

"Actually I never feel pressure when I take position in the range. I always concentrate on my own game," said Baki.

Bangladesh's South Korean coach Lee Hang-Hyun also echoed the sentiment saying: "The Bangladeshi shooters improved on their concentration level as well as skills in practice, but they haven't improved enough on competition skills and they need more international games to improve on that.

However, outgoing coach Hang-Hyun believes Bangladesh have good potential at international level and they will have to increase the number of shooters from grassroots.

Chinese shooters Haoran Yang and Yifei CAO bagged gold and silver medals having scored 209.6 and 208.9 respectively while India's Abhinav Bindra won the bronze medal with a score of 187.1 in the finals.

BD A gain upper hand

SPORTS REPORTER



Pacer Shahadat Hossain along with young leg spinner Jubair Hossain Likhon put Bangladesh A on top against their Zimbabwean counterparts on the second day of the second and final four-day match at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Shahadat initiated the damage by taking the wickets of Tino Mawoyo and Regis Chakabva, while another pacer, Kamrul Islam, dismissed Vusumuzi Sibanda . 18-year old Likhon then took three more wickets as the visitors finished the day at 91 for 6, in reply to home side's first innings total of 258.

Resuming the day on 88 for no loss, the home side saw a middle order collapse after Shahriar Nafees and Sadman Islam contributed 155 runs in the opening stand as a

result of which they were bundled out for 258 runs at tea.

Captain and part-time gentle medium pacer Vusumuzi Sibanda triggered the collapse by taking five wickets. The Zimbabwe A team skipper started with the scalp of Nafees, who missed out on a century by three runs. Nafees hit 97 off 140 balls with 14 fours and a six while his opening partner Sadman was run out for 60 runs.

Bangladesh A lost the plot mainly because of the failures of Rokibul Hasan and Naeem Islam, both of whom returned with ducks.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH A: First innings 258 all out in 96 overs (Nafees 97, Sadman 60, Marshall 27; Masakadza 3-55, Sibanda 5-55) ZIMBABWE A: First Innings 91-6 in 24 overs (Vermeulen 31, Brian Chari 39; Shahadat 2-15, Kamrul 1-17, Likhon 3-40)

Cook stays ODI captain

INTERNET



Alastair Cook is set to be confirmed as England's prospective World Cup captain when the selectors announce their squad to travel first to Sri Lanka for seven one-day internationals. That tour, in November and December, will be England's last before they set foot in Australia to begin their 2015 World Cup preparations in earnest. Unusually in anticipation of a squad announcement, the name which has been the subject of most conjecture is the captain's.

Cook spent almost the entire home summer under pressure, initially as leader of the Test team and then in ODIs after England struggled against Sri Lanka and more so India.

Even before the India series began, Cook - who had answered his Test critics with a 3-1 win over the same opponents - was beset by pundits insisting he should not lead the team to the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand early next year.

His former team-mate and friend Graeme Swann, notably, claimed the England team in its current state - with Cook as captain - would not have a "cat in hell's chance" of winning the competition for the first time.

The captain's strike rate, at sub-80 pedestrian compared with some of his opposite numbers, was the main gripe - and by the end of the summer, his detractors could also point to the fact Cook had lost five successive ODI series.

The selectors, however, appear to have held their nerve and stood by their man in a meeting on Monday night - and Cook's World Cup hopefuls, give or take one or two, will be announced on Wednesday lunchtime.

He will have with him the two stalking-horse candidates suggested as possible alternative leaders, middle-order batsmen Joe Root and Eoin Morgan, and his new attacking foil at the top of the order, Alex Hales.

The latter did enough in England's 3-1 defeat against India to stay on at the top of the order, with the World Cup very much in mind.

Fifty-fifty chance for Atapattu

CRICINFO, Colombo

Marvan Atapattu is still in line to become Sri Lanka's head coach, as the search for the job moved to its final stages, amid controversy. The coach-selection committee selected Atapattu as one of its two final candidates, but the meeting that arrived at those decisions was not attended by chief selector Sanath Jayasuriya, who had resigned from his position in the committee late on Tuesday morning.

The board has not named the other remaining candidate, but the coach-selection committee will interview him on Tuesday afternoon, before making its final recommendation on Wednesday. That recommendation will then need to be ratified by the executive committee at their meeting on the same day, before the appointment is official. The committee had already interviewed Atapattu on Tuesday morning.

Jayasuriya's resignation had come as a surprise to most in the 11-member committee, and is a significant shift for the coach-selection process because Jayasuriya had been among those taking the lead in finding and interviewing candidates for the position. He had also been among the strongest voices and key decision-makers in the Sri Lanka setup since his appointment as selector in early 2013.



PHOTO: AFP

India's ace shooter Abhinav Bindra reacts after a shot during the men's 10m air rifle event at the Ongnyeon International Shooting Range in Incheon yesterday.

Bindra bids shooting bye

AFP, Incheon



India's lone individual Olympic gold medalist Abhinav Bindra ended his career as a full-time shooter on Tuesday by winning two bronze medals at the Asian Games, saying it was time

to take it easy.

Bindra finished third in the showpiece 10m air rifle event won by China's teenaged world champion Yang Haoran. China also picked up the silver through Cao Yifei.

The 31-year-old Bindra led teammates Ravi Kumar and Sanjeev Rajput to a bronze in the team event behind China and South Korea.

"I am very excited to win these two medals," Bindra told AFP after the victory ceremony. "To do well alongside such world-class shooters is always pleasing."

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 have won eight other Olympic golds,

Salma exudes confidence

SPORTS REPORTER from Incheon



Five days into the 17th Asian Games and none of Bangladesh's athletes have managed to inscribe their names in the medals tally. However, with the Bangladesh women's cricket team beginning their campaign by taking on Nepal in the quarterfinal at the newly built Yeonhui Cricket Ground

today, many are hoping for a change of fortunes.

Silver medalists in the last edition at Guangzhou, Captain Salma Khatun has said that she is hoping to go one step further this time.

"It is not right to take your opponents lightly because no one knows what will happen. But we hope we can win this match. After winning silver in the last edition there is a bit of pressure on us to win gold; but we won't let that bog us down. If we can play our natural game then we can beat any team in the Asian Games," said a confident Salma.

Salma however was a bit worried about the lack of knowledge regarding the pitch at Yeonhui.

"We have been practicing here since September 18 to adjust to the conditions but we still don't know what kind of a pitch we are going to play on," said Salma.

Bangladesh's Sri Lankan coach Champika Gamage is also hopeful about the progress of his charges.

"It will be really good if we can win the gold medal. I also want to see the team improve its ranking through this tournament," said Gamage.

The match will begin at 11am Bangladesh time today.

but all of them in field hockey till 1980.

Bindra stunned Indian fans on Monday when he announced that Tuesday's event would "mark the end of my professional shooting life."

He clarified that he had no plans to put down his rifle any time soon, but he would not compete in every domestic and international tournament.

"I have been shooting for the last 20 years -- there is nothing else I have done all these years -- and I know its time to rethink my future," Bindra said.

"Shooting will now be a hobby. Earlier I used to train five times a week, now I will probably pick up the gun once or twice a week."

Bindra said taking part in the Rio de Janeiro Olympics in 2016 was still on his mind.

"If I am good enough to shoot against the best, who knows I may even make it to the Olympics," he said. "Its not that I am giving it up absolutely."

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.