

Dulal rues driving errors

Mamat inches closer to title

SPORTS REPORTER

BASHUNDHARA BANGLADESH OPEN 2011 **ASIAN TOUR THE PLAYERS' TOUR**

Dulal Hossain sneaked into the driving range of the Kurmitola Golf Club, avoiding media attention, to hone in on his driving, which let him down in the penultimate round of the Bashundhara Bangladesh Open yesterday.

The 25-year-old golfer had an almost impeccable second round when he had fired an eight-under (63), the best round of this event so far, to take the joint fifth position. But his game was a mixed bag yesterday as he fired five birdies alongside two bogeys and two double-bogeys to take the joint seventh position at five-under (208), seven shots behind leader Mardan Mamat (12-under 201).

Dulal felt his putting was fine, but driving was what had gone awry. "My swing was not going properly today. Two of my tee-shots – the first on the par-four third hole and the second on the par-four 15th – had gone off the

fairway and under the trees, which eventually cost me two double bogeys," the South Asian Games gold medallist said after finishing his driving practice for about an hour.

"It's not all over yet. I will try to stay bogey-free tomorrow and hit five or six birdies, which is possible on this course as I'm feeling comfortable with the green. The rest will depend on luck and how the others fare," added Dulal.

But the way Mamat has played over the three days -- hitting six birdies on each day -- it looks unlikely that an experienced golfer of his stature will have an uncharacteristically bad day when it matters most. The Singaporean is confident as he had won tournaments while leading from the first day.

"When you come to a tournament and see your photo on the boards, it makes you feel well known. That gave me a bit of confidence," joked the four-time Asian Tour winner at the post-round press briefing.

"I've won three tournaments when I led from the first day. I feel I'm getting closer to another win and hopefully I can continue with the way I'm play-

SELECTED SCORES

1	Mardan Mamat (SIN)	-12 (201)
2	Khalin Joshi (IND)	-9 (204)
3	Soomin Lee (KOR)	-8 (205)
7	Dulal Hossain (BAN)	-5 (208)
17	Thaworn Wiratchant (THA)	-1 (212)
25	Shakhawat Sohel (BAN) par	(213)
48	Dil Mohammed A* (BAN)	+3 (216)
54	Nur Jamal (BAN)	+4 (217)
64	Sajib Ali (BAN)	+6 (219)

ing," added Mamat.

However, Mamat might face some completion from India's Khalin Joshi, who raced to the second position at nine-under (204) after a 65 yesterday. Soomin Lee of Korea, who also returned a card of 65, is a further stroke behind.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's best player Siddikur Rahman had yet another forgettable outing yesterday as he went birdieless while hitting four bogeys to drop to joint 64th position at six-over (219). Shakhawat Hossain Sohel was the best local performer with a 68, which lifted him up to joint 25th position at even-par (213).



Leader Mardan Mamat of Singapore tees off in the penultimate round of the Bashundhara Bangladesh Open yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bomb scare at FIFA congress

AFP, Zurich

The FIFA congress resumed on Friday after the all-clear was given following a bomb alert at the venue where world football's governing body will vote on whether to retain Sepp Blatter as president.

Zurich police spokeswoman Brigitte Vogt confirmed to AFP that a bomb alert had been received at Zurich's Hallen Stadium.

The bomb alert had been called in to a media outlet Friday morning against the FIFA event, Zurich police said in a statement.

Police and FIFA security searched the congress room, but the all-clear was soon given, confirmed FIFA's general secretary Jerome Valcke.

"An anonymous threat was received against FIFA and after an evaluation, the premises were searched and the all-clear has been given," said Valcke.

A thankless job

ATIQUÉ ANAM

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Jane Kaska's tee shot on the eighth hole yesterday escaped the sight of the ball boys who were supposed to indicate where the ball had landed. A rumour, that Kaska's caddie might have violated regulations while trying to locate it, followed. The caddie had a few nervous moments convincing the officials before the confusion was cleared and he was given a clean-chit.

But had it been otherwise, Kaska would have been penalised two strokes for a fault which was none of his making. And we can assume what might have happened to the caddie. That is how punishing is the job of a caddie despite the fact that they barely get paid enough to live a decent life, let alone having the peace of mind to concentrate fully on the game or develop understanding of the finer details of it.

Al Amin, who is working at the

Bashundhara Bangladesh Open as the caddie of Indian golfer Sanjay Kumar, says he wakes up at 4:00am in the morning and rushes to the Kurmitola Golf Club within half-an-hour as Kumar gets here by 5:30am to prepare warm-up for day's action.

Al Amin takes his breakfast -- most of the times bread, banana and an egg at the local caddie canteen -- before he starts his work by polishing the irons that Kumar would be using.

But polishing the clubs or carrying the club kit throughout the day or even keeping the card are the easiest and most routine parts of his job. The more demanding parts, though, are the expertise he can offer to the golfer. A caddie is expected to know the golf course like the back of his hand, better than the golfer who might be playing on that course for the first time, so that he can offer insight to the golfer on the wind, the slope or curvature of the course and the green-regulations, in case the golfer needs a second opinion.



And then there is the obvious chance of making mistakes due to human callousness or lack of complete understanding of the rules or the course.

Al Amin says he tries his best to communicate with Kumar -- and he has the advantage of knowing Hindi which is Kumar's first language -- but never tries to communicate more than necessary which might irritate the golfer. While Al Amin is

Mission treble on

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona can move another step closer to just the second treble in the club's storied 115-year history when they host Athletic Bilbao at the Camp Nou in the Copa del Rey final on Saturday.

It is the third meeting between the two sides in the final in the past seven years with Barca emerging victorious on their way to their first treble in 2009 and in Pep Guardiola's final match as Barca coach in 2012.

Saturday will also see the Camp Nou say goodbye to another club legend as Xavi Hernandez plays his final game on home soil before his farewell in the Champions League final against Juventus on June 6.

"We are very proud to have won La Liga and now comes the Cup final, which although it seems like a minor trophy, matters just as much to us as the Champions League final," said Barca defender Gerard Pique.

"It is another title in the club's museum and here at Barca we only know how to win."

Pique's return to his best form over the past six months has been key to Barca's run of 29 wins in 33 games that has left them on the brink of glory in all competitions this season.

Barca conceded just 21 goals in 38 La Liga matches and have improved markedly on set-

pieces under Luis Enrique this campaign.

However, he understands why his displays have been overshadowed by the stunning form of Lionel Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez, who have combined for 117 goals between them.

"When you win people always look to the strikers and when you lose to the defenders, goalkeeper and coach," added the Spanish international.

"This happens in all the big clubs and is normal. We have three of the best players in the world up front, they understand each other perfectly and are playing marvellously."

In contrast to Barca's treble chase, Athletic are searching for their first major trophy in 21 years since doing the league and Cup double in 1983/84.

The Basques have already suffered at the hands of Messi this season as he played a part in all five of Barca's goals in a 5-2 thrashing at San Mames in February.

However, Ernesto Valverde's men improved significantly from a disappointing first half of the campaign to ensure qualification for next season's Europa League and go into the final on an unbeaten seven-match run.

"Barcelona aren't invincible," insisted Athletic starlet Inaki Williams.

"We deserve a victory. We are going to give them a very hard game."

Anger at the inevitable

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As Joseph 'Sepp' Blatter won Fifa's presidential election and took his place for his fifth consecutive term in charge of football's governing body, the outcry was heard worldwide. Although challenger Prince Ali bin Hussein was never expected to win, there were prominent figures that were rooting for him who were left with a bad taste in their mouths after the Prince withdrew from the election after the first round.

British Prime Minister David Cameron had already lain into Blatter before the elections began, and England's Football Association chairman Greg Dyke said that he would be 'very surprised' if Blatter was still at the helm in two years time.

"To quote the Attorney General, this is the beginning of the process, not the end. The idea Blatter could reform FIFA is suspect. I'd be very surprised if he was still in this job in two years time," said Dyke, referring to the ongoing investigations by the United States Department of Justice into Fifa's corruption.

Luis Figo, a candidate himself before opting out of the race ahead of the Fifa congress, was fuming at the outcome.

"Mr. Blatter being re-elected, that shows exactly how sick the organization is," Figo wrote on his Facebook account.

"Today was another dark day in Zurich. FIFA has lost, but above everything, football has lost and everyone who truly cares about it has lost too."

Figo then said that he expects Blatter

to resign in the coming days 'if he has any dignity'.

Michel Platini, the head of UEFA, thanked his 'friend' Prince Ali, but said nothing about Blatter.

Gary Neville wrote a column calling on the players to take a stand against Blatter.

"There is one body of people that could bring Blatter down that has hardly warranted a mention - the players," Neville wrote.

"The quickest and best way to bring Blatter down is to take players away from him. The World Cup could not exist if Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi turned their backs on it because of the way Fifa is running the game. This would impact sponsors and broadcasters and bring this whole debacle of an organisation to a standstill."

Iniesta hails front three

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona midfielder Andres Iniesta has hailed the club's attacking trident of Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar as the best strike force he has ever played with.

Iniesta has won 22 trophies in a stellar career at Barca playing alongside the likes of Ronaldinho, Thierry Henry and Samuel Eto'o, but he believes the South American trio's return of 117 goals this season puts them on another level.

"I have had the chance to play with the best strikers in the world at this club. At the moment to have these three players is something incomparable," he said.

"For me all three are the number one, all three are still young and have spectacular potential."

Iniesta has the chance to add a 23rd title and a third Copa del Rey to his honours list when Barca face Athletic Bilbao in the Copa del Rey final on Saturday at the Camp Nou.

Victory would seal the second leg of a potential treble for Luis Enrique's men with the Champions League final against Juventus to come on June 6.

The Spanish international was part of the only previous Barca side to win the treble in the 2008/09 season and sees similarities between the two sides.

Wenger aims to silence critics

AFP, London

Arsene Wenger would love to silence his critics by making history when holders Arsenal take on Aston Villa in the FA Cup final on Saturday.

Wenger heads to Wembley on the cusp of an historic double achievement that would go some way to answering the doubters who claim he has lost his touch in recent years.

Frustrated by Arsenal's failure to win the Premier League since 2004 and their inability to make an impact in the Champions League, even some Gunners fans have turned on Wenger over the last two years.

Verbally abused at a railway station following defeat at Stoke and forced to endure the indignity of supporters holding banners calling for his sacking, the Arsenal manager has maintained a dignified stance in the face of extreme provocation this term.

But that isn't to say the jibes don't sting Wenger and, after a strong second half of the season saw Arsenal climb to a third place finish in the Premier League, the 65-year-old has an opportunity to further reassert his credentials by retaining the FA Cup.

A victory over Villa would make Wenger the first post-war manager to win the FA Cup six times, taking him ahead of Alex Ferguson and level with George Ramsay -- the only manager to have won six FA Cups, with his last coming in charge of Villa in 1920.

There would also be a significant slice of history for Wenger's club if they lift the famous old trophy as it would make them the most successful team in the history of the competition with 12 Cup-winning campaigns.

Wenger acknowledged the achievements would be well worth celebrating, but he was keen to keep the focus on ensuring his players don't waste the opportunity to claim only Arsenal's second piece of silverware in 10 years.

"It's not easy. I would love to do it but I'm not honestly focused on that," Wenger said.

"I'm more focused on the fact that we have fought so hard to get there. Now we want to finish the job."

"It's not easy to get to the FA Cup final and it's not easy to finish in the top three in England."

"We have been remarkably consistent since January and that's why I think we have a good chance next season."

CONCACAF dismisses Webb, Li

AFP, Miami

Embattled FIFA executive committee members Jeffrey Webb and Eduardo Li were "provisionally dismissed" Thursday by CONCACAF, football's governing body for North America, in the wake of corruption charges filed by US authorities.

The Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Football Association (CONCACAF) dropped Webb, its president and president of the Cayman Islands football association, and Li, an executive committee member and Costa Rica's football federation president, after they were among FIFA officials charged with racketeering, wire fraud and money laundering conspiracies on Wednesday.

CONCACAF's general secretary, Colombian-American sports executive Enrique Sanz, was also placed on an immediate leave of absence.

He is a vice president at Traffic Sports USA, whose president, Aaron Davidson, was among the sports marketing executives charged in the scandal.

CONCACAF also named executive committee vice president Alfredo Hawit, head of the Honduras football federation, to take over Webb's duties as president.



KZ Islam (4th from R), the man whose 7-year term in the BCB saw him as general secretary and president, launched his autobiography titled 'Cricketer Nirmaan' at the Olympic Bhaban Auditorium yesterday. Islam was responsible for a nationwide cricket tournament featuring many teams called 'Nirmaan School Cricket Tournament'. The autobiography features newspaper clippings, references and precious photos relating to Islam. CEO of Asian Cricket Council Syed Ashraf Haque was present as the chief guest. PHOTO: COURTESY