

The not so home course

SPORTS REPORTER

While four foreign golfers, including eventual winner Mardan Mamat, finished with scores of more than ten-under, the best score among the Bangladeshi golfers is Shakhawat Hossain Sohel's two-under (282).

But should this have been so, considering the fact that these golfers know the course at this Kurmitola Golf Club like the back of their hands and some of them often score 18- or 19- under in local professional and even amateur tournaments here. So what suddenly went wrong for them?

The golfers cited quite a few reasons; some said it was their inexperience of playing during the rain as play is stopped here as soon as rain starts in local events. Others pointed the lack of playing against such good golfers and the stage-fright thereof.

Sohel, who scored three-under and two-under in the final two rounds after a somewhat indifferent start, felt the reasons involve technical aspects of the game and the changes made for this tournament.

"It is true that we never play here if it rains, but there are other things which need to be taken into account," said the 30-year-old golfer.

"Firstly, the 72-par course has been reduced to 71-par for this event; so you can just deduct four from the overall score that we get during local events here.

Then there has been an overboundary (OB) imposed on the fourth hole, which has made it difficult for us to keep the stroke on the fairway. Another thing which happened for this event is that the rough has been heightened quite a few inches all over the course which made our job much harder to roll the ball from the rough towards the green," added Sohel.

However, Sohel believes the experience of taking part in this event alongside some big names from across Asia and beyond will give the local golfers a tremendous confidence boost.

And there is good news from the AT authorities too. The hosting of BBO has ensured that Bangladesh will be getting four 'country spots' from now on, as opposed to a single one offered thus far, in the AT events.

There will also be six country spots for Bangladesh in the Asian Development Tour events.



Mardan Mamat of Singapore kisses the Bashundhara Bangladesh Open trophy after winning the tournament at the Kurmitola golf club yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Mamat ambles to title

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SELECTED SCORES

1	Mardan Mamat (SIN)	-14 (270)
2	Soomin Lee (KOR)	-12 (272)
2	Khalin Joshi (IND)	-12 (272)
4	Carlos Pigem (SPA)	-11 (273)
19	Shakhawat Sohel (BAN)	-2 (282)
38	Dil Mohammad* (BAN)	+4 (288)
38	Siddikur Rahman (BAN)	+4 (288)
38	Dulal Hossain (BAN)	+4 (288)
63	Sajib Ali (BAN)	+8 (292)

When Mardan Mamat missed a six-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole yesterday, he could still afford to smile because he had by then taken an all-but-unassailable lead. The smile got bigger a while later once he tucked in from within a feet with the final shot of the day to rapturous applause of some two-thousand crowd who had gathered at the Kurmitola Golf Club for the climax of the Bashundhara Bangladesh Open.

Mamat got soaked in cold water, danced to the theme music of the event and then held aloft the gold-coated trophy designed after the Bengal Tiger. This was the 48-year-old Singaporean's fifth Asian Tour title and fourth in which he led right from the first round.

Mamat's 69 in the fourth round -- his highest in four rounds -- took his tally to 14-under (270), with young Korean Soomin Lee and India's Khalin Joshi finishing two strokes behind. But things could have gone a lot closer had the chasing pack managed to up the ante a bit earlier than they did. Joshi was the closest to Mamat at the end of the front nine after birdieing on the 9th hole following a bogey on the previous one.

Carlos Pigem of Spain and Janne Kaske of Finland, both of whom stayed in contention till the third round, had bogeyed quite a few holes to fall too far behind. Kaske fired two birdies while Pigem fired two birdies and an eagle on the back nine just to close the gap. Mamat, who wasn't having a birdie spree

like the previous three days, successfully managed keep his bogey count to just one against three birdies to make sure he grabbed the winner's trophy and a paycheck of 54,000 dollars.

"It is always great to be a winner. I'm the first Bashundhara Bangladesh Open winner so I have to give credit to myself for winning," said an elated Mamat at the trophy presentation ceremony.

While Mamat was basking in glory, it was a disappointing end to the home tournament for the six Bangladeshi golfers who had managed to make the cut. Shakhawat Hossain Sohel was the best among the locals as he finished joint 19th at two-under (282), for which he received the best 'Bangladeshi pro award'. Dil Mohammad won the best amateur award after finishing tied 38th at four-over (288). Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman finished on the same score alongside Dulal Hossain, who slipped from overnight seventh position after a terrible nine-over in the final round.

Kiwis fight back

Cook becomes Eng's leading Test run-scorer

AFP, LEEDS

Trent Boult and Tim Southee led a New Zealand recovery after Adam Lyth scored his maiden Test century and Alastair Cook became England's all-time leading Test run-scorer at Headingley on Saturday.

England were cruising on the second day of the second Test while left-handed openers Lyth (107) and skipper Cook (75) were sharing a first-wicket stand of 177.

But the departure of Lyth, needlessly run out shortly before the advent of the new ball, sparked a slump that saw four wickets fall late in the day.

At stumps, England were 253 for five in reply to New Zealand's first innings 350, a deficit of 97 runs.

Earlier, Cook overtook Gooch's previous England record of 8,900 Test runs when he square-drove Southee for four that gave him the score of 32 he needed to surpass his mentor's mark.

The economical Craig removed Cook, although it needed a New Zealand review to have the skipper lbw after he missed an intended sweep.

He walked off having moved up to 12th place in the all-time list of leading Test run-scorers with 8,944 runs in 114 matches and 203 innings, at an average of 46.82, with 27 hundreds and 41 fifties.

New Zealand, who resumed on 297 for eight, thrashed 53 runs in just 7.1 overs on Saturday before they were bowled out.

SCORES IN BRIEF
NEW ZEALAND: First innings 350 all out (Latham 84, Ronchi 88; Broad 5-109, Anderson 2-43)
ENGLAND: First innings 253 for 5 (Lyth 107, Cook 75, Boult 2-63)

Arsenal retain FA Cup

AFP, London

Arsenal retained the FA Cup in majestic style as their 4-0 demolition of Aston Villa in Saturday's final made history for the Gunners and their manager Arsene Wenger.

Wenger's side swept Villa aside with a swashbuckling display sparked by Theo Walcott's first half opener and illuminated by a sublime strike from Alexis Sanchez to double their lead after the interval.

Per Mertesacker and substitute Olivier Giroud also got on the scoresheet for the rampant north Londoners to seal Arsenal's second trophy in 12 months with the biggest margin of victory in an FA Cup final since 1994.

It was a suitably memorable performance on a historic day which saw Wenger become the first manager in the post-War period to win the competition six times, a tally matched by only George Ramsey, who won the last of his with Villa in 1920.

There was another significant slice of history for Arsenal as they lifted the famous old trophy for the 12th time, moving them ahead of Manchester United as the most successful club in the competition.

Wenger insisted this week that he doesn't know where he keeps his medals, but he now has a ninth major honour of his 19-year reign at Arsenal to add to the collection.

Arsenal had conceded twice in a disastrous opening eight minutes against Hull in last year's final.

But there was no sign of such a fraught start this time as Arsenal quickly established their smooth passing rhythm to pen Villa deep inside their own half.

Sanchez was at the heart of all their best moments and he worked space to clip a cross towards Laurent Koscielny, whose header forced a fine one-handed save from Shay Given.

Sepp slams US action

AFP, Zurich

FIFA leader Sepp Blatter said Saturday he was "shocked" at the way the US judiciary has targeted football's world body and slammed what he called a "hate" campaign by Europe's football leaders.

In an interview with Swiss television, Blatter said he suspected the arrest of seven FIFA officials on Wednesday under a US anti-corruption warrant was an attempt to "interfere with the congress" at which he was elected Friday.

Commenting on the fact that it came only two days before his election, he told RTS: "I am not certain, but it doesn't smell good."

He also condemned comments on FIFA made by US judiciary leaders including Attorney General Loretta Lynch.

"Of course I am shocked. I would never as FIFA president make comments about another organisation without being certain of what has happened."

Lynch said corruption in football was "rampant, systemic and deep-rooted, both abroad and here in the United States."

Blatter noted that the United States had lost the 2022 World Cup to Qatar, and England, another major critic, lost the 2018 World Cup to Russia.

He said the United States was the "number one sponsor" of Jordan, where his challenger for the FIFA presidency Prince Ali bin al Hussein comes from.

Blatter also hit out at UEFA president Michel Platini, who had called for his resignation over the corruption scandals.

"It is a hate that comes not just from a person at UEFA, it comes from the UEFA organisation that cannot understand that in 1998 I became president," he added in the interview.

Asked whether he would forgive Platini for the resignation calls, Blatter said "I forgive everyone but I do not forget."

Blatter won the FIFA presidency on Friday when his challenger Prince Ali withdrew after the first round of voting.

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