

# SPORT

## THESE BOYS can play

Bangladesh colts beat India 2-1

AL-AMIN



Who says our country's football is not followed as passionately as cricket? A full house at the Sylhet District Stadium and millions who tuned in to BTB on Thursday afternoon enjoyed quality football from the Bangladesh colts, who beat their Indian counterparts by the odd goal in three in an enterprising group league match of the SAFF U-16 Championship.

The win placed the home side at the top of Group A and set a semifinal clash against either Nepal or Afghanistan at the same venue on Sunday.

Mohammad Shaon gave the hosts a 34th minute lead, poaching home a loose ball in the forbidden zone. Four minutes into the second half, Rahim Ali restored parity with a nicely placed shot over an advancing goalkeeper. Sarwar Zaman Nipu won a penalty for Bangladesh eight minutes from time that Atikuzzaman smartly converted, sending the opposing keeper to the wrong end, much to delight of a passionate Sylhet crowd.

This kind of narrative of a match is nothing special. It's not like a nine-goal thriller that Barcelona won the other day against Sevilla that fans across the world wish to reflect on.

But this particular game or the preceding one that the Bangladesh colts had won 4-0 against Sri Lanka have revived the long-forgotten belief, a belief that our boys know how to play proper football.

It's true that these boys have just started kicking a soccer ball and it will be immature to conclude that they are quite good at it. A few years ago a coach of a famed European academy made an interesting observation while visiting Bangladesh as part of a promotional event.

"The biggest problem in this part of the world is that players here don't know what to do with the ball," quipped that coach

after watching an age-level game.

However, after watching this energetic bunch of players who ran from one end to the other wearing that green during the entire 90 odd minutes, one can safely say that they tried to do something with that 'priceless breakable'.

It was pleasing to see that they tried to build attacks with short passes; turned to long passes for a brief spell; held the ball when it was needed; used the flanks to create more space and produced that burst of speed to create opportunities. The only disappointing part was the finishing or lack of it and this is something one has to accept considering their age.

To be honest, the way the likes of Nipu, Shaon, Atikuzzaman, Khalil Bhuiyan or Saaduddin played, it never looked stale or boring in the eyes of yours truly, who has seen the rise and fall of the country's football.

This particular match against India also reminds me of another game between the two sides way back in 1992. It was a SAFF U-16 Championship final then and the settings were almost the same.

On that summer day at the Rajshahi District Stadium, the stands were not only full but a few thousand overflowing spectators sat on the green-top just outside the playing area. The Indian contingent refused to play until the spectators were ejected from the ground. However, local authorities pushed back the fan-fencing by a few yards and a sporting Indian team agreed to play. Bangladesh won that game 3-0.

After all these years we, who attended that game, still cherish that not because Bangladesh had won, but for the brand of football our boys had played under the captaincy of one Arman Miah, who would go on to earn the reputation of a master craftsman in the top-flight football of the country later in his career.

And on Thursday Nipu and his mates rekindled our belief.



The Bangladesh colts not only beat India 2-1 in a crucial group game of the SAFF U-16 Championship, but also entertained the home fans with their attractive brand of football.

PHOTO: BFF

## Sheikh Jamal rout Benfica

SPORTS REPORTER



Sheikh Jamal got off to a brilliant start in the AFC Cup Play-Off Qualifiers as the Bangladesh Premier League champions came from behind to hand an emphatic 4-1 defeat to Casa Benfica of Macau in their opening match at the Dolen Omurzakov Stadium in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan yesterday.

The three-time professional football league champions of Bangladesh made no mistake in transferring their superb domestic form to the international stage, enjoying the lion's share of possession throughout the game and

creating numerous chances with their fluid build-up game, cashing in on four occasions to sent the Macau champions packing.

Sheikh Jamal had fears of being thumped by the wounded Casa Benfica outfit, who were searching for a way to stay alive in the qualifiers after previously suffering a 2-0 defeat to FC Alga. However, the Dhanmondi-based outfit shrugged off the initial pressure from their opponents and ultimately left the field with their hands held high.

Benfica stunned Sheikh Jamal against the run of play in the 26th minute when Nicholas Mario Tarrao headed past goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel, but the deficit gave Sheikh Jamal the impetus to

bounce back into the game.

Gambian Landing Darboe squandered an easy chance in the 41st minute but Nigerian Emeka Darlington did not make any mistake a few minutes later, levelling the margin in the 44th minute. The prolific striker availed a pass from Toklish Ahmed and chipped Benfica goalkeeper Rui Nibra, who could only watch the ball sail over his head.

After resumption, Sheikh Jamal's Nigerian coach Joseph Afusi withdrew Toklish in favour of Shakhawat Hossain Rony and the former Bangladesh striker repaid his coach's faith by scoring two of Sheikh Jamal's three second-half goals.

Sheikh Jamal continued to keep

possession and launched attacks one after another. Captain Mamunul Islam provided the breakthrough in the 72nd minute, his free-kick giving Sheikh Jamal the lead. Only five minutes later, Mamunul fed a pass to substitute Rony, who made it 3-1 with a clinical finish.

Rony, who warmed Sheikh Jamal's bench throughout the domestic season, wrapped up the victory four minutes from time after playing a nice one-two with Emeka, before finishing off the chance himself.

Now, Sheikh Jamal need only a draw against FC Alga on Saturday to emerge as the champions of Group champions and advance to the next round of the AFC Cup.

## Cook below Mushfiqur

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh has been doing well recently, with their ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza galvanising the unit. While the team was flourishing in the one-day format, it felt like Mushfiqur Rahim's contributions were undermined, but the Telegraph of the United Kingdom set that right when they ranked the Test skipper as the fourth best current captain.

In an article published on their website that rated the Test captains, Mushfiqur was placed ahead of stalwarts like Australia's Michael Clarke, India's Virat Kohli, South Africa's Hashim Amla and England's very own Alastair Cook.

Ahead of him were Sri Lanka's Angelo Mathews at number three, New Zealand's Brendon McCullum at second, while Pakistan's Misbahul Haq was at the top.

Of Mushfiqur, they wrote, "In the past, Bangladesh have often looked beaten before they walked onto the field. But under Mushfiqur, their bullish, street-fighting wicketkeeper, they now go out expecting to win; or at least, compete. They are the fastest-improving team in international cricket, and becoming incredibly hard to beat on their own turf; they have lost just two of their last 12 Tests at home. Their next visitors? Australia."

RANKINGS

1. Misbahul Haq (PAK)
2. Brendon McCullum (NZ)
3. Angelo Mathews (SL)
4. Mushfiqur Rahim (BAN)
5. Alastair Cook (ENG)
6. Hashim Amla (SA)
7. Virat Kohli (IND)
8. Michael Clarke (AUS)
9. Denesh Ramdin (WI)
10. Nobody (ZIM)



PHOTO: REUTERS

India opener Shikhar Dhawan (L) celebrates his century with captain Virat Kohli on the second day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Galle International Stadium yesterday. Kohli also scored a century.

## Two tons put India on top

AFP, Galle



Shikhar Dhawan and Virat Kohli hit centuries before the spinners struck as India took charge of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Galle International Stadium on Thursday.

The tourists, replying to Sri Lanka's first innings total of 183, moved from their overnight total of 128 for 2 to 375 before they were all out just before stumps on the second day.

Sri Lanka, who trailed by 192 runs on the first innings, slipped to 5 for 2 from four overs in their second knock by close as the Indian spinners removed both openers in the first two overs.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who opened the bowling after taking six wickets in the first innings, bowled Dimuth Karunaratne with his fifth delivery before a run had been scored.

Leg-spinner Amit Mishra, sharing the new ball with Ashwin, then bowled Kaushal Silva for no score to

provide a dramatic start to the innings.

Kumar Sangakkara, playing the penultimate Test of his international career, resumes on Friday on one facing a tough challenge to prevent India from running away with the first match of the three-game series.

Nightwatchman Dhammika Prasad was the other batsman at the crease on three, with Sri Lanka trailing by 187 runs.

Left-handed opener Dhawan scored 134, his fourth Test century and the second in succession after making 173 against Bangladesh in June, and skipper Kohli returned to form with 103.

The pair put on 227 runs for the third wicket in a fine partnership after India were reduced to 28-2 after tea on the first day.

India were cruising at 255-2 when Sri Lanka hit back with four quick wickets on either side of the second new ball to make it 302-6.

Wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha, who walked in at 257-4, smashed a gutsy career-best 60 with six boundaries and a six to boost the total.

Off-spinner Tharindu Kaushal finished with five for 134, while seamer Nuwan Pradeep took three for 98.

Dhawan, who was on 53 overnight, reached the three-figure mark 20 minutes before lunch by driving Prasad through the covers for his 10th boundary.

But Dhawan was lucky to survive a loud appeal for leg-before against Kaushal when he was on 79.

Kohli was given out leg-before later in the same over as he attempted to pull the off-spinner, but replays indicated the ball may have turned enough to miss the leg-stump.

Sri Lanka found instant success with the second new ball, which was claimed after 86 overs, as Pradeep bowled Dhawan and Ashwin in the space of six deliveries.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: First innings 183  
INDIA: First innings 375 (Dhawan 134, Kohli 103, Saha 60; Kaushal 5-134)

SRI LANKA: Second innings 5 for 2 (Prasad 3 not out, Sangakkara 1 not out 1; Ashwin 1-2, Mishra 1-1)

## First SA-NZ T20I today

REUTERS, Durban

Despite missing several key players, New Zealand are confident they can continue their growth as a team when they take on South Africa in two Twenty20 Internationals and three one-day internationals this month.

The first T20I is at Kingsmead in Durban on Friday and New Zealand go into the match fresh from a crushing 80-run win over Zimbabwe in a one-off match in Harare last Sunday.

The Black Caps also won a one-day series in Zimbabwe, recovering from a surprise seven-wicket defeat in the first match to win the next two convincingly.

New Zealand have come a long way since their previous visit to South Africa in 2012-13 when they were thrashed in two Test matches before coming back strongly to win a one-day series.

Coach Mike Hesson says that tour was the start of a New Zealand renaissance.

"We hadn't won a series in SA and we were under-strength, so to win that was a big achievement for us."

"That was the start of a pretty big two years, culminating in a World Cup final and the Test team moving up the rankings steadily."

South Africa will be missing batsman JP Duminy and fast bowler Morne Morkel, who are on paternity leave for the birth of their first children.

South Africa will seek to atone for a disappointing tour of Bangladesh, where they were beaten in a one-day series and had to settle for rain-hit draws in the two Tests.

Star batsman AB de Villiers is back after missing the one-day and Test matches in Bangladesh on paternity leave.

## IN A NUTSHELL

### Ponting approached by CA

Cricket Australia (CA)'s executive general manager of team performance, Pat Howard on Thursday said he "would love" to have former captain Ricky Ponting as a batting consultant with the national side, with discussions between the two parties having already taken place.

Ponting has already had success as a head coach with Mumbai Indians in the IPL, winning the tournament at his first attempt earlier this year.

"We have spoken to Ricky a few times. I am certainly very open to getting him involved and we would love to have him on board," Howard said.

"I sense Ricky would also love to be involved. His time commitments are obviously one of the big challenges," he said.

### 'Put the foot on their throat'

England all-rounder Moeen Ali wants Alastair Cook's men to "put the foot on the throat" against Australia as they bid to complete a 4-1 Ashes series triumph at The Oval next week.

No England side has ever won four Tests in a single home Ashes campaign but that target will be in the team's sights.

"It's a great opportunity to win 4-1 in a big series," Ali told Sky Sports on Wednesday. "We've played so well up to now, and we don't want to mess anything up."

"We want to keep the rhythm up, keep the way we're playing and...put the foot on the throat," the off-spinner and stylish batsman added.

### Sharma's 30 crore flat

India batsman Rohit Sharma has purchased a sprawling flat in the plush Ahuja Towers in Worli recently.

The deal is said to be pegged at a whopping Rs 30 crore. The flat is on the 29th floor of the 53-storey skyscraper which has been designed by Palmer & Turner Architects.

The towers are replete with amenities like a concierge service, chef on demand, business area, swimming pool, snooker room, yoga room, salon and spa, kids play area, gymnasium, mini-theatre, sky cafe and cigar room spread across four levels.



Compiled by Star Sport Desk