

SPORT

BD colts eye maiden title

Striker Nipu misses final against India today



Bangladesh captain Shawon Hossain (L) and his India counterpart Brabhasukhan Singh pose with the trophy at a city hotel in Sylhet yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

SPORTS REPORTER



Having beaten defending champions India in the group stages SAFF U-16 Championship, hosts Bangladesh meet their perennial rivals once more -- this time in the final -- at the Sylhet District Stadium today. The charges of Syed Golam Jilani have maintained a hundred per cent record coming into this eagerly anticipated final -- which kicks off at 5:00pm -- and will be looking to end the campaign with another convincing performance to claim their maiden silverware in this regional event.

The performance of these youngsters have been supported wholeheartedly by the sports-fanatic people of Sylhet and admired by people across the country. The boys in red and green want to repay the faith and love bestowed on them, by winning the coveted title. Jilani

thanked the support of the crowd and hoped for more of the same in the final.

"The people in Sylhet have come in numbers to support the team, something that we do not often see in Dhaka. So we would like to thank to the people of Sylhet and, with their support, we will Insha Allah win the final as well," said the Bangladesh coach in the pre-final press conference.

However, the home side will have to play their most important game without arguably their most influential player, Sarwar Zaman Nipu, who had struck a brace against Sri Lanka and won a penalty against India and threatened the Afghans with his galloping runs in the semifinal. The stocky forward will sit out due to two bookings. Jilani tried to play down the loss by claiming he has able replacement for Nipu.

"The presence of Nipu would have been better for the team but we have good replacement for

him even though the replacement is not as speedy as Nipu. I may even push winger Saad Uddin upfront," said Jilani.

India coach, Bithan Singh, conceded that Bangladesh are the favourites for the final. However he was hopeful of repeating the feat of the previous edition, where India beat Nepal at the latter's own turf to win the title for the first time.

"We have respect for Bangladesh, not just because they have the home support, but also the fact that they have beaten us once. It will not be an easy match, but we are prepared for the challenge. I have told my players to play without taking any undue pressure," said the India coach.

Neither of the teams had any practice sessions ahead of the final yesterday. The Bangladesh team spent time at the swimming pool of the team hotel before offering prayers at the shrines of Hazrat Shah Jalal and Hazrat Shah Paran.

More buyers than teams

SPORTS REPORTER



At least ten buyers have expressed their interest to purchase the Bangladesh Premier League's (BPL's) franchises for the third edition of the T20 competition League due to begin in November this year.

Yesterday was the last date for interested candidates to apply for an opportunity to own a team in the cash-rich competition. It was learnt that companies like Beximco and Square were a couple out of the dozen to have submitted their Expression of Interest [EOI] to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday.

According to a BCB official, the owners of Barisal Burners, Chittagong Kings and Sylhet Royals from the second season of the competition also reportedly submitted EOIs.

"Around 10 to 12 have shown interest. We might have switched off the application right now, but if we get good deals in the near future from companies, we may consider," said BPL governing council member-secretary IH Mallick.

"If the owners from the last season want to buy franchises again then they will firstly have to clear the financial issues that remain," he added.

With candidates having expressed their interest, the next step will witness the governing council provide them with the complete financial terms and conditions. The contenders who won't be able to meet those terms will automatically be left out of the race.

"It's good that we have got more buyers than the seven franchises being sold. But we will get a realistic idea once the financial terms are released," said Mallick, adding that the participants would get a week's time to meet the monetary demands.

If there are more than seven buyers meeting the demands, then the governing council will interview the participants and sell the franchise to the company it deems best to take part in the T20 contest.

The cost of each of the franchises has been fixed at Tk 1 crore.

Appeal filed against Oscar verdict

AFP, Pretoria

Prosecutors on Monday filed an appeal calling for Paralympian Oscar Pistorius to be convicted of murder for killing his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp.

Pistorius was jailed last year after being convicted on the lesser charge of manslaughter, and is due to be released from prison on Friday.

Pistorius's defence team has until September 17 to file its response.

The appeal is expected to be heard in November. Pistorius claimed he mistook Steenkamp for an intruder when he fired four shots through a locked bathroom door on Valentine's Day in 2013.

The 28-year-old athlete was acquitted on a charge of murder but found guilty of culpable homicide -- a charge equivalent to manslaughter -- and sentenced to five years in prison.

The state is appealing the judgement, arguing that Pistorius deliberately killed the 29-year-old model and law graduate after an argument.

Pistorius will leave prison this Friday after less than a year behind bars after the parole board agreed to place him under correctional supervision -- a form of house arrest.

If the appeal court finds him guilty of murder, the athlete -- known as the "Blade Runner" for the prosthetic legs he wears on the track -- could face at least 15 years in jail.

Smith's duck in tour game

AFP, London

Steven Smith was out for a duck in his first innings since being named

Australia's next captain as the tourists warmed up for the final Ashes Test with a draw against

Northamptonshire.

Smith, 26, who will replace Michael Clarke at the helm of Australia after the end of next week's fifth Test against England, was caught behind off Maurice Chambers in only the 12th delivery of the last day of the rain-hit three-day match.

Mitchell Marsh (68) and Pat Cummins (82) rescued Australia after they had slipped to 87 for five, to finish on 312 for nine declared.

SAFF U-19 CHAMPIONSHIP Team leaves for Nepal today

SPORTS REPORTER



While the Bangladesh under-16 team fight it out against India today for the South Asian supremacy in Sylhet today, their immediate senior batch, the under-19 team, will leave for Nepal to take part in the inaugural SAFF U-19 Championship, which will be held in Kathmandu from August 20-29.

"The performance of the under-16 team is a big motivation for us and I have asked the boys to keep that in mind to perform well in Nepal," said head coach Saiful Bari Titu at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

Even though there are no national players in the under-19 team, the 23-member squad is considered very strong due to the inclusion of ten players who have the experience of playing in top-flight football for clubs like Abahani, Mohammedan, Muktiyoddha Sangsad, Brothers Union, Rahmatganj MFS and Feni Soccer Club.

Apart from those players, the inclusion of striker Rohit Sarkar and winger Rakib Sarker, who are yet to have premier league experience but considered promising nonetheless, is thought to have added a cutting edge to the side.

"We will try to establish our supremacy in this championship as we are looking forward to producing good results on home ground (in September's AFC U-19 Championship Qualifiers)," said Titu.

Titu could not get his all of his players together during the one-and-a-half-month of training due to their club engagement. The team however played two practice matches against Bangladesh Army (1-0) and Abahani (1-1).

"During the training sessions, I have emphasised on the tactical aspects such as how to defend, how to launch attacks and on set-piece situations because it is not possible to make them technically sound at this age," said Titu adding that he believes his midfield is as good as that of the national team.

Bangladesh, pitted in Group A, will play against Bhutan on August 22 and Nepal on August 24. Group B features India, Maldives and Afghanistan. Top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals.

'It's better to look forward'

SPORTS REPORTER



The national selectors have submitted a long-list to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) for the conditioning camp that will begin from August 22 for the upcoming Test series against Australia. Australia will arrive in Dhaka on September 28 to play two Test

matches against the Tigers in Chittagong and Mirpur.

A total of 27 players have been drafted in the list as the selectors will also pick some players from here for the Bangladesh A team as well, who will be touring South Africa and Zimbabwe in October-November. Some members from the High Performance squad will also be chosen for the second-stringed side. The preparation camp for these two series is likely to kick off on September 3.

Bangladesh A will fly for South Africa on October 14 to play two one-day matches and a three-day game and after that they will visit Zimbabwe to play two four-day and three one-day games during their tour from October 28 to November 18.

Will these A team tours bring any hope for former national players such as Shahriar Nafees, Junaed Siddiqui or Alok Kapali? The selectors love to say that they don't like to write off any player's chance but in reality they are now more

focused on the young talents rather than those who once came up with a lot of promise but failed to deliver.

With utility cricketers like Mahmudul Hasan and Shadman Islam are in the pipeline, the selectors find no reason to go back to the national discards, especially since none of them managed to do anything extraordinary in the domestic circuit.

The notion is that gone are those days when someone enters the team by virtue of another player's failure. The newcomers are very much aware of the fact that only good performance can keep their place intact; it's a message that was perhaps best depicted when a promising player like Soumya Sarker didn't find a place in the playing eleven in the South Africa Tests.

Bangladesh's national team is going through a good time right now and there is a huge competition among the players to stay in the side; the ones in the side are desperately trying to keep their spots. While bad patches may arrive in the future, the current belief among the think-tank enough focusing on reward

however is that they have talent in the pipeline and that they could provide more than reverting to the former players. "One cannot think about Enamul Haque when there is Taijul Islam and Arifat Sunny," was the sentiment.



CAPTAINS ON THE RUN: While ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) has been sweating it out at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in the last few days, Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim, having returned from his break, joined him for a few running drills yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: STAR

Dhawan out of SL tour

AFP, Colombo

India opener Shikhar Dhawan was on Monday ruled out of the rest of the Sri Lanka series with a hairline fracture in his right hand, in a major blow to the tourists.

Dhawan, 29, sustained the injury during the first Test in Galle which India lost by 63 runs on Saturday to concede the lead in the three-match series.

Dhawan, who hit a century in the first innings at Galle, will miss both the second Test starting at the P. Sara Oval in Colombo on Thursday and the final match at the Sinhalese Sports Club in the Sri Lankan capital from August 28.

"He underwent tests that confirmed a hairline fracture in his hand. He would require four to six weeks to recover from the injury," a statement from the team management said.

Team director Ravi Shastri said it was "unfortunate" to lose the in-form left-hander for the key Tests ahead.

"Shikhar showed a lot of courage at Galle," Shastri said. "That's what I look for in a player. It is unfortunate to lose him."

No replacement has been named. The injury to Dhawan left India in a spot of bother after the other opening batsman, Lokesh Rahul, was dismissed for seven and five in Galle.

Indians pay tribute to Sanga

PTI, Colombo



The Indian cricket team led by captain Virat Kohli and team director Ravi Shastri paid rich tributes to retiring Sri Lankan legend Kumar Sangakkara, comparing his illustrious career to that of Sir Donald Bradman and Sachin Tendulkar.

The 37-year-old Sangakkara will be playing his 134th and last Test at the P Sara Oval against India, starting Thursday.

In his international career spanning over 15 years, Sangakkara has so far scored 12,350 Test runs at an average of 57.71, with 38 centuries. In 404 ODIs, he has scored 14,234 runs with 25 tons and a staggering 93 half-centuries.

Kohli termed Sangakkara as a "lovely human being" and stated how glad he was that the master batsman was playing his last international series against India.

"I can imagine the kind of emotions he [Sangakkara] might feel because

this is something that he has probably done for the last 20 years day in and day out of everyday life. And, not to do that anymore would be a big shock for anyone," Kohli told bcci.tv as he gears up to plan Sangakkara's dismissal one last time in international matches.

Shastri compared Sangakkara to Tendulkar, in terms of staying at the top of their game throughout their illustrious careers.

"He broke into being one of the top two or three players and he never got out of that. There are very few players who fall in that list. You can bring Sachin Tendulkar in that league as the kind of player that once broke into the top two or three never moved out of there. He has got runs world over and scored double hundreds like it is a pass time. He is equal with Sir Donald Bradman."

Shastri did not forget to mention that Sangakkara left behind a rich legacy for the Gen-Next of Sri Lanka cricket.

"Sangakkara's record shows you that. We love Sanga for the way he has entertained and he has been a fantastic ambassador for the game of cricket.

That is a legacy that he will leave behind.

Shastri was also of the view that two stalwarts of Sri Lanka cricket -- Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene deserved a lot more accolades than they got.

"I don't think both Sanga and Mahela have got the accolades they should have got. If both of them were playing for India, they would have been on top of a tree or put up on top of a tree. Having said that, no one took an eye off them, especially Sangakkara, because he was back in the top three."

"He would either open or bat at No. 3 which is one of the toughest positions to bat. He would just pile on the runs. He had the ability to switch gears."

Rohit Sharma too joined in wishing Sangakkara the best post his retirement.

"He has been a stalwart of the game and played this game in true spirit. I was fortunate enough to watch him play closely many a times in my career. I would just like to wish him all the very best," Rohit concluded.

Du Plessis may miss NZ ODIs

CRICINFO, Pretoria

Faf du Plessis appears unlikely to recover from the knee injury -- which kept him out of South Africa's T20 series against New Zealand -- in time for the ODIs and could sit out the entire three-match series, which starts on Wednesday.

The team management is mulling adding an extra batsman to the squad as cover with Farhaan Behardien to take du Plessis's place in the starting eleven.

"Faf seems to be struggling at the moment. We are considering bringing an extra batsman into the group but that batsman will be a stand-in in case someone else gets injured because Farhaan was the stand-in," Russell Domingo, the South Africa coach, said.

We won't change our style: Shastri

PTI, Colombo



Notwithstanding India's shock defeat in the first Test against Sri Lanka, team director Ravi Shastri on Monday made it clear that they will not change their style of play in the remaining two Tests, saying the endeavour has always been to play "fearless cricket".

In an extraordinary twist in Galle, India capitulated to an embarrassing 63-run defeat against the islanders, who scripted one of the most remarkable turnarounds in recent Test history.

"Let's hope lightning doesn't strike twice, because we will not change our style of play. Our mindset will be the same. But to close the deal you have to walk the distance and we made that mistake in the first Test. They are getting closer and for this team, it is a case of getting one on board. Then it will be the start of many," Shastri told reporters in Colombo.

Asked if the team was under pressure, the former captain responded in negative.

"It was not a question of buckling under pressure. They go out with intent. The endeavour of this team is to play fearless cricket that comes with mindset. These boys have enough talent. I am sure they must have thought after the match why I didn't play this shot, why I didn't play in this manner."