

SPORT

Booters leaving with high hopes

SPORTS REPORTER

SAFF SUZUKI CUP 2015
Bangladesh coach Maruful Haque yesterday defended his decision to include only two centre-forwards in his 20-man squad for next week's SAFF Suzuki Cup on the eve of the team's departure for Kerala today. The veteran coach, who ran 38 practice sessions at Savar BKSP since taking charge of the team three weeks ago, felt his versatile players from other positions could step into the roles of conventional strikers as his game-plan would revolve around his midfield.

"Our style is to play with one centre-forward, which is why I have included two centre-forwards in the squad," Maruful said during a press conference at the Bangladesh Football Federation House yesterday.

Maruful felt that if any player gets injured or is ruled out for a match, there are enough options in his squad to fill the void. "Some of the defenders and midfielders that we have can also play striking positions. So this will not be an issue. My players are versatile, so I can use either 4-4-2 or 4-2-3-1 or 4-3-3 system according to the demand of the match," the coach added.

The team management has informed that although according to the current decision of the tournament organisers there won't be any replacements allowed for injured players, a couple of participating teams have already voiced their concern about this ruling and this issue will be raised in the managers' meeting the

day before the tournament kicks off.

The group A fixture between Nepal and Sri Lanka will kick-off the biennial event at the Greenfield Stadium in Trivandrum, Kerala on December 23. Bangladesh, who are in group B, will play their first match against defending champions Afghanistan the following day before taking on Maldives on December 26 and Bhutan on December 28.

The Bangladesh coach felt that it was quite possible for his side to beat the defending champions. "Afghanistan are definitely a strong side. But having worked on their strengths and weaknesses, I believe it is possible for us to beat them. I have told [my players] that if you win the first match, consider half of the championship won," opined Maruful.

However, the coach was a bit concerned with the lack of preparation time and hence the lack of recovery time that he got, but felt it was a challenge which he could not refuse. "20 days is not enough time to prepare and hence the players are still in recovery phase. But since this is the only assignment that I have been appointed for, I was ready to take the challenge. I believe we have the ability to win the title," Maruful added.

Skipper Mamunul Islam, who was part of the Bangladesh side which exited the championship from the last two editions, said the players were more motivated than ever.

"I feel that the SAFF Championship is above everything, which is why we want to do well so that the next generation looks up to us and says this team won the SAFF title. We are



Bangladesh national football team's head coach Maruful Haque (R) and skipper Mamunul Islam were in a jolly mood as they arrived at the BFF House to attend a press conference yesterday. The team will leave for Kerala today to take part in SAFF Suzuki Cup, beginning on December 23. PHOTO: STAR

Siddikur survives by a whisker

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman avoided the cut in the last event of the Asian Tour season by a whisker after posting an even-par (144) at the end of the second round of the Philippine Open yesterday. The two-time Asian Tour winner, who had missed eight cuts in the previous 18 events this season, ended a frustrating day at the Luisita Golf and Country Club yesterday.

The 31-year-old golfer exchanged four birdies for a bogey and two double bogeys in the day to slip to joint 59th position on the leaderboard, having started the day at 38th. A total of 68 golfers made the cut in the 300,000-dollar event which will conclude today due to cancellation of one complete round following torrential rainfall.

Rodionova wins on wedding day

AGENCIES, Sydney

Arina Rodionova's wedding day started with a bonus on Saturday -- a semi-final win in the Australian Open wildcard qualifying tournament. The Russian-born Australian beat Storm Sanders 1-6, 6-4, 7-5 to advance to Sunday's final.

Rodionova sealed victory at 11:10am and then walked down the aisle with Australian Rules football player Ty Vickery less than five hours later at 4pm.

The 26-year-old will return to Melbourne Park on Sunday at 12:30pm for the final against Maddison Inglis. "Just a good day all round today," Rodionova said. "I have a few hours to get ready and marry the most amazing guy ever and I'm so looking forward to it. It was really tough to play today mentally. Obviously the wedding is on my mind."

Vickery was absent from Rodionova's semifinal, telling family and friends that as per tradition, he shouldn't see his future bride until the wedding service.

Chameera 5-for wrecks Kiwis

AFP, Hamilton

Sri Lanka fought their way back into the second Test against New Zealand with a destructive burst by young quick Dushantha Chameera on day two in Hamilton on Saturday.

Chameera took his first five-wicket bag as New Zealand slumped from 81 without loss in reply to Sri Lanka's first innings score of 292 to be 232-9 at stumps.

The 23-year-old Chameera, bowling at up to 146 kilometres per hour, was used sparingly by captain Angelo Mathews, taking three for 17 in his first

spell and two for 30 in his second.

In partnership with the wily 37-year-old Rangana Herath they took New Zealand apart when it seemed openers Tom Latham and Martin Guptill were settling in.

New Zealand lost four wickets for eight runs in four overs as Chameera claimed the scalps of Latham, Kane Williamson and Ross Taylor while Herath removed Guptill.

Brendon McCullum tried to steer his side out of trouble and put on 39 for the fifth wicket with Mitchell Santner before he became Herath's second wicket.

Chameera was delighted with his performance.

"This is my fourth Test and I got five wickets so I am very happy," he said,

adding the wicket he treasured most was Williamson's.

The lean fast bowler said Sri Lanka worked out that the batsmen would fall for the leg-side trap "because that's the way they naturally play".

Guptill believed New Zealand were not out of the Test.

"We're not where we'd like to be. Obviously we had to weather a bit of a storm after lunch when Sri Lanka bowled very well," he said.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: First innings 292 all out (Mathews 77, Siriwardana 62; Boult 2-51, Southee 3-63)

NEW ZEALAND: First innings (Guptill 50, Santer 38; Chameera 5-47, Herath 2-75)

BANGABANDHU GOLD CUP 8-team tourney from Jan 8

SPORTS REPORTER

The fourth edition of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup International Football Tournament will feature eight teams and will be held simultaneously in Dhaka and Sylhet from January 8 to 18 next year, organisers informed at a press conference at the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) House yesterday. Hosts Bangladesh will field two teams, the senior national team and the under-23 team. Apart from those, senior national and age-group teams from Maldives, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Malaysia and Bahrain will also participate.

Bangladesh national team are last edition's runners-up, who were beaten to the title by the Malaysia under-22 team in a keenly contested final in February this year.

"The fourth edition of the tournament, and the second during the current regime of the BFF governing body, will be held with eight teams from January 8 to 18 next year," said BFF's senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy after an emergency meeting of the executive committee.

"The tournament will kick off in Sylhet, which will host one group while the matches of other group will be played at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka, where the final will also take place," added Murshedy.

The organisers claimed that Nepal, Maldives and Cambodia have confirmed that their senior national teams will be sent while Malaysia and Bahrain may send either senior teams or age-group sides, depending on the engagements of the sides during that time period.

While the last edition of this tournament was held among six teams including the national team of Bangladesh, the game's governing body decided to field the under-23 team apart from the senior national team this time around in order to give the age-group side some match practice ahead of their participation in February's South Asian Games.

The BFF officials informed that a meeting of the National Teams' Committee will be held within the next three to four days and the under-23 team will start their preparation camp within a week's time.

The organisers also claimed that they are trying to increase the amount of prize money to be awarded to the champions and runners-up teams compared to the last edition.

AFC U-14 GIRLS' C'SHIP BD take on Nepal in final today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh under-14 women's football team will lock horns against their Nepalese counterparts in the final of the AFC U-14 Girls' Regional Championship at the Nepal Army Physical Training Centre in Kathmandu today. The Bangladesh team were looking forward to clinching the title with renewed vigour after having witnessed their brilliant run to the final halted by a devastating earthquake, which struck the Himalayan nation on the originally scheduled final on April 25 this year, forcing a postponement of the match.

Bangladesh team's head coach Golam Rabbani Choton said his charges will try to play attacking football to try and bring the trophy home while his opposite number felt it would be a tough affair as both teams proved their worth on way to the final, according to a press release from the Bangladesh Football Federation. Bangladesh had beaten Iran 2-0 while Nepal had beaten India 1-0 in their respective semifinals.

AL HARAMAIN CRICKET GP clinch title

SPORTS REPORTER

Grameenphone clinched the Al Haramain 5th T20 Corporate Cricket 2015 title after beating IFIC Bank by seven wickets in the final at the Shamoli Club Ground yesterday.

IFIC opted to bat first after winning the toss and they made 143 runs for the loss of eight wickets in their allotted 20 overs. IFIC's Yeadur Rahman scored 61 runs off 28 balls to bolster his side. GP's Tanvir Hossain was the pick of the bowlers, scalping three wickets for 21 runs.

After the exchange, GP breezed to the target in just 12.5 overs. Fazle Rabby smashed 58 runs off just 21 balls to claim the player-of-the-final honours.

His teammate Asfaque Hossain was named player-of-the-tournament. Ahmed Sazzadul Alam Bobby and Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu distributed prizes among the winners.



Winners of the Kool BSPA Sports Award [2013-2014] pose for photographs with organisers and dignitaries at the National Sports Council Auditorium yesterday.

Air Force, BKSP win big

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Air Force and BKSP notched comprehensive victories in the group stages of the Fu-Wang Polymer Victory Day Hockey Competition at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium yesterday.

In the day's first match, Air Force thrashed Raktim Shangkha 6-0, thanks to four goals from Prosenjit. Akib and Rummam scored the other two goals. BKSP routed Narayanjanj DSA 12-0 in the day's second match, with Ashraful Islam scoring three times while Mahbub Hossain and Shohanur Rahman bagged a brace each.

Gayle first to 600 sixes

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Chris Gayle on Saturday became the first player to hit 600 sixes and 600 fours in Twenty20 cricket on Saturday.

Playing for the Melbourne Renegades against the Brisbane Heat in Australia's Big Bash League, Chris Gayle -- who wielded his golden bat for the first time -- smashed two humongous sixes to reach the landmark. Gayle also hit a couple of fours, before being dismissed for 23.

West Indian all-rounder Kieron Pollard, who has hit 388 sixes, is second on the list of most sixes in T20s.

Yuvraj makes comeback

Batsman drafted in T20I squad for Aus series

REUTERS, New Delhi

India named Mahendra Singh Dhoni as their limited-overs captain for next year's World Twenty20 at home while also throwing a lifeline for batsman Yuvraj Singh's international career by including him in the shortest format for the Australia tour.

"Lot of speculation was going around. So selectors wanted to send a very clear cut message about who's going to be our leader," chairman of selectors Sandeep Patil told reporters.

India will play five ODIs and three T20 matches in Australia.

All-rounder Yuvraj, who last played for India in their 2014 World Twenty20 final loss to Sri Lanka, has shown strong form during the domestic season.

"We are happy but we cannot promise any player whether he will be part of the

next tour or the World Cup," Patil said, responding to a question about Yuvraj's future.

Also making a comeback to the T20 team was 36-year-old left-arm fast bowler Ashish Nehra, who last played for India in 2011 while paceman Mohammed Shami and Ravindra Jadeja were also recalled.

SQUAD

ODI: Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane, Manish Pandey, MS Dhoni (C) (Wk), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohd. Shami, Axar Patel, Ishant Sharma, Umesh Yadav, Gurkeerat Singh Mann, Rishi Dhawan, Brainder Singh Sran.
T20I: Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Ajinkya Rahane, Yuvraj Singh, MS Dhoni (C) (Wk), Suresh Raina, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohd. Shami, Harbhajan Singh, Umesh Yadav, Hardik Pandya, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Ashish Nehra.