

SPORT

Booters eye redemption

ATIQUA ANAM from Trivandrum

The mood in the Bangladesh camp and that of their first match opponents, Afghanistan, couldn't have been any more contrasting on the eve of today's Group B fixture of the SAFF Cup. While the Afghans were causing a hubbub over organisational inefficiency, Bangladesh were trying to maintain a low profile while keeping their focus on the match against the defending champions.

The body language of the Bangladesh players and coaching staff betrayed the simmering resolve underneath the calm. They players feel this is their opportunity to regain the respect they used to garner from opposing teams even a few years ago. Bangladesh, however, can only blame themselves for having been sent packing from the group stages in

the one against the Nepalese in their friendly fixture which Bangladesh won 1-0 a few days. Shahidul Alam Sohel is expected to wear the gloves in tomorrow's match while Monaem Khan Raju is all but certain to play in the position of Jamal Bhuiyan, who is yet to regain match fitness following an upset stomach followed by high fever which made him lose seven kilograms of weight. Striker Shakhawat Hossain Rony, who scored the winning goal against Nepal with an excellent glancing header, is likely to start.

Rony said he was mindful of the responsibility bestowed upon him and that he was looking forward to taking any chances which might come his way.

"A lot of things have been said regarding the absence of Emily bhai [Zahid Hasan]. It is our duty to make people realise that the others are good enough as well. The goal that I scored against Nepal has given me a lot of confidence and I would like to repeat the same if I get a scoring chance tomorrow," said the Sheikh Jamal centre-forward.

Skipper Mamunul Islam felt the recent fixtures against 'bigger teams' would stand them in good stead in this campaign. "We have recently played against teams like Australia, Jordan and Kyrgyzstan; so we are not afraid of Afghanistan. And our unbeaten record against them gives us confidence. If you compare the two teams, maybe they [Afghanistan] are just a bit ahead of us, but that can be overcome with a good performance," said Mamunul.

While Bangladesh lie at the bottom of their group in the World Cup qualifying campaign, Afghanistan have managed to avoid that fate with two wins over Cambodia. Afghan captain Faysal Shayesteh said the young and evolving side had no reason to fear anyone.

"A lot of changes in the side have come since our SAFF Championship win two years ago. Only two players remain from that side. But the current side, which is relatively young and mostly Europe-based, is quite good and we are confident about the match against Bangladesh," said the midfielder.

PROBABLE LINE-UP: Sohel, Yeasin, Nasiruddin, Nasirul, Munna, Mamunul, Raju, Sohel, Zahid, Hemanta, Rony.



Bangladesh players jog during a practice session at LNCEP Thiruvananthapuram Ground in Trivandrum yesterday, ahead of their first engagement of the SAFF Cup against Afghanistan today. PHOTO: BFF

SAFF SUZUKI CUP 2015

AFGHANISTAN V BANGLADESH

Kick-off: 7:00pm (Bangladesh Time)

Venue: Greenfield Stadium, Trivandrum

FIFA Ranking: Bangladesh 182, Afghanistan 150

Last Meeting: 1-1 (Dhaka, 2 June, 2015)

the two previous editions, but they now have the opportunity for redemption if they can make a positive start here in Trivandrum.

Whether they can take advantage of the perceived lack of focus from the Afghans is a matter of posterity, but the mindset of the players and coaches is that they don't want to lose this match. Coach Maruful Haque felt this match was like a final and that a draw wouldn't be the worst outcome, even though they will start with the target to win.

"We will try to start with an attacking mindset because this match is very important for us and it is like a final. If we can win this match, the rest of the campaign will become get easier," the Bangladesh coach said. "We have assessed the strengths of the Afghanistan players. They are physically imposing and they are dangerous from set-pieces."

Maruful may adopt a similar strategy to

Cricket ops for 1 Test against Zim

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) cricket operations committee wants the Tigers to play at least one Test against Zimbabwe in January next year apart from three T20Is.

The recommendation was made public after a committee meeting in Mirpur yesterday. The decision though will be finalised only if the board members of the BCB and Zimbabwe Cricket accept the proposal.

Bangladesh were initially supposed to play at least two Tests against Zimbabwe in January. However, developments last week suggested that both the boards were keen on putting the Tests on hold and focusing on T20Is since the ICC World T20 is around the corner. However, the final proposal

made by the cricket operations committee seems to follow a balanced approach.

"Zimbabwe Cricket had sent their proposal and asked if we could play five T20Is. But we have proposed one Test and three T20Is," said Naimur Rahman, chairman of BCB's cricket operations committee.

"If you look, most of the other nations are playing Test cricket and they will also be playing the World Cup. We feel that if a team plays Test cricket it can be ready for all the three formats but it's not the same if we play just T20 cricket. Test cricket provides you with good practice."

"Also we have been trying to increase the number of Tests in our FTP (Future Tours Programme). So if we go on to cancel the number of Tests, that may have a negative impact," added Naimur.

Naimur further said the committee has proposed that Bangladesh

play two Tests and an ODI series in Zimbabwe in July. "We have three Tests due against Zimbabwe and we are hoping we can play one here and two on their home turf in July," said Naimur.

If everything goes according to plan then Zimbabwe will arrive in Bangladesh on January 11. The matches of the series are likely to take place in Khulna and Sylhet.

The other issue discussed was regarding a possibility of organising a camp at Dharamsala before the start of the qualifying round of the World Cup. However, Naimur pointed out that the plan wasn't likely to yield any positive results.

"There were talks about hosting a training camp in Dharamsala before the Asia Cup [before mid-February] because we don't have time to host a camp there after the Asia Cup, since it ends on March 6 and the World Cup begins on March 9.

"We don't think it will yield

anything good since the temperatures over there in February would be around six to eight degrees. On the contrary, in March that will be above 16 degrees. So in terms of acclimatising to the conditions there, it won't be of much use to the players," explained Naimur.

Furthermore, the committee also said that it would permit Bangladesh's players to play in the Pakistan Super League provided that they don't have any injury issues.

PROPOSALS AND DEVELOPMENTS

- One Test and three T20Is against Zimbabwe in January
- Salary increase for 15 national contracted players
- No camp at Dharamsala before the Asia Cup
- NOCs to be provided to players for PSL
- SL A to tour Bangladesh in October.



Bangladesh U-19 skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz (3rd from R) leads his side off the field after beating BCB-XI, which included some of the national players, in a practice match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

U-19s name spin-heavy squad

SPORTS REPORTER



Hosts Bangladesh yesterday announced a 15-member squad for next year's ICC Under-19 World Cup, which will be held across four cities – Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Dhaka and Sylhet – from January 27 to February 14. Mehidy Hassan Miraz will lead a team which has already raised hopes despite their poor showing in last month's tri-series in India.

The home conditions and their performances over the past year-and-a-half, especially their home and away triumphs against defending champions South Africa, makes many believe that this team has the potential to rewrite history.

"The performance against India in the last series didn't make any major impact on the team selection as we trusted the boys who showed good performances in last few series. Basically we emphasized

on spin bowling after considering our home conditions and that's why we picked five specialist spinners," said former Bangladesh batsman Ehsanul Haque Seezan, a member of the BCB's juniors selection panel, yesterday.

"We have a very balanced side. There are six players in the squad who played the last World Cup and there are a number of players like Miraz, Shanto [Najmul Hossain] and Sanjit Saha, who not only played in the National Cricket League and Dhaka Premier League but also performed well. So, experience will not be an issue for the team and we would be surprised if this team doesn't reach the last four," he added.

With an aim of putting up their best possible performance in the mega event, the Bangladesh Cricket Board made massive plans and arranged a number of series while also hiring a high-profile coach like Australian Stuart Law to assist the team as a technical advisor. Bangladesh's best performance in an Under-19 World

Cup was back in 2006 when they finished fifth.

Bangladesh, who have been placed in Group A along with South Africa, Scotland and Namibia, will play one of the opening matches of the tournament against South Africa at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong.

The final preparation camp will start from January 3 and they will play a three-match series against their West Indies counterparts before the start of

SQUAD

Mehidy Hassan Miraz (captain), Najmul Hossain Shanto (vice-captain), Joyraj Sheik Imon, Pinak Ghosh, Mohammed Saif Hassan, Zakir Hasan, Shaif Uddin, Shafiqul Hayat, Saeed Sarkar, Mehede Hasan, Mohammad Abdul Halim, Sanjit Saha, Saleh Ahmed Shawon Gazi, Ariful Islam Jony and Jaker Ali Anik.

STANDBY: Munim Shahriar, Mossabek Hossain Sun, Rifat Pradhan and Qazi Onik Islam

Sudden death for Army

BKSP-Navy final today

SPORTS REPORTER



Star-studded Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Krira Shikha Protisthan (BKSP) set up a predictable final clash in the Victory Day Hockey Tournament when they won two contrasting semifinals at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

While Navy, comprising national players, notched up an easy 4-0 win over Bangladesh Air Force, the second semifinal between Bangladesh Army and BKSP was decided in a sudden death shootout after a pulsating 3-3 draw.

In the nail-biting tie-breaker, national players Sabbir Hossain, Puskhor Khisha Mimo and Milon Hossain of Bangladesh Army converted their shots before Ripon Kumar and Irfanul Haque failed to beat BKSP goalkeeper Biplob Khuzur for a 3-3 stalemate, leaving the country's lone sports

institute to covert the fifth and final shot to win the game. But defender Ashrafur Islam failed to convert it within the stipulated eight seconds, pushing the match in the sudden death.

In sudden death, Raju Ahmed scored for BKSP, leaving the onus on Army's Sabbir Hossain to convert his shot. It sparked a wild celebration in the BKSP camp. The players were seen using their sticks as guns and mimicking shooting in the sky in a hysterical celebration.

However, the celebration turned into a chaos among the supporters of two teams in the gallery and it needed the intervention of the BHF officials to bring things back to normal.

The defeat was heartbreaking for Army, who took an eight-minute lead through Milon before Razib Das equalized for BKSP in the 17th minute.

BKSP took a 3-1 lead after the break before Army came back strongly with a brace by Rokonzaman, forcing the game into the tie-breaker.

Eng sweat on Anderson's fitness

REUTERS, Durban

England are to wait until Thursday before making a decision on whether James Anderson can lead the attack in the first Test against South Africa after the fast bowler had a scan on his calf on Tuesday.

Anderson complained of stiffness in his calf and his scans will be evaluated by medical staff in England before a decision is made on whether he can play in the Boxing Day Test in Durban.

England had been happy to keep him fresh before the first test but had planned hard work in the nets for Anderson before Saturday's start at Kingsmead.

Smith ICC's best

AFP, DUBAI



Australia captain Steve Smith has been named ICC cricketer of the year for 2015, the sport's Dubai-based governing body revealed on Wednesday.

The 26-year-old finished the year, which runs from September to September, as the leading Test run-scorer with 1,734 runs from 25 innings, averaging 82.57.

He also became the second youngest player to reach the number one ranking for Test batsmen behind Indian legend Sachin Tendulkar.

He was also adjudged the Test cricketer of the year.

"Given that there are so many great players around the world, I'm incredibly honoured to receive these awards," said Smith in a statement released by the ICC.

South Africa's ODI captain AB de Villiers was named ODI player of the year while his teammate and T20I captain Faf du Plessis won the award for the T20 performance of the year for his 56-ball 119 against West Indies in Johannesburg in January.

De Villiers scored 1,265 runs in 20 innings averaging just over 79.

De Villiers broke the record for the fastest ODI century of all time, managing the feat off just 31 balls, five fewer than previous record-holder Corey Anderson of New Zealand.

Like Smith, though, De Villiers had mixed feelings about his season.

"It's certainly been a memorable year with many highlights but a lot of disappointments as well," he said.

Australia's women's captain Meg Lanning won the women's ODI cricketer of the year award with Stafanie Taylor of West Indies taking the T20I honour.



AWARDS LIST

- ICC Cricketer of the Year (Sir Garfield Sobers Trophy):** Steven Smith
- Test Cricketer of the Year:** Steven Smith
- ODI Cricketer of the Year:** AB de Villiers
- Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year:** Meg Lanning
- Women's T20I Cricketer of the Year:** Stafanie Taylor
- T20I Performance of the Year:** Faf du Plessis
- Emerging Cricketer of the Year:** Josh Hazlewood
- Associate/Affiliate Cricketer of the Year:** Khurram Khan
- Spirit of Cricket Award:** Brendon McCullum
- Umpire of the Year (David Shepherd Trophy):** Richard Kettleborough