

SPORT

U-23s held by Bahrain

ANISUR RAHMAN from Jessore

The Bangladesh Olympic opened their Bangabandhu Gold Cup campaign with a 1-1 draw against Bahrain in Group B opener at the Shamsul Huda Stadium in Jessore yesterday.

Winger Yousuf Sifat provided Bangladesh with an 18-minute lead but Bahrain midfielder Jasim Al Shaikh equalised the margin only five minutes later to deny the young Bangladesh side a similar outcome to their senior team.

Coach Gonzalo Sanchez Moreno however had something to cheer for with his new team, who are participating in the tournament as part of preparation for next month's South Asian Games, as they worked hard throughout the game and were a bit unlucky not to post an outright win over Bahrain, came here with players born between 1995 and 1996.

Moreno chose four senior players - defenders Rezaul Karim, Kesto Kumar Bose and Arup Kumar and goalkeeper Ziaur Rahman - in his starting eleven, and centre-back Reza and Kesto fought well except for one fumble which saw Bangladesh concede the equaliser.

There was also a lack of cohesion in midfield comprising Atiqur Rahman Fahad, Omar Faruque and Mashuk Mia Jonny while two wingers, Sifat and Rubel Mia, spoiled a few good initiatives with their selfish individual performance. But the midfielders looked steady to hold the ball in the second half which helped the hosts display better performance compared to the first half.

With both sides struggling to control the midfield on the bouncy pitch, Bangladesh suddenly took the lead in the 18th minute when Rubel Mia was played on the right flank by Jonny and the speedy winger darted into the box to square it for Sifat, who shrugged off his marker and goalkeeper Mahboob Aldoseri inside the box to drive home, leaving the spectators celebrating wildly.

The winger from Narayanganj, however, was booked for taking off his jersey while celebrating the goal.

Bahrain though silenced the home crowd with the equaliser when Jasim took advantage of a misunderstanding between defenders Reza and Kesto and coolly placed it to the far post to bring back Bahrain in the match.

Aminur Rahman Sajib should have restored the lead in the 52nd minute with the opposition goalkeeper to beat but the striker failed to beat the onrushing goalkeeper.

Bangladesh once again came close to restoring the lead but Sifat squandered the opportunity as he tried individually instead of playing an early diagonal pass towards unmarked Jonny or Rubel and the chance went wobbling.

With both teams pressing for the lead, Bahrain were reduced to 10 men in the dying moments but Bangladesh could not avail the opportunity in four-minute added time though Sifat nearly struck his second from a free-kick that narrowly missed the near post in the stoppage time.



Mushfiqur Rahim (L) and Shakib Al Hasan (R) take a short break after attending a batting session at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday, while Saqlain Sajib is busy doing his stretches.

Zim arrive today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Zimbabwe national cricket team will arrive in Dhaka today to take part in the four-match T20I series which is scheduled to begin on January 15. All four matches will take place in Khulna and the visitors are scheduled to travel there tomorrow.

Zimbabwe recently played in the UAE against Afghanistan. After losing the three-match ODI series, they also lost the first T20I. Vusi Sibanda and Brian Vitori have been recalled for the Bangladesh series.

The Bangladesh team on the other hand is already in Khulna and have been training there for the last three days. For Bangladesh, this will be an opportunity to get a better idea regarding their T20I squad.

The squad includes a mix of both experienced and new players. The primary objective of course is to find the perfect team ahead of the Asia Cup which begins on February 24.

PHOTO: STAR

Both coaches happy

SPORTS REPORTER from Jessore

Bangladesh under-23 team's head coach Gonzalo Sanchez Moreno was happy with the result and the performance his charges produced in a 1-1 draw against Bahrain in their opening match of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup at the Shamsul Huda Stadium in Jessore yesterday.

"It was a difficult match for us but I am happy with the teamwork and the result because they worked hard throughout the game despite the fact that they were playing together for the first time after a short-period of prepa-

ration," said an ecstatic Moreno at the post-match conference.

"I will say we were a bit unlucky not to win the match as we created 2/3 scoring chances but could not convert those because it was not easy to play on such a hard and bouncy pitch," said Moreno, who was much excited at the sideline throughout the match.

Assistant coach Syed Golam Jilani said that there were some drawbacks in the match but they would play more compact in the next match by rectifying the mistakes.

Echoing the same sentiment of the coaches, scorer Yousuf Sifat said it could have been a great start for them had they won the match.

"Bahrain are a strong opponent but they could not perform well because we worked hard throughout the game," Sifat said. "We hope to play better football in the next match against Maldives."

About the celebration, Sifat said, "It was my first international goal, so I could not restrain myself and took off the jersey."

Bahrain coach Marjan Eid, too, was happy with the performance and the result.

"I am satisfied with the performance and the result because it was our first match. We are looking forward to the next match even though there were a lot of miss passing in today's [Sunday] match."

U-19s series begins today

SPORTS REPORTER

A three match series between the Under-19 teams of Bangladesh and West Indies will commence today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

While the first match of the series will be played at Mirpur, the next two matches will take place in Chittagong. The series is important for both sides as both the teams have a lot to prove.

While Bangladesh have had a good time in the recent past with a series of victories against holders South Africa, they failed to perform as well against their Indian counterparts in a recent tri-series that took place in Kolkata.

And that's one area that the hosts will be a little concerned about. In a number of interviews in the past few days, both skipper Mehedy Hasan Miraz and technical advisor Stuart Law spoke of the importance of gaining momentum and forgetting the results that took place in the past.

With regards to Bangladesh's perspective, the series will provide a good picture regarding where the team actually stands ahead of the Under-19 World Cup which is scheduled to begin on January 27.

Considering that this is the first time that a number of the West Indian players are touring Bangladesh, the junior Tigers will want to win every match of the series in order to go into the World Cup full of confidence.

There have been plenty of talks in the recent past about how this World Cup could well be the one marked for the Tigers, considering that it is taking place at home and that a number of these Bangladeshi players have played first-class cricket.

However, Law, while speaking to the media in the last few days has repeatedly said that the team wasn't thinking about winning the World Cup, rather they just want to get their basics rights. "Let's not put too much pressure on these young men," Law had said.

The West Indies skipper on the other hand had said that the team hadn't prepared as much as they would have liked to ahead of the World Cup and will want to utilise the series as much as possible.

Considering that they are the first ones to arrive in Bangladesh, this series could help them get accustomed to the conditions and the weather quickly. The match is scheduled to begin at 9:00am today.

Curtain falls on Jessore leg today

SPORTS REPORTER from Jessore

The curtain on the Jessore phase of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup drops today through the Group B encounter between Maldives and Cambodia at the Shamsul Huda Stadium.

The eight-team international football tournament, however, failed to attract the residents of Jessore as none of three matches so far saw a full-house crowd at the 12000-capacity stadium. The turnout in yesterday's match between Bangladesh Olympic team and Bahrain was approximately 5,000.

Considering the scenario, the organisers have decided to keep all the gates open to the spectators for today's match between SAFF Suzuki Cup semifinalists Maldives and Cambodia.

Maldives coach Ricky Herbert said that they have come here with a young squad in a bid to giving international exposure to the players ahead of next month's South Asian Games as there are only five senior players alongside 14 new players in the squad.

Cambodia team's manager Chhaing Piseth hoped that they would play a good match against Maldives as their squad comprises 70 percent players, who had recently played in World Cup qualifying matches.

"We have two targets in this tournament. One is to develop young players for the next match against Syria in the World Cup Qualifiers and the second one is to prepare the young players for a tournament to be held in Darus Salam,"



Bangladesh under-23 team forward Yousuf Sifat skips past a Bahrain player during their Group B fixture of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup at the Shamsul Huda Stadium in Jessore yesterday. The match ended in a 1-1 draw.

PHOTO: STAR

Sran in line for debut

AFP, Perth

Rookie fast bowler Barinder Sran is in line to make his international debut for India in the opening one-day match against Australia in Perth this week.

India's bowling coach Bharat Arun said uncapped paceman Sran would give the team an added advantage as a left-armer, indicating the 23-year-old would likely play in the series opener at the WACA Ground on Tuesday.

"He is a bowler with a lot of potential. He has been pretty impressive in the two games that he has played," Arun told reporters late Saturday after India's back-to-back wins in warm-up games against a Western Australian XI on Friday and Saturday.

Kiwis blitz Sri Lanka

AFP, Auckland

New Zealand blitzed the second Twenty20 against Sri Lanka in Auckland on Sunday with a whirlwind display by Martin Guptill and Colin Munro to set up a nine-wicket win.

Munro brought up the winning runs with a six to be unbeaten on 50 after 14 balls, the second fastest Twenty20 half-century behind a 12-ball spree by India's Yuvraj Singh against England in 2007.

It was also the fastest 50 by a New Zealander, eclipsing the 20-minute-old record set by Guptill who took 19 balls to get there at the top of the innings.

Guptill was the only wicket to fall in the New Zealand innings, out for 63 off 25 balls with six fours and five sixes, while Munro clouted seven sixes and one four.

It took New Zealand exactly 10 overs to mow down the modest 143-run target with Kane Williamson unbeaten on 32.

New Zealand captain Williamson said it was "pretty special" to see Guptill and Munro flay the bowling.

"I thought it would be a bit of a scrap on that wicket as it was holding up a fraction, but it didn't seem to be a problem for those two guys and they cleared the ropes consistently," he said.

The victory gave New Zealand a clean sweep of the tour by Sri Lanka, winning the Twenty20s 2-0 to go with their 2-0 domination of the Tests and 3-1 win in the one-dayers.

Sri Lanka's resounding defeat in the Twenty20 matches saw them slip from first to third behind the West Indies and Australia in the world rankings.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: 142 for 8 in 20 overs (Dilshan 28, Mathews 81 not out; Milne 2-36, Santner 2-24, Elliott 4-22)

NEW ZEALAND: 147 for 1 in 10 overs (Guptill 63, Williamson 32 not out, Munro 50 not out; Perera 1-26)

Result: New Zealand won by nine wickets and clinched 2-match series 2-0. Player-of-the-match: Colin Munro.

Akmal banned for one match

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's departure for their New Zealand tour late Saturday night was hit by a one-match ban on dashing batsman Umar Akmal, punished for violating the dress code in a domestic match earlier this week.

Team manager Intikhab Alam said Umar would not be available for the first of three Twenty20 matches in Auckland on January 15.

"Pakistan Cricket Board has informed us that Umar has been banned on violating dress code during the final of the Quaid-e-Azam trophy and will not be playing Friday's Twenty20 in Auckland," Alam told AFP.



Bangladesh Under-19 players have some fun ahead of the West Indies series, in the midst of their training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR