

BUFFON A FEDERER FAN

Interviewed by Italian Newspaper Tuttosport, Juventus FC's goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon spoke about his passion for tennis, especially for the Swiss champion Roger Federer. "Tennis fascinates me, not only as sport, but for my sport as well. I'm a Federer fan. We often hear about each other and I am excited about his mental strength" - said Buffon, adding, "We should try to have it all." The 38-year old also said, "Psychologically tennis is the toughest sport. If you win, it's because of you, but if you lose, you don't get any chance to find excuses or pass blame to others."



Ugly win for booters

Qualify as group champs; face India in semis today

SPORTS REPORTER from Guwahati



Defending champions Bangladesh moved into the semifinal of the football event in the 12th South Asian (SA) Games with a come-from-behind 2-1 win over Nepal at the Sports Authority of India ground in Paltan Bazar, Assam yesterday.

Defender Raihan Hasan cancelled out a third-minute strike from Ananta Tamang in the 40th minute, before hitman Nabib Jewaj Jibon struck the winning goal in the 45th minute to help Bangladesh emerge as Group B Champions.

The men in red and green will face hosts India in the semifinal tomorrow while Group B runners-up Nepal will take on Group A champions Maldives on the same day.

After a frustrating 1-1 draw against Bhutan in the opener, Bangladesh needed at least a draw to qualify for the last-four battle. However, although they notched up a win, they did so in unimpressive fashion, playing what could be best described as 'ugly football'. A journalist from All India Radio even questioned this reporter why the defending champions were resorting to playing in such a way.

Despite having nine senior players in the starting eleven, the booters appeared to have a lack of experience at this level as they were playing without purpose. Especially the backline -- which was marshalled by national players Raihan, Yeasin Khan and Tapu Barman alongside national discard Rezaul Karim --

cleared away the ball every time it came their way, instead of keeping possession and building the play from the back.

Not only that, the charges of Spanish coach Ganzalo Sanchez Moreno played misplaced passes till the last minute of the game, indicating a clear lack of confidence.

"I am happy with the result but not happy with our performance in the first half. We need to work more to improve. I don't like losing possession frequently. Good players should play like good players; I don't know why they panic. I would have liked to control the ball, but I must admit that the field was not good enough for crisp, passing football," said Moreno, adding that they must improve their performance in the next match if they want to reach the final.

Nepal took the early lead after Raihan unnecessarily handled the ball on the left-hand side of the box. Jagajeet Shrestha whipped in the resulting free-kick which was duly headed in by Ananta from close range.

After Bangladesh survived a few close-calls, Raihan made up for his error, side-volleying home from a Jibon cut-back in the 40th minute. Five minutes later, Jibon went from provider to scorer, smashing an angled shot home after some good interplay in the danger zone.

After resumption, Bangladesh exposed Nepal's backline on a few occasions, but Shahedul Alam, Jibon and Hemanta Vincent Biswas failed to beat Nepalese goalkeeper Alan Neupanne. Jamal then rattled the crossbar from a free-kick, while Rasel Mahmud Liton was forced into a brilliant save which kept Bangladesh's lead intact.



A Bangladesh player (C) fights for the ball with his Nepal counterpart during their South Asian Games Group B encounter at the Sports Authority of India ground in Paltan Bazar, Assam yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

India look to stay afloat

PTI, Ranchi

Shocked by an inexperienced Sri Lankan side on a green wicket in the first match, India will aim to regain their winning touch and keep the series alive when they take on the island nation in the second Twenty20 international on Friday.

Indians were taken aback by how skipper Mahendra Singh had described the Pune track as "English". Now that Dhoni will be playing in his own backyard before his home fans, he can hope to get a typical sub-continent wicket at a ground, which is hosting its first ever Twenty20 International.

India have not lost a game out of three One-dayers played here and runs in the vicinity of 300 have been scored in three innings. One match against Australia had no result. But largely, a high-scoring game can be expected at JSCA International Stadium Complex.

But there are concerns about under-prepared outfield where the fielders are expected to have a tough time. The JSCA officials have argued that they got less time to prepare the ground and as a result many rough patches can be seen on the bald sand-based outfield.

From pariah to pride

ANISUR RAHMAN from Guwahati



They were once labelled 'bad girls' and faced a lot of odds in and outside their own homes, but they persisted on their beloved paths. Now those same women have turned into the pride of the nation.

That is what is being said about the female athletes who have upheld the country's sporting pride and created occasions for the national anthem to be played and the red and green hoisted high in a foreign land during the 12th South Asian Games being held in the Indian cities of Guwahati and Shillong.

At the halfway stage of the regional multi-sport extravaganza, the girls have outshone their male teammates to win three gold, seven silver and 13 bronze out of four gold, 10 silver and 40 bronze medals won by the country. The girls even won two silver medals in mixed events, in addition to the previous seven, in the archery recurve and compound mixed teams.

In seven events in the weightlifting category, the women bagged five medals -- one gold, two silver, two bronze -- while the men won only one bronze out of eight events they participated in. The female wrestlers meanwhile won eight medals -- three silver and five bronze -- in eight events while their male counterparts won only two bronze out of eight events.

With half as many female swimmers as male taking part in the games,

two gold and three bronze medals came from women's events while nine bronze came from the events of male swimmers, about whom there were high hopes ahead of this year's Games after they failed to produce a single gold in the last edition at home.

While it is easy to list their accomplishments in athletics, their journey to reach this stage was anything but easy. They faced a lot of barriers and challenges, such as criticism from neighbours, at times family members, threats from unknown persons and also had to fight against poverty.

"I have learned many times that a girl playing sports is a bad girl. The girl playing sports has no chance to be a good girl," said coach-cum-weightlifter Sharia Sultana Suchi. "I started when I was a student of Kushtia Islamic University. I had to face teasing from boys at the campus. I even encountered bad comments -- received letters with blades attached, virtually telling me to kill myself."

Suchi however did not give up on her sport and went on to win gold and silver medal in a couple of international tournaments. She completed her Master's degree in public administration and is now the proud coach of 12th SA Games gold-winning weightlifter Mabia Akter Simanta.

"If you play sports, no one will marry you. If you lift weights, you may face problems during pregnancy. But there was no objections from my parents about going into sports," said Jahura Akter Reshma, a 17-year-old weightlifter.

Reshma had to give up her studies

due to poverty but she later completed her SSC examinations and helped her family financially as she is now an employee of the Bangladesh Lute Mills Corporation.

The women athletes are not only facing problems from society; they are also facing gender discrimination from their respective game's governing bodies, which always prioritises male athletes during international meets. Of 370 Bangladeshi athletes participating in the ongoing SA Games, there are only 147 women athletes whereas there are 223 male athletes.

Double gold-winner Mahfuza Akter Shila faced no problems either from family or neighbours but she has been facing discrimination from the game's governing body.

"The federation (Bangladesh Amateur Athletics Federation) gives priority to male swimmers. It is seen that they send two male swimmers and one female swimmer to the international championship along with two to three officials but all are male officials. It is better to send a female coach or official along with female swimmers," said Shila.

There had also been a substantial contribution from female athletes (eight gold out of total 18 gold medals) in producing good results in the 2010 SA Games at home. It is high time for the sports authorities to rethink their handling of female athletes and create an environment to inspire girls to pursue careers in sport, so that they can continue making the country proud.

More Riders for SRK

PTI, New Delhi

Trinidad & Tobago franchise, which is co-owned by Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan, has been re-branded as Trinbago Knight Riders (TKR) from the previous name of Trinidad and Tobago Red Steel in the Hero Caribbean Premier League (CPL).

"It is a great honour to become part of the rich cricketing tradition of Trinidad & Tobago. We will do everything to uphold the tradition and thank all the people of Trinbago in advance for their passion and support," Shah Rukh Khan, co-owner of Trinbago Knight Riders, said.

The Trinidad and Tobago Red Steel clinched the CPL for the first time in 2015, defeating the Barbados Tridents in the final at their home ground of Queen's Park Oval.

Venky Mysore, CEO of KKR, said: "The acquisition of the Trinbago franchise is consistent with our vision to expand the 'Knight Riders' brand globally.

"We are proud of the powerful KKR brand we have built in India as part of the IPL as well as the ever-growing fan base."

Dismal outing on sixth day

SPORTS REPORTER from Guwahati



After an unexpected gold in the 50m pistol event, Bangladesh will be looking forward to winning a second gold from the Kahilipara Shooting Range in Guwahati today when Commonwealth Games silver-medalist Abdullah Hel Baki participates in the 10m air rifle event.

Though Baki has never won an international gold medal, Bangladesh Sports Shooting Federation expects a gold medal from Baki, who will have to fend off challenges from three Indian shooters -- Olympic bronze medalist Gagan Narayang, SA Games gold medalist Imran Hasan and Chain Singh, who yesterday won gold in the 50m rifle prone event.

"There are some strong opponents of whom one has won a bronze medal in Olympics but I will be trying to put up my best. It is important to shoot in the final round. If I can fully concentrate in the finals, then good results can be produced," said Baki yesterday.

However, the shooters failed to produce any good results yesterday and Bangladesh returned empty-handed in four events -- 50m men's rifle prone (individual and team) and 50m women's rifle prone (individual and team) yesterday.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh women's handball team moved into the semifinals with a convincing 38-24 win over Pakistan, while the men's team started their campaign on a winning note after beating Sri Lanka 16-24.

However, the men's kabaddi team, who have come here expecting to regain their silver medal, frustrated as they suffered a 13-20 defeat to Sri Lanka in their first match. The women's team, silver medallists in the last edition, also suffered a humiliating 14-28 defeat to Sri Lanka.

On the track and field, it was another frustrating day in all events except women's 4X400m relay where Bangladesh women's team -- comprising Sumi, Shirin Akter, Aysha Akter and Shohagi Khatun -- defended the bronze that they won back home, giving Bangladesh their only medal on the sixth day.

Barca set new club record

AFP, Madrid



An under-strength Barcelona set a new club record of 29 games unbeaten to progress to the Copa del Rey final with a 1-1 draw at Gary Neville's Valencia on Wednesday for an 8-1 aggregate win.

Barca's place in a fifth final in six years was assured after a 7-0 first-leg rout last week and without their star attacking trio Lionel Messi, Luis Suarez and Neymar the under-fire Neville looked set to be handed some relief by Alvaro Negredo's first-half opener.

However, 19-year-old Cameroonian midfielder Wilfred Kaptoum came off the bench to score his first Barca goal and preserve the European champions unbeaten run six minutes from time.

Sevilla are well-set to meet Barca in the final on May 21 as they travel to Celta Vigo in the second-leg of the other semifinal on Thursday leading 4-0.

"I'm very happy to be in the final. Everyone at Barca has had things so good in recent years we are used to reaching the final, but it is hard to be there every year," said Barca boss Luis Enrique.

In total, Enrique left 11 first-team regulars back in the Catalan capital with an eye to his side's busy upcoming schedule in La Liga and the Champions League.

By contrast, Valencia find themselves in the midst of a relegation battle in La Liga having not won for 12 league games, including nine since Neville took charge in December.

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