

SPORT



Skipper Marzia (2nd from R) leads the Bangladesh U-14 girls in practice yesterday, ahead of their AFC U-14 Regional Girls' Championship semifinal against hosts Tajikistan at the Aviator Stadium in Dushanbe today. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Kalsindur paved the way

SPORTS REPORTER

In December last year, Bangladesh's Under-14 Girls team made the entire nation proud. They did the unthinkable. They edged past hosts Nepal by a single goal and aced the AFC Under-14 Girls Regional Championship. This was the first time that a Bangladeshi women's football team won a trophy, at any level. Four months on, and they are on the verge of repeating the feat, this time in Tajikistan. Having beaten India 3-1 and thumping Nepal 9-0, the girls are now just one win away from reaching the final of the tournament. What is amazing is the immense contribution that the girls from the Kalsindur Government Primary School of Dhobaura Upazila are continuing to make. 10 players from the school were a part of the team last year and eight are representing the national team this year and they have already made a huge impact. Of the 12 goals that Bangladesh have scored in the tournament this year, nine came from the girls from Kalsindur.

The likes of Shamsunnahar, Nazma, Maria Manda, Tohura Khatun and Marzia have dazzled yet again. While these girls played last year, there has also been an additional player from the school, Sajeda Khatun, representing the women in green. These girls are household names in their respective towns today. Almost every other girl from the school wants to be the next Marzia and make a name for themselves. However, to come to this point, they have had to overcome several obstacles. And no one can better explain these problems than their school coach, Mohammad Mofizuddin. Back in 2011 when he had set out to form a girls football team, Mofizuddin was described as a madman, a marriage destroyer and a master who is only capable of playing football with girls. For a brief period, the discouraging remarks had almost compelled him to quit preparing the girls for the inaugural Bangamata Gold Cup five years ago -- a competition which his school went on to win for two consecutive years in 2013 and 2014. "Those days were difficult," Mofizuddin

said with a tinge of regret in his tone. "They all just asked the same question: why will girls play football? What's in it for them?" After coming across an advertisement for the Bangamata Gold Cup in 2011, Mofizuddin approached the school's headmistress in a bid to participate in the competition. "We barely found girls who wanted to play. It was a new concept. I had to force certain sections to take part in the selection round. "Once we gathered 17 players, we had to then deal with their parents. Because most of them were conservative, we had to work really hard to convince them. "There was this one guardian who blamed me for supposedly spoiling his niece's future. 'She runs around outside all day. No one will marry her because of you,' he lamented. I told

him that if she keeps improving at this rate, she can get married anywhere she wants to," recalled Mofizuddin. As time progressed, the practice sessions became more serious. From merely kicking balls around during lunch breaks the girls started attending training sessions. But that's when several other problems surfaced. "The girls weren't willing to wear half-pants or three-quarters. They used to play wearing salwar kameez, which made it difficult for them to run. It took them time to accept the jerseys. "In the midst of all this, there were ridiculous comments made against us. Once when I was going to school in the morning, a couple of men pointed towards me and said, 'look there goes the master who plays with the girls.' "There was this other time when the

headmistress's son and I were watering the field after training. Two people walked by and teased us. 'Look at those mad men. So this is what the madam's son is doing after finishing his master's degree,' they taunted." It took some time, but the people living around the school eventually came around. "We live in a backward region and most of the guardians either grow crops or pull rickshaws for their living. But the support that we got from them eventually was really great. "Some of them came to practise in the evening and brought chocolates with them. One of them gave my students free rides back home. The mentality changed a lot once we started winning games," said Mofizuddin. The main difference between the Kalsindur Government Primary School and the other institutions is dedication, according to Mofizuddin. "Between 2011 and 2013, the girls trained every single day. It may sound like I am exaggerating, but that's the truth. They were so determined that they even wanted to practise during the Eid holidays. "Once we started winning games, football became a source of inspiration for them. It turned out to be a way for them to travel outside the Upazila, something that most of them couldn't think of doing," he says. "It was also a way for them to delay their marriage. I have a student, Taslima, who studies in class nine. She trained under me in 2011. Her sister got married when in class four, but Taslima still isn't married and continues to play in high school," Mofizuddin adds. Today the school follows a strict six-day training schedule. "The students here know that if they do well, they can earn plenty of respect because they have seen their seniors earn that. For example, Sanjida Akter played under me in 2011. "Today she plays for the national team and the chairman of the Upazila invites her father over for tea every now and then. This is something that Sanjida could not have even imagined before," explains Mofizuddin. A move that was initially feared and expected to spoil the future of these girls has gone on to become a lifeline for these young footballers, for it is through this means that many of them now yearn to achieve the dreams that previously seemed light years away.

Girls eye final

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Bangladesh will look forward to securing a spot in the final of the AFC Under-14 Girls' Regional Championship when they take on hosts Tajikistan in the second semifinal at the Aviator Stadium in Dushanbe today. The teams have only met once before, in the same tournament in 2013, when the game ended in a 2-2 tie. Defending champions Bangladesh seem to be in high spirits going into the final, especially after their commanding performances in the group-stage matches where they notched up a maiden win over India and then thumped last edition's runners-up Nepal 9-0. The hosts confirmed their semifinal berth after beating Bhutan 4-1, before playing out a 1-1 draw against Kyrgyzstan. Bangladesh's striking pair of Marzia and Anuching Mogini have been in great form so far in the tournament, striking a

treble each against Nepal, while midfielder Tahura Khatun scored a brace in both matches. Coach Golam Rabbani Choton had nothing but praise for his charges as they put up a collective performance in both matches. "The girls played brilliant football against India and Nepal and if they can continue to perform at their natural best then tomorrow [Saturday], we can expect a win over Tajikistan," said Choton over the phone yesterday. Choton believes his players are now more mature than the squad that won the regional championship last year as all the players have gained experience from participating in the national women's championship. "We all are in good condition and we have the confidence to beat Tajikistan. Please pray for us," said Tahura Khatun adding that she wants to keep her golden scoring run going. India and Iran will play the first semifinal at the Almosy Academy Stadium today as well.

Bright cricket and official inefficiency

SPORTS REPORTER



The Dhaka Premier League might have witnessed just two rounds so far, with the third round set to begin today, but there has already been plenty to look out for in the 50-over competition.

From bowlers being reported to young players making their mark with centuries and huge totals being chased down, it has been an exciting opening week.

Perhaps the most significant observation was that the wickets in most of the grounds played well. While most of them might have been flat, there was at least a departure from the generally slow and low pitches that the tournament has often seen.

As a result, the league has already seen a number of high-scoring games. The emphatic tie between Victoria Sporting Club and Legends of Rugganj at the BKSP saw both teams post 314. Kalabagan Krira Chakra scored 283 in their pursuit of Prime Doleshwar Sporting Club's 287 at Fatullah. Also, both Gazi Group Cricketers and Mohammedan posted 280-plus totals in the first round.

It was an aspect that Bangladesh chief selector Faruque Ahmed was satisfied with.

"I would say that the wickets that we have seen so far are alright. Even if they were not absolutely sporting, they were flat and we have seen high-scoring games. At least it's not slow and low," said Faruque.

"But at the same time I would like to say that during our last recommendation we had said that we wanted a bit of grass on the wicket for four-day matches. There may not be grass on these wickets, but I would like them to continue the practice of putting grass in the four-day matches," he added.

Another aspect that was noteworthy was the way a number of young guns raised their bats for their respective teams. 22-year-old Mohammad Al-Amin scored his first century for Victoria. At the same time, both former under-19 players Salman Hossain and Saif Hassan posted responsible centuries for Cricket Coaching School. Mahedi Hasan broke the three-figure barrier in his very first List A game for Gazi Group Cricketers.

Have a glance at the highest run-getters of the tournament so far, and you will find these youngsters replacing the experienced domestic campaigners, which is something that pleased Faruque as well.

"This is a good sign. The way some of these youngsters stood up for their teams under pressure was exciting to watch. It was also good to see Mushfiqur Rahim score runs for his side. He needed that. Overall it has been a good start," said Faruque.

However, haunting the good start is the number of suspect-action reports that the umpires are filing. So far, eight bowlers have been reported and that is not a good omen considering that this is the most coveted domestic tournament in the country.

What is even worse is the way the submission of these reports is being handled. The reports have not yet been officially revealed to the media by the CCDM. In fact, even some of the concerned teams were unaware of the umpire's decisions.

Lions win a thriller

STAR SPORT DESK



A century from Steven Smith went in vain as Gujarat Lions overhauled Rising Pune Supergiants' mammoth 195 for three off the last ball of their Indian Premier League match to win by three wickets in Pune yesterday.

Birthday boy James Faulkner hit the winning single in an eventful last over by Thisara Perera that started with Gujarat needing nine with five wickets in hand, saw a boundary, two wickets and perhaps the widest wide in IPL history. Before that, the chase was fuelled by a 93-run opening stand between Brendon McCullum and Dwayne Smith in just 8.1 overs. Suresh Raina and Dinesh Karthik also weighed in, taking Gujarat to 180 for four at the beginning of the 19th. Earlier, Smith scored a 54-ball 101 with seven fours and five sixes to propel Pune to 195.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PUNE: 195 for 3 (Smith 101, Rahane 53, Dhoni 30 not out; Bravo 1-40)

GUJARAT: 196 for 7 in 20 overs (D Smith 63, McCullum 43, Raina 34, Karthik 33; Perera 2-41, Dinda 2-40)

Result: Gujarat won by 3 wickets

Mohammedan break Bank

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Mohammedan Sporting Club moved into the semi-finals of the Marcel Club Cup Hockey tournament with a massive 7-1 win over Sonali Bank SRC at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Mohammedan came into their third match with two morale boosting victories, one over Bangladesh SC and the other over Wari Club.

Sonali Bank also had as many wins in as many matches.

However, despite the numbers, Mohammedan managed to assert their dominance over Sonali Bank to book their semifinal berth with a match to spare.

The Black and Whites took only six minutes to break the deadlock and added

five more in quick succession to take a very comfortable 6-0 lead by the end of the first half.

Rubel Hossain, Rasel Mahmud Jimmy and Deen Islam scored a brace each.

After resumption, Kamruzzaman Rana added to Sonali Bank's miser, scoring another for Mohammedan.

However Sonali Bank did manage to pull back a consolation goal in the closing minutes of the game.

In the day's other match, Bangladesh Sporting Club tasted their first victory, defeating Wari Club 5-0.

Coming into their third match on the back of two defeats at the hands of Mohammedan SC and Dhaka Mariner Youngs, the win provided some solace to the Bangladesh SC.

Belal and Sohel scored braces, while Hosne Mubarak put away another for Bangladesh SC in a game which would aptly be described as a one-sided affair.



Mohammedan Sporting Club captain Rasel Mahmud Jimmy showed the way for his side against Sonali Bank SRC during their Marcel Club Cup hockey match at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday. The skipper scored twice, while Rubel Hossain and Deen Islam also added braces, as Mohammedan ran out with a massive 7-1 victory to secure a place in the semifinals of the tournament.

PHOTO: STAR