

# SPORT

## SIDDIKUR chokes again

ATIQUÉ ANAM

Struggle, struggle, surprise, disappointment. This seems to have become a pattern for Siddikur Rahman these days. Past his heady days, the ace Bangladeshi golfer spends most of his time on the golf course struggling – struggling with a recurring back injury, and also struggling for form. Once hailed as the most consistent golfer on the Asian Tour circuit for his top-ten finishes, the 31-year-old these days makes more headlines for missing cuts.

Yet once in a while and with little sign of form or confidence going in, Siddikur comes up with a surprise performance. The surprise comes in the form of a top-drawer show, but is more often followed by a bigger surprise, in the form of a disastrous finish which was all too evident in the Mauritius Open yesterday.

It has happened many a time in the past. Even in better times, Siddikur had strolled to the top position, and then perhaps shaken by the final-day nerves, finished second or worse. This is why Siddikur has seven second-place finishes on Asian Tour against only two victories so far. But it looked like that pattern was going to be snapped yesterday at the Four Seasons Golf Club in Mauritius.

While most of the golfers struggled in windy conditions of the seaside golf course, only Siddikur and South Korean youngster Jheunghun Wang looked in control. They were the only two golfers to have eventually finished with under-par scores. Siddikur, in particular, looked rock-solid all through the week and

only had four bogeys against 11 birdies over the first three rounds. Enjoying a three-stroke lead with only three holes left, it looked like Siddikur was sailing towards a first-ever European Tour victory. But came the 16th hole, he had a complete nervous breakdown.

Siddikur had spoken of his delight this week at the execution of his swings and drives, yet on the 16th, his tee shot went awfully awry, landing out of bounds and forcing him to drop a shot. The two-time Asian Tour winner eventually finished the hole with a double bogey. His driving wasn't looking all that solid and his putting had gone cold all of a sudden. Then on the 17th hole, he missed a regulation five-foot putter to settle for a bogey. Wang, had meanwhile, held his nerve to convert two difficult chip shots on consecutive holes to chip away at Siddikur's lead. The two were now level for the first time in the day as they went into par-five 18th hole tied at five-under.

More drama was to follow as Siddikur nearly made an eagle as his third shot hit the pin, but two putts were only good enough for a par while Wang knocked down a birdie, sealing back-to-back titles and robbing Siddikur's chance of a first-ever European Tour victory and a third Asian Tour title win.

On the brighter side of things, this was Siddikur's best finish on the European circuit, and it earned him a healthy paycheck of US 1,26,565 dollars, propping him up to the 10th position in the Asian Tour Order of Merit. Now ranked 406th in the world, the Mauritius exploits will in all likelihood lift Siddikur much higher up the ladder and, most importantly, bring him firmly back in the Olympic Games' eligibility list.



The flailing hands and the frustration on the face of Siddikur Rahman right after his tee-shot on the 16th went out of bounds on the final day of the Mauritius Open yesterday. That dreaded shot started the rot as the Bangladeshi golfer blew his chance of a maiden European Tour victory.

PHOTO: ASIANTOUR.COM

### WHAT SIDDIKUR SAID

Well it was good until hole number 15, but unfortunately I don't know what happened I had an O.B. the first shot and a good up and down but it's really unfortunate. Maybe I'll have something good in the

I did visualise that my ball was going to go in the hole (on the 18th), so I could eagle it. I chipped well and the putt was not so good. I

I didn't even think I was going to be able to reach the second position. Before we came here I was really struggling with my golf. I'm really happy to get the second

## A show of solidarity

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's national cricketers yesterday paid a visit to former Mohammedan goalkeeper Ekramul Bashar Tuhin, who has been battling stomach cancer for the past three months.

53-year-old Ekramul, who is the elder brother of former national captain Habibul Bashar, represented Mohammedan and Bangladesh in the Asian Club Cup and played for Bangladesh Police, East End Club, Farajganj, Arambagh and Dhanmondi Club during his prime.

Tigers captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, along with Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal and Taskin Ahmed visited Ekramul at his residence and spent some time with him.

It was a gesture which, according to Habibul Bashar, lifted his elder brother's spirit in desperate times.

"He has been undergoing chemotherapy for the last three months and was mentally down after the first phase. After the national cricketers visited him, he seemed a lot happier and more confident in his fight.

"It was something that I could sense. And at this point of time, this is what he requires most -- confidence," Bashar told The Daily Star on Sunday night.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Mashrafe, Tamim and Mushfiqur requested everyone in the sports arena to show solidarity.

"I request the Bangladesh Cricket Board, the Bangladesh Football Federation and the

Bangladesh Olympic Association to come forward and support him. He has given a lot to Bangladesh's sports and as sportspersons, it's our responsibility to support him. The national cricketers are beside him.

"He has played for Mohammedan for quite a few years and I hope the club support him because the club generally does many

good things," said Mashrafe.

On a similar note Tamim said: "Sports is one arena that brings plenty of happiness to the people of Bangladesh and today one of them is suffering. I request people to help in anyway possible."

In the same vein, Mushfiqur asked everyone to pray for the former footballer.



Tamim Iqbal (L), Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Mushfiqur Rahim yesterday paid a visit to former Mohammedan footballer, Ekramul Bashar Tuhin (2nd from L), who has been battling cancer for the last three months.

PHOTO: BCB

## Fitness the main concern for booters

SPORTS REPORTER



Since Bangladesh's elimination from the semifinals of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup in late February, the key national players had been out of international action due to suspension while others missed out domestic competition due to a court ruling.

And the lack of match-practice is going to be a cause for concern ahead of Bangladesh's Asian Cup Qualifier fixture against Tajikistan next month.

Former captain Mamunul Islam, midfielders Sohel Rana, Yeamin Ahmed Munna, defenders Nasir Chowdhury and Raihan Hasan have been out of the domestic action due to the court's directives following a row between clubs over their possession. Nasirul Islam and Emon Mahmud, on the other hand, could not play for their respective clubs due to injuries they suffered nearly three months ago.

However with the ban lifted and injuries overcome these players face the biggest challenge to get match-fit before the Tajikistan fixture.

To make up for the lost time Mamunul, Sohel and Emon along with Nasir, Nasirul, Yeamin and Raihan have been seen doing extra-training at the Bangabandhu National

Stadium yesterday evening.

"As they have been out of all type of action for the last three months, they have gained a bit of weight and now need to improve their fitness level which is a concern for us. That's why they have been doing extra-training before the play-offs," said coach Saiful Bari Titu.

"The overall condition of the other players is good as they have played a tournament in the meantime. The players have already had two strengthening sessions at the gym and will have another to increase their endurance," added Titu.

Mamunul reiterated the importance of his fitness as he believes he needs to catch-up with the in-form players.

"I personally can say that I need to have more individual training to catch-up with the other players as I did not play any matches despite training with the club. I need to improve my endurance, running and chasing. I believe I can achieve this because I have been training on my own in addition to the schedule, making it two sessions in a day."

Meanwhile, defender Atiqur Rahman Meshu left the training camp with an Achilles tendon injury and chances are slim that he will return to the fold in time, while Monamem Khan Raju and Rubel Mia suffered hamstring injuries and Nurul Absar sustained a knee jerk.

## Khulna crowned NCC champions

SPORTS REPORTER

Khulna district won their fourth National Cricket Championship title when they beat Dhaka district by six wickets in the final of the competition in Pabna yesterday.

This is the fourth time in the last eight years that Khulna have managed to ace the district level competition.

After winning the toss, Dhaka elected to bat first and were restricted to just 204 for 9. Ashiqul Islam top scored for Dhaka with 58 off 104 balls. Khulna's Masum Khan was the pick of the bowlers as he finished with figures of 3 for 26 in seven overs. He was well supported by Razibul Islam and Al Imran, both of who took two scalps each.

After the exchange, Khulna rode on Sadman Kabir and Aslam Ali 123-run stand for the second wicket and set the foundation for the chase. While Sadman scored 78 off 83, Ali remained unbeaten on 88.

The National Cricket Championship is a one-day cricket tournament that takes place between all the districts.

## Huge FIFA fund beckons BFF

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Football Federation is set to get more financial assistance from the FIFA as the 66th Congress of the world's game governing body decided to double the current expenditure fund and provide additional development fund to its member associations.

"FIFA will significantly increase its investment to USD 5 million for each member association per four-year cycle for football projects and support for running costs," the official website of FIFA stated.

"The use of funds will be monitored closely through enhanced compliance, accountability and transparency, with all member associations required to publish independent audits of their finances as per the new 'FIFA Forward' regulations," it also added.

BFF's former general secretary Anwarul Haque Helal explained the statement: "From now on, FIFA will provide 500,000 dollars annually to each of its member association for expenditure purpose and will provide a further 750,000 dollars annually for development purpose, provided that the member association submit development programmes and meet terms and conditions before getting FIFA's approval."

The BFF currently gets 250,000 dollars annually from the FIFA and the same amount annually from Asian Football Confederation.

## 'D/L method rubbish'

PTI, Kolkata

Expressing complete displeasure at the Duckworth-Lewis method, Rising Pune Supergiants coach Stephen Fleming termed the ICC approved rule for rain-truncated games as 'rubbish' stating that a change is needed at least in the shortest format.

"Duckworth-Lewis is rubbish. As soon as you get to D/L, the game is over. I've been saying that for years. The others have said it as well but there's no point carrying on too much about it," a disgusted Fleming said after his team's campaign turned from bad to worse losing to KKR by eight wickets on Saturday. This was RPS' 9th loss in 12 games.

"It needs to be addressed. There's no willingness to change. It's not made for a T20 game. It's just ridiculous really and until it's addressed you just hope the sky doesn't open up," Fleming said.

## Sunrisers stay on top

STAR SPORTS DESK



Mustafizur Rahman took one wicket as the Sunrisers Hyderabad beat Kings XI Punjab by seven wickets in a tense finish in Mohali yesterday. The win almost confirmed a place for Hyderabad in the playoffs and eliminated Punjab from the Indian Premier League.

Mustafizur, who finished with figures of 1 for 32, took his overall tally to 14 wickets in the IPL. While he did get the crucial wicket of Murali Vijay, it wasn't one of his better performances. And the reason behind that was Hashim Amla. The elegant stroke-player drove his way to 96 off just 56 balls with 14 fours and two sixes.

The South African enjoyed playing the scoop and the drives through cover and managed to hit Fizz for three fours in an over.

However, Amla's brilliant performance went in vain as a good batting show from Hyderabad ensured that they reach home in style. Captain David Warner set the foundation with a 41-ball 52 and he was well supported by DJ Hooda's 22-ball 34.

However, with 61 runs required off the last six overs they needed a flourish towards the end and that came from the bat off Yuvraj Singh. He smacked three sixes and three fours during his 24-ball 42.

In the second game, Krunal Pandya hit a



YUVRAJ ... 42 not out

37-ball 86 in his maiden IPL fifty before bowlers took charge as Mumbai Indians pounded Delhi Daredevils by a comprehensive 80-run margin to jump to third spot.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

PUNJAB V HYDERABAD

PUNJAB: 179 for 4 in 20 overs (Amla 96, Saha 27; Kumar 2-32, Mustafizur 1-32)

HYDERABAD: 180 for 3 in 19.4 overs (Warner 52, Yuvraj 42 not out; Patel 1-26)

Result: Sunrisers Hyderabad won by 7 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Hashim Amla.

### MUMBAI V DELHI

MUMBAI: 206 for 4 in 20 overs (Guptill 48, Pandya 86; Morris 2-34)

DELHI: 126 all out in 19.1 overs (de Kock 40, Pant 23; Bumrah 3-13, Pandya 2-15)

Result: Mumbai won by 80 runs.

Player-of-the-match: KH Pandya

## Mariners start strong

SPORTS REPORTER

A rejuvenated Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club got off to a flyer in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Hockey League with an emphatic 4-1 win over Ajax SC at the Maulana Bhasani Stadium yesterday.

Courtesy of Mohammad Toufiq, Mariner Youngs had the lead five-minutes into the game. National discard Mamunur Rahman Chayan doubled the margin just before the break by converting a penalty corner. After resumption, Arshad Hossain struck twice in the 36th and 46th minutes to confirm the cakewalk despite Rahat Sarwar pulling one goal back for Ajax immediately after Arshad's second goal.

In the day's other match, Bangladesh SC notched up a 1-0 win over Shadharan Bima with Prince scoring the decisive goal in the 61st minute.