

SPORT

Booters' new campaign starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will be looking forward to producing a good performance irrespective of the outcome in the first-leg play-off of the Asian Cup Qualifiers against Tajikistan at the Republican Central Stadium in Dushanbe, Tajikistan today.

The match will get underway at 9:00pm (Bangladesh Standard Time).

It was a nightmare for the men in red and green when the two sides met six months ago in Dushanbe amid freezing conditions and rainfall. Under the guidance of Fabio Lopez, Bangladesh suffered a massive 5-0 defeat on that night which was an away fixture of the World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifiers.

Since then Bangladesh's performance graph has gone down consistently under three different coaches and Bangladesh's last international match of the World Cup Qualifiers against Jordan ended in an 8-0 drubbing.

So it is expected to be a tough assignment for Bangladesh to produce a positive result in today's match. However, the visitors can take inspiration from the fact that they won a game against the Tajiks six years ago in Sri Lanka and also from the return of Lodewijk de Kruif, who had guided them to a 1-1

draw against the same side last year.

Though the Dutchman, prior to departure for Tajikistan, vowed to bring a point home, yesterday he said they were looking forward to delivering a good performance.

"The players are highly motivated and dedicated for the match. Our preparation has been good. We want positive performance, no matter what the result is. Tajikistan have some good level players who are playing in foreign countries like Russia, but we will give our best in the field tomorrow [Thursday]," said de Kruif at an official press briefing yesterday.

If the team can deliver their best, it is not impossible to collect a point against Tajikistan, who were held twice by Bangladesh in the past. Last June, a spirited Bangladesh side were on the verge of posting their second win over the Central Asian nation in Dhaka, but the visitors escaped from defeat with a late equaliser from Fatkhullo Fatkhuloev.

This time de Kruif is concentrating on good defensive organisation, but he would definitely miss the services of defender Yeasin Khan, who has been serving a six-month ban.

One thing that might help Bangladesh team this time is the fact that the weather condition in Dushanbe is very congenial right now.

De Kruif's counterpart, Khakim Fuzaylov,



Bangladesh coach Lodewijk de Kruif speaks as skipper Mamunul Islam listens intently at a press conference in Dushanbe yesterday ahead of today's Asian Cup qualifying playoff against Tajikistan.

PHOTO: BFB

is taking nothing for granted and warned his charges to be cautious in the home match.

"We have prepared well for the match. Our training camp was very good and the players understand how important this game is. It is the play-off stage and we have to qualify.

"Our target is to win and to progress to

the group stage of the qualifying round. We are expecting a tough match and it will not be easy against Bangladesh. We respect this team," said the former defender, who is set to make his debut as the country's coach.

The reverse fixture of this double-legged qualifier will be held in Dhaka on June 7.

ASIAN B'BALL QUALIFIERS

Massive loss for hosts

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Hosts Bangladesh got off to a frustrating start in the Treat FIBA Asian U-18 Basketball Championship Qualifiers in Dhaka yesterday, losing their opening match against regional powerhouse India by 31-90 points. The hosts trailed the first half by 13-57 points. India's Bishal Kumar netted highest 15 points while Mohammad Ali and Sajib scored nine and six points respectively for Bangladesh.

India later beat Sri Lanka by 127-52 points while in the day's most exciting match, Nepal edged Sri Lanka by 65-64 points. Bangladesh will take on Sri Lanka in their last match of the competition today.

The champion team from this four-team group will qualify for the continental championship, which will be held in Iran next month.

Kulasekara quits Tests

AFP, Colombo

Veteran Sri Lankan seamer Nuwan Kulasekara announced his retirement from Test cricket on Wednesday but said he would continue to be available for limited-overs matches.

The 33-year-old paceman has not played a Test in almost two years and said in a letter to the Sri Lankan board that he was retiring with "immediate effect".

"I hope it will allow me to better prepare for ODI and T20 cricket, which I would like to continue playing for Sri Lanka subject to good performance and selection," he said.

Kulasekara made his Test debut against New Zealand in 2005 and went on to play 21 Tests, capturing 48 wickets.

His best match figures were 8-58 against Pakistan at Colombo in 2009, while his highest score with the bat was 64 against England at Lord's in 2006.

His last Test appearance, in 2014, was also against England at Lord's although he has remained a regular fixture in Sri Lanka's one-day international and Twenty20 line-ups.

He has so far played 173 ODIs and was ranked as the number one bowler in the world in March 2009.

Kulasekara has also played 50 T20 internationals, including the recent World Cup in India.

Mosaddek magic continues

Doleshwar first into Super League

SPORTS REPORTER

There are few players in Bangladesh's domestic circuit who are hitting the ball as well as Mosaddek Hossain is at the moment. He is just 20 and started playing first-class cricket only two years ago, but the maturity and the consistency that he has shown so far sets him apart from his peers.

He already has three double hundreds in 18 first-class games with a superb average of 70.80. In the ongoing Dhaka Premier League, the country's leading 50-over competition he holds the highest average of 86.20.

His calm, unbeaten 64 against Prime Bank at the BKSP yesterday helped Abahani out of the mire and win a crucial fixture. It was the second consecutive time that he bailed the heavyweights out.

There is a sense of joy when one

watches Mosaddek bat. The manner in which he easily carves the inside-out drives makes you wonder about the immense talent that the youngster has. What's also impressive is the concentration that he displays. He has regularly scored for Abahani at number six in this league, despite the fact that he rarely plays in that position, preferring to play higher up.

Abahani had suffered a mini-collapse during their chase of 240 and lost three wickets for six runs. They were struggling at 156 for five in 29 overs. However, Mosaddek took control from there on. With the help of Liton Das, who scored a 51-ball 25 and kept his own wicket intact, Mosaddek took Abahani over the line. He scored four fours and four sixes during his 49-ball 64 and led Abahani to a five-wicket win over the defending champions.

Earlier, slow left-armers Shakib Al Hasan and Saqlain Sajib shared seven

wickets to restrict Prime Bank to 240 for nine.

At the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Nasir Hossain's Prime Doleshwar became the first team to seal a spot in the Super League when they beat Gazi Group Cricketers by five wickets. An all-round performance from Prime's foreign recruit Ashok Menaria led them to an easy victory.

Batting first, Gazi Group were restricted to 213 for eight with Menaria scalping three wickets.

After the exchange, Menaria posted an unbeaten 59, and along with Nasir's 40 and Rony Talukdar's 43, took the team to the top of the table with 14 points.

Kalabagan Cricket Academy won the battle at the bottom of the table when they beat Cricket Coaching School by five wickets at Fatullah. The player of the match was Kalabagan's foreign recruit Jatin Saxena who scored 87 and also scalped two wickets.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PRIME BANK: 240 for 9 (Nurul 46, Taibur 43; Shakib 4-35, Saqlain 3-37)

ABAHANI: 243 for 5 in 44.3 overs (Mosaddek 64 not out, Pathan 60; Shuvagata 3-38)

Result: Abahani won by five wickets

GAZI GROUP CRICKETERS: 213 for 8 (Elias 46; Menaria 3-29)

PRIME DOLESHWAR: 217 for 5 in 49 overs (Menaria 59 not out; Sharif 1-32)

Result: Prime won by five wickets.

CRICKET COACHING SCHOOL: 185 for 9 (Amit 38; Mahmudul 3-37, Jatin 2-26)

KALABAGAN CRICKET ACADEMY: 186 for 5 (Jatin 87; Nasum 2-31)

Result: Kalabagan won by five wickets.



Impressed by Mosaddek Hossain's knock, Prime Bank's Sabbir Rahman congratulates the 20-year-old after the latter's half-century led Abahani to a crucial victory at the BKSP yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Unruly day in hockey

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The high-voltage affair of the Green Delta Insurance Premier Hockey League between Mohammedan and Usha Kirra Chakra was sopped 18 minutes before scheduled time, with the game locked at 2-2, thanks to bad light and a delay in start which was caused by the late finish of an earlier match of the day.

With 18 minutes left of play and the match locked at 2-2, Usha were awarded a penalty corner but Mohammedan goalkeeper Zahid Hossain declined to

continue due to bad light and the umpires took nearly 15 minutes to suspend the game. The remainder of the match will be played today.

Earlier, Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club notched up a 2-1 win over Sonali Bank in a troublesome encounter which came to an end nearly half-hour later from scheduled time due to frequent halts following arguments over umpires' decisions, scuffles between players and entrance of club officials into the ground.

Taher Ali had cancelled out an Ashraf Islam strike to make it 1-1 at one stage before Ashraf converted a penalty corner to give Mariners the victory.

Does the CEO know his role?

BISHWAJIT ROY

Players always want to maintain a process so that they can be consistent in their performance. It is also believed that a team can only improve their performance graph by following a good process.

It is no different when it comes to administrative issues.

Bangladesh cricket is now going through a good time, though one should not forget that it is only in limited-overs cricket.

There may be a long way to go to be established as a leading cricket nation but the last few years' performances have provided enough signs that this cricket-mad nation has got the talent to reach the pinnacle.

The arrival of a number of world-class players has completely changed Bangladesh's face on the cricketing map. It is however always good to ask difficult questions in good times. And now may be the best time for Bangladesh to make sure that they are proactive in making the most out of their recent improvement in results.

But are the activities of our cricket administration as bright as our current performance under the charismatic leadership of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza?

A controversy regarding the revamp of the current selection panel brought the question to the fore. Leaving aside what people have been saying off the record, the one reason that has been cited time and again for the change to a successful system is the lack of coordination between the selectors and the team management.

A number of questions have been raised about the selectors' leave, their neglect of domestic matches, and many other mistakes.

Should the lack of coordination and the aforementioned issues not be properly taken care of by a powerful chief executive officer?

Tigers in a tough group

SPORTS REPORTER



Calling it the group of death may be a stretch, but considering the current form of their fellow Group A members and the conditions in which the matches will be played, Bangladesh find themselves in the

toughest of the two Champions Trophy 2017 groups. In the fixtures and groups announced by the International Cricket Council (ICC) yesterday, the seventh-ranked Bangladesh cricket team have been drawn in Group A along with hosts England, world champions Australia and World Cup runners-up New Zealand.

India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and South Africa make up Group B. The headline matches of both groups will involve two of cricket's most storied rivalries in the England-Australia match on June 10 and the India-Pakistan clash on June 4. Bangladesh cricket fans however would not have minded breaking up the England-Australia date for the sake of a subcontinent neighbour in their group.

Much of Bangladesh's recent 50-over successes have come against their neighbours and the other team in Group B, South Africa, are the one non-Asian team that have felt

GROUPS & FIXTURES

Group A: Australia, New Zealand, England, Bangladesh.

Group B: India, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Pakistan.

Date	Match	Venue	Time
June 01	England v Bangladesh	The Oval	3:30pm
June 02	Australia v New Zealand	Edgbaston	3:30pm
June 03	Sri Lanka v South Africa	The Oval	3:30pm
June 04	India v Pakistan	Edgbaston	3:30pm
June 05	Australia v Bangladesh	The Oval	6:30pm
June 06	England v New Zealand	Cardiff	3:30pm
June 07	Pakistan v South Africa	Edgbaston	6:30pm
June 08	India v Sri Lanka	The Oval	3:30pm
June 09	New Zealand v Bangladesh	Cardiff	3:30pm
June 10	England v Australia	Edgbaston	3:30pm
June 11	India v South Africa	The Oval	3:30pm
June 12	Sri Lanka v Pakistan	Cardiff	3:30pm
June 14	First Semifinal (A1 v B2)	Cardiff	3:30pm
June 15	Second Semifinal (A2 v B1)	Edgbaston	3:30pm
June 18	Final	The Oval	3:30pm
June 19: Reserve day			
(All times BST)			

the force of the 'Tigers' improved play circa 2015.

In Group A, New Zealand and England may be obvious targets as Bangladesh have had joy against both teams in their last few encounters. They beat England in the famous 2015 World Cup group match to knock them out of the tournament, while they have beaten New Zealand in seven of their past 10 completed encounters.

But there are caveats there; England are a different animal at home and have been on an impressive upward graph ever since that Tigers-induced calamity, and New Zealand are also a much-improved team since their two successive whitewashes in Bangladesh. With a seam-heavy attack they are also suited to English conditions.

According to ICC chief executive Dave Richardson, the Champions Trophy is especially important because it will be played three months before the cut-off for qualification to the 2019 ICC World Cup. It will be interesting to see what steps the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, who is known for his astute planning as evidenced in taking the team early to Brisbane ahead of the 2015 World Cup, take in assuring the Tigers have the best chance to make an impression.



NIZAMUDDIN CHOWDHURY

There have however been whispers about a lack of a proactive attitude, and lots of dilly-dallying regarding any issue. Why is a lack of communication often blamed for the loss of a coach like Stuart Law, who it is said may have served the Academy if things went smoothly?

Why do they need so much time to form a bowling action review committee? Why does the BCB need to wait for advice from its technical committee to decide against the malpractice in domestic umpiring or to realise the importance of improving in Test cricket and creating opportunities for more longer-version cricket?

Whispers abound among board members regarding whether discussions with other board members on the sidelines of the ICC meeting will indeed serve the purposes of the team or if there is a need to strengthen bilateral relationships to keep the ball rolling not only for the national team but also for the A team and different age group teams.

If a good system is always in place a country will never face extreme dearth in quality, like Australia which took little time to re-establish their prowess in world cricket after the departures of one great star after another.