

SPORT



The Bangladesh Under 16 girls put in an aggressive and a tactful display to beat their Iranian counterparts 3-0 in their first game of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship qualifiers at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

More than a 3-0 thrashing

SPORTS REPORTER

Last time when a Bangladesh Under-16 women's football team played against their Iranian counterpart they lost 1-2. On Saturday night a slightly different U-16 team registered a comprehensive 3-0 against a hugely awestruck Iranian team at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. The win gave the home team a perfect start in the AFC Women's Under-16 Group C Qualifiers on a day when Chinese Taipei won 7-1 against Kyrgyzstan in an early morning game and UAE drew 2-2 against Singapore in the afternoon on a hectic opening day fixtures at the premier venue. But for the Bangladesh women their 3-0 win was not just a sort of revenge but a reward of continuity which has been building around the success of the Under-14 team at the international level. With so many players coming through a very strong junior system ignited by the now-famous Kalsindhur School, the latest win is not just a fluke. It was rather coming after the same set's 2-0 semi-final win against Iran in the AFC Under-14 regional championship in Nepal that our girls won in the most dramatic of

circumstances two years ago.

Marzia, a star of that famous victory in Nepal, opened the scoring in the 63rd minute. Three minutes later it was the turn of Mousumi Jahan to blast home a spectacular right-footer, worthy

of any quality strike at any level. Tohura, a hero of Bangladesh success at the Under-14 level in Tajikistan last year, headed in the third four minutes from time. Her header off a whipping cross from the left was so immaculate that an

out of position Iranian custodian only could watch it sailing over her head.

But the three goals hardly reflected how well the home girls played. It was a pity that only a handful of fans were in attendance in a match the home team dominated from the word 'go' till the final whistle. It would be unwise to draw the overall standard of our football including that of our men's team, but those who watched this particular game were amazed to see their ability to run at the same pace on a full-size ground for 90 minutes, their hunger to win back the ball, some individual skills like bending the ball, providing those defense-splitting passes, playing those one-twos with authority. It may sound harsh but the kind of football they played with all the basic ingredients deeply rooted in every one of them, it can be even impress the senior most men's team of our country.

This was a rarity on a football field when a Bangladesh opponent were allowed only one shot at the target. And the rate at which the Bangladesh girls, who have been allowed to take football seriously not long ago, are progressing, it is not far away for them to reverse a 6-0 drubbing by Iran at the Under-19 level. What they need is continuity to floor one frontier after another.

Iranian coach stunned

SPORTS REPORTER

Iranian coach Shadi Mahini was full of praise for the Bangladesh girls after they thumped his side 3-0.

"We knew that the match would be hard for us but never thought Bangladesh would come up with such stuff," said Iran coach Mahini at the post-match conference yesterday.

"We beat Bangladesh two years ago but this squad is far better. We knew Bangladesh is good team and one of favourites but we did not expect such a performance from them," said Mahini, who believed Bangladesh have progressed because of their strong grassroots programme.

"I can't mention any names

of Bangladeshi players, rather I want to say that together they a good team," said Mahini, who believed the defeat made it difficult for them to progress.

Mahini's counterpart Golam Rabbani Choton was ecstatic after a dream start to the championship.

"Winning against a big team like Iran is a great achievement but we still have a long way to go. We want to think match by match to achieve our target," said Choton, adding that he was not happy with the scoreline.

"We dominated throughout the match and did everything except score till the 63rd minute," said Choton, who guided this group of girls for last two years.

Afghanistan before England?

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director Akram Khan has said that there is the possibility that another team might tour Bangladesh before England arrive on September 30. He also indicated that that team could be Afghanistan.

Earlier in the day, television channels reported that the BCB is in discussion with the Afghanistan Cricket Board regarding a series.

When asked about the matter, Akram said: "We are still discussing the possibility of a series. It is not yet confirmed, but yes there is a discussion going on. We will get it confirmed in a day or two. This is series is not a part of the Future Tours Programme (FTP)."

Speaking to reporters earlier this afternoon, BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury also indicated that a foreign team may arrive in Dhaka prior to the England series. He however, didn't mention any particular team.

On another note, the BCB have also started discussions on finding a possible replacement for the recently sacked assistant coach, Ruwan Kalpage. According to Akram, the board is likely to select Bangladesh's fielding coach, Richard Halsall.

"He has plenty of experience. He had the same role when he coached England and we are confident that he can perform this role. After a discussion last night we zeroed in on him. It is yet to be official, but he is likely to be our next assistant coach," said Akram.

Afghanistan are expected to play a number of ODIs after their arrival. If this series does take place then this will be the first ODI series that Bangladesh will play this year.

So far, they have only played one T20 series against Zimbabwe in 2016. Apart from that they have played in the ICC World Twenty20.

Root leads England

AFP, London



Joe Root's 89 saw England to a four-wicket win over Pakistan in the second one-day international at Lord's on Saturday.

Victory put England 2-0 up in the five-match series after their 44-run rain-affected success at Southampton on Wednesday.

Aggressive pace bowling, with Chris Woakes and Mark Wood taking three wickets apiece, left England chasing a modest target of 252.

Pakistan had collapsed to two for three before Sarfraz Ahmed's 105, the first ODI hundred by a Pakistan player at Lord's, and Imad Wasim's 63 not out kept the tourists in the match.

The pair put on 77 for the sixth wicket. After a couple of early stumbles in their reply, a third-wicket partnership of 112 between Root and England captain Eoin Morgan (68) effectively put the result beyond doubt.

Left-hander Morgan's knock on his Middlesex home ground ended a run of 23 international innings without a fifty for the former Ireland star.

England's chase suffered a setback when in-form opener Jason Roy -- who made a dashing 65 at Southampton -- fell for a second-ball duck as he played on to Mohammad Amir.

Root steadied England nerves with two fours in as many balls off Hasan Ali -- a cover-drive followed by a cut. But opener Alex Hales' lean run contin-

ued when he was bowled for 14 trying to slog-sweep left-arm spinner Wasim.

That left England 35 for two but Root and Morgan took the game away from Pakistan, the skipper hitting nine fours before he too was bowled by Wasim.

Ben Stokes made a brisk 42 before Root, whose innings featured just five fours and 53 singles, holed out off Wahab Riaz with England in sight of the winning post at 240 for six.

Woakes ended the match with 15 balls to spare when he cut leg-spinner Yasir Shah, England's tormentor in chief during Pakistan's Test win at Lord's earlier this season, for four.

Pakistan, who saw captain Azhar Ali win the toss and bat on a cloudy morning, lost recalled opener Sami Aslam (one) following an England review after his attempted pull off Woakes was held down the legside by wicket-keeper Jos Buttler.

There was no hot-spot mark but Australian third umpire Simon Fry decide the spike on real time snicko was large enough to give Aslam out.

But there was no doubt at all when Wood dismissed Sharjeel Khan for nought with an express delivery that cut sharply off the seam to knock over the left-hander's off stump.

Azhar also fell for a duck when caught behind off Woakes.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: 251 all out in 49.5 overs (Sarfraz 105, Imad 63 not out; Woakes 3-42, Wood 3-46)

ENGLAND: 255-6 in 47.3 overs (Root 89, Morgan 68, Stokes 42; Imad 2-38)
Result: England won by 4 wickets

No worries about pace attack

15-member ODI squad by Sep 2

SPORTS REPORTER



As the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) confirmed that England's tour to Bangladesh in October would continue as planned, the home of cricket in Mirpur was

overcome by a vibrant mood. The players were buzzing, the officials were hustling and the selectors were working to fine-tune the 15-member squad for the three-match ODI series against England.

The Tigers' one-day squad has gotten into good shape following their performances over the past two years under the leadership of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. So nobody would expect any significant changes to the side for the home series against England, who will arrive in Dhaka on September 30 to play three ODIs and two Tests spread across Mirpur and Chittagong.

However, the selection committee has been doing some brainstorming in order to adequately shape the bowling attack. Especially the pace attack needs some tinkering with their special weapon, Mustafizur Rahman, was ruled out due to injury and as Taskin Ahmed's fate hangs in the balance.

The selection committee is likely to announce the 15-member ODI team before head coach Chandika Hathurusingha goes on leave on September 2, so that the team can practice together after the Eid vacation.

It is more or less confirmed that the team will comprise three pace bowlers. Taskin Ahmed along with left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny will go to Australia on September 6 and have their respective bowling actions tested at an ICC-accredited centre in Brisbane on September 8.

As it is a home series, the selectors are not willing to hold back the announcement of the team until the result of Taskin and Sunny's tests are revealed.

"We will most likely give the team before our coach leaves on holiday. We are planning to announce the team by September 2

so that they can train together after the Eid break. The ODI players will play the first round of the BCL starting from September 20," said chief selector Minhajul Abedin.

However, some changes may be made if Afghanistan come to play an ODI series before the England tour.

"We have got a settled one-day team. But as Mustafizur is out and we are yet to know about Taskin, we have to think about our pace bowling options.

"The good news is that Rubel [Hossain] has fully recovered and Shafiqul Islam's condition is very good. So we are not too concerned with our pace attack," he continued.

"We have had a special focus on fitness and refreshingly, the players had very good fitness training and all are fit," Minhajul added.

Selector Habibul Bashar found no reason to be concerned with the pace department. "Rubel, Al-Amin [Hossain] and Shafiqul [Islam] are available for selection and they are experienced and proven bowlers in international cricket. We also have some pacers in Subashis Roy and Kamrul Islam.

"You cannot replace Mustafizur but you have to accept the fact that a pace bowler cannot be available all the time," said Bashar.

"In the past you saw Bangladesh play good cricket even absence of some of its key players and it's a good indication for our cricket. So we should accept the reality. I believe a culture has developed in our team where players try to make best out of their opportunities," he added.

Bashar also believed that Mustafizur missing out would be an opportunity to show the world just how much the Tigers had improved.

"Our pace attack over the past two years drew attention from the whole world. There is no doubt that Mustafizur's arrival brought out excitement and added a new dimension to the team. However, in order to determine how good a team truly is you have to see what they have in the pipeline. It depends on what kind of replacements you have for the team. So if we look at it like that, then this is an opportunity to show just how good our team really is."



With Mustafizur Rahman injured and Taskin Ahmed yet to get the clean chit from the ICC, the pace combination will definitely be an issue that Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (2nd from L) and co will ponder quite a bit ahead of the England series.

PHOTO: STAR

Final decision on Kurtz soon

SPORTS REPORTER

German coach Oliver Kurtz was scheduled to arrive here last night and meet an interview board as he bids to take charge of the national hockey team ahead of Bangladesh's engagement in the AHF Cup, scheduled to begin on Nov 19 in Hong Kong.

Kurtz had worked with Bangladesh as the deputy of Peter Gerhard Rach during the 2010 South Asian Games. He had also been with Oman for a long time before the Oman hockey association parted ways with him in December last year following the failure of the Oman U-18 team.

"Kurtz is supposed to present his plans for the national team in an interview. We will take the final decision about his appointment if we are convinced. However, he may be given a short period of time," said Bangladesh Hockey Federation vice-president Khaza Rahmatullah.

However, there is a strong opinion in the hockey fraternity that local coaches like Mahub Harun, Mamunur Rashid and Kavar Ali are better options than Kurtz, who was once banned for taking banned substance during his playing career.

ENGLAND'S TOUR OF BD Broad, Anderson expected to be fit

AFP, London



England's new-ball Test duo of James Anderson and Stuart Broad will both miss the final few weeks of the domestic season through injury, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced Saturday.

However, they are expected to be fit for the upcoming tour of Bangladesh.

Anderson, England's all-time leading wicket-taker, requires what an ECB statement said was "ongoing rehabilitation" of his right shoulder and won't now feature again for Lancashire in the remainder of the 2016 county season.

Broad, who last played for Nottinghamshire in their Twenty20 Blast semi-final defeat by Northamptonshire at Edgbaston last Saturday, is recovering from an ankle problem.

However both bowlers are expected to be fit for the Test leg of England's tour of Bangladesh, which gets underway in October. "Both players have managed their injuries through the summer and a break is needed to best prepare the Test opening bowling pair for England's winter campaign that begins this October in Bangladesh," the ECB statement added.

Anderson and Broad were both omitted from England's squad for their ongoing one-day series against Pakistan.

Earlier, director of cricket Andrew Strauss urged all players to participate, saying that the tour was '100 per cent safe'.

"At no stage did we ask players whether they would make themselves available," Strauss said. "We are not at that stage yet. I'm certainly hopeful that we can convince the players that it is safe to tour. I'm 100% convinced that is the case. I have the utmost confidence in Reg Dickason [ECB's head of security] and his experience.

"My view is that the job of the ECB and Reg is to assure the players it is safe to go and, once they have that, I'm very hopeful that we'll have all the squad coming together and saying 'let's go' as a group.