

SPORT



Improvement in defeat

ANISUR RAHMAN from Thailand

Bangladesh put up a much improved performance against Japan but ultimately suffered a 3-0 defeat, which is a reasonable margin considering the strength of the opposition and their performance in the last match, in their second match of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship at the Institute of Physical Education Stadium in the Thai Province of Chonburi Thailand yesterday.

Bangladesh made two changes to the squad that lost 9-0 to North Korea in their first fixture with goalkeeper Mahmuda Akter and midfielder Monica Chakma replacing Ruksana Begum and defender Nargis Khatun respectively. The girls in red and green looked confident throughout the encounter after shrugging off the nerves early on.

It was greatly encouraging to watch the girls begin to connect their passes, in addition to sporadically going on the attack. The five at the back also managed to block Japanese attacks halfway through the pitch and pressed forward when Bangladesh had possession in the final third.

The decision to restore Akhi Khatun to centre-back proved an inspired one as she along with Masura Parvin, Shamsunnahar, Sheelul Azim and Sanjida Akter hardily blocked the Japanese pressure, keeping the defence a clean sheet for the remaining 51 minutes after conceding the third and last goal in the 39th minute.

Japan proved to be less formidable than North Korea as Bangladesh managed to keep pace physically. On the other hand, lone striker Itrat Jahon Shopna was pried with a couple of long balls from midfield but Shopna was not quick enough to race past the Japanese players.

Japan coach Kusunose Naoki made eight changes to the squad that thrashed Australia 5-0 and yet they were still far ahead of Bangladesh, especially in the attacking third where they held possession superbly and consequently struck two goals during the first half by outmanoeuvring the outside target after initially taking the lead through a well-worked free kick.

Japan broke the deadlock in the 12th minute when they struck through Tomoko Tanaka, who struck a brace against Australia, while the unmarked forward drove a shot home from just inside the box by availing a grounded free-kick. The lead was then doubled in the 31st minute by Mo Nakea, who raced into the box and placed the ball to right-hand side of Mahmuda.

The three-time champions again pried the Bangladeshes back to make it 3-0 as Yuzuki Yamamoto capitalized on the large gap between the defenders, who were practicing at the centre-line, and Mahmuda by availing a free-kick pass.

However, Bangladesh then elected to defend a bit deeper in a bid to thwart coming attacks with first-choice Mahmuda



The Bangladesh girls produced a strong performance against Japan in their second match of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship but were eventually overwhelmed by the pedigree of the three-time champions.

putting up a brilliant performance. Mahmuda was superb even in one-on-one situations and went on to deny the Japanese

forwards around four to five times. One could consider this defeat as a step forward if one remembers the 24-0 humiliation

Bangladesh suffered at the hands of Japan during the inaugural edition of the AFCU-17 Women's Championship in 2005.

PHOTO: AFC

A clearer reflection

SPORTS REPORTER from Thailand

Bangladesh's fighting performance against Japan in their AFC U-16 Women's Championship was a clearer reflection of the girls' natural game said head coach Golam Rabbani Choton after Bangladesh went down 3-0 to the three-time champions in Thailand.

"The girls broke down in the first match thinking of playing against the world champions [North Korea]. After that match, the girls were eager to prove the point that they were not as bad as the scoreline against North Korea suggested. And today [Thursday] they started confidently and played their own way," Choton said at the post-match conference yesterday.

Choton believed that the girls had learned from their mistakes in the previous match.

"The girls really played well and confidently till the 90th minute but they conceded goals due to some silly mistakes. But it is important for us to learn

and improve match by match," added the coach, who believes tightly marking two Japanese players in the second half helped them not concede any goals after the break.

"The strategy in the second half was the same; to play our own game. But the girls were told not to give any space to number 14 [midfielder Chihiro Ishida] and number 17 [midfielder Momoka Kinoshita], who were building up the game. And they did that well in the second half to keep the score sheet clear," Choton explained.

He also admitted that playing against Japanese teams as part of their preparations helped them put up such a brave performance.

"We know their playing style as we visited Japan twice. Besides, we analysed the match between Japan and Australia," he said.

He reserved special praise for goalkeeper Mahmuda, who thwarted numerous chances, and Choton named her as the best player on the night.

Mahmuda, who conceded only two goals in the qualifying stage, was also praised by Japanese coach Kusunose Naoki.

"After a 3-0 lead, our girls tried their best to score as many as they could in the second half to take the lead on goal difference against North Korea. But they did not do it because of Bangladesh's backline and goalkeeper, who played very well under the post," Kusunose said.

"The Bangladeshis defenders were also very good and our players failed in their attempts to break the defence, but I am still pleased that they beat Bangladesh and secured three points."

Meanwhile, Australia suffered a 7-0 defeat to North Korea in the day's second match and with two successive defeats, both Bangladesh and Australia have been eliminated from the group stages. They will meet each other on September 17 in an academic affair, while North Korea and Japan will play to decide the group leader on the same day.

Steyn may miss Tests against Tigers

AGENCIES, Cape Town

The prospect of Dale Steyn returning to the Proteas set-up for the first Test against Bangladesh on September 28 has been dealt a blow with the speedster ruling him out of next week's Sunfoil Series action.

Steyn, who has been recovering from a shoulder injury since last November, is eyeing a comeback to the international stage.

Reports last week suggested that Steyn would be making a return to cricket by playing in the first round of domestic fixtures this season for the Titans when they take on the Dolphins in Centurion from next week Tuesday.

But now, according to Cricinfo, Steyn has ruled himself out of playing four-day cricket in the Sunfoil Series.

"I've decided not to play tonight now. I'm bowling fine but I haven't hit the full workload I'd need to handle four-day cricket or a Test so I decided it was best not to play," he told the website.

Steyn added that he was trying to make sure that he did not break down again and that, in his opinion, playing shorter formats of the game might be a good place to start.

A number of Proteas are expected to take part in this first round of Sunfoil Series action as it provides new coach Oosie Gibson with his only look at his players before the Bangladesh series gets underway.

The 34-year-old Steyn has taken 417 Test wickets and needs just five more to equal Shaun Pollock's record of 421 for the most Test wicketers ever taken by a South African.



U-19s to face Afghan challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-19s' wait for international matches is finally set to end as Afghanistan Under-19s will arrive on September 25 to play five Youth ODIs against them at Sylhet and Mirpur.

The first four matches will take place at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium (SICS) while the fifth and final match will be held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The Bangladesh Under-19 team had a tremendous build-up to the last ICC Under-19 World Cup, which took place in Bangladesh in January 2016 and, under the

leadership of Mehedi Hasan Miraz, the home side achieved their best result in the tournament by finishing third.

With another World Cup fast approaching, the Bangladesh Under-19s were lacking in international matches, which can provide valuable experience ahead of the looming challenge in New Zealand in January next year, although the youths have started their preparations for the mega event more than 10 months ago. The board also hired Australian Damien Wright to fill the position of head coach and nurture them.

The Bangladesh Under-19s will play against England, Namibia and Canada in the Group C matches of the World Cup which will start from January 13 next year.

ITINERARY

September 28: 1st Youth ODI at SICS
September 30: 2nd Youth ODI at SICS
October 2: 3rd Youth ODI at SICS
October 4: 4th Youth ODI at SICS

champion team of Tier 2 will be promoted to Tier 1 and the fourth-placed team in Tier 1 will be relegated to Tier 2 for the next season.

competition, especially with the continued effort about sporting wickets.

In the first round, the focus will also be on Mashrafe Bin Mortaza who is set to play for hosts Khulna against Rangpur in order to gain some practice ahead of the ODI series in South Africa.

In the other tier-1 match, Dhaka face off with Barisal in Cox's Bazar while in the second-tier opening matches, Dhaka Metro take on hosts Chittagong and Rajshahi hosts Sylhet.

Each team will face each other twice and the champion team of Tier 2 will be promoted to Tier 1 and the fourth-placed team in Tier 1 will be relegated to Tier 2 for the next season.

Cricketers back in the fray as NCL kicks off

SPORTS REPORTER

The country's cricketers will get down to the serious business of excelling in their jobs in the endeavour to catch the eyes of the national selectors when domestic cricket rolls out with the start of the four-day National Cricket League (NCL) today across the country.

The players have claimed that the competitiveness has increased in the last few seasons but there still needs to be more of that increase. Like previous seasons, everyone will look forward to seeing how the pitches behave in the 19th edition of the

WALTON logo and text: The country's cricketers will get down to the serious business of excelling in their jobs in the endeavour to catch the eyes of the national selectors when domestic cricket rolls out with the start of the four-day National Cricket League (NCL) today across the country.

Finch doubtful for first ODI

PTI, Chennai

Big-hitting Australia opener Aaron Finch aggravated his right calf injury during a practice session and is facing a race against time to be fit for the first ODI against India on September 17.

Finch got injured during practice at the M Chidambaram Stadium and pulled out of the rest of the session, cricinfo.com.au reported.

In the event of Finch being ruled out of the first game, Australia may turn to Travis Head or Hilton Cartwright, the board said.

The Victorian had been rested from Australia's warm-up match on Tuesday due to the injury, which he suffered while playing for Surrey in England six weeks ago.

Unhappy all-rounder Cartwright opened in Finch's absence in the warm-up game, but was dismissed for a second-ball duck in Australia's 103-run win.

Australia's stand-in coach David Saker had indicated earlier that Head was the "preferred choice" for the No.4 slot in the line-up.

The left-hander, during an interaction with the media here this afternoon, said he would be happy to bat up the order.

"Hopefully I'll get the chance to go up the order again and bat at No.4," he said.

Head has also said his team has some exceptional fielders, who can turn the match in pressure situations.

"Fielding could win or lose you a game. I guess the Australians pride themselves on their fielding and we have worked hard on that skill," Head told reporters.

"Make sure we go in and do that in pressure situations. We have some extremely good fielders, yes. We have seen guys who can win games with their fielding," he said.

Talking about the batting line-up, Head said, "We have got David (Warner) and Steve (Smith), who are in great touch and also (Matthew Wade, Marcus) Stoinis batted really well the other day and James Faulkner has done that before."

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Mirpur outfield rated 'poor'

STAR SPORT DESK

The International Cricket Council (ICC) match referee rated the outfield for the first Test between Bangladesh and Australia from August 27 to 30 at the recently re-laid Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur as 'poor', according to a press release issued by cricket's global governing body on Tuesday.

Crowe, in accordance with Clause 3 of the ICC Pitch and Outfield Monitoring Process, submitted his report to the ICC in which he expressed concern over the quality of the outfield.

The report has been forwarded to the Bangladesh Cricket Board, which now has 14 days to respond.

"The grass was their main concern and we understand why they found it to be poor," said ICC Chairman Graeme Pollock.

"The matter will be dealt by Clause 4 of the process in which the first occasion of such a rating is dealt with a fine not exceeding 15,000 dollars given together with a 'directive' for appropriate corrective action. If it happens again within five years of the first finding, the fine goes up to 30,000 dollars.

'Tigers have more fast bowlers now'

SPORTS REPORTER

In November 2008 during the Bangladesh tour of South Africa, the then national bowling coach Champaka Ramanayake had showed pride on pacer Rubel Hossain when asked who would take up the baton after

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

"He (Rubel) is an amazing talent. A former Sri Lanka pacer told reporters in Kimberley, adding: "he is a very exciting talent and one of the guys I am very, very keen to see progress."

Rubel however is yet to live up to Champaka's expectations since he made his Test debut against West Indies in July 2009, as his 24 Tests so far have yielded just 32 wickets at an average of 77.93.

The 27-year-old right-arm fast bowler has been included in the 15-member Test squad for the upcoming tour of South Africa but his place is not guaranteed in the playing eleven.

It is not certain whether the failed prophecy about Rubel still plays in his mind but the Sri Lankan, who has now returned with a different assignment of working with budding pacers in the High Performance Squad and age level cricket, was not ready to single out any young bowler under his guidance when talking to reporters yesterday at Mirpur.

"I don't want to mention any name because others will get upset. They are all young but there are some impressive bowlers there as well and if they keep working hard they will improve," Champaka said when asked about special bowlers.

It is difficult to predict the extent to which Bangladesh's pace performance will improve this time on South Africa's pace-friendly pitches as opposed to the meagre returns in 2008, but there is no doubt that Bangladesh's pace bowling department has made a lot of progress and the team management has also been encouraging the growth of pace stocks.

Champaka echoed that outlook.

"You have more fast bowlers than before [in the national set-up] so they (the young bowlers) are all excited. The only way is to work hard and improve. But they'll have to keep performing in domestic cricket and whenever they get chances in international cricket or in the U-19 or High Performance team," he said.

During that tour in 2008, Champaka also talked about the need for sporting wickets and competitive class cricket in developing fast bowling talent, but unfortunately the game's governing body are yet to make significant progress in those aspects.

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The BCB High Performance Unit's bowling coach Champaka Ramanayake speaks about the country's budding pace bowling stocks in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: FEROZ AHMED



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