

REPORT

Hosts ready to fight against Pakistan



ANISUR RAHMAN
Having trained hard for the past three months, hosts Bangladesh hope to make a good first impression in this edition of the Hero Asia Cup hockey tournament when they take on three-time World Cup and Asia Cup champions Pakistan in their campaign opener at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium today.

Bangladesh once gave Pakistan – the then undisputed hockey kings – a run for their money during an encounter at home 32 years ago. Eventually succumbed to a narrow 1-0 defeat. That bit of history should certainly provide the boys in Red and Green some inspiration ahead of today's tie while playing on a familiar ground in front of a home crowd is sure to be a key source of motivation as well.

However in the history of the Asia Cup, with the exception of the 1985 edition held in Dhaka, Bangladesh have barely ever offered any challenge to a superior Pakistan side, who beat Bangladesh in each of the five previous meetings without conceding a single goal. This time too, Pakistan will undoubtedly be the favourites to win the fixture but despite this, the home team's management still hold the dream of an upset.

Such a dream as this could be backed by the fact that Pakistan are going through a run of poor form for the moment, having finished seventh in the 10-team Hockey World League semifinal round held in England in June. Bangladesh also have the advantage of knowing about a few of the Pakistan players' style of play as the individuals in question participated in the premier league in Dhaka last season.

Another bit of hope can be taken from the South Asian Games encounter in Dhaka in 2010 where Bangladesh fought valiantly before conceding three goals due to silly mistakes following a 6-0 drubbing at the hands of the same opposition in the 2013 Asia Cup.

On the other hand, Pakistan will simply look to put their bad patch behind them with a good start to the tournament at Bangladesh's expense.

Ever since their fifth place finish at home back in 1985, Bangladesh have never finished as high as fifth in the past seven editions. However, national team coach Mahabub Harun is optimistic about playing a good match as his charges have overcome the fear of facing big teams.

The Bangladesh hockey team will hope to play as a unit and turn a new page in their history as the tenth edition of the Asia Cup gets underway at the new-look Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium today.

With hope of a new dawn

TIQUE ANAM
Thirty-two years is a long time. It's a long time for a game to get through a sea-change and get a new world order in place. Thirty-two years ago in 1985, as world hockey was shifting from grass to artificial turf and the change of guard it brought along, Bangladesh were awarded the rights to host Asia's biggest competition – the Asia Cup.

The country was not quite prepared at that time as hockey was still only a game that used to be played in small pockets, especially around the old part of Dhaka. The then Dhaka Stadium was the venue for the nine-team competition. There were no floodlights at the big bowl and artificial turfs in these parts of the world were still a thing of future.

Yet that competition proved to be a milestone in the country's hockey history, for it witnessed the emergence of the game as the second most popular one, right behind football, thanks to the presence of superpowers like Pakistan and India, and of course a spirited performance by the hosts.

The Pakistan versus India final, eventually nicked by Pakistan 3-2, reportedly drew a record crowd for a hockey match at the big bowl.

While Bangladesh only managed a sixth place finish in the ten-team event, the performance of the team led by Shahabuddin Chaklader gave hope to the nation. The hosts drew against higher-ranked Japan and China sides and suffered a narrow 1-0 defeat against the then all-conquering Pakistan side, a result which still stirs emotions among hockey veterans and the game's followers.

The upshot of the event was that the game started to be taken up by youngsters from a wide spectrum of population. Bangladesh eventually reaped the rewards of this popularity with two good outings in the Hiroshima Asia Cup (1994) and the Kuala Lumpur Asia Cup (1999). While they did not cause any major upsets, once in a while

ROLL OF HONOUR

Edition	Year	Venue	Teams	Champions	Runners-up	Pos of BD
1st	1982	Karachi, Pakistan	7	Pakistan	India	5
2nd	1985	Dhaka, Bangladesh	10	Pakistan	India	6
3rd	1989	Delhi, India	7	Pakistan	India	7
4th	1999	Hiroshima, Japan	9	S.Korea	India	6
5th	2003	KL, Malaysia	9	S.Korea	Pakistan	6
6th	2003	KL, Malaysia	8	India	Pakistan	8
7th	2007	Chennai, India	11	India	S.Korea	7
8th	2009	Kuantan, Malaysia	7	S.Korea	Pakistan	7
9th	2013	Ipo, Malaysia	8	S.Korea	India	7

The hosts come into this competition as the lowest-ranked side and have a task at hand if they are to meet their desired result of sixth-place finish.

There are good signs though that some positive movements have taken place in the local hockey quarters in recent times. The top league has again resumed after a considerable gap and there has been various other tournaments taking place. The Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium has got a face-lift. The old green turf has been rolled out last year, replaced by a new blue one. Floodlights and a giant screen have been added to the facility.



Expect no quarters to be given when Bangladesh captain Rasel Mahmud Jimmy (R) and his Pakistan counterpart Mohammad Irfan marshal their troops on the opening day of the Asia Cup.

the team came up with sparks during that period. Unfortunately the game's local governing body failed to cash in on the upsurge of popularity due to its continuous infighting, and as a result, performance on the pitch continuously fell short of expectations – taking the game back to mediocrity, and even at times, to obscurity. While Bangladesh took a backseat, world hockey moved fast, constant with the fast-paced nature

of the surface and the fast-changing rules of the game. Even though India and Pakistan had lost their world supremacy some time ago, they are still trying hard to stay relevant at the top level, and often produce inspiring performances against the powerhouses. South Korea, too, fight shoulder to shoulder with the big boys on the world stage.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, are struggling to stay aloft at the lowest rung of the top-tier of Asian hockey

ties and a dormitory has been set up for the players' accommodation. The administrators seem to be getting their act together finally. With the Asia Cup coming to Bangladesh for the second time, the game's local governing body now has the onus on it to not let go of the opportunities yet again. It is much as its effort as well as the performance of the team that may decide which direction our hockey will head in the next decade.

"Not really, the day Test ended we ended that in the dressing room," said batsman Imrul Kayes yesterday when asked if the pain of the Test defeat is lingering. "If we think a lot about how we performed now, then the preparation for the upcoming ODI series could be hampered. So, the management and coaches said that day to forget about the Tests now and focus on the upcoming ODI and T20 series."

The returns of stalwarts like ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Shakib Al Hasan also helped in that regard. "Obviously it's a boost.

FIXTURES

Date	Match	Teams	Stage	Time
Oct 11	M01	India/Japan	Pool A	3:00pm
	M02	Bangladesh/Pakistan	Pool A	5:30pm
	M03	Malaysia/China	Pool B	3:00pm
Oct 12	M04	Korea/Oman	Pool B	5:30pm
	M05	Japan/Pakistan	Pool A	3:00pm
	M06	Bangladesh/India	Pool A	5:30pm
Oct 14	M07	China/Oman	Pool B	3:00pm
	M08	Korea/Malaysia	Pool B	5:30pm
Oct 15	M09	Bangladesh/Japan	Pool A	3:00pm
	M10	India/Pakistan	Pool A	5:30pm
	M11	Malaysia/Oman	Pool B	3:00pm
	M12	China/Korea	Pool B	5:30pm
Oct 17	Rest Day			
Oct 18	M13	TBC/TBC	Super-6s	3:00pm
	M14	TBC/TBC	Super-6s	5:30pm
	M15	5-8th Place	3A+18	8:00pm
Oct 19	M16	TBC/TBC	Super-6s	3:00pm
	M17	TBC/TBC	Super-6s	5:30pm
	M18	5-8th Place	3B+4	8:00pm
Oct 20	M19	7/8th Place	LM15/LM18	3:00pm
	M20	5-8th Place	WMS/WMS18	5:30pm
Oct 21	M21	TBC/TBC	Super-6s	3:00pm
	M22	TBC/TBC	Super-6s	5:30pm
Oct 22	M23	3/4th Place	354v454	3:00pm
	M24	Final	154v254	5:30pm



Jamil Parvez Lulu
1985 Bangladesh hockey team midfielder

"That time [in 1985], we were a united unit and committed to delivering a hundred per cent whenever we took the field. Besides that the feelings for the nation was very high among the players. I am also optimistic because of the performances this team has put up in recent times."



Shahabuddin Chaklader
1985 Bangladesh hockey team captain

"The boys should not pay heed to the fact that they have come into the tournament as the number eight side. In Wimbledon, the rank outsider often upsets the top players. It is our ground, our wind, our crowd and if they can hold the ball and maintain their formation then something can happen."

Ireland A starts today

SPORTS REPORTER
The selectors will keep a close eye on the Bangladesh A team as they take on the Ireland A side in the lone four-day match beginning in Sylhet today. The visitors will also play five one-day matches in Cox's Bazar during the same opening touring their tour. Meanwhile Mahedi Hasan was named as the replacement of Saif Hasan after the left hander injured his nose during the fielding session on Monday. Bangladesh skipper Nazmul Hossain Shanto, who performed well during this High Performance team's recent tour of the UK, is being considered for an opening spot in the national team after Imrul Kayes and Soorayya Sarkar's poor performance recently.

'Possible to do well in ODIs'

SAKIB SUBHAN from Bloomington
While fans and critics are still dwelling on the royal thrashing handed out by South Africa to Bangladesh in the two-Test series, the cricketers themselves do not have much of a choice but to move on. Although the Test finished two days early on Sunday, it just gave the Tigers more time to focus on the ODI leg that will start with the one-day practice game against a South Africa Invitational XI tomorrow at the Mangaung Oval in Bloemfontein. "Not really, the day Test ended we ended that in the dressing room," said batsman Imrul Kayes yesterday when asked if the pain of the Test defeat is lingering. "If we think a lot about how we performed now, then the preparation for the upcoming ODI series could be hampered. So, the management and coaches said that day to forget about the Tests now and focus on the upcoming ODI and T20 series."

'Tamim likely for practice match'

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloomington
There seems to be some good news on the horizon for Bangladesh as star opener Tamim Iqbal is well on the way to recovery from a thigh muscle injury, with chief selector and acting team manager Minhaj Abedin saying that there is a good chance of the left hander playing the one-day practice game against a South Africa Invitational XI in Bloemfontein tomorrow. "He is okay. He will be at the nets tomorrow [Wednesday]," Minhaj told The Daily Star yesterday. "He stretched and did weight training in the gym today [yesterday]. There is more than an even chance that he will play in the practice game on Thursday. We will know more after practice tomorrow."

'Tamim likely for practice match'

The Bangladesh team did not practice yesterday, opening for a gym session which all members attended.