



Hosts thrashed by Pakistan

SPORTS REPORTER

All the pre-tournament talk of taking inspiration from the past and playing with possession came to nothing as Bangladesh surrendered meekly to three-time champions Pakistan in a 0-7 defeat in their opening game of the Hero Asia Cup hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Shabbub Hanu's charges were lacklustre all through the game and hardly ever threatened the opposition goal or stitched together a string of meaningful passes as they mostly busy defending their own goal, albeit with tepidity, against a not-so-vintage yet-effective Pakistan side.

The result was in keeping with the tradition of suffering heavy defeats against the men in dark green, but a far cry from the 1-0 defeat in the 1985 Asia Cup, which was expected to be the source of inspiration for the Men in Red. For the record, Pakistan earned nine penalty corners (PC) and one penalty stroke while the hosts failed to earn any as they were completely dominated both in possession and attacking effort.

Tall forward Abu Mahmood scored three goals from penalty corners while Shaheel Ammad Butt and Arslan Qadri scored two apiece for Farhat Khan's charges.

The hosts started the game in a defensive fashion and were busy thwarting attacks from the Pakistanis, who looked short of sharpness in the opening period. Despite completely dominating the first quarter, it took Pakistan three minutes into the second quarter to break the dead-lock, with Mahmood picking the top corner of the net from the team's second penalty corner.

In the same quarter, Bangladesh did make some kind of impression with skipper Rasel Mahmud Jimmy in thick of things during the period. The veteran skipper dodged past a couple of Pakistan defenders from the right in the 22nd minute and released the ball across the face of the goal, only to see Milon Hossain not able to connect with the ball.

Six minutes later, Jimmy produced a moment of magic as he sneaked his way past two Pakistan defenders on a forward push and scooped the ball from inside the D, only to be denied by the post.

But everything went downhill for the hosts after that as Pakistan scored twice in quick succession at the start of the third quarter. Mamunur Rahman Chayan brought down a Pakistan player in the 33rd minute while Shaheel dodged the lead from the spot before Abhinav deflected a fierce hit from Shabbub Hanu's goalmouth later.

Mahmood then made the scoreline 4-0 from a PC before Shaheel showed his skill with a fantastic solo effort to further increase the lead seven minutes on. Mahmood grabbed his third from a PC three minutes later while Arslan wrapped up the victory with a reverse hit right before the end.

The hosts will try to dust themselves off when they play their next match tomorrow against India, who had earlier in the day breezed past Japan 5-1.

Two-time champions India, who came into the tournament following a disappointing campaign in the Hockey World League (HWL) semifinal round in England, took only three minutes to take the lead when Sunil Somwapat net India ahead from a counter attack. However their lead lasted only one minute as a youthful Japan side hit back through a field goal.

However, Japan, who lost all five of their matches during the HWL semifinal round, were rendered helpless against India - the world's sixth-ranked side, who controlled the game nicely and scored one goal after another to leave the field with their heads held high.

Harmapreet Singh converted two penalty corners while man-of-the-match Lalit Upadhyay and Gingsensam Kangjam struck one goal apiece for the Indians, whose last time came in 2007.



Pakistan players celebrate during their 7-0 drubbing of Bangladesh in their opening game of the Hero Asia Cup at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'We made too many mistakes'

SPORTS REPORTER

Ahead of the Hero Asia Cup, hosts Bangladesh had earmarked Pakistan as the side that they could give a run for their money to due to the opposition's poor form in recent times, but the reality of the situation turned out to be very different at the blue turf under the newly-installed floodlights of the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium last night as the hosts lost 7-0 against the former world champions.

A strong anticipation to do well against Pakistan was hyped up by Bangladesh's 1985 Asia Cup match in Dhaka, but the three-time World and Asia Cup champions proved that they are still a much superior side compared to Bangladesh, despite the fact that they came into this tournament having suffered two massive defeats against bitter rivals India in the Hockey World League three months ago.

However, Bangladesh captain Rasel Mahmud Jimmy believes it was a case

of them gifting goals to Pakistan rather than the opposition playing superior hockey.

"We played good hockey in the first two quarters and conceded only one goal during that time, but since the beginning of the third quarter, we made too many mistakes and gifted them five goals," Jimmy said. "There were messages relayed to all the players about holding ball possession and not to launch attacks down the middle and not to dribble against two players, but the players failed to follow the instructions right from the third quarter."

Jimmy, the only outfield player for Bangladesh who shows glimpses of class, worked his way through the opposition to create a great opportunity in the second quarter, but was denied by the woodwork.

"If I got the level, the scenario might have changed because scoring against a big side can boost the morale of a team like ours," said Jimmy.

We have to take a lesson from this defeat and rectify the mistakes we made against Pakistan if we want to

prove that we are a good team. There is no alternative to coming back in the next matches and I think we will play well in the next matches," said Jimmy, whose side will play their second match, against India, tomorrow.

Meanwhile, Jimmy's Pakistan counterpart Mohammad Irfan was very happy to get off to a blistering start against the home side.

"We have prepared well and tried to build up the game by holding ball possession. It was a really good start for us. I want to thank the new management and the boys who really gave a good effort for such a start," said Irfan, who had previously played for Abahani in the Dhaka Premier League.

"We knew that we are a better ranked side than Bangladesh and are able to score more. We had a good game plan. They played well but we also missed three more chances. We are looking forward to keeping this momentum in the tournament," said an ecstatic Irfan, who along with five senior players, were called back for the Asia Cup.

LOOKING UP DOWN SOUTH

Madiba's shadow

SAKEB SUBHAN from Bloemfontein

In the north-east corner of the city sprawl that is Bloemfontein in South Africa's Orange Free State, there is an unusually flat-topped hill, and on it, midstride with right arm raised aloft in a clenched fist, a statue of a man. It is a monument to a man of indomitable spirit, a symbol of triumph, is frozen the indomitable symbol of Madiba, looking out on the City of Roses.

When we got down from the hill, it was not roses, but thousands of metaphorical fireflies that lit up the city before the statue of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, the remarkable human being who once took the nation to the brink of a civil war, and whose shadow is cast over the city of Bloemfontein. PHOTO: STAR

An eight-metre tall statue of Nelson Mandela on Naval Hill looks over the ever-changing hues that colour the city of Bloemfontein.

The bronze statue was created by sculptor Kobus Hattingh and unveiled on December 13, 2012, and since Madiba, as Mandela was affectionately called after his clan name, has been frozen over the wide expanse of Bloemfontein in a state of movement. And that is perhaps the sculptor's great triumph - he captured Mandela's movement, the revolutionary spirit in a form that is by its nature static.

The eight-metre tall Mandela statue has the legs far forward and the weight of the right foot seemingly on its toes, as if Madiba will at any moment take the next step. And before him is an ever-changing palette of colours. The bright sun setting in his right casts the shadow of his outstretched right arm across his smiling, squaring face, as if even in a moment of smiling repose he is aware of the distance of his destination. Then, when night falls, the setting sun seemingly setting fire to the wide African horizon, the thousands of Bloemfontein lights light up the city with the twinkling stars of the clear African sky.

"I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made mistakes along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one discovers that there are many more hills to climb," is the inscription on a plaque at the feet from Mandela's autobiography "A Long Walk to Freedom", words of inspiration for anyone fighting injustice.

Questions only BCB can answer

SAKEB SUBHAN from Bloemfontein

Since Bangladesh's torment on the tour of South Africa began, in other words since the first day of the first Test on September 28, skipper Mushfiqur Rahim has faced up to the media four times, with the first day of the second Test being an unexpected and unusual appearance as captains normally take questions before and after each Test. It was also that appearance that very publicly exposed tension between the head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and Mushfiqur, who said that the management had instructed him to field in the deep.

Hathurusingha, meanwhile, has not answered for his charges' performances since he last fronted up to the media on the eve of the first Test, when he was still good. There are things to be asked, such as why were the batsmen so clueless against short-pitched bowling even on fairly docile pitches? Was there not adequate preparation or net practice with South African conditions in mind? These are questions that only a head coach can answer, and Bangladesh's team management and the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) are presiding over a situation where communication from the team to their adoring public is, to say the least, seen as unimportant and not worth the time or effort to organise.

Yesterday, for the second time on this tour the Bangladesh team management took the quite absurd step of shutting out the press from their practice session. They did it two days before the second Test when rain forced them indoors, barring Bangladesh media from seeing the practice or taking pictures from the viewing area. Interestingly, a South African journalist was allowed in minutes after the Bangladesh press was ushered out. It is absurd because, unlike in football where formations are closely guarded secrets, there is nothing much

to be secretive about to the point of shutting the windows on the outside world. Also, it was a source of mirth for the South African scribes that there was such a thing as a closed-door practice session in cricket.

It was informed by chief selector turned team manager for this tour Minhajul Abedin yesterday that no one will talk to the media and it was the decision of the management that no one from the team or the coaching staff will speak other than during official press conferences.

The very appointment of Minhajul, one of the country's best batsmen but who does not seem most at ease with the stop-gap role of tour manager which often involves striking a balance between the team's seniors and the coaching staff, as manager betrays the BCB's disinterest in such matters. In this tour so far, he has struggled to manage either party. Minhajul said on October 9 that the coach will speak on October 11, the day before the practice game. In fact, he has fielded demands for Hathurusingha to face the questions and Minhajul has consistently deferred that action, culmi-

nating in yesterday's declaration.

If this media freeze came about because of Mushfiqur's outburst after the first day of the second Test - which according to BCB president Nazmul Hassan the captain should not have done publicly - then it must be asked why he was allowed to go to the press conference in the first place. It was learnt that Rubel Hossain was supposed to take questions that day, but Mushfiqur overrode any directive to the contrary.

Yesterday, when one journalist approached Hathurusingha to ask whether he had wanted the media frozen out, the Sri Lankan very brusquely answered that he is only the coach and that the manager should be asked. When it was informed that the manager was the one who gave the directive, Hathurusingha said: "you are wasting your time and you are wasting my time," and made his way to the team bus.

It seems that for the BCB, how the team and management is represented and perceived is a waste of time, as is the need for the answers to come from within the cricketing setup. Perhaps all questions should be directed at them.



The Bangladesh team had an extended, nearly four-hour practice session yesterday in Bloemfontein, where pacers bowled 10 overs each and most batsmen did double shifts. But as the press were not allowed in, it was not clear how far Tamim Iqbal has recovered from his thigh muscle tear, but he is unlikely to play in today's warm-up one-day match against a South Africa Invitational XI at the Mangaung Oval.

PHOTO: SAKIB SUBHAN

Low publicity, low turnout

SPORTS REPORTER

With the installation of floodlights and the overall renovation works for the Hero 10th Asia Cup, the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium has taken on a new look, but there was hardly any life in the galleries due to a low turnout during Bangladesh's first match, against Pakistan yesterday.

The opening match between India and Japan was held in front of all-but-empty stands before approximately 2000 spectators, wearing red and green and with national flags in hand, turned up to support the home side under the floodlights.

Spectators were one of the major components the 1985 Dhaka Asia Cup's success, but this time the lack of promotional activities regarding the tournament has left organisers red-faced.

The galleries are free-entry for spectators but it has hardly been publicised. Some spectators asked this reporter about ticket booths as they did not know about the free-entry facility and only came to the stadium after learning of the event from media.

"I have never watched any hockey match before even though I have seen cricket matches many times. Today I came here after learning about the Asia Cup on television," Sonarogon University student Mohammad Rubel said. "I didn't know about free entry, and someone asked me to pay Tk 200 for a ticket, but I ignored it."

Ferdous Alam, an employee of the High Court, said his office is close to the stadium yet he did not notice any banners or posters about the tournament, adding that he came here only after reading news about the tournament on newspapers.

However, Selim Mahmud, a businessman of Old Dhaka, is well aware of the tournament as he once played the game and now two of his sons are playing in the second division.

"I watched the 1985 Asia Cup from the stands and there were big crowds from the beginning of the tournament, so it is disappointing to see this low turnout," said Mahmud, who believes the federation officials were busy with elections instead of promoting the event.

A BHF official, seeking anonymity, said that the tournament committee did not take any steps to publicise and only two horse-drawn carriages were deployed for publicity around the stadium a few days ago.

'A good chance to dent the Tigers'

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein



Bangladesh opener Imrul Kayes had said on Tuesday that he had never seen a Test match that consisted of sustained short balls at the body like that unleashed by the likes of Kagiso Rabada and Duanne Olivier in the second Test which ended inside three days with an innings and 254-run win for South Africa on Sunday. Imrul had also said that the players will win the Test that consisted of sustained short balls at the body like that unleashed by the likes of Kagiso Rabada and Duanne Olivier in the second Test which ended inside three days with an innings and 254-run win for South Africa on Sunday.

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JP DUMINY