



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 easily in their first international. Pakistan in a 0-7 defeat in their opening game of the Hero Asia Cup hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Mahmud Hanif's charges were lackluster all through the game and hardly ever threatened the opposition goal or stitched together a string of meaningful passes as they were mostly busy defending their own goal, albeit with trepidation, 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 Shakeel Ahmad Butt and Arslan Qadir 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 quarter, it took Pakistan three minutes into the second quarter to break the deadlock, 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 skipper dodged past a couple of Pakistani defenders from the right in the 22nd minute and released the ball across the face of the goal, only to see Milton Losman fail to connect with the ball.

Minutes later, Jimmy's next 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 Rahim Chayan brought down a Pakistan player in the 33rd minute while Shaked hit the lead from the spot before Arslan deflected a fierce hit from Shahn Ali for the third goal a minute later.

Mahmood then made the scoreline 4-0 from a PC before Shaked 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 with a 5-1 win.

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

However, Japan, who lost all five of their matches during the HWL semi-final 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.

Harmjeet Singh converted two penalty corners while man-of-the-match Lahir Upadhyay and Cinglensana Kangjam struck one goal apiece for the Indians, whose last title 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

Hero 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, 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 and 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.

"I got the leveller, 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 match 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 Irfan.

"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," Sonangan University student Mohammad Rubel said. "I didn't know about free-entry, and someone had 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 senior division.

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

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

LOOKING UP DOWN SOUTH

Madiba's shadow

SAKIB SUBHAN from Bloemfontein



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

In the north-east corner of the city sprawl is Bloemfontein in South Africa's Orange Free State. There is an unusually flat-topped hill, and on it, midrise with a clenched fist of determination and anticipation 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 vista before the statue of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, the remarkable man, being won, fought South Africa's sorid racial politics of apartheid, which was imposed for over 27 years and emerged on the other side undiminished and with a greater will to build the nation that he had so struggled for, a vision that took him to the presidency of South Africa from 1994 to 1999.

The bronze statue was created by sculptor Kobus Hattingh and unveiled on December 13, 2012, and since Madiba, as

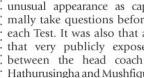
Mandela was affectionately called after his clan name, has been frozen over the wide expanse of Bloemfontein in a state of movement. And that is perhaps the sculptor's great triumph – he captured Mandela's movement, the revolutionary spirit in a form that is by its nature static.

The eight-metre tall Mandela statue has the left leg 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 to his right casts a long shadow across his body, while his eyes are fixed on 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 fight for primacy 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 only finds that there are many more hills to climb," is the inscription on a plaque at his feet from Mandela's autobiography 'A long walk to freedom', words of inspiration for anyone fighting injustice.

Questions only BCB can answer

SAKIB SUBHAN from Bloemfontein



CRICKET

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 Mashrujee 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 suddenly and tensely between the head coach Chandrika Hatherusingha and Mashrujee, who said that the management had instructed him to field in the deep.

Hatherusingha, meanwhile, has not answered for his charges' performances since he last fronted up to the media on the eve of the first Test, when the going was still good. There are things to be asked, such as why were the batsmen so clueless against short-pitched bowling even on easy strokes? 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 that is completely detached from the team to the adoring public is, to say the least, seen as unimpressive 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's media from seeing the practice or taking pictures from the viewing area. Interestingly, a South African journalist was allowed in minutes after the Bangladeshi press was ushered out. It is absurd because, while 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 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 disregard in such matters. In this tour, he has managed to do a better job than 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 Hatherusingha to face the questions and Minhajul has consistently deferred that action, culminating in yesterday's declaration.

If this media freeze came about because of Mashrujee's outburst after the first day of the second Test – which is what 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 Mashrujee overruled any directive to the contrary.

Yesterday, when one journalist approached Hatherusingha 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.

What it was learnt that the manager, the one who is the director of Hatherusingha said, "You are wasting my time and you are wasting my time, and make him go to the bathtubs."

It seems that for the BCB, the team and management is represented and perceived as 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.

There are a few factors that make those a little unpredictable for the two tests in Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein, which is why the bounces and the bounces at Bloemfontein is pretty much what you can expect from flat South African wickets. And as far as scoring runs for the home side goes, South Africa have scored 496 for three and 573 for four in the first two tests, so it is doubtful they will be looking for much more of an improvement surface-wise.

"I think there will be a bit of it short bowling," said South Africa Invitational XI skipper and veteran South Africa batsman JP Duminy when informed of Imrul's words. "Obviously the format's changed so the strategy will be changed accordingly. But there will be definitely some sort of plan after watching the Test series according to the opposition's strengths and weaknesses."

As for the plan for the Tests, Duminy – who has recently retired from Test and first-class cricket – is looking to carry on from the work done in the Tests. "This is a great opportunity for the invitational team to dent Bangladesh. They must be low on confidence after a 2-0 loss. It's important for us to put up a performance."

He said Shabik Al Hasan's return for the ODI leg will definitely be a boon for the beleaguered bowlers. "No doubt it will be a big boost for Bangladesh as Shabik returns in the shorter formats. Obviously they missed Shabik in the Tests. He is a big player for them and a match-winner."

"I certainly do believe the series will be tougher for us to win against Bangladesh compared to the Test series. From the one day perspective, Bangladesh have really stepped up their game recently. And we have to play well to beat them."

'A good chance to dent the Tigers'

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein

Bangladesh opener Imrul Kayes had said on Tuesday that he had never faced a line of attack that consisted of sustained short balls at the body like those delivered 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 pacers will not be so vicious in ODIs and he hoped that the pitches for the one-day series, the practice match for which against a South Africa Invitational XI will take place today from 20:00pm (Bloemfontein time) at the Mangaung Oval in Bloemfontein, will be flatter because they [South Africa] also want to score runs'.

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Today will also mark the return to the international fold of AB de Villiers as the batting maestro will play the warm-up in preparation for his first match in national colours since the T20I series in England in June.

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 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

PHOTO: SAKIB SUBHAN

JP DUMINY