

SPORT

Hiatus ends with fighting draw

SPORTS REPORTER
Bangladesh made their return to international football a memorable one with a come-from-behind 2-2 draw against Laos in Vientiane yesterday.

Two dreadful errors from defenders had given Laos a 2-0 lead at the end of the first half as the hosts looked to be taking a stranglehold on the game between the two lowly sides in FIFA ranking. However, the Bangladeshis upped their game quite a few notches after restart and came out with a creditable draw, courtesy of late goals from young forwards Jafar Iqbal and Mahbubur Rahman Sufil.

This was the first international game for Bangladesh since their 3-1 defeat against Bhutan on October 10, 2016. While that humiliating defeat brought an end to Bangladesh's Asian Cup qualification hopes together with the short stint of Belgian coach Tom Saintfiet, yesterday's draw will likely come as a shot in the arm for the team and new coach Andrew Ord, who was standing at the Bangladesh dug-out for the first time since his appointment in June, 2017.

The game played before a sparse crowd on the bumpy pitch at the Lao National Stadium was a story of two halves as the hosts bossed while the visitors struggled to find a foothold. Laos, ranked 183rd in FIFA against the 197th ranked Bangladesh, started the game briskly, but it was Bangladesh who had the first real opportunity to get ahead.

The Bangladesh players showed individual skills but there was a clear lack of cohesion going forward and discipline at the back for which they had paid heavy. Veteran



Bangladesh and Laos players jostle for possession during their FIFA friendly in Vientiane yesterday. Bangladesh mounted a spirited fightback to draw the match 2-2 after going two goals down.

right-back Mamun Miah gifted the hosts the opening goal on the half-hour mark as he failed to properly control the ball during a Laos attack, and instead of trying to clear the danger, allowed opposition striker Phithack Kongmathilath to pounce on it and poke it past goalkeeper Ashraf Islam Rana.

The second goal came on the stroke of half-time, with substitute midfielder Mashuk Mia Johnny bringing down a Laos

forward just inside the box. Kongmathilath stepped up again to dispatch the ball past Rana as Ord's charges went into the break facing defeat.

The Australian coach made a string of substitutions, as is usually the norm in international friendlies, and those substitutions seemed to inject some much-needed pace to the Bangladesh attack. Sufil, Jafar and Waly Faisal applied tremendous pres-

sure down the flanks as the hosts' defence became increasingly jittery.

Jafar then produced a moment of intelligence, flicking with the side of his boot to beat Laos goalkeeper Outhilath Nammakhot from a scramble inside the box on 82 minutes before Sufil completed the comeback with a placing shot after Topu Barman had teed him up with a header inside the box two minutes into added on time.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Young guns salvage pride

SPORTS REPORTER
Bangladesh coach Andrew Ord heaped praise on his young forwards Mahbubur Rahman Sufil and Jafar Iqbal for salvaging a creditable 2-2 draw against Laos after what seemed like a lost cause due to two dreadful defensive errors.

The two youngsters scored two intelligent goals right at the death after an injection of some young and fresh legs had turned the table on the hosts.

"We made some changes and we brought some new players into the game. And we looked sharper, suddenly we looked like a better team and by the end of the game, I thought we were totally dominant really," the Anglo-Australian coach said at the Lao National Stadium.

"Credit to this lad Sufil and a really good finish from Jafar. Two young players and they're the future of Bangladesh football," the coach added.

However, it looked like the same old story for the Bangladesh team when they gifted two goals to the opposition team while failing to take their own chances. "I think the game started very evenly. We had two early chances but then unfortunately we did something that we are very, very keen to stop which is making really silly mistakes," said the 38-year-old, who was standing in the Bangladesh dug-out for the first time in an international match since his appointment in June last year.

Mamun Miah's moment of indiscretion on the half-hour mark handed the hosts the lead before the visitors conceded another when Mashuk Mia Johnny's reckless challenge gave away the penalty stoppage time.

Ord felt if Bangladesh are to eke out results, these mistakes need to be ironed out. "If we want to win games at this level we have to stop making silly mistakes. We talk about it daily. We had started to improve but unfortunately that came back to haunt us," he said.

In the end, though, it was two opportunistic and intelligent strikes that helped the visitors come out with a morale-boosting draw.

T20 match for DPL outcasts

SPORTS REPORTER
Since returning from the Nidahas Trophy in Sri Lanka Shakib Al Hasan has been spending time at the Mirpur gymnasium as his only avenue to keep fit because his club Mohammedan Sporting Club failed to get a ticket for the ongoing Super League.

The all-rounder however may get a chance to gain some match practice before his Indian Premier League stint as the cricket operations committee of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) was planning to a T20 practice match involving players from Mohammedan, Shinepukur Cricket Club and Prime Bank Cricket League.

"Yes, we are making two teams taking players from the three clubs who were eliminated. Shakib (Al Hasan) and (Mahmudullah) Riyad will also be included in the team. The COC instructed us to form the team for a T20 practice match and they will decide when it will take place," informed chief selector Minhajul Abedin over telephone last night.

When asked, cricket operations committee chairman Akram Khan said: "We are planning to arrange a T20 practice match and it will take place within two-three days."

BCB revisits Kirsten

SPORTS REPORTER
The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is now working on bringing former South African opener and the 2011 World Cup-winning coach of the Indian cricket team Gary Kirsten as an advisor of the national team. The board has revitalised negotiations with Kirsten for a solution as they have been struggling to get a suitable long-term head coach, a position left vacant following the departure of Chandika Hathurusingha late last year.

Soon after the departure of Hathurusingha, BCB had contacted the high-profile South African coach but Kirsten was reluctant to take a full-time coaching job and instead showed interest in an advisory role, which is why the BCB was reluctant to move forward. However, the reality regarding the unavailability of a suitable permanent coach has forced them to think otherwise and that is why they are now renegotiating with Kirsten.

BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus hinted at the possibility while speaking on the progress in appointing a new head coach. "As per previous discussion everything is the same as before. As a final agreement will take place after the IPL, we are waiting," said Yunus when asked how hopeful the board is regarding Kirsten's appointment.

He also added that as a consultant Kirsten may also work with the under-19 team, the A team and infrastructure.

Chand halts Abahani's march

SPORTS REPORTER
Table-toppers Abahani Limited stumbled in their Dhaka Premier Division title race after suffering a 26-run defeat in their Super League match at the hands of Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club courtesy of Indian batsman Unmukt Chand's second successive hundred in the league yesterday.

With 16 points Jamal are in second position in the points table alongside Legends of Rupganj. Despite the defeat, Abahani are still on top of the table with 18 points with three games left to play in the Super League.

After being asked to bat, Sheikh Jamal posted 256 for eight in 50 overs at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali stadium in Fatullah, riding on the former Indian under-19 World Cup winning captain Chand's 138-ball 101 which featured eight fours and three sixes.

Opener Shykat Ali scored 56 off 55 balls with six fours and two sixes as he added 90 runs in the opening stand with Chand. However, since Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza took a return catch to dismiss Chand, none of the Jamal batters were

able to score significantly, with Tanbir Hayder's 31 the third-highest score for the batting side.

Mashrafe ended up picking three wickets while fellow pacer Taskin Ahmed and off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz bagged two wickets each as Jamal managed just 64 runs in

SCORES IN BRIEF

SHEIKH JAMAL V ABAHANI
SHEIKH JAMAL DC: 256 for 8 in 50 overs (Shykat 56, Unmukt 101, Tanbir 31; Mashrafe 3-46, Taskin 2-59, Mehedi 2-37)
ABAHANI: 230 all out in 47.2 overs (Anamul 34, Vihari 23, Nasir 28, Mosaddek 27, Mehedi 35, Sunzamul 27, Taskin 31; Jayed 2-51, Robiul 3-35)
Result: Sheikh Jamal DC won by 26 runs.

the last 10 overs. In reply, despite Mashrafe opening the batting for the first time in his List A career, he was unable to make an impact and was the first of three wickets taken by pacer Abu Jayed when he was bowled going for a cross-batted heave after scoring just seven.

Warm-up fanned down

SPORTS REPORTER
Wicket-keeper batsman Mithun Ali was caught behind off pacer Abu Jayed for just five and title contenders Abahani were struggling on 54 for four in chase of a challenging 257 against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club in their Super League encounter at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali stadium in Fatullah yesterday.

Minutes later a helicopter approached the outer stadium of Fatullah where a warm-up match between third division teams Nawabganj and Kamkrangirchar was forced to take a short break to allow the helicopter to land.

For a brief time, the helicopter managed to catch the attention of the players, officials and crowd as the vice chairman of Bashundhara group and the president of Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi club, Safwan Sobhan, stepped out of the aircraft and headed towards the dressing room to cheer on his players.

Sensing a win against giants Abahani, Safwan had flown directly to the ground and left the stadium only after making sure his team were just a wicket away from victory. That of course meant that the warm-up game took an enforced break once again as the helicopter landed in the outer stadium to pick up Safwan for the flight back. This was not the first time Safwan flew in to encourage his side - the most recent example being a touchdown at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong to meet Rangpur Riders players - and the club owner's enthusiasm will certainly boost the morale of the players.

U-17s clinch Afghan series

SPORTS REPORTER
The Bangladesh Under-17 team clinched the three-match one-day series against Afghanistan Under-17 2-1 after winning the third and final match by seven wickets at the Greater Noida Sports Ground in India yesterday.

Afghanistan batsmen faced the music after being asked to bat. Apart from skipper and opener Ijaz's top score of 45 and Mohammad Ishaq's 24 none of the batsmen were able to reach double figures and were eventually bundled out for just 114 in 44.4 overs.

Left-arm spinner Mehedi Hasan bagged three wickets while Mrittunjoyi Chowdhury and Tahsin took two wickets for the bowling side.

Bangladesh reached the target with ease, riding on an unbeaten 79-ball 54 from opener Prantik Nowroz. Skipper Parvez Hossain added 32 to clinch a comfortable win in 29.3 overs, losing just three wickets.

Bangladesh have come back strong after losing the first one-day and went on to win the next two games to clinch the series.

Rupganj trump Liton ton

SPORTS REPORTER
Liton Das continued his impressive form but his third hundred went in vain as a 140-run opening partnership between Abdur Mazid and Mohammad Naim guided Legends of Rupganj to a five-wicket victory against Prime Doleshwar Sporting Club in the Dhaka Premier League's Super League match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

A brilliant top-order batting display helped Rupganj bounce back from a seven-wicket defeat against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club in the previous match to tally 16 points and trail only leaders Abahani in the six-team table. Gazi Group also came back strong from their 73-run loss to Abahani in the previous round as they beat Khelaghar Samaj Kallyan Samity by 34 runs at BKSP yesterday. Gazi increased their total to 14 points.

At Mirpur, Liton displayed brilliant stroke-play during a fine 107 off 126 balls that contained nine fours and two sixes. Along with Imtiaz Hossain (29 off 66 balls with three fours) he added 69 for the opening wicket and then contributed 113 runs for the second wicket with Fazle Mahmud, who scored 46 off 64 balls with one four and one six.

It was however number six batsman Iqbal Abdulla's unbeaten 22-ball 42 and Forhad Reza's 22-ball 29 that made sure that Doleshwar posted a fighting total of 257 for five.

Rupganj made the perfect start in chase of the target, riding on a 140-run opening partnership in 28.5 overs. Mazid hit 58 off 90 with five fours and a six while Naim struck the team-highest 88 off 101 balls with six fours and five sixes.

Mushfiqur Rahim and captain Naeem Islam then maintained the tempo of the chase. Mushfiqur scored a 36-



Opener Unmukt Chand's second successive hundred powered Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club to a 26-run victory over table-toppers Abahani in the DPL Super League fixture in Fatullah yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Warm-up fanned down

Minutes later a helicopter approached the outer stadium of Fatullah where a warm-up match between third division teams Nawabganj and Kamkrangirchar was forced to take a short break to allow the helicopter to land.

For a brief time, the helicopter managed to catch the attention of the players, officials and crowd as the vice chairman of Bashundhara group and the president of Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi club, Safwan Sobhan, stepped out of the aircraft and headed towards the dressing room to cheer on his players.

Sensing a win against giants Abahani, Safwan had flown directly to the ground and left the stadium only after making sure his team were just a wicket away from victory. That of course meant that the warm-up game took an enforced break once again as the helicopter landed in the outer stadium to pick up Safwan for the flight back. This was not the first time Safwan flew in to encourage his side - the most recent example being a touchdown at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong to meet Rangpur Riders players - and the club owner's enthusiasm will certainly boost the morale of the players.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PRIME DOLESHWAR V LEGENDS OF RUPGANJ
PRIME DOLESHWAR SC: 257 for 5 in 50 overs (Imtiaz 29, Liton 107, Mahmud 46, Reza 29, Abdulla 42 not out; Naeem 2-28)
LEGENDS OF RUPGANJ: 260 for 5 in 48.4 overs (Mazid 58, Naim 88, Mushfiqur 41, Naeem 31; Reza 2-54)
Result: Legends of Rupganj won by 5 wickets.

GAZI GROUP V KHELAGHAR
GAZI GROUP CRICKETERS: 304 for 6 in 50 overs (Imrul 63, Mominul 47, Raza 90, Asif 32, Nadif 45; Tanvir Islam 3-43, Masum 2-73)
KHELAGHAR SKS: 270 all out in 49.3 overs (Robiul 67, Mahidul 69, Menaria 25, Masum 44; Mahedi 2-45, Hider 3-43)
Result: Gazi Group Cricketers won by 34 runs.