

SPORT



Bangladesh coach Jamie Day has a bit of fun with his dependable centre-back Tapu Barman at the team hotel yesterday ahead of today's SAFF Suzuki Cup match against Pakistan.

PHOTO: STAR

Last four in sight Bangladesh take on Pakistan today

SPORTS REPORTER



Fresh from a 2-0 win over Bhutan, Bangladesh football team are looking forward to keeping their winning run intact as they take on Pakistan in their second group match of the SAFF Suzuki Cup at Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Both Bangladesh and Pakistan have posted wins in their respective group openers and a win tonight would seal semifinal berth for either side.

However, the semifinals have been a stage that these two sides have not featured in for a long time -- Bangladesh's last semifinal berth was in 2009 when they hosted the event for the second time while Pakistan's was 13 years ago, that too coming on their home soil.

It is difficult to separate the sides based on their previous performances -- both teams have won six matches each with four draws in 16 times they faced each other.

Bangladesh coach Jamie Day is aware of the statistics and also about the strength of the opposition. The 38-year-old Englishman was a bit cautious about his opposition as he termed Pakistan as one of the three good sides of the tournament.

"We are looking forward to tomorrow's game, but it's going to be tough against a good side who have some Europe-based players and they can be physically strong. Obviously they gained confidence after

winning the first match. But we need to perform at our best to get some points from the game. So, we are confident and the boys are confident too about tomorrow's game. We have to play with good standard for us to get something from the match," Day made this cautious assessment at a briefing at the BFF House yesterday after having given the players rest by cancelling the scheduled training session. The players, however, had swimming and gym sessions at the team hotel.

Pakistan, with two Europe-based strikers, adopted a counter-attacking strategy against Nepal and took a first-half lead before conceding the equaliser in face of tremendous pressure from Nepal. But they hit back late into stoppage-time from another counter-attack, with Denmark-based striker Muhammad Ali scoring the winner.

"They have five or six experienced players who know how to play at international level and higher. They have technical ability and they are strong. We know we have to cope with it," said Day, who put Pakistan ahead of Bangladesh, apparently in a bid to get the pressure off from his charges.

"If we win tomorrow's match we are the first team into the semifinals; so we want to win and not lose it. We have to be sensible," said Day, whose charges may get inspiration from the fact that their predecessors beat the same opposition 3-0 at home during a FIFA World Cup pre-qualifiers play-off in 2011.

Another encouraging statistic for the hosts is that they have never lost a game against Pakistan on home soil.

Relieved and rejuvenated

ANISUR RAHMAN



Defender Tapu Barman was perhaps the happiest among all on Tuesday night after Bangladesh inflicted a 2-0 defeat on Bhutan in their SAFF Suzuki Cup encounter to exact revenge for their ignominious defeat at the hands of the Himalayan nation two years ago.

The centre-back, who was helpless in stopping the Bhutanese attackers during that infamous defeat, stood tall against the Bhutanese forwards this time. He also played a key role in the win by putting the home side ahead by converting a spot-kick in the third minute.

The way the 24-year-old celebrated the goal by running towards the gallery, jumping in the air to punch his fist, was the evidence of his ecstasy, releasing the pain he was bearing for the last two years.

"I am really happy after the win and had a sound sleep last night. All the players are happy and a feel-good environment is prevailing among the players, who showed perseverance to beat Bhutan. We are relieved as we were away from international football for nearly two years due to that defeat," Tapu told this reporter at the team hotel yesterday.

"We are happy that we did not disappoint the huge crowd who came to the stadium and supported us tremendously throughout the match," said the lad from Narayanganj -- the highest paid player of the last season.

Even though Tapu opened the scoring, the game was still within Bhutan's reach before young striker Mahbubur Rahman Sufil took it away from them with a stunning goal right at the start of the second half. The 20-year-old striker did not hide his elation.

"We are all happy with achieving our first

"I was personally confident that we could beat them as we beat them at age-level. Our confidence increased when we played good football in the Asian Games."

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN SUFIL

target. I can tell you that there was determination among the players because we lagged behind after losing to Bhutan. So we did not want to lose to them again and the only target was to win against them," said Sufil, who had also scored against Bhutanese opponents during the SAFF U-18 Championship last year.

"I was personally confident that we could beat them as we beat them at age-level. Our confidence increased when we played good football in the Asian Games," said the Arambagh KS striker.

"I am happy to have scored such a goal. I won't get such opportunities in every match, so I must capitalise on the opportunities that I get to do more for the team," said the lad from Moulvibazar, who had squandered a one-on-one chance in the seventh minute of the game.

"There is scope for improvement in one-on-one situations. I need to keep my cool in such situations. As a striker I always want to score but I need to improve myself and I am working on it with the coach," said the promising striker.

However, neither of the players wanted to dwell on the victory too much; rather they were looking forward to putting up much more improved performance in upcoming matches against Pakistan and Nepal.

Winning start for India

SPORTS REPORTER



Defending champions India got off to a flying start in the

SAFF Suzuki Cup with a 2-0 victory over Sri Lanka in Group B opener at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Ashiqre Kuruiyan put the seven-time champions ahead with a placing shot in the first half before Lallianzuala Chhangte wrapped up the victory at the start of the second half to all but ensure their semifinal berth from the three-team group, which also features Maldives.

India, comprising under-23 players, kept Sri Lanka at bay throughout the match with their pacy run through the flanks which virtually kept the Sri Lankan defence under tremendous pressure.

Sri Lanka, however, tried to display some organised football but it was tough for them against the high-pressing football from the charges of English coach Stephen Constantine.

The Islanders could hardly take a shot on target even though they were the first to come close to breaking the deadlock when Mohamed Rifnaz saw his free-kick narrowly drift away from the far post.

With India pressing high after controlling the midfield, Kuruiyan

was presented with a through-pass by Smeet Passi and the forward ran past a defender to place it on to the far post with his left foot from inside the box in the 35th minute.

Four minutes later, Chhangte squandered an opportunity by floating over the crosspiece from inside the box, but the winger made amends to double the lead two minutes into the second half with a cross from the left flank which drifted into far post.

Haji Faruk Kasem was denied by the woodwork in the 71st minute while Sri Lankan goalkeeper Sujan Perera made a couple of brilliant saves to deny India from increasing the margin.



India forward Ashiqre Kuruiyan (C) watches his shot beat Sri Lanka goalkeeper Sujan Perera during their SAFF Suzuki Cup fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Beckham names team Inter Miami

BBC ONLINE

David Beckham's Major League Soccer team will be called Club Internacional de Futbol Miami - or Inter Miami CF - and the club's crest has been unveiled.

Inter Miami will make their MLS debut in 2020, after being awarded an expansion contact in January.

The crest is pink, black and white, featuring two herons and a sun with seven rays - which are a "homage" to the ex-England captain's career.

"This is such a proud day for myself and for the entire team," said Beckham.

The former Manchester United, Real Madrid, Paris St-Germain and AC Milan midfielder, who is team owner and president, added: "We are taking another important step in establishing our club and today marks an important moment in the history of Club Internacional de Futbol Miami."

The crest appeared on the front page of Wednesday's Miami Herald.

Curry for Curran?

AGENCIES, London

Sam Curran's stunning emergence for England this summer has attracted a raft of interest among the IPL's cash-rich teams.

A number of franchises - including Virat Kohli's Royal Challengers Bangalore - are understood to have flagged up the 20-year-old as a possible target for 2019, in keeping with the recent trend that match-winning performances against India count for more. All-rounders are viewed as precious commodities among the IPL teams too.

Curran has shown himself to be a steely batsman in high pressure situations - his two half-centuries this series have rescued England at Edgbaston and the Ageas Bowl - while the left-arm angle of his swing bowling offers a lot as well.

Was thinking of quitting for six months: Cook

AFP, London



Alastair Cook had considered retiring from England duty for the last six months before finally announcing the end of his international career.

Cook revealed on Monday that he will step away from the England stage following the fifth Test against India at The Oval this week.

The 33-year-old, England's record run-scorer, had been pondering the move for most of the year and eventually made the decision ahead of last week's fourth Test with India, where his country secured a series win.

"It's hard to put it into words but over the last six months there have been signs in my mind this was going to happen," former England captain Cook said.

"I always had been mentally tough and had that edge to everything I've done and that edge had kind of gone."

Cook informed captain Joe Root before the game and head coach Trevor Bayliss while it was going on, but the rest

of the squad found out in a beer-fuelled emotional speech afterwards.

"I told Rooty before the game and then told Trevor during the game," Cook said.

"I was a couple of beers in, which I needed to be, otherwise I would have cried more than I actually did. I managed to hold it together."

"At the end of the game I said, 'It might be good news, it might be sad for some, it might be happy for others but it's time and I have done my bit. I will play one more game'."

"I can look back and say, I became the best I could become, that actually means quite a lot to me," he said.

"I have never been the most talented cricketer, I don't pretend I was, but I definitely think I got everything out of my ability."

"Everyone was talking as if I'd died. It's nice when you hear so many nice words said about you. The last couple of days I have been back at home but I had a look last night."

"Hopefully this week can go well, score some runs and then I can go."

Aus cricket to produce 'better people'

AFP, Sydney

Australian cricket is drawing up a cultural blueprint in which players will pledge to uphold certain standards in a move away from their win-at-all-costs mentality, according to skipper Tim Paine.

The player charter is being developed in the wake of a ball-tampering scandal in March that rocked the game and cost captain Steve Smith and his deputy David Warner their jobs.

Paine told the Sydney Morning Herald Wednesday that he and new coach Justin Langer were playing a central role in formalising a blueprint for players to follow to ensure such scandals never happen again.

He said the new team charter, linked to the reviews, could be in place ahead of their Test series against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates next month.

"It's going to be how we go about it, how we want to be seen and what we are about,"

he said. "That's really important. We are the lucky ones that get to represent our country and pull on that baggy green cap, which is a huge privilege."

"I think we have to go back to that and just remember that we are Australia's team -- we are not the Australian cricket team. We don't own it," the wicketkeeper-batsman added.

"We are just here for the ride and it's important that we leave that team in a better place to when we went into it."

Under the charter, which will be separate to Cricket Australia's code of conduct and encourage a hard-but-fair attitude, players will be held to account by their peers.

Paine told the newspaper it was as much about improving cricketers as "people" as it was about the team's on-field actions.

"We want to build a culture that makes people want to be better and produce not only better cricketers but better people," he said.