

SPORT



Defender Bishwanath Ghosh (R) replicates his long throw-in skill during a light moment with his teammates at the team hotel yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Do-or-die against Nepal today

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Bangladesh will look to maintain their spirited show and ensure a semi-final berth in the SAFF Suzuki Cup when they take on a rejuvenated Nepal in the final encounter of Group A at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today. The hosts are on top of the group with two successive wins over Bhutan and Pakistan, but they still need a point against Nepal to ensure a last four spot. A defeat against the Himalayan kingdom might send the hosts out, subject to Pakistan's win over Bhutan in the day's first match.

In that case, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan will have an equal six points, but Bangladesh might lose out on goal difference. However, the men in red and green will go through to the last four before the kick-off of their match if Pakistan fails to beat Bhutan.

Except for the last edition in Kerala, Bangladesh were in a similar situation



JAMIE DAY

ahead of their final group matches in the 2011 and 2013 editions, but they failed to beat Pakistan and Maldives respectively on those occasions, which ended their campaigns there.

However, this time around they look more confident going into the final group game against Nepal, who beat Bangladesh in the 2011 and 2013 editions, with two wins to their name.

English coach Jamie Day did not want to think much about the equations; rather he wanted his charges to play their

own game like they did in their first two matches.

"We can't lose but we need to play our own game and hopefully we'll play well enough to get through," Day said before a training session at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

Day rested all the players who started against Pakistan while training the remaining eight players as midfielder Atiqur Rahman Fahad is still nursing the knee injury he sustained during the match against Bhutan.

Today's match is being considered as a tough one for Bangladesh as the Nepalese are comparatively faster than the Bhutanese and Pakistani players and they also have good scorers who can threaten Bangladesh's defence.

"Nepal are a very good side, they are going to cause us problems. They were unlucky against Pakistan but they scored four goals against Bhutan.

"We can't worry too much about their scores but the goal difference is troublesome. It's going to be a really tough

game," said the 38-year-old, who believes it would be very disappointing if Bangladesh fail to qualify for the semifinals despite coming to this stage.

Day, however, can be pleased with the fact that his back four hardly made any costly mistakes while one of them has scored two of their three goals.

"The match against Nepal is more important than the first two matches because we haven't confirmed the semifinals despite winning two matches. The defenders and the midfielders have to work hard, to be more cautious and alert with high concentration so that we don't concede any goals and our first intention will be not to concede any goal," defender Tapu Barman said, adding that the forwards must avail the opportunities they get during the match.

Right-back Bishwanath Ghosh is also appeared upbeat about creating an unbreakable defence to achieve the target of getting through to the last four.

"I'm confident about performing well against Nepal and leave the field with a victory," said Biswanath.

A tale of long throw-ins

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Spectators can still recall ex-national team defenders Abul Hossain, Alamgir Hasan and Belal Ahmed, obviously not for their spectacular performances; but rather for their famous long throw-ins which always posed a threat to the opposition backline.

In the recent past, Raihan Hasan had emerged with the same skill, releasing long throw-ins into the opponent's danger zone, and now Bishwanath Ghosh has entered the scene. Bishwanath has begun to hog the limelight with his long throw-ins in the ongoing SAFF Suzuki Cup. One of his throw-ins found its way to centre-back Tapu Barman, who then headed the national team to a 1-0 win over Pakistan on Thursday.

Interestingly, all five of the aforementioned players were defenders. Raihan, now a national discard, has been mentoring Bishwanath, who has been inspired to play great football and master the long throw-in by the Abahani defender. However, the 20-year-old has virtually dethroned his mentor to secure a place in the team.

"I have a belief that anyone can score by availing my long throw-ins whenever I go to the touchline. I'm really happy that Tapu Bhai finally scored to give Bangladesh a win, though the initial plan was for him to flick it while the second man would rush to head it home," Bishwanath told The Daily Star yesterday.

Bishwanath, who started taking such throw-ins during his time with the under-19 team, flourished during his debut professional football league season with Mohammedan SC in 2016-17. He was also instrumental in the 1-1 draw against Thailand in the Asian Games. In that match, Mahbubur Rahman Sufil flicked Bishwanath's long throw-in home.

Ahead of the throw-in, Bishwanath urged the spectators to applaud loudly as he believed it has an impact on the match.

"I did it to get inspired by the home spectators as I was playing in front of such a big crowd for the first time. Playing in front of such a crowd is always a different experience for any player. I'm happy after assisting a goal in an international match for the first time but I already got such an assist during a 1-1 draw against Thailand in the Asian Games.

"Another reason was to distract the Pakistani players. When we played in the Asian Games, I saw Indonesia were down 2-1 against the UAE at one stage but after the home crowd supported them loudly from the gallery, the UAE made mistakes and Indonesia bounced back, making the UAE players look nervous in the last moments. The match eventually entered shootouts," said the lad from Tangail, who admitted Raihan has done a lot to ensure his rise to this stage.

"Raihan Bhai and I are from the same ground and the same area of Santosh village of Tangail. I never saw a throw-in by Belal or Alamgir Bhai but I have been inspired to attempt long throw-ins by Raihan Bhai, who helped me grow as a footballer from my childhood and brought me to Dhaka for the national age-level teams trial," said Bishwanath, who represented Bangladesh at the U-12, 13, 14, 15, 16 and 19 levels.

The right-back is now a part of the national team following two seasons at the top flight with Mohammedan SC and Sheikh Russel KC.

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BISHWANATH GHOSH

BHF says no to Pak tourney

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The Bangladesh Hockey Federation has decided against sending the national team to the upcoming Hockey Series Open, which is scheduled to take place in Pakistan from September 25-30 in Lahore and Rawalpindi.

Six teams -- Bangladesh, Oman, Sri Lanka, Kazakhstan, Qatar and Afghanistan -- were supposed to take part in the hockey event but Bangladesh withdrew from the recently introduced Asian Hockey Federation event.

"Teams like Oman and Thailand are not taking part in the tournament, so the meeting of the BHF Working Committee on Thursday decided not to send a team from Bangladesh," said BHF joint secretary Ehsan Rana yesterday.

"Since the teams aren't at our level, we don't see the need to play against low-ranked sides by spending 20 to 25 lakhs of taka. Besides, some of the players will be travelling to Europe to play in European leagues, which is another reason for not sending the team," Rana said, adding that they would inform the concerned authority within a couple of days.

Rana also informed of another reason for Bangladesh's opting out of the tournament, citing visa complications as another factor they considered when making their decision.

Sri Lanka hold Maldives

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Sri Lanka kept their hopes for a spot in the SAFF Suzuki Cup semifinals alive by holding title aspirants Maldives to a goalless draw in a Group B encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The outcome of yesterday's match advanced defending champions India to the semifinals as the first team following Wednesday's win over Sri Lanka, who will now pray for India to beat Maldives by more than a two-goal margin to help them make it to the last four.

Though Sri Lanka struggled against seven-time champions India, the

Islanders put up a really brilliant performance against neighbouring Maldives and probably were unlucky not to have posted a win, despite creating more scoring chances than Maldives, who seemed to be running after their own shadows without star striker Ali Ashfaq.

However, it was Maldives who came close to taking the lead in the third minute but Sri Lanka goalkeeper Sujan Perera gathered a close-range header from Ibrahim Hassan Waheed off a Hassan Naiz corner. Sri Lanka then almost broke the deadlock through Mohammad Fazal but the effort was ruled offside.

Sujan then denied Maldives again by stopping Naiz in the 27th minute before Afeel Mohamed missed the target narrowly four minutes from the

break, much to the disappointment of Sri Lanka.

After resumption, Maldives cornered Sri Lanka by applying huge pressure with Ali Fasir missing the target narrowly from a free-kick on the edge of the box while Mohamed Irufaan failed to connect in front of an open Sri Lankan net in the 56th minute.

Afterwards, the show belonged to Sri Lanka, who created four scoring chances but unfortunately could not avail those, with Maldives goalkeeper Mohamed Faisal playing a tremendous role between the sticks, denying the charges of Nizam Packeer Ali time and again.



Sri Lanka defender AB Warakagoda fights for the ball with a Maldives player during their SAFF Suzuki Cup fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Alastair Cook received a guard of honour from the Indian team and a standing ovation from The Oval crowd as he walked out to bat in his final Test on Friday. He hit a typically defiant 71 on the first day.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Cook exit sparks collapse

AFP, London



Alastair Cook marked his final Test appearance with a fifty before India's Jasprit Bumrah sparked an England collapse at the Oval on Friday. England were making steady progress at 131 for one on the first day of the fifth Test, but Cook's exit sparked a slump that saw six wickets lost for 48 runs. England captain Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow and Sam Curran were all dismissed for noughts.

At stumps, England were 198 for seven, with Ishant Sharma taking three for 28 and fellow paceman Bumrah two for 41.

Cook was thrust straight into action when Root opted to bat first. England had already won this five-match series after a 60-run victory at Southampton gave them a 3-1 lead.

In his final appearance for England, Cook walked out to a guard of honour from India and, along with Keaton Jennings, put on an opening stand of 60 before the latter was caught off left-arm spinner Ravindra

Jadeja at legslip.

England were 68 for one at lunch, with Cook 37 not out and Moeen two not out. Both batsmen were dropped on their interval scores. Cook was missed by Ajinkya Rahane in the gully off Sharma and India captain Virat Kohli floored a far more difficult chance from Moeen at third slip off Bumrah.

Cook cut Jadeja for four to go to 49 before completing a 139-ball fifty with a capacity crowd giving him a standing ovation. His typically patient vigil ended when he inside-edged Bumrah onto his stumps to end a 190-ball innings. Three balls later Root was leg-before to Bumrah. Bairstow then fell when he jabbed at a Sharma delivery and Jadeja had Ben Stokes leg-before for 11.

Moeen departed for 50 when he hung his bat out to Sharma and was caught behind. On his Surrey home ground, Curran was then caught behind second ball off Sharma.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First innings 198 for 8 (Cook 71, Moeen 50, Jennings 23; Sharma 3-28, Bumrah 2-41, Jadeja 2-57)