

SPORT



INDIA 3 - 1 PAKISTAN
MANVIR 48', 69'
PASSI 84'

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Manvir Singh's second-half double propelled holders India to the final of the SAFF Suzuki Cup with a 3-1 win against bitter rivals Pakistan in the second semifinal at the rain-soaked Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. India will take on Maldives in Saturday's final.

India brush aside Pakistan

SPORTS REPORTER



Defending champions India set up a final clash in the SAFF Suzuki Cup against Maldives after handing archrivals Pakistan a 3-1 defeat in the second semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

After a barren first half, Manvir Singh scored a brace while substitute Sumeet Passi's goal took favourites India to the final for the 11th time – in 12 editions – and their seventh in a row, shattering Pakistan's dream of a first-ever final.

Hassan Bashir pulled one back but that was not enough for Pakistan to emulate their feat of 2003 when they handed India a defeat in the first match of the SAFF Championship at this venue.

The young India side had breezed into the semifinals with victories against Sri Lanka and

Maldives, but they were given a real test by the Pakistanis last night.

And it was Pakistan who came close to taking the lead in the seventh minute, but Muhammad Riaz's header at near post flashed inches wide.

However, India continued to display their fast-paced football through the wings and dominated proceedings in the following ten minutes, exposing the Pakistan defence a few times. Yet, they could not break the final hurdle, thanks to some excellent saves from Pakistan goalkeeper Younsif Ijaz Butt.

Butt denied Manvir in the ninth and 25th minutes before thwarting an effort from India striker Haji Faruk Kasam in the 27th minute.

Having reorganised, Pakistan put the pressure back on the Indian defence and created three scoring chances, but this time India goalkeeper Vishal Kaith stood tall and denied Muhammad Riaz from close range. Bashir saw two successive

attempts narrowly miss the target, much to the relief of the Indian goalkeeper as the two sides went into the break on a deadlock.

The deadlock was broken in the 48th minute when Ashique Kuruniyan's cross from the left was placed home by Manvir. The India No. 9 doubled the lead in the 69th minute after a nice build-up from the right flank. From a counter-attack, substitute Lallianzuala Chhangte nutmegged two defenders to play a diagonal pass for Vinit Rai, who set up Manvir for a powerful angular shot.

As Pakistan looked tired, substitute Passi took the game away from them by heading home a cross from Kuruniyan's in the 84th minute before Bashir pulled one back two minutes from time.

Pakistan defender Mohsin Ali and India forward Chhangte were sent off in the 85th minute following a scuffle, but as the tempers subsided India started their celebration.

Riyad echoes Tigers' confidence

SPORTS REPORTER



There is no shortage of confidence in the Tigers' camp in the UAE as the Mashrafe Bin Mortaza-led side have been preparing under hot and humid conditions with the aim of achieving a new milestone in the Asia Cup.

Mahmudullah Riyad exuded confidence over Bangladesh's chances in the six-nation tournament after vice-captain Shakib Al Hasan issued a strong statement by saying: "We want to take one game at a time, but obviously the ultimate goal is to win the trophy. This is what everyone is here for."

Bangladesh will be hoping to go one better this time around after reaching the

well, so hopefully we can deliver," said Riyad about their first opponents.

"We are confident enough. We had a very good series against West Indies, especially in ODIs and T20Is, so we will take that confidence into the Asia Cup. Both teams [Afghanistan and Sri Lanka] have been playing good cricket, especially in 50 overs, so we have to play our best to go into the next round," added Shakib.

Climate will be a big challenge for the teams in the tournament and Dubai International Stadium head curator Toby Lumsden said: "I think the conditions that will be present during the Asia Cup will be determined mostly by the weather. We will have hot days, possibly humid nights with some heavy dew is possible."

"The conditions will change throughout



Bangladesh ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan (L) plays football with teammate Mohammad Mithun during a practice session ahead of Asia Cup at the ICC Cricket Academy ground in Dubai on Tuesday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

final of the 50-over Asia Cup in 2012 and also of the T20 version in 2016 before losing at home to Pakistan and India respectively.

Much like Shakib, Riyad, one of the most dependable men in the Bangladesh batting line-up, also emphasised on match-by-match focus to realise the dream.

"I think all the teams are playing very good cricket at the moment. Every team is very important and we can't afford to be relaxed. We need to take it game by game so that we can do well in the first stage," opined the right-hander, who is usually trusted with the responsibility of finishing innings.

Both Riyad and Shakib also reminisced on some sweet memories while they were talking to reporters from the Asian Cricket Council (ACC).

"I think we have got some good memories against Sri Lanka from a few months back [Nidahas Trophy], but Sri Lanka are a very good team, and they are playing very good cricket. We have to be at our best to beat them. We have been preparing quite

the day. Maybe reasonably fast conditions in the afternoon session, and then it might seem a little bit at night time and maybe get a bit of grip and spin for the evening," Lumsden added.

Riyad however expressed confidence of surmounting that challenge. "At the moment it is quite humid, but as professional players we have to be able to adapt and embrace the situations that come our way. We have to take it further on a positive note."

He was also hoping to receive good support from the stands.

"Hopefully we are going to get a really good crowd here because plenty of Bangladeshis live here. We hope they will come out and support us and we hope to deliver some good results for them," he said.

Riyad further said that his only target was to contribute to the team.

"It always feels good to contribute to the team and if the team is winning it feels even better. I will try to keep it simple and try and contribute as much as I can."

Still among the fittest

SPORTS REPORTER



Former Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful, who completed a five-year international ban for his involvement in match-fixing and spot-fixing in the 2013 Bangladesh Premier League in August this year, scored an impressive 11.4 in the beep test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has initiated a fitness programme for all the members of the participating teams in the upcoming National Cricket League, where Ashraful has been impressing for Dhaka Metropolis.

Two cricketers scored over 12 while Ashraful and two others finished on 11.4. Ashraful also surpassed two former national teammates Shamsur Rahman (11.2) and Marshall Ayub (10.7). Any score over 11 is rated as good.

Ashraful returned to domestic and first-class competitions after serving a separate three-year ban and the right-hander enjoyed his time in last season's Dhaka Premier League with Kalabagan KC, striking five hundreds.

However there were questions over his low strike rate despite those centuries and according to 34-year-old, improving his fitness will have a positive effect on his strike rate as well. Ashraful has been hard at work in the gym since the conclusion of the DPL and has been able to shed eight kilograms over the past three months.

"I have been preparing for the last three months to take part in the National Cricket League and wanted to take my fitness to international standards. It requires a lot of mental toughness when you work on your fitness. I followed a strict diet and minimised consuming rice," Ashraful told reporters yesterday.

U-19 ASIA CUP Hridoy to lead Bangladesh

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 15-member squad for the ACC Under-19 Asia Cup scheduled to begin from September 29 in Bangladesh.

Towhid Hridoy will lead the side with Shamim Hossain as his deputy.

Bangladesh, who were placed in Group B, will take on Sri Lanka in their first group stage match on the opening day at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong. Pakistan and Hong Kong are the other teams in their group. Defending champions Afghanistan will battle it out against India, Nepal and UAE in Group A.

The knockout phase of the tournament, which will begin from October 4, will see all matches played at the Sher-e-Bangla National stadium in Mirpur, with the final scheduled on October 7.

SQUAD: Tawhid Hridoy (C), Shamim Hossain (VC), Tanzid Hasan, Sajid Hossain, Prantik Nawrose, Amit Hasan, Akbar Ali, Shahadat Hossain, Rakibul Hasan, Minhazur Rahman, Mohammad Rishad, Shoriful Islam, Mehedi Hasan, Murtinjoy Chowdhury, Avishek Das.

Nepal fall in semis again

SPORTS REPORTER



Nepal once again failed to break their semifinal curse in the SAFF Suzuki Cup as they suffered a 3-0 defeat against Maldives in the first semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Captain Akram Abdul Ghaneen put Maldives early in the match before Ibrahim Hassan Waheed scored a late brace to break the hearts of the Himalayan nation, who were desperately seeking to make it to their maiden final following their spirited show in the group-stages.

Maldives made it to the final for the fifth time, but their first in nine years. Interestingly the Islanders had played their last SAFF Championship final at this ground in 2009. They were eliminated from the semifinals on the last three occasions – every time losing against India.

Nepal were tipped favourites in this match for the way they played against Pakistan, Bhutan and Bangladesh, but the men from the Himalayas, who played four semifinals before, failed to replicate that form on a rain-soaked pitch.

They looked short of confidence after conceding the lead in the ninth minute when Ghaneen saw his curling free-kick from the edge of the box beat the Nepal goalkeeper after a



Nepal players leave the pitch with heads hanging low after their 3-0 defeat against Maldives in the first semifinal yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

clever dummy from a Maldives forward.

The match was suspended for 30 minutes due to thunderstorm, but Nepal were barely able to make their presence felt once the game restarted, despite creating a few scoring chances. It was Maldives though who dominated the show and Waheed's goals in the 84th and 86th minutes broke the Nepalese hearts, a repeat of the result from 19 years ago.

"We had a good opportunity to reach the final for first time as we played some good football in the

group stages but today it was hard luck for us as our players are not used to playing on such slippery pitch and they were not comfortable on this rain-soaked ground. Besides, the break for the rain also destroyed our rhythm. We made tactical changes in the second half but it did not work," Nepal coach Bal Gopal Maharjan said at the post-match briefing.

"Nepal played well but we scored even though the match was very difficult for us," said Maldives coach Peter Segert, who took Afghanistan to the final in the last edition in India.



NEPAL 0 - 3 MALDIVES
GHANEEN 9'
WAHEED 84', 86'

Maldives forward Ibrahim Hassan Waheed celebrates one of his two goals with teammates during comfortable win against Nepal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Fixtures

Date	Match	Venue
Oct 1	First T20I	Cox's Bazar
Oct 3	Second T20I	Cox's Bazar
Oct 4	Third T20I	Cox's Bazar
Oct 6	Fourth T20I	Cox's Bazar
Oct 8	Only ODI	Cox's Bazar

Erasmus to run Ind-Pak clash

AGENCIES, Dubai

Marais Erasmus, one of the most respected officials on the ICC elite panel of umpires, is set to supervise a India-Pakistan ODI for the third time in 15 months when the two subcontinent giants face each other in their Asia Cup Group 'B' fixture in Dubai on Sept 19.