

Headache remains over goal-scoring

ANISUR RAHMAN from Sylhet

The ridiculous fumble from goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel against Nepal was the most-discussed subject after Bangladesh failed to reach the semifinals of last month's SAFF Championship but there were hardly any discussions about the team's inability to find the back of the net in the remaining sixty-odd minutes during that match.

That lack of a goalscoring threat was highlighted again on Friday, when the men in red and green put up a spirited performance against Philippines in their final group match of the ongoing Bangabandhu Gold Cup in Sylhet but left the field with a 1-0 defeat. Despite dominating the match and carving out numerous opportunities, the strikers' inability to score saw them fail to reply to the Philippines' 24th-minute opener.

In the SAFF Championship, Bangladesh had played with a lone striker as they opted for a counter-attacking strategy, but it was centreback Tapu Barman who came up with the goods, scoring one each against Bhutan and Pakistan while promising forward Mahbubur Rahman Sufil struck once.

Bangladesh coach Jamie Day reorganised for the Bangabandhu Gold Cup and went with two strikers in a bid to get goals. However, again they failed to shine in the two group matches and it was winger Biplu Ahmed who scored the hosts' only goal in the tournament so far, striking against Laos to take Bangladesh to the semifinals.

The booters have so far played 75 matches over the past 10 years and have won only 16 matches while playing out 20 draws and losing

on 39 occasions.

The men in red and green scored 58 goals during those matches at an average of 0.77 goals per game. At the same time, they have conceded 125 goals at an average of 1.66 goals per game.

While most of the goals were conceded to stronger teams like Australia, Japan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan during the qualifiers for the Russia World Cup and Asian Cup, Bangladesh also suffered massive defeats to Thailand, United Arab Emirates and Maldives in international friendlies.

Having analysed the statistics over the past 10 years, it was seen that a total of only 20 players have gotten their names on the score sheet with the strikers -- led by Zahid Hasan Emily's 11 goals -- logically atop the charts with 33 goals that accounted for 55% of the team's tally.

Midfielders have come up with only 15 goals (25 per cent), led by Zahid Hossain's four strikes and Mamunul Islam's three, while the defenders, led by Tapu Barman's three strikes, have come forward to score 10 times (16.67%).

Scoring has been a long-standing problem for Bangladesh at the international level and they have often been deprived of deserved wins due to the failure of strikers, who spend most of their time in domestic competitions on the bench to accommodate foreign players. That lack of game time leaves them befuddled when they enter the opposition box at the international level.

However, it was once a different scenario for local strikers who were regularly drafted into the playing eleven in domestic competitions.

Strikers such as Zahid Hasan Emily, Enamul Haque and Shakhawat Hossain Rony were as good at the international level as they were at the domestic one. Unfortunately, they failed to

SINCE MAY 2008					
BOOTERS' RECORD					
M	W	D	L	GF	GA
75	16	20	39	60	125

WHERE THE GOALS CAME FROM



Despite being out of the national team for a few years now, Zahid Hasan Emily remains their top scorer over the past 10 years with 11 goals to his name. PHOTO: STAR FILE

shine for a prolonged period as they lost their edge after being shifted out of position in domestic matches.

Current striker Mahabubur Rahman Sufil only drew attention last season after his exploits in the Independence Cup but he still needs time to hone his scoring abilities while

Nabib Newaj Jibon has been an irregular striker for Abahani and has had no consistency at the international level.

Aside from strikers, defenders Tapu, Nasiruddin, Yeasin Khan and midfielders Zahid, Hemanta Vincent Biswas and Abdul Baten Komol have scored decisive goals in

international matches as they do in domestic circuits.

It seems that the desperation for goals at the international level will continue for Bangladesh until everyone, from the strikers to the defenders, refine their skills in front of the net at the domestic level before making the step up.



RONALDO ON TARGET AGAIN

Cristiano Ronaldo shrugged off damaging rape allegations to score the second goal for Juventus after Rodrigo Bentancur opened the scoring as the Italian champions beat Udinese 2-0 to stretch their lead at the top of Serie A on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Hosts get Palestine in semifinal

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet



Pre-tournament favourites Palestine set their Bangabandhu Gold Cup semifinal clash against hosts Bangladesh when they sent defending champions Nepal packing with a 1-0 win in their final group match at the Sylhet District Stadium yesterday.

With two wins from as many matches, Palestine topped Group A ahead of runners-up Tajikistan, who face Group B champions Philippines.

To emerge group champions, Palestine needed only a single point against Nepal, who required all three points to avoid the group-stage exit. But the defending champions lacked urgency throughout the match even though they avoided a bigger-margin defeat by defending heavily inside their own half.

The match was apparently played in Nepal's half in the first half before Nepal tried to go on counter sporadically but they never managed to have a shot on target.

Palestine came close to taking the lead in the 16th minute when Helal Mousa entered the danger zone from the right but his powerful drive at near post drifted away while Nepal goalkeeper Bikesh Kuthu had no trouble in dealing with Sameh Maraaba's shot on the half-hour mark.

After resumption, Palestine coach Noureddin Ali brought some positional changes, sending on Jonathan Zorrilla and Mahmoud Ali Wisat but the Nepal goalkeeper thwarted two good efforts from Islam Batran and Abdullah Jaber.

Bikesh, however, was helpless against a powerful header from Khaled J Salem, who headed home a well-judged cross from Abdullah Jaber in the 70th minute.

"Nepal played well but we did not lose our focus. We played better in the second half and brought some tactical changes and won the match," said Palestine coach Ali.

"It was another tough match for us and Palestine are better than us in every aspect. I think two good teams from our group advanced to the semifinals," said Nepal coach Bal Gopal Maharjan.

Gold Cup moves to Cox's Bazar

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

The knockout phase of 5th Bangabandhu Gold Cup is set to move to Cox's Bazar after the completion of the group-stage in Sylhet, with Palestine and Nepal playing the final group match at the Sylhet District stadium yesterday.

Cox's Bazar will host two semifinals with Philippines taking on Tajikistan on Tuesday and Bangladesh squaring off against Palestine on Wednesday. Both matches will begin at 2:30pm at the Cox's Bazar District Stadium.

All four semifinalists are scheduled to fly out to Cox's Bazar this afternoon while Nepal are scheduled to return to Dhaka for their trip back Kathmandu.

The men in red and green are scheduled to have their training for the Palestine match this afternoon. They underwent only gym and swimming sessions yesterday following their match against Philippines on Friday.

The final will be held at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka on October 12.

Snooker C'ship begins

SPORTS REPORTER

The third edition of the Beximco National Snooker Team Championship, comprised of 16 clubs and 17 teams, kicked off yesterday with a total of 52 competitors.

The six day long tournament will conclude on October 11. The champions will receive Tk 1 lakh while the runners up will get Tk 50 thousand. The tournament is dedicated to former Dhaka Club and the Bangladesh Cricket Board director, the late Afzalur Rahman Sinha.

Men's team show improvement

Finish 56th in Chess Olympiad

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh men's team finished 56th among 150 teams in the 43rd Chess Olympiad, which concluded in Georgia on Friday. The five-member team, coached by Igor Rausis, started as 64th seed and finished in 56th position, having initially set a target of finishing within the top 50 teams.

Bangladesh had finished 76th in the last Chess Olympiad in 2016. Their best result so far had been in the 2012 edition where they finished 33rd.

Bangladesh won their last round by 2.5-1.5 points against Panama on Friday, with GM Ziaur Rahman and FM Fahad Rahman winning their boards. GM Enamul Hossain Razib drew his board while GM Abdullah Al Rakib lost his board.

FM Fahad Rahman and GM Ziaur Rahman had the best results in this year's Olympiad, bagging seven points from 11 games each, with the former earning his maiden IM norm from this championship.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh women's team, which started the Olympiad as the 60th seeded team, finished 72nd following their 3.5-0.5 point defeat against Lithuania in the final round. Only WFM Tanima Parvin managed to draw her board while WIM Shamima Akter, WFM Shirin Sharmin Sultana and WIM Rani Hamid lost their respective boards.

Veteran Rani hamid was the most successful, with 6.5 points from 11 games while Shirin Sharmin Sultana earned six points from 10 games.

Relief for Jose as MU stage comeback

AFP, Manchester

Under-pressure Manchester United manager Jose Mourinho saw his side score three goals, including a late winner, as they beat lowly Newcastle 3-2 at Old Trafford in the Premier League on Saturday.

Amid newspaper speculation he could be sacked this weekend, Mourinho's side fell 2-0 behind as early as the 10th minute after goals from Kenedy and Yoshinori Muto fired the visitors -- who haven't won in the league this season -- into a shock lead.

But Juan Mata pulled a goal back in the 70th minute with a fine free-kick, Anthony Martial equalised six minutes later and Alexis Sanchez scored in the 90th minute to end United's run of four games without a win.

Victory saw United move up into eighth place in the table but still left them six points adrift of leaders Manchester City, who are away to Liverpool on Sunday.

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