



Looking to learn from mistakes

ANISUR RAHMAN from Biratnagar, Nepal

Suffering a heavy defeat against Nepal is not a first-time experience for the Bangladesh national women's team; they even tasted wider-margin defeats in recent past compared to the one they suffered during the ongoing SAFF Women's Championship on Saturday.

The 3-0 defeat was thought to have broken the morale of the young ladies as it made them face the daunting prospect of being pitted against four-time champions India in the semifinals. But the reality is the Bangladeshi women are not at all shattered, on the contrary, they are looking to learn from the mistakes.

Asked whether she had a good sleep after the defeat against Nepal, midfielder Monica Chakma's reply summed up the sentiment of the whole team: "Why not? I had a sound sleep because defeat is part of the game. We are not thinking much about the Nepal defeat even though there was a little bit disappointment because of the mistakes we made against those experienced players."

"We have learnt a lot from the last match. We want to show you better football by rectifying the mistakes we made against Nepal. As it is a semifinal match, we will definitely try to win against India," said a confident Monica,



The 3-0 defeat against Nepal in their SAFF Women's Championship game on Saturday has not disheartened the Bangladesh women's team, who were instead determined to put up a better show in their semifinal against India on March 20 in Biratnagar.

PHOTO: BFF

who is a key midfielder for Bangladesh in the under-16, the under-19 and the senior team.

As many as nine under-16 players including Monica, goalkeeper Rupna Chakma, Maria Manda, Akhi Khatun, Shamsunnahar are part of the senior

team. Qualifying for the final round of the AFC U-16 Championship last month was evidence of how strong they are mentally at age-level competitions as these same players had suffered some big defeats during the AFC U-19 Championship Qualifiers and Tokyo

Olympic Qualifiers last September and November respectively.

The players boosted themselves during the half-time break of the Bangladesh-Nepal match and showed character in the second half by not conceding any more goals.

Bangladesh to face India

SPORTS REPORTER from Biratnagar

"Everybody was down after the first half but the players exchanged their views among themselves in interval. We told them that the first half is over and now focus on the second half. We brought some tactical changes and the team played well in the second half. The reflection of discuss was on the performance. Now we are looking forward to the semifinals and we extremely confident that the young girls will perform well against India," said the team's technical adviser Paul Smalley at the team hotel yesterday.

Although India have never lost any match in the history of SAFF Women's Championship, Smalley believes they would be less tougher than Nepal, who have game-changing players like Sabitra Bhandari and Niru Thapa.

But the experience may be a decisive factor in this match.

"Our players are young and inexperienced at senior level and they are coming from different age groups but India and Nepal senior teams are very good with their players gathering experience at senior level competitions. It is a chance for us to cope up with them. Except for enforced errors in first 25 minutes of the Nepal match, we dealt with Nepal very well in the second half and created real chances. So, we are looking ahead to playing against another better side in the semifinal," said the UEFA Pro-licensed coach.

Bangladesh would face India in the semifinals of the SAFF Women's Champions after the four-time champions emerged Group B winners following a 5-0 victory against Sri Lanka at the Shahid Rangsala in Biratnagar yesterday.

While the victory extended India's unbeaten run in the competition's history to 21 matches, it also served as a good warm-up for them with five different players scoring, especially ahead of the March 20 semifinal against last edition's beaten finalists Bangladesh.

India took a comfortable 4-0 lead in the first half with goals from Grace Dangmei, Sandhiya, Ranganathan and Indumati Katheresan. Ratanbala Devi wrote her name on the scoresheet in the second half as the defending champions ran out comfortable winners.

Group A champions Nepal will square off against Group B runners-up Sri Lanka in the first semifinal on the same day.



Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman (L) and FIDE Master Fahad Rahman lock horns during their Asian Zonal Chess Championship match at the Engineers Institute in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Zia beats Fahad

SPORTS REPORTER

Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman beat FIDE Master Fahad Rahman to hold on to the joint lead after the third round of the open section of the Asian Zonal Chess Championships (Zone 3.2) at the Engineers Institute of Bangladesh yesterday.

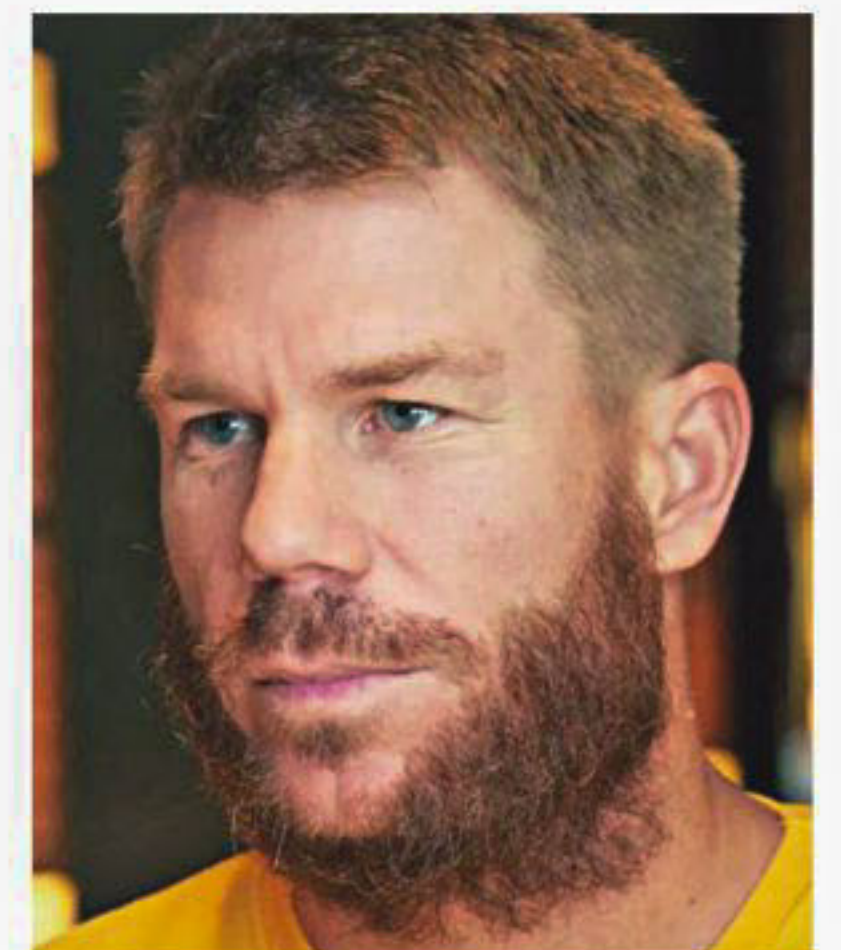
Zia collected three points from three rounds to share the lead with GM Enamul Hossain Razib and GM Niaz Murshed. Razib beat FM Mehdi Hasan Parag while Niaz beat FM Mohammad Javed in this round.

Three players -- GM Abdullah Al Rakib, IM Minhaz Uddin and Showkat Hossain Pollab -- shared the second position with 2.5 points each.

'Like we didn't really leave'



STEVE SMITH



DAVID WARNER

AFP, Melbourne



Steve Smith and David Warner have been welcomed back into the Australian fold with "hugs and cuddles" at a team meet-up in Dubai, and said it was like they'd never left.

The disgraced pair, whose year-long bans for ball-tampering expire this month, were invited by coach Justin Langer as part of their re-integration after the scandal in South Africa that rocked the cricketing world.

Australia are in Dubai as they prepare for an upcoming series against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates following their upset one-day series win against India.

"It's been awesome. It's like we didn't really leave, the boys were very accepting of us coming in and with open arms," said Warner in audio comments supplied to AFP Sunday.

"A lot of big hugs and cuddles. It's been great.

"It's good to see the spirit they're in after a great series win in India and I am obviously looking forward to watching them play against Pakistan here and hopefully they win that series as well," he added.

The "sandpapergate" scandal in Cape Town, which also saw opening batsman Cameron Bancroft banned for nine months, had far-reaching consequences for Australian cricket.

Then-coach Darren Lehmann quit and there was a clean-out of top executives from Cricket Australia after a scathing review said its "arrogant and controlling" culture was partly to blame for players bending the rules.

Australian cricket has since undergone a host of cultural changes under Langer, and Warner and Smith were brought up to speed at the meeting on how it now worked.

"Making sure we're in line with team

values moving forwards," Warner said of the meet-up, which also discussed the squad's preparations for the upcoming World Cup.

"Obviously (we've) been out for 12 months and there has been a big change, which is great, and it's about accepting that and playing what our role should be in the team."

Smith, who was stripped of the captaincy and is barred from being considered for any leadership role for a further 12 months after his ban ends, echoed Warner's comments.

"It seems like some really good energy among the team at the moment," he said.

"It's great to be back around the group, they've been really welcoming and almost like we've never left."

While the cheating row initially unleashed a torrent of vitriol against them, that sentiment has eased significantly and they are expected to be slotted straight back into the team.

Smith said the Dubai catch-up went through "the values that are instilled in the team at the moment and making sure we are on the right path looking forward to what's coming up; a huge World Cup and an Ashes series in England".

The pair, who are both returning from elbow surgery, are

eligible for the final two games of the Pakistan series, joined their Indian Premier League teams Sunday after missing out on the previous edition of the Twenty20 tournament over a ball-tampering controversy.

Langer, who has been vocal in championing their return, said it was like "two brothers coming home".

"They have been received really well, we had a good night together and had some great meetings today (Saturday) so it's been really positive," he said.

"As a coach when you have got two guys with as many runs and experience as they've got coming back into a team that's playing well, that's very exciting."

Proteas pin hopes on bowlers

AFP, Cape Town

South Africa finished their one-day series against Sri Lanka with a clear idea of both the team and the tactics they will use in the upcoming Cricket World Cup.

Sri Lanka, after their fourth 5-0 series defeat in less than two years, appeared to be in disarray.

South African captain Faf du Plessis said after the fifth match on Saturday night that he was "98 to 99 percent" sure who would go to England.

He said the "one or two percent" was to allow for "guys who are really red hot or striking good form".

Sri Lankan captain Lasith Malinga said form in a forthcoming domestic tournament would be important, while he expected experienced players like Angelo Mathews and Dinesh Chandimal - who did not play in South Africa - to be in contention.

Du Plessis indicated that South Africa were pinning their hopes on a potent bowling line-up to win matches, even if meant that the team might have a lengthy tail.

South Africa's fast bowlers, backed by leg-spinner Imran Tahir, dominated the Sri Lankan batsmen, who were unable to bat out a full 50 overs in any of the matches.

Du Plessis cited the example of Pakistan, who won the 2017 Champions Trophy in England.

Afghanistan on the verge of victory

AFP, Dehradun



Spinner Rashid Khan claimed five wickets to put Afghanistan in sight of their maiden Test victory after bowling out Ireland for 288 on day three of the one-off game on Sunday.

Chasing 147 to win, Afghanistan were 29 for one at stumps. Ihsanullah Janat, on 16, and Rahmat Shah, on 11, were batting at close of play in Dehradun.

Spinner Andy McBrine had opener Mohammad Shahzad caught behind for two before Janat and Shah, who made 98 in Afghanistan's first innings total of 314, played out the last few overs of the day.

Ireland batsmen Andy Balbirnie and Kevin O'Brien had earlier hit half-centuries before Khan returned career-best figures of 5-82 to bowl out Ireland in the final session of play.

Balbirnie made 82 and O'Brien 56 before a 10th-wicket 58-run partnership between James McCollum and Tim Murtagh set up a potentially tricky chase for the Afghans.

Cameron-Dow was left unbeaten on 32 after number 11 Murtagh, who hit 54 not out in Ireland's first innings score of 172, was the last man out on 27.

Earlier Balbirnie put on 104 runs for the third wicket with James McCollum, who made 39, to frustrate the Afghan bowlers in the first session.

An umpiring howler cost Ireland their first wicket of the day with Paul Stirling adjudged lbw off paceman Yamin Ahmadzai for 14 after the opener got a thick edge onto his pad.

Balbirnie, who resumed the day on

14, stood firm to register his maiden Test half-century with a boundary off Mohammad Nabi.

Ireland took lunch at 124-2 but a batting collapse in the second session saw them slip to 157-6, with Khan and Salamkheil sharing the spoils.

Balbirnie was caught behind off Salamkheil after his 149-ball stay at the wicket, and Khan trapped McCollum lbw in the very next over as

The left-handed batting duo of Cameron-Dow and Murtagh put on another defiant stand for Ireland, who had posted an 87-run last-wicket partnership in their first innings.

Both sides are playing their second Test after making their debuts in the five-day format last year.

Afghanistan lost to India inside two days in Bangalore while Ireland went down to Pakistan in Dublin.



Afghanistan's leg-spin wizard Rashid Khan bagged a five-wicket haul that took the side within touching distance of their first Test win over fellow Test rookies Ireland on the third day of their one-off Test in Dehradun yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Afghanistan regained control.

O'Brien, who took Ireland past their 142-run trail and into a lead, then put on 63 runs with George Dockrell, who made 25, to take the attack to the opposition bowlers.

But Khan got the two dangermen back in the pavilion after tea to get into the Ireland tail that once again wagged.

SCORES IN BRIEF

IRELAND: First innings 172
AFGHANISTAN: First innings 314
IRELAND: Second innings 288 (Balbirnie 82, McCollum 39, K O'Brien 56, Dockrell 25, Cameron-Dow 32 not out, Murtagh 27; Ahmadzai 3-52, Rashid 5-82-5, Salamkheil 2-66)
AFGHANISTAN: Second innings 29 for 1.