

SPORT



Bangladesh defender Tutul Hossain Badsha is embraced by teammates after scoring the second goal in their 2-0 win over Sri Lanka which secured the booters' first ever win in the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers in Bahrain yesterday. (Inset) Bangladeshi expatriates raucously cheered them on from the gallery.

PHOTO: BFF

Under-23s taste maiden win

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The Bangladesh U-23 football team tasted their maiden win in the history of the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers when they handed a 2-0 defeat to Sri Lanka in their third and final group match at the Khalifa City Sports Stadium in Manama yesterday.

Bangladesh have all played all three previous editions since the introduction of AFC U-23 Championship in 2012, losing nine matches and only drawing once against India in the second edition in Dhaka in 2015.

The elusive triumph finally came in the fourth edition after Bangladesh showed tremendous character in their first two matches against hosts Bahrain and Palestine before falling to identical 1-0 defeats in both matches.

The result not only gave Bangladesh their first win, but also made the campaign a positive one as they finished third in their four-team group for the first time in the competition.

The fighting attitude from Jamie Day's charges in the past matches had seemingly

given them hope of ending their winless run and the men in red and green proved that with a fifth-minute strike against Sri Lanka, whose senior side beat their Bangladesh counterparts 1-0 in a friendly match in Nilphamari last year.

Midfielder Biplu Ahmed broke the deadlock with a placed shot from the edge of the six-yard box before defender Tutul Hossain Badsha scored the second in the 18th minute after side-volleying home from a goal-mouth melee following Raibul Hasan's long throw-in.

Bangladesh maintained their dominance from start to finish to ensure that the expatriate spectators who provided huge support from the gallery would not be disappointed.

"The boys played well today. I am pleased because they managed to score two goals which is a positive thing to take from this championship," said Day.

Having praised Bangladesh's performance in the qualifiers, Day's counterpart Pakeer Ali said: "The performance of Bangladesh was good today. They suffered 1-0 [losses] to Bahrain and Palestine in the first two matches but they had opportunities to win or draw those matches."

'New faces unlikely'

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Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan said yesterday that there was very little chance of seeing any new faces in Bangladesh's World Cup squad as he mentioned the names in what he would prefer to be the squad for the big event.

"It's not about surprises as we will make a 15-member squad and you can guess it from the names of a few usual players. If we see it that way, then there is very little possibility of seeing someone new. I am not saying there is not any chance at all."

"A new player can play very well at domestic level but it is a lot different to playing on the international stage. It would be a different case if it [World Cup] was in the sub-continent. So even if a player performs very well at domestic level, the chances of being picked all of a sudden is very slim."

'Finishing a concern for World Cup'

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During the six-month suspension of Sabbir Rahman for allegedly abusing and threatening a fan on social media in September 2018, the Bangladesh team management tried quite a few cricketers at the problematic number seven position in limited-overs cricket.

With the World Cup in the United Kingdom this summer in mind, the likes of Mosaddek Hossain, Ariful Haque and even Soumya Sarkar were tried in ODIs for the position, which demands the skill to score quick runs as well as the ability to face quality fast bowling.

It was Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza who argued for Sabbir's return for the ODI series in New Zealand because of the hard-hitting right-hander's ability to tackle quality fast bowlers.

Sabbir's ban was reduced by one month and the right-hander was included in the ODI squad for the

New Zealand series. He did prove his worth as the 27-year-old struck his maiden ODI ton in the third game after scoring 43 in the second game against the Kiwis.

However, Sabbir was untested as far as his role as a number-seven enforcer was concerned because repeated top-order failures through the three-match series forced him to play a different, more accumulation-based role. Mashrafe was wary about this weakness in the finishing department with the bat.

"I have felt this for quite some time, that we have some weakness in the finishing department and there is no point blaming just the juniors. It is actually a problem with the entire team. It is not only while chasing as we were unable to post good totals even when batting first. We have lost quite a few close matches in the last two-three years."

"These slots [number seven position] are crucial in tournaments like the World Cup and there will be ties in the primary stage of the tournament where there will be a few close matches as we



Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan (L) had a conversation with ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, perhaps about the possible squad for the upcoming World Cup in England, at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

have nine games in the group stage. It will play a big role in the result and obviously, we are concerned about it. I

believe we will be able to reduce the mistakes that we have made in the past. I am not saying we will get hundred per

cent success as it's a matter of a process that requires more time, but I hope it will be fixed in time," Mashrafe told reporters yesterday.

Meanwhile, there was talk about the performance of the national in the ongoing Dhaka Premier League (DPL) where Liton Das has had a disappointing run so far with the bat.

Talk has been doing the rounds that another wicket-keeper batsman Anamul Haque could be included in the World Cup squad after he struck three consecutive centuries in the league for Prime Bank.

Mashrafe however pointed out the difference in quality between the DPL and the international stage and backed Liton, saying that the right-hander has the ability to be a 'destroyer.'

"Actually I am not concerned about the Dhaka league as I have seen many times in the past that someone scores centuries one after the other in the league but goes on to struggle on the international stage. If you talk about the wicket, intent and the intent towards the cricket, it is not close to the international stage," he added.



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Archer Ruman Sana finished first in the qualification round of the World Cup (Stage-1) in Bangkok yesterday.

Ruman shoots to third round

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Bangladesh's top archer, Ruman Sana, registered his career best score in the Recurve Individual event to finish first in the qualification round of the World Cup (Stage-1) in Bangkok, Thailand yesterday.

Ruman scored 681 out of 720 points, eclipsing his previous best of 677 points which came during the Asian Games in Jakarta in 2018, amid adverse weather conditions, informed assistant coach Ziaur Rahman over the phone.

After finishing on top among 60 participants, the 23-year-old archer secured direct entry to the pre-quarterfinal, where he will face the winner of the match between Thailand's Tanapat Pathairat and India's Sutradhar Swakirti.

However, teammate Hakim Ahmed Rubel and Emdadul Haque Milon finished 22nd and 35th with scores of 654 and 641 points respectively.

Ruman had grabbed 662 points to top the 3rd ISSF Solidarity Archery Championships' qualification round in Gazipur in February but eventually had to settle for a runners-up finish after losing to Thailand's Denchai Thepna. Therefore, Ruman will hope to perform well in the elimination round.

Meanwhile, their female compatriots were eliminated from the first round following poor performances in the qualification round at the same venue.

Diya Siddique lost by 1-7 sets to Hong Kong's Lam Shuk Ching Ada while Nasrin Akter suffered a 4-6 set defeat to India's Premilaben Baria. Beauty Roy also suffered an identical 4-6 set defeat to Chinese Taipei's Lin Shin-Ling.

Khawaja not worried about Warner return

ICC



Australia opener Usman Khawaja has said that he hasn't thought about the effect that David Warner's return to the side will have on his own chances of getting selected for the ICC World Cup 2019.

Khawaja, who was recalled for Australia's home series against India in January after a gap of nearly two years, has capitalised on the opportunity with six fifty-plus scores in his last 10 innings, including two hundreds. His terrific form now adds to the selectors' headache as they try to slot the returning Warner and Steve

Smith back into the side.

Khawaja, though, sounded happy about his current run of form, saying that his focus was on the three remaining games in the Pakistan series. "It's [World Cup] a long way away. For me, it's [about] the next three games," he said ahead of the third ODI on Wednesday.

"[Warner's return] is not something I've thought about at all. I'm just enjoying playing one-day cricket."

Australia, who are 2-0 up in the five-match series, comfortably ran down targets of 281 and 285 in the first two games. Khawaja and Finch shared a 209-run opening stand in the second ODI, which marked the first time Khawaja had shared a 200-

plus opening stand in ODIs.

"Finchy [hits] a lot straighter, hits the ball hard, and I sort of work it [around]. I think we just complement each other," he said. "In Sharjah, we talked a lot just about the game situation, keeping each other calm. I guess at the start, I got off to a quick start when he [Finch] was sort of struggling to find rhythm early on, so I was going a bit harder."

"Once we got out of the Powerplay, the spinner came on with the wind. He took him on and hit him for a six, and you could just see him find his rhythm again. When he started finding his rhythm, I was just happy to give him strike. When Finchy is going, just let him go."

His skipper's return to form came as

little surprise to Khawaja. Finch first broke the drought with 93 against India in the third ODI in Ranchi. He had also made some solid starts in that series and looked to be regaining his touch. He then peaked during the Pakistan series, where he now has two centuries in as many games.

"I think he was batting well last tour too. He got a 90 and we got a couple of starts and he was looking good. But it's obviously nice to get that 100 done. It's nice to see him be himself again. Nice to see him being the same old Finchy," said the opener.

"He is a really good player and he was always going to score runs. It was only a matter of time. It only takes a few overs here and there for someone to click."



(L) State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel bats during an exhibition match to observe Bangladesh's Independence Day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (R) Former national striker Alfaz Ahmed also marked the day by participating in a friendly match at the BFF Artificial Turf adjacent to the BFF headquarters in Arambagh.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED