

ANOTHER FOUR YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS?

points during this time.



ATIQUE ANAM

April 4, 2019 and April 17, 2019 could define the future of Bangladesh football. On those two days we will get to learn what is in store for the national team over the next four years.

On the 4th of next month, FIFA will announce its latest world rankings while on the 17th of April, based on the April 4 rankings, the draw for the first round of the joint qualifiers for the 2022 FIFA World Cup and the Asian Cup 2023 will be decided.

These two events could have massive implications for the Bangladesh team in the form of how many FIFA/AFC games they will get to play in the next four-year cycle. In the worst-case scenario, it could be down to two matches while in the best-case scenario. they will potentially get at least 14 matches.

The draw for the first round of the joint qualifiers would deem teams ranked 41st to 46th in Asia as unseeded and teams from 35th to 40th as seeded ones. The six seeded teams will be pitted against six unseeded teams in the double-legged playoff, with the six winners joining the top 34 teams for the group stages of the qualifiers. The six losing teams, on the other hand, will have to say goodbye to FIFA/AFC competitive matches for the next four years.

When the next rankings are published next week, according to our calculation, Bangladesh will move to 910 rating points from their current 907, thanks to their 1-0 win over Cambodia in the FIFA friendly on March 9. That means Bangladesh would move four places up in the world rankings and one place up among Asian nations. The men in red and green would overtake Guam, but would still be five points behind 40thranked Mongolia, who are likely to stay on

their current 915 points. That means Bangladesh would still be one of the bottom six teams and therefore would be one of the unseeded teams for the joint qualifiers.

Had the match against Cambodia been played during a FIFA window [It was played outside the FIFA calendar], however, a win

But that did not turn out to be the case. What we are presented with currently is that Bangladesh will be one of the six unseeded teams alongside Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Guam, East Timor and Brunei Darussalam. And these six teams will be pitted against six



Coach Jamie Day has done a wonderful job with the Olympic team and the U-23 team, but will he be able to guide the senior side past the first round of the joint qualifiers for the 2022 FIFA World Cup and the 2023 Asian Cup? PHOTO: BFF FILE

FIF	A RANKI	NG AND ITS IMPLI	CATIONS	
		Rating points	World Position	Asian Rank
Bangladesh's current ranking (Feb 7, 2019) Bangladesh's projected ranking (April 4, 2019)		907 910	192 188	42 41
Six seeded teams (projected):	Malaysia/Singapore, Cambodia, Macau, Laos, Bhutan, Mongolia			

would have taken Bangladesh to 913 rating points due to higher weight attributed to matches on FIFA calendar days. That would have kept Bangladesh in with a chance of being one of the seeded teams, given that the higher ranked teams lost some valuable seeded teams -- Malaysia/Singapore, Cambodia, Macau, Laos, Bhutan and Mongolia. On paper, this looks like a tall ask for the men in red and green and it is needless to say that Bangladesh would have preferred to avoid facing a seeded team.

To put things in perspective, let us rewind to four years ago when the draw was made for the 2018 World Cup and the 2019 Asian Cup.

Bangladesh were placed 30th among 46 countries in Asia during the cut-off date of ranking for the draw, which gave them a bye for the first round of playoffs, ensuring the team eight matches against Asian powerhouses such as Australia, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Two rounds of double-legged playoff matches followed, where Bangladesh lost against Kyrgyzstan in both legs of the first round before that fateful defeat over two legs against Bhutan. That defeat against Bhutan not only denied the men in red and green at least six more matches against other Asian teams and a shot at the Asian Cup proper, it also fatally dragged them down below the 180-mark and subsequently below the 190-mark in FIFA rankings, from where they have failed to lift themselves over the past two years. And that has been the root cause of the current desperate situation that the team finds itself in.

But the writing has been on the wall for a long time. The valid question that arises here is: has the game's local governing body taken enough measures to ensure more FIFA friendlies on FIFA calendar dates in a bid to earn a few more rating points, which could have helped the team avoid the unseeded status?

When asked what plans they had regarding the team's FIFA fixtures, the Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF's) general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said, "We organised a FIFA Friendly against Cambodia on March 9. We are trying to arrange for more such matches, but we have to also consider our domestic league and the clubs' interest before planning for such matches."

It may be mentioned here that prior to the match against Cambodia this month, Bangladesh's last FIFA friendly was against Laos in March last year; and in the meantime the senior team had only played two tournaments - the SAFF Championship and the Bangabandhu Gold Cup.

Since the end of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, there were two more windows in the FIFA calendar - in November, 2018 and in March, 2019 - which Bangladesh did not make use of. In November the national team players were busy with domestic football while during the March window, there was the under-23 team's assignment in the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers where many of the national team players were playing.

Despite seeing the looming danger, Bangladesh team's coach Jamie Day is putting on a brave face. The English coach has done a wonderful job since his appointment in May last year, guiding the Olympic team to the knock-out rounds of the Asian Games for the first time last year and notching the first victory in Bangladesh's history of the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers in Bahrain earlier this week. More than that Day and his coaching staff have instilled a fighting attitude among the young players, riding on high fitness levels and a concerted team effort. But unfortunately, that discipline, fitness and performance of the young team has not quite transmitted to the senior side, which is what makes the upcoming challenge a more frightening prospect.

The coach, though, is seemingly not too concerned about being unseeded at this stage and about the opposition team they would face as he feels 'our ranking was too low to start with,' and that 'we can do well against any team we play.'

But he does feel, given the desperate nature of the situation, that Bangladesh should put all its resources together and concentrate on a well-planned and well-organised training camp along with practice matches, even if it means keeping the league suspended ahead of the crucial June qualifiers.

"No other countries go back to their clubs and play in the league [ahead of such international engagements] so I don't see why we should be any different," Day opined.

*The projections made in this story are not absolutely foolproof, but they are expected to be very close to the correct outcome.

Mumbai clinch their first win

STAR SPORT DESK

Jasprit Bumrah and Lasith Malinga held their nerves as Mumbai Indians beat Royal Challengers Bangalore by six runs in a last-over thriller at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru yesterday.

while Virat Kohli chipped in with a handy 46 but Royal Challengers fell short by six runs in the end in reply to Mumbai's 187-8. Earlier Rohit Sharma and Hardik

AB De Villiers hit an unbeaten 70

Pandya helped Mumbai Indian reach 187 for 8 in 20 overs despite a four wicket haul from Yuzvendra Chahal. SCORES IN BRIEF

MUMBAI: 187-8 in 20 overs (De Kock 23, Sharma 48, Yadav 38, Yuvraj 23, Pandya 32 not out; Yadav 2-26, Siraj 2-38, Chahal 4-38)

BANGALORE: 181-5 in 20 overs (Patel 31, Kohli 46, de Villiers 70 not out; Bumrah 3-20)

Result: Mumbai Indians won by six runs.

'Crease awareness vital'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's away series in New Zealand was supposed to be the barometer by which to gauge the team's strengths and weaknesses ahead of the World Cup in May. The

pitches and conditions in England will be somewhat similar to the ones that Bangladesh faced in New Zealand and after the 3-0 humbling by the Kiwis, the top border turned out to be one of the problem areas that the team management will have to focus on. Left-handed batsman Soumya Sarkar was of the opinion that the level of cricket the team are currently playing is inadequate.

He asserted that 'planning [for the World Cup] is different for everyone' but reiterated that 'there is something lacking in the cricket we are playing now.' While the team did not have the best of preparations for New Zealand -- where the team travelled to immediately after playing the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) -- many feel that the Dhaka Premier League will also not provide the

challenge that the players need to excel.

Soumya said that spending some time out in the middle will help him work on the details that need focus. "Now that I am back to playing domestic cricket, the target is to bat for long periods. It's not about how many deliveries I face or how much I bowl. It's important to understand the team's scenario and play accordingly."

Bangladesh have not been able to adjust to match situations, a problem that has often shown up on the biggest stages. Soumya said that his emphasis would be on learning how to come up with plans according to the demands of the moment. "Match preparation is really important to me. There will have to be a much more of the planning phases while at the wicket.

"I am getting out for 30s or 40s and I have fallen to similar shots in the first few matches. So, I have to be able to develop plans, not from outside but while I am at the crease, so that I can change my strategies to get through those situations easily. It is important to learn while at the wicket," he concluded.



Abahani's Soumya Sarkar (L) and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza enjoy a chat while on the sidelines during training ahead of DPL's third round at the BCB Academy ground in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



A day after ruling the 'Mankad' to be essential to the game, cricket lawmakers MCC have taken a U-turn on their stance on the controversial dismissal after it took place during an Indian

The 'Mankad' has been a hot topic of debate over the last couple of days, ever since Kings XI Punjab captain Ravichandran

Ashwin employed it to dismiss Jos Buttler. Various experts, and former and current players weighed in on the issue, but the MCC, the guardians of the laws of cricket, said Ashwin did

nothing unethical. "The crux of the issue is when the non-striker can safely leave his/her ground, and what the bowler can do to effect this form of dismissal without courting controversy. To clarify, it has never been in the laws that a warning should be given to the non-striker and nor is it against the spirit of cricket

changed their minds and decided Ravichandran Ashwin was not acting within the spirit of the game when he ran out Jos Buttler, but I still believe there will be more incidents of this nature because of the win-at-all-costs mentality in cricket now.

I am glad the MCC

MICHAEL VAUGHAN Former England captain

to run out a non-striker who is seeking to gain an advantage

by leaving his/her ground early."

However, in a turnaround of the interpretation, the lawmakers on Wednesday told British newspaper The Telegraph that the run-out was indeed contrary to the spirit of the game. "Having extensively reviewed the incident again, and after further reflection, we don't think it was within the spirit of the game, " MCC laws manager Fraser Stewart said.

MCC flip-flops on Ruman third shot at Ashwin's 'Mankad' foreign gold

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's top archer Ruman Sana reached the final of the men's recurve individual event in the Asia Cup: World Ranking Tournament (Stage-1) by posting four straight victories in Bangkok, Thailand yesterday.

Ruman, ranked first among 60 participants after registering his career best scores in the qualification round of the ongoing tournament, continued his brilliant performance when squared off with his counterparts from India, Myanmar, Russia and Thailand to ensure his overall sixth final berth at the international level.

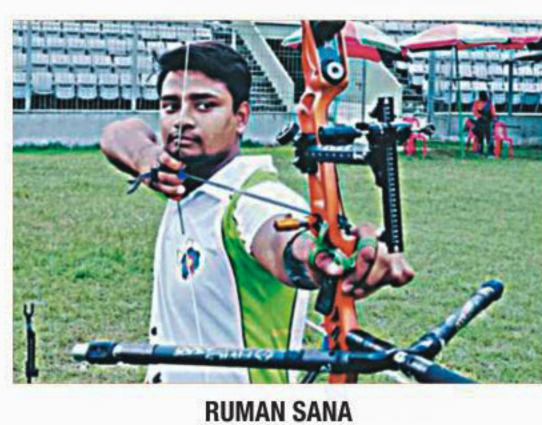
Although the 23-year-old faced stiff challenges in the in the pre-quarterfinals and quarterfinals, he defeated his more illustrious opponents in the third round and semifinal matches relatively easily.

Having secured direct entry to the third round following a first place finish in the qualification round, Ruman beat India's Sutradhar Swakirti by 6-0 sets defeat before handing Myanmar's Lin Oo Nay a 7-3 set defeat in the fourth round. In the quarterfinals, Ruman outclassed Russia's Bair Tsybekdorzhiev by 7-3 sets.

The Bangladeshi archer then beat Thailand's Witthaya Thamwong by 6-2 sets in the semifinals to set up Saturday's final against Kazakhstan's Abdullin Ilfat.

"There was wind at the venue but I coped with it very well. The matches were not easy because a couple of opponents had experience of playing in the Olympic Games," Ruman told The Daily Star over the phone.

"However, I didn't pay much heed on the opponents, rather I concentrated on me and tried to play my own game without thinking what would happen.



Thank God I performed well and reached the final, Ruman continued. "There is nothing to say about the final but I can tell you that I will try my level best."

Interestingly, the two gold medals Ruman has both came from tournaments held abroad. He bagged his maiden gold medal in the same event during the First Asian Archery Grand Prix in 2014 in Thailand while the second came from the International Archery tournament in 2017 in Kyrgyzstan.

Since then, Ruman has gone close to winning gold thrice but he had to remain content with silver medals from three tournaments -- the 3rd ISSF International Solidarity Archery Championships in 2019, 2nd ISSF International Solidarity Archery Championships in 2018 and 3rd South Asian Archery Championship in 2018 -- which were held in Bangladesh.

With this being the third time Ruman will play a final abroad, he will surely hope to make up those losses at home.

BCL title race heats up

SPORTS REPORTER



The race for the Bangladesh Championship League title has turned into an intense battle among the top five sides as Bangladesh Police FC climbed to second position in the semiprofessional football league with an emphatic 3-1 win over Feni Soccer Club at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal

Stadium yesterday.

Amirul Islam slotted a hattrick, scoring in the 28th, 34th and 81st minutes respectively to ensure Bangladesh Police's fourth win in 10 matches. Shafiqul Islam had pulled one goal back in stoppage time but it was not enough for Feni Soccer to avoid their fifth defeat in 10 matches.

At the end of the first phase, Farashganj are leading the 11-team table on 18 points while Bangladesh Police, Agrani Bank, Dhaka City FC and T&T Club, follow with 16, 16, 15 and 14 points respectively from their allotted 10 matches.

Mid-table sides, such as Wari Club, Feni Soccer and Uttar Baridhara Club,

are also breathing down the title contender's neck seeing as there is only a six to seven point differential between the sides ahead of

second phase. It could be noted here that none of the 11 participating teams have shown consistency with leaders Farashganj

posting only five victories. Although the league witnessed some competitive matches, there have been only 1.74 goals per match on average with approximately 96 goals being scored in 55 matches.

POINTS TABLE the next 10 matches in the GF/GA Pts Teams 12/5 Farashganj SC 10/5 Police AC Agrani Bank SC 10 3 0 Dhaka City FC T&T Club Victoria SC Wari Club 8/12 10 3 5 2 8/11 11 Feni Soccer Uttar Baridhara Fakirerpool YMC Swadhinata KS 10 1 4 5 10/17 8