

# TIME TO CHOP AND CHANGE TO FIT NEW REALITY

ANISUR RAHMAN

Muhotasin Ahmed Ridoy is so far the sixth table tennis player from outside the capital to become the men's singles champion in the recently-concluded national table tennis championship. The 15-year-old player from Rangpur is probably the youngest among the 14 men's national champions the country has produced in 38 national championships over the 46 years since 1974. But there has hardly been any appreciation of the youngest champion at a time when the country's table tennis is struggling for survival.

The obvious question now is whether 10th-grade student Ridoy can further flourish in the current state of table tennis and make an impact on the international stage, similar to what Indian table tennis players did in the last Asian Games in Jakarta and the Commonwealth Games in the Gold Coast.

While Ridoy is the new sensation in national men's table tennis, the same old face persists in the women's singles event



Muhotasin Ahmed Ridoy (L) and Moumita Alam Rumi.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

sanctioned championship in 1974, before which BUET hosted the Bangladesh Open Table Tennis Championship, which was considered the national championship.

Four-time champion Saidul Haque Sadi, eight-time champion Mosadekul Haque Rochi, three-time champion Nasimul Hasan Kochi, two-time champion Ali Khan Sumit, two-time champion Sad Uddin Kislu are all from Dhaka and were once household names much like footballers. Then, six-time champion Mahabub Billah from Narail and five-time champion Manosh Chowdhury from Chattogram emerged onto the scene and kept dominating despite being at their fag end of their careers, thanks to the scarcity of new faces and quality players.

**Shrinking pipeline**  
Unfortunately, there is now little buzz surrounding table tennis in the aforementioned parts of Dhaka except in Armanitola, so no household names like Rochi, Kochi, Sadi, Kislu, Akbar Aziz and Sumit have come to the fore. Meanwhile, the young generation in Narail has also lost interest following a lack of proper facilities and opportunities, sounding a clear alarm of not getting champions like Mahabub, Mostafa, Gautam and Javed from Narail.

"Table tennis is now not played in different parts of Dhaka except Armanitola because the clubs in those areas have long since lost interest to nurture players as they failed to provide the wages to their own players in the face of lucrative offers from other big clubs," said Enayet Hossain Maruf, secretary of Armanitola Jubo Sangha and director of Sheikh Russel Table Tennis Club.

"I have been detached from table tennis for a long time but I heard about 10 years ago that is now no culture of table tennis Azimpur like we once had at Azimpur Community Center," said eight-time champion Rochi. "I had once engaged in table tennis in a bid to bring children to the game but I couldn't show them any future in the sport."

"We came into table tennis through the guidance of former champion Mostafa Billah bhai and some senior table tennis player in Narail, but now there are no senior players who can provide the proper guidance and training to upcoming players. So, the practice of table tennis in Narail has gradually been shrinking," said 2017 national champion Mohammad Javed Ahmed.

"You may find a lot of players and teams taking part in every national championship but the fact is that the same old faces are playing year after year and representing different districts," said a BTTF executive committee member, preferring not to be identified.

**Inept organisers**  
"The present state of table tennis is zero because a group of organisers, who have no knowledge of and passion for table tennis, hold BTTF posts and at the same time

prevent devoted organisers from entering the federation," said Maruf, alleging that the Bangladesh table tennis team went to Hungary to take part in the World Table Tennis Championships without a single day's preparation.

Rafiqul Islam Tipu also believes that the internal clash among organisers is holding the sport back.

"Not only table tennis, most disciplines are going backward due to internal conflicts among the organisers. Besides, no table tennis player could give a breakthrough at international level and thus could not capture the imagination of the youth," said Tipu.

"Some organsiers come from outside Dhaka to attend executive meetings and go back with handsome financial facilities but they don't make any contribution to table tennis, while some organisers have no technical knowledge of the sport," said a BTTF EC member seeking anonymity.

**A slim ray of hope**  
Despite the odds being stacked against the sport, there is still some hope as a new generation is getting involved at school and university levels.

"In the last four to five years, some organisations like Pallima Sangsad, Delhi Public School, International University of Bangladesh are organising school tournaments regularly with students of mostly English-medium schools taking part while students at University level are also participating in national championships," said former player and coach Mohammad Ali. He added that BSKP and Quantum Cosmo School of Rangamati are also producing quality and skilful players.

Organiser Enayet Hossain Maruf also informed that they have been promoting table tennis across the country by providing approximately 300 tables at cheap prices as the guardians are now more eager to engage children in indoor sports.

**Recommendations**  
Youngest champion Muhotasin Ahmed Ridoy knows well that he will have to work harder to retain the title in the next championships and to shine at international level but he does not have facilities in Rangpur to hone his skills further. It is also very important that players emerging from university and school competition as well as neighbourhood tournaments be brought into mainstream focus to bolster the national pipeline.

Back to Ridoy, who will take the responsibly of fulfilling the promise of a young star? While it is true that there seems to be no one around who will back Ridoy, it is now a desperate need for organisers to be united and nurture players like him and other upcoming paddlers by drafting a modified strategy that can adapt the sport to changed circumstances.

# Bangladesh aim for top spot

Take on Kyrgyzstan today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will be looking to emerge group champions in the Bangamata U-19 Women's International Gold Cup when they take on a spirited Kyrgyzstan in Group B's final match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Both sides have already confirmed their semifinal berths by beating the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and, with three points each, the tie will decide which team sits top of the three-team group.

A draw would be good enough for the women in red and green as they have a better goal difference, meaning Kyrgyzstan will need an outright win if they are to top the group.

However, Bangladesh are not thinking of a stalemate. Instead they have their sights on securing three points and moving into the semifinals with a winning record.

"We have already booked the semifinal seat but our target is to become group champions and try our level best to beat Kyrgyzstan, who are a good side and came to this stage following a good show against the UAE," said captain Misrat Jahan Moushumi yesterday.

Golam Rabbani Choton's charges had a rest day yesterday but they watched Wednesday's Kyrgyzstan-UAE match to study the strengths and weaknesses of their opponents, who had a brilliant result

in last October's AFC U-19 Women's Championship Qualifiers where they finished group runners-up with wins over UAE, Guam and Maldives and a defeat to ultimate champions Uzbekistan.

"Kyrgyzstan are physically strong and play attacking football. We have discussed how will we play against them and we will also be trying to give our best," said central defender Akhi Khatun.

"We are not taking Kyrgyzstan lightly. We are focused on not repeating the same mistakes we made against the UAE. We practiced for the past two days to rectify those mistakes. We will be trying to avail all the scoring opportunities against Kyrgyzstan," said forward Krishna Rani Sarker, who also believes a 10-0 win over Kyrgyzstan in the AFC U-16 Women's Championship Qualifiers will give them a morale boost.

Kyrgyzstan coach Gaivornoskaia Natalia said they were waiting for the Bangladesh match as they were eager to put up their best performance.

"It is going to be an entertaining match because both sides are equal. Bangladesh beat UAE 2-1 (actual margin was 2-0) and we beat UAE 2-0," said Natalia, adding that Bangladesh were a speedy side that played as a team.

The match will get underway at 6:00pm with private satellite channels RTV and Nagorik TV telecasting live from the venue.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Players of the Laos women's team acknowledge the crowd at the Bangabandhu National Stadium with a traditional bow after their 5-0 win over Mongolia in their Bangamata U-19 Women's International Gold Cup match yesterday.

# Laos hammer Mongolia

SPORTS REPORTER

Laos made their Bangamata U-19 Women's International Gold Cup bow with a bang after handing a huge 5-0 defeat to Mongolia in a Group A encounter at Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The triumph in the opening match means Laos and Mongolia have three points each but the Southeast Asian nation are top of the group table by virtue of a superior goal difference with a match against Tajikistan left. The result also all but confirmed Laos' semifinal berth and the outcome of the final group match on Saturday will decide which of Mongolia and Tajikistan will advance to the last-four

battle.

Mongolia came into the match on the back of an emphatic 3-0 win over Tajikistan but found the going tough against Laos, who went ahead in the second minute with a strike from forward Pe, who raced into the box before placing her shot to the far post.

Aphatsala Chanhthanovgxay doubled the lead in the 13th minute after availing a fumble by the opposition's goalkeeper before making it 3-0 in the 31st minute with a powerful shot.

After resumption, Pe struck her second in the 50th minute while defender Saysamone Inthaphone wrapped up the victory by curling home a free-kick from the right in the 82nd minute.



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