



Argentina striker Lautaro Martinez (R) celebrates his opening goal with teammate Lionel Messi during their Copa America quarterfinals against Venezuela at the Maracana Stadium in Rio de Janeiro on Friday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Diacre admits 'failure'

AFP, Paris

France coach Corinne Diacre accepted that her team's campaign at the women's World Cup would go down as a "failure" but said she would not resign after the hosts were knocked out by the United States in the quarterfinals on Friday.

Les Bleus lost 2-1 to the holders in Paris, a Megan Rapinoe brace leaving them with too much to do before Wendie Renard pulled a goal back late on at the Parc des Princes.

"Yes it's a failure in a footballing sense, we can't hide from that,"

Diacre said. "We are far from fulfilling our objective."

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No favourites in semis, says Messi

AFP, Rio de Janeiro



Lionel Messi said Argentina would take on hosts Brazil on an equal footing in the Copa America semifinals after beating Venezuela 2-0 on Friday.

Lautaro Martinez and Giovanni Lo Celso scored the goals that gave improving Argentina a quarterfinal success at Rio de Janeiro's Maracana stadium.

It was the Argentines' best performance yet in a tournament they began with 2-0 defeat to Colombia followed by a 1-1 draw with Paraguay.

"It's difficult to give a favourite between Argentina and Brazil, even more so in this Copa America where anyone can beat anyone," said the 32-year-old Barcelona star ahead of Tuesday's semi-final in Belo Horizonte.

"We respect them, we know what Brazil represent," he added.

The hosts struggled to make the

semifinals, toiling for more than 40 minutes against 10 men before beating Paraguay on penalties following a 0-0 draw in Porto Alegre on Thursday night.

"We're in good form to take on Brazil, but we'll have to be very focused," said five-time Ballon d'Or winner Messi, who admitted he's not at his best.

"I'm not having my best Copa America," he said.

But as a team, Messi said their performance against Venezuela was "complete."

"Defensively we didn't have any problems and the team was very solid at all times."

"We didn't leave them any spaces when they went looking for them. We were very united and waited for the opportunities to counter quickly."

Having already been scathing about the Gremio Arena pitch in Porto Alegre -- as was Brazil coach Tite following their quarterfinal there -- Messi hit out at the general state of the surfaces in Brazil.

"Honestly, the pitches are really

difficult, they don't favour good football. The ball bounces in every direction, but it's the same for everyone," he said.

Venezuela's coach Rafael Dudamel said the team's Copa campaign would stand them in good stead in qualifying for the 2022 World Cup in Qatar, noting that his team was "getting stronger, more mature."

"What will come will be more demanding and we've created in this Copa America a very competitive team, that's how we must continue," he added.

"This leaves us bitter, unsatisfied, but it's part of the journey we must embark on to forge the team's character."

Captain Tomas Rincon regretted Venezuela's slow start that saw them overrun by an effervescent Argentina that took the lead after just 10 minutes.

"We didn't start well in the first half and maybe that cost us the qualification because we lacked a bit of the character to get through those first few minutes," said Rincon.

Bashundhara thrash Muktijoddha

SPORTS REPORTER



Bashundhara Kings bounced back from a goal down to hand Muktijoddha Sangsad a 4-1 thrashing in their home fixture of the Bangladesh Premier League at the Sheikh Kamal Stadium in Nilphamari yesterday.

The league leaders conceded an early goal, but a brace from centre-back Nasiruddin Chowdhury in the first half, followed by two more goals from two other players in the second half helped the new powerhouse to ease to their 15th win in 16 matches, taking their tally to 46 points.

They lead defending champions Abahani by six points, with both teams having eight matches left to play.

Muktijoddha Sangsad, who came into the match in seventh position with 17 points from 16 matches, took a surprise lead in the 12th minute when Ballo Famoussa initiated a move down the right

flank before squaring it up for Mehedi Hasan, who hit the far corner of the net from the middle of the box.

The goal stirred the league leaders as they hit back in the 33rd minute, with Nasiruddin finding the back of the net courtesy of a big deflection following a corner.

Nasiruddin doubled the lead in the third minute of stoppage time with a glancing header on a cross from Daniel Colindres.

The second half saw complete domination from the hosts, who extended their lead in the 68th minute through Marcos Vinicius, who received a long-ball from Motin Miah before dancing past one defender and slotting the ball home past the opposition goalkeeper.

And the hosts wrapped up the victory in the stoppage time of the second half, with Alamgir Kabir Rana slamming the ball home from inside the box after being teed up by Bakhtiyar Duyshobekov.

Chile beat Colombia on penalties

AFP, Sao Paulo



Champions Chile maintained their hopes of a third straight Copa America victory after beating Colombia on penalties on Friday to reach the semifinals.

Chile could have won the game in normal time but had two goals ruled out for marginal decisions in a scoreless draw, before Alexis Sanchez stroked home the winning spot-kick.

It was just rewards for the champions after dominating a match in which Colombia held on thanks to a couple of tight VAR calls.

Charles Aranguiz had a goal ruled out in the first half for a marginal offside against Sanchez in the build up to the move.

And after Arturo Vidal shot low into the far corner on 70 minutes that was chalked off for a handball against Guillermo Maripan, who had teed up the Barcelona midfielder.

Following eight successful penalties, William Tisillo casually put his effort wide for Colombia, leaving Sanchez to be the hero, as the Manchester United forward continues to make up in Brazil for a dreadful club season.

"We dominated practically the whole match. It was a great match against a team with a lot of quality," said Vidal.

They will face either Uruguay, who beat them 1-0 in the group stages on Monday, or Peru in Wednesday's semifinal in Porto Alegre.

Archers leave for Germany today

SPORTS REPORTER

A three-member Bangladesh archery team will leave for Germany today to take part in the Archery World Cup (Stage 4), which will be held in Berlin from July 1 to 7.

The countries two best recurve archers -- Ruman Sana and Beauty Roy -- will represent Bangladesh in three events -- men's singles, women's singles and mixed team. Coach Martin Frederick will accompany the team while Tanvir Ahmed of Bangladesh will also go with the team to act as a judge in the competition.

Ruman recently won a bronze medal in World Archery Championships in Netherlands, thereby securing a spot in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Ruman Sana: From Khulna to Tokyo Olympics

Archer Ruman Sana recently became only the second athlete from Bangladesh to qualify for the Summer Olympics directly, and he did so with a bronze-medal winning feat in the World Archery Championships in the Netherlands. The journey so far for the 24-year-old has been a long and arduous one, beginning in Khulna in 2008 and now reaching the world stage. The Teer Go for Gold project, guidance from German coach Martin Frederick and exposure to international tournaments have helped hone his skills and given him fortitude in this journey. The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman spoke to Ruman about his career, recent achievement and plans regarding archery. Here are the excerpts:

TDS: Tell us about your introduction to archery and your initial years.

RS: The Bangladesh Archery Federation ran a week-long talent-hunt program in Khulna in 2008, when I was a student of Class-IX. I participated in that program, which was under coach Sajjad Hossain, and I got selected. Then I had a one-month training at BKSP in Dhaka and became first in selection after convincing my parents, who did not initially allow me to stay away from them. I first participated in the national archery championship in 2010 and in an international tournament in 2011 before a motorbike accident in 2012 kept me away from archery for nearly a year.

Bangladesh Ansar Coach Babul Mia brought me to Dhaka and trained me in Shafipur Ansar camp during a time when I was too weak to walk. That was my second coming in archery. I emerged champion in the Bangladesh Games in 2013 with a national record of 327 points in the recurve bow qualification round.

TDS: Were you involved with any other sport before trying your luck in archery?

RS: I played football and cricket regularly. I was more interested in sports than studying. I even went on hunting birds with a slingshot. I think the experience of slingshots helped me hit the targets in archery.

TDS: What were the reasons for your parents not allowing you to play archery initially?

RS: I'm the youngest of three siblings in my family. My father works at an export-oriented shrimp business in Khulna, so there are financial constraints. However, they tried their best to help me grow as an archer when I chose to play it. They provided a small amount of money when I went aboard but questioned whether the expenditure was worth it. I told them to be patient.

TDS: Do you support your family financially now?

RS: I got a contract job [Tk 5000 per month] in Bangladesh Ansar in 2013 and the job was made permanent in 2014 with a Tk 15,000 salary per month apart from other facilities

such as ration, pocket-money for travelling, cash-award for winning medals etc. After winning gold medals in both individual and team events in Bangladesh Games, I got some cash-award of around Tk 80 thousand and I handed it over to my father. That amount was spent for my mother's surgery.

TDS: You have always worried about your post-athlete career. Has the worry eased yet?

RS: I am still worried because I could not continue my studies after the HSC exams for the sake of archery. So, I could not earn the educational qualification to get a good job. However, if I concentrated on studies, I would not have earned a quota place in Tokyo Olympics. We are bringing laurels and building a positive image for the country, but we don't get the return from the nation. This thought is often frustrating.

TDS: What are your suggestions about it?

RS: Sportsmen never dream of becoming millionaires. Our dream is of a secured future after our career ends because we are giving our best time for sports and the country. To be honest, the junior archers get frustrated when they see I'm not getting any big rewards.

I think the government should take initiatives to find a way to ensure a secured life for athletes by taking our international success into consideration. The government may also tag corporate houses with each discipline. I think athletes like me can perform better at the international stage if they are personally sponsored by corporate houses.

TDS: What personal improvement have you made under Frederick?

RS: First of all, Frederick made me physically strong and helped me improve technically. We train and exercise six days a week. I have improved two basic things -- bowhunting and follow through -- and that's why I could score a career-best 681 out of 720.

TDS: How is Frederick different from others coaches who worked here before?

RS: Frederick is a great motivator with a friendly approach. We can't say 'no' to him for anything. He is really keen to improve the performance of the archers. I had also



trained under different Korean coaches, who taught us the same basic skills. But Frederick is different; he understands the psychology of each archer perfectly. He works accordingly and tries to improve, keeping the archers' basics the same. He also found me a sponsor, which makes archery accessories.

TDS: Is your qualification round's score good enough to produce any medals in the Olympics?

RS: 681 is my career-best score in qualification. From now on, my target will be to score 690-plus because nearly 10 archers in

the world can score 690-plus in competition and I want to put my name in that list.

TDS: You stunned some of the world's top archers in Netherlands over three days. How did you make it?

RS: Initially I could not perform well in the first phase of the qualification round. Then I decided to come back to my own shooting and I scored 343 out of 360 in the second phase of the qualification round. Since then, I tried to keep my own shooting to the last day. Every archer has a secret shot and if he finds it on the day, he can overcome everything.

TDS: Archery is called a mental game. How strong is Ruman Sana mentally?

RS: Mental strength is a mix of concentration, experience and confidence and it depends on how frequently you are taking part in world-class tournaments. When you play in world-class tournaments, you get to compete against the world's top archers regularly. After Frederick's appointment, we played two World Cups which we could not do in last 10 years. If we participate in big tournaments regularly, we will be able to fight against them without any fear or pressure. You can say I am now mentally stronger than before.

TDS: Is your current mental strength enough to do well in the Tokyo Olympics?

RS: To be honest, there is no end to earning experience. My personal thought is if I can take part in all international tournaments before the Tokyo Olympics, I can produce something good. I will take part in a Test archery competition at the same venue in Japan where the Olympics will take place. So I will have the experience and the mental strength.

TDS: Bangladesh, a country with a population of 17 crore, have not won a single Olympic medal yet. Can the nation hope Ruman will bring an end to this medal-drought?

RS: I can't say that I will win a medal in the Olympics but I can say that we are close to the target. Olympic medallists work really hard and I think we will have to take ourselves to that level first. Before achieving something in Olympics, I will prepare myself through hard work. If I can score 680-plus points regularly, then I will start believing that I can win an Olympic medal.

TDS: Is Ruman Sana satisfied with his 10-year career?

RS: I'm happy because I never thought I could earn a quota place in the Olympics. It was a dream-come-true for me to win a bronze medal in the World Archery Championships. My hard work had finally paid off. Allah showed me the path and I believe he will help us fill the void of an Olympic medal.