

What to WATCH

GAZI TV
Bangladesh v Afghanistan
Solitary Test, Day Two
Live from 10:00am
SONY SIX
The Ashes

England v Australia
Live from 4:00pm
TEN 1
Sri Lanka v New Zealand
Third T20I
Live from 7:30pm

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh v Afghanistan
Solitary Test, Day Two
Time: 10:00am
Venue: Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium

DEL BOSQUE DOESN'T WANT NEYMAR BACK

Former Spain manager Vicente del Bosque has said he would not have brought Neymar back to La Liga had he been coach of Barcelona or Real Madrid, even though he recognises the Brazilian's outstanding qualities as a player. "I think it would have been good for the Spanish league if he had come back but if I was a coach of a club I wouldn't have brought him back," Del Bosque told Spanish television network Estudio Estadio. "Whilst I'll say he is a brilliant player, I don't think very highly of him for other reasons. With Barcelona he did not behave well, in fact he behaved badly, very badly," he added.

---REUTERS



Booters limber up with a draw

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh national football team ended their run of practice matches to prepare for the Joint Qualifiers of the World Cup and Asian Cup with a 1-1 draw against CSKA Pamir Dushanbe at Hisor Stadium in Tajikistan yesterday.

Robiul Islam gave the boys in red and green the lead in just the third minute before Mabat Shoev negated Bangladesh's advantage in the 28th minute, according to information provided by the Bangladesh Football Federation.

Mohammad Ibrahim whipped a cross from the right flank and Saad Uddin, playing as a striker, rose high but could not connect while Robiul, who struck a goal each against Cambodia and Laos, tapped in to give Bangladesh a lead.

Like the first practice match against FC Kukhtosh, British coach Jamie Day yesterday gave all 23 players except goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico and midfielder Masuk Mia Jonny opportunities to play the match against CSKA Pamir, who finished sixth in the last edition of the Tajikistan Premier League.

The 39-year-old coach started the first half with goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana, defenders Yeasin Khan, Tutul Hossain Badsha, Sushanta Tripura and Bishwanat Gosh and midfielders Jamal Bhuiyan, Sohel Rana, Biplu Ahmed, Mohammad Ibrahim, Saad Uddin and Robiul Hasan before goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel, Mamunul Islam, Nabib Newaj Jibon, Rahmat Mia, Yeasin Arafat, Riyadul Hasan, Arifur Rahman, Mahbubur Rahman Sufil, Matin Mia and Jewel came on in the second half.

"In line with the formation, the boys played well in both halves compared to the first practice match as the coach fielded two elevens in each half. The defending shape was good. They also exposed the opposition backline a few times. There were also some mistakes and Jamie talked to the players about those after the match," said manager Satyajit Das Rupu over phone after the match.

Rupu also said that Bangladesh were denied a second goal in the first half when the CSKA Pamir goalkeeper made a goalline save, while striker Matin Mia and Arifur squandered two opportunities in the second half.

Coach Jamie Day is perhaps happy with the outcome, especially after losing the first practice match 2-1. He will now outline his game strategy and possible playing eleven for the September 10 match against Afghanistan, who were scheduled to face Qatar last night. Bangladesh's two other groupmates, India and Oman, squared off in their first match yesterday with the latter winning by a 2-1 margin.



Australia's Steve Smith celebrates after reaching 200 on the second day of the fourth Ashes Test against England at Old Trafford in Manchester yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Smith returns with an epic

REUTERS, Manchester



Steve Smith's domination of England's bowling attack in the Ashes series reached new heights on Thursday as his magnificent 211 led Australia to 497-8 declared on the second day of the fourth Test at Old Trafford.

England lost opener Joe Denly for four, brilliantly caught by Matthew Wade short leg after he fended off a rising delivery from Pat Cummins to leave them struggling on 23-1 at the close.

But a day in which Australia surely smelt again the chance to make sure of retaining the Ashes was all about Smith.

It takes nothing away from the appreciation of the 30-year-old's fine demonstration of the art of Test batting to note that as well as his impeccable timing and shot selection he also enjoyed good fortune.

Having made his third century

of the series, Smith was on 118 when he was caught by Ben Stokes at slip off left-arm spinner Jack Leach. Unfortunately for the hosts, their joy turned to despair when video officials deemed Leach had delivered a no-ball.

As the top-ranked test batsman in the world was making his way towards the pavilion, the video reviewers spotted that Leach's front foot was not behind the crease when he let go of the ball, handing the Australian his second reprieve of the day.

Smith had had a lucky escape in the second over of the day when Jofra Archer dropped a caught and bowled chance after his full toss was driven straight back at him.

Those were the "if only" moments for England but the bigger picture was that Smith has succeeded in making a mockery of the idea that the hosts had gained momentum from their remarkable comeback victory at Headingley in the last Test.

Smith missed that drama due to concussion but his scores in this series speak for themselves -- 144, 142, 92 and 211 at an average of 147.25.

BUOYANT MOOD

England did indeed come into this match in buoyant mood but minute by minute, over by over and run by run, Smith drained away their self-belief.

The sixth-wicket partnership with captain Tim Paine (58) added 145 and put Australia firmly in control.

England's misery in the afternoon session was compounded when all-rounder Stokes went off with an injury, unable to finish his over of bowling.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 497 for 8 decl (Labuschagne 67, Smith 211, Paine 58, Starc 54 not out, Lyon 26 not out; Broad 3-97, Leach 2-83, Overton 2-85)

ENGLAND: First innings 23 for 1.

Nadal breezes into semis

AFP, New York



Rafael Nadal will play Italy's Matteo Berrettini in the US Open semifinals after the 18-time Grand Slam champion defeated Argentine 20th seed Diego Schwartzman 6-4, 7-5, 6-2.

Second seed Nadal -- a winner at Flushing Meadows in 2010, 2013 and 2017 -- beat a spirited Schwartzman for the eighth time in as many meetings in a nearly three-hour match that finished early Thursday morning.

Schwartzman put up firm resistance against Nadal and twice fought back from double-break deficits in the first two sets, but the Spaniard found another gear at crucial moments to secure an eighth semi-final berth in New York.

"Straight sets but big challenges especially after the first two sets, having 4-0 and 5-1 and losing both breaks in a row, but I know how good he is when he's confident," Nadal said.

"I'm so happy how I accepted the situation and challenge and kept going, point after point. Here I am in the semi-finals. I'm super happy, it means everything."

Nadal is the only former major champion left in the men's field following the elimination of Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic, leaving him as the clear frontrunner in his pursuit of a 19th major title.



'Most of the athletes are now more interested in cricket and football'

Despite the fact that athletics in Bangladesh has a storied past, the only time athletes are seen in the spotlight these days is when the National Athletics Championships roll around each year. Although there are numerous athletes in Bangladesh contesting various disciplines throughout the year, the standards of athletics in the country is languishing well below those set by neighbouring countries. With the National Summer Athletics Championships having dominated headlines until its recent conclusion, the athletes will now go back to their reality of being largely ignored for another year. Rafiq Ullah Aktar Milon has been involved in athletics for the past 42 years, of which he has spent 31 years as a grassroots level coach. He has groomed illustrious athletes such as SA Games gold-winning hurdler Mahfuzur Rahman Mithu, silver-winning hurdler Sumita Rani, Bangladesh's fastest man Shamsuddin, two of Bangladesh's fastest women Nazmunnahar Beauty and Shamsunnar Chumki and national record-holding shot-putter Mohammad Ibrahim. The level-1 coach, who is a physical teacher of a college in Noakhali, also worked as the country's national coach. The 59-year-old spoke to The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman after the conclusion of the Summer National Athletic Championships, shedding light on the current state of athletics in the country and how the situation came to where it is now.

Weekend WINDOW

The Daily Star (TDS): How was the recent National Summer Athletic Championships?

Rafiq Ullah Aktar Milon (RUAM): The arrangements were really good this time because of the involvement of the Bangladesh Army. Everyone was punctual.

However, there were fewer events for women when compared to men's events. In India, the junior women athletes participate in events which our senior women do not get a chance to participate in, even in senior competitions. The timeframe of the championships was also only two days, which put a big load on the athletes looking to compete in more than one event. That happened due to a lack of sponsors.

To be honest, there were hardly any signs of using modern technology. We used rifles instead of pistols to signal the start of events, the electronic timers are not good and the track is not in a position to be used. Our neighbours India are using every piece of modern technology, even at the junior meets, with the Indian prime minister patronising promising players.

We want medals at international level but are just holding the national championships in a traditional manner and giving no benefits to athletes.

TDS: Have you seen athletes who have good prospects in the near future?

RUAM: I focused on two male athletes who I think have a good future. One of them, Mahfuzur Rahman, made a national record in high jump while the other, Jahir Raihan, bagged gold in the 400m race. However, Jahir could not even match the time he produced in the junior international meet.

In other events, our athletes, especially sprinters, are well behind their counterparts from other Asian nations even though we were once very close to them in timing. Our women athletes are even lagging behind

athletes from West Bengal. If Bengal athletes can go forward, then why can't we?

TDS: Bangladesh's athletics has been trending downwards for more than the past decade. What do you think are the reasons behind that downward spiral?

RUAM: We cannot carry out our respective duties properly from our respective positions. The Youth and Sports Ministry is the supreme body of sports. Then come the National Sports Council (NSC), Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA), National Sports Federations, and District and Divisional Sports Associations (DSAs).

But none of the bodies show sincerity towards athletics. We are all reluctant. There is no hope or future in athletics, so new

championships at national level. This time around, they could not win a single medal. Why?

RUAM: Most of the districts do not hold athletics events and there is no training for athletes at the district level. Once, Noakhali finished among the top six in the medals table [in the national championships] but this time we had to return empty-handed.

The boys and girls don't have much interest in sports. We once found athletes from schools, which are considered breeding grounds of sports all over the world. But nowadays, students are burdened by studies so they don't get time to play sports. Some schools don't even have sports activities despite having instructors for physical education.



athletes are not coming to athletics. If we had been more sincere, then athletics would have moved forward.

I think the NSC must monitor the DFAs' activities because they are providing money to the DFAs. In the age of digital Bangladesh, all organisations affiliated with the NSC must have a database of their sports activities that anyone can see from any part of the country.

TDS: Once the teams from districts, divisions and universities shone in athletics

TDS: You once groomed many prominent athletes but have not been able to replicate that in the recent past. Why is that so?

RUAM: Actually, my students are roped in by service teams before they come into the limelight. I had 30 to 35 athletes grow under my guidance but they are now representing various teams. Three of them are working as trainers.

Besides, most of the athletes are now much more interested in cricket and football, so I

can't motivate them to come into athletics in my district. But I am still working on finding athletes and training them under the banner of the Noakhali Athletics Club.

TDS: Bangladesh once produced the fastest man in the South Asian (SA) Games but are now far from even winning a gold medal in any of the SA Games' events. Why do you think that is?

RUAM: The athletes of other participating nations have gone well ahead but we are stuck and can't go further. They are committed and have long-term plans, but we don't.

I'm really surprised by the successes of the Indian athletes, who won 17 medals in the Asian Athletics Championships in Doha. I think the standard of India's B-category athletes is better than our top athletes.

TDS: Do you see any possibility of Bangladesh winning a medal in the upcoming SA Games in Nepal?

RUAM: I do not see many possibilities. However, if Mahfuzur and Jahir stay in good condition physically and show immense commitment to improving their performances, then we can expect something from them in the SA Games. If Mahfuzur can clear 2.20 meters and Jahir can finish the 400m race within 45 seconds, then we can hope for medals from them.

In other events, there is no chance. Our male sprinters clock in at above 10.60 seconds in 100m races while the females clock in at above 12 seconds. India's male sprinters clock in at between 10.30 to 10.40 seconds and female sprinters take a little over 11 seconds. So how can we expect medals in sprint events?

TDS: The Bangladesh Athletics Federation (BAF) is confined to only three meets a year. What should they do to take athletics forward?

RUAM: While it is true that the BAF has been playing a role only in competitions, they are dependent on the BOA or NSC to send athletes abroad.

The BAF doesn't have any funds to run long-term training programmes for athletics round the year. The federation doesn't have any targets either, whereas athletes from India and Sri Lanka have now surpassed Asian and Commonwealth levels and are competing and winning silver and bronze medals on the world stage.

The federation should also appoint some paid coaches to train athletes, like India are doing.

The number of athletic turf (facilities) also need to increase. We have only one astroturf. The government should install athletic turf at all divisional level (facilities). It is not possible to improve athletes on grass; the athletes should be comfortable with athletic turf.

TDS: Who is responsible for the downward spiral of athletics?

RUAM: Overall, we all lost our inspiration.

I thought a lot of spectators would turn up to the stadium when Noakhali hosted some football matches of the Bangladesh Premier League, but it was empty.

We could not spread the motto of the Olympics. We have still to make people understand what athletics is. Once the sport was a medium of entertainment and some athletes took it as a profession. But politics is a big profession and business.

To be honest, we can't unearth athletes at district level because boys get financial incentives if they follow political leaders. They can't get anything from the ground. A student leader has big bucks, but what does an athlete have at the end of day?

TDS: Is it possible to bring Bangladesh's athletics back to past glories?

RUAM: I don't see a possibility of returning athletics to its glorious past.

If I leave out athletics at district level, what is BKSP doing despite having modern technology, a new athletic turf, medical science department, proper nutrition and quality training?

But despite having such good facilities, BKSP has not been able to produce a good sprinter since Bimal Chandra Tarafder won the 100m gold medal in 1991 SA Games in Dhaka.

I can't find any explanation for that. The more important thing is that there is nothing to do if the athletes are not committed and cooperative.

Nowadays, our athletes are more committed to social media and other engagements but I learned from an article that Indian Olympic silver medalist shuttler PV Sindhu refrained from using a mobile phone five to six months before the Olympic Games. If you implement the same thing in Bangladesh, our athletes will die without mobile devices.