

Maiden title for Bangladesh or India?

Evenly-matched giants lock horns for elusive SAFF U-18 glory

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will look to get their hands on the elusive SAFF Under-18 Championship title when they take on India in the final in Kathmandu today.

The match will kick off at the APF Stadium at 2:45pm Bangladesh time.

Despite being the two most powerful nations in age-group football in South Asia, neither of these two sides have managed to win the title at the under-18 level in its two editions, with India beaten by Nepal in the final of the first edition in 2015 and Bangladesh finishing second to Nepal on head-to-head count two years ago in the second edition, which was held in round robin format and did not feature a final.

This time, with Nepal out from the group stages, it is a chance for both India and Bangladesh to lay their claim on regional supremacy. But there is very little to separate India and Bangladesh at this stage as both sides fared identically on their way to the final.

Bangladesh started with a 3-0 win over Sri Lanka before playing out a goalless draw against India, who beat Sri Lanka 3-0 in their second match.

With both sides equal on points and goal difference, India were adjudged group champions on coin toss. The Indians beat Maldives 4-0 in the second semifinal while Bangladesh handed the same margin of defeat to Bhutan in the first semifinal.

Even the history of the tournament



Bangladesh captain Yeasin Arafat (L) and his Indian counterpart Prabhsukhan Singh Gill pose with the SAFF U-18 Championship trophy at a press conference in Kathmandu yesterday ahead of today's final.

PHOTO: BFF

suggests there is very little to choose from between the two sides as India beat Bangladesh in the semifinals of the 2015 edition on penalties while Bangladesh won the second encounter two years later with a brilliant come-from-behind 4-3 victory.

With such a big prize at stake yet so little to choose from, little things – tactical or technical – may be the difference in the final reckoning.

Bangladesh coach Andrew Peter Turner hinted that he might change his tactics a bit from the goalless draw against India in group stages.

"It [the group match] was quite an even game. They wanted to play the ball around a little bit and we tried to stop them. Hopefully it will be a different proposition tomorrow when we change a few things," the coach told local media yesterday.

Although the coach claimed India are the favourites of the tournament, he also showed confidence in his charges when saying: "It's a game we're looking forward to and it's a game that I think we deserve to be in. We'll be playing against tournament favourites India. It's a final and I want to come home winners."

The team captain Yeasin Arafat, who was called up to the senior squad recently, said everyone was eager to bring home the trophy.

"Everyone has fighting attitude. Everyone is hungry for victory. Insh-Allah we will play good football against India tomorrow," the defender said.

BANGLADESH WOMEN TOUR OF PAKISTAN

Indian staff refuse to travel with team

SPORTS REPORTER



The Indian coaching staff of the Bangladesh women's national cricket team are unwilling to travel with the team for their upcoming tour of Pakistan given the sour diplomatic relations between India and Pakistan.

Head coach Anju Jain, assistant coach Devika Palshikar and physio Anuja Dalvi are the current coaching staff of the Bangladesh women's team. Local coach Dipu Rai Chowdhury is set to play the role of head coach on the tour Pakistan.

The Tigresses will tour Pakistan for the second time in four years and are scheduled to play three T20Is and a two-match ODI series between October 26 to November 5. All the matches will be played at Lahore's Gaddafi stadium.

The Bangladesh women's team last toured Pakistan in 2015, when they were whitewashed by the hosts in both the ODI and the T20 series.

The Pakistan women's team toured Bangladesh last year for four T20Is and an ODI in Cox's Bazar. Pakistan won the T20I series 3-0 while Bangladesh won the one-off ODI by six wickets.

The Bangladesh women's cricket will go through a busy patch as they are also scheduled to play a three-match ODI and a three-match T20I series in early October. The Under-23 team are also scheduled to take part in the ACC Emerging Cup in Sri Lanka next month.

Salma Khatun and her troops retained the title after becoming champions of the ICC World T20 qualifiers and are looking forward to the upcoming ICC World T20 in Australia next year.

BCB beep-ing to the right beat

NABID YEASIN



The recent fuss in the country's cricket fraternity seems to be over the Bangladesh Cricket Board's newly-set requirements for the beep test that must be met in order to play in the National Cricket League (NCL), scheduled to begin next month.

The BCB announced that the players would need to score at least 11 points in the beep test in order to be allowed to play in the NCL this year, although the BCB had allowed players with scores as low as 9 to participate in the domestic circuit last year.

This leap in the required level of fitness was done after head coach Russell Domingo was left shocked by the fitness of Bangladesh players earlier this week.

"What sort of fitness is this?" Domingo, who himself said that he had not seen such poor fitness

from players at the international level, was quoted as saying by BCB president Nazmul Hassan.

Although the decision from the BCB seems to be right on cue given the urge to increase the standard of cricket in the domestic circuit, the sudden bump in fitness requirement was labelled unfair by a few players who have been out of the national side for a while.

"If a player scores 14 in the beep test but has no ability to perform in a game, then what is the use of such a score?" said 33-year old pacer Mohammad Sharif, who thought fitness should not be an issue if a player performs well despite lacking that department.

One may argue that the level of competence required in the domestic circuit cannot be compared to that needed in international matches. But is it not necessary to implement required standards at the lower

levels so players from the pipeline who get into the national squad are not suddenly asked to meet a new standard?

When writing about the fitness levels required in Bangladesh, the scenario worldwide should also come to the fore.

India only allows a player to stay in the national team if he has a minimum score of 16.1 in yo-yo test, a test inspired by the beep test but slightly different.

In both the tests, athletes run to exhaustion while completing a multi-stage 20m shuttle run test. However, yo-yo tests have a rest period after every 40 metres (2x20m) covered compared to the beep test, which is continuous.

The world's top-ranked Test side, India, are even considering increasing the minimum qualification mark from 16.1 to 17 before their tour of South Africa next month.

And such a move would be no

surprise for a team led by Virat Kohli, who aced their recent yo-yo test with a score of 19.

Pakistan and Sri Lanka's minimum level for the yo-yo test is now 17.4. West Indies set the mark at 19 while England and New Zealand have a bare minimum of 19 as the required level to be considered for the international side.

A score of 11.6 in the beep test is equivalent to an 18.3 in the yo-yo test. Considering the current scenario and fitness levels required by other top international cricket teams, it is evident that BCB are on the right track.

In September 2016, Bangladesh players were reported to have an average of 11 -- their all-time high fitness levels -- in the beep test. And maybe it is time for players to realise that if they are to compete at the highest level, it is time to convert their peak scores into regular ones.



Sabbir Shaikh of Shanto-Mariam University takes the ball past Northern University goalkeeper during their match of the Faraaz Gold Cup Football Tournament at the Kamalapur Stadium yesterday. Sabbir's two goals helped his side win 4-0 and move into the quarterfinals.

PHOTO: COLLECTED



When it comes to fitness, Bangladesh wicketkeeper batsman Mushfiqur Rahim always remains ahead of others and sets the bar. Maybe it is time for others to follow the senior campaigner as the BCB has now increased the fitness requirement level in the domestic circuit.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Taylor retires due to anxiety

AFF, London



World Cup-winning England wicketkeeper Sarah Taylor has announced her retirement from international cricket because of an ongoing battle with anxiety.

Taylor's 6,533 runs in 226 appearances across all formats places her second on England's all-time list, while she is widely regarded as one of the best wicketkeepers in the world.

The 30-year-old, part of England's victorious World Cup team in 2017, withdrew midway through the recent Ashes series.

In recent years she has missed a number of series due to mental health issues.

"This has been a tough decision but I know it's the right one, for me and for my health moving forward," said Taylor, who made her international debut in 2006.

"I can't thank my teammates

enough, both past and present, and the ECB (England and Wales Cricket Board) for being supporters and friends along my journey.

"Playing for England and getting to wear the shirt for so long has been a dream come true and I have been blessed with so many great moments throughout my career." Managing director of women's cricket Clare Connor paid tribute to Taylor, saying she could be "immensely proud" of her career.

SHORT CORNER

Kohli is like Ganguly, says Zaheer

Zaheer Khan believes it is an exciting time to be a fast bowler in India and said that Virat Kohli reminded him of Sourav Ganguly.

India's rise to the top of the Test rankings has a lot to do with skipper Kohli's love for the longest format of the game and the emphasis he puts on thriving in red-ball cricket. One of the few to have had the fortune to play under Ganguly, Dhoni and Kohli (in the IPL), Zaheer believes that the current India skipper is a lot like his first captain in international cricket -- Sourav Ganguly.

"Sourav made us believe that we can win overseas and inspired us to play with a lot of aggression. Dhoni was calm through tough situations, yet aggressive in his approach. We won the World Cup under him, so it was always very special playing under his leadership.

"Virat is a lot like dada (Ganguly), he is expressive, bold in his decisions and always pumps the team up through crunch situations. His sublime batting form is always reflective of the way he leads the team on field. I wish to see him lift the World Cup for India one day," he explained.

-- Agencies

Liton's journey starts with defeat

Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Liton Das played his first match in the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) representing Jamaica Tallawahs yesterday.

The Tallawahs lost by four wickets against St Lucia Zouks at the Darren Sammy National Cricket Stadium in Gros Islet today.

After being asked to bat, the Tallawahs managed to score 165 for seven which the Zouks chased in 19.1 overs with four wickets and five balls to spare.

After losing both the openers -- Glenn Phillips and Chris Gayle -- inside 10 overs, Liton strung an important 56-run third-wicket stand with Dwayne Smith before being dismissed in the 17th over after scoring a run-a-ball 21. However, a 38-ball 58 from Smith helped the Tallawahs post a 165-run total.

After the exchange, a 25-ball 51 from opener Rakheem Cornwall and another 24-ball 32 from Hardus Viljoen helped the Zouks register a victory.

-- Star Sport Desk

Khadka scores maiden T20I ton for Nepal

Paras Khadka became Nepal's first batsman to score a T20I century on Saturday. Chasing a stiff 152 against Singapore, the 31-year-old remained unbeaten 106 from 52 deliveries, which included seven boundaries and nine maximums.

Khadka etched his name in the history books by becoming the first skipper to slam a century in T20I cricket while chasing. It took him just 49 deliveries to complete the ton, also making it the fourth-fastest T20I century by an Asian batsman.

He shared a 145-run partnership with Aarif Sheikh which is the fifth-highest partnership for the second wicket. Sheikh scored 39 runs from 38 balls while Khadka was engaged in the swashbuckling.

Nepal chased down the target with 24 balls to spare and won their first match of the tournament by nine wickets.

Singapore had won the toss and elected to bat first and skipper Tim David was their top-scorer, remaining unbeaten on 64. Despite failing to scalp a wicket, Nepal's star spinner Sandeep Lamichhane was economical with the ball, as he gave just 18 runs in his four-over quota.

-- Agencies



Rani Hamid proudly displays the National Women's Chess Championship title for the 20th time in her career on Saturday. The 75-year-old had won her first title about 40 years ago, in 1979, and has been relentless ever since.

PHOTO: COLLECTED