



Saif Sporting Club players celebrate wildly after beating Mohammedan in a penalty shootout in a thrilling Federation Cup quarterfinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Saif knock out Mohammedan

SPORTS REPORTER



7-6 win in sudden death tiebreaker against 10-time champions Mohammedan in the second quarterfinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The topsy-turvy encounter moved into penalty shootout as neither side could find the back of the net in the second half of normal time as well as 30 minutes of extra time after a frantic first half, which has produced four goals.

Mohammedan's Aminur Rahman Sajib and Atikuzzaman missed their spot-kicks while apart from Yeasin Arafat's attempt which cannoned off the crossbar, the charges of Paul Put were bang on target, setting up a semifinal clash

against Chattogram Abahani on January 6.

This will be the first ever semifinal appearance for Saif, who were eliminated from the quarterfinals in the last two editions following a first-round exit in their debut appearance in 2017.

For Mohammedan, though, the wait for a record-equalling 11th title in the curtain-raising tournament of the season extended to 11 years. Sean Lane's charges had exited from the semifinals in the last edition, but failed to go even that far this season, despite making a strong start in the game.

The Black and Whites came running out of the blocks and caught Saif off-guard with a barrage of attacks in the first five minutes, in the process taking the lead with the clock barely registering a minute.

Habibur Rahman Sohag's corner was headed by Mounzi

Coaliadati towards fellow defender Atikuzzaman, who nodded home from close range. Mohammedan could, in fact, have gone in front within the first 16 seconds of the game had it not been for a last-ditch clearance on a placing shot from Farhat Mona. The Black and Whites wasted another gilt-edged chance soon before they let Saif back into the game with some sloppy defending.

It was another corner that gave Saif the equaliser in the seventh minute, with Emmanuel Ariwachuku, completely unmarked inside the box, nodding home Faisal Ahmed Fahim's swinging corner.

Another defensive mishap saw Saif take the lead four minutes later, with Ikechukwu Ngowke burying home a long-ball from the midfield.

Saif enjoyed more possession and had more of the chances since that period, but Souleymane

Diabate restored parity just before half-time with a powerful header on Shahed Mia's corner.

The second half and the 30 minutes of extra time saw a battle of attrition between Saif forwards and Mohammedan goalkeeper Ahsan Habib Bipu, the youngster coming up trumps against everything Saif threw at him, making three point-blank saves. The woodwork, too, came into Black and Whites' rescue twice as it seemed as if the Motijheel outfit would come victorious in the end.

But Bipu's heroics deserted him in the shootout as he failed to make a save out of seven attempts despite getting his hand on the ball on a couple of occasions. His opposite number, Pappu Hossain, made one save and that in the end, considering one missed attempt by each team, proved to be the difference in this thrilling encounter.

Tigresses finally back in their habitat

SPORTS REPORTER



While the national men's cricket team gears up to return to international cricket through an upcoming home series against the West Indies this month after two domestic tournaments, the Bangladesh women's team have been out of action since the ICC Women's T20 World Cup last February.

Their cricketing activities have remained halted despite the cricketers' eagerness to return to the field and Salma Khatun and others had to stay home.

However, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) did arrange a national camp for the Tigresses, which will get underway at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium from today. The 29-member squad will undergo fitness and skills training at the month-long camp, which will also include five limited-overs practice matches.

Salma Khatun, Nigar Sultana, Jahanara Alam and others underwent coronavirus testing before reporting to assistant coach Foyzal Hossain at the camp yesterday and everyone was keen to return to cricket after a long break.

After the month-long camp, the BCB is planning to start the under-17 camp in February along with the under-19 camp

before the South Africa emerging team's expected tour in March.

"Women's cricket took a major blow due to the pandemic. We gave importance to the safety of the players first. However, we are planning to focus on building the pipeline of women's cricket in Bangladesh. We are planning to work countrywide on a women's under-19 side as we were supposed to host the women's ICC under-19 World Cup, which was also postponed due to Covid-19," BCB's women's cricket wing chairman Shafiqul Alam Chowdhury Nadel said.

The Tigresses are expected to tour Sri Lanka in June, where Rumana Ahmed and her troops will take part in a tri-nation series between Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

According to Nadel, the tri-nation series will be part of preparation for the upcoming World Cup qualifiers, which will begin in Sri Lanka from June 26.

The BCB has also been looking for a head coach for the women's national team since parting ways with Anju Jain after the ICC Women's T20 World Cup.

"Our first job is to appoint a head coach and we are hoping to do so soon. Apart from that, we also have our own local coaching staff who will get a good opportunity to showcase their talents," Nadel said.



SON NETS 100TH TOTTENHAM GOAL

Son Heung-min scored his 100th goal for Tottenham Hotspur as they returned to winning ways with a 3-0 win over Leeds United to climb back into the Premier League's top four on Saturday. The South Korean doubled Tottenham's lead just before the interval after strike partner Harry Kane's penalty had given the hosts the lead on a crisp winter day in north London. Toby Alderweireld's header made it 3-0 in the 50th minute.

PHOTO: REUTERS



'A GREAT FEELING'

Mushfiqur Rahim was hard at work in BCB's indoor nets at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday ahead of Bangladesh's home series against West Indies this month. Meanwhile, Mushfiqur was delighted to be named in Wisden's Teenage Riot Test XI alongside greats like Sachin Tendulkar, Imran Khan, Wasim Akram, Garry Sobers. The Test XI features players who made their Test debut as teenagers but does not involve more than two players from one country. And the players were picked based on not how they performed as teenagers, rather by considering how they performed or have been performing throughout their careers. "Alhamdulillah. What a great feeling to be part of a team featuring so many legends! I am truly honored to be part of the Wisden's Teenage Riot Test XI," wrote Mushfiqur, who was 16 years and 267 days old when he made debut at Lord's, on his official Instagram account.

PHOTO: BCB

Hockey camp starts Jan 10

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Hockey Federation yesterday named a 32-man preliminary squad with 18 players from the under-21 squad for the Asian Champions Trophy, which will be held in Dhaka in March this year.

The 32-man squad will report to head coach Mahbub Harun on January 10 before having themselves tested for Covid-19 ahead of the camp, which will start the following day at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.

The squad features most of the senior players from the last assignment as well as juniors, some of whom have already represented the senior team. Bangladesh's last International assignment was in 2018 Asian Games, with a 5-0 defeat against Pakistan on August 28, 2018 being their last match.

Veterans Imran Hossain Pintu and

Kamruzzaman Rana are the two omissions from that squad while defender Mamunur Rahman Chayan announced his retirement after the Asian Games. "The selectors gave the squad based on performances. The squad is a blend of youth and experience. We will trim the squad down to 18 before the tournament," coach Mahbub Harun told media regarding the squad.

Bangladesh will host the Asian Champions Trophy, the elite hockey competition of the continent featuring India, Pakistan, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia and hosts Bangladesh from March 11 to 19.

Squad: Ashim, Nippon, Biplob, Noyon, Khorshed, Ashraf, Shitul, Shabuj, Mehedi, Rezaul, Manoz, Shishir, Shaon, Rakin, Sarowar, Roman, Nayeemuddin, Rabbi, Niloy, Abed, Topu, Jimmy, Milon, Koushik, Arshad, Mahbub, Emon, Rakibul, Mimo, Rajib, Mohsin, Debashish.



Lionel Messi (L) and Cristiano Ronaldo (C) were upstaged by Robert Lewandowski last year, but the three of them are expected to once again be very much in contention for football's top prizes as they play their first games of 2021 tonight. Ronaldo's Juventus meet Udinese in Serie A while Barcelona and Messi face Huesca. 2020's all-conquering Bayern Munich, meanwhile, begin the new year with a clash against Mainz.

PHOTO: TWITTER

South Africa target series sweep

ICC

Having brushed Sri Lanka aside in the first game, South Africa will hope to close the series out with another win in the second Test, starting today in Johannesburg.

South Africa have lost each of their last three bilateral Test series, despite two of those contests being at home.

Their last series win came over two years ago, against Pakistan, and so, they will be keen to close the series out against an injury-hit Sri Lanka.

Man Utd must be more ruthless, says Fernandes

REUTERS



Manchester United midfielder Bruno Fernandes was delighted by Friday's 2-1 win over Aston Villa that put them level on points with leaders Liverpool, but said his side must learn to kill teams off to sustain a Premier League title challenge.

United stretched their unbeaten league run to 10 games with Fernandes netting the winner from the penalty spot after Bertrand Traore had cancelled out the home side's opener from Anthony Martial.

United largely controlled the game but Paul Pogba, Fernandes and Marcus Rashford failed to drive home their advantage.

In the dying minutes, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's side were forced to defend desperately with centre back Eric Bailly putting in a crucial stoppage-time block to deny Villa a draw.

"It was tough. We have to learn from this," Fernandes told reporters after the game. "We have to manage the game much better. We had some situations to close the game, you have to try and score because we know that teams can score. If we close the game early it is better. It is better. We have to take care of this."

Pogba put in a solid performance in midfield, starting the move for Martial's opener before winning the crucial penalty.

Fernandes is confident the France World Cup winner will continue to deliver strong performances. "We all know the qualities he has. It is not in doubt here. He will give more and more with the confidence he gets game after game," Fernandes said.

United next face Manchester City in the semi-final of the League Cup on Wednesday. Meanwhile, manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer stopped short of saying his side were title contenders after a hard-fought 2-1 home win over Aston Villa.

Liverpool visit Southampton and United travel to Burnley before a mouth-watering clash at Anfield on Jan. 17, albeit in front of eerily empty terraces.

