

Tigers heading to NAPIER FOR 31-0?

BISHWAJIT ROY

The Tigers sit at 30-0 after a crushing 66-run New Zealand win in the first of the three-match T20I series at the Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. It was the Tigers' 30th international match across all formats against the Black Caps in their backyard and the outcome was as similar as it was in the other all games.

Bangladesh T20I skipper Mahmudullah Riyad had said in a pre-match briefing that there were no big or small teams in the shortest format of the game, but there was no proof of his words in the field.

Instead, he had to sing the same old song that Test captain



Wrecker-in-chief Ish Sodhi (L) is congratulated by wicketkeeper Devon Conway, who smashed an unbeaten 92 off 52 balls, after taking the wicket of Bangladesh batsman Soumya Sarkar while Liton Das walks back for four runs during the first T20I at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP/ICC



SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: 210 for three in 20 overs (Guptill 35, Conway 92 not out, Young 53, Phillips 24 not out, extras 6; Nasum 2-30, Mahedi 1-37)
BANGLADESH: 144 for 8 in 20 overs (Naim 27, Liton 4, Soumya 5, Mithun 4, Mahmudullah 11, Afif 45, Mahedi 0, Saifuddin 34 not out, extras 9; Southee 1-34, Bennett 1-20, Ferguson 2-25, Sodhi 4-28)
Result: New Zealand won by 66 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Devon Conway.

Mahmudullah said after the heavy defeat. He may not say anything new if things continue like this when the series moves to Napier on Tuesday and only a miracle can stop the scoreline reading 31-0 and the series being sealed with a match in hand.

New Zealand went into the match without six frontline players, including Kane Williamson and Trent Boult, making it a game of debuts and comebacks for the hosts. But Devon Conway smashed an unbeaten 92 off 52 balls and Will Young struck a half-century on debut before Ish Sodhi (4-28) ran through visitor's middle order to give New Zealand a comfortable win.

So, there was reason for stand-in captain Tim Southee to say: "It's great to be able to see guys come in and perform. If you had five or six

guys out a few years ago, we would be scratching around but there's a number of guys now knocking on the door."

Bangladesh's debutant left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed had a wicket in his beautiful opening over, removing debutant Finn Allen for a first-ball duck. He later dismissed Martin Guptill, caught at long-off for a 27-ball 35, to finish with figures of 2 for 30. Afif Hossain (45) showed some resistance during his side's abysmal batting performance.

The team can take some positives from their performances if they want but it would be foolish to search for any hope from such sporadic performances. They have to look at the home side's thoroughly professional performance from start to end.

After the ODI whitewash,

captain Tamim once again proclaimed: "We are a much better team [than this] but if we continue to play like this, we are going nowhere."

The problem is that the Tigers have to prove on the field that they are much better team than one would think after seeing their performances against all formats since returning to the international cricket after the hiatus brought on by the pandemic.

But one thing for sure is if they continue to play like, Bangladesh cricket is going nowhere.

It cannot be good enough to simply promise better following one poor performance after another as Mominul did following a 2-0 Test defeat at home in February this year, saying: "We have to work on our issues and plan things."

Day eyes experiment, players trophy

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh coach Jamie Day is still focused on giving game-time to younger players as the men in red and green take on hosts Nepal in the final of the Three Nations Cup at the Dasharath Rangasala in Kathmandu today.

"I will still be looking at the players. As I said before we came here, the focus is not on the outcome here but getting players ready for June [World Cup Qualifiers]," Day told The Daily Star over phone from Nepal. "If we win the final, it will be great but the main focus is on giving players game-time."

Day used all the players except for goalkeeper Ashraf Islam Rana in the two group matches against Kyrgyzstan U-23 and Nepal. He is now thinking of reshuffling his starting XI in the final match.

"We will just rotate players around again so that all the players get the same amount of game-time," Day said. "[I'm] very pleased with everyone. They have worked extremely hard and played some good football and kept two clean sheets."

The players, though, are determined to put up a good show to lift the trophy for the nation in the month of March as the nation celebrates its golden jubilee of independence.

It is the first time since the Bangabandhu

Gold Cup in 2015 that Bangladesh have reached the final of any tournament. The hosts had lost that final 3-2 against Malaysia U-23. Bangladesh senior team's last success was lifting the 2003 SAFF Championship trophy in Dhaka even though the U-23 team later emerged champions in the 2010 SA Games in Dhaka.

Forward Suman Reza said that they want to return home with a trophy.

"The players have good momentum after playing two matches. They are also determined to produce a good result in the final in a bid to return home with a trophy," Suman told The Daily Star, adding that he would give his best effort to get goals in the final if he is given an opportunity in the playing eleven.

"Before playing against Nepal, we have kept one thing in our mind that we would not lose to them even if we don't beat them. However, we want to win the final tomorrow [Monday] and we must score goals for that. We need to avail the opportunities as soon as we get them in front of the Nepal goal," said forward Mabbubur Rahman Sufil.

Midfielder Mohammad Abdullah, however, believes they will have to make quick movements in the attacking third against Nepal, who have a solid defence.

The tournament has so far seen only one goal scored in three matches. That goal was an own goal scored by a Kyrgyzstan defender in the opening match against Bangladesh.



'Three-step measures' to keep Games safe

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) promised to take firm measures to ensure a healthy and safe environment amid an alarming Covid-19 situation ahead of the start of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Games across the country on April 1.

The BOA was forced to defer the



BANGABANDHU 9TH BANGLADESH GAMES
Duration: April 1-10
Disciplines: 31
Athletes: 5300
Events: 378
Medals: 1271
Venues: 29 in 7 districts
Budget: Tk 20 crore

9th edition of the Bangladesh Games by a year on March 12 last year due to the outbreak of Covid-19. The rescheduled April 1-10 timeline has unfortunately also coincided with a spike in Covid-19 cases, forcing authorities to take measures to ensure the safety of athletes, officials and organisers.

"We have instructed participating districts and teams through federations to send their athletes to the Games with Covid-19 certificates and we will stick to it," BOA vice-president and Games steering committee chairman Sheikh Bashir Ahmed said at a press conference at the BOA auditorium yesterday.

Ahmed also said: "We have taken three-step measures in a bid to make it a Covid-19-free Games. Athletes will undergo rapid Covid-19 testing, their temperature will be measured before entering the venues and the athletes will be kept in isolation if they display any symptoms of Covid-19."

BOA secretary general Syed Shahed Reza informed: "We have thought a lot about the Covid-19 situation before thinking of starting the Bangladesh Games. We have formed a strong medical committee with the inclusion of military services, different hospitals and divisional civil surgeons. There will also be doctors in each of the 29 venues across the country."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has given her consent to declare the Games open through her virtual presence at the Bangabandhu National Stadium while the torch relay of the Games will get underway from Tungipara, the birthplace of Bangabandhu, on March 31 before prominent golfer Siddikur Rahman and SA Games double-gold medallist swimmer Mahfuza Akter

Shila ignite the torch of the Games.

The country's biggest multi-sports carnival is being held after eight years after starting its journey in 1978. The first edition saw only 10 disciplines played across six days but there are now 31 disciplines which will be played across 29 venues in seven districts. Women's cricket has already finished before the Games started, while men's football also got underway on Saturday.

Of the 31 disciplines, a maximum of 384 athletes from handball and a minimum of 60 athletes each from badminton and chess will be taking part in the Games, featuring some 5,300 athletes.

Most of sport came to a standstill in March last year due to the pandemic and most athletes were idle until last November when some sports like football, cricket, basketball, karate, taekwondo, weightlifting, shooting, table tennis, kabaddi, handball, chess archery returned to the ground in full swing, while some disciplines returned on a smaller scale.



Bangladesh players catch a raider of the Poland team during the opening match of the Bangabandhu Cup International Kabaddi Tournament at the Volleyball Stadium in Paltan yesterday. Bangladesh beat the European champions by 40-22 points in the match. The second match of the day saw Sri Lanka beat Kenya by 35-33 points.

PHOTO: STAR

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS



RONALDO FUMES AS SERBIA SNATCH DRAW

Cristiano Ronaldo stormed off the pitch before fulltime when he was denied a clear stoppage-time winner in a 2-2 draw in Serbia, while Belgium were held 1-1 by the Czech Republic in World Cup qualifiers on Saturday.

Ronaldo threw off the captain's armband and headed for the tunnel when his effort was cleared by Serbia defender Stefan Mitrovic after it had crossed the line, with Dutch referee Danny Makkelie waving play on.

With no VAR in place to review the decision, Serbia held out for a draw having fought their way back into the

NETHERLANDS BEAT LATVIA FOR FIRST POINTS

Steven Berghuis and Luuk de Jong scored either side of half-time as the Netherlands got their World Cup qualifying hopes back on track with a 2-0 home win over plucky Latvia on Saturday.

The Dutch were looking for a strong response after a shock 4-2 loss to Turkey in Istanbul on Wednesday at the start of their Group G campaign.

The victory left them three points behind early group leaders Turkey, who beat Norway 3-0 on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Stephanie Frappart reached another milestone on Saturday when she became the first female referee to take charge of a men's World Cup qualifier during the Netherlands' 2-0 win



PHOTO: REUTERS

Portugal coach Fernando Santos argues with referees after the match. He later said "it isn't possible" that what he saw as a clear goal scored by Cristiano Ronaldo in Saturday's World Cup qualifier against Serbia could be ruled out.

match from two goals down in Belgrade.

Forward Diogo Jota, whose brace had given the Portuguese a 2-0 lead in the first half, said: "What happened can't happen at this level because we switched off and let Serbia draw level 15 minutes into the second half."

MARTINEZ PLEASED WITH CHARACTER OF THE TEAM

Belgium may have played a poor game in drawing at the Czech Republic in their World Cup qualifier but coach Roberto Martinez said the character of the team had pleased him. The Belgians, top of the FIFA rankings, had to fight back for a 1-1 draw in Prague in their Group E game on Saturday with record scorer Romelu Lukaku equalising in the second half.

"I saw resilience and character. We really wanted to come back after going behind. Concentration returned, we became dangerous again. I would like to emphasise that we did not accept that we could lose," said Martinez.

over Latvia in Amsterdam.

Earlier in December, Frenchwoman Frappart became the first female official to take charge of a men's Champions League match when Italian champions Juventus defeated Ukrainian club Dynamo Kyiv 3-0 in the group stage in Turin.

She also refereed the Super Cup match between Liverpool and Chelsea in 2019, and the women's World Cup final between the U.S. and the Netherlands the same year.

DZYUBA DOUBLE GIVES RUSSIA 2-1 WIN

Captain Artem Dzyuba scored twice to give Russia a 2-1 win over Slovenia in front of 15,000 fans in Sochi's Fisht Stadium on Saturday, putting the home side top of their World Cup qualifying group after two games.

Russia, who have six points, play Slovakia away next, while Slovenia play Cyprus, with both games to be played on Tuesday.

2nd round of BNCL starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

The second round of the Bangabandhu 22nd National Cricket League (BNCL) will start from today across four venues.

In Tier 1, defending champions Khulna will lock horns against hosts Rangpur at the Rangpur Cricket Garden while Dhaka Division will face Sylhet at the outer ground of Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar.

In Tier 2, Rajshahi will take on Barishal at BKSP-3 ground in Savar while Dhaka Metropolis will face Chattogram at the main ground of the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar.

A total of six centuries were scored in the first round of the BNCL, with all four games ending in results. Khulna, after posting 375 in their first innings, bowled brilliantly and forced Sylhet to follow on and eventually sealed an eight-wicket win.

It was a cracker of a game between Dhaka Division and Rangpur where Nasir Hossain's all-around performance - a century and a four-wicket haul - could not help Rangpur avoid a defeat. It was Saif Hasan's hundred in the first innings and later left-arm spinner Nazmul Islam's six wickets in the second innings which helped Dhaka to an 80-run victory.

Shahadat Hossain's century followed by some brilliant bowling from Noman Chowdhury and Mehedi Hasan Rana guided Chattogram to an 88-run win over Rajshahi in the first round.

Centuries from Marshall Ayub and Shohidul Islam and a fine bowling display from the latter had guided Dhaka Metro to an eight-wicket win against Barishal.