



[L] Dipu Chakma of Bangladesh Army won gold in the 32+ age category poomsae event of taekwondo while [R] Ruma Khatun and Nuruddin Hossain of Bangladesh Ansar & VDP secured gold medals in senior women's and men's poomsae (17-24 age group) events of taekwondo in the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games at the National Sports Council gymnasium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Squad for SL tour to be finalised today

SPORTS REPORTER



Members of the national selection committee, including chief selector Minhajul Abedin, had a meeting with the Bangladesh Cricket Board's cricket operations department yesterday before announcing the squad for the upcoming two-match Test series in Sri Lanka.

It was learned that selectors will have a final meeting with BCB president Nazmul Hassan today before officially announcing the squad.

There were rumours that they may recall the experienced Mahmudullah Riyad for the upcoming Sri Lanka series in the absence of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who will miss the tour due to his obligations to Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League.

But Mahmudullah, who was dropped from the Test squad against Zimbabwe in 2020, is unlikely to feature as he is yet to recover from a strained left thigh suffered that ruled him out of the third T20I against New Zealand.

Left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman will also feature in the IPL for Rajasthan Royals and is currently in India. He may also not be considered for the Test series against Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh's Test performances have seen a major dip since a debacle against

newest Test playing nation Afghanistan in 2019, followed by a 2-0 whitewash at home against an inexperienced West Indies side earlier this year.

Many have raised questions about head coach Russell Domingo and his long-term plans, but former captain and current board director Khaled Mahmud -- who will be the team leader for the Tigers on the upcoming Sri Lanka tour -- backed the South African and said the players needed to execute.

"He (Domingo) is obviously a good coach but a team's performance doesn't depend on a coach. It's a collective thing. It's the players who will play on the field, not the coach. A coach can give you a thousand plans, but if the players are unable to execute on the field then there is no point to having such plans," Mahmud said, adding that he was the Tigers would put up a better show in Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, the board will offer central contracts to cricketers based on their performances in the tour of Sri Lanka and the home series against the same opponents in May, informed cricket operations chairman Akram Khan yesterday.

The last national central contract had introduced separate contracts for red and white-ball cricket and had seen 16 cricketers sign. Seven were offered contracts for both red and white-ball cricket while four cricketers were signed for Test cricket only. For white-ball cricket, the BCB had offered contract to five cricketers.

Krishna steals the spotlight

SPORTS REPORTER

Following the elimination of country's top archer Ruman Sana in pre-quarterfinal stage, the focus was on men's individual recurve event in the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games, and Ram Krishna Saha stole the spotlight by winning gold medal in this event at the Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Stadium in Tongi yesterday.

Krishna, competing for Bangladesh Air Force, staged a strong comeback in the final round to beat Tamimul Islam of Bangladesh Police in shootout after the final was tied at 5-5 set points. The archer from Faridpur hit 10 in the deciding tiebreak while Tamim could only manage nine.

"It was a tough final for me because I trailed by 5-1 set points at one stage before fighting back. I was also under tremendous pressure but I kept my cool and used all my experience to reach the target," said the 2019 national championship winner, who belongs to the same generation of archers as Ruman.

"I got admitted in BKSP in 2009 and was once part of the national team but I was out of competitive archery due to



Ram Krishna Saha

training in Bangladesh Air Force from 2016 to 2018. Now I'm training regularly and dreaming of representing Bangladesh again," Krishna said. "Now I have to secure a place in the national team, which is not an easy thing as there is hardly any difference among the top archers."

Despite being a contemporary, Krishna sees Ruman as an inspiration.

"I am hungry for international medals and want to play in the upcoming World Cup. I think

- Weightlifting produced six more records -- three each in men and women categories -- to take the total records tally eight in the last two days in Mymensingh.
- Swimmer Kajal Mia registered his second record in 200m individual medley event on the final day to take the total records in swimming events to 11. Bangladesh Navy dominated the pool as they won 33 golds out of 42.
- While many internationally successful athletes across disciplines returned home empty-handed, SA Games double-gold medalist swimmer Mahfuza Khatun Shila shone in her pet event of 50m backstroke to win a gold medal yesterday.
- Five more disciplines -- archery, swimming, cycling, table tennis and rugby

-- completed their events in the last two days. Seven disciplines had completed their events in the first four days of Games.

Young Sadia Rahman Mou broke the dominance of Sonom Sultana Soma to emerge champion in women's table tennis singles and helped Bangladesh Ansar top the chart with five golds, two silvers and five bronzes, leaving behind Bangladesh Police who grabbed the remaining two golds.

SA Games gold medalist karateka Humaira Akter Antara had to stay content with a silver medal after losing to gold medalist Nu Me Marma, a student of 2010 SA Games gold medalist karatekas Ushu Pru Marma, in the final of the Kata event in Bandarban.

Ruman drove all other archers in Bangladesh to dream big," said Krishna.

Krishna's effort helped Bangladesh Air Force to a gold medal but Bangladesh Army dominated the medals table with four gold, one silver and three bronze medals as its archers showed improvement in individual scores.

Explaining the reasons behind Bangladesh Army's success, coach Mohammad Sajjad Hossain said, "During the pandemic, our archers availed uninterrupted training

opportunity in cantonment which actually helped them to perform consistently in big stage."

"We also introduced internal weekend competition in a bid to bring competitive attitude among the archers. Besides, we also set individual scoring targets for each archer. Archers such as Tania Rima and Roksana produced their best scores in the Games while Nasrin Akter made her best of 147 out of 150 on way to winning gold medal in compound event," said Sajjad, country's first international gold-winning archer.

FIFA wants 'more transparent' BFF accounts

SPORTS REPORTER

Whenever there have been allegations of malpractice in maintenance of the financial accounts of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), the allegations were swept aside, but this time the game's local governing body not reject the observations of FIFA, football's world governing body.

FIFA has reportedly stopped providing financial allocations to Bangladesh after auditing the financial documents that BFF submitted in December last year. It has also been reported that FIFA sent a letter to BFF on March 30 asking for documents on various financial aspects. FIFA officials and BFF officials yesterday sat in a virtual meeting to discuss the issue.

"FIFA has requested the BFF to make the activities of the accounts more transparent, neutral and accountable and we also promised them to strengthen the implementation process of the standard procedure in maintaining the accounts," Abdus Salam Mursheedy, senior vice-president and head of BFF's finance committee, told reporters after the meeting.

The BFF also promised FIFA to formulate written policies of purchase, tendering method and payment procedure, if needed with technical assistance from FIFA, in order to implement those issues within May, a timeline given by FIFA.

FIFA provides BFF with US\$500,000 yearly apart from other allocations in technical aspects, national teams and other areas while AFC provides BFF with US\$250,000 per year.



"I think I was just trying not to be on social media as much because a lot of people have opinions on you and how they think you should play."

**COCO GAUFF
AMERICAN TENNIS
PRODIGY**

A decisive turning point?

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI

Was it the strike that might finally see Ousmane Dembele flourish at the Camp Nou? Having inspired confidence and then deceived so many times before, whether sitting on the sidelines through numerous nagging injuries or missing sitters that amounted to null contributions, 'that' goal -- a last-minute effort against Real Valladolid that gave Barca a 1-0 win on Monday night -- may be the first of Dembele's that really matters as the La Liga race was thrown wide open for the final push with just nine games left in what is in evidence a three-horse-race.

It was a nervy night at the Camp Nou and the lure of closing the gap on leaders Atletico Madrid -- who slipped up yet again with a 1-0 defeat at Sevilla the previous night -- had made Barca's execution in possession slightly dim. Disciplined, yet bold, Valladolid's Kenan Kodro headed against the bar early and there were early sighters for Roque Mesa, who bypassed the Barca press in midfield and urged the visitors



forward.

In defence, they remained tight, and bar a Pedri effort in the dying minutes of the first half that was palmed away and hit the post and an Antoine Griezman effort headed wide in the second half, Barca's attacks did not amount to much.

Dembele's goal in the Copa semifinal had also mattered, but there was a growing sense, given some careless execution from the Frenchmen throughout the Valladolid game, that he would be taken off. But while Ronald Koeman made changes, he banked on the Frenchman to keep up the surge as Barca pushed forward.

A straight red card to Oscar Plano in the 79th minute after a tackle on Dembele saw Barca with a man

advantage and when the forward's volley cannoned into the back of the net in the 90th minute, the celebration -- with Lionel Messi and others climbing up Dembele -- said it all; Koeman's faith had been repaid; doubts, injuries and the confusion of whether he would amount to anything, put to rest for now.

"He's an important player," Koeman said at post-match press conference. "He's shown that with his performance here and above all with the goal that gave us three points. Ousmane's development this season has been really good."

Real Madrid are on 63 points, Barca on 65, just a point behind leader Atletico on 66. The league is well and truly in their hands now ahead of El Clasico next week. Koeman's side has arrived at the final hurdle with the mental stamina required and Real's Champions League quarterfinal ties with Liverpool offer helpful distractions.

"The team is capable of winning the games we have left but today was also a reminder you always have to be at your very best and you have to be clinical," Koeman told reporters.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUARTERFINALS

'Everyone needs to be in front of their TVs'

Mbappe hypes Bayern showdown

STAR SPORT DESK



Last year's finalists Bayern Munich and Paris Saint-Germain's will lock horns in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal and tonight's clash in Munich could set the tone for the rest of the tournament before it comes down to the final four.

Bayern Munich, partly because they are victim to the standards they set last year and partly because they will be without Robert Lewandowski, have been painted as the team that will have the tougher time in the tie.

Shining more limelight on the absence of Bayern's record-chasing goal-machine is Kylian Mbappe, who apparently decided to make

the Champions League his stage by scoring a sensational hat-trick against Barcelona in the Round of 16.

PSG's ever-busy social media team has already aired a video with some of the team's players reflecting on the defeat in last year's final, but their tone was tempered with hints of caution. That tone was also reflected in the words of their 22-year-old phenom.

"Bayern are a great team. Now, it's just about being calm and confident in preparation for the first leg in Munich. It's a game that people will be looking forward to watching. It'll be a good game, so everyone needs to be in front of their TVs, and we'll try to put on a good show and hopefully come away with the win."

From the Parisiens' perspective, it

was understandable why they would err on the side of caution. Their form has dipped to the point that they are now staring at a three-point deficit in Ligue 1, trailing Lille with seven games to go.

Their last league outing, a crucial clash against the now league-leaders, was supposed to be a chance for Neymar to get some crucial minutes upon return from injury. It was his first start in two months but while the Brazilian showed glimpses of his genius, in the end all he had to show was a red card in a loss. Marco Verratti and Leon Parades missing out is another worry.

Bayern, meanwhile, are seven points clear at the top of Bundesliga and show no signs of slowing down, and are chasing Manchester United's record of 25 consecutive games unbeaten in Europe's elite competition. They are currently undefeated in 19 straight games.

All Bayern Munich would require is one trademark performance at home. That would be enough to set alarm bells ringing among Europe's elite. But Mbappe, who watched the Bavarians lift a sixth Champions League title on the same night he and PSG lost at their first attempt, welcomed the competition.

"For me, the Champions League holds a very important place. We've lost at different stages, we've suffered. I think that if I win it, there'll be a lot of emotion. Even though the World Cup is the Holy Grail, for me, at club level, the Champions League is the best. The Champions League is, as the song says, for 'les meilleures équipes' (the best teams)."

