



Topu Barman jumps in the air as his teammates chase him following his decisive strike against Sri Lanka in the opening match of the SAFF Championship at the National Stadium in Male yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Topu stars as Bangladesh get off to winning start

ANISUR RAHMAN from Male

Bangladesh's bid to play the final of the SAFF Championship got off to a positive note as they handed a single-goal defeat to Sri Lanka in the opening match of the regional football extravaganza at the National Football Stadium in Male yesterday. Central defender Tapu Barman converted a penalty in the 56th minute to separate both sides in a match where Bangladesh had the upper hand throughout. The strike from the Man of the Match Tapu was good enough to give his side the winning start, however, the margin of victory could have been widened had the likes of Rakib Hossain, Bipul Ahmed, Saaduddin not squandered a few scoring chances against a

team who played with ten men for over 40 minutes. On a rain-soaked ground with rousing expatriate spectators cheering from the stands throughout the 90 minutes, the men in red and green never felt like playing away from home. Head coach Oscar Bruzon apparently drafted the players, who had featured in the starting eleven from their respective clubs in the Bangladesh Premier League, in his own starting eleven. And his charges did not disappoint the interim coach in terms of ball possession as they had good exchange of passes from the outset of the game and launched attacks from both flanks. There had been an apprehension regarding Sri Lanka's expatriate forwards players - England-based Marvan Hamilton and German-based Ahmed Waseem Razeek, who however could not pose any real

threat in the match, even though a couple of moves from Waseem had the Bangladesh defenders in a spot of bother. Left-winger Rakib Hossain was in his usual elements and whipped a couple of crosses but left-winger Jewel Rana, top scorer among locals in the domestic league, looked nervous throughout the first half before Saad Uddin replaced him to inject some pace from the left flank. Right-back Bishwanath Ghosh was excellent as usual. His long throw-in wreaked havoc inside the Sri Lankan box and Tapu Barman almost capitalised one to break the deadlock in the ninth minute. Tapu claimed a hand-ball after his drive was blocked by a Sri Lankan defender but the referee had turned it down. Bangladesh tried to penetrate the Sri Lankan high-defence line by keeping the ball on their feet, but

were not decisive enough. Captain Jamal Bhuiyan drove wide once before Waseem broke free from the Bangladesh backline in the 37th minute but Tariq Raihan Kazi intervened at the cost of a corner. Following a fluid exchange of passes, Tapu came close to giving Bangladesh a lead before the interval but his close-range header off a Yeasin Arafat cross was brilliantly saved by Sri Lankan keeper Sujana Perera. After resumption, Oscar made three changes that added pace in the game, which led to the creation of more scoring chances in the second half. Bangladesh could have faced trouble when Queens Park Rangers forward Dillon De Silva fielded as a substitute but the backline kept him inactive to make sure Bangladesh got off to the best possible start.

I'm not fully satisfied, says Bruzon

SPORTS REPORTER from Male



"This goal is not mine, it is for all my teammates," central defender Tapu Barman said after striking the decisive goal against Sri Lanka to give Bangladesh a winning start in the SAFF Championship in Male yesterday. Netting the only goal of the game also saw Tapu join Mahbubur Rahman Sufil on five goals for the national team. "I'm happy to have scored the winner because I always try to help my team. We played really well today. I always listen to my coach and take four to five penalty shots every day during practice," Tapu said, opining his best goal was the one that helped Bangladesh play out a draw against Afghanistan in the World Cup Qualifiers. However, while Tapu may have found a reason to be satisfied, coach Oscar Bruzon was not overjoyed by the team's performance. "We were favourites according to the FIFA ranking. I think it was good for our side to play against Sri Lanka in the opening match because we set a tone of improvement," the Spaniard said at the post-match conference. "We could not be satisfied even with the playing style, only with our control of the

game. I repeat I am not fully satisfied with the performance. But we need to be aware that we should convert half our chances by improving our conversion rate," the 44-year-old added. Bruzon believes the result could have been different had the forwards converted the opportunities they created in the second half of the game. "My only worry is that we need to improve finishing, which is a long-standing problem. I think we created five to six scoring chances in the second half but could not finish. We are going to work on it in the coming days," Bruzon said. "Bangladesh can play very good football and Bangladesh can control the game. I think we formed excellent combination, short and long. If we had a better conversion rate, results could have been better today." "I think we knew that we should have full control of the game and we wanted to command the central areas in the opposing half. Sri Lanka defended deep in the first half and we went very close to their defence though we struggled to control some areas. "We created good openings from the left flank and, in the second half, we decided to change the formation to a 4-4-2 from a 4-1-4-1 to keep the backline solid. Saad Uddin replacing Jewel Rana also clicked well for us," added Oscar.



Expatriate Bangladeshis lent tremendous support to the men in red and green.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'Focus now on consistency'

Despite being rated as one of the talented batsmen in the Bangladesh team, Soumya Sarkar had to face criticism regarding his consistency since he made his international debut six years back. During an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin, the 28-year-old shared his plans for the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup along with a few other topics. The excerpts are below:



The Daily Star (DS): Having already played ODI World Cups in 2015 and 2019 and the 2016 T20 World Cup, this is going to be your fourth ICC World Cup. How important the upcoming event is going to be for you as a player and also for Bangladesh?

Soumya Sarkar (SS): Obviously the upcoming World Cup is very important for me as I was unable to do well in the previous events. My aim will be to become a regular performer for my team. World Cups are always special for any player as it's the biggest stage where you can showcase your talent and gain confidence.



DS: In the T20I series in Zimbabwe, you were adjudged the player-of-the-series. But you had a tough time at home against Australia in the next series and were only picked for the last match against New Zealand. What do you think went wrong?

SS: I normally play with positive intent but the Australia series at home didn't go well for me. I think my reading of the pitch went wrong as it was difficult to play my natural game in such pitches at home. I have worked on this aspect and it's very important to read the surface as a batsman. I want to focus on the positive side of my batting and I am mentally working on this aspect.

DS: Do you think it's the consistency that you need to work on to become a better

batsman in world cricket?

SS: To be honest, I have been thinking of this aspect for quite some time now and trying to work on being more consistent. If you have noticed, I was playing my natural game in Zimbabwe. But things went differently at home where my positive intent backfired because of the surface as it required a different approach. My focus is now on consistency as a batsman and yes, I am eyeing to compete among the best in the world and not just in my country. I am aiming to be among the top ten batters in the world and for that, you have to perform on a consistent basis and I realise it.

DS: Keeping the pitch in Oman and the UAE in mind, what are the areas you think Bangladesh can utilise with the bat, especially during the powerplay?

SS: We utilised the powerplay well in Zimbabwe. I think the batters will want to do the same in Oman and the UAE and play freely during the powerplay.

DS: Is there any specific area that you have worked on with batting consultant Ashwell Prince?

SS: He [Ashwell Prince] used to play shots on the back-foot really well as typical South Africans do. And I tried to learn a few tricks and tips from him about that shot. Though we didn't get the opportunity to work for a long time, I have been practicing those back-foot strokes individually.

A breath of fresh air

ANISUR RAHMAN from Maldives

The little Velana International Airport may not be that attractive upon arrival, especially after catching a sneak peek of the splendid beauty of Maldives from the sky. However, after stepping off the airport, which is linked to the capital city of Male with a bridge, the pristine water of the Indian Ocean is bound to completely sway the visitors in no time. Having flown out from the Hamad International Airport of Doha in the morning, it took over four hours to reach Maldives' airspace. Initially, from high above, the ring-shaped atolls in the blue water misled us to consider those as clouds. But when the aircraft had significantly descended, the view cleared up in high-definition to reveal lush green and hidden islands with picturesque resorts, resembling the ones generally found on internet search. The mild and meditative waves of the crystal clear water must tempt one to go closer to it first, before boarding either water buses or taxi cabs destined for your place of stay. We began heading towards Male on the hotel-provided microbus and the 15-minute journey impressed all of us to a great extent, especially the traffic system as the chauffeur neither had to overtake another vehicle, despite having ample space on both sides of the middle lane, nor did he ever resort to pressing any irritating horn. We got to know from the chauffeur that overtaking is forbidden in Maldives, although the

seemingly reckless bikers on the road disagreed, apparently. On route, a lot of parked motorcycles caught our eyes. We got to know that the motorcycle, which costs around 40,000 Maldivian Rufiyaa (approximately 2600 US Dollar), is the most popular mode of personal transport in the 8.30-square-km city of Male.



Apart from male bikers, hijab-wearing female bikers dominate the streets, made of square-shaped zigzag concrete blocks which look similar to ones that Dhaka footpath had before the recently-laid red-yellow plates. If Amsterdam is a city of bicycles and Dhaka is a city of rickshaws, then Male can be labelled as a city of motorcycles, no doubt.

It takes nearly one hour, or a few if you walk, to traverse Male from one end to another with the traffic being really thin except for the bikes. One of us found out that most of the Male roads have one-way movements that hardly cause any traffic jams. On top of it, no traffic police was seen anywhere. The most interesting part of traffic is that the vehicles stop and wait until you cross the road via zebra-crossing and not the other way around, which is quite different compared to other sub-continent countries. Interestingly, to see different shops with big glass windows, kept locked without any shutters or collapsible gates, may surprise you with the indication of the absence of robbers in the city. It is common to have a view of the ocean's blue waters from the end of almost each narrow road, that basically joins the Male-surrounded ring road, and one can take a long breath of fresh air at the end of each road. Another pleasing aspect of the city is that the sky view is not hampered by high-rise buildings as it is in Dhaka. Except for a few high-rise buildings, most of the six or seven-story buildings and the trees virtually bear the beauty of the small town. Finally, feeling lonely is not an option if you are from Bangladesh because invariably you will come across compatriots -- workers, companies' employees and businessmen -- surrounding you in airports, hotels, shops and almost every other place in the city of Male.



ZIARUL'S RECORD ON LAST DAY

Ziarul Islam of Bangladesh Army set a new national record, lifting 292 kilos in the 109-kg category on the concluding day of Mujib Borsho National Weightlifting Competition at the old National Sports Council building yesterday. Ziarul lifted 132 kilos in snatch and 162 kilos in clean & jerk -- both new records -- to lead Army to overall victory. Baki Billah of Ansar was adjudged best male weightlifter while Smrity Akter of Army was adjudged best female weightlifter of the competition.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED