

SPORT

What to
WATCH**T SPORTS**
SAFF Championship
Bangladesh vs Nepal
Live from 5:00 pm
India vs Maldives
Live from 10:00 pm**GTV & STAR SPORTS 1**
IPL
Qualifier 2
Kolkata vs Delhi
Live from 8:00 pm

With a final berth at stake, Bangladesh players are determined to turn the table against Nepal in their all-important fixture of the SAFF Championship in Male today.

PHOTO: BFF

Do-or-die against Nepal

ANISUR RAHMAN from Male



Bangladesh national football team are looking forward to putting an end to a 16-year drought for a place in the SAFF Championship final as they square off against Nepal in a do-or-die clash at the National Football Stadium in Male, Maldives

today.

The match will get underway at 5:00pm (Bangladesh Standard Time) before hosts Maldives and India play the final group match at five hours later.

Both matches have seemingly turned into virtual semifinals as Bangladesh and India need victories to advance to the final while a draw for Nepal and Maldives will see them through.

Though Bangladesh hold an edge over Nepal in head-to-head record, with the men in red and green winning 12 out of 24 matches against Nepal's eight wins, the Himalayan nation have a better record in recent times. The Gorkhalis have beaten Bangladesh in last three meetings of the SAFF Championship. Nepal have not lost against Bangladesh in their last three meetings, winning the most recent encounter 2-0 in Kathmandu in March this year.

HEAD-TO-HEAD

Overall
Matches- 24, Bangladesh won – 12,
Draws – 4, Nepal won– 8

In SAFF Championship
Matches-7, Bangladesh won -4,
Draws-0, Nepal won -3

Nepal have shown character in the ongoing tournament by beating Maldives 1-0 and Sri Lanka 3-2 before suffering a 1-0 defeat against India in their last match.

Bangladesh had a good start too with a 1-0 win against Sri Lanka followed by a 1-1 draw against seven-time champions India, despite playing majority of the second half with 10 men.

However, the charges of Oscar Bruzon are under pressure following their 2-0 defeat against Maldives as they now need a victory in the must-win fixture.

After two days' rest and three days' practice,

the confidence of Jamal and Co is apparently high and they look determined to bounce back.

"Thing is back on the track. The energy is full, the intensity is full, and willingness to do something is full. We are going to face Nepal, who have self-characteristic that we need to be aware of. They are not going to be a team that won't fight us for the possession of the ball. They are not going to be a team that won't play in our half. They are really sharp and practical. They have excellent runners in the central area of the pitch, so we may need to change a bit of our game style. All of us have to try to find out the best way to beat Nepal. We have our own weapons and we are really confident that tomorrow is going to be our day," Bruzon said at the pre-match press conference yesterday.

"We all are taking it as the true semifinal and it is fantastic to be here in this position. Before the tournament, I said that our main rivals are Maldives and Nepal. We could not make it against Maldives but now we have another opportunity against Nepal and we will be trying to make it against Nepal and keep trusting us," said Bruzon, who got only six sessions to prepare the team before heading for the tournament last month.



Can booters roll back the years?

SPORTS REPORTER from Male



Those predictions would mostly be in favour of Bangladesh as the country boasted reliable forwards like Kazi Salahuddin, Enayetur Rahman, Sheikh Mohammad Aslam, Ashraf Uddin Ahmed Chunnu, Imtiaz Ahmed Nakib, Alfaz Ahmed among many others.

However, probably only a handful dare to bet on Bangladesh when the men in red and green take on the same opponents nowadays. And the reason could be the absence of genuine strikers in this Bangladesh side.

Bangladesh are all set to take on Nepal today in a bid to make it to the final of the SAFF Championship for the first time in 16 years.

Bangladesh defeated Nepal in four

editions of the regional championship -- in 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2005 respectively. But their failure to even score a single goal in their defeats to the same opposition in 2011, 2013 and 2018 goes a long way to show how Bangladesh's prowess in front of goal has diminished over the years.

Forward Rizvi Ahmed's brace gave Bangladesh a 2-0 win over Nepal in the 1995 edition before goals from Mizanur Rahman and Alfaz Ahmed helped the booters to a 2-1 win over Nepal in the semifinal of the 1999 edition.

It was Alfaz's long-range strike in 2003 and a brace from striker Rokonzaman Kanchan in 2005 that helped Bangladesh beat Nepal and keep a perfect record against them till that edition of the tournament.

Surprisingly, skipper Jamal Bhuiyan is not sweating over who will come up with the winner

against Nepal even though it took strikes from defenders Tapu Barman and Yeasin Khan to beat Sri Lanka and clinch a crucial draw against India.

"For me, it doesn't matter who scores. Even if we win 1-0, I will be happy. It is the media who are making a fuss over who is going to score. The most important thing to me is that we win," Jamal said.

Meanwhile, coach Oscar Bruzon thought that the team would need to make most of their set-pieces against Nepal.

"If you analyse, you can see that all of our goals in the tournament came through transitions, counter-attacks and set-pieces. Tomorrow [Wednesday] we are going to work in these areas and I think having control of the ball is going to be crucial for us," said Bruzon.

Germany qualify but have work to do

REUTERS, Skopje



Germany are on the right track ahead of next year's World Cup in Qatar after on Monday becoming the

first European nation to qualify, but the players know there is still considerable work to be done to reach world class level.

The four-time world champions crushed North Macedonia 4-0 to secure top spot in Group J with two games left to play, as they look to make amends for their shock 2018 World Cup first-round exit and their Round of 16 elimination at this year's Euros.

"We should keep our sights low at the moment," midfielder Leon Goretzka said. "There were a lot of things also in today's game that we need to be better.

"We have the quality but we also have to grow together as a team and we have to use every available training session to do that. We are on the right track but still have work to do."

Germany have won all five matches under new coach Hansi Flick, who replaced Joachim Loew following their disappointing performances in their last two international tournaments.

Flick, who took over in September following his successful stint at Bayern

Munich, seems to have found the right mix of youth and experience, with veteran Thomas Mueller indispensable once more after having been dropped by Loew for two years.

They have scored 18 goals and conceded four in their last five matches. Although their opponents - Liechtenstein, Armenia, Romania, Iceland and North Macedonia - have been far from European heavyweights, they are raising the fans' expectations.

"The last few games have shown what kind of quality there is in our team," goalscorer Kai Havertz said. "Especially after the Euro - that was bitter for us - we wanted to qualify quickly.

"That (run of wins) gives us a lot of confidence but we have a long road ahead of us."

The Germans still look vulnerable at the back, especially against quick breaks, while lacking some precision up front.

"When you play for Germany then it is about winning titles and reaching the highest peak," Havertz added.

"That is how we will arrive there at the World Cup next year but we have a lot of work before us. We will do everything so that in the coming year we prepare well for it."



Jimmy suspended for semifinal

SPORTS REPORTER

Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, the veteran forward of Bangladesh hockey, has been suspended for one match from the ongoing SIBL Club Cup Tournament for assaulting an umpire and attacking opposition players during Mohammedan's group-stage fixture against Bangladesh Police on Monday.

The former national team captain will miss Mohammedan's crucial semifinal fixture against Mariner Youngs Club tomorrow. The forward has also been fined Tk 50,000 for unruly action. The decision was taken at a meeting of the tournament committee yesterday.

The match ended



abruptly after Police players stormed off the pitch protesting a decision of the umpire, who, as per bylaws, declared Mohammedan as winners after waiting for 10 minutes. The high-tempered fixture also saw players, including Jimmy, getting into scuffles.

Bangladesh Hockey Federation's vice-president Abdur Rashid Shikder told media that the decision was based on match report and video footages. He also said that the action deserved harsher punishment, but they were lenient considering that hockey returned after three years and the league will commence soon.

Meanwhile, defending champions Abahani will take on Sonali Bank in the other semifinal on the same day.

Tigers lose warm-up against Sri Lanka

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh suffered a four-wicket defeat against Sri Lanka in the first warm-up game ahead of the ICC T20 World Cup at the Tolerance Oval in Abu Dhabi last night.

Playing without three of their key members – skipper Mahmudullah Riyad, all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and pacer Mustafizur Rahman, Bangladesh posted 147 for seven in 20 overs. Sri Lanka, were in a were in a spot of bother in their chase, struggling at 75 for six inside 11 overs but Avishka Fernando's unbeaten half-century guided them to the victory target in 19 overs.

Fernando, in partnership with Chamika Karunaratne, added 72 runs for the eighth wicket partnership to guide. Fernando faced just 42 balls for 62 not out, his innings featuring three sixes and two fours. Karunaratne remained not out on 29 off 25 balls with a four and a six.

After top-scoring for his side with the bat, Soumya Sarkar picked up two wickets with the ball for the Tigers.

There was, however, confusion over the official score as none of the warm-up games were broadcast on and there was no live scoring update available from any reliable source.

Although Bangladesh Cricket Board's official media group gave some brief score updates, many had to rely on the Abu Dhabi Cricket Council's website which remained troublesome throughout the game.

Earlier, Bangladesh won the toss and elected to bat, with Soumya coming in at number three. The left-hander scored with

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH

147 for 7 in 20 overs (Soumya 34, Mahedi 16 not out, Liton 16; Chameera 3-27)

SRI LANKA

148 for 6 in 19 overs (Avishka 62 not out, Karunaratne 29 not out; Soumya 2-12)

34 off 26 balls, his innings featuring two sixes and a four. Mahedi Hasan was unbeaten on 16 off 12 balls in the end.

Bangladesh had lost stand-in captain and opener Liton Das in the fifth over after a 14-ball 16 while Naim Sheikh departed for 11. Mushfiqur Rahim (13), Afif Hossain (11) and Nurul Hasan (15) were also unable to make an impact as the Tigers lost their way in the middle.

Pacer Dushmantha Chameera was the pick of the bowlers for Sri Lanka with three wickets while Lahiru Kumara, Mahesh Theekshana, Wanindu Hasaranga and Dasun Shanaka took a wicket each.

Regular skipper Mahmudullah was rested to alleviate his back pain after missing out on the practice match against Oman A on Friday.

Mustafizur, who joined the side in the UAE, was also rested while Shakib will join the Tigers after completing his Indian Premier League stint with Kolkata Knight Riders.

Bangladesh will play their second and last official practise game against Ireland tomorrow at the same venue before returning to Oman to begin the qualifying round, with the first game against Scotland scheduled for October 17.



A long shot of the Tolerance Oval in Abu Dhabi last night, with Sri Lanka bowling against Bangladesh.

PHOTO: TWITTER