



PHOTO: STAR

India stand in way of women's 'ultimate goal'

SPORTS REPORTER

With an eye on the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship trophy, Bangladesh will be looking to improve on their performances when they take on India in the final of the regional football extravaganza at Bishreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium today.

The match will kick off at 6:00pm with T-Sports broadcasting live from the venue.

Bangladesh, who lifted the now-defunct SAFF U-18 Women's Championship title two years ago, should be well aware of the threat posed by India, who spoiled Bangladesh's party in two of their three finals appearances in the SAFF U-15 Women's Championships from 2017 to 2019.

Although the hosts stormed into the final

with a draw and three wins in the group stages, including a 1-0 win over India, head coach Golam Rabhani Choton was cautious of his opponents, who defeated Bangladesh 9-0 in the 2006 edition, 1-0 in the 2010 edition and 6-0 in the 2012 edition of the AFC U-19 Women's Championship Qualifiers.

"The girls' performance in the group stage was a reflection of consistency and improvement. I am happy with their performance because they achieved the initial goal of reaching the final. But the ultimate goal hasn't been achieved yet. I think the girls have to improve their performance because it is India," Choton said at a pre-final conference at the BFF House yesterday.

The long-serving coach will see his side bolstered by the return of five regular players, who were rested in a 12-0 win over Sri Lanka in

the final group-stage match. Choton will also have the edge over India in terms of having more experienced players in his squad as well as on-song goalscorers.

"We tried our best in the group-stage matches to stay ahead of everyone. We are ready to play the final, and rectify any mistakes we made in the group-stage matches. We will go out to win the match," captain Maria Manda said.

Alex Mario Ambrose, Choton's counterpart, is also looking to deliver a good game, terming Bangladesh a well-organised team with good players from back to front.

"We are happy to have reached the final and are looking forward to a good final. Every final is difficult, especially when you play against the home team, who are well-organised and have good defenders, midfielders and forwards. But we are also a disciplined side."

Mushy has a go at alleviating troubles

SPORTS REPORTER

Batting remains the core concern for Bangladesh ahead of any series be it at home or overseas, but when it comes to a series away in New Zealand, those batting concerns deepen and can be narrowed down to particular aspects.

In New Zealand, Bangladesh have displayed batting brilliances such as Tamim Iqbal's 126, Soumya Sarkar's 149, Mahmudullah Riyad's 146, Shakib Al Hasan's 217 and Mushfiqur Rahim's 159. All these knocks were registered by the Tigers in the four Tests played in New Zealand since 2017.

However, despite these individual cameos, Bangladesh lost all four of those encounters, including innings defeats in two matches. In fact, Bangladesh have lost all 33 matches across the formats in the nation, including nine Tests.

On the back of a string of defeats, including whitewashes to Pakistan at home in T20I and Test series after a dismal performance at the T20 World Cup, Bangladesh are now preparing for a two-Test series against New Zealand starting from January 1.

Understandably, before such a challenging series that is also part of the World Test Championship (WTC), the prime concern for the Tigers is their batting department.

With Shakib and Tamim out due to injuries and Mahmudullah having retired

from Tests, Bangladesh travelled to New Zealand with a fairly inexperienced lot. Hence, Mushfiqur, the most experienced player in the squad, was seen sharing his experience with the batters.

"There is a huge difference between red-ball cricket and white-ball cricket in New Zealand. There is always something for the bowlers at the beginning of a Test," Mushfiqur cautioned to the likes of Shadman Islam, Test skipper Mominul Haque, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Liton Das.

All these players, alongside batting coach Ashwell Prince and head coach Russell Domingo, were sitting in a circle as Mushfiqur imparted valuable insight after their first outdoor practice session at the Lincoln University Ground in Christchurch, 11 days after landing in the country.

"However, if anyone can settle down, he can score plenty of runs. Because the surfaces here offer consistent bounce and the ball comes onto the bat nicely," Mushfiqur added.

For the time being, Mushfiqur did his part by sharing his experience with others. What the likes of Joy, Liton and Shadman probably have to realise themselves is that even if one of them finds a way to score big by utilising their skills and the advice given by Mushfiqur, they still need to show consistency. Others in the team will also need to step up and provide the collective approach that has eluded the Tigers on their previous tours of New Zealand.



Japan, Korea set up surprise final

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The final of the Asian Champions Trophy is set to be contested without either Pakistan or India for the first time in the tournament's history as Japan and South Korea defeated last edition's joint-champions in the semifinals at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Japan produced the biggest upset in the tournament yesterday, handing an emphatic 5-3 defeat to India. It was India's first loss to Japan in the eight years following a 2-1 defeat in the 2013 Asian Champions Trophy. Meanwhile, South Korea notched up a nerve-wracking 6-5 win over Pakistan in the first semifinal to confirm their maiden final berth in the Asian Champions Trophy. It was South Korea's first win over Pakistan in eight years as well, following a 2-1 semifinal win in the 2013 Asia Cup.

India and Pakistan contested the final of the Asian Champions Trophy four times in five prior editions. Pakistan and Japan contested it once during the third edition in 2013, with Pakistan winning 3-1.

Under floodlights, Japan -- who suffered



a 6-0 defeat to India in the group stage -- looked determined to turn the tables and took a 2-0 lead within the first two minutes against third-ranked India, who were left chasing shadows and lagged behind 5-1 at one stage before reimbursing two goals in the last quarter.

Graham Reid's charges were well below their usual levels and failed to match the Japan's pace, surrendering meekly to the 15th-ranked nation in the world.

In the day's first match, South Korea's Jonghyun Jang not only struck the winning goal but also smashed a hattrick to power to take his side into the final.

Similar to the group-stage game that ended in a 3-3 draw, Pakistan and Korea fought neck-and-neck throughout the 60-minute game before Korea came out on top to claim a maiden final berth.

Pakistan took an early third-minute lead but their lead crumbled after conceding

two consecutive penalty strokes, converted by Jonghyun, in the first quarter.

Having lost the lead, 17th-ranked Pakistan could not break through 16th-ranked Korea till the last minute.

They levelled the margin four times but continued to struggle against Jonghyun, who struck the winning goal four minutes from time, leaving Pakistan to contest the third-place decider with their arch-rivals India.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Amite, Towhid notch tons

SPORTS REPORTER

Young Towhid Hridoy struck an unbeaten century, his maiden ton in first-class cricket, and was ably supported by another centurion Amite Hasan as BCB South Zone put up a big score on the third day of their encounter against BCB North Zone at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

Amite's patient 373-ball 131 and Towhid's unbeaten 159 off 286 deliveries propelled South Zone to 350 for three, still 35 runs behind North Zone's first innings total before stumps yesterday.

However, despite the two tons, the match between South Zone and North Zone is headed towards an expected draw as both the teams are yet to bat in their second innings.

South Zone had resumed the day on 112 for two with Amite and Towhid at the crease. The duo had put on a



'What happens off the field is irrelevant'

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Test captain Dean Elgar says he will not let the allegations of racist conduct that have come to light at Cricket South Africa in recent months become an excuse for failure as his side prepare to host India in a three-match series from Sunday.

Director of cricket Graeme Smith, who denies the claims, and national team coach Mark Boucher were among a number of CSA employees implicated in "tentative findings" made by the Social Justice and Nation Building Ombudsman into alleged past discrimination.

CSA confirmed on Tuesday they would investigate the conduct of everyone implicated in the report, though only once the series with India has concluded.

"What happens off the field for me is irrelevant now," Elgar told reporters on Tuesday. "As a playing unit we have been through such crappy times (amid the COVID-19 pandemic) that we have formulated such a good bond within our group."

"We must be mindful that if things are bad off the field, we can't use that as a cop-out for us. We are a professional team and professional players."



Richardson happy to play a cameo

REUTERS, Sydney

Jhye Richardson is painfully aware that the depth in Australian fast bowling means his five-wicket haul in the second Ashes Test is far from a guarantee that he will take the field in the third.

Richardson came into the side for the Adelaide Oval clash with Michael Neser to replace the injured Josh Hazlewood and skipper Pat Cummins, who was ruled out after being adjudged a close contact of a COVID-19 case.

The personnel changes made no difference to Australia's utter dominance of the series and Richardson took 5-42 in the final innings as the hosts romped to a victory by 275 runs to take a 2-0 lead in the series on Monday.

Cummins and Hazlewood, ranked first and fourth in the world rankings, will return to the squad on Thursday ahead of the Boxing Day Test and Richardson was philosophical about retaining his place in the side at Melbourne Cricket Ground.



"The beauty of Australian cricket at the moment is we've got fast bowling stocks for days," the relatively diminutive paceman told reporters.

"I think that's a wonderful problem for the selectors ... to have. Whatever happens, happens. I had an unfortunate first innings and then bowled a little bit better second innings. I'm happy to go either way. As long as we're winning, then that's all we can ask for."

Playing his first test in nearly three years after a prolonged recovery from

a shoulder problem, Richardson conceded that he had struggled to make the step up in England's first innings as he went for 78 runs without a wicket in 19 overs.

His ability to bowl straight and get the ball to skid along the deteriorating Adelaide surface played an integral role in ending a spirited English rearguard, however, and Richardson felt it might be effective late on in other tests in the series.

"If my job is to hit the stumps, then that's what I'm going to try and do," he said. "Potentially being a little bit skiddier on wickets that are up-and-down, that may be an advantage."

Meanwhile, Cricket Australia on Tuesday called up fast bowler Scott Boland to the squad. Cricket Australia said he "joins the squad while the medical team assesses the fast bowling group following the second Test victory."

It was not clear which Aussie bowler was at risk of missing the Melbourne Test, but Josh Hazlewood is racing to recover from a side strain, which forced him to miss the second Test in Adelaide.

Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal and selector Habibul Bashar watch on from the stands in Mirpur during the third day's play between Islami Bank East Zone and Walton Central Zone yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

laudable display of batting, amassing a 258-run stand for the second wicket before Amite departed to a Md Sharifullah delivery in the final session of the day's play.

Although both the batters remained cautious at the beginning of the day, building their partnership steadily, Towhid ratcheted up his strike rate slightly as the day went by, notching 13 fours and three maximums during his unbeaten knock.

After Amite's departure, Towhid was joined by Zakir Hasan, who remained unbeaten on 17.

Meanwhile, at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Walton Central Zone set themselves on course for a victory following an all-round display with bat and ball on the third day of their encounter against Islami Bank East Zone.

After ending the day on 87 for one in their second innings, Central Zone will only be needing 112 runs more to win with nine wickets in hand on the final day of the game today.

Yesterday, left-arm spinner Hasan Murad bagged a four-wicket haul after pacers Abu Hider Rony and Mirtunjoy Chowdhury provided Central Zone with the start they were looking for as they bundled out East Zone for 180.

After that, Mohammad Mithun and Soumya Sarkar provided stability at the top, remaining unbeaten on 42 and 33 runs respectively, as Central Zone ended the day on top.