



# Kalsindur fairytale's unfair narrative

AMINUL ISLAM FROM MYMENSINGH

When the success story of the Kalsindur girls broke out in mainstream media, it had sent massive ripples throughout Bangladesh, in an outside of its sporting sphere. Countless jaws had dropped, happiness escalated off the roof and then diffused and deserving accolades and recognitions kept flowing for the darlings of the country who emerged from the Garo foothills of the Dhobaura upazila in Mymensingh.

Unfortunately, not all fairytales are known to have happy endings. The way things have digressed there, it could be hypothesized that had these budding female footballers not earned their deserving place in a school textbook, this Kalsindur story would end up becoming no more than an urban legend, or a footnote in history.

It's indeed unfair for Maria Manda and her band of sisters, part of the SAFF 2021 Under-19 title winning team among others, to witness the ongoing development in the place where they created some supernova- esque explosion out of nowhere, starting from 2011.

The story titled 'The Unbeaten Girls' in the higher- secondary textbook titled 'English For Today' tells the struggle- story of the likes of Maria, Sanjida Akhter and Tahura Khatun. Such a story, the first of its kind to be printed in the country's textbook, obviously makes the residents of Kalsindur proud knowing that future generations will read about the history they all had the privilege to witness.

From Anwar Hossain, chairman of Gamaritola Union Parishad in Kalsindur, to Abdul Hamid, an English teacher at Kalsindur Govt High School and College, to Mala Rani Sarkar, an assistant professor at Kalsindur Govt Higher Secondary School, to Jewel Mia, the coach of the girls' at the institution- they all echo the same sentiments of

overwhelming pride of witnessing the feats of a indomitable group of teenagers, their own, get cemented in something as prestigious as a textbook.

However, Mala Rani said, "What we received had far exceeded our expectations."

Expectations can be a tricky thing though. Often, the weight of a monumental reality caused by comparatively little expectation- backfires.

the inertial resistance as he started coaching the girls in 2011 with utmost devotion, after which his charges ventured into a mad run, sealing titles one after another and becoming district champions in 2016.

While speaking to this correspondent, Mofiz informed that in 2016, a rift formed between Kalsindur Govt Primary School and Kalsindur Govt School and College over the possession of finances as the senior

intended to be.

"That really hurt us a lot and at one stage, we were forced to terminate coaching," informed Minoti.

Mofiz lamented recalling how the high school authority went on to appoint a different coaching panel for the girls in 2016 and the fact that coaching had totally stopped at the primary school, the cradle of the mesmerising women's football in the country.

Minoti urged the high school authority to resume coaching in primary school as they recently had possessed a reasonable fund from administration but it is yet to be channelled properly.

As far as current proceedings are concerned, Mala Rani, also the current manager of the high school team, assured that coaching at primary school would resume soon. Meanwhile, Mohammad Enamul Haque (deputy commissioner of Mymensingh) and Shaliqur Reza Biswas (Mymensingh divisional commissioner) have already visited Kalsindur and they reserved a fund of Tk five lakh for the development of women's football there, sources said.

Someone like Tahura Khatun, a key member of the national female football team, who has enrolled for Intermediate (higher secondary) class at Kalsindur Govt Higher School this year, said that nothing could possibly bring more happiness than reading their own story of accomplishments.

But deep down, given the prevailing reality, Tahura and company would be longing to see the next generations sprout like they did. Their beloved mentor, Mofiz, had hit the nail on the head when he said:

"The girls must be shaped at the primary level for the future of Kalsindur football, which should remain colourful not only in textbooks but on the field as well."



In this case, things don't add up. Why a place like the Kalsindur Govt Primary School where the football gods have sung since 2011, unearthing an unprecedented pipeline of football talents, has seen all forms of football coaching halted since 2018?

Mofiz Uddin, one of the key architects of the fairytale, if not the most decisive one, sheds light on what went wrong. It was Mofiz, the then assistant teacher of the primary school, who broke

girls were playing at the national level. The row's intensity escalated in the same year over the deposition of twenty thousand takas made by a British expatriate in the primary school's account.

According to Minoti Rani Shil, Kalsindur Primary School's headmaster, a section of people with vested interests and ulterior motives- kept on criticising their activities and ultimately, the donation could not be utilised as it was

## Shunned as a player, Munna makes hay in coaching

DWOHA CHOWDHURY FROM SYLHET

2014 unfolded a dark chapter in Moynul Islam Munna's career. Despite being at his peak, Munna's career as a badminton player came to a standstill as he was barred from the national championship that year due to an internal clash between his coach and the tournament committee.

But instead of giving up, Munna chose to pursue a career as a badminton coach. Eight years on since that dark phase of his career, Munna has now been recently appointed as the head coach of the Mauritius national badminton team.

Munna's journey in badminton began in 2008 when national coach Shibbir Ahmed, who also hails from Sylhet's Baraikandi area as Munna, saw him playing badminton with a bunch of kids.

"I was just casually looking at the kids and realised that this one kid has exceptional talent. I called him, talked to him and then convinced his father to let me coach him," said Shibbir, who is also the head coach of Sylhet Badminton Academy.

Munna was just a ninth-grader back then. After years under Shibbir's tutelage, Munna got called up to the national team in 2013, secured third place in national junior championship and came second in Asian Junior Championship.

That year, he played Asian Junior and other international tournaments in India. He also



joined a club in Narayanganj. In 2014, the national championship was organised in Sylhet and Munna was asked to join Sylhet district team leaving the Narayanganj club. He obliged.

But what could have been another step in the right direction for Munna, turned out to be something unforeseen. It was then Shibbir and national coach Wahiduzzaman Razu, who inspired Munna to be a coach.

Munna migrated to Malaysia as a coach and over the years, he excelled in coaching.

During his five-year-long coaching career at the New Nation Badminton Academy in Malaysia, Munna served as the head coach for the Malaysia junior side and as an assistant to the head coach of the senior side.

In 2016, Munna toured Bangladesh with his Malaysia junior team to participate in a Junior International Tournament and won the championship and was runners up in both men's singles and doubles events.

Last year, he again visited Bangladesh with his team for International Senior Citizen Championship and his players ended up runners-up in the women's doubles event.

"Badminton players of Mauritius used to spend six months training in Malaysia and I am acquainted with them for long. In the first quarter of 2020, I was offered to be their head coach but the Covid-19 pandemic postponed the process," Munna shared how he went on to become the head coach of Mauritius.

Even after what had happened, Munna, however, is still interested to coach Bangladesh in future. "I was never given value in Bangladesh, even after my Malaysian players won titles coming to Bangladesh. Still, I am interested to work for my country," he said.

# It only takes a few to turn the tables

ASHFAQ UL MUSHFIQ

What had casually initiated with bare minimum resources as a means to maintain fitness after a hectic day at the office, Green Table Tennis centre slowly emerged, in less than a decade, into one of the most well- equipped table tennis training platforms in the country without any peripheral assistance.

It was back in 2013 when the seed had germinated. Pia Afreena Huq, owner of Green Table Tennis (GTT), recalled how two players- one of whom happens to be her husband- and a single playing board had set things into orbit for a set-up, which grew as big as a two-storied facility with as many as six tables.

Pia describes her establishment as 'A Social Entity', a place where people of all ages could show up to hone their skills or just play the game for purely physical exercise and recreational purposes.

However, GTT's journey was not smooth at all, as it is the case with most unorthodox projects.

"Starting with just two, the number of people gradually went up," Pia recalled. "All the expenses were carried by me and my husband. But making our efforts sustainable was very difficult."

Understandably, ping pong enthusiasts of all ages were drawn to the rare

environment, and thus the expansion of the facility was in demand. In 2017, a second playing board was introduced. Pia revisited how she and her husband found the pivotal solution next.

"So we came up with the concept of 'pay and play' for the first time in the TT [Table Tennis] arena. We started to charge a nominal fee and we had segmented it. One had the option to apply for a membership and pay monthly, or someone could just pay and play on arrival," she informed.

This new initiative did face resistance though. Pia further informed that people were not willing to pay money initially, but it had to be done to keep the establishment functioning at optimum mode. Other necessities such as a snack bar came to fruition as well.

At the GTT, children can socialise while developing their similar interests, service holders gather here after office hours, and elderly people, now enjoying a retired life, also come here to play and stay healthy in the process.

"Green Table Tennis is one of my favourite places. It feels more like home," said Aparesh Chandra Saha, a 64-year-old retired teacher of Viqarunnisa School and College.

Aparesh further said, "I used to play this game when I was younger, but couldn't continue when I started working. Now I



started playing again after my retirement. The people here are very welcoming and friendly.

"As long as I'm alive and healthy, I look forward to playing this game with all my heart."

Mr. Anand, an Indian who came to Bangladesh for work purposes, also enrolled himself to GTT to keep his physical and mental health in tune.

"Ever since I came to Bangladesh, I've been looking for a place where I can

entertain myself alongside improving my physical fitness," he mentioned.

"Green Table Tennis is a very well facilitated table tennis arena. I've found a lot of professional players and freelancers who come here and practice this game. Also, I try to participate in the tournaments."

The centre also managed to draw national table tennis players who, apart from refining their game, could train young players from scratch to an advanced

level. Apparently, federation set-up aside, there is no other entity in the country which is comparable to GTT, according to some national players.

National table tennis player Javed Ahmed said, "I haven't seen such a great facility anywhere else in Dhaka. You can find all sorts of equipment and gears and that helps everyone."

"The children who come here to learn, I try to pass the knowledge that I gathered from my coaches in the federation. And to witness someone winning a tournament in school after training from here becomes my biggest achievement."

And the fact that several corporate and amateur tournaments have been held regularly here- does helps the community develop further.

"Corporate groups rent our place to host their TT tournaments because you need a space big enough and some special logistics to conduct such tournaments. And we provide all of that," the owner of GTT said while adding that they look to serve society through passion and endeavour.

"Our goal is not to make a commercial table tennis organisation but to become a prominent social entity where anyone who loves table tennis can come here and have a great time. I believe that is our core responsibility towards society."