

‘Our focus is on next World Cup, not this one’

SPORTS REPORTER

The gloomy weather in Mirpur that halted the second day of the Tigers’ three-day training camp may not have had a huge impact in any other situation. But given the current scenario, it appeared to be a crucial miss for the team management, who were relying heavily on these training sessions to finalise the squad for next month’s T20 World Cup.

While most teams have already announced their squads well ahead of the September 15 cut-off, as of yesterday Bangladesh were still searching for an exact combination.

Technical consultant Sridharan Sriram was expected to gauge players but after a chance was missed, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon



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BCB president
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said they were planning to arrange a camp abroad before heading to New Zealand for the tri-nation series which precedes the World Cup.

After disappointing performances in the T20 format over the years and just one month until the T20 World Cup, the BCB boss tempered expectations by saying they were planning drastic changes and focusing on the next World Cup.

“We cannot adapt to the T20 format like other nations, which is why we are planning to make changes. What we are trying to do is not for the upcoming World Cup. We need to think about the next World Cup,” Papon said.

“Our main focus is on the next World Cup, not this one. You can’t change everything overnight. We are planning long-term and trying to prepare a squad for the next World Cup. Even if the upcoming World Cup does not go well for us, I won’t be disappointed. We are hoping to form a squad in the next six to eight months,” Papon told media yesterday.

It will be interesting to see whether the board manages to stick to their plan and bring some clarity in the process or if things remain the same going forwards. Only time will tell.



[Below] Two young Bangladeshi fans watch on from the stands as Bangladesh women’s football team celebrate their 3-0 victory over India in the group-deciding game of the SAFF Women’s Championship at the Dasharath Rangasala Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

Historic victory for women footballers

SPORTS REPORTER

The dream finally came true for Bangladesh women footballers, who earned their maiden victory over South Asian powerhouse India in the SAFF Women’s Championship at the Dasarath Rangasala in Kathmandu yesterday.

Sirat Jahan Swapna struck a brace while Krishna Rani Sarker scored the other as Bangladesh beat India 3-0 to pull up the biggest surprise in the region’s women’s football.

The result not only ended India’s enviable 25-match unbeaten run in the regional championship, but also helped Bangladesh top Group A and set up a semifinal clash against Bhutan, a potentially much lesser opposition. The semifinal will be held on September 16 while five-time defending champions India will square off against Group A winners and hosts Nepal in the other semifinal on the same day.

Apart from a goalless draw against India in the fourth edition of the championship in 2016, Bangladesh lost 11 matches against their mighty neighbours, including a 4-0 defeat in the last edition in 2019. Yesterday’s result is not just a massive victory for Bangladesh, but might be dubbed as the biggest upset in South Asian women’s football, where India had proved to be the unbeatable powerhouse over the years.

India may be 89 places above Bangladesh’s lowly FIFA ranking of 147, but there was no reflection of that gulf in ranking on the pitch as it was the Bangladeshi players who dominated right from the word go in front of a big crowd, which boasted quite a few Bangladeshi fans too.



After having survived a bit of initial pressure from India, Bangladesh played positive football to press for the lead and found the back of the net in the eighth minute, but Swapna’s effort was ruled out as Krishna had pushed India goalkeeper Aditi Chauhan in the build-up.

Bangladesh, though, took the lead four minutes later following a brilliant move, with captain Sabina Khatun setting up Krishna outside the box and Krishna releasing a defence-splitting through-pass for Swapna, who beat Chauhan with a placing shot.

The lead was doubled 10 minutes later when an excellent link-up play between Swapna and Krishna saw the latter enter from the left and the striker from Tangail placed the ball at near post, with Chauhan’s outstretched leg failing to stop the attempt.

India had some sporadic attacks but the Bangladesh defence, marshalled by Akhi Khatun, Masura Parvin, Sheuli Azim and Shamsunnahar Sr, played tremendously

well to foil almost every attack while helping the forwards go quick counter attacks.

Sabina, playing behind the forwards, turned into provider for the third goal in the 53rd minute as she released a clever through ball for Swapna, who finished the move with another placing shot past the keeper.

“I would like to salute the girls, who made history with this victory over India,” head coach Golam Rabbani Choton said at the post-match press conference. “The girls showed their ability today as they have been working really hard for last the five to six years.”

“We were confident, especially after the way they performed against Maldives and Pakistan and we believed they could win if they carried the momentum from the previous matches,” said Choton.

Player-of-the-match Krishna termed the victory as a result of teamwork and dividend for years of hard work.

Riyad’s farewell from T20Is in New Zealand?

SPORTS REPORTER

According to sources in the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), the board might consider giving farewell to stalwart Mahmudullah Riyad from the T20 format in one of the matches during Bangladesh’s tri-nation T20I series in New Zealand next month.

As a prelude to the upcoming T20 World Cup, set to begin from October 16 in Australia, Bangladesh are scheduled to play a tri-nation series involving hosts New Zealand and Pakistan from October 7.

Bangladesh might not include Mahmudullah, who led the Tigers in the previous edition of the T20 World Cup last year, when they announce the squad for the upcoming marquee T20 event at the BCB headquarters today.



However, as a gesture of respect for Mahmudullah’s service to the national team, he could get a game during the tri-nation series to say goodbye to the format, if the cricketer agrees to call time from the format. That’s what BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon also indicated yesterday.

“If he wants [to retire], then yes, [we are willing to say goodbye to him from the field]. If we can’t include him in the squad [for the World Cup] then I think, he deserves to say goodbye from the field. We must show him this much respect. As he won us many games, we can not overlook his contribution,” Hassan told the media on Tuesday.

“It also hurts us that Mushfiqur [Rahim] retired. I think we would give the players the respect they deserve if they give us the opportunity to give them farewell from the field instead of announcing it on their own,” Hassan added.

‘England are not just a one-trick pony’

AFP, London

Joe Root has warned England’s rivals they are no “one-trick pony” after the team wrapped up a sixth Test victory in seven matches with their new hyper-aggressive brand of cricket.

England’s fortunes in the red-ball game have been transformed under their new leadership team of head coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes.

The home side sealed a 2-1 series victory against South Africa at the Oval on Monday to add to a 3-0 success against New Zealand and a victory in the single postponed match against India.

It is in sharp contrast to their dismal record in the latter stages of Root’s captaincy, which ended in April with one win in 17 games.

The success under Stokes and McCullum has been attributed to unwavering positivity and has led to some rash dismissals, but Root feels England’s performances were more nuanced as the season progressed.

“We’re not just a one-trick pony,” he said. “There’s always going to be periods in Test cricket that you have to manage well and smartly.

“We’ve not got it right every time this summer but we’ve got it right more often than not and that’s why we’re sat here with six (wins) out of seven (Tests).

“We’re definitely not the finished article but to see the strides we’ve made in such a short space of time has been really a breath of fresh air.”

Dortmund face clinical Haaland

AFP, Manchester

Borussia Dortmund know too well of Erling Haaland’s ability to destroy defences in the Champions League, but the German giants may die by the sword they previously lived by when they visit Manchester City on Wednesday.

Haaland blossomed into one of the world’s most feared strikers during two-and-a-half years in Germany, scoring 86 goals in 89 games for Dortmund.

Eight games into his City career, the giant Norway striker with a devastating turn of speed, has already scored 12 times for the English champions.

Haaland holds the record for the most goals in a player’s first 5 appearances in the following competitions: Premier League (9 goals), Bundesliga (8 goals), Champions League (8 goals).



“His numbers in all his career, not just here but when he was in previous teams, is quite similar,” said City boss Pep Guardiola after Haaland struck twice in a 4-0 win at Sevilla to kick off City’s latest quest to break their Champions League duck.

“He has an incredible sense of goal.” Losing Haaland may prove the biggest loss of all with the 22-year-old threatening to rewrite records set by Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi that many believed would remain intact for generations.

Haaland’s double against Sevilla took his tally in the Champions League to 25 goals in 20 games.

At the same stage of their careers, Ronaldo, the competition’s all-time top goalscorer with 140, was yet to score, while Messi struck eight times in his first 20 matches in Europe’s elite club competition.

“I love the Champions League. I have to say this, it’s a big dream for me,” Haaland told Telemundo Deportes this week as he revealed the competition’s anthem is the

ringtone on his phone.

“When I wake up every morning, I listen to this song. It’s my favourite competition.”

Haaland’s haul in the Champions League was also why City were so desperate to sign him as the successor to the club’s all-time top goalscorer Sergio Aguero.

Under Guardiola, City have won four Premier League titles in the past five years and six in total stretching back over the past decade.

Yet, the billions invested in the club from Abu Dhabi since 2008 have so far fallen short when it comes to winning the Champions League.

Any doubts that the recruitment of a superstar could destabilise the collective effort that has characterised City’s success under Guardiola have been blown away within weeks.

“This fella is going to break virtually every goalscoring record there is,” tweeted former England striker Michael Owen.

“He’s too big, too quick, clinical in front of goal and he’s playing in a team that create dozens of chances.”

Dortmund know what is coming. Halting the momentum of the man mountain they used to call their own is another matter.



PSG stars Neymar and Lionel Messi train ahead of their second Group H game in the Champions League at the Sammy Ofer Stadium on Wednesday. PSG will be able to rely on what appears to be Neymar’s best version as the 30-year-old forward, who had failed to show his full potential in previous seasons, has already scored eight goals and set up six in seven Ligue 1 games. He also grabbed a goal and an assist in PSG’s 2-1 win against Juventus in their Champions League opener last Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP