

## Women eye final

SPORTS REPORTER

A buoyant Bangladesh will be looking to make it into the final of the SAFF Women's Championship for the second time ever when they take on Bhutan in the first semifinal at the Dasharath Rangashala Stadium in Kathmandu today.

The match will get underway at 1:15pm before hosts Nepal and five-time champions India lock horns in the second semifinal at the same venue at 5:45pm.

Bangladesh have advanced to the semifinals of the SAFF Women's Championship four times, but they only progressed to the final once, after an emphatic 6-0 win against Maldives in the 2016 semifinals.

On the other three occasions, they were eliminated by either five-time champions India or four-time runners-up Nepal. With neither in their way in this semifinal, Bangladesh will be looking to reach their second final.



However, Bhutan are a relatively unknown quantity. After losing 4-0 to Nepal in their opening Group B match, they blitzed Sri Lanka 5-0. It was their maiden victory after 16 matches in the SAFF Women's Championship and the first time they advanced to the semifinals in 12 years.

Meanwhile, Golam Rabbani Choton's charges can take heart from their fantastic form, which saw them notch three straight wins against Maldives, Pakistan and a maiden win against India in the tournament.

"We have to perform well because it is a semifinal. We discussed a lot of things with players and they will try to repeat their performances because we have to win," Choton said after yesterday's training session.

"Bhutan are of course strong side. They came to this far by performing well. They beat Sri Lanka 5-0 so there is no opportunity to see them an easier opponent," Choton said.

Bangladesh captain Sabina Khatun is also expected to continue playing a key role, although she dropped deeper against India after wreaking havoc in the heart of defence against Maldives and Pakistan.

"I will try my best. We have a different plan for Bhutan but our focus is on the natural performances we had over the past three matches," Sabina added.

Sabina's Bhutanese counterpart, Pena Choden, promised to put up a tough fight.

"Bangladesh are a very strong team with super-fast and good touches. They have great team chemistry. All we can do is to give them a tough fight. Hopefully, it won't be one-sided," the Bhutan captain said.



FEDERER'S CAREER IN NUMBERS

20 Grand Slam titles (Eight Wimbledon titles, Six Australian Opens, Five US Opens and One French Open)  
103 ATP titles  
237 consecutive weeks at No 1  
Turned professional in 1998  
£113,692,166 total prize money  
1,526 matches and 1,251 wins

## 'Tennis will never be same without you'

AFP, Paris

From racquet-smashing enfant terrible with a bad attitude and ill-advised ponytail to universally respected role model and modern icon, Roger Federer has attained almost saintly status.

More than 19 years after winning his first Grand Slam title at Wimbledon in 2003, which set him on the road to being acclaimed the greatest player of all time, Federer on Thursday announced his retirement.

At the age of 41 and trying to recover from a third knee surgery in 18 months, the great Swiss bowed to the inevitable march of time.

He leaves the sport with 20 Grand Slams, including a record eight Wimbledons, 103 titles and more than \$130 million in prize money alone, all driven by a rare grace, laser precision and a signature one-handed backhand.

The artistry associated with the Swiss brought him a global legion of fans bedecked in 'RF' hats and almost mystic appreciation. A columnist once famously even penned a gushing article headlined 'Federer as Religious Experience'.

Juan Martin del Potro tweeted after Federer's announcement: "I LOVE YOU, Roger. Thank you for everything you've done in tennis and with myself. Tennis world will never be the same without you."

Federer also held the world number one spot for 310 weeks, including 237 consecutive weeks between February 2004 and August 2008.

His net worth was estimated in 2019 at \$450 million and such is the cash-register recognition of the Federer brand that in 2018, he penned a 10-year, \$300 million deal with clothing manufacturer Uniqlo.

He was 36 at the time.

In his prime, Federer left opponents bamboozled.

"I threw the kitchen sink at him but he went to the bathroom and got his tub," sighed an exhausted Andy Roddick after losing the 2004 Wimbledon final.

### WHAT THEY SAID

Thank you for doing more for tennis than any single individual — Milos Raonic.

Cheers Roger. Thanks for the shared memories my friend. It was an honor to share time/experiences on the most hallowed grounds in our sport. Don't be a stranger. — Andy Roddick, who lost the 2009 Wimbledon final to Federer.

Roger Federer is a champion's champion. — Billie Jean King.

The saddest day in tennis. Thanks Mr Federer. — David Ferrer, former world number three.

It's been one of the great pleasures in life to watch you play. You've brought so much joy to so many. Good luck with whatever comes next. — Gary Lineker, former footballer.

Thank you for everything you have done for our sport — Carlos Alcaraz.

His path to super-stardom wasn't always so settled. As a talented young player, Federer's hair-trigger temper threatened to stunt his progress. "I had a tough time getting my act together out on court, trying to behave properly. For me that was a big deal," he admitted.

At just 19, Federer famously defeated

personal hero Pete Sampras at the 2001 Wimbledon tournament. Twelve months later, however, Federer exited Wimbledon in the first round.

It took a personal tragedy for him to press the reset. Just when he turned 21, his coach and close friend from his formative years Peter Carter was killed in a car crash in South Africa.

From that point on, the multi-lingual Federer committed himself to winning in style, no longer consumed by his inner demons.

Born on August 8, 1981 in Basel, to Swiss father Robert and South African mother Lynette, Federer started playing tennis at eight. Turning pro in 1998, he won his first ATP title in Milan in 2001.

His first extended rest, to recover from a knee injury caused by running a bath for his two daughters, led to a 2017 renaissance with a refreshed Federer winning an 18th major at the Australian Open.

It had been after the first of his five Australian Opens in 2004 that he claimed the world number one ranking for the first time.

Federer has eight Wimbledons, six Australian Opens, five US Opens and a single Roland Garros.

He won 28 Masters, a 2008 Olympic doubles gold medal with close friend Stan Wawrinka and a Davis Cup victory for Switzerland in 2014.

Had he not competed in the same era as Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, his trophy collection could have been more impressive.

Federer's stunning longevity saw him play 119 matches at Wimbledon (105 wins/14 losses), 117 in Melbourne (102/15), 103 at the US Open (89/14) and 90 at Roland Garros (73/17).

## 'Time for us to pick up the baton'

SPORTS REPORTER

Following the exclusion of Mahmudullah Riyad, and with another experienced cricketer in Mushfiqur Rahim having already announced his retirement from the T20I format, Bangladesh cricket is set to venture into a new era with a new-look squad for the upcoming ICC Men's T20 World Cup next month.

With the intention of reforming the overall approach and attitude towards the shortest format of the game, the team management will now have to handle the transition period followed by the vacuum of senior players with a lot of maturity and subtlety in the coming days.

Apart from skipper Shakib Al Hasan, all the other remaining members of the Tigers squad now have the chance to step up and prove their mettle.

The current scenario can be compared to the period in Bangladesh cricket during the mid-2000s, in which a young and talented Mushfiqur had replaced the experienced wicket-keeper and former captain Khaled Mashud Pilot to eventually make his Test debut at Lord's.

A similar sort of transition phase saw the likes of Shakib, Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah Riyad arriving to the frame and later going on to become the stalwarts of Bangladesh cricket.

Fast-forward to around a decade and half where Nurul Hasan Sohan now finds himself on similar grounds as the wicketkeeper-batter was named the deputy of Shakib for the mega event.

"The contributions from our senior players towards our cricket is on a different level as they took us a long way forward. So now is the time for us to pick up the baton and take Bangladesh cricket even further," Sohan told the media yesterday.

Not just Nurul, the likes of Liton Das, Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed, Sabbir Rahman, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and others who played international cricket for more than five years, will need to prove that they have come of age.

"Most of us have been playing for over five to six years now and we have all matured enough. We've played a lot of matches in the premier league, and maybe this will be the first World Cup for most of us," Sohan added.

"We go out in the middle only to win matches for Bangladesh and I think it (the absence of experienced players) won't have a huge impact on us. If we are able to play as a unit and not be concerned about the result initially and follow the process, we can do something good," Sohan said further.

In the absence of Shakib — who will join the Tigers' contingent after playing the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) — Sohan will be leading Bangladesh against the hosts UAE in the two T20Is on September 25 and September 27, respectively, at the Dubai International Stadium as part of the preparation camp ahead of the upcoming tri-nation series in New Zealand before the T20 World Cup in Australia next month.

There were, however, questions whether the conditions in the UAE can truly help Bangladesh to prepare accordingly since the bouncy surface and seaming conditions in New Zealand and Australia are virtually poles apart.

"No matter who you are playing against, it certainly helps you to gain experience as you can't take any team lightly in the T20 format. I think it's a very good opportunity for us that we will be able to play two matches before heading for our World Cup mission," Sohan added.



## England crave 'great cricket' in first Pak tour in 17 years

AFP, Karachi

England skipper Jos Buttler said Thursday he hopes his injury-hit Twenty20 side embrace the challenge of facing a strong Pakistan team on their first tour of the country in 17 years.

Security issues have meant Pakistan has struggled to attract visiting sides since an attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in 2009, but tours have slowly resumed in the past few years — with England the latest.



England last played in Pakistan in 2005 and were due to visit last year, but cancelled at short notice after New Zealand pulled out of a tour citing safety concerns.

This seven-match series is seen as a preparation for next month's Twenty20 World Cup to be held in Australia, and Buttler hoped his young side build up well for the mega event.

"We look forward to the tough challenge

and to be battle-hardened for the World Cup after this series," said Buttler, who will miss the first few games to recover fully from a calf injury.

Two of England's World Cup squad members — Liam Livingstone and Chris Jordan — are also missing this series as they recover from ankle and finger injuries respectively, while Test skipper Ben Stokes was given a rest.

Buttler said he hoped the injuries would give an opportunity to other players hungry to show their talent.

"Obviously the main aim for everyone is to turn up for Australia fully ready," said Buttler of the event to be held from October 16 to November 13.

He said seven of his squad — David Willey, Phil Salt, Will Jacks, Liam Dawson, Harry Brook, Luke Wood and Ben Duckett — had featured in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) this year and would know local conditions.

"Plenty of our players featured in the PSL and shared the positive experiences of being here and about how much the public love the game," said Buttler.

"We know Pakistan are a very great side. We look forward to challenge ourselves against them and I expect to see some great cricket."

The first four matches will be in Karachi on September 20, 22, 23 and 25, and the next three in Lahore on September 28, 30 and October 2.



Erling Haaland scores his 13th goal in nine games for Manchester City as his telescopic left leg prodded home a late winner against Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday, making City coach Pep Guardiola compare the acrobatic stunner to Johan Cruyff's 'Phantom Goal' for Barcelona at the Camp Nou in 1973, which had earned Cruyff the nickname of 'The Flying Dutchman'. Elsewhere, PSG and Real Madrid earned hard-fought wins while Juventus and Chelsea suffered setbacks with a loss and draw, respectively.

PHOTO: REUTERS