

Twin blow for Tigresses ahead of T20 WC Qualifiers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh suffered a major blow ahead of the ICC Women's World T20 Qualifiers as pacer Jahanara Alam and batter Fargana Hoque Pinky were ruled out of the tournament due to injuries.

Jahanara suffered a hand injury while training on Thursday while Fargana tested positive for Covid-19.

Left-arm seamer Fariha Islam was named as Jahanara's replacement while all-rounder Shohaly Akhter replaced Pinky.

Bangladesh, who were scheduled to take part in a practice game against the UAE yesterday, are in Group A in the Qualifiers alongside Ireland, Scotland and the United States. In Group B, Thailand, Zimbabwe, Papua New Guinea and hosts UAE will battle it out, with the top team from each group qualifying for the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa next year.

Bangladesh will take on Ireland on the opening day on September 18. Also on the opening day, Thailand will also lock horns against the UAE while Zimbabwe will take on Papua New Guinea and Scotland will face the United States.

Bangladesh skipper Nigar Sultana Joty was banking on quality and the buoyant spirits



around the team to ensure qualification.

"We are obviously looking to ensure qualification. It's not about the opposition or the conditions. We are focusing on improvement all the time. I think we are right up there in terms of experience and quality. The players have been together for a while so team spirit is excellent," Pinky told the ICC ahead of the tournament yesterday.

"This tournament is an opportunity to look at some of our upcoming talents like Marufa Akter, who bowls quick, has hard-hitting abilities and is a brilliant fielder. We can also count on the international experience of Salma [Khatun], Lata [Mondol] and Rumana [Ahmed]. We are nicely balanced."

According to the 25-year-old, the Tigresses have enjoyed good preparations before heading to the qualifiers.

"We played a major domestic competition, the National Cricket League, before coming here. This season's tournament was played in the T20 format, which has helped players adapt to a different style because our last international competition was the 50-over World Cup. Besides, we have been training continuously and I must thank the BCB for providing all-out support for our preparations.

"I believe we are prime contenders to qualify for the main event, and there, the challenge is to live up to expectations. I am very confident in the capabilities of my team, but we have to play our natural game and be consistent," she added.

Bangladesh will take on Scotland in their second group game on September 19 before facing the United States in their third and final qualifying game on September 21. All the matches will take place in Abu Dhabi.



PHOTO: SAFF

Bangladesh captain Sabina Khatun jumps in the air to celebrate one of her three goals as the women in red and green thrashed Bhutan 8-0 in the semifinals to book a place in the final of the SAFF Women's Championship at the Dasrath Rangasala in Kathmandu yesterday. (Bottom) Nepal players celebrate their winning goal against India in the second semifinal.

A step away from SAFF SUPREMACY

SPORTS REPORTER

Captain Sabina Khatun, who played in a deeper role against India, slotted home a brilliant hat-trick yesterday from her usual position as striker to guide Bangladesh to an emphatic 8-0 win over Bhutan in the semifinal of the SAFF Women's Championship in Kathmandu.

Bangladesh will now play the September 19 final against Nepal, who recorded a 1-0 win in the other semifinal against perennial champions India -- who had won the title in all five previous editions.

Sabina, who has played all five editions of the regional football extravaganza, is now the current edition's top scorer with eight goals from four matches. She has twice as many goals as the second-best scorers -- her teammate Sirat Jahan Swapna, India's Anju Tamang and Pakistan's Nadia Khan, who each have four -- and is in pole position for her first golden boot at the tournament.

The 28-year-old also raised her total tally in the SAFF Women's Championship to 23 goals after leading Bangladesh to a second final and may also reclaim the tournament's most valuable player award, which she claimed in 2014 despite Bangladesh losing in the semifinals to four-time runners up Nepal.

Although Bhutan had proven tough opponents in their last two meetings, they were utterly helpless this time. Their high line was exposed time and again courtesy of some nice combination play between Sabina, Swapna, Krishna and midfielders Maria Manda and Monika

Chakma.

Apart from Sabina, Sirat Jahan Swapna, Krishna Rani Sarkar, Ritu Porna Chakma, Masura Parvin and Tahura Akter also netted in the one-sided affair.

Sabina was ecstatic after getting her second hat-trick of the event, with the



first coming against Pakistan in the second game following a brace in the opener against the Maldives.

"I am very happy because our target was to reach the final and we made it. So we are happy," Sabina said at the post-match conference.

"Of course, it has been a landmark for me [to find herself as the tournament's top scorer] because I have been trying my best. The final match is still left. We play differently against different teams. The match against India was tough, but we tried to play in line with our game plan. That's why I did not get goals. However, I am feeling very good now."

The Satkhira native also hailed

coach Golam Rabbani Choton for the outstanding performances of the women's team.

"It is also credit to our sir, who has been with women's football from the start. Now he is getting dividends. We also dedicated our triumph over India to him because we are pleased to have such a teacher and guardian," Sabina added.

Giving his players the lion's share of credit, Choton also recalled the Bangladesh Football Federation's contributions to developing the batch of footballers.

"In October of 2016, BFF president Kazi Salahuddin felt that he should provide long-term training to the girls because they were scheduled to play the AFC U-16 Championship in Thailand in September, 2017. With that in mind, long-term training started. And it has continued with these girls, who have been together over the years. That continuation is paying off," Choton said.

Some of these promising footballers like Krishna, Swapna, Maria Manda, Marzia, Sanjida, Masura, Sheuli Azim and Shamsunnahar and the four senior players -- Sabina Khatun, goalkeeper Sabina Akter, Suinu Pru Marma and Aungmrachin Marma -- confirmed a maiden SAFF Women's Championship final in 2016, but they had to settle for a 3-1 loss to India in the final.

However, those experiences have only made them stronger and they are now bold enough to go toe-to-toe with the subcontinent's powerhouses like India and Nepal.



(L) Spanish midfielder Joaquin became the oldest player at 41 to score a Europa League goal on Thursday as his side, Real Betis, beat Bulgarian outfit Ludogorets 3-2. (R) Cristiano Ronaldo holds the match ball after scoring his first Europa League goal during a 2-0 win over Sheriff Tiraspol. It was the 699th club goal for the Portuguese superstar.



PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

Jordan's jersey sells for record \$10.1 million

REUTERS

Michael Jordan's jersey from the opening game of the 1998 NBA Finals sold for over \$10 million at an auction on Thursday, making it the most expensive piece of game-worn sports memorabilia in history.

The previous record was established earlier this year at Sotheby's, with Argentine soccer great Diego Maradona's "Hand of God" jersey fetching a staggering \$9.3 million.

Jordan's jersey was expected to fetch \$3 to \$5 million at Sotheby's "INVICTUS" auction and eclipsed the \$3.7 million spent in May on Kobe Bryant's Los Angeles Lakers jersey worn in his rookie year -- the previous record for a basketball jersey at auction.

It also broke the record for any item of Jordan sports memorabilia after his autographed relic card from 1997-1998 sold for \$2.7 million.

The jersey from the famed "Last Dance" season -- named after the 2020 ESPN/Netflix documentary chronicling Jordan and Chicago Bulls in their quest to win their sixth NBA championship in eight years -- attracted a total of 20 bids.



Boucher, Bayliss take IPL jobs

AFP, Mumbai

Outgoing South Africa coach March Boucher will lead the Mumbai Indians and Australia's Trevor Bayliss will take charge of the Punjab Kings in the next Indian Premier League season, the franchises said Friday.

Boucher, 45, will leave his current role once the Twenty20 World Cup wraps up in November, despite having a year left on his contract. He will replace Sri Lanka's Mahela Jayawardene as coach of Mumbai, the IPL's most successful franchise, when the cash-rich league resumes next year.

"Their history and achievements as a franchise clearly put them up there as one of the most successful sporting franchises in all of world sport," Boucher said in a statement.

Mumbai have won five IPL crowns since the league's inception in 2008, including three under Jayawardene. But the team have been disappointed in the past two seasons, finishing last in the latest competition after losing their first eight matches.

Boucher's remaining time with South Africa includes a white-ball tour of India this month, followed by the T20 World Cup in Australia.

Punjab is the third IPL team to be coached by Bayliss, who had long stints as England and Sri Lanka coach. He guided the Kolkata Knight Riders to two IPL titles in 2012 and 2014 before a disappointing two-season stint at Sunrisers Hyderabad. "I look forward to working with a talented squad of players determined to compete for silverware," Bayliss said in a statement.