



'NO ONE KNOWS HOW HARD THE GIRLS TOILED'

ROLL OF HONOUR

YEAR	CHAMPIONS	RUNNERS-UP
2010	India	Nepal
2012	India	Nepal
2014	India	Nepal
2016	India	Bangladesh
2019	India	Nepal
2022	Bangladesh	Nepal

BANGLADESH PLAYERS SWEEP AWARDS

- Top Scorer: **Sabina Khatun (8 goals)**
- Most valuable player: **Sabina Khatun**
- Fair Play trophy: **Bangladesh**
- Best goalkeeper: **Rupna Chakma**



Finally, it ended our long wait of twelve-thirteen years. The way all the people of Bangladesh prayed for us... I even saw many tag me in their comments on social media last night, asking us to bring the trophy home. So, this trophy belongs to the entire nation and the people of Bangladesh. We won the Fairplay award. Then again, I won the top-scorer award and the most valuable player award. So, it is a big achievement for me aside from winning the title. I think this is the best day of my life.

BANGLADESH CAPTAIN
SABINA KHATUN

ANISUR RAHMAN

"We had a dream of winning the SAFF Women's Championship but we could not do it. The dream finally came true through this group of brilliant girls," was the instant reaction from former national striker Suinu Pru Marma, who represented Bangladesh in the first three editions of the regional women's football extravaganza.

once a day," Suinu, who represented Bangladesh from 2005 to 2015, added.

Suinu also praised the Bangladesh Football Federation for the all-out support that they have given to groom these players over the years.

"We once played the international tournaments on the back of only two-four weeks of preparation. There were a lot of problems. There were restrictions from family members and the community, but



"They deserved the trophy," Suinu said. "They have been working really hard over the years. No one knows how hard these girls toiled every day. While everyone sleeps, they wake up at 4:00am every day to train."

That training has paid dividends for a team that has been together since 2014. They delivered trophies in age-group international tournaments before making history by winning a maiden SAFF Women's Championship by beating Nepal 3-1. But in the background, there were unyielding barriers.

"To be honest, there are endless tales to these girls and their sufferings. Some did not have enough to afford the bus fare to Dhaka. Some even struggled to get meals

women's football has been rising day by day on the back of tremendous support from the federation."

To keep women's football on track, Suinu urged authorities to hold the Women's Football League regularly and to organise more age-group tournaments.

"I was once paid Tk one lakh by champions Abahani in the women's football league and many questioned the payment, saying it was too high. But today the girls are getting Tk 5 to 10 lakh playing the women's football league and I want to urge the federation to keep staging the league so more girls are interested in football," said the 32-year-old, adding that these milestones would help women's football in Bangladesh go further.



YES! YES! YES!
 We made history and clinched our maiden SAFF Women's Championship title with a 3-1 victory over Nepal. We are South Asian Champions! Thanks for your support.

MARIA MANDA

Thank you everyone for believing in us and supporting us.

KRISHNA RANI SARKAR

Congratulations. Undoubtedly one of the biggest achievements in Bangladesh sports.

BANGLADESH ODI
 CAPTAIN TAMIM IQBAL

'I hope this is only the beginning'

ASHEFAQ UL MUSHFIQ

It was a cold, rainy evening at the Dasarath Rangasala in Kathmandu, but it was not only the weather that was conspiring against Bangladesh. There was also a hostile capacity crowd, cheering on hosts Nepal, but the women held their nerve and clinched their most significant milestone by winning a maiden SAFF Women's Championship title with a 3-1 victory in yesterday's final.

As the nation celebrated a glorious triumph, legendary striker Alfaz Ahmed put the challenge in perspective through the lens of the 1999 South Asian Games, when he led the men's team to a first gold medal in football against Nepal in a final at the same venue.

"When you play an away game, you're not just playing against the host team, you're playing in front of passionate supporters. Things mostly favour the hosts. The challenge is much bigger," Alfaz told The Daily Star. "But if you ask me how it feels to win, I can't put my emotions into words. The entire country is very happy and proud of what our women have achieved."

Sanjida Akhter, who comes from the famed Kalsindur village in Dhobaura, Mymensingh, recalled the struggles this team had to endure in a post on social media ahead of the final. She also reminded that this team belonged to everyone and was made up of players from all corners of the country. Skipper Sabina Khatun has spoken about the struggles that women face forging a livelihood through professional football several times in the past. Although she stated that the situation has somewhat improved, there is scope to make things far better.

Alfaz echoed those sentiments, adding that the future of women's football in Bangladesh could

As the nation celebrated a glorious triumph, legendary striker Alfaz Ahmed put the challenge in perspective through the lens of the 1999 South Asian Games, when he led the men's team to a first gold medal in football against Nepal in a final at the same venue.



only improve if domestic football was structured properly.

"Winning international matches is undoubtedly a great feat. It will give you fame and win the love of the people. But that is not enough when you think about making a living. If the women's football league is well-structured, it will give them an opportunity to not only play more often, but to earn a better livelihood."

When asked whether any footballer stood out in the tournament, the legendary striker put a spotlight on the team's overall finishing quality.

"Obviously it was a team effort," Alfaz said. "But the quality of their finishing is something that got my attention. They scored tremendous goals in nery situations. Scoring three past India is not something to take lightly. Even in the final, when Nepal got one back [to make it 2-1], I was a bit anxious. But they scored yet another beautiful goal to take the game away and seal the championship," Alfaz concluded.

Following their success at the South Asian level, Alfaz believes this team has the quality to expand their horizons on the Asian level.

"I hope this is only the beginning. Some of these players have the quality to go beyond regional success. And the way that this team is marching forward, I believe they can get themselves to a higher level in Asian football," he concluded.

Bangladesh's indomitable band of sisters

KHALID HOSSAIN

Before emerging as champions of the just-concluded 2022 SAFF Women's Championship, the women in red and green had played a final once before – during the regional competition's 2016 edition. But as the in-form Sabina Khatun, Sanjida Akhtar and company prepared to encounter hosts Nepal, the Bangladesh head coach Golam Rabbani Choton deemed his charges as favourites – not based on the track records against the four-time champions but on their current form.

Taking all factors into consideration, it would have been unwise to bet against the home side playing in front of a raucous full-capacity crowd at Kathmandu's Dasarath Rangasala, which saw Bangladesh fans vastly outnumbered.

However, Choton's faith in his charges made complete sense since the Sabina-led band of sisters, with several players from the SAFF U-19 champion side, have shown that they have what it takes to thrive

under pressure ever since they burst into the scene in the country's footballing sphere. And in the final, a 3-1 victory verified that notion.

With the way they operated throughout the tournament, Bangladesh won the hearts of football audiences, neutrals or otherwise. Skills, determination, tactical clarity and composure, were all on full display. This bunch of footballers – hailing from Satkhira, Rangamati, and now-famous Kalsindur village, and more – and their passion for the game was an embodiment of how a team game like football must be played in its most authentic form.

Earlier in the group stage, Bangladesh were expected to shrug off Maldives and Pakistan, and they did. However, the hallmark of a great team is to not just win against inferior opponents, but to win in style.

Against Pakistan, when Bangladesh were 4 goals up, Ritu Porna's stunning long-ranger – a goal she dedicated to her brother, who recently passed away – was a testament to the team's attacking



flair.

Then in the final group stage match, five-time champions India were in Bangladesh's way. Bangladesh emerged comfortable winners of the tie with a 3-0 victory as Bangladesh forwards – Sirat Jahan Swapna and Krishna Rani Sarkar – showed tremendous chemistry between themselves and skipper Sabina – being the only player in the team aged over 21 –

played the role of the playmaker, led from the front. The resilience and composure displayed by the two central defenders Akhi Khatun and Shamsunnahar Sr. and goalkeeper Rupna Chakma, who soldiered through despite getting hurt, were also laudable.

Aside from outplaying India, what Bangladesh players showed that day was their ability of neutralizing the strengths of opponents superior on

paper.

Bhutan in the semifinals was no match as they too suffered a heavy defeat, an 8-0 drubbing. What was most impressive about the Bangladesh team is how they kept the intensity despite going 3-0 up inside 30 minutes.

The midfield duo of Monika Chakma and Maria Manda, combining with the full-backs in Sheuli Azim and Masura Parvin, hounded the Bhutanese players like a pack of wolves while gaining possession.

The best teams to have graced the pitch in history have shown,



time and again, that despite odds stacked heavily against them, champion teams decide their fate for themselves. At the opponents' den at the Rangasala last night, the rainy conditions did not allow Sabina and Co to impose their natural attacking flair but still the women in red and green made the most of the opportunities to seal the game and the elusive maiden trophy.

Losing striker Swapna to injury early was a big blow since Bangladesh had featured a fixed playing eleven in the games prior. But the charges of Choton are not just all about the preferred eleven. It was verified when Shamsunnahar Jr. superbly flicked to give Bangladesh the lead in the 14th minute, just four minutes after her arrival before Krishna showed her finishing prowess on either side of the interval.

The way centre midfielder Monika set up the first goal – dummifying the defender the other way to make room for the cross from the right flank – showed the flexibility of the players playing in this dynamic side where the whole becomes larger than the sum of its parts.