

## Shifting landscape of women's sports in Pakistan

EKUSH TAPADER *from Sylhet*

There were obstacles aplenty when Pakistan's Nida Dar started playing cricket more than a decade ago.

But Nida never stopped believing in herself. And now, 12 years after making her debut for Pakistan, the off-spinner can sense positivity in the air. During a conversation with The Daily Star, the veteran cricketer said that Pakistani women have progressed a lot in all forms of sports over the years.

"When we started playing, it was very difficult for the girls. We are Pakistanis, we faced huge criticism. We did not have a favourable atmosphere. But the girls never gave up as we always wanted to move forward," Nida said as she found a little bit of respite from her training session on Wednesday ahead of their Women's Asia Cup match against Thailand today.

"But things have changed a lot nowadays. There are more opportunities for the girls, and representing Pakistan is a matter of pride for us. The girls are also getting



the support of their families," Nida added.

The 35-year-old also mentioned how her teammate Bismah Maroof was empowered by those shifting perspectives.

"You see, even Pakistani women used to think that if you play cricket, you won't be able to get married or have a family life. But seeing Bismah, even such perception is changing. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) also supports her tremendously. Her child sometimes even stays with her in the dressing room. Overall, perspectives are changing," Nida said.

Nida made her debut for Pakistan in 2010. Playing a total of 116 matches, she remains the highest wickettaker (108) in T20Is for her country. She also bagged 89 wickets in 94 ODIs, ranking second, only behind Sana Mir, in Pakistan's top wicket takers' list.

Nida's father Khawaja Rashid Hasan, who played first-class cricket, was the one who inspired her.

"My father has always supported me in hard times. But these days, most families are supporting their daughters to pursue a career in sports. If we can improve some issues, I think things will be much easier," she added.

She also talked about how financial aspects have improved. "Due to a bump in salaries, women are becoming more interested in taking cricket as a profession. PCB organises a lot of events these days. There is more financial aid than before and we have a central contract with the board."



Delighted Bangladesh Under-17 players run towards the crowd at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium after a spill from Singapore goalkeeper Isaac Lee saw the boys in red and green take a 2-1 lead, which they maintained till the final whistle, in their AFC U-17 Championship Qualifier Group E opener yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Tigers await Shakib as Sohan seeks positives

SPORTS REPORTER

New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson and Pakistan captain Babar Azam came to the captains' meet yesterday for a photo session ahead of the tri-nation series to be played between hosts New Zealand, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, but the duo was accompanied by Tigers vice-captain Nurul Hasan Sohan.

Bangladesh T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan had also missed the captains' meet ahead of the Bangladesh Premier League final in 2022, with Sohan incidentally filling in on that occasion as well. Prior to that, the premier all-rounder was absent from Bangladesh's team photo ahead of their departure for England for the 2019 World Cup.

This time it is Williamson and Babar that were left hanging.

It had been reported that Shakib was expected to reach New Zealand on October 6, but yesterday the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) wanted to clarify why the skipper would reach just a day ahead of the Tigers' first match against Pakistan on October 7 at Christchurch.

The BCB stated that Shakib was set to join the side on October 4, but 'complicacies with the visa procedure' rendered the skipper unable to board his flight from Los Angeles on October 2.

"The designated airlines resolved the issue and rebooked him on the next available flight from LA on 4 October, which he has taken to reach New Zealand," the BCB statement added.

While the delay was forced, the absence of the skipper ahead of a key series that is



part of the build-up to this month's T20 World Cup raises questions about the team's environment, especially with the team struggling in the shortest format.

With Shakib delayed, Nurul spoke about the need to adjust to the weather and play as a unit instead of focusing on individual performances.

"The team atmosphere is very good and the message that is being communicated is that we should not worry about the results but instead follow our process. If we work honestly and play as a team, if we can play without focusing on individual performances and instead put the team first, then we can play our roles according to the situation. All eleven players will not

perform on the same day. We are focusing on these aspects," Nurul said in a video message to the media.

Pakistan whitewashed the Tigers 3-0 in T20Is in Mirpur last year and have over a win-rate of over 86 per cent against Bangladesh in the shortest format.

Nurul said they wanted to take positives from this series heading to the World Cup.

"Before going to Australia we will be playing a few matches in these conditions and that too against teams like New Zealand and Pakistan. This will certainly be a boost in the World Cup. If we can take positives from this series in the World Cup, we can expect something good," he concluded as the Tigers await their skipper today.

## U-17s eke out fortunatate win in opener

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh made a winning start to the AFC U-17 Championship Qualifiers with a fortunate 2-1 win over Singapore in their Group E encounter at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday.

Curiously, Singapore scored all three goals in the game, incredibly bundling twice into their own net for own goals as Bangladesh notched up a win in front of nearly 2,000 spectators after Yemen had put up a scintillating performance to demolish Bhutan 8-0 in the day's first match.

With the match trickling towards a 1-1 draw, Singapore goalkeeper Issac Lee fumbled the ball into his own net as he tried to latch onto a header from teammate Jonan Tan following a long throw from Mohammad Ratul.

Bangladesh, comprising players from the BFF Elite Academy, completely failed to live up to expectations on the field despite having played 22 matches in the second-tier Bangladesh Championship League.

The boys in red and green struggled to even receive and control the ball on the artificial turf. They tried to press the opponents through both flanks but Singapore's defence negotiated the attacks before launching on the break themselves.

Despite erratic passing and casual ball control, Bangladesh enjoyed the lion's share of possession. The initial pressure from the hosts saw Singapore concede an own goal in the 10th minute after Nazimuddin narrowly missed a third-minute attempt after the shaky Lee deposited the ball to Nazimuddin's feet just outside the box.

As Paul Smalley's charges continued to penetrate, centre-back Brayden Goh struck an own goal while attempting to clear a cross from Nazimuddin. Five minutes later, Mirajul Islam darted into the box from the right flank and unleashed a shot, only to be thwarted by Lee.

Mirajul again who saw a feeble side-volley from a Rubel Sheikh cross easily gripped by Lee in the 27th minute before Singapore equalised from a counter attack, with Muhammad Syazwan driving home outside the box in the 28th minute.

After resumption, Smalley made five changes, although they hardly impacted the game.

## Tigresses take on Malaysia today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will take on Malaysia in their third Women's Asia Cup encounter in today's second game at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

After a defeat to Pakistan in the previous game, the hosts will be eager to return to winning ways against Malaysia.

Nigar Sultana and her troops won the opening game of the tournament comprehensively, beating Thailand by nine wickets, but were utterly outplayed by Pakistan in a game when the Tigresses were bundled out for just 70 runs.

There was plenty of talk about the pitch at the ground-2 of the Sylhet International Stadium.

Pakistan opener Sidra Ameen condemned the pitch, saying it was 'unsuitable for T20s'. Bangladesh's head coach AKM Mahmud Emon also lamented the state of the pitch, the low and slow nature of which caused his batters numerous problems.

But with a return to the main ground, the Tigresses will be hoping for a comeback today.

Earlier, in the first game of the day, Pakistan will take on Thailand at the same venue.

## Barca finding European ghosts hard to vanquish

AFP, Barcelona

It all seemed too good to be true for Xavi and Barcelona.

Their summer spending spree was validated by La Liga and their new signings, including Robert Lewandowski, hit the ground running.

The overhaul sent them back to the top of La Liga for the first time since June 2020, and the "Xavineta" (Xavi truck, as his project is known in Catalonia) picked up new passengers in droves, with Camp Nou attendances booming once more.

But the thorn in their side, their Champions League failure over the past seven campaigns, remains.

After last year's humiliating group stage exit, Tuesday's 1-0 defeat by Inter Milan puts Barcelona in a precarious position.

They welcome the Italians next week at Camp Nou, a match which they must win, with Bayern Munich leading Group C on nine points, ahead of Inter on six, Barca on three and pointless Viktoria Plzen bottom.

After the lavish investment in Lewandowski, Raphinha and Jules Kounde, among others, there are no excuses for failure -- although Barcelona left San Siro with plenty of ammunition.

On Monday, Xavi insisted La Liga was a fairer competition than the Champions League, which comes down to a handful of crucial moments, tiny details, and was proven right quicker than he hoped.

Barcelona had a goal harshly ruled out for handball and were denied a penalty when Denzel Dumfries handled in the area late on. In a game of few clear-cut chances, these moments were decisive.

It didn't help that Ousmane Dembele, who has sparked this season, was at his inconsistent worst, with his crosses going awry. It was only when he got one right that Barcelona did create danger.

Andre Onana was drawn out and could only deflect the ball into Pedri's path, for the midfielder to tap home. However, the goalkeeper nudged the ball against Ansu Fati's hand on its way to Pedri, and after watching it again, Slovenian referee Slavko Vincic disallowed the goal.

Barcelona left the pitch furious as Dumfries handled in stoppage time, but this time the official did not re-watch the incident on the pitch-side VAR screen.

"I am furious. It is an injustice," said Xavi. "Referees have to come out and explain themselves because I don't understand anything. (He) did not want to give me an explanation after the game."

Any other outcome than a win against Inter next week would leave them likely needing to beat Bayern, a team they have lost against five times in a row.

Barcelona hoped with the remodelling of the squad their European ghosts from the past could be forgotten, but their visit to Milan shows that will not be as easy as it looked.



Hakan Calhanoglu celebrates after lashing in the decisive goal on the stroke of half-time in their 1-0 win over Barcelona in a Champions League group stage encounter in Milan on Tuesday. Elsewhere, Club Brugge continued their stunning run as they beat Atletico Madrid 2-0. Liverpool also eased to a comfortable 2-0 win against Rangers while Napoli underlined their credentials with an impressive 6-1 thrashing of 10-man Ajax in Amsterdam.

PHOTO: COLLECTED