

Shorna makes it in U-19 WC XI

SPORTS REPORTER

Shorna Akter was recognised for her efforts as the middle-order batter became the only Bangladeshi to feature in the ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup Team of the Tournament, published by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Monday.



The hard-hitting batter left an impression in the tournament with her lusty blows and proactive nature with the bat. The batter was also among the five nominees for the Most Valuable Player (MVP) award.

Shorna also hit a total of six maximums, only behind India's Shafali Verma who leads the chart for most sixes with seven maximums, throughout the tournament. Among those, the fan favourite was her massive six over deep mid-wicket against Australia in their historic victory in the tournament opener.

Shorna, who is one of three players alongside Under-19 skipper Disha Biswas and Marufa Akter called up for Bangladesh's squad for next month's Women's T20 World Cup, accumulated 153 runs in five matches, batting at a strike rate of 157.73. The 16-year-old recorded scores of 20 or more in all the games, with her highest score of 50* helping Bangladesh register a 10-run win over Sri Lanka in the group stage.

It was, in the end, a tournament of mixed emotions for Bangladesh. The young Tigresses started with a convincing win over tournament favourites Australia and went on to win two more to qualify for the Super Six as group winners. However, a loss to hosts South Africa in the Super Six saw Bangladesh bow out of the tournament due to net run-rate, despite winning their final game against the UAE.

Smith wins fourth Allan Border medal

REUTERS, Sydney

Australia run machine Steve Smith clinched his fourth Allan Border Medal on Monday, becoming only the third player, after Ricky Ponting and Michael Clarke, to achieve the feat.

Smith polled 171 votes, while nearest rival Travis Head managed 144, to claim Australian cricket's greatest individual honour which he had previously won in 2015, 2018 and 2021.

Former captain Smith racked up 1,524 runs, which included four hundreds, during the voting period and was crucial to Australia's rise to number one in the Test rankings.

Such was his domination in the two other formats that it did not matter in the end that Smith did not poll a single vote in the T20 Internationals.

Smith will be one of Australia's key figures as they embark on a four-Test tour in India where they hope to secure their place in the final of the World Test Championship.

The 33-year-old has been in strong form in 50-overs cricket too and famously quipped "I'm back, baby" during an ODI against England in November after a successful technique tweak.

He, however, lost the men's ODI player of the year award to David Warner on countback, while Marcus Stoinis won the T20 honours ahead of Josh Hazlewood. Opener Usman Khawaja claimed the Shane Warne award for the men's Test player of the year after a prolific 12 months during which he scored 1,020 at an average of 78.46.

Beth Mooney won her second Belinda Clark Award to be crowned Australia's best women's cricketer after delivering consistently across all three formats.

Djokovic may have settled the GOAT debate

AGENCIES

A triumphant Novak Djokovic paraded the Australian Open trophy around the gardens of Melbourne's Government House on Monday, his 10th title having added another notch in the plus column for those who argue he is the Greatest Of All Time (GOAT).

For some, the Serb settled the GOAT debate with his record-extending 10th Australian Open crown.

Certainly his vanquished opponent on Rod Laver Arena thinks so.

'He's the greatest that has ever held a tennis racquet, for sure,' said Stefanos Tsitsipas after losing 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5).

It seems inevitable that Djokovic, who returned to world number one with his dominant victory in Sunday's final, will win more Slams.

At 35 he is a year younger than great rival Nadal and except for hamstring trouble early on in Melbourne, he appears to be in excellent physical shape.

In contrast, Nadal's battered body broke down again at the Australian Open and he limped out with defeat in the second round, his title defence over and the Spaniard in pain with a hip injury.

Roger Federer, the third of the 'Big Three' who have dominated men's tennis for the past 15 years, retired last year with 20 Grand Slam titles. He sent his congratulations to Djokovic on Instagram - "Incredible effort, again!" - but Nadal was back in Spain being treated for the latest



in a series of injuries that have blighted his career.

Federer will always be the 'people's champion' in the eyes of many because of the graceful way he played, but it is Djokovic who looks primed to pull away with the record number of men's major crowns.

Djokovic seems to thrive on pain and feed off adversity.

Two years ago he won in Australia despite tearing stomach muscles, this year it was a hamstring that did not allow him to practise between matches.

If not for Djokovic's vaccine status, which saw him deported from Australia a year ago and prevented him competing

at the US Open, he may well have already been on 23 or 24 Slam wins.

"Haha, I told you. We created a monster... Sat on my couch and enjoyed the entire show. Soak it all in," Nick Kyrgios, beaten by Djokovic in the Wimbledon final last year, tweeted on Sunday.

Nadal, at 36, may be able to recover from his latest injury and even find the will to achieve another triumph on the clay of Roland Garros in May. Nadal is a new dad and as the calls grow from family and friends to stop punishing his body, he could bow out sooner rather than later.

There is a theory that he could call it quits at this year's French Open. Djokovic's coach, Goran Ivanisevic,

believes there are a few more years at the top - and more Slams - to come.

"Definitely two, three more years," Ivanisevic told reporters after Sunday's final.

"The way he's taking care of his body, the way he approaches everything, the food, it's amazing. It's unbelievable the level."

Some tennis fans will always take convincing to accept Djokovic as the greatest, despite that the number of Grand Slam titles says.

He polarises opinion, whereas Federer and Nadal are universally loved for how they are on and off the court.

There are those who see something too calculating in the intense, brooding Djokovic.

Controversy is never far away. Last year it was his Covid vaccination status. This year it was his father Srđjan posing with a fan holding a Russian flag featuring Vladimir Putin's face.

But Djokovic supporters say those traits are what have driven him to glory.

Djokovic clearly felt impacted by the controversies this year and talked honestly about them, whereas before he may have just batted questions away.

It was one of the reasons an emotional Djokovic called Sunday's title 'the biggest victory in my life'.

The Grand Slam numbers don't lie. But gaining universal acceptance from tennis fans as 'the greatest' may be an even bigger achievement.



Sylhet Strikers batters Towhid Hridoy and Zakir Hassan embrace each other after the former's half-century during their BPL fixture against Khulna Tigers at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. Hridoy scored 74 while Zakir made 53 as the hosts set up a challenging total of 192 for four in their allotted 20 overs.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Coaches' confidence comes good for Mahedi

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

This BPL has seen the rise of a few youngsters, which bolsters belief that the future of the T20I unit may not be quite as uncertain as it appeared after veterans such as Mushfiqur Rahim and Tamim Iqbal retired from the national T20 duties. However, there are others such as Sheikh Mahedi Hasan, who have not been able to find a grip on their national team roles yet.

Mahedi was dropped from the T20 World Cup squad last year after failing to impress selectors with his performances. Having played 122 T20 games, including 38 T20Is, this is a critical time in the 28-year-old's career. Yesterday, he showed some of the charisma he had shown in earlier editions of the BPL, where he was able to dominate proceedings and take responsibility for his team.

He played an inside-out shot over cover off Amir Hamza to pick up a six, hammered one short delivery for six and was able to rely on his strengths square of the wicket to good effect as he had done while in form.

His 43-ball 72, laced with six fours and five sixes, helped Rangpur to a five-wicket win over Dhaka Dominators and also to 10 points in the tournament. His best outing with the bat this BPL prior had been a score of 38 against Khulna Tigers. The obvious question was whether he could be relied upon in one particular position, especially



as he has also appeared in various positions for the national team.

Mahedi has been tried at the top in the national team but has also come in at number seven or eight. This BPL, he came in at number three on four occasions and opened the innings once. The consistency might have come good.

Rangpur Riders coach Sohel Islam talked about Mahedi's return to runs yesterday, saying: "When we picked him, the thinking was to play him at number three. He wasn't amongst the runs but he is now. We were very confident he would come good. We knew if he got a big score in one innings, his confidence would return. This is why he got opportunities consistently."

Maybe confidence and consistency in the batting order did

not always work in Mahedi's favour, but after having played so many games, he is no longer considered one for the future, but rather the present.

"When a guy is in a downward spiral, it's important to back him. I was always confident in his bowling but he didn't have rhythm with the bat and there was shuffling when he did play. If he was to get set in one position [it is better] ... and you need to give time to those who face the new ball. He was not a natural top order batter and since we tried him at the top, we had to give him time. The confidence you need to inject to allow him to play at the top was very important," Sohel said.

Usually used as a pinch-hitting option in the national side, Mahedi had shown more flair and versatility in BPL before.

Mahedi will not have a better time to showcase his skills and show his calibre for the national side. The future of the T20I outfit is the present for Mahedi given the vacuum created by veterans' retirement. The critical element now is consistency and Mahedi needs to pile up a string of performances.

"I think he is better at the top because, given his range of shots, he is more prone to succeeding in the Powerplay," Sohel said. Time will tell whether the required ingredient comes good for Mahedi in the national outfit too.

Real, Barca meet in Copa semis

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid will take on Clásico rivals Barcelona in the Copa del Rey semifinals while Athletic Bilbao will face Osasuna following Monday's draw.

The reigning Spanish champions will host Barca before visiting the Camp Nou, in the only round of Spain's national knockout competition held over two legs.

Carlo Ancelotti's side reached the last four after overcoming local rivals Atletico Madrid 3-1 in extra time in the quarter-finals, while Barcelona defeated Real Sociedad 1-0.

"It's a huge game, not only for the Copa del Rey, it's a big game across the world," Barcelona's sporting director Jordi Cruyff said in reaction to the draw held near Madrid.

Cruyff said his players had already moved on from their 3-1 win against Real Madrid in this month's Spanish Super Cup final in Saudi Arabia.

"We start from zero and it will be a wonderful battle," he added.

Athletic Bilbao gained their place in the final four with a 3-1 victory over Valencia in the last round.

Their opponents Osasuna knocked out Sevilla in the quarter-finals.

'Sometimes football is unfair'

AGENCIES

Roma manager Jose Mourinho claimed his suffered an 'unfair' defeat to runaway Serie A leaders Napoli on Sunday as he saluted both his team and Napoli, who moved 13 points clear of the chasing pack and a step further in ending their 33-year wait for the Scudetto.

Napoli continued their march towards a first Serie A title in over three decades on Sunday with a 2-1 win over Roma, but Mourinho praised his side for giving the leaders a tough time.

"From the first minute we played well. The team were always in control, we pressed very hard, we defended well," Mourinho said.

"Napoli suffered, we are the team that scared them most. The stadium seemed empty, and beyond the negative result I leave here more confident," he added.



Roma can consider themselves unfortunate to leave Naples with nothing after impressing despite the backroom drama involving away star Nicolo Zaniolo poisoning their pre-match preparation.

Jose Mourinho's team sit sixth, a point behind the Champions League positions and Milan who have been dumped down to fifth following their humiliating defeat and Lazio's 1-1 draw with Fiorentina.

"There are some matches where you lose but come away feeling better about the team. Sometimes football is unfair. Sometimes the team who deserves more loses," said Mourinho to DAZN. Despite unusual for a manager of Mourinho's character, the 60-year-old even praised his side on his social media following the defeat.

"What a TEAM what a SPIRIT what a PERFORMANCE. Let's go... See you on Wednesday at the Olimpico," read the caption of Mourinho's Instagram post of a team photo of Roma.



Lieutenant General Akbar Hossain, commandant of National Defence College, poses for a group photograph alongside Brigadier General Shahidullah Chowdhury, executive director of Abul Khair Group and other officials of the sponsor company and Bangladesh Golf Federation at the opening ceremony of the 8th Shah Cement-AKS Cup Golf Tournament at the Kurmitola Golf Club recently. The tournament concluded on Friday.

PHOTO: COLLOCATED