

Bangladesh off to winning start

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts Bangladesh edged Nepal 3-1 in their opening match of the SAFF U-20 Women's Championship after defending champions India thrashed Bhutan 12-0 at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Bangladesh looked like they were in for a dominant performance when they took a 2-0 lead within 13 minutes but Nepal fought back and gave the hosts a run for their money, but eventually in vain.

Bangladesh took only three minutes to break the deadlock when Aklima Khatun raced on to a long ball from Shaheda Akter Ripa and beat the Nepal goalkeeper Kabita with a placing shot. The lead was doubled 10 minutes later, with captain Shamsunnahar finding the back of the net following another long-ball from inside the Bangladesh half.

Nepal, however, pulled one back in the 24th minute, with Manmaya Damai's effort from the top of the box hitting the inside of the far post and nestling at the back of the Bangladesh net.

Shamsunnahar, the Bangladesh captain, got injured when a Nepal player's high foot hit her in the head towards the end of the first half. She got back on her feet after a delay but was subbed off at the start of the second half, with Airin Khatun taking her place. And her absence was clearly felt as Bangladesh lacked creativity in the attacking third in the second half.

Just as Nepal were looking desperately for an equaliser, Bangladesh sealed the victory with Ripa finding the far corner of the net with a wonderful volley from just outside the box in the first minute of stoppage time.

In the opening game of the four-team championship, India blanked Bhutan 12-0, with Neha, Lynda Kom and Anita Kumari getting hattricks. Apurna Narzary scored the first two goals for India while Nitu Linda scored the other for India, who led the first half 4-0.

Bangladesh will play against India while Nepal will take on Bhutan on the second match day tomorrow.



Bangladesh players celebrate one of their early goals during a 3-1 win against Nepal in their first match of the SAFF U-20 Women's Championship at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

'What matters is how mentally prepared we are'

Mehedi Hasan Miraz had an incredible 2022, which ended with a series win against India, and appears to bubbling with confidence as Bangladesh gear up for the 2023 World Cup. He talked about the dressing room culture, skills needed to fulfil the World Cup dream and the return of Chandika Hathurusingha during an interview with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): What are your expectations for the 2023 World Cup individually and as a team?
Mehedi Hasan Miraz (MHM): We have been doing well in ODIs over the past five-seven years so the expectation from everyone is to become World Cup champions. Everyone has to stay fit and perform. How much we prepare ourselves is crucial. The captain, coach and players will have a plan and this World Cup is one where we are at full strength.

Our seniors have the experience of four World Cups and juniors have at least six years of international experience. Anyone can win matches on their day. We don't lack skills or experience so what matters now is how mentally prepared we are. I believe this World Cup will be a memorable one for us. If it doesn't happen this time, I want to at least win a World Cup someday. Of course, luck is needed but we have a chance and our first target is the semis.

DS: What is required to make the dream come true?

MHM: Players know what they need to do. We have to develop skills. For example, I bowl a certain way but if I can add to my arsenal confidently, it changes morale. We have to chase 300-350 so we have to train to

do that and plan accordingly. It's mental and skill-based; not about experience.

DS: How did it feel to get Virat Kohli's wicket?

MHM: I always wanted to get Virat Kohli out. I created three opportunities but it didn't happen before. He survived once by taking a review but this time I got him. I really wanted his wicket in the Dhaka Test



and wanted to produce my best delivery. When you play T20s more, sometimes your shape is disturbed when you go for Tests. The rotation [of the ball] needs to be completely different in Tests. My coaches Sohel [Islam] and [Rangana] Herath help me a lot.

DS: What did you make of Hathurusingha's return?

MHM: He knows everyone and that's an advantage. He has plans

and the board wants something good from him. I debuted under him and I have grown after that so I will be able to learn more. He has been really successful and we did well under him in the 2015 World Cup. He has gotten more experienced now and we will share our experiences with him.

DS: Your thoughts on the dressing room culture of Bangladesh?

MHM: Everyone is very supportive of each other. It's been happening for 10-12 years; our seniors set the example. When I was watching highlights of the first ODI against India, I saw how happy the dressing room was and Shakib bhai even took me up on his shoulders. Without a good dressing room culture, such feelings don't arise. There is no jealousy. A team gets results when they are this way.

DS: How do you feel about those seniors approaching the end of careers?

MHM: They took us to a new level when we didn't have many dreams and their journey is still continuing. Our target is to take the team to the next step so that we can tell the next generation to go higher. That's how things grow. Our seniors always give us the same message.

Bale stuns onlookers

AGENCIES, California

Few tuning in to watch the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am on Thursday would have been surprised to learn that former Real Madrid star Gareth Bale was good at golf, but the former Real Madrid forward caught many by surprise after an impressive first-round showing on his PGA Tour debut in California.

Playing alongside professional partner Joseph Bramlett, Bale carded a seven-under 65 on the notoriously challenging Spyglass Hill course to finish the day five shots behind the Pro-Am's leading duo.

Just three months ago, Bale was his country's captain at the Qatar World Cup. But the 33-year-old's overwhelming highlight this time came on the second hole when Bale was given a drop on a cart path close to the green.

Faced with an awkward route over a curb, Bale sent a ricocheting shot bouncing off the bank and onto the green, the ball trickling to within four feet of the hole for a par-saving putt.

In the moment, Bale's first thought was to check the nearby cameras had captured the effort. "It was a great shot. Just tried to put it into the bank and hope for the best, like most amateurs do. It was nice to see it roll up nice and close," he said.

Siddikur makes cut in \$5m event

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman made the cut in the PIF Saudi International after securing a par half-way through the five million US-dollar event at the King Abdullah Economic City of Saudi Arabia yesterday.

Although Siddikur started with two birdies, the two-time Asian Tour winner could not keep up the good work.

The 38-year-old later carded two bogeys for a par on the day and ended up having carded 70 in the first two rounds for an aggregate of 140, which helped him narrowly avoid missing the cut by just a stroke.

The feat will help Siddikur with a substantial prize money even if he fails to make an impression in the last two rounds of the event, funded by the SoftBank Investment Advisers.

This PIF Saudi International is the first event of the Asian Tour and will be shortly followed by big-money events in Qatar and Oman over the next two weeks.

Donald contract extended till WC

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The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) extended the contract of Bangladesh fast bowling coach Allan Donald till the upcoming ICC 50-over World Cup, set to take place in October this year in India.

The legendary South African quick was appointed in the role in March last year with a contract till the 2022 ICC T20 World Cup. The 56-year-old also worked with the Bangladesh team during their last home series against India in December after the T20 World Cup.

"We have extended the contract of our fast bowling coach, Allan Donald, till the upcoming ICC ODI World Cup," BCB's cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus confirmed the news to The Daily Star yesterday.

According to Jalal, Tigers' spin bowling coach Rangana Herath will also continue with the Bangladesh team as his contract runs till the end of this year.

Earlier, the BCB had appointed Chandika Hathurusingha as the new head coach with the Sri Lankan expected to arrive in the country for his second stint with Bangladesh by February 20. Hathurusingha's first assignment is set to be the white-ball home series against England, including three ODIs and as many T20Is, starting from March 1.

The remaining members of the coaching panel are set to arrive on February 22, a day before the training camp for the England series is scheduled to begin.

Resolute MSC come close to spoil Kings' party

SPORTS REPORTER

A last-gasp winner by Dorielton Gomez helped Bashundhara Kings maintain their 100 per cent record in the Bangladesh Premier League as the defending champions edged past Mohammedan Sporting Club 1-0 at the Shaheed Dhirendra Nath Dutta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

Having won the away fixture, Kings now have a maximum of 24 points from eight matches. This time though, they were made to toil hard to break down a resolute Black and Whites, who were looking to end a sequence of defeats and draws after winning their league opener and currently remain on six points from seven matches.

In the game, with hardly any clear-cut opportunities on either end, it looked like Oscar Bruzon's charges would taste their first setback of this season. However, the fifth minute of second-half's stoppage time triggered the change of fate for Kings as Dorielton back-headed a long ball from Miguel Ferreira to find Ali Reza Khanzadeh galloping inside the box. Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujon Hossain then tried to retrieve the ball ahead of the Iranian, but defender Sadikuzzaman Fahim did not hesitate to clear the ball for a corner.

Little did he know that the touch taken at the stroke of the final whistle would come back to haunt him and his side as Robson Robinho curled in the corner in the middle of the box to find a leaping Dorielton, who successfully headed the ball at the target's corner.

Elsewhere, the other match of the day between fifth-placed Fortis FC and 10th-placed Chittagong Abahani ended in a goalless draw at the Bir Sreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj.

