

Sriram’s return still on horizon?

SPORTS REPORTER

Is Sridharan Sriram, the technical consultant of the Bangladesh national team during the T20 World Cup in Australia last year, slated for a return to the national setup? And if he does, then in what form?

Although technical consultant was the role thrown around in his last stint, the former India all-rounder had been in charge as a head coach during the Asia Cup in the UAE and the World Cup in Australia. After Chandika Hathurusingha was named as the head coach in all three formats, the question now being pondered is whether Sriram’s return is still plausible.

Khaled Mahmud Sujon, former team director of Bangladesh and head coach of Bangladesh Premier League’s (BPL) Khulna Tigers, suggested the door has not been closed yet.

“I’m not sure, but as far as I know he [Sriram] still has a chance [of returning]. I am a bit detached from that due to BPL. I had a talk with him before and maybe there are some demands and we want him to come. How much time can he give and in what capacity, that is important,” Mahmud said yesterday.

Whether the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had approached Sriram with a specific role remains unclear. And even as he had met with BCB high-ups during the ongoing BPL in Dhaka, they have not agreed terms.

Although Sriram had been in charge of the T20 side of things last year, whether he is willing to come as a technical consultant still remains to be seen. Will his return create a stir with Hathurusingha?

“Obviously every coach has a different philosophy. From that regard... I feel that Sri and Hathurusingha are mirror images of each other. I have worked with both and



held discussions and yes, obviously, there is the matter of philosophy but both are attacking minded and positive as coaches. Hathurusingha will be given time to build the side since he has been handed the head coach role. I don't think it will be very difficult [for them to work together],” Mahmud opined.

The matter of local coaches being appointed in assistant coaching roles was also brought during Mahmud's brief to the press.

“I had a good relationship with Hathurusingha from before. I have already talked to him over the phone and there was a brief discussion on the matter. He is very positive and he wanted a big team management unit with local coaching staff included so that when the team goes out of the country, the other players get to practice. We want to have some assistant coaches who are working with the team all day,” said the former team director.

There had been criticisms regarding Hathurusingha being a difficult taskmaster but Mahmud, who had been team manager during the Lankan's previous stint, had a different opinion.

“I don't think he's that strict. One thing about him that I really like is his straightforwardness. There are senior stars like Shakib [Al Hasan] and Tamim [Iqbal] who are very important but Hathurusingha does not create that definition in the side where young players won't be respected. He has always shown that respect to everyone. Back then he was younger but he is more mature now,” Mahmud concluded.

Asked whether he himself will return to the team director role for the upcoming England series, he said: “Not sure. It's BCB's call. It's not a permanent job and I fill that role when the [BCB] president asks me.”

Meanwhile, the BCB president Nazmul Hasan Papon has informed the media yesterday that the board is “looking for a foreign coach in the assistant role, and Sriram's name is still on the shortlist.”

Finch bows out in altered landscape

REUTERS, Perth

Aaron Finch, who called time on his international career on Tuesday, had his first brush with the elite stars of the global game when he faced Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid and Sourav Ganguly in 2007.

The Indians were in whites but this was not a Test match but a first-class match between Finch's state side, Victoria, and the touring Test squad at Melbourne's suburban Junction Oval.

Such matches have become an anachronism over Finch's long and distinguished career, but the erstwhile Australia limited overs captain still recalled the curtailed contest with fondness.

“It was amazing,” Finch said with a smile in Townsville last year. “It was meant to be a three-day game and 40 overs in, it was just rained out ... But I got a stat in the game. Didn't get a bat, didn't get a bowl.”

That stat came courtesy of catch at mid-off to dismiss India opener Wasim Jaffer for a



duck off the bowling of left-arm paceman Allan Wise. Although it was 11 years before Finch again faced India in whites during his brief Test career, he went on to accumulate an impressive array of stats in the shorter formats.

A T20 and ODI World Cup winner, he twice held the record for the highest score in a Twenty20 international with his 172 against Zimbabwe in 2018, bettering his own mark of 156 against England in Southampton

in 2013.

The limited-overs cricket that made his name, however, filled up the playing schedule and effectively killed off the first-class tour matches against states, counties and provinces in Australia and abroad.

“The tour games are something that have become less of a priority because guys tend to fly in later for tours,” Finch said. “The Big Bash is going longer and longer, which means the (Sheffield) Shield



Bangladesh captain Shamsunnahar wriggles past a host of Bhutan players during their 5-0 win over Bhutan in the last round robin match of the SAFF U-20 women's Championship at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. (Bottom) Nepal players celebrate after beating India to seal a final berth.

PHOTO: BFF

BANGLADESH STORM INTO FINAL

SPORTS REPORTER

Shamsunnahar struck a hattrick as Bangladesh stormed into the final of the SAFF U-20 Women's Championship as group champions with an emphatic 5-0 win over Bhutan in the last encounter of the group stages at Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Bangladesh will play Thursday's final against Nepal, who upset pre-tournament favourites India with a come-from-behind 3-1 win to send the defending champions packing.

India needed just one point to ensure a spot in back-to-back finals and they appeared on the right track after taking a 21st-minute lead through Apurna Hazary, but the Himalayan women changed the course of the match drastically by netting thrice in the second half.

Anjali Chand equalised in the 48th minute before Preeti Rai and Amisha Kharki struck in the 69th and 89th minutes respectively to book a final berth with six points from three matches, which included a defeat to Bangladesh.

Although an outright win for India would have seen Bangladesh into the final before they took the field against Bhutan, the upset in the day's first match meant Bangladesh could not afford to lose against Bhutan, who conceded 16 goals in their previous two matches.

Despite being eliminated from

contention, Bhutan seemed that they had come out with a different mindset and were aiming to finish the tournament on a high. They gave the hosts a run for their money in the opening minutes, but the Bangladeshi backline did not waver.

Golam Rabbani Choton's charges grew in confidence as the match progressed and established complete control, keeping the Bhutanese defenders busy as



Shamsunnahar Jr and Shaheda Akter Ripa whipped in several crosses while forward Aklima Khatun unsettled the backline with dazzling dribbles.

She also joined Shamsunnar in scoring twice. Aklima, who finished as the top scorer in the Bangladesh women's football league, got her first chance in the ninth minute when she dribbled past two defenders but failed to muster a shot with only the goalkeeper to beat. Two minutes

later, Unnoti Khatun saw her feeble shot blocked.

Shamsunnar was also frustrated in an attempt to break the deadlock after finding herself one-on-one with opposing goalkeeper Norbu Zangmo in the 17th minute. But she shook that off and turned provider for Aklima, darting into the box from the left and cutting back for Aklima, who took her time before driving home a grounded shot in the 22nd minute.

In the next minute, Ripa squandered a penalty when she drove wide but Shamsunnar made no mistake, doubling the lead after nodding home a curling Unnoti Khatun corner kick on the half-hour mark.

Bangladesh maintained their stranglehold in the second half and Shamsunnar, availing a through ball from Ripa, raced into the box to make it 3-0 in the 53rd minute. In the same fashion, Aklima widened the margin to 4-0 on the hour-mark.

Shamsunnar then completed her hattrick in the 66th minute to complete the rout after Aklima nicely set up the forward with a long ball.

Bangladesh could have added even more gloss to the scoreline afterwards, but multiple chances went begging and no further goals were added by either side.

Atsu found alive in quake rubble

AFP, Accra

Ghana national player and former Newcastle midfielder Christian Atsu has been found alive in the rubble of an earthquake that killed more than 4,800 people in Turkey and neighbouring Syria, Ghana's ambassador to Turkey said Tuesday.

Atsu, 31, joined Turkish Super Lig side Hatayspor in September, based in the southern province of Hatay near the epicentre of Monday's massive quake.

“I have good news coming. I am just getting information from the president of the Ghana association that Christian Atsu has been found in Hatay,” Francisca Ashietey-Odunton told Accra-based Asaase Radio, referring to a local Ghanaian community association.

The envoy gave no further details on his condition.

Chelmsford to host Ire-BD series

STAR SPORTS DESK

Bangladesh will cap off their Super League fixtures with three ODIs against Ireland in May, to be played in Chelmsford, England. The tour was supposed to happen in 2020 but Covid pandemic postponed it.

The Tamim Iqbal-led side will get the opportunity to ramp up preparations courtesy of a practice match on May 7 before the series opener commences on May 9. The second and third ODI is slated for May 12 and 14, respectively.

Prior to the Ireland tour, however, Bangladesh will host England and Ireland, in that order, following the end of the BPL. The white-ball England series will run from March 1 to March 14 and the Irish are set to touch down before the series concludes as their all-format series will kickstart with the first ODI on March 18 in Sylhet. The second and third ODI will also take place at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on March 20 and 23, respectively.

Afterwards, Chattogram's Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium will host the three T20Is on March 27, 29 and 31, while the solitary Test will commence in Dhaka on April 4.

Kings emerge group winners

SPORTS REPORTER

The quarterfinal lineup of Federation Cup completed when Bashundhara Kings handed a 2-0 defeat to Chittagong Abahani to emerge Group B champions at Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

Despite the first defeat in third match, the port-city outfit emerged group B runners-up to progress to the last eight berth while Muktijoddha Sangsad defeated Fortis FC 2-1 at Shaheed Birshreshtha Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj to qualify for the quarterfinals from the same group as one of two best third finishers in the II-team tournament.

In Cumilla, Bashundhara Kings dominated the match to have scored one goal apiece either side of the break as Tapu Barman tapped in rebounder home from close after a Suman Reza header off a Yeasin Ararat header came off the crossbar in the 40th minute.

Ten minutes into the second half, Brazilian forward Miguel Ferreira converted from the spot to notch up three wins in a row after defender Mohammad Rocky handled the ball inside the box.

In Munshiganj, Fortis FC needed an outright victory to put behind Muktijoddha Sangsad to seal a place as one of best two third-finisher but the freedom fighters' side finally succeeded with Nigerian forward Emmanuel Ikechukwu breaking the deadlock in the 44th minute before substitute



Sabuj Hossain cancelled out Muktijoddha Sangsad's lead in the 85th minute.

Though the stalemate was good enough for Fortis FC to progress to the last eighth berth, Muktijoddha Sangsad broke the hearts of Fortis in the stoppage time with Burundi forward Selemani Landry netting the winning goal two minutes of the stoppage time in the second half.

Scavenging to fund one's dream

REUTERS, Cairo

Nationally ranked bodybuilder Ali el-Sharkawy trains in the evenings, but only after the 29-year-old has spent the morning collecting rubbish to support himself through his sporting career.

Although he has won accolades including two bronze medals at national championships, like many other Egyptian athletes practising individual sports, he has been unable to secure funding or external support.

Instead, he uses a horse-drawn cart to collect waste and recycling across Gharbia, his hometown in Egypt's Nile delta, making up to 200 Egyptian pounds (\$6.59) per day.

“I wish there were better options,” Sharkawy told Reuters.

Sharkawy says he has not found state support for his bodybuilding career and that most funding is used for higher profile team sports like soccer. Sharkawy's coach, Mostafa el-Tamimi, said Sharkawy found his own success soon after starting training.

“He is seeking to participate in an international championship, but a bodybuilding career needs support and funding to provide nutrition,” he said.