

'Tears of victory' for Shamsunnahar

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Shamsunnahar had her long-cherished dream of winning an age-group title of the South Asian region fulfilled at last when she led the team to a 3-0 win in the final of the SAFF Women's U-20 Championship in Kamalapur yesterday.

Although the striker won the Women's SAFF Championship last year, she had to be content with two runners-up trophies while playing in age-group teams.

Now that she is about to graduate to the senior side, captain Shamsunnahar had one last chance to realise her dream, and she did so by leading from the front by becoming the best player of the championship and also the top scorer with five goals.

"Our target was to play in the final and since we have trained together for a long time and played in three tournaments together. We were runners-up twice and this was our last chance to go one step further as a lot of players would not be eligible due to their age," the elated captain told reporters following the final win.

"Since the tournament took place



Bangladesh players celebrate with the SAFF Women's U-20 Championship trophy after beating Nepal 3-0 win in the final at the Birsreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. (Inset) a section of the large crowd cheering the home team during the final.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Australia the team to beat

AFP, Cape Town

Defending champions Australia have undergone significant changes in their squad but the five-time champions, most by any side, remain the team to beat in the Women's T20 World Cup which starts in Cape Town on Friday.

Meg Lanning's team slipped to a surprise loss to Ireland in a warm-up game on Wednesday but prior to that they had lost just once in 27 T20 internationals since March 2021.

That defeat came in a super over after a tied match against India last December – they won all the other four matches in the series.

"Our squad has gone through a period of change since the last World Cup but I think that is a positive," said Lanning.

Seven of the team that beat India in front of a world record crowd of 86,174 in the 2020 final in Melbourne are in the squad in South Africa, including stars such as Lanning, Alyssa Healy, Beth Mooney, Ashleigh Gardner and Megan Schutt.

If anything, Australia have been strengthened by the inclusion of Ellyse Perry, one of women cricket's all-time greats, who was injured in the early stages of the 2020 tournament, while Tahlia McGrath has emerged as one of the game's leading all-rounders.

From the cauldron of a packed Melbourne Cricket Ground, Australia will start the defence of their title in quieter surroundings when they meet New Zealand in Paarl on Saturday, where they are likely to have to contend with a slow pitch.

They will also be up against arch-rivals New Zealand, the only team to have beaten them since the 2020 World Cup, other than in a super over. The White Ferns' two wins, though, were countered by four

ICC Women's T20 World Cup

Group 1

Australia
Bangladesh
New Zealand
South Africa
Sri Lanka

Group 2

England
India
Ireland
Pakistan
West Indies

BANGLADESH'S FIXTURES

Feb 12: Bangladesh v Sri Lanka (11:00pm), Cape Town

Feb 14: Australia v Bangladesh (11:00pm), Gqeberha

Feb 17: New Zealand v Bangladesh (07:00pm), Cape Town

Feb 21: South Africa v Bangladesh (11:00pm), Cape Town

We know from our previous visits that South Africa is a beautiful place to play cricket and all the venues look fantastic. Hopefully, we will get some nice, bouncy tracks where the ball comes nicely on to the bat.

Bangladesh skipper Nigar Sultana Joty told ICC ahead of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in South Africa.



victories by Australia.

Competing attractions

Women's cricket reached a high point in Australia in 2020 which is unlikely to be challenged in terms of crowd attendances in South Africa, where tickets for all matches remain available.

Advance sales for some matches have been promising, however, notably for the opening match between South Africa and Sri Lanka at Newlands on Friday and the final at the same ground on February 26.

A distraction for many players will be the Women's Premier League auction in India on February 13 which has the potential to take some players into a new stratosphere of earnings, while there will

be disappointment for those who are not bought.

All the women's matches are at the coastal venues of Cape Town, Paarl and Gqeberha.

The 10 teams in the T20 World Cup are split into two sections of five teams, with the top two in each section qualifying for the semifinals.

Hosts South Africa will have to be at their best to get beyond Group A, where they will almost certainly have to beat Sri Lanka and Bangladesh as well as either Australia or New Zealand to progress.

England will be favourites in Group B, which also includes India, West Indies, Pakistan and Ireland.

New faces dominate Ireland squads

SPORTS REPORTER

Ireland have a number of players in the squad who are yet to feature for the national team – 10 in fact – and their coach Heinrich Malan said they needed to find the right balance in approach in white-ball and red-ball formats as Ireland squads for the three ODIs, three T20Is and a lone Test was announced yesterday.

"We're not going to try and play like anyone else, we'll play our own way and that is the key message within our environment at the moment. We have a group of players who like to play an aggressive style in white-ball cricket that people like to watch, but

ODI Squad

Balbirnie (Capt), Adair, Campher, Delany, Dockrell, Doheny, Hume, Humphreys, Little, McBride, McCarthy, Stirling, Tector, Tucker, White

T20I Squad

Balbirnie (Capt), Adair, Campher, Delany, Dockrell, Hume, Humphreys, McCarthy, Olphert, Stirling, Tector, Tucker, White, Young

Test Squad

Balbirnie (Capt), Adair, Campher, Commins, Dockrell, Hume, Humphreys, McBride, McCarthy, McCollum, Moor, Tector, Tucker, White

in red ball it's finding that balance," Heinrich was quoted as saying in a press release from the Ireland cricket board.

Ireland have shown what they possess in the white-ball formats but their Test nous is only three games long. But in Peter Moor, they have someone with experience of playing Tests in Bangladesh.

Zimbabwe-born Moor played the two-Test series in Sylhet and Dhaka with Zimbabwe and has been named in the Ireland squad. Seamer Josh Little, who picked up 39 wickets last year and was named in ICC's T20I team of the year, has only been named in the ODI squad due to IPL obligations while skipper Andrew Balbirnie, currently playing in the BPL, will lead the side in all three formats.

'Relaxed' Real left Ancelotti bothered

REUTERS, Rabat

Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti was not pleased with his team's attitude during their 4-1 win over Egypt's Al Ahly in the Club World Cup semifinal on Wednesday, suggesting they played with fire in a match they should have finished off earlier.

After Vinicius Jr and Federico Valverde scored either side of halftime, Real wasted several chances to extend the lead and Al Ahly got a lifeline when they earned a penalty which was converted by Ali Maaloul.

"When we were leading 2-0 (early in the second half), we thought that the game was over and started to dribble a little too much. We relaxed and it cannot be like that," Ancelotti told a news conference on Wednesday. "This is a tournament that Real Madrid have a lot to lose and nothing to win," the Italian added.

Asha missed a sitter that would have been the equaliser for Al Ahly, giving the Spanish giants a real scare.

Real face Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal in the final in Rabat on Saturday after they shocked South American champions Flamengo 3-2 in the first semifinal. Ancelotti confirmed that forward Karim Benzema and defender Eder Militao, who stayed behind in Madrid for treatment of their injuries, will join the team on Thursday and could be available for the final.

European Super League coming back stronger?

REUTERS, Berlin

A future European Super League could include as many as 80 teams, Bernd Reichart, the chief executive of A22 Sports Management, a company formed to sponsor and assist in the creation of a breakaway football league, said on Thursday.

In a statement outlining the preliminary results of talks that A22 had with what it said was 50 European clubs and stakeholders of football, the company said change was necessary.

"The vast majority of them share the assessment that the very foundation of European football is under threat, and it is time for change," A22 said.

"Feedback suggests a European football league that is open, based solely on sporting merit, multidivisional with 60 to 80 clubs and a minimum of 14 guaranteed European matches per club."

Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus were among 12 clubs to announce a breakaway Super League in April 2021. But the move collapsed within 48 hours after an outcry from fans, governments and players forced Manchester United, Liverpool, Manchester City, Chelsea, Tottenham Hotspur, Arsenal, AC Milan, Inter Milan and Atletico Madrid to pull

out.

That left only Real, Barcelona and Juventus as holdouts. The ESL took its case to a Spanish court which subsequently sought guidance from the Luxembourg-based Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

"Our objective is to present a sustainable sporting project for European

club competitions available to, at a minimum, all 27 EU Member States as soon as possible after receipt of the judgment," Reichart said.

"The issues are clear, and action must be taken for the benefit of fans, players, and clubs."

A22 said there were 10 principles that emerged from the discussions, including improving competitiveness, financial sustainability and fan experience.

Spain's La Liga President Javier Tebas, a staunch opponent of the ESL, said the plan would only favour big clubs.

"The Super League is the wolf, who today disguises himself as a granny to try to fool European football, but his nose and his teeth are very big," Tebas wrote on Twitter on Thursday.

"Four divisions in Europe? Of course the first for them, as in the 2019 reform. Government of the clubs? Of course only the big ones."

European football body UEFA, the biggest opponent to the ESL plan which it sees as threatening its own Champions League club competition, did not immediately respond to a request for a comment.

The Football Supporters' Association, which represents fans in England and Wales and is a co-founder of Europe's equivalent fan body, said the ESL plan did not have any backing from the continent's fans.

"Their newest idea is to have an 'open competition' rather than the closed shop they originally proposed that led to huge fan protests. Of course an open competition for Europe's top clubs already exists – it's called the Champions League," said FSA chief executive Kevin Miles in a statement.

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India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja celebrates his fifth wicket, that of Australia batter Peter Handscomb during the first day of the first Test at the VCA Stadium in Nagpur yesterday. Jadeja's five-wicket haul helped skittle out the tourists for 177 before the hosts reached 77 for one at stumps.

PHOTO: AFP