

Choton seeks improvement despite big win

SPORTS REPORTER

Although Bangladesh began their AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers campaign with a convincing 4-0 win over Turkmenistan, head coach Golam Rabbani Choton demanded more from his troops in their crucial upcoming clash with Iran.

Iran and hosts Bangladesh are tied on three points each in the three-team Group H, but Iran have a superior goal difference after beating Turkmenistan 7-1. That means Bangladesh have no alternative than to defeat the visitors and claim top spot in order to script history by moving into the second round of the Qualifiers, a phase only the U-16 women's team has reached in the past.

At the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday, Bangladesh, sans injured forward Shamsunnar Jr, were made to toil before Aklima Khatun shattered the Turkmen resistance from a goal-mouth



Bangladesh romped to a 4-0 victory against Turkmenistan at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur on Friday to kick off their AFC U20 Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers campaign in style.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Tigers close in on path to progress

SPORTS REPORTER

Fans witnessed a fresh and fearless approach from Bangladesh during a maiden T20I win over England, leading many to opine that the time had finally come for the Tigers to invest in youth in order to make a mark in the shortest format of the game.

A Shakib Al Hasan-led Bangladesh ticked all the right boxes as they beat the world champions by six wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

After restricting England to a modest 156 for six, the attacking mindset from all the home side's batters was evident from the start as Rony Talukdar, who made a comeback to the side after eight years, did not hesitate to play those free-flowing strokes he had unleashed in the recently-concluded Bangladesh Premier League.

Despite facing a pace line-up that featured the likes of Chris Woakes, Mark Wood, Jofra Archer and Sam Curran, the Tigers never strayed from their mindset.

Youngster Towhid Hridoy also impressed on debut, displaying confidence and shot-making ability. He looked solid before being dismissed for 24 off 17 deliveries with two fours and a six. Najmul Hossain Shanto, who was the leading run getter in the BPL, continued his fine form as he struck four consecutive boundaries to English pacer Mark Wood on way to scoring a fifty.

According to Mohammad Salahuddin, coach of BPL champion Comilla Victorians, the improvement in pitches during the BPL helped batters express themselves freely against England.

"I think it's a very big achievement to



beat a team like England. The boys played fearless cricket and we were able to witness a wide range of strokes from them, which is a very good sign. The reason the boys were very confident about playing their shots was due to the pitches during the BPL being very good. Even if we had the ability to play strokes, our boys were not confident enough in the past [due to the nature of the pitch]. I think this time it helped them play freely. Since the range of shots increased, I think it will have a positive impact in the T20 format," Salahuddin told the media yesterday.

The Tigers also showed uncharacteristic energy on the field, which raised questions about whether age was having an impact on the team's fielding efforts and if it was time for the team management to bank on fresher legs.

"Age is not a big factor when it comes to

fielding. It is about how presenting yourself aggressively on the field and enjoying that determines your fielding ability. Fielding is something you can always improve. Age is not a factor. Since there were quite a few young players in the team who had come through a process like the Under-19 side and High Performance team, naturally their fielding has to be good. It's nothing unexpected. Fielding is a factor, but if you don't bat and bowl well, you won't be able to win a game," he said.

Salahuddin felt that the Tigers needed to carry this momentum and hoped that Bangladesh would go on to win the series.

"When you are chasing something around 150, there is always a winning feeling in the team. It may have been different if they were chasing a bigger total. I think England missed some tricks about how to bowl on these wickets, but our boys were able to show a fearless attitude. But it will be better if they can convert those starts into a bigger knocks," Salahuddin said, adding that Bangladesh should go on to win the series.

"I think Bangladesh should win the series since England have a shortage of batters. Whatever you say, England played with only four batters. Since they are short, I think we should take advantage and win the series."

Regardless of the result of the series, the Tigers think-tank needs to provide a platform for youngsters. Since skipper Shakib Al Hasan has his eye on the bigger picture, namely the T20 World scheduled for 2024, it will be crucial to see how the players respond in the coming days.

'Fantastic' Green cherishes Khawaja influence

AFP, Ahmedabad

Australia's Cameron Green credited the maiden century of his international career to his seasoned partner at the crease after Friday's marathon 208-run stand with Usman Khawaja against India.

Green hit 114 in his fifth-wicket partnership with Khawaja, who made 180 on a good batting pitch in Ahmedabad on day two of the fourth and final Test.

The middle-order batter, who returned to the team for the third Test after recovering from a finger injury, took the attack to the opposition but credited Khawaja for his hard grind.

"He's an experienced head that's played Test cricket for more than 10 years now, he's so valuable for guys like myself and a few of the young guys in the team," Green said.

"I'm trying to learn as much as I can off him, and luckily enough there are a lot of guys in the change rooms like that."

Green, standing tall at 1.98m (6 feet and 6 inches), reached his ton soon after lunch with a boundary, earning a hug from Khawaja.

"It's an incredibly tough game, and when you get moments like that you really cherish them," said Green.

He finally fell to off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who heaped praise on the 23-year-old.

"I hope you tuned into the IPL auction, it just tells you how the Indian cricketing fraternity rates Cameron Green," Ashwin said, referring to Green's \$2.11 million contract with the Mumbai Indians last year.

"I think he's a fantastic player."



Struggling Palace face City test

AGENCIES

While Pep Guardiola's Manchester City will hope to ramp up the pressure on Arsenal in the Premier League title race by winning at Crystal Palace on Saturday, the hosts' manager Patrick Vieira will be under pressure to save his job.

According to reports, the Palace hierarchy are concerned about being dragged into a relegation battle having failed to win a single Premier League game in 2023.

After hosting champions Manchester City, Palace face arch-rivals Brighton and league leaders Arsenal in their next two matches.

Vieira was appointed in July 2021 and led the Eagles to a 12th-place finish last term.

But their form has nosedived in recent months and while they are sitting 12th in the table again as it stands, they are only five points clear of the bottom three.

Palace's last victory came against Bournemouth on New Year's Eve.

City, however, will not show any mercy on Vieira's side, especially when there is a chance to close the points gap to two with leaders Arsenal (at 63 points from 26 games) -- at least till Mikel Arteta's men take on Fulham away from home the next day.

City have enjoyed a rare midweek off, but Guardiola's team selection could also be impacted by Tuesday's Champions League last 16, second leg against RB Leipzig with the tie finely balanced at 1-1.

Appeal of international cricket at risk: WCC

AFP, London

Cricket chiefs have been urged by the MCC World Cricket Committee to intervene urgently to ensure the international game can thrive alongside booming franchise competitions.

The committee, which includes former and current players, acknowledged the increased playing opportunities and financial health of the game but said it was vital to make it sustainable in the long term.

A statement issued by the body said the men's cricket schedule in 2023 was "saturated" with franchise competitions, which competed and overlapped with international series.

"Of the domestic tournaments, only the Indian Premier League (Twenty20 competition) commands anything like a window to avoid international clashes," the WCC said.

The glut of cricket across the globe is a growing issue for top players.

England Test captain Ben Stokes cited an "unsustainable" schedule when he announced last year that he was retiring from the 50-over format.

New Zealand bowler Trent Boult asked to be released from his contract with the Black Caps to spend more time with his family and make more room in his

schedule for franchise cricket.

The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) still has global responsibility for cricket's laws but the role of the WCC is to discuss the main issues in the game.

"Continued overlap and congestion will see an increasing number of players forced to choose between club and country, which will threaten the 'best v best' status that is so critical to the success and appeal of international cricket," it said in its statement issued on Thursday.

The WCC said the issue of overlap in the women's game between international cricket and domestic leagues was not currently a problem but urged boards to find the "optimal balance" between the two.

Former India captain Sourav Ganguly, a WCC member, said Test cricket remained the "biggest platform".

"That should always continue to be the pinnacle and I am sure that countries will give importance to it and find the right balance between franchise cricket and Test cricket," he said.

Fellow member Justin Langer, a former Australia opener and coach, said: "The difference between international cricket and domestic T20 cricket is that the whole nation cares when their country is involved.

"The best players' statistics are measured at international level."



Wout Weghorst celebrates after scoring the final goal in Manchester United's emphatic 4-1 win over Real Betis in the first leg of their Europa League last-16 tie on Thursday, just four days after their humbling 7-0 loss to Liverpool in the Premier League.

PHOTO: REUTERS