

Booters eye back-to-back victories

SPORTS REPORTER *from Sylhet*

Bangladesh are looking forward to tasting consecutive victories after a long time when they square off against Seychelles in the second FIFA friendly match at the Sylhet District Stadium today.

The match will get underway at 3:45pm, with satellite channel T Sports telecasting the game live from the venue.

Bangladesh won the first of the two matches 1-0 and they won't want to repeat the mistakes they made last September when they lost 3-1 against Nepal after beating Cambodia 1-0 in back-to-back friendly matches.

The last time the men in red and green tasted back-to-back victories was four years ago when they beat Bhutan 4-1 and 2-0 in two FIFA friendly matches in Dhaka under Jamie Day, who also guided the team to another back-to-back wins against Bhutan and Pakistan during the SAFF Championship in Dhaka in 2018.

"Everyone is aware of the whole objective which has not been achieved yet. We have come to Sylhet to win both matches but we are halfway there," Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera said yesterday.

"We don't want to make the same mistakes we made last September and everyone is aware of it and everyone knows we are going to face challenge again as we faced the day before yesterday," the Spaniard added.

Seychelles are expected to come stronger in the second match, especially given their second-half performance in the first match. Bangladesh are ready to deal with the challenge though.

"I think tomorrow's match is going to be more challenging and tough for us because Seychellois, who are ahead of us physically, will also come to win the match.



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They are likely to play attacking football and in that case we should take chances on the break," said captain Jamal Bhuiyan.

Seychelles' coach and captain appeared more confident than their counterparts as they vowed to win the second match.

"We will definitely go for a win because the team spirit is quite high and we believe we can play much better than we played in the first match and we can win the game," said coach Neville Both, adding that they would bring three to four changes to their playing eleven.

The 53-year-old coach also explained how they want to win over Bangladesh.

"I think Bangladesh is a technical team and they have analysed our game and we also analysed their game. They have some strong points but they have some weak points too, so we will try to gain some advantages from their weakness. And I think if we try to play more aggressively, that will be one weapon to win the game," said Neville.

Captain Stenio Marie said, "We are not far behind them. The first half of the game was not kind of our play, maybe the second half was our identity of play. The defence is our strong point but if we go for goals like Bangladesh, we can do better than Bangladesh."



Cristiano Ronaldo continued to score goals for fun, netting twice during Portugal's 6-0 drubbing of Luxembourg in a Euro 2024 qualifier on Sunday. "Two games, two wins! Objective accomplished. Happy to have contributed to this very positive start. Let's go," CR7 wrote on Twitter afterwards.

PHOTO: TWITTER



Hasan Mahmud embraces Taskin Ahmed, who stood out with his career-best T20I figures of four for 16 in two overs in Bangladesh's 22-run victory against Ireland yesterday. The duo shared five wickets between them as the Tigers' pace-bowling unit continued to impress.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'If they can, so can we'

SPORTS REPORTER

T20 cricket has been Bangladesh's Achilles heel for a long time. The Tigers' record in the format has been way below par and their style of play, planning, mindset and approach in T20s have always left a lot to be desired.

However, things have changed in the past few weeks. Following a dominant 3-0 series sweep of world champions England earlier this month, Bangladesh began the three-match T20I series against Ireland in commanding fashion in Chattogram yesterday.

The 22-run victory [via DLS] in the rain-affected game at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium not only helped the Tigers take a 1-0 lead in the series and see them record their best winning streak in the format with four wins in a row, but also showed that the Shakib Al Hasan-led side could finally become a force to be reckoned with in the format.

In the past, even in the Tigers' rare wins in T20Is, Bangladesh's performances often did not include the elements that fans look for in a T20 contest. Rarely have the Tigers dominated things on the batting front in T20Is as they did during their 207 for five in 19.2 overs yesterday.

Openers Rony Talukdar and Liton Das starred in a blistering 91-run opening stand as the Tigers set a number of records. Liton began by taking on Harry Tector, using his feet to hit the off-spinner for a maximum over long on in the very

first over.

Bangladesh never slowed down since, with Rony joining in on the act and surpassing Liton when it came to putting away the Irish bowlers for boundaries. Courtesy of their carnage, Bangladesh recorded the fastest team fifty by any side in T20Is at the venue, crossing the 50-run mark in just 4.1 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH VS IRELAND

Bangladesh:
207 for five in 19.2 overs
(Rony 67, Liton 47; Young 2-45)

Ireland:
81 for five in eight overs
(Delany 21, Tector 19; Taskin 4-16, Hasan 1-20)

Result:
Bangladesh won by 22 runs
(DLS method)

Player-of-the-match:
Rony Talukdar

The duo also amassed 81 for no loss in the Powerplay -- the highest accumulation for Bangladesh in the first six overs in T20Is.

"It felt amazing [seeing Rony and Liton play]. We saw South Africa score over 100 [102] in the Powerplay in their game against West Indies yesterday [Sunday].

We were wondering if something similar was afoot here," Taskin Ahmed, who registered career-best T20I figures of four for 16 in two overs, said.

In a record T20I chase, the Proteas on Sunday got to the 259-run target set by the West Indies with six wickets in hand and seven balls to spare in Centurion -- a game that had plenty of entertainment in store for the T20 lovers.

Although it has not happened often in the past for Bangladesh, the Tigers now think that they too can pull off something like the Proteas in the coming days.

"After Liton got out and came to the dressing room, I asked him: 'Were you hitting like that after witnessing South Africa's game last night?' And he said: 'Yes, if they can do it, so can we,'" Taskin added.

What Liton said to Taskin only shows that the players have already imbibed head coach Chandika Hathurusingha's philosophy of aggressive and fearless cricket by disregarding the fear of failure.

And that is not only the case for batters as similar aggression was shown by Taskin himself with the ball in hand. Being set a revised target of 104 runs in eight overs, Ireland had gotten off to a great start, amassing 32 for no loss in the first two overs.

Pacer Hasan Mahmud broke the deadlock in the third over before Taskin buried Ireland with three wickets in the fourth over to see them reeling at 44 for four -- from where the visitors could not bounce back.

Flick promises to 'excite' Germany fans with new style

AFP, Berlin

Coach Hansi Flick promised Germany will play "a style and manner of football that excites the fans" as his side continue their post-World Cup redemption against Belgium on Tuesday.

Flick's Germany were booted out at the group stage in Qatar, their second-consecutive World Cup group exit, but the coach said on Monday his focus was on the way the team plays rather than just winning. "Wins always do us well, for self-confidence and self-worth. But I think the style and manner of football we play can excite the fans."

Germany qualify for the 2024 Euros as hosts and therefore will only play friendlies until the tournament takes place.

The four-time World Cup winners were dominant in defeating Peru 2-0 in a friendly on Saturday thanks to two goals from Niclas Füllkrug in their first match since their disappointing early return from Qatar.

Flick however admitted Belgium would be "another calibre of opponent" and could give Germany a chance to assess their comeback. "They have a new manager and a new spirit, you can see that they have outstanding footballers... Under pressure they find good solutions."

Mash aging like a fine wine

SPORTS REPORTER

He may not be in contention for a spot in the national team any longer, but former Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and the venom in his deliveries is still making life difficult for the batters that come up against Legends of Rupganj in the Dhaka Premier League.

Bowling with a short run-up yesterday, the 39-year-old single-handedly demolished Mohammedan's batting line-up as they were bundled out for just 80 runs in 22.4 overs. He ended with figures of five wickets for 17 runs in 8.4 overs, which included three maidens. In the process, he became the oldest Bangladeshi to pick up a five-wicket haul in List A cricket.

Courtesy of Mashrafe's seventh five-wicket haul in List A competition, Rupganj clinched a comprehensive 10-wicket win as Mohammedan continue to search for a first win after five games.

The charismatic cricketer showed his class with the ball despite not being as quick as he used to. Instead, he used slower and cutters to perfection. Using the angle of the crease to dismiss the left-handed Imrul Kayes was another example of how Mash employed his wiles.

He also became the first Bangladeshi to scalp 450 wickets in List A competition. Mashrafe now has 452 wickets in 324 games. With eleven wickets in four matches, the 'Narail Express' is also the leading wicket taker in the DPL so far.



Messi eyes 100th Int'l goal

STAR SPORTS DESK

Argentina captain Lionel Messi will go in search of his 100th international goal when the world champions host Curacao in Tuesday's friendly.

The PSG superstar led by example in Saturday's win over Panama, scoring his side's second with a trademark free kick on a night of unbridled celebration, which also marked his 800th career goal.

Victory over Panama marked Argentina's seventh win in a row across all competitions, with La Albiceleste scoring at least two goals in all of those successes since being shell-shocked by Saudi Arabia in their opening World Cup contest.

Each of Argentina's last five friendly matches has also ended in victory - with five clean sheets in tow - and Lionel Scaloni's charges can enjoy one final pressure-free contest before the qualifying cycle for the 2026 World Cup commences in six months' time.

While Argentina's 2022 was unforgettable for all the right reasons, Curacao's calendar year was a largely forgettable affair, and the world's 86th-ranked nation could not upset the apple cart in their Nations League group with Canada and Honduras.

Since the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles in 2010, Curacao have never tackled Argentina in competitive or non-competitive action, but few will expect the visitors to spoil the party mood on Tuesday.