

Heartbreak leaves booters speechless

SPORTS REPORTER FROM BENGALURU

Before taking to the ground for the warm-up session at the Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru ahead of the SAFF Championship semifinal against Kuwait, Bangladesh right back Bishwanath Ghosh announced that he would distribute Tk 5 lakh among his teammates as a bonus if they could make it to the final for the first time in 18 years.

The defender's announcement was intended to charge up and motivate his teammates against a strong Kuwait team and Bangladesh showed their character throughout the match, even as the game rolled into extra time. However, Kuwait ultimately broke Bangladeshi hearts by scoring the winner in stoppage time of the first half of extra time after the regulation time ended goalless.

Bishwanath, who was outstanding throughout the match, would have been among the happiest if he was compelled to disburse that hefty bonus from his pocket, but he and the likes of Rakib Hossain, Suman Reza, Rabiul Hasan and Mohammad Ibrahim had no choice but to burst into tears at the final whistle.

The disappointment even led to a little scuffle among the two side's players and officials, centring on a conversation between Tariq Raihan Kazi and Kuwait's Mahdi Dashit and Bangladesh team manager Amer Khan was shown a red card by Indian referee John Crystal as a consequence.

As the dejected booters headed to the dressing room with heavy hearts, the Indian spectators cheered the Bangladeshi players for their fighting performance, with the men in red and green responding in kind with rounds of applause.

On the way to the team bus, Bishwanath said: "We always returned home with consolation [prizes] but this time we had a big dream. We always told our teammates that if we kept faith in each other, then it was possible to cross the Kuwait hurdle. But the wind was not with us. Besides, many decisions from the referee went against us."

Tariq Kazi could utter one just sentence, saying: "Nothing to say at the moment."

Sheikh Morsalin, who squandered the easiest chance of the game in the second minute, added: "There was a great chance to make history but we could not do it. We put up a good performance and created chances but we were unlucky. Pray for us so that we can do better in the future."

Tapu Barman stated bluntly: "The referee killed us, we don't have anything to say."

When queried about the refereeing, coach Javier Cabrera responded: "We are not surprised by what happened. We have been seeing this during the tournament. This is what we were expecting and it happened."



(Clockwise from L) Rakib Hossain provided the spark in the attacking third while Anisur Rahman Zico proved to be a wall for Bangladesh in their heroic display against Kuwait in their SAFF Championship semifinal at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru yesterday. The men in red and green eventually left the pitch in tears but with heads held high.

PHOTO: SAFF

This should be Bangladesh's level: Cabrera

ANISUR RAHMAN FROM BENGALURU

Bangladesh came into the SAFF Championship with little hope of making it to the semifinals, a stage they had failed to reach over the past five editions of the regional football extravaganza, and their poor performances in some recent friendlies cast further doubt on their ability to make it out of the group stage.

However, Javier Cabrera's charges exited with their heads held high after putting up brave and consistent performances in all four matches. That self-belief was born in a brave showing in the first match against the tournament's top-ranked side, Lebanon, before being further reinforced by two come-from-behind wins against Maldives and Bhutan.

The team then ensured a lasting impression of their capabilities against Kuwait, who appeared lucky to have found a winner with an extra-time strike.

Cabrera, however, was struggling to accept the loss given the way his team performed over the course of 120 minutes. But he iterated that this should be the standard and the challenge would be to maintain it in the coming days.

"It is tough to accept the defeat. The performance and consistency of the team has absolutely been incredible. They were better today and created chances to qualify for the final," the Spaniard said at the post-match briefing at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium.

"This should be Bangladesh's level from now on. We should not perform below



this level. We have to match this standard. There were tough moments, but I am very proud of the team's performance in the SAFF Championship," the 38-year-old added.

Bangladesh could have taken the lead in the second minute had Sheikh Morsalin not shot straight at the Kuwaiti goalkeeper after getting a square pass from Rakib Hossain, who himself was later denied by the crosspiece and then goalkeeper Abdul Rahman Marzouq.

"We created chances against a team

which is the number one team in the tournament. They topped their group and are unbeaten in seven-eight games. Nobody was expecting to do well today, but we were about to qualify for the final. Over the 90 minutes, we had a first-minute chance. We were not able to push them more in the second half, but I don't think they got more chances. There is absolutely nothing to tell to the players except to take positives from the game," added Cabrera, who outshone previous coaches like Nikola Ilievski, Maruful Haque, Lodewijk De Kruij, Jamie Day and Oscar Bruzon by taking Bangladesh to the semifinals of the SAFF Championship.

The coach believed a good mix of senior players and young guns had resulted in the consistent showings, opining one player could not be singled out for praise. Cabrera had picked nearly 10 players who did not play in the 2021 SAFF Championship, some of whom had little international exposure before the regional championship.

The Spaniard added that they had one full training session related to defensive adjustments and the backline showed character, resilience and competence as they foiled Kuwait's forward forays.

"We deserved the win. Maybe the opposing coach will say the same. We made three-four adjustments yesterday and had one session to adjust. It is unbelievable the way they executed. It was amazing. I think we deserved to win, so I am disappointed. But proud of their performance," Cabrera said.

Windies denied World Cup spot for first time

AFP, HARARE

The West Indies failed to qualify for the Cricket World Cup for the first time as the two-time champions slumped to a seven-wicket thumping by Scotland at the qualifying event on Saturday.

The Caribbean side, needing a win to keep their slim qualification hopes alive, were bowled out for 181 in their 50 overs before Scotland chased down the target with 6.3 overs to spare in Harare.

Shai Hope's men have zero points with only two matches remaining in the Super Six stage in Zimbabwe after previous defeats by the hosts and the Netherlands.

The global one-day showpiece, which will be held in India from October 5 until November 19, will be notable for the absence of one of the sport's traditional powerhouses. The West Indies had previously played at every World Cup, winning the first two editions in 1975 and 1979.

Scotland exacted revenge for an agonising and controversial loss by the West Indies at the previous World Cup Qualifier in 2018 which saw them miss out on the main tournament with a first one-day international win over their opponents.

They now sit just two points behind Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, with the top two to qualify for the 10-team event, ahead of their final two games against Zimbabwe on Tuesday and the Dutch two days later.



'Want to be the type who plays well on grass'

REUTERS

World number one Iga Swiatek is on a mission to improve her modest record on grasscourts and said on Saturday that she had gone back to basics in the buildup to Wimbledon, which starts on Monday.

Swiatek won the U.S. Open in 2022 and last month secured her second consecutive French Open crown. But while the 22-year-old has had success on hardcourts and clay, she is yet to win a tournament on grass and has yet to get past the round of 16 at Wimbledon.

The Pole's overall win-loss record on the slick surface is 9-5, and she acknowledged that she had to do better to be counted among the game's great players.

"I believe the best players, they can play on all surfaces. I want to become that kind of player who can play well on grass as well and feel comfortable there," Swiatek, who meets China's Zhu Lin in the first round, told reporters.

"I'm doing my best to just work on my skills. Last year I feel like we've done a pretty good job with my coach in terms of my touch and getting back slices and also playing the slice."



Joe Root surpassed Alastair Cook and became the highest outfield catcher of all time for England in Test cricket with 176 catches to his name when he took a one-handed stunner at short leg to dismiss Australia's Travis Head on Day 4 of the second Ashes Test at Lord's on Saturday. Like Head, most of the Australia batters fell prey to short deliveries by the English seamers as the hosts staged a strong fightback. However, Australia still managed to score 279, setting England a daunting victory target of 371 runs.

PHOTO: AFP

Tigers approach July ODIs with WC in mind

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a record win in the lone Test, Bangladesh will be looking to replicate their fine run in the upcoming white-ball contests against Afghanistan as the Tigers reached Chattogram ahead of the three-match ODI series yesterday.

Meanwhile, Hashmatullah Shahidi and his troops also reached the port city after landing in Bangladesh yesterday. The visitors are expected to give a tough fight with a full-strength side following the return of star cricketers – the likes of Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, and Mohammad Nabi.

Some Bangladesh players trained yesterday while Afghanistan are set to resume training today ahead of the first ODI, scheduled on July 5. The Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury stadium will also stage the second and third ODI on July 8 and 11, respectively.

As Bangladesh will begin their ICC ODI World Cup campaign against Afghanistan in Dharamsala later this year, the upcoming ODI series emerged as a great platform for the Tigers to prepare and chalk out their game-plan ahead of the mega event.

The ODI series against Afghanistan and the upcoming Asia Cup is expected to be the last two series before the World Cup. According to selector Habibul Bashar, it will be important for the Tigers to take the momentum beside them before heading for the mega event.



"I think the significance of the upcoming series and also the Asia Cup is how we gain the momentum before heading for the World Cup. It is important to have good form as a team since we are well aware of the structure of the tournament, where every team will play against each other. Obviously, we will have our own game plan, considering the opponent," Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday.

According to the former captain,

there is not much to adjust as a unit for the Tigers considering the Indian conditions which is pretty similar to Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, Bashar said that the upcoming series against Afghanistan will not be too crucial in terms of selection for the upcoming World Cup, since there is not much to tinker in the squad.

However, there will be eyes on the likes of Naim Sheikh and Afif Hossain who made a comeback in the ODI side for the Afghanistan series and it will be important for them to showcase their worth and become strong contenders to make it to the final World Cup squad.

"We don't see too many places where we can make changes. Probably there are one or two areas where we can give our final thought. However, it's not that the upcoming Afghanistan series or the Asia Cup will play a big role in that."

The return of Shakib Al Hasan from a finger injury will strengthen the team. However, the persistent injury concern of skipper Tamim Iqbal will also remain crucial from Bangladesh's point of view, and the team management will surely want the captain to lead from the front both on and off the field.