

Joty believes Bangladesh are favourites

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's team skipper Nigar Sultana Joty deemed her side as favourites going into the first of the three-match ODI series against India, starting at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur today.

Joty's troops won the third and final T20I against the visitors on Thursday after pushing them to the brink in the second. But the skipper believes that despite the win only being a consolation for the Tigresses in their 2-1 series loss, it created a positive environment within the team as they brace to take on a familiar foe in India.

"I think Bangladesh are favourites because we won the last match [third T20I]. I keep us ahead regardless of the change in formats," Joty told the reporters in the pre-match press conference yesterday.

Bangladesh have lost all five previous encounters in the 50-over format against India but the Tigresses still remain upbeat as Joty asserted: "We are playing at home. The team is feeling positive. The energy levels have been boosted." Joty also insisted that Bangladesh batted better than India in the final two T20Is.

Messi's expected Miami unveiling on Monday

AGENCIES

World Cup winner Lionel Messi is expected to be presented as an Inter Miami player during Sunday's event named 'The Unveil' by the Major League Soccer side.

Although they didn't mention Messi by name, Inter Miami announced "a major unveiling event" for Sunday evening at their home stadium, the DRV Pink Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

The event is scheduled on Monday 06:00 am in Bangladesh.

The Argentine is already in Florida and was spotted doing some casual grocery shopping at a supermarket in Miami on Thursday. He has also been reported to have avoided crashing with another vehicle while driving in Fort Lauderdale on Friday. Fortunately, nobody was hurt.

Messi's latest venture will see him follow in the footsteps of such players as Pele, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Steven Gerrard and Frank Lampard.

Miami owner Jorge Mas told reporters that Messi will make his club debut on July 21 in their first Leagues Cup match against Liga MX side Cruz Azul. Messi is also expected to be reunited with two of his former Barcelona teammates in the US as the club is also expected to introduce Spanish stars Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba to the team.



Having secured a win in the first T20I to lead the two-match series 1-0 against Afghanistan, Bangladesh players enjoyed a day off the field on Saturday. With no practice scheduled for the day, skipper Shakib Al Hasan was pictured outside the team hotel while [bottom] pacer Shoriful Islam went sightseeing yesterday. However, Mujeeb Ur Rahman and other Afghan players trained as usual, hoping to bounce back in the final T20I at the Sylhet International Stadium today. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/COLLECTED

Festive Sylhet embraces RELAXED TIGERS

MAZHAR UDDIN from Sylhet

Around hundred people, including men, women and children, were seen waiting yesterday outside the Grand Sylhet hotel located near the airport road, where Bangladesh cricket team had checked in for the ongoing T20I series against Afghanistan.

Similar scenes were also witnessed inside the hotel premises as forty to fifty had been patiently waiting for a lifetime opportunity to snap a selfie with their heroes.

Around 3pm, pacer Shoriful Islam -- who hit the winning runs for the Tigers as they clinched a dramatic two-wicket win over Afghanistan in the first T20I on Friday -- returned to the team hotel with his wife after a trip to Ratargul swamp forest, 26 km from the Sylhet city.

Shoriful and teammates enjoyed a well-deserved day off, without official training or any media activity, yesterday.

Half hour later, skipper Shakib Al Hasan, dressed in a white t-shirt, black trouser, and a cap, was seen heading out from the lobby. The star cricketer hopped in to a van and went out for a brief outing.

The mood in the Tigers camp was relaxed at the team hotel. On the other hand, a contrasting atmosphere pervaded among the visitors as Rashid Khan and his troops spent time training at the Sylhet International Cricket stadium, focused on avoiding a series loss today.

The crowd outside the hotel were unable to get a chance to see their beloved cricketers up close, but the craze and buzz

in the northeastern region of the country remains at its peak; especially following a brilliant show from the home side.

The current T20I series has been the talk of the town in Sylhet, where Bangladesh registered their first win in the shortest format after three outings here so far.



Meanwhile, there were long queues outside the ticket booth of the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium (SICS) yesterday. The fans are again expected to flock in numbers to support the Tigers in the second T20I today.

The atmosphere at the SICS was no short of electrifying on Friday. Around a twenty-thousand capacity crowd witnessed the

game at the picturesque venue, while at least more than a thousand without tickets had hovered along the stadium's periphery.

Since the Tigers do not get to play international cricket that often in Sylhet, the locals have voiced their demand of seeing more matches getting staged here in future.

With a high demand for tickets and the subsequent overwhelming situations during matches, the authorities have to prepare to constantly stay on their toes to maintain a huge crowd outside the venue.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board director and chairman of the women's wing department, Shafiul Alam Chowdhury Nadel, urged to have more matches in Sylhet in order to bring commonality among the hyper-enthusiastic fans in Sylhet.

"Since we don't get the opportunity to host more matches, the craze among the supporters skyrockets whenever there is a series in Sylhet. The capacity of the stadium is for around twenty-thousand spectators, and we distribute tickets up to eighteen-and-half thousand," said Nadel.

"Since we also have the grass bank, we try to release around two-thousand tickets for the security purpose.

"Considering the structure of the stadium premises, if you notice, there are so many open spaces from which the spectators who don't purchase tickets try to get in illegally. We are trying to stop them and also want more matches in order to bring some stability among the fans when it comes to their craze for cricket."

Women's chance to beat Nepal

SPORTS REPORTER

After conceding a late goal to be held to a 1-1 draw in the first match, Bangladesh women's football team will have the opportunity to rectify mistakes and win the two-match series against Nepal in the second and final match at the Birshershtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur today, the action kicking off at 5:30pm.

Bangladesh were close to inflicting a second defeat on Nepal in their first match since the historic SAFF Women's Championship final win on Thursday, only for Sabitra Bhandari's stoppage time goal canceling out Sabina Khatun's opener.

But the women in red and green have regrouped and prepared to prove taste victory under new head coach Mahbubur Rahman Litu following the resignation of Golam Rabbani Choton.

"We are hoping that the mistakes won't be repeated in the next match. We are working on keeping the defence compact till the end. Everyone will give their best," Litu told media on Saturday.

"There will not be any major changes in gameplan from us. We will try to beat them with the same plan and will have to conserve the lead if we can take it," the coach said, adding that there are no major fitness issues in the team.

Paul Smalley's resignation accepted

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation's technical and strategic director Paul Smalley tendered his resignation yesterday, bringing an end his second stint two years into the three-year contract.

The 56-year-old British coach told media that he could not come to a negotiation with his employers over working conditions and other demands.

"I have had discussions with the BFF president over the last month-and-a-half where I wanted some changes in BFF's operations, especially regarding manpower in some departments. He had asked for time from me to execute those things, but since those issues have not yet been resolved, I have decided to resign," Smalley told reporters yesterday.

It was widely believed that he could not come to agreement with the BFF over his demanded increase in salary and benefits. However, Smalley refuted such suggestion, saying that financial issues played no part to play in his decision to resign.

"We accept resignations because we do not try to compromise when someone wants to leave," BFF president Kazi Salahuddin told reporters.

Muktijoddha relegated

SPORTS REPORTER

Muktijoddha Sangsads were relegated from the top-tier of professional football league for the first time following a 2-1 defeat against Chittagong Abahani in their penultimate match of the Bangladesh Premier League in Gopalganj yesterday.

The two-time league runners-up in the professional era which began in 2007, Muktijoddha managed just 15 points from 19 games, four points less than Rahmatganj, who ensured top-tier stay with a goalless draw against Sheikh Russel in the day's other match.

The freedom fighters' club, which won two Dhaka Premier League titles, one National Championship and three Federation Cup titles prior to the professional era, will join Azapur FC in Bangladesh Championship League next season.



Marketa Vondrousova became the first unseeded woman to win Wimbledon in the Open era as the Czech swept to a shock 6-4, 6-4 victory over Tunisia's Ons Jabeur in Saturday's final, stretching further the latter's wait to become the first Arab and African player to win a Grand Slam title.

PHOTO: AFP

DJOKOVIC MEETS ALCARAZ in 'the ultimate showdown'

AFP, London

Novak Djokovic says the "world of sport" will be watching when he faces Carlos Alcaraz in a Wimbledon final where history and a generational shift are at stake.

Djokovic is attempting to equal Roger Federer's record of eight titles at the All England Club and match Margaret Court's all-time mark of 24 Grand Slam crowns.

Having already pocketed the Australian Open and French Open in 2023, victory on Sunday will put the 36-year-old just one major away from completing the first men's calendar Grand Slam since 1969.

"It's the ultimate showdown," said Djokovic, who will be playing in a record 35th Grand Slam final.

"Everything comes down to one match. All eyes of the tennis and sports world will be directed on this Sunday's Wimbledon final. It's probably the most watched tennis match globally."

At 20, Alcaraz is Djokovic's junior by 16 years.

When Djokovic captured the first of his 23 majors at the 2008 Australian

Open, the Spaniard was still three months shy of his fifth birthday.

Djokovic can become Wimbledon's oldest champion while Alcaraz is bidding to be its third youngest after Boris Becker and Bjorn Borg.

"Obviously have more experience. It



can help a little bit in some important moments, beginning the match, managing the nerves, managing the occasion, circumstances," said Djokovic.

"But it's not going to be the deciding factor really. Whoever, on a given day, is in a better state, mentally

and physically, will be the winner."

Djokovic won the mind games when the pair clashed in the French Open semifinals in June.

Alcaraz suffered body cramping, a physical ailment brought on, he freely admitted, just by the sight of Djokovic



on the other side of the net.

The memory of his Paris collapse is still raw for Alcaraz who plans a series of mental exercises to counter the tension on Sunday.

"I'll try to forget that I'm going to play a final against Novak," he said.

Sunday will be Alcaraz's first

Wimbledon final in just his fourth grass-court event.

Djokovic has won 34 successive matches at the tournament and has not been beaten on Centre Court since losing the 2013 final to Andy Murray.

"He's in great shape," Djokovic said of Alcaraz. "He's very motivated. He's young. He's hungry. I'm hungry, too, so let's have a feast."

Their progress to the final has been similar.

Both have only lost two sets. They have spent virtually the same amount of time on court.

"This is going to be the best moment of my life," said Alcaraz who aims to become the third Spanish men's champion after Manuel Santana in 1966 and Rafael Nadal, who won the title in 2008 and 2010.

"Playing a final here in Wimbledon is something that I dreamt about when I started playing tennis."

"It's even better playing against Novak. It's going to be a really emotional moment for me. For Novak is one more day, one more moment," added Alcaraz who described Djokovic as a "legend" of tennis.