



"Certainly I made a mistake and I have to acknowledge that. It was done without any ill intention in a moment of the highest exuberance. Here we saw it as natural and normal but outside it has caused a commotion."

Spanish FA chief Luis Rubiales apologising for kissing star player Jenni Hermoso on the lips after the Women's World Cup final.

Contrasting scenarios for men and women's sides

SPORTS REPORTER

While the women's side have been undergoing camp in Sylhet as part of their preparations for the Asian Games in September, the men's side still have to contend with fragmentation brought on by the Asia Cup and the World Cup assignments for the national team.

A preliminary team has been submitted for the Asian Games but is yet to be announced. According to rules of the Games, a 32 member squad had to be provided initially which the BCB had submitted a while back. From that, a 15-member squad will be named officially. There is no age-restriction for the upcoming tournament. The already formed men's squad mostly contains young stars, according to BCB officials.

The women's team have been undergoing camp in Sylhet since August 14 and are joined by a host of U-19 players.

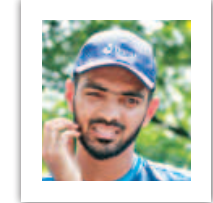
Meanwhile in men's cricket, the Bangla Tigers program, HP Team, along with the national team are undergoing separate camps. There are also nine players, listed as backups, including probables for New Zealand series along with the Asia Cup standbys, are undertaking a separate camp away from the national side.

The likes of Soumya Sarkar, Mosaddek Hossain and Taijul Islam had been undergoing training as part of that list of "backups". Saif Hassan is there too and, although there are suggestions that he may be named as skipper of the side, his inclusion in that list of backups also makes him uncertain for the Asian Games.

It is a precarious position for Saif, who at this moment remains a standby player for the Asia Cup. He, however, had received some instruction from national team head coach Chandika Hathurusingha for the camp with backup stars. "I have talked [to Hathurusingha], I was in the training sessions the last few days and his message was that the intensity [of training] should be high," Saif told the media yesterday at Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

At this moment any door may open for him according to the scenario. However, without the squad being named, the practice regime continues separately. The squad of 15 cannot come from outside the 32 member squad initially named. It was learned that changes can be made to the final 15 member squad only in case of injury.

Both the Bangladesh men's and women's sides would start their Asian Games from the quarterfinal stage as Test-playing nations.



Ever the showman, Novak Djokovic ripped off his shirt after beating World No 1 Carlos Alcaraz, the man who stopped the Serbian in his record-equalling bid to win a 24th Grand Slam in Wimbledon last month, in the final of the Cincinnati Open in Ohio yesterday. Djokovic overcame a match point and stifling heat to beat Alcaraz 5-7, 7-6(7), 7-6(4) -- a win that catapulted him to the second position in ATP rankings.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Abahani rely on foreigners for Mohun Bagan challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Six-time Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) champions Abahani aim to enter the group stage of AFC Cup when they encounter Mohun Bagan SG in the tournament's play-off match in Kolkata today.

The match is scheduled to get underway at the Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan, commonly known as the Salt Lake Stadium, from 7:30pm (Bangladesh Standard Time).

Abahani kept their sights on the group stage after a 2-1 win over a Maldivian outfit, Club Eagles, in the preliminary second round last week in Sylhet. However, Indian Super League (ISL) champions Mohun Bagan stand ominously tall in Abahani's path.

The Kolkata-based popular outfit, who came to this stage after beating Nepal's Machhindra FC 3-1, had defeated Abahani 3-1 in the play-off last season before thrashing BPL champions Bashundhara Kings 4-0 in the group stage and becoming South Asian zone champions.

Going further back, the two sides met in the AFC Cup group stage in 2017. Mohun Bagan had a comfortable 3-1 victory but Abahani managed to draw the next match. Mohun Bagan recently thumped Bangladesh Army Football Team 5-0 in Durand Cup, sending an indication of their strength this season.

Abahani coach Mario Lemos, who has been at the helm of the Dhanmondi-based outfit since 2018, are well-aware of how hard Mohun Bagan can come at his charges.



PHOTO: ABAHANI

"We have a lot of respect for Mohun Bagan and know their qualities. As a team we will try our very best," Lemos told The Daily Star via text messages before conducting the first practice session in Kolkata.

"They are a very attacking team and create many chances, get many players inside the box. We have to be able to stop them. Otherwise, that will make a big difference in the game," added the 38-year-old Portuguese.

Lemos got only one session to prepare his charges ahead of the crucial fixture after landing in Kolkata yesterday morning. Unlike their previous match, played under unplayable conditions in front of a huge home crowd in Sylhet, Abahani are set to feel immense pressure against Mohun Bagan who are boosted by Australian and Spanish players.

Abahani will certainly bank on their six foreigners, of whom Stuart Cornelius and Danilo Augusto struck against Club Eagles. Lemos believes the fielding of six foreign players will make them stronger.

"I think it [fielding six foreign players] will improve the team and make it a bit more solid and physically stronger," said the Abahani coach, who is likely to play three foreign defenders to neutralise Mohun Bagan.

Abahani could not cross the preliminary round or play-off stage in the last three editions after having emerged as the South Asian zone champions to enter the inter-zonal semifinals of the AFC Cup in 2019. Asked what shortcomings prevented Abahani from getting into the group stage in the last three editions, Lemos said, "I see it more the other way, I see the opposition teams we faced have been strong teams. When you play against strong teams, sometimes the result doesn't always go your way."

Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu on Sunday also admitted that the Indian clubs are progressing due to the ISL, "where a lot of big players are coming to play and the Indian local players also grow in stature". Now, time will tell whether Abahani can pull off the seemingly improbable.

BCB sweats on Ebadot's fitness

SPORTS REPORTER

Pacer Ebadot Hossain is doubtful for the Asia Cup due to fitness concerns, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chief selector Minhajul Abedin Nannu confirmed to The Daily Star on Monday.

"The physio will give us a report tomorrow [today] since there is some concern regarding Ebadot's fitness. Then we will take a decision," he said.

Ebadot suffered an injury to his left leg during the second ODI against Afghanistan last month and was consequently ruled out of the ensuing T20I series. The pacer had been undergoing rehabilitation work since the national team began their Asia Cup camp earlier this month.

The 29-year-old felt some discomfort in his left leg on Monday, and with the World Cup in sight, the BCB will most likely opt to play it safe and leave out Ebadot for the Asia Cup.

According to sources, BCB is not likely to name a replacement for the 29-year-old as there are four other pacers in the Tigers' Asia Cup squad. However, it was learned that the BCB is considering carrying young pacer Tanzim Hasan Sakib with the Asia Cup squad to give him more exposure.

Iyer, Rahul back for Asia Cup

REUTERS, New Delhi

India on Monday recalled fit-again batters KL Rahul and Shreyas Iyer to their one-day set up for the Asia Cup, inching closer to finalising the squad for the home World Cup later this year.

Wicketkeeper batter Rahul (thigh) and middle order batter Iyer (back) returned from injuries to join the 17 member squad led by Rohit Sharma for the Asia Cup to be co-hosted by Pakistan and Sri Lanka from Aug. 30.

While Iyer's return is expected to end India's search for a set batter at number four, Rahul's ability to bat anywhere in the top and middle order, as well as his glove work, make him a limited-overs asset.

With pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah having made a successful comeback from back surgery in the current T20 series in Ireland, India have now gathered all their frontline players ahead of the World Cup.

Chief selector Ajit Agarkar said it was a "no-brainer" that the 17-member squad pretty much included the 15 who would play the World Cup.



Pakistan captain Babar Azam and his Afghanistan counterpart Hashmatullah Shahidi pose with the trophy in Hambantota yesterday ahead of their three-match ODI series which starts today. The first bilateral ODI series between the two teams, which is being held in Sri Lanka, will be followed by the six-nation Asia Cup beginning on August 30.

PHOTO: PCB

A wonder goal for women's game

REUTERS, Melbourne

Scheduled in a far-flung time-zone and carrying eight extra teams, the ninth Women's World Cup kicked off in Australia and New Zealand a month ago with some doubts it could deliver on lofty ambitions.

Those concerns eased well before Sunday's final where Spain were crowned first-time champions by beating England 1-0 at a packed Stadium Australia in Sydney.

Less than a year after a player revolt tore the Spanish squad apart, La Roja's triumph was only one of the surprises for record crowds and TV audiences through the month-long festival of women's football.

Fears the first 32-team Women's World Cup might suffer for its size proved groundless, as did predictions of another processionary victory for the United States.

Sunday's final was the first without either the U.S. or Germany involved, the four-times champion Americans dumped out of the round-of-16 by Sweden and the Germans exiting before the knockout phase.



Australia were the outliers in the last four, their thrilling run helping to draw nearly two million people to the games, far more than the previous record of 1.35 million for the 24-team tournament in Canada in 2015.

Home fans agonised over captain Sam Kerr's calf injury but her wonder goal in the semifinal was some consolation in the defeat by England.

Co-hosts New Zealand crashed out much earlier but the nation

of 5 million warmly embraced the tournament. More than 700,000 attended matches there.

Eight nations made their World Cup debut and most exited with pride. Morocco proved the pick of them, the tournament's first Arab team turning around a 6-0 horror show against Germany to reach the knockout phase.

It was Morocco's second World Cup fairytale in a year, with the men's team having made the semifinals in Qatar.

In a minor triumph for African soccer, three out of four of the continent's teams made it out of their groups, with Nigeria and South Africa joining Morocco in the last 16.

The tournament bid farewell to greats of the game like USA's Megan Rapinoe, Canada's Christine Sinclair -- the all-time leading goal-scorer in women's internationals -- Brazil icon Marta. Meanwhile new stars were introduced like Spain's 19-year-old forward Salma Paralluelo, who won the young player of the tournament, Colombia's 18-year-old forward Linda Caicedo, and Golden Ball winner Aitana Bonmati of Spain.

It was, however, Hinata Miyazawa's five goals making her the surprise Golden Boot winner during Japan's rollicking run to the quarterfinals.

FIFA boss Gianni Infantino said Australia and New Zealand generated more than \$570 million in revenue. But with teams competing for a fraction of the prize pool awarded to the men in Qatar, the success of the Women's World Cup may pressure FIFA to fast-track its long-term goal of gender parity.

Lyles trying to fill the Bolt-hole

REUTERS, Budapest

Since his retirement in 2017, athletics has routinely asked "where is the new Usain Bolt?" but newly minted world 100 metres champion Noah Lyles is doing his best on and off the track to bring his sport firmly into the public limelight.

The double world 200m champion claimed the 100m title with a personal best 9.83 in Budapest on Sunday, backing up his prediction of glory, if not quite the predicted 9.65 time, and will now seek to become the first man since Bolt to do the world sprint double.

His achievements are being followed by the latest "behind the scenes" documentary and Lyles, 26, is proud to be doing his bit for a sport that, in the United States in particular, has to fight tooth and nail for attention.

"I believe track and field needs to market itself better, it needs to be fun," Lyles said after his victory, the fourth in a row in the event for the U.S.

"It's easy to market me, I'm out there, but there are other stories, other approaches. I feel we have everything you need in track and that needs to be told better."

"We're giving people a docu-series - tonight is episode two, it should be a good one. Winning the 100 metres always helps,

a double helps more and a treble helps even more."

Lyles expects to claim a third successive 200m title, and the U.S. will start as hot favourites in the 4x100 relay.

He has predicted he can take down the great Jamaican's 2009 200m world record of 19.19 seconds having already accomplished the "hardest part" of the series via the 100.

"The 100 has been a long journey," he said. "Today was my first PR (personal record) since 2019 and I remember that day I believed in myself so much. I felt it again today, but the scary thing is that there is so much to improve on for me in the 100."

"With the 200 I know where I am. Me and the 200 have a special connection. I know that bend, that straight, that slingshot. In the 100 there are spots I don't know but in the 200 I know I'm there and that record is so close."

"The double is important because I know I'm the fastest, but to be able to say that with the utmost confidence I had to win the 100."

"I've known for a long time I had so much more to give to 100, but I've been giving it all to the 200. Now I'm going for three and people will look back at this year and say that was the start of a dynasty."

