

Soma, Mou return to ‘controversial’ national TT squad

SPORTS REPORTER

Sonam Sultana Soma and Sadia Rahman Mou are set to represent Bangladesh again in international competitions after serving one year of a two-year ban, but there was more controversy surrounding the eight-player Bangladesh table tennis contingent for the upcoming Asian championships.

The paddlers are slated to fly for South Korea on September 1 with the hope of producing better results than the last edition, with the 26th Asian Table Tennis Championship scheduled to be held in Pyeongchang from September 3 to 10.

The Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) formed the men's and women's teams picking top three players each from national men's and women's rankings while including one male and one female player from the Bangladesh Youth Championships, ignoring the fourth-seeded player from the national rankings.

The 2017 national champion Javed Ahmed, fourth-ranked player after Manosh Chowdhury retired from the national team, alleged that BTTF vice-president Khandokar Hasan Munir excluded him from national team intentionally due to his good relation with Manosh, who has a rift with Munir.

Denying the allegation, Munir said, "I have good relation with Javed, whom I took to the Commonwealth Games squad in 2014. I still say that he is one of the talented players of the country."

"It was not my decision, rather the BTTF executive committee's decision to include a youth player, depending



on the availability of sponsors. As Nafis Iqbal and Khoi Khoi Marma are both BKSP students, BKSP is bearing most of the expenditure for these two players," explained the BTTF official, adding that there was another such instance in 1991.

The BTTF had, in the last edition of the championships, picked four players each in men's and women's section based on their rankings.

Meanwhile, Soma and Mou were handed a two-year suspension for breach of discipline during the Birmingham Commonwealth Games last year when they visited relatives in London, skipping their scheduled matches. But the BTTF, earlier this month, lifted their suspension following an apology letter and considering their performance in last month's national championships.

Soma and Mou, who missed two international tournaments in last one year, still have six months' domestic suspension to serve.

"Asian championships are very challenging for us but we want to see where we stand. We will try our best to produce good results," said Soma.

"Good results mean winning medals but it is not an easy task to win a medal in Asian Championships. If we can improve our ranking playing against China, Japan and other superior teams and can play well against the South Asian nations, it will be a big achievement for us," said Mou, who is supposed to pair up with Soma in women's doubles event apart from playing in singles event.

Munir informed that the Asian championships will also work as qualifiers of the Commonwealth Games. He further stated that they are targeting qualification for the Commonwealth Games and improving their position compared to the 20th-place finish from the last edition.



Bangladesh players Najmul Hossain Shanto, Afif Hossain, Nasum Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, and Mehedi Hasan Miraz pose for a photograph during an official photo session in Kandy on Monday ahead of the 16th edition of the Asia Cup, starting on August 30. [Bottom] Earlier in the day, Mushfiqur Rahim and Miraz enjoyed the scenic view of the city.

PHOTO: BCB/FACEBOOK

Tigers enjoy rest day as wait for Liton continues

SPORTS REPORTER

Newly appointed skipper Shakib Al Hasan hurried to the official photoshoot for the Asia Cup in Kandy, Sri Lanka, yesterday, arriving at the event after the other team members.

It was a rest day for the Tigers, with no official training session scheduled. The players had gym sessions amidst the official photoshoot responsibilities while Mushfiqur Rahim was seen enjoying the scenic view of the city, revealed by a picture he shared on his social media page.

The Bangladesh team reached Kandy yesterday and the team management is still waiting on opener Liton Das. The opener was suffering from a fever and could not leave with the team.

Although Liton's fever has subsided, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) opted to wait till the player feels well enough to travel. According to sources, he remains "unlikely" for the Tigers' Asia Cup opener against Sri Lanka on August 31 as the opener would need time to be match-ready even after recuperating from fever.

While talking to the media yesterday afternoon, the team manager Nafees Iqbal also stated that Liton would fly once he recovers.

Meanwhile, Tanzim Sakib, the new inclusion who replaced the

injured Ebadot Hossain, departed for Sri Lanka yesterday and was expected to join the team by yesterday evening.

The Tigers will partake in their first practice session on Tuesday since moving to Sri Lanka.

"We had a team meeting in the morning and since we had a long journey yesterday [Sunday], we planned to have gym or recovery sessions with [BCB head of physical performance] Nick Lee for those



who needed it. We have training tomorrow [Tuesday]," team manager Nafees told reporters in Sri Lanka yesterday.

According to Nafees, the players remain positive about their chances as the conditions in the island nation are similar to home.

"Asia Cup is a big tournament with lots of competitive teams. We also see ourselves as a competent team and have a good record. The conditions, as per the weather and the pitches, are similar to

Bangladesh," Nafees said.

The opening slot would be a headache for the Tigers with Liton's participation in the first game still somewhat in doubt. Mohammad Naim, who is with the Tigers, may likely get the nod along with Tanzid Tamim in case Liton fails to make the cut in the opening game.

The team, however, looked in good disposition during their photo session, where Shakib in particular charmed the cameras with some boxing moves.

While the team had no training session yesterday, the team management is satisfied with the preparation the team had before leaving for Sri Lanka. There were a few closed-door sessions along with a closed-door practice match and the players' efforts had seen head coach Chandika Hathurusingha say in a press conference that the "players competed till the last ball until I asked them to come off."

Team manager Nafees also remained confident regarding the Tigers' preparations.

"That [mood in the camp] shows that our preparation was good and everyone is very happy and in a good state. We are a very good side in this format. As a team, we want to go match by match, and from there we would look to gain momentum. If we can get that momentum and play good cricket, we know that Bangladesh are a dangerous team," Nafees said.

Spanish court opens probe on Rubiales

AFP, Madrid

Prosecutors at Spain's top criminal court said Monday they had opened a preliminary investigation into Luis Rubiales' forcible kiss on the lips of World Cup player Jenni Hermoso on grounds it could constitute a crime of "sexual assault".

"Prosecutors from the National Court have opened a preliminary investigation to look into the facts, which could constitute an offence of sexual assault," a court statement said.

They would also contact Hermoso to offer her a chance to file a suit within 15 days, the statement said.

After Spain won the Women's World Cup in Sydney on August 20, Rubiales sparked a massive backlash after forcibly kissing Hermoso on the lips during the medal ceremony.

"Given the public statements made by Jennifer Hermoso, the sexual act she was subjected to by (Luis) Rubiales was not consensual," the court statement said.

FIFA suspended Rubiales as president of Spain's RFEF football federation, and he could face further sanctions in Spain with the country's National Sports Council (CSD) meeting on Monday to discuss to examine the complaints against him.

"I get more positive vibes, for sure than before last year's tournament. But being the defending champion is not easy, so I'm kind of taking it easy, trying to do everything step by step."

Defending US Open champions Iga Swiatek



Ebadot heads to UK with WC on line

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh pacer Ebadot Hossain left for the United Kingdom yesterday to consult a doctor after the pacer was ruled out of the Tigers' Asia Cup squad due to a knee injury.

The 29-year-old left for London early in the morning on Monday. He is scheduled to consult a doctor on August 30.

Ebadot is suffering from an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury, sustained during last month's ODI series against Afghanistan. The pacer was not considered for the Asia Cup as he could not make the expected recovery after rehab.

It was learned that Ebadot will seek a second opinion in the UK regarding his injury.

Since the BCB is concerned about the current state of Ebadot's injury, it would make a decision whether to go with conservative treatment or have the pacer go under the knife.

According to the sources, if Ebadot has to undergo surgery, the pacer is likely to miss the upcoming ODI World Cup scheduled for October-November this year.

Pollard slams 'ridiculous' cricket red card

AFP, Paris

Former West Indies captain Kieron Pollard said the first Caribbean Premier League red card handed out to his Trinbago Knight Riders side was "absolutely ridiculous".

Trinbago were forced to field with only 10 players, including just two outside the 30-yard circle, for the final over of their bowling innings against St Kitts and Nevis Patriots on Sunday due to a slow over-rate.

The CPL has brought in the red card rule as part of new initiatives to speed up slow over-rates.

Pollard was first forced to have one extra fielder inside the ring for the 18th over, before another had to come up from the boundary in the penultimate over, leaving just three in the outfield.

His team were still behind the required rate heading into the final over and spinner Sunil Narine was forced to leave the field.

"To be honest, it will take away the hard work everyone has done," Pollard said.

"We are like the pawns and we are going to do what we are told.

"We are going to play as fast as we can. If you are penalised for 30-45 seconds in a tournament like this, it is absolutely ridiculous."

Despite the final over of the Patriots' innings costing Trinbago's Dwayne Bravo 18 runs, it did not prove crucial.

Pollard, Nicholas Pooran and Andre Russell made short work of a 179-run target with 17 balls spare.

'Learned a lot from the race in Baku'

REUTERS, Zandvoort

Red Bull's runaway Formula One leader Max Verstappen credited a rare defeat for setting in motion a record-equalling run of nine wins in a row.

The Dutch driver, victorious for the third year in a row at his home race on Sunday, said the Azerbaijan Grand Prix in Baku in April was key to his subsequent success.

He finished second then to Mexican team mate Sergio Perez, the last time he has stood lower than the top step of the podium.

From Miami in May he has been on another level to his rivals and on Sunday he moved 138 points clear of Perez with nine races remaining.

"I think I learned a lot from the race in Baku how to do some things with the car, how to set it up," Verstappen told reporters at Zandvoort.

"Of course I didn't win that race in Baku but I actually really tried a lot of stuff and different tools in the car and that's why throughout the race it was a little bit inconsistent but at one point I got into a good rhythm with what I found.

"Then I damaged my tyres a bit too much but I was like 'OK, that's quite interesting for the next races' and I basically implemented that and it has helped me on every track," added Verstappen.

Sunday's win was possibly the hardest so far, with torrential rain throwing up potential dangers and the race halted and then re-started after a long delay with seven laps remaining.

The only other driver to win nine races in a single season was four times world champion Sebastian Vettel, also with Red Bull in 2013.



Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra became the first Indian to win a gold medal at the World Athletics Championships when he pipped Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem (87.82m) in the men's javelin in Budapest on Sunday with an 88.17m effort in the final. Czech Republic's Jakub Vadlejch took the bronze with 86.67m throw.

PHOTO: REUTERS